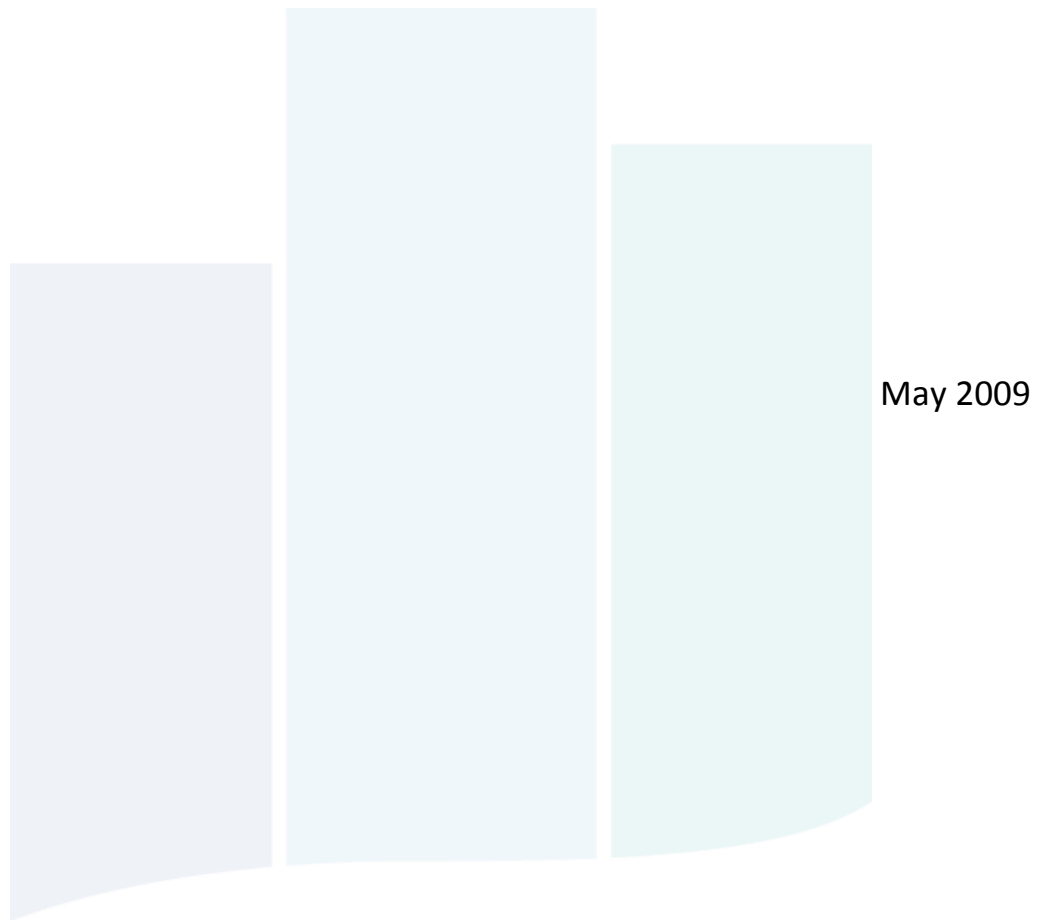


Mainline Protestant Clergy Views on Theology and Gay and Lesbian Issues:

Findings from the 2008 Clergy Voices Survey

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Executive Summary

The CVS surveyed senior clergy from the seven largest Mainline denominations: United Methodist Church, Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, American Baptist Churches USA, Presbyterian Church USA, Episcopal Church, United Church of Christ, and Christian Church (Disciples of Christ).

On a range of policy issues, Mainline Protestant clergy are generally more supportive of LGBT rights than the general population, and mostly in line with Mainline Protestants overall. Two-thirds of Mainline clergy support hate crimes legislation (67%) and workplace protections for gay and lesbian people (66%), and a majority (55%) supports adoption rights. Same-sex marriage is the only major LGBT public policy issue that does not enjoy majority support from Mainline clergy; on this issue, one-third supports same-sex marriage and nearly a third (32%) supports civil unions.

Support for same-sex marriage increases significantly when clergy were provided with an assurance that no church or congregation would be required to perform same-sex marriage services against its beliefs. With this religious liberty assurance, support among clergy jumped from one-third support to nearly half (46%), a movement of 13 points.

There are significant and sometimes stark differences across denominational lines. Generally speaking, clergy in the UCC and Episcopal Church are more supportive of LGBT rights, while clergy in UMC and ABCUSA are less supportive. Clergy in the other three denominations in the study—DOC, PCUSA, and ELCA—cluster in the middle but lean supportive on all of these issues with the exception of same-sex marriage.

A plurality of Mainline clergy constitute an Uncertain Middle, while close to one-third are strongly supportive of or opposed to LGBT rights and inclusion in the church.

- Supportive Base (29%), clergy who strongly support gay and lesbian rights and generally do not see homosexuality as a choice nor as a sin;
- Opposing Base (30%), clergy who strongly oppose gay and lesbian rights and generally see homosexuality as a choice and as a sin; and
- The Uncertain Middle (41%), clergy who support some gay and lesbian rights but are ambivalent on others.

On most policy issues the Uncertain Middle tends to be closer in opinion to the Supportive Base. Strong majorities of the Uncertain Middle support adoption rights (65%). A similarly large number of the Uncertain Middle opposes a constitutional

amendment banning same-sex marriage (71%) and favors employment nondiscrimination laws to protect gay and lesbian people (79%).

A religious liberty affirmation is particularly powerful in moving clergy in the Uncertain Middle toward support for civil marriage equality. Support for same-sex marriage nearly doubles among the Uncertain Middle, from just 26% to 49%, when they are assured that the law would guarantee that no church would be forced to perform same-sex marriages against its beliefs.

Overall, close to half (45%) of Mainline Protestant clergy support the ordination of gay and lesbian people with no special requirements. A huge majority (84%) of UCC clergy supports the ordination of gay and lesbian people with no special requirements, more than 2.5 times the number of ABCUSA clergy (28%) or UMC clergy (32%). ELCA and PCUSA clergy are largely split on the issue, with 54% and 50% respectively supporting ordination.

Mainline clergy believe strongly in separation of religious institutions and the state and are willing to differentiate their religious beliefs from their public policy opinions. Fifty-five percent of Mainline clergy support a strict separation of church and state, and 68% believe that opposing homosexual practices on theological grounds does not mean that one has to oppose legal rights for gay and lesbian people.

Strong majorities of clergy in most Mainline denominations, and a slim majority overall, believe that the church should not oppose efforts to make homosexuality acceptable in society. Fifty-one percent of ministers believe that the church should not work to oppose making homosexuality acceptable, including 81% of UCC clergy, 77% of Episcopal clergy, and 61% of ELCA clergy. Among United Methodist and American Baptist ministers, less than 4-in-10 agree (39% and 31% respectively).

Mainline clergy have become significantly more progressive on gay and lesbian issues over the last decade. Between 2001 and 2008, the number of clergy agreeing that gays and lesbians should have all the same rights and privileges as other American citizens increased 9 points from 70% to 79%. Nearly half (45%) of Mainline clergy report that their views on gay and lesbian issues are more liberal today than they were 10 years ago. About 4-in-10 say their views have not changed. Only 14% say their views are now more conservative than they were a decade earlier.

