

February 21, 2013

## Reactions to the Papal Resignation

---

# U.S. Catholics Divided On Church's Direction Under New Pope

---

**FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT:**

**Alan Cooperman**

Associate Director, Pew Research Center's  
Forum on Religion & Public Life

**Gregory Smith**

Senior Researcher

**Jessica Hamar Martinez**

Research Associate

1615 L St, N.W., Suite 700

Washington, D.C. 20036

Tel (202) 419-4562

Fax (202) 419-4599

[www.pewforum.org](http://www.pewforum.org)

---

## Reactions to the Papal Resignation

# U.S. Catholics Divided On Church's Direction Under New Pope

As the pontificate of Benedict XVI winds down, many American Catholics express a desire for change. For example, most U.S. Catholics say it would be good if the next pope allows priests to marry. And fully six-in-ten Catholics say it would be good if the next pope hails from a developing region like South America, Asia or Africa.

At the same time, many Catholics also express appreciation for the traditions of the Roman Catholic Church. While about half of U.S. Catholics (46%) say the next pope should “move the church in new directions,” the other half (51%) say the new pope should “maintain the traditional positions of the church.” And among Catholics who say they attend Mass at least once a week, nearly two-thirds (63%) want the next pope to maintain the church's traditional positions.

The latest national survey by the Pew Research Center, conducted Feb. 13-18 among 1,504 adults (including 304 Catholics) also finds that nine-in-ten U.S. Catholics have heard a lot (60%) or at least a little (30%) about Benedict's resignation. Just one-in-ten Catholics say they have heard nothing at all about his resignation.

---

### Catholics' Hopes for the Next Pope

<i>Next pope should...</i>	<b>%</b>
Move in new directions	46
Maintain traditional positions	51
Don't know	<u>3</u>
	100

<i>If next pope allows priests to marry, it would be...</i>	
Good	58
Bad	35
Wouldn't matter/no opinion	<u>8</u>
	100

<i>If pope is from developing world, it would be...</i>	
Good	60
Bad	14
Would not matter	20
Don't know	<u>6</u>
	100

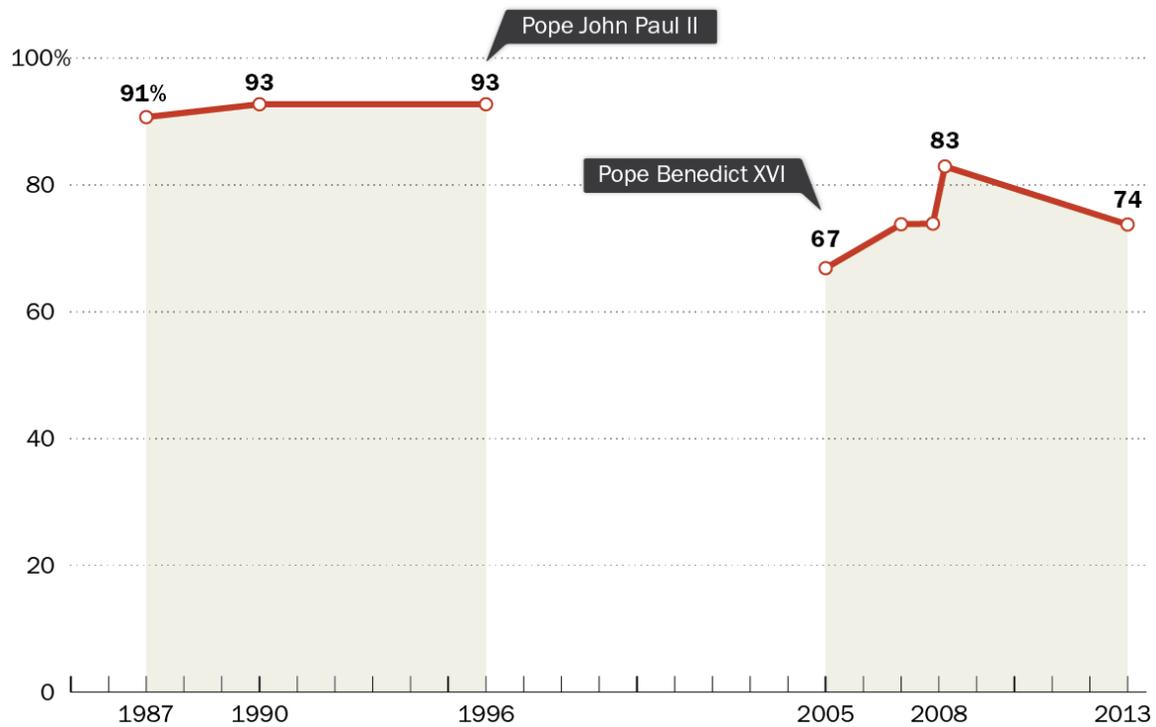
PEW RESEARCH CENTER Feb. 13-18, 2013. Q.62, Q.64a-b. Based on Catholics. Figures may not add to 100% because of rounding.

