



Religion in Culture Community of Interest

February 2017

The Navy reflects the religious diversity of our country. A majority of Sailors and Marines continue to identify with established religions and religious faith expressions. Religion often helps people understand their place in the world and how their military duties are part of their larger perspective on life.

Religious diversity is part of our Navy culture

- Many Sailors and Marines identify with established religions and religious faith expressions. A growing number of service members see religion differently. One of the fastest growing groups today is known as the 'Nones.'
- The "Nones," or No Religious Preference, are religiously unaffiliated. Today, one in five Americans identify with no particular religion. Among those aged 18-29 the number is over 30%. Many see themselves as spiritual, but not religious. A small number are either atheist or agnostic.
- The 'Dones' are a subcategory. They were exposed to established religion and have made the decision that they are 'done' with it for a variety of reasons; church is too bureaucratic, too judgmental, etc.

Religious diversity and spiritual growth

- Our diversity gives us strength as an organization. The free exercise of religion requires tolerance for diverse religious expression and respect for the rights of individuals to determine their own religious convictions, including those who claim none at all.
- Chaplains provide faith-specific ministry to those of their own faith, facilitate the religious requirements for those of other faiths, and care for all service members, including those who claim no religious faith.

FACTS AND FIGURES

- Religious Faith Code data reveals that a majority of our Sailors and Marines list some religious preference.
- The group growing the most are the so-called "Nones," or religiously unaffiliated—up over 10% since 2007.
- Among those age 18-29 well over 30% claim no religious preference.
- 'Nones' are churchless but not faithless—only about 3% are atheist or agnostic.
- 'Dones' have given up on organized religion. They want to practice spirituality on their own terms.

KEY MESSAGES

- Diversity in the DON reflects the diversity found in our nation, including religious diversity.
- Religious ministry to those with no religious preference is challenging; ministry of presence, ministry of care, ministry of hope, ministry of resilience.
- Religious ministry to the 'nones' looks different—focus on spirituality and not on traditional church.
- Chaplains care for all Sailors and Marines, including those who claim no religious preference, the 'Nones.'

Where it Matters — When it Matters — With What Matters

Religion in Culture Community of Interest — Book Review

Rise of the Nones: Understanding and Reaching the Religiously Unaffiliated

James Emery White, Baker Books, 2014

James Emery White is the founding and senior pastor of Mecklenburg Community Church in Charlotte, North Carolina. He is president of Serious Times, a ministry that explores the intersection of faith and culture. He was the president of Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary where he is an adjunctive professor of theology and culture.

According to a study, *Souls in Transition: The Religious and Spiritual Lives of Emerging Adults*, 40% of all emerging adults are clearly distanced from religion. This group “neither care to practice religion nor to oppose it.” The Nones make up the nation’s fastest-growing and second largest religious category, eclipsed only by Catholics, outnumbering even Southern Baptists, the largest Protestant denomination.

What is most important to understand about the Nones is that most are not atheists and most still believe in God and pray on a daily basis. They do not reject God, but they do reject any specific religion. They are “spiritual but not religious.”

John Green, a senior research advisor at Pew Research breaks the religiously unaffiliated into three groups:

1. Those who were raised totally outside of organized religion.
2. Those who became unhappy with their religion and left.
3. Those who never really engaged with religion in the first place, even though they were raised in a religious household.

The Nones consider religion to be too entangled with politics. Research by the Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life found, “They think that religious organizations are too concerned with money and power, too focused on rules and too involved in politics.”

The Pew Forum study suggests that one of the forces behind the rise of the religiously unaffiliated is generational replacement. Three deep and fast-moving cultural currents are shaping the modern world: secularization, privatization and pluralization.

1. **Secularization.** Christianity is losing its place as the dominant worldview. The belief that ideas of faith should be privately engaged and are culturally irrelevant is widely accepted. Secularists control the epicenters of culture where values and ideas are being disseminated; educational, media and legal system.
2. **Privatization.** Separation between the public and private spheres of life; spiritual issues are placed with the private arena. Faith is a matter of personal preference— little more than a reflection of ourselves. Spirituality has become anything an individual desires it to be, a private affair to be developed as one sees fit.
3. **Pluralization.** A multitude of ideologies and faith options competing for attention. Traditional role of religion was to provide a “sacred canopy” covering contemporary culture. Today the canopy is gone and instead we have a million small tents, which we can choose to dwell. Suggestion that no one perspective or religious persuasion has the inside track about the spiritual realm. The result is relative moralities where all values are of equal validity, which says in effect that no conviction about values have any validity

Major Religious Types Among Emerging Adults

Committed traditionalists (no more than 15%)
Selective adherents (perhaps 30%)
Spiritually open (about 15%)
Religiously indifferent (at least 25%)
Religiously disconnected (no more than 5%)
Irreligious (no more than 10%)

From a study called *Souls in Transition: The Religious and Spiritual Lives of Emerging Adults*

Snapshot of the Nones

56% are male—64% of the males are atheists or agnostics.
71% are white, 11% Hispanic, 9% black and 4% are Asian.
82% of the whites are agnostic or atheists.
68% believe in God or a universal spirit, and 30% are certain God exists.
27% say there is no God.
72% seldom or never attend religious services
60% are registered to vote as Democrat
75% are liberal or moderate.

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How do you reach and engage the Nones?

1. Having a cause for which to work is a way to connect with Nones. Campaigns to rescue girls from sex trafficking, or food drives to end hunger become the leading edge of connecting with Nones, in terms of both arresting their attention and enlisting their participation in the community and relationship.
2. Learn the language. In order to reach a culture, in this case the culture of the Nones, we must learn the language, become a student of the culture and translate faith so that it can be heard, understood and appropriated.
3. We must strive for unity. Our culture has become too argumentative and we have experienced a loss of civility. We don't talk to one another anymore. Relational unity means being kind to one another, gracious to one another, forgiving of one another---not assuming the worst, shooting the wounded, or being too quick to be suspicious.
4. Use visual communication. In communicating with Nones, there is a deep need for visual communication. The arts are an important part of communicating with Nones. It is the way that people best receive information and meaning, content and context, and it has a way of sneaking past the defense of the heart.

How Young Americans Describe Christianity

Anti-homosexual (91%)
Judgmental (87%)
Hypocritical (85%)
Old-fashioned (78%)
Too involved in politics (75%)
Out of touch with reality (72%)
Insensitive to others (70%)
Boring (68%)
Not accepting of other faiths (64%)
Confusing (61%)

From research by Gabe Lyons and David Kinnaman

Defining Belief System of Nones

Truthiness: the assertion that we are not only to discern truth for ourselves from the facts at hand, but also to create truth for ourselves despite the facts at hand.

Wikiality: "Reality as determined by majority vote," such as when astronomers voted Pluto off their list of planets.

Mistakers: To avoid calling ourselves sinners, we've become "mistakers." To turn everything we do into a virtue where lust becomes "sensuality" and anger is just "being honest with your emotions."

Sources

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