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## Fewer Americans view homosexuality as a sin

by David Gibson by Religion News Service

Americans' acceptance of gays and lesbians is continuing to grow, with a new poll showing that a little more than a third of Americans view homosexuality as a sin, down from 44 percent a year earlier.

The finding from LifeWay Research, which was founded by the Southern Baptist Convention, was released just as the pastor who was to give the inaugural benediction for President Barack Obama withdrew from the program over an anti-gay sermon he gave 20 years ago.

The Rev. Louie Giglio bowed out Thursday after a liberal group discovered a sermon he preached in the 1990s in which he denounced the gay rights movement and advocated efforts to turn gays straight. In withdrawing, Giglio did not renounce the remarks but said that battling gay rights was no longer a priority for him.

"The culture is clearly shifting on homosexuality and this creates a whole new issue: How will America deal with a minority view, strongly held by evangelicals, Catholics, Mormons, Muslims, and so many others?" said Ed Stetzer, president of LifeWay Research.

Stetzer said Obama's own shift in embracing same-sex marriage and other gay rights in the last year may have played a role in the change in public opinion.

"The president's evolution on homosexuality probably impacted the evolution of cultural values -- there is a real and substantive shift, surprisingly large for a one-year time frame -- though this was hardly a normal year on this issue," Stetzer said.

Gay rights groups criticized Obama for inviting evangelical megachurch Pastor Rick Warren, an outspoken opponent of gay marriage, to deliver a benediction at his first inauguration, in 2009. But neither Warren nor the White House backed down.

LifeWay's survey in November found 37 percent said they believe homosexual behavior is a sin, down from 44 percent in September 2011.

The percentage of Americans who do not believe homosexuality is a sin remained nearly the same, at 43 percent in September 2011 and 45 percent in November 2012. There was an increase in the percentage of those who said they were unsure of what they believe.

The new LifeWay survey found that those who identify as "born-again, evangelical, or fundamentalist Christian" are the most likely to say that homosexual behavior is a sin (73 percent). Conversely, those who never attend religious services are the most likely to say they do not believe homosexual behavior is a sin (71 percent).

The survey of almost 1,200 adults has a margin of error of plus or minus 2.9 percent.

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