Mainline clergy are more likely to embrace a more modernist than orthodox theological worldview. Nearly half (47%) of clergy take a modernist approach to theology, compared to one-third who have more traditional theological views. One-in-five has a mix of modernist and traditionalist theological views.

Introduction

This report is the second of two reports based on the results of the 2008 Clergy Voices Survey (CVS), the most comprehensive survey of Mainline Protestant clergy ever conducted. The CVS builds upon earlier studies of Mainline clergy in 1989 (Guth et al. 1997) and 2001 (Smidt, ed. 2004). While our first report, *Clergy Voices: Findings from the 2008 Clergy Voices Survey* (March 2009), focused broadly on the political and social attitudes of Mainline clergy, the current report focuses on theological beliefs and attitudes regarding lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) issues. The CVS is the most in-depth study of Mainline clergy attitudes on LGBT issues ever undertaken, containing more than sixty questions on a range of LGBT issues both in the context of public policy and the church.

In addition to mapping clergy attitudes on a variety of LGBT issues, this report analyzes the relationship between a variety of factors and clergy views on these issues. For example, we examine the influence of theology, denominational affiliation, relationships with gay and lesbian people, and gender on attitudes about LGBT issues. We also develop a unique sexual orientation belief index, which provides a composite measure of clergy beliefs about the nature of and theological conclusions about sexual orientation. This model allows us to identify three groups of clergy who hold decidedly different beliefs about LGBT issues: a Supportive Base, an Opposing Base, and a larger group we call an Uncertain Middle.

Why Mainline Protestant Clergy?

White Mainline Protestants are arguably the most neglected of the major religious groups in the American religious landscape. Despite the fact that the Protestant Mainline is the home of newly elected President Obama, who was a longtime member of the largest congregation in the United Church of Christ, Mainline Protestants are largely absent from political reporting and serve more as a footnote in many analyses of religion and politics. Mainline Protestants continue to constitute a large segment of the American religious landscape.¹ They represent 18.1% of all Americans (Pew Forum 2008)

¹ In this report, when we refer to Mainline Protestants in the general population, we follow the dominant practice in most political surveys of restricting the category to white Mainline Protestants only. While this approach has the advantage of maintaining consistency with political polling, it screens out minority Mainline Protestant laity. When Mainline Protestants are defined using denominational affiliation regardless of race, Mainline Protestants are 91% white (Pew Forum 2007).

and 24% of all voters (2004 NEP Exit Poll). Mainline Protestants account for approximately 40.7 million American adults.²

A number of studies have found that clergy have a significant influence on congregants' religious views. Clergy engage in a number of political activities in and out of the pulpit and are aware of their political influence (Guth et al. 1997). Clergy enjoy via their role in the pulpit and in community leadership regular opportunities to influence others.

Understanding Mainline Protestant clergy views on theology and LGBT issues is important for a number of reasons. First, the area of LGBT rights is an area both of considerable change and of considerable controversy. Many Mainline denominations are poised to examine their support for public policies and their own internal policies in 2009. Second, the Mainline is a repository for theological and social diversity—one of the few places in our society that has the capacity for deliberation among diverse perspectives. Understanding these Christian leaders' views provides an important window into religious engagement in public life and the way in which theological beliefs intersect with public policy and church polity.

A Brief Note on Methodology

We discuss the methodology in detail in the appendix, but a few points are worth making at the outset of this report. We obtained a random sample of 1,000 senior clergy from each of the seven largest Mainline Protestant denominations: The United Methodist Church, the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, the American Baptist Churches U.S.A., the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), the Episcopal Church, the United Church of Christ, and the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ). Together these denominations make up 77% of the Mainline Denominations. We weighted the data to reflect the relative size of each denomination in the general population (e.g., United Methodist clergy, members of the largest denomination, were weighted more heavily than Disciples of Christ clergy from the smallest denomination). This method allows us to have a sense of the relative influence of clergy from each denomination on the population as a whole.

² We calculated a population estimate of Mainline Protestant adults by taking 18.1% of the population estimate of 225.1 million adults (age 18 or older) in the American population (American Community Survey, U.S. Census Bureau 2007).

Theological Orientations

Overall, Mainline Protestant clergy hold a theological outlook that is a mix of modernist and traditional views. On the one hand, more than two-thirds (67%) of clergy do not believe that the Bible is the inerrant word of God, both in matters of faith and in historic, geographical, and other secular matters. More than three-quarters (76%) reject the notion that there is only one correct Christian position on political issues. Moreover, less than 4-in-10 (38%) believe that social issues would take care of themselves if enough people were brought to Christ. On the other hand, more than 6-in-10 (61%) believe in the existence of the Devil and that the only way to attain salvation is through Jesus Christ. Eight-in-ten clergy believe that Jesus will return to earth one day.

In order to more easily examine the theological distinctiveness between denominations, we created a single index that includes three measures: belief in the Devil, view of the Bible, and belief about the means of attaining of salvation. This replicates a theological index used in two previous studies of Mainline Protestant clergy and allows us to examine changes in theological orientation over time.³

On balance, Mainline clergy are more likely to adopt modernist views than orthodox views on basic theological questions. Nearly half (47%) embrace a modernist approach to theology compared to one-third who have a traditional theological orientation. One-in-five clergy have a mix of modernist and traditionalist theological views.

³ This analysis replicates the work of Corwin Smidt in “The World Is Not My Home: Patterns of Clerical Involvement in Politics Over Time” in *Pulpit and Politics* (Baylor University Press, 2004). Throughout this section we use the term ‘traditional’ in place of the term ‘orthodox’, which was used in Smidt, because in the judgment of the authors it is a more value-neutral term. The initial three variables were all coded 1-5 from strongly agree to strongly disagree. Each variable was recoded such that the traditionalist position was represented as a +1 (Agree/Disagree) or +2 (Strongly agree/disagree) and the modernist position was represented by a -1 or -2. The net score was then computed to create a single scale ranging from -6 to 6 with -6 representing the most traditional position and 6 representing the most modernist position. This scale was then collapsed into 5 categories: Most Traditional (+6), Traditional (3,4,5), Mixed (2,1), Modernist (0,-1,-2), and Most Modernist (-3,-4,-5,-6).

