

ELECTION 2000

Survey implies Catholics could decide presidency

WASHINGTON — On Election Day Catholics could play the decisive role in who is the next U.S. president, according to a study by the Center for Applied Research in the Apostolate.

"Perhaps more than in any other recent national elections, American Catholics are poised to play a decisive role in the presidential elections in 2000," said C.A.R.A. researcher Mercy Sister Mary E. Bendyna at a press luncheon Oct. 27.

Not only do Catholics form the largest religiously identifiable group of citizens and turn out to vote in higher proportions than others, but they are "concentrated in the so-called battleground or toss-up states," she said.

In addition, they form more of a "swing vote" because while more tend to be Democrat than Republican, "Catholics are somewhat more likely to vacillate in their voting, regardless of party affiliation," she said. One-fifth of those surveyed said they had not yet decided which candidate to vote for on Nov. 7.

A panel of experts in politics and sociology largely agreed with the C.A.R.A. find-

ings but, less than two weeks from Election Day, found themselves still baffled about what Catholic voters would do in swing states and unable to predict what it would mean.

David C. Leege of the University of Notre Dame's government and international studies department, a specialist in analysis of U.S. voting behaviors, said the "biggest story" he saw in the findings was the impact of gender, political generation and economic class on the choice of candidates by Catholics likely to vote.

The 62-page C.A.R.A. study, "The Political Preferences of American Catholics on the Eve of the 2000 Elections," was based on telephone survey interviews of a national sampling of 1,200 self-identified Catholic registered voters who said they were likely to vote in November. It had a 2.8 percent margin of error. It was conducted Sept. 13-18, in a period of relative political calm following the national conventions but before the candidates' debates.

The survey is part of a larger C.A.R.A. research project on how the religious di-

mensions of U.S. Catholics' lives relate to their political and civic views.

That research is jointly sponsored by the Faith and Reason Institute in Washington and the Commonwealth Foundation in New York under a grant from the Pew Charitable Trusts to study how Catholics can have a more robust and effective presence in U.S. politics, business, economics and other areas of civic life.

Sister Bendyna said the extent to which Catholics are influenced by their religious faith varies greatly and "even among those who share high levels of religious commitment, there is a great deal of variation in the way Catholics apply their faith and values in the public square."

She said at the time of the survey the Democratic candidate, Vice President Al Gore, led his Republican opponent, Texas Gov. George W. Bush, 42 percent to 35 percent among Catholics who were likely voters.

Bush had an 8 percent edge over Gore among Catholic men, but Gore was ahead by a 17 percent margin among Catholic women, she said.

"Bush also leads among young adult Catholics, those between the ages of 18 and 39," by a margin of 43 percent to 36 percent, she said.

Within that young adult group, she said, Bush's lead comes from among men, rather than women, and from among those in their 30s, rather than among

those 18-29 years old.

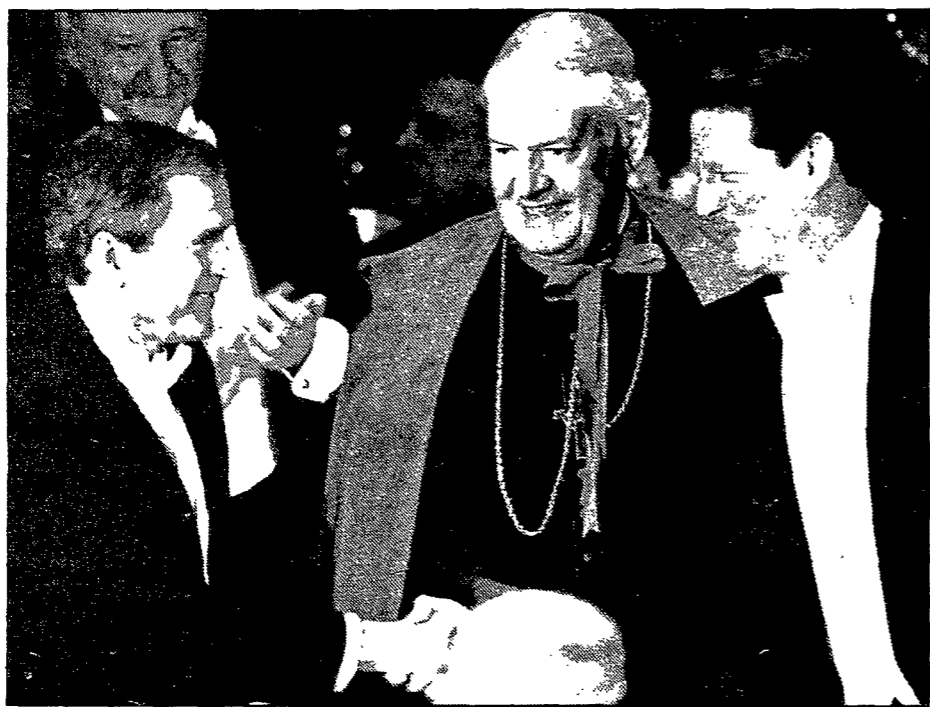
When C.A.R.A. researchers compared Catholic voters' candidate preferences with their religious practice, Sister Bendyna said, "Gore's lead over Bush is greatest among those who participate least in church life and among those who say that their faith is not important to them." Those two groups, however, form a very small percentage of Catholics, she added.

