

New Pope Must Deal With Divided Church in United States

Pope Francis will face a divided church in the United States, with the faithful at odds over issues like contraception, same-sex marriage and married priests.

Jorge Mario Bergoglio of Argentina was chosen to lead the Roman Catholic Church on Wednesday. He took the name Pope Francis.

“Intense prayer from all around the world surrounded the election of Pope Francis I,” Cardinal Timothy Dolan of New York, president of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops, said in a statement. “The bishops of the United States thank God for the guidance of the Holy Spirit and the inspired choice of the College of Cardinals.”

In the United States, the results of November’s presidential election highlighted the divide between Catholics who want the Church to modernize and those who favor its traditional ways. U.S. Catholic bishops pushed hard against policies favoring gay marriage and contraception, warning of the “intrinsic evils” of the Democratic platform. But post-election polling showed that most U.S. Catholics favored Democratic President Barack Obama.

Forty-six percent of Catholics surveyed said the new pontiff should “move in new directions,” while 51 percent say he should “maintain traditional positions,” according to a Pew Research Center poll conducted last month.

Donna Doucette, executive director of Voice of the Faithful, a group of lay Catholics that formed in 2002 in reaction to the clergy sex scandals, said she had mixed opinions about Pope

Francis, who is not known to be a liberal.

"We are definitely waiting to see," Doucette said. "It remains to be seen whether he is a person of the 21st century or the 17th century."

National polls also show continuing anger over the clergy sexual abuse scandal in the United States, which has resulted in the bankruptcies of prominent archdioceses and cost the Church in America an estimated \$3 billion in settlements. A Reuters/Ipsos poll conducted over the past week showed that most American Catholics name the scandal as the biggest problem facing the Church.

About 25 percent of U.S. residents are Roman Catholic, but that number has been buoyed by a continuing influx of Hispanic immigrants. Lapsed Catholics have become the nation's second largest religious classification, after Catholics, representing 10 percent of U.S. residents, according to the Pew Forum on Religion & Public Life.

A Chicago woman who calls herself a "recovering Catholic," said she left the Church because she finds its views "too archaic" on homosexuality, birth control and women's ordination.

"It made me sad to be in an organization that says love your neighbor, but not if your neighbor is any of these things," said Barbara Richter, 27, a science teacher with the Chicago Public Schools.

Even those who continue to identify as Catholics find themselves at odds with some Church teachings, particularly on the subject of contraception. A 2012 Gallup poll found that 82 percent of U.S. Catholics found birth control morally acceptable, even though it is prohibited by the Church.

Most U.S. Catholics surveyed, 54 percent, also support gay marriage, compared to 47 percent of all Americans, according

to a Quinnipiac University poll released this month.

Also, 58 percent of Catholics think it would be good if priests could marry, compared with 35 percent who disagree, according to a Pew Forum poll. Among Catholics who said they attend Mass weekly, 46 percent said priests should not be allowed to marry, while 43 percent objected.

Some U.S. Catholics see the increasing traditionalism of the Church as a positive development and a source of strength. Terry Sullivan, a parishioner at St. John Cantius in Chicago, which has regular Latin Masses, believes there is “so much good going on in the Church right now.”

“We live in a culture that’s ailing,” said Sullivan, 57. “The Church is here to heal it, not to accommodate the disease.” She said on issues like abortion, “the Church is right to hold firm.”

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