---

In a separate national survey conducted Feb. 14-17 among 1,003 adults (including 212 Catholics), three-quarters of U.S. Catholics (74%) express a favorable view of the pope. Benedict's ratings among Catholics now stand about where they were in March 2008 (just before his U.S. visit) and are lower than they were in April 2008, when 83% of U.S. Catholics expressed favorable views of him. Benedict's predecessor, Pope John Paul II, was rated favorably by upwards of 90% of U.S. Catholics in three separate Pew Research polls in the 1980s and 1990s.

## Papal Favorability, Among U.S. Catholics

Percentage of U.S. Catholics who have a "very" or "mostly" favorable opinion of the pope



PEW RESEARCH CENTER Feb. 14-17, 2013. PEW4a. Based on Catholics.

U.S. Catholics voice dissatisfaction with Benedict's handling of the sex abuse scandal in the church. Among Catholics who say they followed news of the pontiff's resignation, nearly two-thirds (63%) think he has done a poor or "only fair" job of addressing the sex abuse scandal, while 33% give him excellent or good ratings for his handling of the issue. Benedict gets better marks for his handling of interfaith relations; 55% of Catholics say he has done a good or excellent job promoting relations with other religions, while 37% say he has done a poor or "only fair" job in this area.

But the public is more negative now than in 2008 in its views both on Benedict's handling of the sex abuse scandal and on his handling of interfaith relations. Immediately following his 2008 visit to the U.S., 49% of American Catholics gave the pope good or excellent ratings for his handling of the sex abuse scandal, and 70% said he was doing a good or excellent job promoting interfaith relations.

---

### Pope Benedict's Handling of Abuse Scandal, Interfaith Relations

*How good a job has pope done...*

	Addressing sex abuse scandal		Promoting good relations w/other religions	
	April 2008	Feb 2013	April 2008	Feb 2013
	%	%	%	%
Excellent/good	49	33	70	55
Only fair/poor	40	63	24	37
Don't know	<u>11</u>	<u>3</u>	<u>5</u>	<u>8</u>
	100	100	100	100

PEW RESEARCH CENTER Feb. 14-17, 2013. PEW5-6. Based on Catholics who have followed news of Benedict's resignation "very closely," "fairly closely" or "not too closely." Figures may not add to 100% because of rounding.

---

## A Look Ahead to the Next Pope

Half of U.S. Catholics (51%) say the next pope should maintain the traditional teachings of the church, while about the same number say the next pope should move the church in new directions (46%).

But among Catholics who say they attend Mass at least once a week, nearly two-thirds (63%) say the new pope should maintain the traditional positions of the church, while about one-third (35%) say the new pope should move the church in new directions. By contrast, among those who attend Mass less often, 54% say the next pope should move in new directions while 42% prefer to maintain the church's traditional positions.

Six-in-ten Catholics who are college graduates say the next pope should move the church in new directions, compared with 38% who say the pope should maintain the church's traditional positions. This balance of opinion is reversed among Catholics with some college or less education, among whom 56% want the church to maintain its traditional positions and 41% would like it to move in new directions.