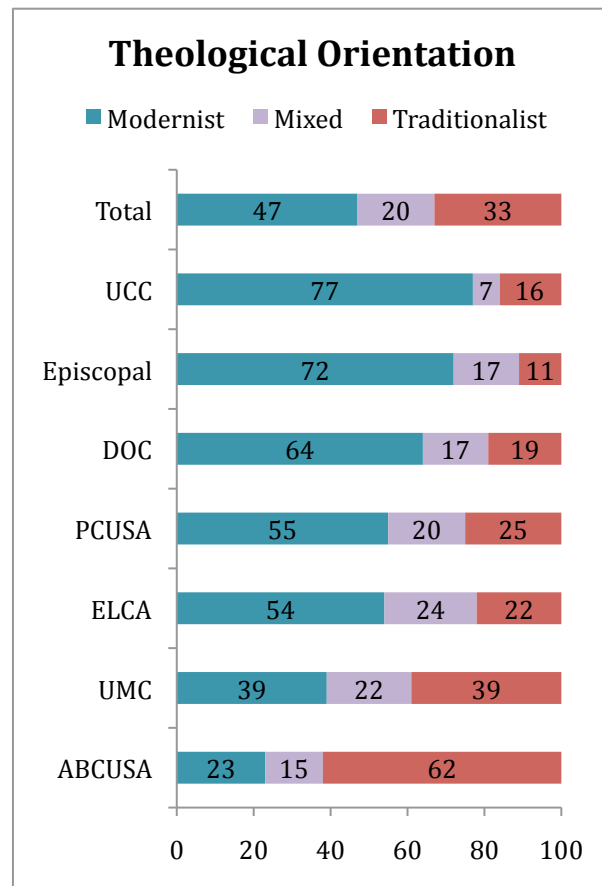
There have been few changes in the theological orientation of clergy over the last twenty years. Roughly an equal number of clergy embraced a traditional approach to theological questions in 1989 (30%), 2001 (33%) and 2008 (33%). During all three time periods, a plurality or majority of clergy embraced a modernist theological orientation.

	1989*	2001**	2008
Most Traditional	10	13	12
Traditional	20	20	21
Mixed	20	18	20
Modernist	27	22	24
Most Modernist	<u>24</u>	<u>24</u>	<u>23</u>
	100	100	100

*Source: 1989 Clergy survey (Guth et al. 1997).
 **Source: 2001 Cooperative Clergy Survey (Smidt 2004).

Although there are some theological issues on which there is widespread agreement among Mainline Protestant clergy, on many issues there is considerable disagreement between clergy who have modernist, mixed, and traditionalist theological orientations. To give just one example, traditionalist clergy are nearly 5 times as likely as modernist clergy to believe that Mainline churches are declining because they are becoming too theologically liberal (69% to 14%). Among clergy with mixed theological views, nearly half (48%) agree that increased theological liberalism is responsible for the decline.

Although clergy have remained relatively stable in their theological beliefs over time, there are significant differences between denominations. UCC and Episcopal clergy are most likely to be theological modernists (77% and 72% respectively). A majority of DOC (64%), PCUSA (55%), and ELCA (54%) clergy are also theological modernists. Methodist clergy are evenly split between those who embrace traditional and modernist theological positions. ABCUSA clergy are the only group among whom a majority (62%) are theological traditionalists.



LGBT Public Policy Issues

On a variety of LGBT public policy issues, Mainline Protestant clergy are generally more progressive than the general population and mostly in line with Mainline Protestants overall.

Mainline clergy are generally supportive of a variety of key LGBT public policy issues. At least two-thirds of Mainline clergy support hate crimes legislation (67%) and workplace protections for gay and lesbian people (66%), and a majority (55%) supports adoption rights. Same-sex marriage is the only major LGBT public policy issue that does not enjoy majority support from Mainline clergy; one-third of Mainline clergy supports same-sex marriage.

	Support Same-sex <u>Marriage</u>	Support <u>Adoption</u>	Support <u>ENDA</u>	Support Hate Crime <u>Laws</u>
Total	33	55	66	67
UCC	67	83	88	84
Episcopal	49	77	79	79
DOC	42	67	77	72
ELCA	37	67	77	71
PCUSA	38	61	72	68
UMC	25	45	58	65
ABCUSA	20	33	50	52

Note: Shaded areas denote less than majority support.

On LGBT public policy issues, a clear pattern of denominational support is evident. Generally speaking, clergy in the UCC and Episcopal Church are more supportive of LGBT rights, while clergy in UMC and ABCUSA are less supportive. Clergy in the other three denominations—DOC, PCUSA, and ELCA—cluster in the middle but lean supportive. For example, Mainline clergy in every denomination are supportive of hate crimes laws and employment non-discrimination legislation. Strong majorities of every denomination except UMC and ABCUSA support adoption by gay and lesbian people. Clergy are more divided, however, on the issue of same-sex marriage. UCC clergy strongly support same-sex marriage, and nearly half of Episcopal clergy support it. Majorities of clergy in the remaining denominations do not support same-sex marriage.

Hate Crimes Legislation

More than two-thirds (67%) of Mainline clergy support passing hate crimes laws to protect gay and lesbian people who might be targets of violence. Nearly two-thirds of clergy in every denomination support hate crimes legislation, with the exception of American Baptist clergy among whom a slight majority (52%) supports it.

Employment Non-Discrimination (ENDA)

Two-thirds of Mainline ministers support employment discrimination protections for gay and lesbian people. UCC and Episcopal clergy again are most supportive of employment protections, although there is a strong majority support across all denominations, with the exception of ABCUSA clergy, among whom half (50%) support employment non-discrimination protections.

Adoption

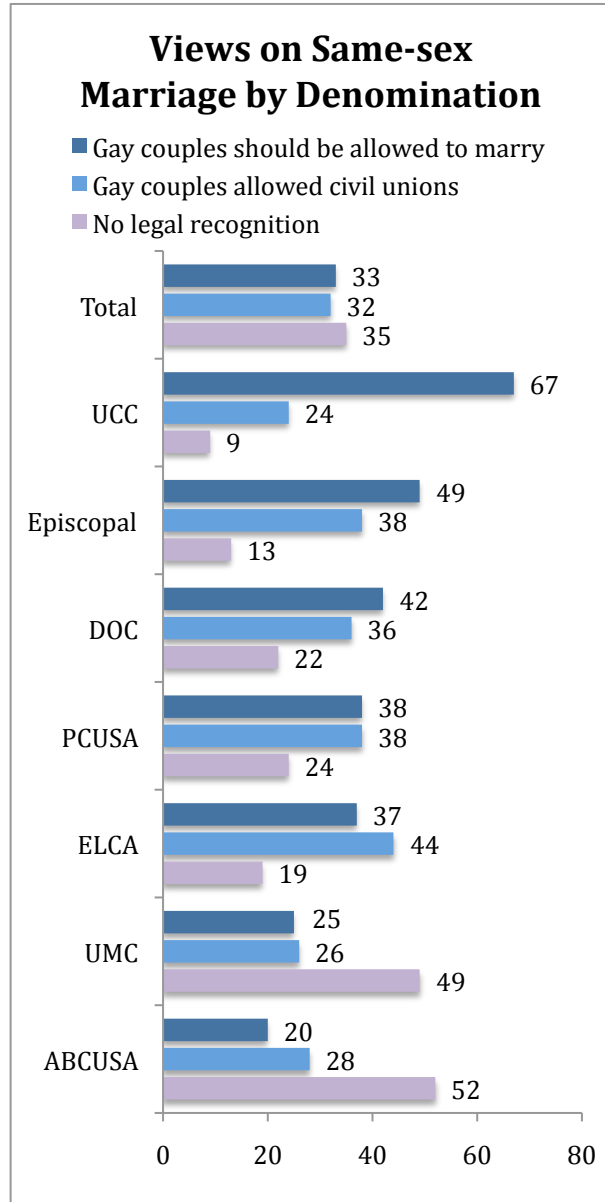
A majority (55%) of Mainline Protestant clergy support adoption rights for qualified gay and lesbian people. UCC and Episcopal clergy are the most supportive. Approximately 8-in-10 UCC clergy (83%) and Episcopal clergy (77%) say that otherwise qualified gay people should be allowed to adopt children. In comparison, less than half (45%) of clergy in the United Methodist church and only one-third of American Baptist clergy support adoption rights for gay and lesbian people.

