Attitudes towards the Catholic Church
An Amárach Report for the Iona Institute

October 2011
The Catholic Church in Ireland has been the subject of considerable criticism in recent years.

The Iona Institute commissioned a survey of Irish attitudes towards the Catholic Church to gauge the impact of recent reports.

This report summarises the main findings, and are based on a nationwide survey of 1,000 Irish people in September 2011, using the Amarách Research omnibus service.
Catholic Ireland?

7 in 10 Irish adults describe themselves as Catholic, including the majority of those aged 15-24.

Just under half of all Catholics attend Mass on a weekly or monthly basis.

### Catholics in Ireland

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>% Catholic</th>
<th>% Past Week</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>All Adults</td>
<td>69</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15-24s</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25-34s</td>
<td>63</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>35-44s</td>
<td>71</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>45-54s</td>
<td>76</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>55+</td>
<td>77</td>
<td>52</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Source:** Amárach Research, September 2011

Q. What is your religion?
Q. If Catholic: When was the last time you attended Mass?
Middle aged Irish people have the most unfavourable view of the Catholic Church.

Indeed, only 27% of all Catholics have a favourable view of the Church at present.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age Group</th>
<th>Favourable</th>
<th>Unfavourable</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>All Adults</td>
<td>24%</td>
<td>47%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15-24s</td>
<td>14%</td>
<td>48%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25-34s</td>
<td>18%</td>
<td>46%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>35-44s</td>
<td>18%</td>
<td>54%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>45-54s</td>
<td>19%</td>
<td>58%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>55+</td>
<td>55%</td>
<td>44%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Source:** Amárach Research, September 2011

Q. When you think about the Catholic Church in Ireland is your view favourable or unfavourable?
The scandal over child abuse has driven the unfavourable view of the church among both Catholics and non-Catholics in Ireland.

Source: Amárach Research, September 2011

Asked if ‘unfavourable’:
Q. What are some of the reasons why you say you have an unfavorable opinion of the Catholic religion?
Women are more likely to agree than men that Catholic teachings are still of benefit to Irish society (50% vs 43%).

Almost half of the general public believe Catholic teachings are of benefit to society.

Source: Amárach Research, September 2011

Q. To what extent do you agree or disagree with the statement: Despite the scandals, Catholic teachings are still of benefit to Irish society?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age Group</th>
<th>% Agree</th>
<th>% Disagree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>All Adults</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15-24s</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>36</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>35-44s</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>45-54s</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>55+</td>
<td>67</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Amárach Research, September 2011
Good Riddance?

Although attitudes are generally unfavourable towards the Catholic Church in Ireland right now, it is clear that only a minority would welcome its disappearance from Ireland.

Men are more negative (27% agree) than women (18%).

Source: Amárach Research, September 2011

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<thead>
<tr>
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<th>% Disagree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>All Adults</td>
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<td>51</td>
</tr>
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<tr>
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<td>25</td>
<td>44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>45-54s</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>55+</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>65</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Q. To what extent do you agree or disagree with the statement:
I would be happy if the Catholic Church disappeared from Ireland completely
One in five consider the Government to be excessively hostile towards the Catholic Church.

Almost a third of weekly Mass-goers believe the Government is excessively hostile towards the Church.

Source: Amárach Research, September 2011

Q. To what extent do you agree or disagree with the statement:
I believe the Government is excessively hostile towards the Catholic Church

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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<th>Agree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
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Incidence of Abuse

Percentage of Irish Priests

- Average Estimate = 28%
- Actual = 4% accused*

* Source: John Jay College of Criminal Justice
** Includes 18% who estimated over 50%

Q. In your opinion, approximately what percentage of Irish priests are guilty of child abuse?

Source: Amárach Research, September 2011
The Catholic Church in Ireland has been through an unprecedented crisis in recent years.

The impact of that crisis on the values and beliefs of Irish Catholics has been profound.

Although the impact has been mostly negative – as reported in our research – there remain other, positive attitudes towards the Church as well.
Questions used in Survey:

1. When you think about the Catholic Church in Ireland is your view (rotate first four):
   - Very favourable
   - Mostly favourable
   - Mostly unfavourable
   - Very unfavourable
   - Neither favourable nor unfavourable
   - Don’t know

2. If answer to question 1 is ‘very or mostly unfavourable’ than ask: What are some of the reasons why you say you have an unfavorable opinion of the Catholic religion? (Open-ended)

3. To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements:
   [Agree Strongly/Agree Slightly/Neither-Nor/Disagree Slightly/Disagree Strongly]
   - Despite the scandals, Catholic teachings are still of benefit to Irish society
   - I would be happy if the Catholic Church disappeared from Ireland completely
   - I believe the Government is excessively hostile towards the Catholic Church

4. In your opinion, approximately what percentage of Irish priests are guilty of child abuse? (Open-ended but code answer to one of the following):
   - None
   - 1% to 5%
   - 6% to 10%
   - 11% to 20%
   - 21% to 30%
   - 31% to 40%
   - 41% to 50%
   - Above 50%

5. What is your religion?
   - Roman Catholic
   - Church of Ireland
   - Islam
   - Presbyterian
   - Orthodox
   - Other religion
   - No religion

If Roman Catholic ask:

6. When is the last time you attended Mass?
   - Within the past week
   - More than a week but within the past month
   - More than a month but within the past year
   - More than a year
   - Never
About Amárach Research

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bounce forward

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