

The Star-Ledger/**Eagleton-Rutgers Poll**

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CONTACT: MONIKA McDERMOTT
(732) 932-9384 x 250

A story based on the survey findings presented in this release and background memo will appear in the Wednesday, June 19 *Star-Ledger*. We ask users to properly attribute this copyrighted information to "*The Star-Ledger/Eagleton-Rutgers Poll*."

THE CATHOLIC CHURCH IN CRISIS

New Jersey Residents Blame Church Leaders

The Catholic Bishop's conference in Texas last week may have come just in time, as the image of the Catholic Church has suffered in New Jersey as a result of recent charges of child sexual abuse by Catholic priests, and the way the Church handled them. In a *Star-Ledger/Eagleton-Rutgers Poll* conducted before the Bishop's conference, half of residents – both Catholic and non-Catholic – said they viewed the Church less favorably as a result of the sexual abuse scandal. Overall, New Jerseyans were divided in their opinions of the church, with Catholics viewing the Church favorably and non-Catholics viewing the Church unfavorably.

The scandal permeated deeply in New Jersey – an overwhelming 94 percent of residents had heard or read at least some news about the sexual abuse charges, including 78 percent who had heard or read "a lot" about them. And among those residents who heard something about the charges, an overwhelming eight in ten disapproved of the way the Church had been handling the charges, and six in ten blamed the Church hierarchy, rather than the abusive priests, for the Church's current problems.

The silver lining for the Catholic Church may be that the scandal has had little effect on the religious faith of Catholics in New Jersey. Few Catholics said either their faith or their behaviors – attending church and donating money – had been adversely affected.

The *Star-Ledger/Eagleton-Rutgers Poll* was conducted by telephone among a scientifically selected sample of 801 New Jersey adults, from June 4th through 9th. The margin of sampling error is plus or minus 3.5 percentage points. The sample includes 336 Catholics for whom the sampling error is plus or minus 5.3 percentage points.

One-third of Garden State residents – 34 percent – said they had a favorable view of the Catholic Church while 29 percent had an unfavorable view and 37 percent had no opinion. Non-

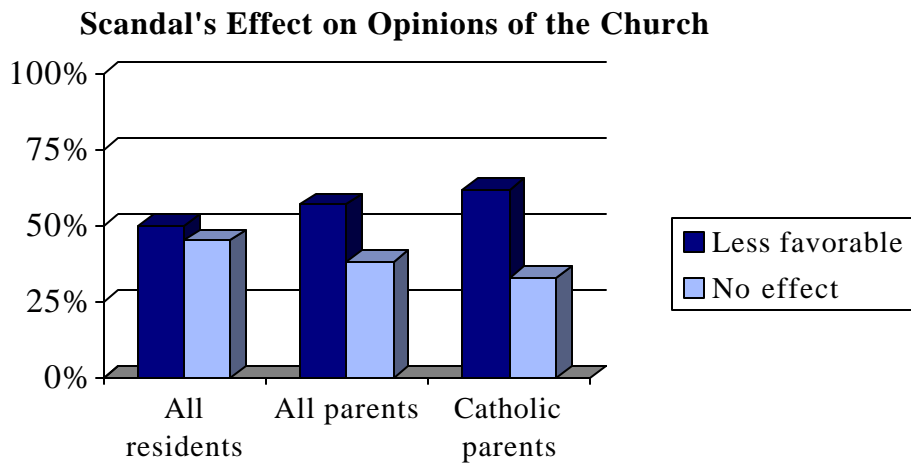
The Star-Ledger/Eagleton-Rutgers Poll • Eagleton Institute of Politics

191 Ryders Lane, New Brunswick, New Jersey 08901

Phone: 732-932-9384 - Website: <http://slerp.rutgers.edu> - Fax: 732-932-6778

Catholics held much more negative opinions than did Catholics – 52 percent of Catholics viewed the Church favorably, compared to only 21 percent of non-Catholics. Only 21 percent of Catholics said they hold unfavorable opinions of the Church, but 36 percent of non-Catholics expressed unfavorable opinions.

While Catholics’ views of the Church are more positive than non-Catholics’, they were equally affected by the problems in the Church. Half of those New Jersey residents who heard or read about the charges – including 49 percent of Catholics and 50 percent of non-Catholics – said their views of the Church were less favorable as a result of the charges and the Church’s handling of them. Forty-five percent of residents said their opinions of the Church were unaffected by the scandal.



Parents with young children were the most likely to have been affected by the recent events. Among all residents, 57 percent of those with children under the age of 18 living at home had a less favorable view of the Catholic Church as a result of the scandal. Among Catholics, the effect was stronger still – 62 percent of Catholics with children under age 18 had a less favorable view of the Catholic Church as a result of the allegations and the way the Church was handling them.