Marriage and Civil Unions

The issue of same-sex marriage creates the broadest spread of opinion among Mainline Protestant clergy.

Overall, nearly two-thirds of Mainline clergy support either same-sex marriage (33%) or civil unions (32%). Only 35% of Mainline clergy say there should be no legal recognition of gay couples' relationships.

More than two-thirds (67%) of clergy who belong to the United Church of Christ and half (49%) of Episcopal clergy say gay couples should be allowed to marry. In contrast, only a quarter of United Methodist clergy and even fewer (20%) American Baptist clergy support same-sex marriage.



Clergy in the other denominations are more divided. About four-in-ten Disciples (42%), PCUSA (38%) and the ELCA (37%) clergy support same-sex marriage. It is worth noting that only in two denominations—ABCUSA and UMC—do a majority or plurality (52% and 49% respectively) of clergy oppose any legal recognition for gay and lesbian couples.

The views of Mainline clergy on marriage equality are more progressive than the general population and basically in line with Mainline Protestant laity. For example, nearly two-thirds (65%) of Mainline clergy support either same-sex marriage or civil unions, compared to 70% of Mainline Protestants overall and 57% of the general population (FAPS 2008). Among Mainline clergy and Mainline Protestants overall, support for same-sex marriage is virtually identical (33% vs. 34% respectively), and slightly fewer clergy than Mainline Protestants support civil unions (32% vs. 36% respectively).

Same-sex Marriage and Religious Liberty Concerns

Among clergy who initially did not support allowing gay couples to marry, support increased significantly when they were provided with an assurance that no church or congregation would be required to perform same-sex marriage services. With this religious liberty assurance, support among clergy jumped from one-third support to nearly half (46%), a movement of 13 points. Nearly all of this movement occurred among clergy who initially supported civil unions.

The increase in support for same-sex marriage due to this religious liberty assurance varied considerably by denomination. Among ELCA clergy, support for same-sex marriage increased nearly 20 points from 37% to 56%. Among Presbyterian clergy, support for same-sex marriage jumped from less than 4-in-10 (38%) to majority support (51%). DOC clergy also moved from 42% to solid majority (57%). American Baptist clergy were least likely to be influenced by an assurance of religious liberty, although support among this group increased from 20% to 27%.

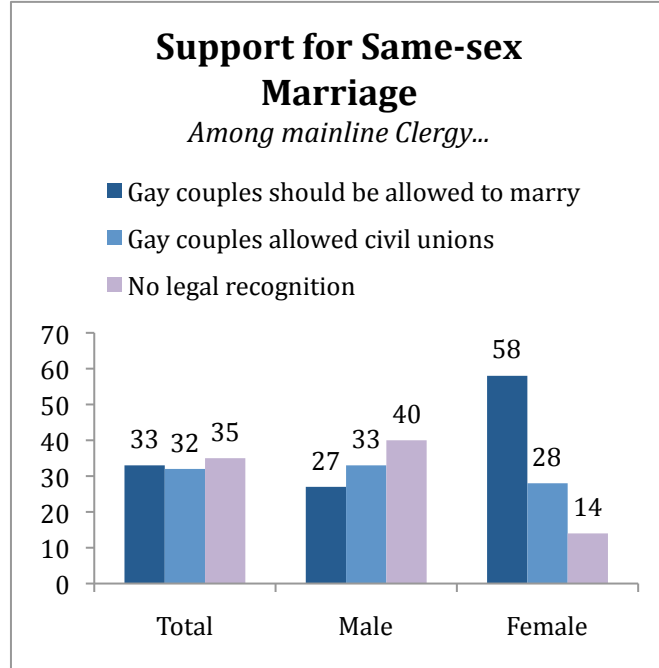
The Influence of Theology, Age, and Gender on Same-Sex Marriage Attitudes

The theological orientation of Mainline clergy has significant impact on views of LGBT public policy issues. For instance, nearly 6-in-10 (59%) modernist clergy support allowing gay couples to marry legally. Nearly a third (35%) support civil unions for same-sex couples, and only 6% say there should be no legal recognition of a gay couple's relationship. On this issue, traditionalist clergy are strongly at odds with modernist clergy. Only 4% of traditionalist clergy support same-sex marriage. About 1-in-5 clergy (22%) supports civil unions for same-sex couples, and nearly three quarters (74%) say there should be no legal recognition of a gay couple's relationship.

Age and gender also play a powerful role in clergy views on same-sex marriage. Younger clergy are significantly more likely to support same-sex marriage than older clergy. Among clergy under the age of 40, close to half (45%) say gay couples should be allowed to marry, compared to approximately one-third of clergy 40 and older.

The gender gap among clergy on the issue of same-sex marriage is stunning. Slightly more than a quarter (27%) of male clergy support same-sex marriage for gay and lesbian couples, compared to nearly 6-in-10 (58%) female clergy. Four-in-ten male clergy believe there should be no legal recognition for same-sex couples—a view held by only 14% of female ministers.

Although the number of female clergy has increased nearly three-fold over the past two decades—up from only 7% in 1989 (Guth 1997) to 20% in 2008—men continue to constitute the overwhelming proportion of senior clergy. The domination of the clergy by men is a key factor in the more conservative overall profile of Mainline ministers on the issue of same-sex marriage.



LGBT Issues and the Church

The pattern of support evident on gay and lesbian public policy issues is also evident on LGBT-related issues within the church. On issues like the ordination of gay and lesbian persons and support for gay and lesbian lay leaders, UCC and Episcopal clergy are overwhelmingly supportive, while ABCUSA and UMC clergy register considerably lower levels of support. The gap between ABCUSA and UMC clergy and other Mainline clergy on each of these intra-church issues is at least 20 points.

Overall, close to half (45%) of Mainline Protestant clergy support the ordination of gay and lesbian people with no special requirements. A slim majority (51%) of ministers believe that the church should not oppose making homosexuality acceptable. More than 6-in-10 (62%) support allowing gay and lesbian people to become lay leaders.

The contrast between the denominations on ordination is stark. More than 8-in-10 (84%) UCC clergy support the ordination of gay and lesbian people with no special requirements, more than 2.5 times the number of ABCUSA clergy (28%) or UMC clergy (32%). ELCA and PCUSA clergy are divided on the issue, with a bare majority or plurality supporting ordination (54% and 50% respectively).

Significantly more clergy (62%) support allowing gay and lesbian people to serve as lay leaders. Majorities of clergy in every denomination support allowing gays and lesbians to serve as lay leaders, with the exception of ABCUSA clergy among whom only one-third supports it.

