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Views of the Catholic Church Today

U.S. Catholics See Sex Abuse as the Church's Most Important Problem, Charity as Its Most Important Contribution

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT:

Alan Cooperman

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

Jessica Hamar Martínez

Research Associate

1615 L St, N.W., Suite 700

Washington, D.C. 20036

Tel (202) 419-4562

Fax (202) 419-4599

www.pewforum.org

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U.S. Catholics See Sex Abuse as the Church's Most Important Problem, Charity as Its Most Important Contribution

As the Roman Catholic Church prepares for a conclave to elect a new pope, Catholics in the United States tend to view the scandal over sex abuse by clergy as the most important problem facing their church today. Asked to say in their own words what they think is the Catholic Church's most important problem, 34% of U.S. Catholics mention sex abuse, pedophilia or some other reference to the scandal. No other problem garners more than 10% of responses. When asked about the main way the church helps society today, U.S. Catholics most commonly refer to charitable efforts to aid the poor, feed the hungry and heal the sick.

In a nationwide Pew Research Center survey conducted Feb. 28-March 3, 2013, that included 184 Catholics (out of a total of 1,003 adults), nearly one-in-ten U.S. Catholics (9%) say that the church faces a lack of credibility or trust. And 7% cite

low attendance at Mass, a loss of followers or a general loss of faith in society as the most important problem facing the church at this time. An equal number (7%) say the church's most important problem is that it is outdated or out of touch and needs to become more modern or adapt to changes in society. Just one-in-twenty U.S. Catholics (5%) mention the temporary lack of a pope or the need to choose a new pope as the

Most Important Problem Facing Catholic Church Today

<i>% among Catholics...What do you think is the MOST IMPORTANT problem facing the Catholic Church today? (OPEN-ENDED)</i>	%
NET sex abuse/scandal	34
Sex abuse/pedophilia	28
Scandal/sexual problems	6
Dishonesty/low credibility/low trust	9
Outdated/out of touch/not modern enough	7
Low attendance/losing followers/losing faith	7
No pope/choosing new pope	5
Lack of consensus/consistency/organization	3
Media bias/unfair treatment by media	3
Contraception	3
Not moral/conservative/traditional enough	3
Priest shortage/priests can't marry/no women priests	2
Homosexuality/gay marriage	2
Abortion	2
Ineffective at reaching youth	2
Other	7
None	2
Don't know	17

Feb. 28-March 3, 2013. Based on Catholics. Figures total more than 100% because respondents were allowed to give multiple responses.

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church's most important problem today. About one-in-six (17%) decline to offer an opinion or say they do not know what is the most important problem facing the church.

More than a quarter of U.S. Catholics (27%) say the most important way the Catholic Church helps society today is by serving those in need through charitable works. This includes those who cite efforts by Catholics in general to help the poor, feed the hungry and heal the sick as well as those who mention Catholic Charities or other organizations providing services in the United States or overseas.

About one-in-ten U.S. Catholics say the church's most important contribution to society is providing moral guidance and values (11%). A similar percentage (9%) say the church helps society the most by acting as a source of faith and spreading Christianity or the Catholic faith.

Most Important Way Catholic Church Helps Society Today

<i>% among Catholics...What do you think is the MOST IMPORTANT way the Catholic Church helps society today? (OPEN-ENDED)</i>	%
Helps the poor, sick, needy/charitable works	27
Provides moral compass/values	11
Source of faith/spreading religion	9
Source of hope/emotional support	7
Promotes kindness, getting along with others	4
Provides place to worship/gather	3
Education	2
Prayer/religious practice	1
Other	8
None/does not help	5
Don't know	29

Feb. 28-March 3, 2013. Based on Catholics. Figures total more than 100% because respondents were allowed to give multiple responses.

Some respondents (3%) mentioned a problem with the church or suggested a change in the church rather than mentioning a way the church helps society.

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Nearly three-in-ten U.S. Catholics decline to offer an opinion or say they don't know what is the most important way that the Catholic Church helps society today (29%).

About the Survey

The analysis in this report is based on telephone interviews conducted Feb. 28 through March 3, 2013, among a national sample of 1,003 adults, 18 years of age or older, living in the continental United States (501 respondents were interviewed on a landline telephone and 502 were interviewed on a cell phone, including 228 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. 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 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:

Group	Unweighted sample size	Plus or minus...
Total sample	1,003	3.5 percentage points
Catholics	184	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.

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February 28-March 3, 2013 Omnibus
FINAL TOPLINE
N=184 Catholics

READ TO ALL CATHOLICS (RELIG=2):

As you know, the Catholic Church will soon choose a new Pope.

RANDOMIZE PEW.1 AND PEW.2

ASK IF CATHOLIC (RELIG=2):

PEW.1 What do you think is the MOST IMPORTANT problem facing the Catholic Church today?

**[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 28-Mar 3

2013

34	NET sex abuse/scandal
28	Sex abuse/pedophilia
6	Scandals/sexual problems (not further specified)
9	Dishonesty/low credibility/low trust
7	Outdated/out of touch/not modern enough
7	Low attendance/losing followers/losing faith
5	No pope/choosing new pope
3	Lack of consensus/consistency/organization
3	Media bias/unfair treatment by media
3	Contraception
3	Not moral/conservative/traditional enough
2	Priest shortage/priests can't marry/no women priests
2	Homosexuality/gay marriage
2	Abortion
2	Ineffective at reaching youth
7	Other
2	None
17	Don't know

RANDOMIZE PEW.1 AND PEW.2**ASK IF CATHOLIC (RELIG=2):**

PEW.2 What do you think is the MOST IMPORTANT way the Catholic Church helps society today?

[RECORD VERBATIM RESPONSE. PROBE FOR CLARITY – DO NOT PROBE FOR ADDITIONAL MENTIONS. IF MORE THAN ONE MENTION, RECORD IN ORDER OF MENTION]

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Feb 28-Mar 3

2013

27	Helps the poor, sick, needy/charitable works
11	Provides moral compass/values
9	Source of faith/spreading religion
7	Source of hope/emotional support
4	Promotes kindness/getting along with others
3	Provides place to worship/gather
3	Respondent mentioned problem (rather than way church helps)
2	Education
1	Prayer/religious practice
8	Other
5	None
29	Don't know