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Survey claims 'Francis Effect' on Catholic wallets

by David Gibson by Religion News Service

Pope Francis' enormous popularity may not have translated into more parishioners in the pews or penitents in the confessional, but a new survey indicates it may be persuading Catholics to dig deep and give more to the poor -- another priority for the pontiff, who was elected a year ago Thursday.

The survey shows that one in four U.S. Catholics say they have increased their charitable giving in the past year, and 77 percent of them say it's because of Francis.

"It is clear that Pope Francis and his message of mercy and joy, and a special concern for the poor, are inspiring U.S. Catholics in their giving," said Alexia Kelley, head of Foundations and Donors Interested in Catholic Activities, or FADICA, an association that promotes Catholic philanthropy.

The survey of just over 1,000 Catholics, conducted March 7-10, was done for FADICA and the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops Office of National Collections by Zogby Analytics. The survey has a margin of error of 3.2 percentage points.

The results also showed that half of those who were inspired to boost their donations were motivated by the pope's message of compassion for the poor, and 44 percent said Francis' exhortations to care for others will inspire them to give more to Catholic efforts or organizations in the future.

"As FADICA looks to the future, this data suggests that the 'Pope Francis Effect' on Catholic giving will continue to grow, thus bringing the church's critical ministries and mercy to those who need it most," Kelley said.

A Pew Research Center survey released earlier this month found that American Catholics and the public give Francis high marks as pope -- 85 percent and 66 percent favorability ratings, respectively -- but so far that has not translated into higher rates of Mass attendance, volunteering at church or going to confession.

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