

Poll: Pastors Say Mormons not Christians

Most pastors feel strongly that Mormons are not Christians, according to a survey by LifeWay Research.

The survey polled 1,000 American Protestant pastors and asked them to respond to the statement: "I personally consider Mormons (Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints) to be Christians."

Three-quarters (75 percent) disagree with the statement, including 60 percent who strongly disagree and 15 percent who somewhat disagree. Just 11 percent somewhat agree, 6 percent strongly agree and 9 percent do not know.

"Though pastors believe overwhelmingly that Mormonism is not Christianity, their opinions should not be confused with personal scorn for Mormons," said Ed Stetzer, president of LifeWay Research. "A person can respect a religious group and even appreciate their commitment to traditional moral values without equating their beliefs with Christian orthodoxy."

Mormonism has come into the public eye in recent years with the rise of prominent adherents like Republican presidential candidate Mitt Romney, U.S. Senate majority leader Harry Reid and conservative talk show host Glenn Beck.

According to a 2009 study by the Pew Research Center, Mormons comprise 1.7 percent of the U.S. adult population and 58 percent of Utah's population—the state founded by early Mormon leaders. In comparison, evangelical Protestants and Roman Catholics each make up about a quarter of the U.S. population (26 percent and 24 percent respectively).

Seventy-six percent of the U.S. Mormon population is concentrated in the West, with 35 percent in Utah, 13 percent

in California and 7 percent in Idaho.

In the Pew study's measure of intensity of religious belief and practice, Mormons ranked higher than Evangelical Protestants, Catholics and Mainline Protestants. A full 83 percent of Mormons say religion is very important in their lives, compared with 56 percent of the general population. Three-quarters of Mormons (76 percent) attend church at least once a week, compared with 39 percent of the general population.

In the LifeWay Research survey, pastors' self-identification as either mainline or evangelical was a predictor of their opinions regarding Mormons. While two-thirds (67 percent) of evangelicals strongly disagree that Mormons are Christians, just 48 percent of mainline pastors feel the same way.

Mainline pastors are more likely than their evangelical counterparts both to strongly agree that Mormons are Christians (9 percent to 3 percent) and to somewhat agree (16 percent to 9 percent).

Pastors 65 and older are the least likely age bracket to strongly disagree that Mormons are Christians, with 48 percent holding that opinion.

Pastors whose highest education level is no more than a bachelor's degree are more likely to be unsure about Mormons than pastors who hold a graduate degree. While 16 percent of those with no more than a bachelor's degree are unsure whether Mormons are Christians, just 5 percent with a graduate degree are unsure.

"Individuals holding to the Mormon faith are in the news in politics, entertainment and sports," Stetzer said. "It is inevitable that pastors will be approached with questions from their parishioners regarding the Mormon belief system. All ministers would do well to learn about Mormonism and have an answer ready for their congregations."