There is little evidence of a generation gap on this question. Among Catholics under age 50 and those ages 50 and older, opinion is closely divided as to whether the new pope should move in new directions or maintain the church's traditional positions.

---

### Should Next Pope Move in New Directions or Maintain Traditional Positions of the Church?

	Maintain traditional positions	Move in new directions	Don't know
	%	%	%
All Catholics	51	46	3=100
Attend weekly+	63	35	3=100
Attend less often	42	54	4=100
18-49	50	47	3=100
50+	51	45	3=100
College grad+	38	60	2=100
Some college or less	56	41	4=100

PEW RESEARCH CENTER Feb. 13-18, 2013. Q62. Based on Catholics. Figures may not add to 100% because of rounding.

---

Catholics who say the next pope should move the church in new directions were asked to describe, in their own words, in what new directions they would like to see the church go. (Since some respondents gave more than one answer, the percentages in the table to the right cannot simply be added together.)

About one-in-five Catholics who think the next pope should move the church in new directions say simply that the church should become more modern (19%). And 15% want the next pope to do more to end sex abuse in the church and punish the priests involved.

In addition, roughly one-in-five mention issues regarding the priesthood, including 14% who say priests should be allowed to marry and 9% who say women should be allowed to serve in the priesthood.

Others mention a desire to see the church become more accepting and open in general (14%), and 9% say they want to see the church become more accepting of homosexuality and gay marriage in particular. Of Catholics who want a pope who will move the church in new directions, 7% specifically mention birth control, mainly indicating a desire for a lessening of the church's opposition to the use of contraception.

---

## New Directions for the Church

<i>In your view, what new directions would you like to see the Catholic Church move in? (OPEN-ENDED)</i>	%
Become more modern	19
Get tougher with abusers/end sex abuse	15
Allow priests to marry	14
Become more accepting/open (general)	14
Accept homosexuality/same-sex marriage	9
Allow women to be priests	9
Accept contraception/birth control	7
Less strict/conservative, more liberal (general)	6
Get better/improve/change (general)	5
More focus on religion/bring people to church	4
Gender equality (general)/women's rights	4
Less focus on money	4
More focus on social justice/helping people	3
Stay out of sexual issues/private lives	2
Less strict about heterosexual marriage (divorce, interfaith marriage)	2
Better communication/less secretive	2
Become less strict about abortion	1
Become more traditional/conservative	1
Other	10
Unclear	1
Don't know	7

PEW RESEARCH CENTER Feb. 13-18, 2013. Q63. Based on Catholics who say the new pope should move the church in new directions. Figures total more than 100% because respondents were allowed to give multiple responses.

---

In response to a closed-ended question, nearly six-in-ten Catholics (58%) say it would be good if the next pope allows priests to get married, while 35% say this would be bad. Support for allowing priests to marry is much more common among Catholics who attend Mass less than once a week (66%) than among those who attend Mass regularly (46%).

Six-in-ten Catholic women (61%) say allowing priests to marry would be a good thing — about twice as many as say it would be a bad thing (30%). Men are more inclined than women to say that allowing priests to marry would be a bad thing (41% vs. 30%).

College graduates express more support than those Catholics with less education for allowing priests to marry (71% vs. 53%). There is little generational difference on this issue.

---

## Most Catholics Support Allowing Priests to Marry

*If next pope allows priests to marry, it would be...*

	Good	Bad	Would not matter/ Don't know
	%	%	%
All Catholics	58	35	8=100
Attend weekly+	46	43	11=100
Attend less often	66	29	5=100
Men	53	41	6=100
Women	61	30	9=100
18-49	55	38	7=100
50+	61	31	8=100
College grad+	71	24	5=100
Some college or less	53	39	9=100

PEW RESEARCH CENTER Feb. 13-18, 2013. Q64a. Based on Catholics. Figures may not add to 100% because of rounding.

