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Americans' view of clergy ethics drops

Tom Gallagher | Dec. 11, 2009 NCR Today

In a story by Solange De Santis of Religion News Service, Americans' views of the "honesty and ethics" of clergy [1] have hit a 32-year low, with just half rating their moral caliber as high or very high, according to Gallup's annual Honesty and Ethics Ratings of Professions survey.

The reason for the decline from 56 percent last year to 50 percent in 2009 is "unclear," according to a Gallup news release, which also noted that "now the clergy's ratings are below where they were earlier this decade" at the height of the Catholic Church's clergy abuse scandal.

Ratings dropped year-over-year among Catholics and Protestants, as well as among regular and occasional churchgoers. However, they rose in one category: among those professing "no religion." Last year, 31% rated clergy honesty high or very high; in 2009, that figure inched up to 34%.

The most highly regarded profession was nursing, with 83% judging nurses' honesty and ethics as high or very high.

Police officers showed the greatest gain (7 points), to 63%. Bankers' ratings tumbled amidst the financial crisis to 19%, down from 23% in 2008 and 35% in 2007. Ratings of stockbrokers fell to 9%, the same level as members of Congress.

The survey was based on telephone interviews with 1,017 adults nationwide with a margin of error of plus or minus 4 percentage points.

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[1] http://www.usatoday.com/news/religion/2009-12-10-clergy-ethics-abuse_N.htm