Southerners lead nation in religious devotion: Mississippi is first

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There's a reason the South is known as the Bible Belt: a survey shows that Southerners—and Mississippians in particular—are the most active in their religious practices and beliefs.

Residents of Mississippi ranked first among Americans in all four measures of religiosity in a survey by the Pew Forum on Religion & Public Life, with 82 percent saying religion is very important in their lives. Five other states had at least seven in 10 people stating that religion holds that kind of importance for them: Alabama, Arkansas, Louisiana, Tennessee and South Carolina.

Six in ten of Mississippi residents said they attend religious services at least once a week. Several states had at least 50 percent exhibiting that level of commitment: Utah, South Carolina, Louisiana, Alabama, Tennessee, Oklahoma and Arkansas.

While 77 percent of Mississippians said they pray at least once a day, they're followed closely by residents of other southern states in which more than 70 percent claim to be that prayerful: Louisiana, Alabama, South Carolina, Kentucky and Tennessee.

More than nine in 10 Mississippians say they believe in God "with absolute certainty." The survey showed that in several southern states more than 80 percent hold a similar belief: South Carolina, Alabama, Tennessee, Arkansas, Louisiana, Kentucky, Georgia and North Carolina.

The findings, published online by the Pew Forum on December 21 and drawn from data from its 2007 U.S. Religious Landscape Survey, mirror results released by the Gallup Poll in January 2009, which also found Mississippi to be the most religious state.

Like Gallup, Pew researchers found New Hampshire and Vermont to be the states with the lowest percentage of respondents viewing religion as personally very

important. *–Religion News Service*