---

A majority of Catholics (60%) say it would be a good thing if the next pope is from a developing region of the world, like South America, Asia or Africa. Only 14% say this would be a bad thing, while one-in-five say it would not matter either way (20%).

Catholics who attend Mass at least once a week and those who attend less often express similar views on this issue. The view that it would be a good thing if the next pope is from a developing region is more common among college graduates (71%) than among those Catholics with less education (56%).

---

## Pope From Developing World Seen as a Good Thing

*Pope from a developing region like South America, Asia or Africa would be...*

	<b>Good</b>	<b>Bad</b>	<b>Would not matter</b>	<b>Don't know</b>
	%	%	%	%
All Catholics	60	14	20	6=100
Attend weekly+	57	18	20	6=100
Attend less often	63	12	19	6=100
College grad+	71	10	18	1=100
Some college or less	56	16	20	8=100

PEW RESEARCH CENTER Feb. 13-18, 2013. Q64b. Based on Catholics. Figures may not add to 100% because of rounding.

---

## Views of Pope Benedict

Currently, about three-quarters of U.S. Catholics express either a very favorable (32%) or mostly favorable (41%) opinion of Benedict; roughly one-in-six U.S. Catholics (16%) express an unfavorable opinion. Catholics who attend Mass at least once a week are far more likely to express a favorable opinion of Benedict than those who attend less often (87% vs. 64%).

### Trends in Papal Favorability, Among U.S. Catholics

	(NET) Favorable	Very	Mostly	(NET) Unfavorable	Can't rate/Ref
	%	%	%	%	%
<b>Benedict XVI</b>					
February 2013	74	32	41	16	10=100
April 2008	83	49	34	9	8=100
March 2008	74	36	38	11	15=100
August 2007	74	31	43	12	14=100
July 2005	67	17	50	5	28=100
<b>John Paul II</b>					
June 1996	93	49	44	5	2=100
May 1990	93	53	40	6	1=100
May 1987	91	48	43	8	1=100

PEW RESEARCH CENTER Feb. 14-17, 2013. PEW4a. Based on Catholics. Figures may not add to 100% because of rounding.

Benedict's favorability rating among U.S. Catholics has declined since April 2008, when it reached 83% immediately following the papal visit to the United States. The percentage of U.S. Catholics expressing a favorable opinion of Benedict has now settled back to levels seen in March 2008, prior to his visit. By contrast, in Pew Research polling conducted between 1987 and 1996, John Paul II was consistently rated favorably by upwards of nine-in-ten U.S. Catholics.

Of U.S. Catholics who have followed the news of the pope's resignation, 55% say that Benedict has done a good or excellent job in promoting relations with other religions. Like the pontiff's overall favorability rating, this number has declined in the past five years; it is down 15 points since the pope's visit to the United States in 2008. Currently, 37% of U.S. Catholics give the pope poor or "only fair" marks for his handling of interfaith relations.

Most Catholics who have followed news of the pope's resignation (63%) rate Benedict's handling of the sex abuse scandal as "only fair" or poor; one-third say he has done an excellent or good job addressing the scandal. Current evaluations of the pope's handling of the scandal are comparable to those seen in 2010 and are significantly more negative than in April 2008.

---

### How Has Pope Done Promoting Relations With Other Religions?

	Excellent/ Good	Fair/ Poor	Don't know
	%	%	%
February 2013	55	37	8=100
April 2008	70	24	5=100
March 2008	64	26	10=100
August 2007	54	40	6=100

PEW RESEARCH CENTER Feb. 14-17, 2013. PEW5. Based on Catholics who have followed news of Benedict's resignation "very closely," "fairly closely" or "not too closely." Figures may not add to 100% because of rounding.

---



---

### How Has Pope Done Addressing Sex Abuse Scandal?

	Excellent/ Good	Fair/ Poor	Don't know
	%	%	%
February 2013	33	63	3=100
April 2010	32	59	9=100
April 2008	49	40	11=100

PEW RESEARCH CENTER Feb. 14-17, 2013. PEW6. Based on Catholics who have followed news of Benedict's resignation "very closely," "fairly closely" or "not too closely." Figures may not add to 100% because of rounding.