Residents’ opinions of the Church and the scandal stem more from the way the Church handled the allegations of sexual abuse than from the abuse itself. When asked who bears more blame for the Church’s problems, the priests accused of abuse or the Church leaders who covered up the charges, 63 percent of residents placed the blame on Church leaders. Equal numbers of Catholics and non-Catholics agreed on this point. Overall, only 19 percent blamed

the priests, and 16 percent volunteered that both the abusive priests and Church leaders share the blame equally.

These results are not surprising given the level of dissatisfaction among New Jerseyans with the way Catholic Church leaders handled the charges of abuse. Among those who heard or read something about the charges, 81 percent said they disapproved of the way Church leaders handled the problem. Only 13 percent expressed approval of the Catholic Church leaders dealt with the charges. Even 81 percent of Catholics disapproved of the Church's handling of the sexual abuse charges.

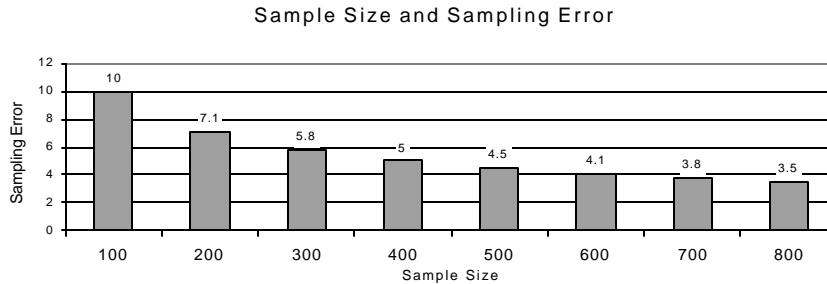
The one bright spot for the Church may be that the vast majority of New Jersey Catholics have not let the Church's recent problems affect their religious faith. Only 17 percent of Catholics said the charges of abuse and the Church's handling of them lessened their Catholic faith. Eighty percent said the problems have had no effect on their faith at all. Behaviors were also largely unaffected. Only 10 percent of Catholics have been attending church less often as a result of the Church's problems. And among the 83 percent of Catholics who said they regularly donate money to the Church, only 15 percent have been giving less money as a result of the scandal.

The scandal is slightly more likely to have affected the beliefs and behaviors of Catholics who have children under age 18 living at home. Twenty-one percent of Catholic parents with young kids said they have less Catholic faith as a result of the scandal. Thirteen percent of Catholic parents said they have been attending church less often, and among those who donate money to the church, 19 percent have been giving less.

The problem of priests sexually abusing children is not thought to be a new one by New Jersey Catholics. Eighty-one percent said it has always been a problem, while only 12 percent believed it was a problem that developed over the past few decades. And despite the high levels of information New Jerseyans have about the scandal, very few have had much personal experience with the issue. Three percent of all residents reported that they have a friend or relative who was abused by a Catholic priest.

BACKGROUND MEMO – RELEASE (EP137-4) June 19, 2002

The latest *Star-Ledger*/Eagleton-Rutgers Poll was conducted by telephone from June 5 to June 9 with a scientifically selected random sample of 801 New Jersey adults. All surveys are subject to sampling error, which is the expected probable difference between interviewing everyone in a population versus a scientific sampling drawn from that population. The sampling error for all respondents in this survey is ± 3.5 percent, at a 95 percent confidence interval. Thus if 50 percent of New Jersey residents were found to have a favorable opinion of the Catholic Church, one would be 95 percent sure that the true figure would be between 46.5 and 53.5 percent (50 ± 3.5) had all New Jersey residents been interviewed, rather than just a sample. Sampling error increases as the sample size decreases, so statements based on various population subgroups, such as separate figures reported for Catholics and non-Catholics, are subject to more error than are statements based on the total sample. The following chart shows the relationship between sample size and sampling error.



Sampling error does not take into account other sources of variation inherent in public opinion studies, such as non-response, question wording or context effects. The verbatim wording of all questions asked is reproduced in this background memo. The sample has been stratified based on county and the data have been weighted on age and education to insure an accurate proportional representation of the state. The questions referred to in this release are as follows:

Is your opinion of the Catholic Church favorable or unfavorable, or don't you really have an opinion of the Catholic Church? [C2]

	<u>Favorable</u>	<u>Unfavorable</u>	<u>No opinion/ DK</u>	<u>Total</u>	<u>(n)</u>
June 2002	34%	29%	37%	100%	(801)
<u>Religious affiliation</u>					
-- Catholic	52	21	27	100	(336)
-- Non-Catholic	21	36	42	99	(429)

How much have you heard or read about charges of child sexual abuse against priests in the Catholic Church – a lot, some, not much, or nothing at all? [C3]

	<u>A lot</u>	<u>Some</u>	<u>Not much</u>	<u>Nothing at all</u>	<u>DK</u>	<u>Total</u>	<u>(n)</u>
June 2002	78%	16%	4%	1%	1%	100%	(801)
<u>Religious Affiliation</u>							
-- Catholic	79	16	4	1	--	100	(336)
-- Non-Catholic	78	16	4	2	1	101	(429)

