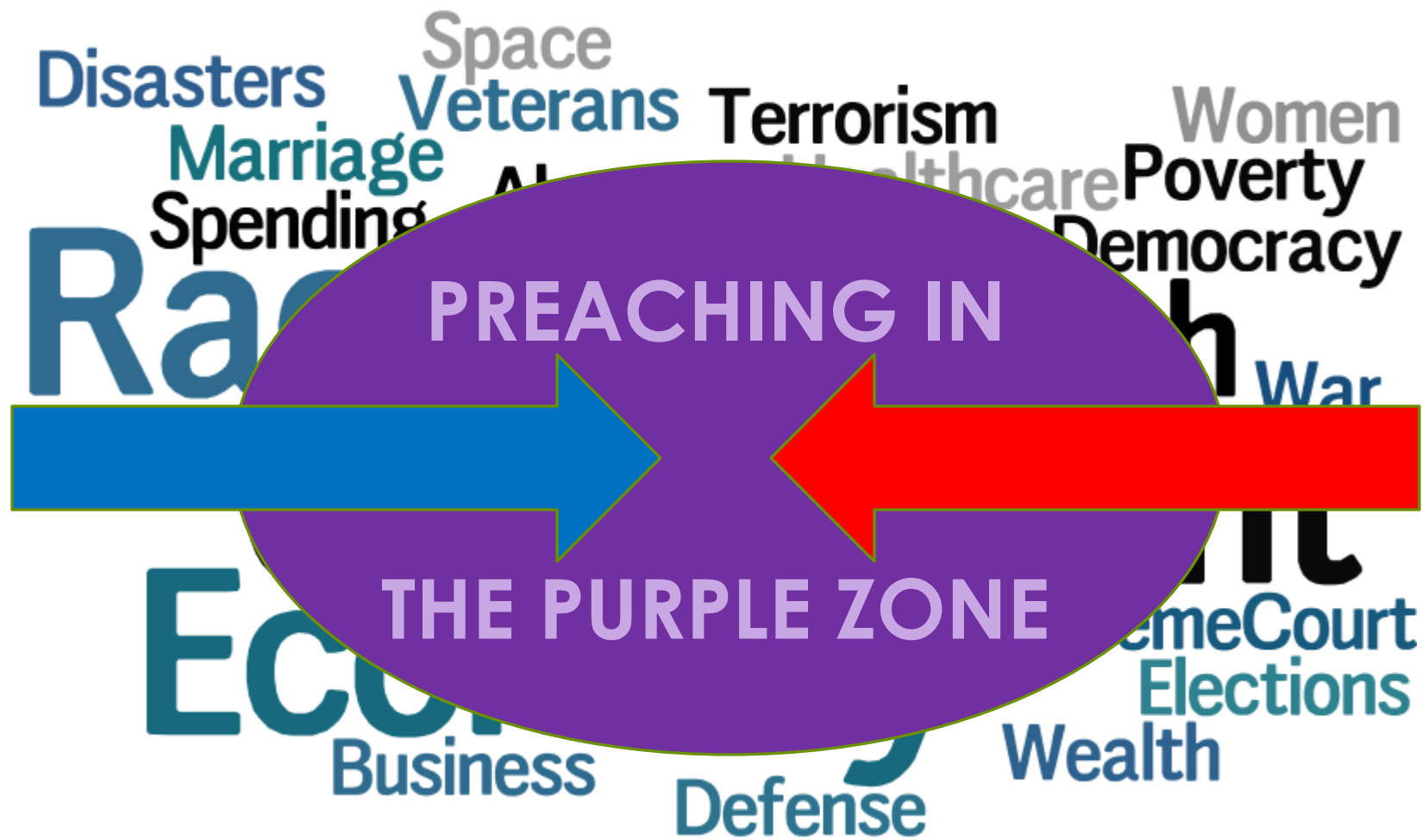


DISCOVERING OUR “THEOLOGIES OF CONFLICT”



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Questions for these controversial topics (implicit and explicit)

- What does the Bible have to say about these things?
- What do theological traditions have to say about these issues?
- What Word do you, Preacher, have to proclaim about these things?

