



FocusFamilyINSIGHT

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To: Focus on the Family Leadership and Management
Re: Leaving the Faith: Who, How Many and Why?

WHO ARE LEAVING THEIR FAITH? WHAT ARE THEY LEAVING IT FOR? * WHY?

These questions are answered in a new report this week -- *Faith in Flux: Changes in Religious Affiliation in the U.S.* -- from The Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life and the answers both *confirm* and *challenge* some widespread assumptions.

The largest overall findings are:

- 1) **Change Happens Young:** A large minority of Americans change their faith affiliations (44%), with most doing so before the age of 24, while 56% of Americans retain their childhood faith into adulthood.
- 2) **Merely Lane Changes:** The single largest group of U.S. adults making changes is Christians who left their tradition -- not for no faith or a very different one -- but for another Christian tradition, like Catholic to Protestant or Episcopal to Baptist. Eight in ten childhood Protestants are still Protestant.
- 3) **Changers from Lukewarm Homes:** Those who left the Christianity of their childhood come overwhelmingly from homes without a “very strong religious faith” and did not regularly attend church as teenagers or Sunday School as children.
- 4) **The “Unaffiliateds” are Fluid:** Two-thirds of Christians who change their faith to “no affiliation in particular” say they have changed their faith or beliefs at least two times in their life.
- 5) **Catholicism Greatest Change:** In this loss, Catholics are evenly divided between those who unaffiliated with any faith and those who have become Protestant - and the largest subset of these became evangelical.

WHO CHANGED	SHARE OF U.S. POP.
Still Hold Faith of Childhood	56%
No Longer Hold Faith of Childhood	44%
Raised Protestant, now different Protest.	15%
Raise Protestant, now unaffiliated	7%
Raised Catholic, now Protestant	5%
Raised Catholic, no unaffiliated	4%
Raised non-affiliated, now affiliated	4%
Other changes in religious affiliation	9%





MEMO

Who Leaves and Why?

People who were raised as Christians and left their faith altogether for either another religion or none come overwhelmingly from homes where they did not regularly attend church as teenagers or Sunday School as children. These were more likely to report not “having had a very strong religious faith as a child or teenager.” Only 11% of those who abandoned their childhood Christian faith said they had a very strong faith during childhood.

Seven in ten said they just drifted away from their childhood faith -- more a result of apathy stemming from a lukewarm faith. Five in ten said they stopped believing in their faith’s teachings.

Religion not Trumped by Science: Of currently unaffiliated who were raised evangelical, only 24% believe science proves religion to be false.

Their exit stems more from their ideas that religious people are hypocritical and/or judgmental, no religion is completely true or there is too much focus on rules.

Low Retention Among “Unaffiliateds”

The report explains that, “paradoxically, the unaffiliated gained the most members in the process of religious change despite having one of the lowest retention rates of all religious groups.

Most who are raised unaffiliated (54%) now belong to a religion, with only 9% of those joining a non-Christian religion. Seven out of ten “unaffiliateds” from childhood who joined a faith in adulthood did so because they “enjoy religious services and the style of worship” and 55% said they “felt called by God” to join their community of faith.

Implications for Focus on the Family

Retention of adults to their childhood Christian faith is more of a good news story, with the great majority of Christians sticking to some form of the Christian faith, according to this study.

Those who do leave their childhood Christian faith report coming from cold to lukewarm homes of faith. And most of these report a drifting away from their faith, rather than leaving for hard disagreements or beliefs that science proves faith outmoded.

This means that our work of helping parents raise their children in serious and committed Christian homes can go far in helping those children stick with their faith in adulthood!

Source: *Faith in Flux: Change in Religious Affiliation in the U.S.* (The Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life, April, 2009).