---

## About the Surveys

Most of the analysis in this report is based on telephone interviews conducted Feb. 13-18, 2013, among a national sample of 1,504 adults, 18 years of age or older, living in all 50 U.S. states and the District of Columbia (752 respondents were interviewed on a landline telephone and 752 were interviewed on a cell phone, including 364 who had no landline telephone). The survey was conducted by interviewers at Princeton Data Source under the direction of Princeton Survey Research Associates International. A combination of landline and cell phone random digit dial samples were used; both samples were provided by Survey Sampling International. Interviews were conducted in English and Spanish. Respondents in the landline sample were selected by randomly asking for the youngest adult male or female who is now at home. Interviews in the cell sample were conducted with the person who answered the phone, if that person was an adult 18 years of age or older. For detailed information about the survey methodology, see <http://people-press.org/methodology/>

The combined landline and cell phone sample are weighted using an iterative technique that matches gender, age, education, race, Hispanic origin and nativity and region to parameters from the 2011 Census Bureau's American Community Survey and population density to parameters from the Decennial Census. The sample also is weighted to match current patterns of telephone status and relative usage of landline and cell phones (for those with both), based on extrapolations from the 2012 National Health Interview Survey. The weighting procedure also accounts for the fact that respondents with both landline and cell phones have a greater probability of being included in the combined sample and adjusts for household size among respondents with a landline phone. Sampling errors and statistical tests of significance take into account the effect of weighting. The following table shows the unweighted sample sizes and the error attributable to sampling that would be expected at the 95% level of confidence for different groups in the survey:

Group	Unweighted sample size	Plus or minus...
Total sample	1,504	2.9 percentage points
Catholics	304	6.5 percentage points
Attend weekly+	135	9.8 percentage points
Attend less often	168	8.8 percentage points
Men	141	9.6 percentage points
Women	163	8.9 percentage points
Age 18-49	128	10.1 percentage points
Age 50+	172	8.7 percentage points
College grad+	110	10.9 percentage points
Some college or less	193	8.2 percentage points

Sample sizes and sampling errors for other subgroups are available upon request.

In addition to sampling error, one should bear in mind that question wording and practical difficulties in conducting surveys can introduce error or bias into the findings of opinion polls.

Some of the analysis in this report is based on telephone interviews conducted Feb. 14-17, 2013, among a national sample of 1,003 adults 18 years of age or older living in the continental United States (502 respondents were interviewed on a landline telephone and 501 were interviewed on a cell phone, including 276 who had no landline telephone). The survey was conducted by interviewers at Universal Survey Center under the direction of Princeton Survey Research Associates International. A combination of landline and cell phone random digit dial samples were used; both samples were provided by Survey Sampling International. Interviews were conducted in English. Respondents in the landline sample were selected by randomly asking for the youngest adult male or female who is now at home. Interviews in the cell sample were conducted with the person who answered the phone, if that person was an adult 18 years of age or older.

The combined landline and cell phone sample are weighted using an iterative technique that matches gender, age, education, race, Hispanic origin and region to parameters from the 2011 Census Bureau's American Community Survey and population density to parameters from the Decennial Census. The sample also is weighted to match current patterns of telephone status, based on extrapolations from the 2012 National Health Interview Survey. The weighting procedure also accounts for the fact that respondents with both landline and cell phones have a greater probability of being included in the combined sample and adjusts for household size among respondents with a landline phone. Sampling errors and statistical tests of significance take into account the effect of weighting. The following table shows the unweighted sample sizes and the error attributable to sampling that would be expected at the 95% level of confidence for different groups in the survey:

<b>Group</b>	<b>Unweighted sample size</b>	<b>Plus or minus ...</b>
Total sample	1,003	3.7 percentage points
Catholics	212	8.1 percentage points
Attend weekly+	101	11.7 percentage points
Attend less often	109	11.3 percentage points

Sample sizes and sampling errors for other subgroups are available upon request.

