

Changing Our Religion

✖ **April 29, 2009** – Last year a massive nationwide survey discovered that 44 percent of Americans switch denominations in their lifetime. Now an in-depth study is taking it a step further by uncovering how many change religions—and exactly why they do.

A report released Monday by the Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life found that roughly half of Americans change their religious affiliation at some point in their lives. Most people who change do so before they are 24 years old, and many of those actually switch multiple times. Not surprisingly, most believers settle into their faith at an older age, with very few people leaving their religion after turning 50. (The majority of those surveyed found their current church home at age 36.)

Among Protestants, more than half who become unaffiliated with any denomination or religion say it's because they "stopped believing its teachings." In addition, almost 40 percent of those who no longer attend church remain unaffiliated because of their spiritual needs not being met.

Although the reasons for changing religions Normal 0 -or leaving a faith altogether Normal 0 -range from theological disagreements to simple spiritual drifting, pastors will be interested to find that the majority of Protestants who have changed denominations have done so because of life circumstances (marriage, relocating to different community) rather than doctrinal differences. Still, a full 36 percent say they leave their denomination because of their church, practices or people.

"If I was a religious leader, the good news is the low number of people raised unaffiliated stayed that way," said Pew researcher John Green. "It suggests that many who are

unaffiliated are open to religion. ... There is a real demand side of the religious marketplace that compliments the supply side. There are people who are ready, willing and able to change faiths if they find one that appeals to them."