

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

Although the new *Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life* survey concerns itself with empty and switched pews, be advised that the "pew" in Pew Forum is the name of the family that set up the trust to fund the forum and has nothing to do with seats in houses of prayer! On my blog ([ConcordPastor.blogspot.com](http://ConcordPastor.blogspot.com)) I've provided links to the complete Pew report, *U.S. Religious Landscape Survey*, to a video interview with Forum director Louis Lugo and links to the major media reports on the release of the survey's findings.

Here are some excerpts from the *Catholic News Service* story on the Pew study:

According to a new study on the religious affiliation of U.S. adults, 28 percent of Americans have either changed religious affiliations or claim no formal religion at all.

The study also shows the Catholic Church has been hardest hit by these shifts, but that the influx of Catholic immigrants has offset the loss. So, the percentage of the adult population that identifies itself as Catholic has held fairly steady at around 25 percent, it says.

The 148-page study, "U.S. Religious Landscape Survey," was conducted by the Pew Forum on Religion & Public Life and based on interviews with 35,000 adults last year.

Its findings, released Feb. 25, show that roughly 10 percent of all Americans are former Catholics. Almost half of these former Catholics joined Protestant denominations, while about half do not have a religious affiliation and a small percentage chose other faiths.

"If everyone raised Catholic stayed (with their religious affiliation), Catholics would be one-third of the population," said John Green, a senior research fellow and a principal author of the study...

The Catholic Church was not the only religious affiliation to lose members. Study researchers said they found an overall fluidity of religious affiliation.

Baptists experienced a net loss of 3.7 percent and Methodists lost 2.1 percent. Figures relating to the Catholic Church show that 31.4 percent of adults in the United States said they were raised Catholic while only 23.9 percent of them identify with the Catholic Church today, giving the church a net loss of 7.5 percent.

"Everybody in this country is losing members; everybody is gaining members," said Luis Lugo, director of the Pew Forum on Religion & Public Life, during the teleconference.

"It is a very competitive marketplace and if you rest on your laurels, you're going to be history," he added.

The survey, conducted through phone interviews from May to August 2007, asked respondents more than 40 questions, including what faith they were raised in and what they currently practice. According to the responses, 78.4 percent of Americans are Christians, about 5 percent belong to other faith traditions and 16.1 percent are unaffiliated with any religion, which the survey described as the fastest-growing religious category in America.

The respondents who said they were not affiliated with any particular faith today are more than double the number who said they weren't affiliated with any particular religion as children. Among Americans ages 18-29, one-quarter say they are not currently affiliated with any particular religion.

According to the survey, Latinos already account for roughly one in three adult Catholics overall and may account for an even larger share of U.S. Catholics in the future. It said Latinos represent roughly one in eight U.S. Catholics age 70 and older and account for nearly half of all Catholics ages 18-29.

The study also shows that Muslims, roughly two-thirds of whom are immigrants, now account for roughly 0.6 percent of the U.S. adult population; and Hindus, more than eight in 10 of whom are foreign-born, now account for approximately 0.4 percent of the population.

How do these survey results square with our experience in the Archdiocese of Boston? Coincident to the Pew report's release, it was just last week that the Archdiocese published its annual Directory which includes some comparative statistics. Consider these numbers comparing 1998 with 2007:

	<u>1998</u>	<u>2007</u>
General Population in the Archdiocese	3,764,400	4,070,686
Catholic Population	2,002,322	1,855,315
Mass Attendance (average weekend)	383, 811	258,019
Parishes	388	294
Priests of the Archdiocese	971	785
Child Baptisms	30,110	17,360
Confirmations	15,734	15,060
First Communions	23,721	19,437
Marriages	8,896	4,213
Deaths	18,847	19,437

Certainly, the sex abuse crisis in the Catholic Church (2002) and the reconfiguration of parishes in our archdiocese (2004) and many other dioceses are part of the story behind these numbers. But the numbers are part of most churches' stories, regardless of faith tradition or denomination. On my blog in a few days and in my letter next week I'll offer comment on these statistics.

Sincerely,  
Rev. Austin Fleming