Mainline clergy are also divided over whether the church should oppose efforts to make homosexuality acceptable, with a bare majority (51%) saying it should not. Strong majorities of clergy in most Mainline denominations believe that the church should not oppose efforts to make homosexuality acceptable in society, including 81% of UCC clergy, 77% of Episcopal clergy, 61% of ELCA clergy, and 57% of PCUSA clergy. Among

	Support ordination of gay & lesbian persons	Church should NOT oppose making homosexuality acceptable	Support gay & lesbian persons as lay leaders
Total	45	51	62
UCC	84	81	90
Episcopal	72	77	87
DOC	64	60	76
ELCA	54	61	80
PCUSA	50	57	64
UMC	32	39	51
ABCUSA	28	31	33

Note: Shaded areas denote less than majority support.

United Methodist and American Baptist ministers, less than 4-in-10 agree (39% and 31% respectively).

The Influence of Theology, Gender, and Age on Ordination Attitudes

The issue of ordination for gay and lesbian people reveals similarly striking differences between clergy with different theological orientations. Almost 8-in-10 (79%) modernist clergy believe that gay and lesbian people should be eligible for ordination without special requirements, a position advocated by just 7% of traditionalist clergy. In fact, 61% of traditionalist clergy say that gay and lesbian people should not be eligible for ordination under any conditions. Among clergy with mixed theological views, 29% say that gay and lesbian people should be eligible for ordination without special requirements, and a plurality (43%) say that they should be eligible only if they are celibate.

As with attitudes on same-sex marriage, gender and age affect clergy views on ordination. More than 7-in-10 (72%) female clergy, compared to only 39% of male clergy, support the ordination of gay and lesbian clergy with no special requirements. Age also affects clergy views of ordination, although in a much more modest way than gender. A majority (56%) of clergy under the age of 40 support ordination with no special requirements, compared to 45% of clergy who are 40 years of age or older.

Changing Views on LGBT Issues Over Time

This survey contained one question on LGBT rights that was asked on two previous clergy surveys in 1989 and 2001. All three questionnaires included a question that asked clergy to agree or disagree with the following statement: “Homosexuals should have all the same rights and privileges as other American citizens.”⁴ We found that about 8-in-10 (79%) Mainline clergy agree with this statement in 2008, compared to 7-in-10 in both 2001 and 1989. This movement represents an increase of 9 points over the last 7 years.⁵ Moreover, there has been a significant shift in strength of opinion over this time period, with a majority (55%) of clergy now strongly agreeing, up 18 points from 37% in 2001.

We also asked clergy to evaluate how their views had shifted over the last decade. Consistent with the findings above, nearly half (45%) of Mainline clergy report that their views on gay and lesbian issues are more liberal today than they were 10 years ago. About 4-in-10 say their views have not changed. Only 14% say their views are now more conservative than they were a decade earlier.

Among clergy who reported becoming more liberal on gay and lesbian issues, the top factors they cited as being very or extremely important to this change were discernment through prayer and reflection (66%), having a friend, congregant or colleague who is gay or lesbian (58%), and additional Bible study (55%).

Clergy who reported becoming more conservative on gay and lesbian issues also reported different factors contributing to their change in opinion. The top factors they cited as very or extremely important were additional Bible study (73%) and discernment through prayer and reflection (72%). Nearly 4-in-10 (39%) say that additional knowledge about human sexuality was very or extremely important in changing their views.

⁴ We report these comparisons as “over-time comparisons” rather than “trends” because the denominational composition of the samples in the three surveys varied. The current CVS provided the most complete sample of Mainline clergy, including samples from each of the seven largest denominations: UMC, ELCA, PCUSA, ABCUSA, Episcopal, UCC and DOC (representing 77% of the Mainline Protestant population). The 2001 clergy survey included five denominations in the sample: UMC, ELCA, PCUSA, ABCUSA and DOC. The 1989 clergy survey included just three denominations: UMC, ELCA and PCUSA. While these samples are not directly comparable, each constitutes the best snapshot of Mainline Protestant clergy opinion for that time period.

⁵ A more direct comparison between 2001 and 2008 that includes just the five denominations surveyed in both time periods confirms a significant shift. Agreement with the belief that homosexuals should have the same rights and privileges as other Americans rose from 70% in 2001 to 76% in 2008.

Addressing Gay and Lesbian Issues in Church

Barriers and Resources

There is near universal (92%) agreement among Mainline ministers that if their congregation requested more discussion about gay and lesbian issues, they would be responsive. Yet less than one-third (29%) of clergy report that their church sponsors programs or activities related to human sexuality, and most clergy (55%) report that their congregation has a difficult time openly talking about LGBT issues. When asked to name the primary barrier to their congregation having more open conversations, about one-third (34%) of clergy cite general discomfort with sexuality issues, and roughly an equal number (32%) cite concerns about creating divisions within the congregations. One-quarter of Mainline ministers also said that the greatest barrier to open discussions about gay and lesbian issues was that their congregation believes the Bible is already clear on these issues.

When asked what resources would help them lead their congregations to discuss LGBT issues more openly, more than one-third of clergy stated that additional theological resources (36%) and willingness of congregants to share their experiences (35%) would be helpful.

A Crisis in the Church?

A slim majority (51%) of ministers believe that disagreements over homosexuality in church constitute a crisis. There are few differences between clergy by denomination. Clergy who oppose same-sex marriage are much more likely to believe that differences about homosexuality represent a crisis than supporters (62% to 43% respectively).

Among the ministers who believe that homosexuality constitutes a crisis, a plurality (40%) believes that the crisis is about how the Bible should be read. More than a quarter (27%) of this group say that the crisis revolves around what the church is supposed to be, and slightly fewer (23%) say it is about the core of Christian doctrine.

Similar numbers of clergy who oppose and support same-sex marriage believe disagreements about homosexuality constitute a crisis about how to read the Bible (42% and 41% respectively). However, clergy who say there should be no legal recognition for same-sex couples are much more likely to say homosexuality reveals a crisis about the core of Christian doctrine (39% to 7% respectively), while supporters of same-sex marriage are much more likely to say it reveals a crisis about what the church is supposed to be (41% to 11% respectively).

Impact of Denominations' Positions

Most clergy do not think that their denomination's official position on gay and lesbian issues has helped their church. Only about 1-in-5 clergy say that their

denomination's position on gay and lesbian issues has had a positive effect on their church. Close to a third (29%) say they do not know whether it has had a positive effect, and fully half say it has not.

Clergy who belong to denominations with more supportive policies regarding gay and lesbian people are more likely to say their denomination's policies have helped their church. A majority (51%) of UCC clergy—who belong to the denomination with the most supportive policies on gay and lesbian rights—say that their denomination's position on gay and lesbian issues has had a positive effect on their church. Among Episcopal clergy, views are nearly evenly split (41% agree, 40% disagree) over whether their denomination's position has had a positive impact. Strong majorities of American Baptist and UMC clergy do not think their denomination's position benefits their church.

Opinions on Common Rhetorical Strategies

There is widespread agreement among Mainline clergy that simply avoiding the topic of homosexuality is not a realistic option. Less than 1-in-10 (9%) clergy agree that the best approach to homosexuality in the church is “don't ask, don't tell.” Overwhelming majorities of clergy across every denomination agree that avoiding the issue is not a viable solution.