In addition to sampling error, one should bear in mind that question wording and practical difficulties in conducting surveys can introduce error or bias into the findings of opinion polls.

**PEW RESEARCH CENTER FOR THE PEOPLE & THE PRESS**  
**FEBRUARY 2013 POLITICAL SURVEY**  
**FINAL TOPLINE**  
**February 13-18, 2013**  
**N=1,504**

**QUESTIONS 1-54 RELEASED PREVIOUSLY OR HELD FOR FUTURE RELEASE**

**ASK ALL:**

On another subject...

RELIG What is your present religion, if any? Are you Protestant, Roman Catholic, Mormon, Orthodox such as Greek or Russian Orthodox, Jewish, Muslim, Buddhist, Hindu, atheist, agnostic, something else, or nothing in particular?

**[INTERVIEWER: IF R VOLUNTEERS "nothing in particular, none, no religion, etc." BEFORE REACHING END OF LIST, PROMPT WITH: And would you say that's atheist, agnostic, or just nothing in particular?]**

Feb 13-18

2013

	Protestant (Baptist, Methodist, Non-denominational, Lutheran, Presbyterian, Pentecostal, Episcopalian, Reformed, Church of Christ, Jehovah's Witness, etc.)
36	
21	Roman Catholic (Catholic)
2	Mormon (Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints/LDS)
*	Orthodox (Greek, Russian, or some other orthodox church)
1	Jewish (Judaism)
1	Muslim (Islam)
1	Buddhist
1	Hindu
3	Atheist (do not believe in God)
3	Agnostic (not sure if there is a God)
1	Something else ( <b>SPECIFY: _____</b> )
15	Nothing in particular
12	Christian ( <b>VOL.</b> )
*	Unitarian (Universalist) ( <b>VOL.</b> )
3	Don't Know/Refused ( <b>VOL.</b> )

**ASK ALL:**

ATTEND Aside from weddings and funerals, how often do you attend religious services... more than once a week, once a week, once or twice a month, a few times a year, seldom, or never?

Feb 13-18

2013

17	More than once a week
22	Once a week
11	Once or twice a month
19	A few times a year
16	Seldom
12	Never
3	Don't know/Refused ( <b>VOL.</b> )

**ASK IF CATHOLIC (RELIG=2) [N=304]:**

Q.61 How much, if anything have you heard about Pope Benedict announcing that he would step down as head of the Catholic Church? Have you heard a lot, a little, or nothing at all?

Feb 13-18

2013

60	A lot
30	A little
10	Nothing at all
1	Don't know/Refused (VOL.)

**ASK IF CATHOLIC (RELIG=2) [N=304]:**

Q.62 Do you think the next pope should [RANDOMIZE]?

Feb 13-18

2013

46	Move the Church in new directions [OR SHOULD HE]
51	Maintain the traditional positions of the Church
3	Don't know/Refused (VOL.)

**ASK IF POPE SHOULD MOVE CHURCH IN NEW DIRECTIONS (Q62=1) [N=144]:**

Q.63 And, just in your view, what new directions would you like to see the Catholic Church move in? [RECORD VERBATIM RESPONSE. PROBE FOR CLARITY – DO NOT PROBE FOR ADDITIONAL MENTIONS. IF MORE THAN ONE MENTION, RECORD IN ORDER OF MENTION]

**NOTE: Responses sum to more than 100% because multiple responses were accepted**

Feb 13-18

2013

19	Become more modern
15	Get tougher with abusers/end sex abuse
14	Allow priests to marry
14	Become more accepting/open (general)
9	Become more accepting of homosexuality/same-sex marriage
9	Allow women to serve as priests
7	Become more accepting of contraception/birth control
6	Become less strict/less conservative/more liberal (general)
5	Get better/improve/change (general)
4	More focus on religion/bring people to Church
4	Gender equality/women's rights (general)
4	Less focus on money
3	More focus on social justice/helping people
2	Stay out of sexual issues/private lives
2	Become less strict about heterosexual marriage (divorce, interfaith marriage)
2	Better communication/less secretive
1	Become less strict about abortion
1	Become more traditional/conservative
10	Other
1	Unclear
7	Don't know/No answer

