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## New poll finds Pope Francis wildly popular

by Maureen Fiedler

NCR Today

Over breakfast Thursday morning, *The Washington Post* (which I "eat" almost daily with my oatmeal) greeted me with new polling data on Pope Francis:

"Among Catholics, 92 percent have a favorable view of Francis and 95 percent say the same of the church," the paper reported. The poll, released Dec. 11 was commissioned by the *Post* and ABC News.

The story went on to note: "Francis's popularity marks a large increase from Pope Benedict XVI's 76 percent favorable rating in a Post-ABC poll in February just after he announced his retirement."

The rise in popularity is especially noteworthy, according to the article, among liberal Catholics and non-Catholics.

For those who have been following Francis, this is not a surprise. Although I personally take issue with him on his understanding of -- and approach to -- women, I nonetheless recognize the enormous cultural shift he is attempting to bring to contemporary Catholicism.

He is moving away from a rigid, rule-based, doctrine-laden Catholicism to an open, warm, flexible Catholicism that sounds and smells like the Gospel.

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