Another rhetorical strategy adopted by some clergy seeks to make a distinction between negative evaluations of homosexuality and the treatment of homosexual persons. This “love the sinner, hate the sin” approach holds appeal for many clergy, particularly in certain denominations. Overall, close to half (48%) of clergy say that the best approach to homosexuality in church is to love the sinner but not the sin; slightly fewer numbers, about 4-in-10 (42%), reject this idea. Among UMC and ABCUSA ministers, a majority endorse this approach to dealing with homosexuality (57% and 66% respectively). In contrast, only 19% of UCC ministers and 23% of Episcopal clergy embrace this method; overwhelming majorities of ministers in these denominations oppose it. Among DOC, PCUSA and ELCA denominations, clergy remain closely divided.

Models for Dealing with Homosexuality

A plurality (44%) of ministers believe that human or civil rights provide the best analogy for how the church should address gay and lesbian issues. Slightly less than 1-in-5 (17%) say that the issue of alcoholism provides the best model for dealing with gay and lesbian issues. Only about 1-in-10 say that slavery (10%), women's issues (11%) or divorce (11%) serve as the best examples for how the church should address homosexuality. There are some significant differences between clergy across denominations but no discernible pattern.

Risk Assessments: Perceived Consequences of Addressing Homosexuality

Losing members is a very real concern among Mainline clergy.⁶ However, less than 4-in-10 (38%) Mainline clergy believe that their congregation risks losing members by talking too much about homosexuality. An equal number disagrees with this argument, and nearly a quarter (24%) are not sure that membership losses will result from addressing the issue. Clergy are also somewhat divided over whether the church is alienating young adults by being too judgmental on gay and lesbian issues. More than 4-in-10 (42%) clergy say that the church is alienating Americans in their twenties and thirties, while about a third (34%) disagree. Again, nearly a quarter (24%) are unsure whether the church is alienating young people by being too judgmental. There are only minor differences between the denominations on these questions.

Welcoming and Inclusion, Opening and Affirming

We found significant differences between the ideas of “welcome” and “full inclusion” among Mainline clergy. Nearly all (94%) Mainline clergy say gay and lesbian people are welcome in their church. On the other hand, less than two-thirds (63%) of Mainline clergy believe that the gospel requires the full inclusion of gay and lesbian persons in their church.

Only 13% of Mainline clergy report that their congregation has completed a process of becoming an “open and affirming congregation” with regard to gay and lesbian people. UCC and the Episcopal clergy are twice as likely as Mainline clergy overall to lead open and affirming congregations (30% and 26% respectively), while ABCUSA clergy are half as likely (6%) to lead open and affirming congregations.

⁶ From 1965 to 1990, Mainline denominational membership declined approximately 20% (Wuthnow and Evans 2002, 6). The rate of decline lessened in the 1990s, but declining membership remains a top issue of concern for many Mainline clergy.

The Influence of Relationships with Gay and Lesbian People

Nearly 9-in-10 (87%) ministers say they personally know or work with someone who is gay, lesbian, bisexual or transgender. Majorities of clergy report having an acquaintance outside the church or knowing a church member who is gay or lesbian (52% and 51% respectively). Less than 4-in-10 (37%) say they have a close friend who is gay or lesbian. One-quarter say they have a co-worker (26%) or a family member (25%) who is gay or lesbian.

The type of relationship ministers have with LGBT people dramatically impacts support for issues like same-sex marriage and ordination eligibility for gay and lesbian people. Among clergy, the relationships that are most influential are co-workers and close friends.⁷ A majority of ministers who have a gay or lesbian co-worker (54%) or close friend (53%) say they support allowing gay couples to marry. More than 4-in-10 ministers with gay or lesbian church members (44%) or family members (41%) support same-sex marriage. Clergy who do not personally know any gay or lesbian people are least likely to support same-sex marriage. Among ministers who have no relationship with a gay or lesbian person, only 1-in-10 supports allowing gay couples to marry; 65% say there should be no legal recognition of a gay couple’s relationship.

A similar pattern is evident on the issue of ordination of gay and lesbian people. More than two-thirds (68%) of clergy who say they have a close friend or a co-worker who is gay or lesbian

<i>Type of LGBT relationship...</i>	Relationships With LGBT People		
	<i>% who favor....</i>		
	Same-sex <u>Marriage</u>	Civil <u>Unions</u>	No legal <u>recognition</u>
Co-worker	54	26	20
Close friend	53	32	15
Church member	44	31	25
Family member	41	34	25
Acquaintance	37	31	31
No Relationship	10	25	65

support ordaining gay and lesbian people with no special requirements, compared to only 16% of clergy who report having no relationships with a gay or lesbian person.

⁷ In this context co-worker refers to a church staff member.

Support, Opposition and the Uncertain Middle: Another Look at Mainline Clergy on LGBT Issues

The analysis above has largely focused on a denominational approach to understanding the Mainline Protestant landscape: with UCC and Episcopal clergy generally supportive on most LGBT issues; DOC, ELCA, and PCUSA generally divided; and UMC and ABCUSA generally opposed. However, we also found considerable diversity within denominations.

After testing a variety of methods, we developed a sexual orientation belief scale that produced reliable groupings of clergy. These groupings provide a lens for seeing how similar groups of clergy cluster across denominations. We used a statistical method called factor analysis to identify and isolate a single underlying factor from eight unique measures of clergy beliefs about sexual orientation. Factor analysis allows us to discern a fundamental attitude or orientation that is not directly measurable, but that lies underneath these particular questions.

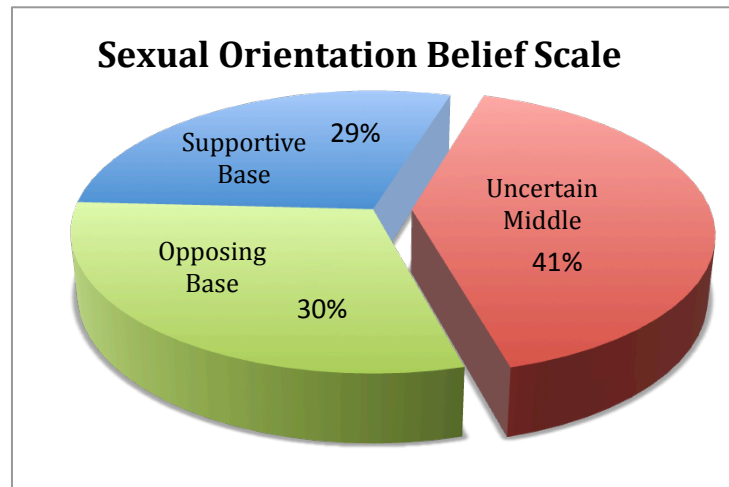
Sexual Orientation Belief Scale

Questions used in factor analysis:

- Q.38b Homosexuality is a sin.
- Q.38c Homosexuality is a choice.
- Q.38d Homosexual orientation can be changed through therapy and prayer.
- Q.38e Sexual orientation is determined at birth.
- Q.38g Homosexual behavior is inconsistent with Christian teachings.
- Q.38h Sexual diversity is part of God's plan.
- Q.38j LGBT issues are an essential part of the prophetic social justice agenda.
- Q.38l The gospel message requires full inclusion of LGBT persons in the church.

