

Three years of polls show Catholic, non-Catholic views on moral issues

WASHINGTON - Telephone polling of Catholics and non-Catholics over three years shows the degree of difference between the two groups on abortion, the death penalty and other moral issues about which the Catholic Church has spoken.

According to figures released March 30 by the Gallup Organization in Princeton, N.J., only on the abortion issue did a minority of Catholics overall find it acceptable - 40 percent compared to 41 percent for non-Catholics.

The only other moral issue which Catholics overall found less acceptable than non-Catholics was the death penalty, but substantial majorities - 61 percent of Catholics and 68 percent of non-Catholics - still found capital punishment morally acceptable.

Besides abortion and the death penalty, other moral issues covered by the polling included sex outside marriage, divorce, gambling, homosexual activity and having a baby outside of wedlock.

The polling figures were taken from Gallup's 2006, 2007 and 2008 Values and Beliefs surveys, in which 3,022 respondents were polled. The margin of error is plus or minus 2 percentage points, which means that Gallup has a 95 percent degree of confidence that, were the survey to be repeated, the results would be within 2 percentage points of the current results.

Even when separated from Catholics and non-Catholics who attend church regularly, a majority of Catholics polled found a majority of the issues raised to be morally acceptable - and, with the exception of the death penalty, declared the issues to be more morally acceptable than their non-Catholic counterparts.

On the issue of embryonic stem-cell research, 63 percent of Catholics overall believe the practice to be morally acceptable, compared to 62 percent of non-Catholics. Among regular churchgoers, 53 percent of Catholics approve of it while 45 percent of non-Catholics do.

Catholics tended to find other practices to be morally acceptable as well:

- Sex between an unmarried man and woman: 67 percent of all Catholics and 57 percent of all non-Catholics said it was acceptable; among regular churchgoers, 53 percent of Catholics and 30 percent of non-Catholics said it was acceptable.
- Divorce: 71 percent of all Catholics, 67 percent of all non-Catholics; among regular churchgoers, 63 percent of Catholics, 46 percent of non-Catholics.
- Having a baby outside marriage: 61 percent of all Catholics, 52 percent of all non-Catholics; among regular churchgoers, 48 percent of Catholics, 29 percent of non-Catholics.
- Gambling: 72 percent of all Catholics, 59 percent of all non-Catholics; among regular churchgoers, 67 percent of Catholics, 40 percent of non-Catholics.
- Homosexual relations: 54 percent of all Catholics, 45 percent of all non-Catholics; among regular churchgoers, 44 percent of Catholics, 21 percent of non-Catholics.
- Abortion: 40 percent of all Catholics, 41 percent of all non-Catholics; among regular churchgoers, 24 percent of Catholics, 19 percent of non-Catholics.
- Capital punishment: 61 percent of all Catholics, 68 percent of all non-Catholics; among regular churchgoers, 52 percent of Catholics, 69 percent of non-Catholics.

The Gallup results mirror a poll taken last fall by the Knights of Columbus in that churchgoing Catholics tended to favor the church's teaching on moral issues more than nonpracticing Catholics, although the two polls did not always cover the same issues.

The results for churchgoing Catholics, described as going to church every week or nearly every week, are "much more in line with the church's teachings than are the views of non-practicing Catholics," said a statement by Gallup announcing the results.

"However, even among committed Catholics, a slim majority seem to be at odds with the church's positions on premarital sex, embryonic stem-cell research, divorce and

the death penalty,” it said.

A statement from Gallup noted that “the stance of the Catholic Church on moral issues” had been in the spotlight recently with the announcement that President Barack Obama would be the commencement speaker this year at the University of Notre Dame in Indiana.