

Kentucky ranks high when it comes to religion

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In Kentucky, over 70% of adults identify as Christian, making it the most prevalent religion in the state.

The commonwealth is also located in the famed Bible Belt, an area in the South and parts of the Midwest. According to a 1978 study by Charles Heatwole, the region is dominated by 24 fundamentalist Protestant denominations, which corresponded to essentially the same area mapped by Wilbur Zelinsky in a 1961 study.

According to a recent report by SmileHub.com, Kentucky is ranked 15th in Most Religious States with a score of 50.07. Thirteen of the Top 15 states in Smilehub's report are located in the Bible Belt, including the top nine (Virginia, Tennessee, Alabama, South Carolina, Texas, North Carolina, Mississippi, Indiana, and Georgia).

Kentucky ranked 13th in religious interest and places of worship, 14th in religious education and careers, and 23rd in religion-affiliated organizations, the three key dimensions SmileHub used to determine the most religious states. Nationally, more than 2/3 of adults are religiously affiliated.

Virginia led the way with a score of 64.61, ranking first in religious education and careers, 14th in religious interest and places of worship, and 11th in religion-affiliated organizations. Tennessee was second at 61.03. Texas, which ranked fifth (60.13), held the No. 1 spot for religion-affiliated organizations, while Mississippi (7th, 55.17) was No. 1 for religious interest and places of worship.

While Christianity is the most prevalent religion in Kentucky, in this area, Catholicism has a significant presence. Marion, Washington, and Nelson counties make up what is often referred to as the "Kentucky Holy Land." In the late 1700s, settlers from Maryland seeking religious freedom and fertile farmland arrived in the area and established key locations like Pottinger's Creek, Harden's Creek (St. Mary's), and



Holy Cross Church is in Marion County. The county is considered the cradle of Catholicism in Kentucky, which Smilehub ranked as the 15th most religious state.

Bardstown. Marion County is known as Kentucky's most Catholic county, containing not only the center of the state, but it is also the location of the first Catholic settlements in the western part of the county. Historical Marker #913 in Marion County notes the location of the first Catholic church west of the Allegheny Mountains. A group of 60 Maryland Catholic

families, largely from St. Mary's County, immigrated to Kentucky. In 1785, about 25 of those families made the journey on the Ohio River to Limestone (now Maysville) and then overland to Goodwin's Station in present-day Nelson County. The men of the party set out for claimed lands on Pottinger's Creek in present-day Marion County.

The first priest to serve at the Pottinger's Creek community was Father Whelan, who arrived in 1787 and served for three years. In 1792, the aforementioned first Catholic church west of the Alleghany Mountains, a log structure, was constructed by Rev. William de Rohan. The church was located in Holy Cross, and the present-day church at Holy

Cross was constructed in 1823. To this day, Holy Cross is considered the cradle of Catholicism in Kentucky.

Nerinx was founded in the early 19th century by Father Stephen Theodore Badin and is the home of the convent and Motherhouse of the Sisters of Loretto. The Sisters moved to the site around 1820.

The Abbey of Gethsemani is located in Nelson County, as is the Basilica of St. Joseph Proto-Cathedral. Kentucky even has a Faith Trail, where individuals can visit 10 religious landmarks that stretch from Covington in the north to Clarksville in the southwest.

The Pew Research Center conducted a Religious Landscape Study confirming 72% of Kentuckians consider themselves Christians, while 46% are Evangelical Protestant, 2% Historically Black Protestant, 11% Catholic, and 1% are Latter-day Saints (Mormons), Orthodox Christian, Jehovah's Witness, Jewish, Muslim, Buddhist, Hindu, Other Christian, and other world religions, while 2% were something else, 3% Atheist, 6% Agnostic, and 15% Nothing in particular.

According to the Smilehub study, New Hampshire is the least religious state with a score of 6.44, the only state not in double digits in scoring. Maine was 49th, Vermont, 48th, Nevada, 47th, and Wyoming, 46th.

Vermont had the fewest faith and religious support charities per capita, while Texas had the most, a 31 times difference between the two. North Carolina had the most religious establishments per capita, while Utah had the fewest. Mississippi had the highest share of adults who are very religious, with New Hampshire and Vermont tied for 49th with the lowest share. Mississippi also had the highest share of people who pray at least daily, with Vermont having the lowest. When it comes to the highest Google search interest index for "religion," Utah was No. 1, while Vermont had the lowest.

To view the entire report, visit <https://smilehub.org/blog/most-religious-states/142>.

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