Using this Sexual Orientation Belief Scale, we identified three distinct groups of Mainline Protestant clergy:

- A Supportive Base (29%), clergy who strongly support gay and lesbian rights and generally do not see homosexuality as a choice nor as a sin;
- An Opposing Base (30%), clergy who strongly oppose gay and lesbian rights and generally see homosexuality as a choice and as a sin; and
- An Uncertain Middle (41%), clergy who are supportive of some gay and lesbian rights but are ambivalent on others. At more than 4-in-10, the Uncertain Middle makes up the largest segment of Mainline clergy.



LGBT Policies: The Special Case of Same-sex Marriage

The issue of same-sex marriage remains the most divisive issue among Mainline clergy. These divisions can be seen in the large gaps between the three Sexual Orientation Belief Scale groups. Fully 80% of the Supportive Base supports same-sex marriage, compared to only 26% of the Uncertain Middle and a mere 1% of the Opposing Base.

Notably, support for same-sex marriage almost doubles among the Uncertain Middle from 26% to 49% when they are assured that the law would guarantee that no church would be required to perform same-sex marriages. With this religious liberty assurance,

the Uncertain Middle moves much closer to majority support for same-sex marriage.

Issues by Sexual Orientation Belief Scale Groups			
	Supportive	Uncertain	Opposing
	<u>Base</u>	<u>Middle</u>	<u>Base</u>
LGBT Public Policy Issues			
Support same-sex marriage	80	26	1
<i>With religious liberty assurance</i>	94	49	3
Support adoption by gay or lesbian people	97	65	6
Oppose constitutional marriage amendment	98	71	17
Support ENDA	93	79	30
Hate Crimes	92	77	33
LGBT Issues in the Church			
Church should bless same-sex marriages	84	30	4
Support ordination with no special requirements	97	45	*
Church should NOT oppose efforts to make homosexuality acceptable	96	55	5
Support gay and lesbian lay leaders	98	74	14
Views on Homosexuality			
Homosexuality NOT determined at birth	4	18	74
Homosexuality is a sin	*	31	97
Homosexual behavior inconsistent with Christian teaching	3	44	96

Other LGBT Policy Issues

On most LGBT issues, the Uncertain Middle tends to be significantly closer in opinion to the Supportive Base than to the Opposing Base. Strong majorities of the Uncertain Middle support adoption rights (65%), and a similarly large number of the Uncertain Middle opposes a constitutional amendment banning same-sex marriage (71%). Nearly 8-in-10 supports passing hate crimes legislation to protect lesbian and gay persons who might be targets of violence (77%), and favors employment nondiscrimination laws to protect gay and lesbian people (79%).

LGBT Issues in the Church

On gay and lesbian issues in the church, equally large differences are evident between the groups. Opinions on whether the church should bless same-sex marriages largely parallel support for the legalization of same-sex marriage, with less than one-third of the Uncertain Middle supporting same-sex blessings. Among the Supportive Base more than 4-in-5 (84%) agree the church should bless same-sex marriages, while only 4% of the Opposing Base agree.

On the issue of ordination of gay and lesbian people, the Uncertain Middle is somewhat divided, with a plurality (45%) supporting ordination with no special requirements and an additional 36% supporting ordination with a requirement of celibacy. Only 19% of the Uncertain Middle opposes making gay and lesbian people eligible for ordination under any circumstance. Among the Supportive Base, nearly all (97%) support ordination with no special requirements, compared to less than 1% among the Opposing Base.

A majority (55%) of the Uncertain Middle says that the church should not oppose efforts to make homosexuality acceptable, compared to nearly unanimous polar opposite opinions among the Supportive Base and the Opposing Base. One place where the Uncertain Middle is not so uncertain is on the issue of allowing gay and lesbian congregants to serve as lay leaders in the church; nearly three-quarters (74%) support gay and lesbian lay leaders.

Views about Homosexuality

Underlying views about homosexuality are also polarized, but the opinions of the Uncertain Middle are consistently closer to the opinions of the Supportive Base than to the Opposing Base. Like the Supportive Base, few (18%) clergy in the Uncertain Middle believe that homosexuality is not determined at birth, while close to three-quarters (74%) of Opposing Base clergy express this belief. In terms of theology, 97% of the Opposing Base say that homosexuality is a sin, while among the Uncertain Middle less than a third (31%) hold this view. Not surprisingly, less than 1% of the Supportive Base believes homosexuality is a sin. Nearly all (96%) of the Opposing Base hold the view that homosexual behavior is inconsistent with Christian teachings, while among the Uncertain Middle less than half (44%) agree.

A Profile of the Uncertain Middle

Demographic and Denominational Breakdown

On nearly every major demographic characteristic, the Uncertain Middle closely resembles the makeup of Mainline clergy overall. The Uncertain Middle is also made up of a proportional cross-section of Mainline Protestant denominations. Uncertain Middle clergy are slightly more likely to be ELCA, but other proportions are nearly identical to the distribution of clergy overall.

Uncertainty about the Nature of Homosexuality and the Church

Although large majorities of the Uncertain Middle support adoption by gay and lesbian people, policies protecting gay and lesbians from workplace discrimination, and some legal recognition for gay couples, one characteristic that sets them apart from both the Supportive Base and the Opposing Base is the degree to which this group exhibits high levels of uncertainty about the nature of homosexuality and the effect it is having on the church.

Clergy in this group express considerable levels of uncertainty about the nature of homosexuality. Nearly a third (30%) say they do not know whether homosexuality can be changed through therapy and prayer, and more than 4-in-10 (42%) say they are unsure whether homosexuality is determined at birth. In contrast, only 10% of Supportive Base and 18%

of Opposing Base clergy say that they are unsure if homosexuality is determined at birth. One-fifth of Uncertain Middle clergy also says they do not feel well-informed about transgender issues, a rate that is twice as high as both Supportive Base (10%) and Opposing Base (10%) clergy.

Clergy in the Uncertain Middle also exhibit significant indecision on questions about the effect that homosexuality is having on the church. For instance, one-third of clergy

The Uncertain Middle Unsure about Homosexuality and Church			
<i>Homosexuality in the church...</i>	<u>Agree</u>	<u>Unsure</u>	<u>Disagree</u>
Risk alienating youth	44	33	23=100
Denominational position on LGBT issues helped church	16	37	47=100
LGBT organizations are hurting the church	27	26	47=100
<i>Views on Homosexuality...</i>			
Homosexuality determined at birth	40	42	18=100
Homosexuality can be changed	14	30	56=100
Feel well-informed about transgender issues	59	20	21=100

in the Uncertain Middle say they are not sure whether becoming too judgmental on LGBT issues may alienate youth. About 4-in-10 (37%) say do not know whether the church's position on gays and lesbians has helped the church. More than a quarter (26%) express uncertainty about whether LGBT organizations are hurting the church.