Those in power *dare* clergy and congregations to answer these questions.

The powers mostly assume clergy will not answer these questions in a public way, or in a way that has any impact on how they conduct themselves in the world.



So how are clergy navigating this time of divisiveness in the red-blue divide?

Preaching and Social Issues Surveys

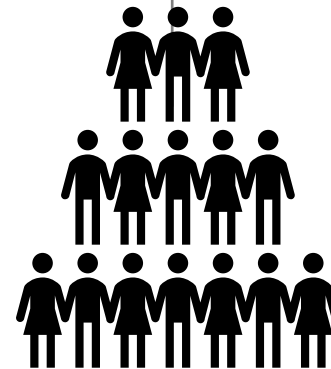
Research team:
The Rev. Dr. Leah Schade
The Rev. Dr. Amanda
Wilson Harper
Dr. Wayne Thompson
The Rev. Dr. Katie Day

2017

- 1,104
respondents

2021

- 1,919
respondents



Range of topics included:

- **The difference the 2016 and 2020 presidential elections made in preachers' willingness to address social issues in the pulpit**
- **Social issues clergy addressed during an election year**
- **Reasons clergy list for either engaging social issues in their sermons, or avoiding them**
- **What kind of training and support pastors are seeking to foster healthy dialogue about public issues in their congregations**

Survey Methodology

The survey was designed to represent the total U.S. population of mainline Protestant pastors serving congregations in the United States.

Geographic locations of respondents

- The two surveys included respondents from all 50 states as well as Washington D.C. and Puerto Rico.



Demographics

	2017	2021
Gender	52% male, 48% female	48% male, 52% female
Ages	All ages, 25-70+ (45% 51 and older)	All ages, 25-70+ (65% 51 and older)
Sexual orientation	86% hetero, 6% LGBTQIA, 8% other, did not answer	Same
Race, ethnicity	89% White, 7% other races and ethnicities, 4% did not answer	Same

**Other variables tested: Denomination; Year of ordination;
Geographic setting; Job status/title**

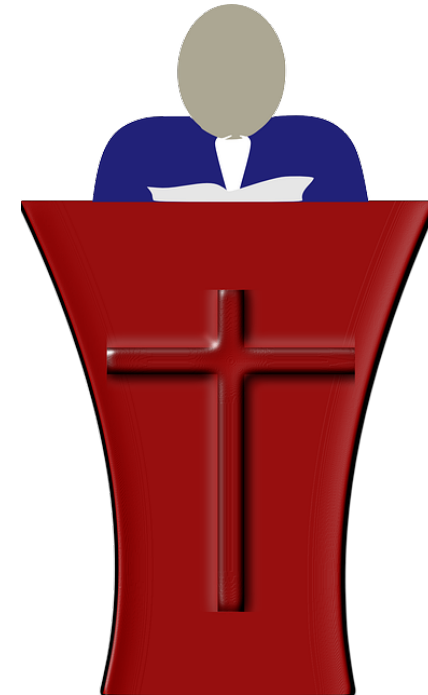


Four basic reasons for clergy hesitancy in addressing social issues in preaching

- A. Fear about hurting or dividing their congregation**
- B. Fear about receiving negative push-back for being “too political”**
- C. Fear about loss – loss of members, money, and their own positions**
- D. Fear about compromising their ability to effectively minister in their church**

Characteristics of preachers who are MOST likely to address social issues:

- Older
- Male
- Big steeple
- Big budget
- Long tenure



Characteristics of preachers who are **LEAST** likely to address social issues:

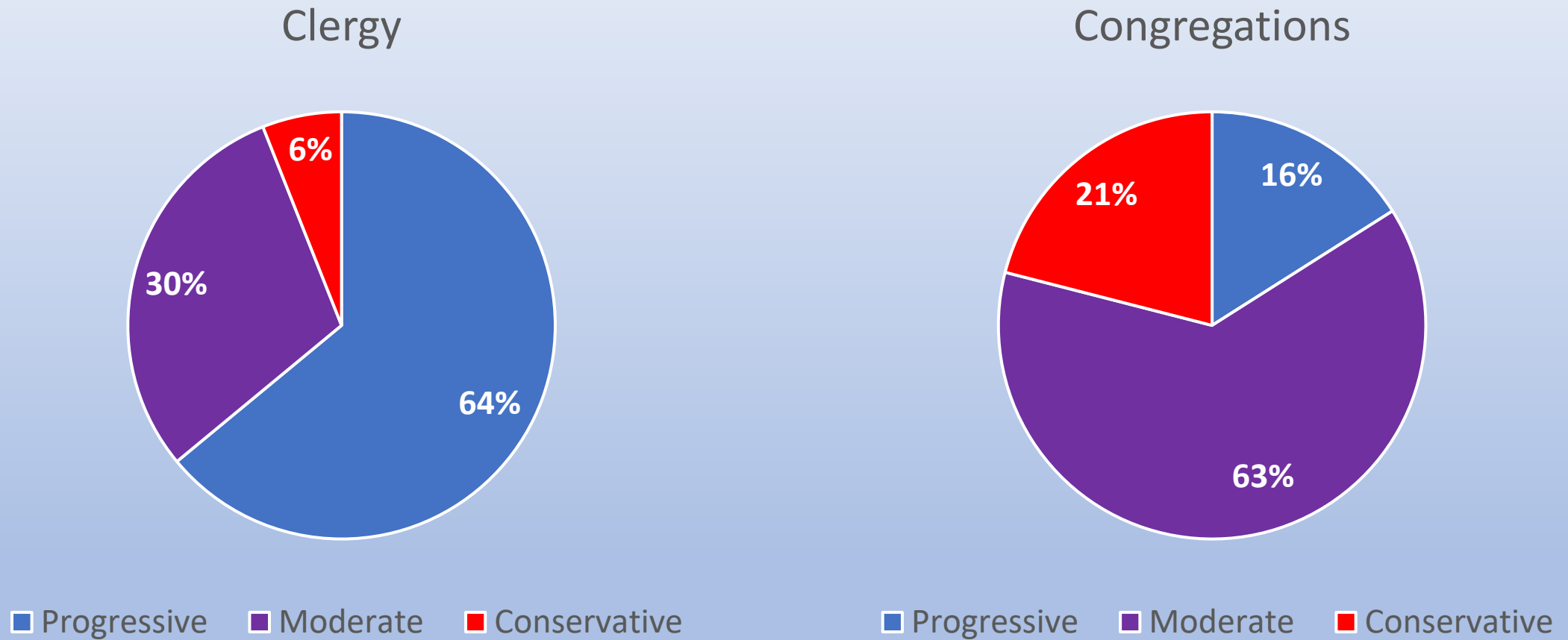
- ◉ Younger
- ◉ Female
- ◉ Clergy of color in white churches
- ◉ Clergy in smaller churches with smaller budgets
- ◉ Clergy in rural churches
- ◉ Clergy new to their congregations or new to the ministry





Questions so far?

Political leanings of clergy v. congregations (2021)



Political leanings of U.S. mainline Protestant clergy versus congregations, 2021.

Source: "Preaching and Social Issues Survey, 2021." Copyright, Leah D. Schade, 2021.

How often do you preach on social issues?

2017

- “Frequently” = 30%

2021

- “Frequently” = 55%

How willing are you to preach on social issues in light of the election?

2017

- “More willing” = 39%

2021

- “More willing” = 49%

2021: How would you assess the level of divisiveness...

In your community

- More divided = 48%

In your church

- More divided = 25%

Are you concerned that your church may close?