**ASK IF CATHOLIC (RELIG=2) [N=304]:**

Q.64 In your own view, do you think it would be good or bad if the next pope **[INSERT ITEM; RANDOMIZE]**? How about if he **[NEXT ITEM]**? **[IF NECESSARY: Would this be good or bad?]**

	<u>Good</u>	<u>Bad</u>	<u>(VOL.) Would not matter</u>	<u>(VOL.) DK/Ref</u>
a. Allows priests to get married Feb 13-18, 2013	58	35	2	6
b. Is from a developing region, like South America, Asia, or Africa Feb 13-18, 2013	60	14	20	6

PEW RESEARCH CENTER  
February 14-17, 2013, OMNIBUS  
FINAL TOPLINE  
N=1,003

## PEW.1a-e RELEASED PREVIOUSLY

## NO PEW.2-3

## ASK ALL:

PEW.4 Is your overall opinion of [INSERT NAME; RANDOMIZE] very favorable, mostly favorable, mostly UNfavorable, or very unfavorable? How about [NEXT NAME]? [IF NECESSARY: Just in general, is your overall opinion of [NAME] very favorable, mostly favorable, mostly UNfavorable, or very unfavorable?] [INTERVIEWERS: PROBE TO DISTINGUISH BETWEEN "NEVER HEARD OF" AND "CAN'T RATE."]

	-----Favorable-----			-----Unfavorable-----			(VOL.)	(VOL.)
	Total	Very	Mostly	Total	Very	Mostly	Never heard of	Can't rate/Ref
a. Pope Benedict the sixteenth								
Feb 14-17, 2013	49	14	34	27	12	16	4	20
Apr 23-30, 2008	61	22	39	17	8	9	4	18
March, 2008	52	18	34	18	6	12	7	23
August, 2007	50	14	36	18	6	12	8	24
July, 2005	44	10	34	11	4	7	4	41
June, 1996 ( <i>John Paul II</i> )	76	28	48	13	4	9	1	10
May, 1990 ( <i>John Paul II</i> )	79	31	48	11	4	7	1	9
May, 1987 ( <i>John Paul II</i> )	76	28	48	14	4	10	1	9

## NO QUE PEW.4c

## QUESTIONS PEW.4b-f RELEASED PREVIOUSLY OR HELD FOR FUTURE RELEASE

**ASK IF FOLLOWED POPE AT LEAST NOT TOO CLOSELY (PEW.1d=1-3) [N=750]:**

PEW.5 From what you know, how good a job is the pope doing in promoting good relations between the Catholic Church and other major religions? Is he doing an excellent, good, only fair, or a poor job of promoting good relations with other major religions?

Feb 14-17 <u>2013</u>		April <u>2008</u> <sup>1</sup>	March <u>2008</u>	Aug <u>2007</u>
8	Excellent	14	9	6
30	Good	37	30	32
34	Only fair	21	29	35
10	Poor	8	11	11
18	Don't know/Refused (VOL.)	20	21	16

**ASK IF FOLLOWED POPE AT LEAST NOT TOO CLOSELY (PEW.1d=1-3) [N=750]:**

PEW.6 In your view, how good a job has the pope done in addressing the sex abuse scandal in the Catholic Church? Has he done an excellent, good, only fair, or a poor job?

Feb 14-17 <u>2013</u>		Apr 1-5 <u>2010</u> <sup>2</sup>	April <u>2008</u>
4	Excellent	3	9
16	Good	9	30
30	Only fair	27	28
39	Poor	44	20
10	Don't know/Refused (VOL.)	17	13

<sup>1</sup> In April, 2008 and earlier, question was asked of those who had heard at least "a little" about the pope.

<sup>2</sup> In April, 2010 and earlier, question was asked of those who had heard at least "a little" about the pope.