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In a recent survey, 88% of American Catholics said that “how a person lives is more important than whether he or she is Catholic,” according to *Catholics in America: Persistence and change in the Catholic landscape*.

The survey finds that just over half (56%) say they would “never leave” the Catholic Church, and one in three say it is unlikely they would leave. However, 86% say “you can disagree with aspects of church teachings and still remain loyal to the church.”

It also looks at Mass attendance which has fallen from 44% attending at least once a week in 1987 to 31% in 2011, while those who attend less than monthly rose from 26% to 47%. The image of believers doing good deeds was knocked by the survey as 60 % said you could be a good Catholic without donating time or money to help the poor.

The survey’s co-author Michele Dillon, chair of the sociology department at the University of New Hampshire, said that when it comes to questions of abortion, non-marital sex and homosexuality, more than half of Catholics, including those most highly committed to the church in their personal practices, say it’s their own moral views, not those of church leaders, that matter.

The loss of the Catholic Church’s credibility shows in the responses to questions about child abuse:

- 7% of Catholics say they personally know someone who was a victim of abuse.
- 12% say they know a priest accused of abuse.
- 83% say the issue has hurt church leaders' political credibility at least somewhat.
- 77% say it has hurt priests' ability to meet parishioners' spiritual or pastoral needs.
- Only 29% say the bishops have done a good or excellent job in handling the issue.

There is more on the survey [here](#).