

Religion and today's teens

With the death and appointment of a pope for the Roman Catholic Church, the subtle reaction from students here at Antioch Community High School calls into question how religious students actually are. Learn just how much students really believe and how they show it and learn all about Pope John Paul II's life and of the new Pope, Pope Benedict XVI.

In today's world of violent video games, Michael Jackson, and illegal music downloads, religion is a far fetched topic to teens; so the question arises, just how religious are teens today.

The facts of student beliefs

After taking a survey of 500 random students school wide, many might be shocked. While 89% (449) of the students polled say that they believe in God, or a higher being, such as Allah or Buddha, only 36% (180) of the students said that they attend church on a close to regular basis, at least once a month.

Father Folger, of St. Peter's Church in Antioch, said, "We have definitely seen a decline in attendance of teens and younger families in the last ten years; it seems that they are more concerned with video games and sports than with their religious life." While newer generations have statistically been attending Catholic churches less and less, especially with the recent sexual abuse scandals among priests, other churches agree that attendance has not been as high in recent years.

According to religoustolerance.org, the growing trend in the West, Europe and the Americas, is to declare oneself as a religious person or one who believes, but not to attend a church service. The site also cites the fact that a larger range of religions are growing, "In about the year 1990, Christianity started to lose market share in the U.S. The percentage of American adults who identify themselves as Christians is dropping by about 1 percentage point per year. The number of Adults who identify themselves as having no religious affiliation is largely growing. Some small religions are growing rapidly. One example is Wicca, an Earth-based Neopagan religion. It is doubling in numbers about every 30 months. If this trend holds, then sometime during the early 2030's, Christianity will become a minority religion in the U.S."

The school wide poll closely followed the site's figures 11% of the polled students said that they either considered themselves Atheists or practiced a religion which did not support the idea of a single god-like figure.

An insight into the changes

Along with the survey, students were allowed to write additional anonymous comments as to why they believed the way they did; some responses provide insight as to why teens are becoming less religious. One respondent refused to practice a religion under a Christian God because "I can't practice a religion that so blatantly goes



Photo courtesy of: morguefile.com
A crowd of over two million people came to Vatican City, over one billion Catholics world-wide, and many non-Catholics mourned John Paul II's death.

against gay rights and gay marriage," while another respondent said, "I just can't believe in a god that lets so many bad things happen to so many good people."

While some of these ideas have been around since the beginning of time, some point to more recent openings in the way of child to parent communications.

"It used to be that when a parent told their child to go to church, they went to church," said Andrew Martin a religious counselor for the Archdiocese of Chicago. "These days though, and I'm not saying this is a bad thing,

teens are becoming more vocal and expressing their personal beliefs...it's not like the days of 'Leave it To Beaver' anymore."

A look into the future church

No matter the reasons, the numbers have religious heads worried.

"In all honesty I worry about the future generations," said Folger, "If today's youth stray away from God, what does that mean for their children, and their children's children? There has to be hope somewhere."

And many agree. Among the students who answered that they attend church on a semi-regular basis, 95% (171) of the students said they see a shrinking future for major religions.

One respondent commented, "I just hope that this is just some fad, that teens will eventually see that without God there is no future."

While opinions are divided on whether major religion will exist in its form as it is today or not, the numbers don't lie that at its current rate religion has a dismal future.

The faith fad - designers capitalize on cultural icons and celebs bite

Within the last year, brands such as Gucci, Prada, and numerous T-shirt companies have been taking cultural symbols such as crosses and Kabbalah bracelets as a new sort of fad, the faith fad.

Commercializing on cultural icons has celebrities jumping to the stores, and religious supporters heading to protest.

After surveying several Antioch Community High School students the general opinion tended to be that students found the faith fad harmless and not offensive as long as the religion was not being made fun of. Also, if the designs on a piece of clothing were portrayed in a sensual manner, students found that a offensive because religion is not supposed to be sexual.

"If it is just a cross, then that is fine," said Lauren Forster, an ACHS senior, "But when it is making fun of the religion, such as the 'Jesus is my homeboy' T-shirt then people are crossing the line. People need to be more sensitive about things that people believe in. They should not make fun of it."

Another student, Becca McCarthy a junior, thought that it was entirely harmless. "People really shouldn't

take offense to it, it is just a fashion statement, it is so easily ignorable that I don't let it get to me," said McCarthy, but she also said, "When I buy religious items such as T-shirts and belts, I do it because I'm proud of my faith and not because it's a fad."

Some examples of the products involved are Prada's and Gucci's handbags, belts, and belt buckles, which have cross charms on them. T-shirt companies such as Teenage Millionaire produce the 'Jesus is my homeboy' and 'Mary is my homegirl' shirts.

The faith fad fashion statement originated around the time that the movie 'The Passion of the Christ' premiered in theatres. The celebrities that were seen wearing the faith fad wear (homeboy/homegirl shirts) were Madonna, Ashton Kutcher, and Pamela Anderson.


The trend then grew to Prada and Gucci and finally to bracelets from Kabbalah which is a Jewish oral law. What ever the opinion, many hope that this like every other fad will pass in a short period of time.



The Pope: past and future

During his record breaking 27 year term in the papacy, John Paul II turned the position of Pope back into a world leadership position and revolutionized the way the Roman Catholic Church appeared to the world.


1978



Oct. 16, 1978 - Karol Joseph Wojtyla is elected the 264th Roman Catholic pope. He became the first non-Italian pontiff since Pope Adrian VI of Holland in 1522.

June 2, 1979 - Takes trip to Poland that sets off the first independent labor movement in the Soviet bloc.


1980



May 13, 1981 - Shot in the abdomen in an assassination attempt by a Turk in St. Peter's Square.


Dec. 1, 1989 - Accepts visit from Mikhail Gorbachev, which was the first ever meeting between a pope and a Kremlin chief.

1990



Jan. 15, 1991 - Writes letters to President Bush and Iraqi leader Saddam Hussein in an attempt to avert the Gulf War.


1995



March 25, 1995 - Decree from the Pope calling abortion and euthanasia a "culture of death." Decree made in the 11th encyclical (a special letter reserved for matters of extreme importance to the church).

Jan. 21, 1998 - The Pope travels to Cuba and visits with Fidel Castro.


2000



March 20, 2000 - Travels to the Holy Land and prays at the Western Wall for God's forgiveness for Christian persecution of Jews.

March 2003 - Publishes "Roman Trip-tych" his first book of poetry. It's a three part meditation on nature, life, and death, including his own.

2005 and beyond



April 2, 2005 - Pope John Paul II dies at 9:37 p.m. of septic shock and cardio-circulatory collapse. He served the third longest term and traveled more than any other Pope.

April 19, 2005 - Joseph Alois Ratzinger is elected the 265th Pope, Pope Benedict XVI. Benedict is 78, the oldest Pope since Clement XII in 1730.