

Press Release by The Iona Institute

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New poll shows big rise in church-attendance

Church attendance highest among FF/FG voters

TWO-THIRDS OF IRISH PEOPLE go to church at least once a month, a new opinion poll conducted by RedC on behalf of The Iona Institute has found. Compared with an ESRI poll conducted early last year this figure has jumped from 54%.

The new poll is the first confirmation of anecdotal evidence that religious practice has been on the increase since the recession began.

It shows that weekly church attendance is 46% (up from 42% compared with the ESRI poll (see note 2 below)), while the percentage who go monthly or more is 19% adding up to a grand total of 65%. Only 1% of respondents never go, while another 10% have not been in at least a year.

In addition, the poll finds that church attendance is still reasonably high among young people. While attendance rates are lower than the national average, almost a third of 18-24 year olds go weekly (31%) and another 22% go monthly or more. Among those aged over 65, the weekly attendance rate is 70%.

Church attendance also varies by region. In rural areas 56% of respondents said they go weekly compared with 38% in Dublin. A further 16% and 20% respectively said they have been to church within the past month.

There is also variation by political affiliation. Fianna Fail voters are most likely to attend church monthly or more (72%) followed by Fine Gael voters (68%) and Labour (65%). Green party voters are least likely to attend church.

Commenting on the findings, David Quinn, Director of The Iona Institute, said: "This poll bears out anecdotal evidence that church attendance has been increasing since the recession began. The increase among those who say they go at least monthly is very striking and outside the margin of error. The increase in the weekly attendance figure is also significant.

He continued: "Obviously, no religious leader is going to welcome the recession because it may have had this effect on church attendance. However, taken on its own, the findings will be widely welcomed by those who believe in the importance of religion.

"The finding for younger people is also worth noting. It's assumed that very few young people go to Mass or other religious services. This simply isn't true.

"Also, it's worth noting that the poll was conducted after the release of the Ryan report but it seems this has had no negative effect whatever on church attendance."

Professor Patricia Casey, consultant psychiatrist at the Mater Hospital in Dublin added : "The recession has the potential to cause major mental health problems and it is in this context that people may turn to religion and will benefit from the moderating effects of religious practice on the stress that inevitably results from the current downturn."

Professor Casey is the author of a paper called 'The psycho-social benefits of religious practice' published by The Iona Institute last April.

ENDS

Notes to editors

1. RED C interviewed a random sample of 1,000 adults aged 18+ years old by telephone between the 19th-21st October 2009. Interviews were conducted across the country and the results weighted to the profile of all adults aged 18+. The margin of error on the sample size of 1,009 is +/- 3.2%. Information in this report can be republished if sourced correctly and prior agreement from the Iona Institute and RED C is sought.
2. The ESRI poll is found in ‘The Challenge of Indifference’ by Micheal Mac Greil, published earlier this year.
3. David Quinn, Director of The Iona Institute, can be contacted at (087) 982 9910.
4. Professor Casey can be contacted at (087) 2435542.
5. The Iona Institute is a pro-religion and pro-marriage organisation.

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