- Yes = 20%

TYPES OF NEGATIVE PUSHBACK, 2017 V. 2021

In the past four years, which of the following **NEGATIVE** responses have you experienced after addressing social issues in sermons? (check all that apply)

TYPE OF RESPONSE	% REPORTED			
	2017		2021	+/-
Angry words, letters, emails	51%		47%	-4
Some stopped attending worship services	50%		44%	-6
Some left the congregation entirely	26.5%		33%	+ 6.5
Some refused to speak with me	35%		28%	-7
Some withheld financial giving	23%		27.5%	+ 4.5
Some stopped volunteering	NA		20%	NA
Threats or intimidation	NA		11%	NA
Some called for my resignation	8%		6.5%	-1.5
I left or was let go partly or entirely because of the sermon(s) I preached	2.5%		3.5%	+1

Source: "Preaching and Social Issues Survey, 2017, 2021." Copyright Leah D. Schade

Why do clergy AVOID addressing social issues?

	WEIGHTED AVERAGE
▼ Maintaining unity and avoiding divisiveness.	1.40
▼ If there is no clear or overt biblical position on the issue.	1.17
▼ People may stop attending worship or leave the church.	1.01
▼ Separation of church and state.	0.88
▼ People may stop giving financially.	0.83
▼ Spiritual issues are more important than social issues.	0.76
▼ Preaching on the issue(s) won't make enough difference.	0.71

(1,771 mainline Protestant clergy)

Why do clergy think it's important to address social issues?

	WEIGHTED AVERAGE
▼ To connect scripture/faith with issues that affect people's lives.	3.87
▼ Because Jesus/the Bible speaks about social issues.	3.84
▼ To provide moral, biblical, or theological perspective on an issue.	3.71
▼ If God places an issue on my heart for the week.	3.26
▼ If lectionary readings address an issue.	2.88
▼ If asked by the bishop, ecclesial leader, or larger church body to address an issue.	2.36

(1,740 mainline Protestant clergy)

But . . .

The ability of a congregation to have these conversations – and be resilient in the midst of the difficulties – is directly tied to its relationship with CONFLICT.

- **Past history with conflict and controversy.**
- **Capacity for tolerating initial discomfort.**
- **The congregation's “theology of conflict.”**

What is a “Theology of Conflict”?

A theology of conflict is what we believe about the relationship between God and human conflict.



Having some understanding of our own – and our congregation's – theologies of conflict is important because it has both implicit and explicit ramifications for dialogue.

- For instance, if the assumption is that God does not approve of conflict, we may be reticent to engage any controversy at all.
- We may worry that we are disappointing God or going against God's will.
- Alternatively, if we believe that God works in and through human conflict in order to manifest God's will, we may be more willing to enter into dialogue about a difficult issue.

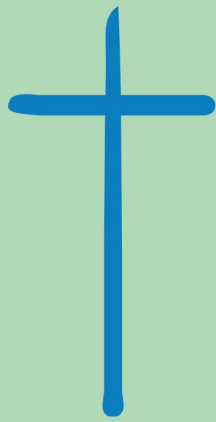


Exercise: DISCOVERING OUR “THEOLOGIES OF CONFLICT”



Take a short break, then:
Fill out the worksheet on your own.
Return for small group discussions at 3:00.





CLERGY EMERGENCY LEAGUE

RESIST | RECLAIM | RENEW

Started in June 2020, The Clergy Emergency League (CEL) is a grassroots network of more than 2,600 clergy speaking with a unified voice against the abuses of power at the federal, state, and local levels.

We repudiate the fusion of politics with radical, right-wing, fundamentalist Christianity. And we denounce the growing power of racist white nationalism and a militarized police state.

We provide support, accountability, resources, and networking for clergy to prophetically minister in their congregations and the public square in this time of political upheaval, social unrest, and partisan division.

<https://www.clergyemergencyleague.com/>

Facebook group (be sure to answer vetting questions to gain admittance):

<https://www.facebook.com/groups/3268854966534981>

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