QUESTIONS C4– C10 ASKED OF THOSE RESPONDENTS WHO HAD HEARD OR READ “A LOT” OR “SOME” [QUESTION C3]

Do you approve or disapprove of the way Catholic Church leaders have handled charges of sexual abuse against priests? [C4]

	<u>Approve</u>	<u>Disapprove</u>	<u>DK</u>	<u>Total</u>	<u>(n)</u>
June 2002	13%	81%	5%	99%	(767)
<u>Religious affiliation</u>					
-- Catholic	15	81	4	100	(325)
-- Non-Catholic	12	82	7	101	(410)

Have the charges of sexual abuse and the way the Church has handled them affected your opinion of the Catholic Church? IF YES: Have they made your opinion of the church more favorable or less favorable? [C5]

	<u>Yes, more favorable</u>	<u>Yes, less favorable</u>	<u>No effect on opinion</u>	<u>DK</u>	<u>Total</u>	<u>(n)</u>
June 2002	2%	50%	45%	3%	100%	(767)
<u>Religious Affiliation</u>						
-- Catholic	3	49	45	3	100	(325)
-- Non-Catholic	1	50	46	3	100	(410)
<u>Children under 18 at home</u>						
-- Yes	2	57	38	3	100	(268)
-- No	2	46	49	3	100	(493)
<u>Catholics only -- children under 18 at home</u>						
-- Yes	2	62	33	3	100	(110)
-- No	3	42	52	3	100	(213)

Who do you think bears more blame for the problems the Church now faces – the priests who are accused of child sexual abuse, or the Church leaders who covered up the allegations? [C6]

	<u>Priests</u>	<u>Church leaders</u>	<u>Both equally (vol.)</u>	<u>DK</u>	<u>Total</u>	<u>(n)</u>
June 2002	19%	63%	16%	2%	100%	(767)
<u>Religious Affiliation</u>						
-- Catholic	21	63	15	1	100	(325)
-- Non-Catholic	16	65	16	2	99	(410)

QUESTIONS C7 – C10 ASKED OF CATHOLICS ONLY

Have the charges of sexual abuse and the way the Church has handled them had any effect on your Catholic faith? IF YES: Have they caused you to have more faith or less faith? [C7]

	<u>More faith</u>	<u>Less faith</u>	<u>No effect on faith</u>	<u>DK</u>	<u>Total</u>	<u>(n)</u>
Catholics -- June 2002	2%	17%	80%	1%	100%	(325)
<u>Children under 18 at home</u>						
-- Yes	2	21	77	--	100	(110)
-- No	1	16	82	1	100	(213)

Have the charges of sexual abuse and the way the Church has handled them had any effect on your church attendance? IF YES: Have they caused you to attend church more often, or less often? [C8]

	<u>More Often</u>	<u>Less Often</u>	<u>No effect on attendance</u>	<u>DK</u>	<u>Total</u>	<u>(n)</u>
Catholics -- June 2002	1%	10%	87%	2%	100%	(325)
<u>Children under 18 at home</u>						
-- Yes	--	13	87	--	100	(110)
-- No	2	9	86	3	100	(213)

Do you now, or have you in the past regularly donated money to your local church or to the Catholic Church in general? [C9]

	<u>Yes</u>	<u>No</u>	<u>DK</u>	<u>Total</u>	<u>(n)</u>
Catholics -- June 2002	83%	16%	1%	100%	(325)
<u>Children under 18 at home</u>					
-- Yes	83	17	--	100	(110)
-- No	83	16	1	100	(213)

ASKED OF THOSE WHO DONATE MONEY:

Have the charges of sexual abuse and the way the Church has handled them had any effect on your donations to the Church? IF YES: Have they caused you to give more money or less money to the Church?

	<u>More money</u>	<u>Less money</u>	<u>No effect on donations</u>	<u>DK</u>	<u>Total</u>	<u>(n)</u>
Catholics -- June 2002	--	15%	85%	--	100%	(273)
<u>Children under 18 at home</u>						
-- Yes	--	19	81	--	100	(93)
-- No	--	12	87	--	99	(178)

Do you think child sexual abuse by priests is a problem that developed over just the past few decades, or do you think the problem has always been there? [C10]

	Developed in past few decades	Always been a problem	DK	Total	(n)
Catholics -- June 2002	12%	81%	7%	100%	(325)
<i>Children under 18 at home</i>					
-- Yes	13	82	5	100	(110)
-- No	11	81	8	100	(213)

ASKED OF ALL RESPONDENTS:

Do you now have, or have you ever had a friend or relative who was sexually abused by a Catholic priest?
[C11]

	Yes	No	DK/Refused	Total	(n)
June 2002	3%	96%	1%	100%	(801)
<i>Religious affiliation</i>					
-- Catholic	3	97	--	100	(336)
-- Non-Catholic	3	96	1	100	(429)