

# **75 percent of Americans surveyed read Bible passage in last year**

VATICAN CITY - In a survey conducted in nine countries in anticipation of the October world Synod of Bishops on the Bible, 75 percent of U.S. residents interviewed said they read a Bible passage in the previous 12 months.

In Western and Eastern Europe, the percentage of Bible readers ranged from a low of 20 percent in Spain to a high of 38 percent in Poland.

The study, commissioned by the Catholic Biblical Federation, began with 13,000 interviews in the United States, the United Kingdom, Germany, the Netherlands, France, Poland, Russia, Spain and Italy in November 2007.

The president of the federation, Italian Bishop Vincenzo Paglia of Terni, Narni and Amelia, presented the initial results of the survey April 28 during a Vatican press conference and said a second stage of the survey was being conducted in Argentina, South Africa, the Philippines and Australia.

The majority of people in the first nine countries - including 90 percent of Polish respondents - said the Bible is an important source of truth, but more than 50 percent of those interviewed in each country said the Bible was difficult to understand.

Bishop Paglia said, "Despite secularization and little openness to religious experience ... the sacred Scriptures are looked upon with great respect by everyone."

But the fact that the majority defined the Bible as difficult to understand challenges the church to help people learn to read it and see how it applies to their lives, particularly through improved homilies, the bishop said.

Luca Diotallevi, the Rome sociologist who coordinated the survey's working group, said that, while the study found the Bible to be important in the lives and cultures of those interviewed, there was a huge difference between Bible reading in the United

States and in the other countries.

The most relevant factor in promoting Bible reading, he said, was having a Bible in one's home; 93 percent of the U.S. residents interviewed said they had one and 56 percent said they had given someone a Bible as a gift.

He said he was struck particularly by the elements that seemed to predict a higher level of individual reading of and praying with the Scriptures; reading, reading books with a religious theme - including fiction - participating in religious services and being involved in a church-related group were the most predictive factors.

Praying often, believing the Bible contains important truths and identifying oneself as Christian did not correlate as closely with reports of actually reading the Bible on one's own, he said.

The differences, Dr. Diotallevi said, "indicated that reading the Bible is a habit one acquires through imitation," rather than simply conviction.

In the nine countries, he said, "the sense that God is near is anything but extinct and religious practice is anything but marginal."

"The Bible is seen by the vast majority of the population as a source of truth, as the source of a message that has something to do with one's life," he said.

The other interesting thing, he said, is that those who took a "fundamentalist" approach to the Bible, affirming that it is the "direct word of God" and must be taken literally, were not those who knew the Bible best.

And, Dr. Diotallevi said, the U.S. residents who reported reading the Bible most often did not have a significantly greater knowledge of its contents than those who did not read the Bible often.

Biblical knowledge was tested by asking these questions: Are the Gospels part of the Bible? Did Jesus write one of the books of the Bible? Was Paul or Moses a figure from the Old Testament? Which of the following wrote a Gospel: Luke? John? Paul? Peter?