

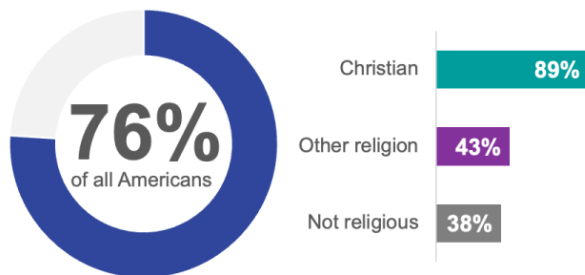
Episcopal Church releases Jesus in America study, data shows wide-ranging views

by [David Paulsen](#) in the [April 6, 2022](#) issue

## Most Americans believe Jesus was an important spiritual figure, although, some question His historical existence

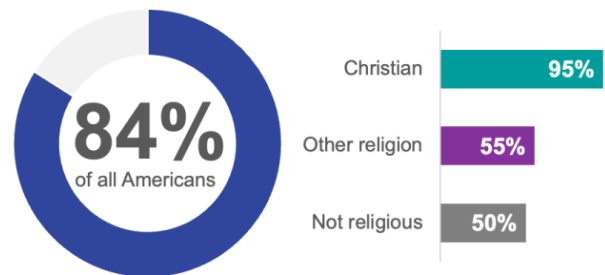
Do you believe in the historical existence of Jesus Christ or Jesus of Nazareth?

% Yes



Do you believe Jesus was an important spiritual figure?

% Yes



Q10. Do you believe in the historical existence of Jesus Christ or Jesus of Nazareth?  
Q11. Do you believe Jesus was an important spiritual figure?  
Base = All respondents (Total n=3119, Christian n=2113, Other Religion n=503, Not Religious n=503)



Most Americans see Jesus as an important spiritual figure. More than 30 percent have decreased their participation in religious activities during the COVID-19 pandemic. And only one in ten thinks those who attacked the US Capitol on January 6, 2021, were associated with organized religion.

Those are some of the findings of a national study commissioned by the Episcopal Church and conducted by the polling firm Ipsos.

The results of the Jesus in America study, released March 9, highlight the wide-ranging faith perspectives of a diverse cross section of Americans, including those who identify as nonreligious.

Episcopal leaders say the study points to both the popularity of Jesus' teachings and the ways Christians are often perceived as failing to live up to them.

"We are encouraged that the research shows Americans still find Jesus compelling, but we also see that the behavior of many of his followers is a problem, and it's not just certain Christians: it's all Christians," Presiding Bishop Michael Curry said in a

press release announcing the study.

“This is a wake-up call for us, and based on what we have learned, we are refocusing our efforts on being a church that looks and acts like Jesus and models its behavior on his teachings. In this process, we hope to ignite a revival of love that encourages all Americans to do a better job of loving their neighbors.”

To conduct the study, Ipsos polled 3,119 people in the United States, age 18 and older, from November 22 to December 2, in English and Spanish. The results will be used by Episcopal leaders to help plan for the post-pandemic church.

Christopher Moessner, who oversaw the study’s Ipsos research team, emphasized in an interview that the large, nationwide pool of respondents represents a wide range of faith backgrounds.

“We did not want to limit our audience to only Christians or only Americans who held a particular view. We wanted to survey all Americans,” said Moessner, a senior vice president at Ipsos.

That approach helped the study more clearly examine common perceptions of Christianity and Christians in the United States

One question asked respondents what they thought was Jesus’ most important teaching. More than a third said “love your neighbor,” including nearly a fourth of respondents who reported no religion. About 20 percent of all respondents answered with “not judging others, without first judging yourself,” and those with no religion gave that answer at about the same rate.

“Not many polls get into ‘What do you really believe Jesus was about?’” Moessner said. “This poll also sought to understand where the intersection was between all faiths. Where’s the common ground?”

He pointed to questions about what activities offered by religious organizations would most interest respondents. Some of those results were similar across all faiths, with respondents generally emphasizing outdoor activities and helping others.

Another question asked what characteristics respondents associate with Christians. The words most chosen by the Christian respondents were “giving,” “compassionate,” “loving,” and “respectful,” while non-Christians associated Christians

most with “hypocritical,” “judgmental,” “self-righteous,” and “arrogant.”

That disconnect underscores a central reason the church commissioned the study. Episcopal leaders hope that by better understanding public perceptions of Christianity, the church can more effectively spread its message of Jesus’ love and compassion in contrast to what they see as distortions of the faith by others.

Curry has taken up that cause prominently since 2018, when he joined an ecumenical group of Christian leaders in launching the Reclaiming Jesus initiative. The group sought to address “a dangerous crisis of moral and political leadership at the highest levels of our government and in our churches” and to affirm what it means to be followers of Jesus in today’s world.

Such efforts gained urgency after riotous supporters of then president Donald Trump stormed the US Capitol on January 6, 2021, seeking to block the certification of Joe Biden’s election as president. Five people died, including a Capitol Police officer.

For the Jesus in America study, pollsters asked: “Do you think the events at the U.S. Capitol Building on January 6th are associated with organized religion?” Overall, 11 percent said yes, with wide variation among respondent groups. The study found 24 percent of nonreligious respondents answered that way.

When the 11 percent of respondents who said yes were asked a follow-up question, 63 percent said they associated the attack more specifically with evangelical or Protestant Christians.

The study also produced data on how the pandemic has disrupted churchgoing over the past two years. When asked about their “ability to participate in organized religious or spiritual activities,” 37 percent of mainline Protestants said their participation had decreased, while 55 percent reported no change in participation.

“Lent is a time of intentional reflection and action,” Curry said in a press release, “and we are especially mindful of our resolve to continue building meaningful and inclusive communities in our post-pandemic world that encourage all Americans to listen without judgment and celebrate differences.” —Episcopal News Service