She said Catholic support for Bush "generally increases as religiosity increases."

Within that general area, however, she said the only subgroup in which Bush had a statistically significant lead over Gore was among "those who attend Mass at least every week" — a group comprising 37 percent of those surveyed. In all other groups Gore had a significant lead or the margin of difference was insignificant.

At the same time, she said, "those who participate more frequently in church life, especially those who say their faith is very important to them, actually are more likely to identify with the Democratic Party than with the Republican Party."

The C.A.R.A. report found that in mid-September, in the 14 states then regarded as closely contested, with a combined total of 163 electoral votes, Gore led Bush among Catholic voters by a seven-point margin overall. But Bush led Gore by a three-point margin in the four Midwestern states of that group.



Reuters/CNS

Rivals shake hands

Republican presidential candidate Texas Gov. George W. Bush (left) and Democratic presidential candidate Vice President Al Gore shake hands while New York Archbishop Edward M. Egan looks on at the annual Alfred E. Smith Memorial Foundation Dinner in New York Oct. 19.

Clinton

Continued from page 1

proached the church for permission to have Clinton stop there because the parish is known as a center for Hispanic community life.

"There is no greater icon in the Hispanic community than St. Michael's Church," said Cruz, himself a parishioner at Our Lady of Perpetual Help Church in Rochester. He added that the rally took place in the church for the sake of older people who might get cold in an outdoor rally. Such a rally took place at a neighboring supermarket plaza following Clinton's appearance at St. Michael's.

Cruz also said that church officials told him they would be open to having any political candidate speak there, including Clinton's opponent, Republican Rick Lazio.

St. Michael's pastoral leaders did not respond to phone calls or e-mails sent to them by the *Catholic Courier*.

Clinton appeared at the church with U.S. Sen. Charles E. Schumer and other Democratic politicians following the parish's regularly scheduled 11:30 a.m. Spanish Mass. During Schumer's introductory remarks prior to Clinton's speech, a man started shouting: "No politics in the church," according to Siobhan Hanna, a parishioner at Penfield's Holy Spirit Church.

Cruz said the people in the church continually drowned out this man and other hecklers with applause. And, he added, some of the people at St. Michael's to whom he spoke afterwards told him they thought the protesters were "disrespectful."

Hanna said she had gone to the church because, like Foy, she couldn't believe Clinton would be allowed to use a Catholic church as a campaign stop. She added that she was not a "professional protester," but a concerned Catholic.

"I was dumbfounded that they would consider having her there because she is the antithesis of Catholic values," Hanna said of Clinton. "She supports abortion and the death penalty."

Hanna said she saw a police officer remove one man who had begun loudly reciting the Apostles' Creed and the rosary. Another man stood up and talked in Spanish about Clinton promoting the "culture of death," and was also asked to leave, she said. She herself sang the civil rights anthem "We Shall Overcome" while sitting in a pew. Organizers, and then a police officer, asked her to leave, she said, but she ignored their requests and was forcibly taken out by the officer. "I'm very offended as a practicing Catholic that I would be expelled by a policeman from church," she said, though she added that most of the people around her seemed to support Clinton more than the protesters.



I plan to find joy in the littlest things.

A plan for living.

Hospice really is a plan for living.

And the sooner you call, the

sooner we can help you put that

plan into action — with emotional

support, pain management,

in-home care — anything you need

to keep enjoying life. Call 214-1400.

Genesee Region
Home Care
An Excellus Company

www.grhc.com

© 2000 Eric Mower and Associates

Catholic Courier (USPS 135-580)
Vol. 112 No. 5, Nov. 2, 2000

Published weekly except the last
Thursday in December.

Subscription rates: single copy, 75¢; one-
year subscription in U.S., \$20.00; Canada
and foreign \$20.00 plus postage. Offices:
1150 Buffalo Road, Rochester, N.Y.
14624, 716/328-4340. Periodicals
postage paid at Rochester, N.Y.

POSTMASTER: Send address changes
to Catholic Courier, P.O. Box 24379,
Rochester, N.Y. 14624.