NATIONAL CATHOLIC REPORTER
Published on *National Catholic Reporter* (https://ncronline.org)

Clergy fall in middle when it comes to societal contributions, study shows

Caitlin Hendel | Jul. 12, 2013 NCR Today

Fewer than 40 percent of Americans see members of the clergy as major contributors to society, with Hispanic Catholics especially unimpressed, a recent Pew Research Center study [1] shows.

The results put the clergy in the middle of 10 professions as far as perceived contributions go, and showed little change from a similar study done in 2009. Members of the military ranked first, with 78 percent saying they contribute ?a lot? to the ?well-being of society,? and lawyers came in last with 18 percent.

The Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life published the results Thursday.

For the clergy, 37 percent said members contribute ?a lot,? and 18 percent put their value in society at ?not very much or nothing.? In 2009, clergy received 40 percent in the ?a lot? category.

Those who said they attend church every week gave a higher opinion of clergy than those who do not, although it wasn?t an especially rousing vote of confidence. Just more than half ? 52 percent ? of weekly churchgoers viewed clergy as strong contributors.

Hispanic Catholics are notably underwhelmed by their clergy. Across-the-board, whether they attend church weekly or not, less than a third of that group gave the highest ratings to clergy, and 20 percent saw little or no contributions from their priests, deacons and other church leaders.

In contrast, among white churchgoing Catholics and Protestants, the numbers ran above 60 percent in support of the clergy, with fewer than 12 percent in the ?not very much or nothing? category.

Besides members of the military, those ranked above clergy in the survey included teachers, doctors, scientists and engineers. The contributions of artists, journalists, business executives and lawyers fell below those in the clergy.

The Pew survey of 4,006 adults was conducted from March 21 to April 8.

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[1] http://www.pewforum.org/Other-Demographics/Public-Esteem-for-Military-Still-High.aspx