



# Stretching for Jesus

Many Christians are turning away from the pews and toward their mats

Lisa Takeuchi Cullen  
**Time.com**  
The yoga teacher sits in a lotus position atop a polished wooden platform. Behind her, verdant woods are visible through panoramic windows. Gentle music tinkles from overhead speakers. Two dozen students in spandex outfits, most of them women, settle onto purple and blue mats to begin the class with ujjayi, a breathing exercise. Their instructor, Cindy Senarighi, recommends today's mantra. "'Yahweh' is a great breath prayer," she says. "The Jesus Prayer also works. Now lift your arms in praise to the Lord."  
The platform is an altar, the tinkly tune is praise music, and

the practice is Christian yoga. Senarighi's class, called Yogadevotion and taught in the main chapel of St. Andrew's Lutheran Church in Mahtomedi, Minn., is part of a fast-growing movement that seeks to retool the 5,000-year-old practice of yoga to fit Christ's teachings.  
From Phoenix, Ariz., to Pittsburgh, Pa., from Grand Rapids, Mich., to New York City, hundreds of Christian yoga classes are in session. A national association of Christian yoga teachers was started in July, and a slew of books and videos are about to hit the market. But the very phrase stiffens yoga purists and some Christians—including a rather influential Catholic—who insist

yoga cannot be separated from its Hindu roots.  
Still, the boom, say its backers, is just beginning.  
Books on Christian yoga were published as early as 1962, but in recent years, as yoga has become as ubiquitous as Starbucks, more Christians have decided to start their own classes. Susan Bordenkircher, a Methodist from Daphne, Ala., is one. She discovered yoga in 2002. "I knew right away I was getting something out of it spiritually and physically, but it felt uncomfortable in that format," she says. So Bordenkircher prepared a vinyasa, or series of postures, with a biblical bent.

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## FAITH Religion in the USA

Dramatic shifts in those who call themselves religious

Cathy Lynn Grossman  
**USA Today**



When it comes to religion, the USA is now land of the freelancers.  
The percentage of people who call themselves in some way Christian has dropped more than 11% in a generation. The faithful have scattered out of their traditional bases: The Bible Belt is less Baptist. The Rust Belt is less Catholic. And everywhere, more people are exploring spiritual frontiers — or falling off the faith map completely.  
These dramatic shifts in just 18 years are detailed in the new American Religious Identification Survey (ARIS), to be released today. It finds that, despite growth and immigration that has added nearly 50 million adults to the U.S. population, almost all religious denominations have lost ground since the first ARIS survey in 1990.  
"More than ever before, people are just making up their own stories of who they are. They say, 'I'm everything. I'm nothing. I believe in myself,'" says Barry Kosmin, survey co-author.  
Among the key findings in the 2008 survey:

So many Americans claim no religion at all (15%, up from 8% in 1990), that this category now outranks every other major U.S. religious group except Catholics and Baptists. In a nation that has long been mostly Christian, "the challenge to Christianity ... does not come from other religions but from a rejection of all forms of organized religion," the report concludes.  
Catholic strongholds in New England and the Midwest have faded as immigrants, retirees and young job-seekers have moved to the Sun Belt. While bishops from the Midwest to Massachusetts close down or consolidate historic parishes, those in the South are scrambling to serve increasing numbers of worshippers.

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