Struggling to Talk about LGBT Issues

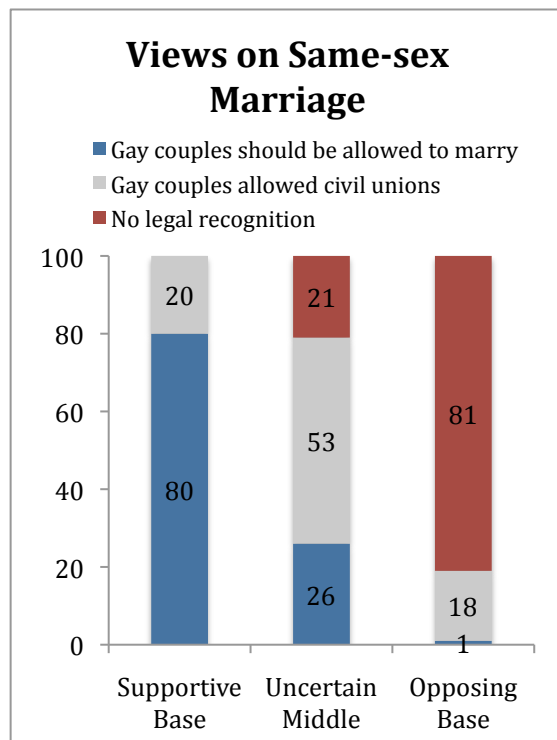
Uncertain Middle clergy are significantly more likely than other clergy to say that their congregations have trouble talking about LGBT issues. Nearly two-thirds (65%) of Uncertain Middle clergy say this, compared to 52% of Supportive Base clergy and 46% of Opposing Base clergy. Both Supportive Base and Uncertain Middle clergy report that the greatest barriers to having better conversations are congregational discomfort (40% and 37% respectively) and concerns about creating divisions (37% and 33% respectively), while in Opposing Base congregations, the greatest barriers are the congregation's belief that the Bible is already clear on these issues (46%).

Supportive Base and Uncertain Middle clergy both report that two factors would enhance their ability to have better discussions about LGBT issues: congregants who were willing to share their experiences (53% and 41% respectively) and theological resources (43% and 40% respectively). Opposing Base clergy are much less likely to say that any factor would help lead them their congregation in discussing gay and lesbian issues more openly.

The Uncertain Middle: Moderate and Moving

Another characteristic that is clearly evident among this group is the degree to which they stake out middle or moderate positions on many gay and lesbian issues and the degree to which they report their views changing over time.

About one-fourth (26%) of clergy in the Uncertain Middle believe gay couples should be allowed to marry, and a majority (53%) says gay couples should be allowed to form civil unions. Only one-in-five (21%) Uncertain Middle clergy says there should be no legal recognition for gay and lesbian couples. Among Supportive Base clergy, fully 80% support same-sex marriage, and one-in-five supports civil unions for gay couples. No one in this group says there should be no legal recognition for same-sex



couples. On the other side, nearly the same proportion (81%) of Opposing Base clergy say there should be no legal recognition, and only 1% support same-sex marriage.

Although only about a quarter of the Uncertain Middle favors same-sex marriage, nearly half (49%) say they would support allowing gay couples to marry if the law guaranteed that no church or congregation would be required to perform the ceremony. Among the Supportive Base, 94% say they would support same-sex marriage if provided with this religious liberty assurance. Among the Opposing Base, 97% say they would not support same-sex marriage even with this religious liberty assurance.

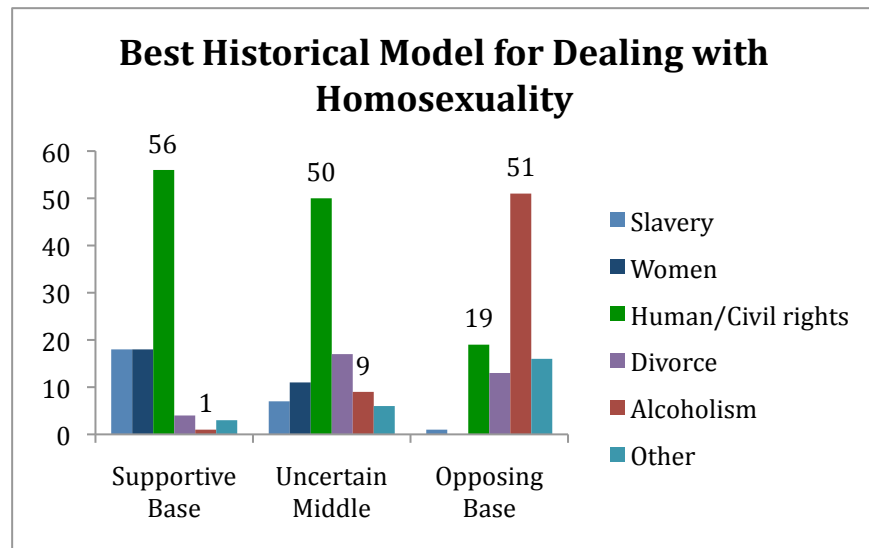
Clergy in the Uncertain Middle report significant movement toward more supportive positions on gay and lesbian issues over the last decade. Six times as many clergy in the Uncertain Middle report that their views have become more liberal than conservative on LGBT issues over the last ten years (56% vs. 9% respectively), while 36% say they have not changed their views on LGBT issues. This profile contrasts sharply with the Opposing Base, where more clergy report becoming more conservative than liberal on LGBT issues over the last ten years (33% vs. 16% respectively). A slim majority (51%) of this group says they have not changed on LGBT issues in the last 10 years. Among the Supportive Base, 62% of clergy report that their views have moved in a more liberal direction, compared to only 1% saying their views have become more conservative.

Opinions on Common Rhetorical Strategies

Like Mainline clergy overall, only 1-in-10 (12%) of Uncertain Middle clergy support a “don’t ask, don’t tell” policy that avoids the topic of homosexuality in the church. However, a “love the sinner, hate the sin” approach holds some appeal for the Uncertain Middle, with a plurality (45%) agreeing with this approach. About 9-in-10 (88%) Opposing Base clergy also embrace this strategy, while only 4% of Supportive Base clergy agree with this approach.

Best Historical Models for Dealing with LGBT Issues: Human Rights or Alcoholism

Uncertain Middle clergy are considerably closer to Supportive Base clergy in how they think about historical analogies to LGBT issues. Majorities of both Supportive Base and Uncertain Middle clergy believe that human or civil rights



provide the best model for dealing with LGBT issues (56% and 50% respectively). Reflecting their negative judgment of homosexuality in general, a majority (51%) of Opposing Base clergy say that alcoholism serves as the best example for how the church should approach homosexuality, and only 19% say that human or civil rights serves as the best model.

Assessments of Mainline Denominational Decline

Uncertain Middle clergy are also closer to Supportive Base clergy than to Opposing Base clergy in their opinions about causes of Mainline membership decline. A majority (52%) of the Uncertain Middle *disagrees* that Mainline churches are declining because they are becoming too theologically liberal, while 1-in-5 say they are unsure. Nearly half (47%) of Uncertain Middle clergy believe that Mainline churches are declining because they have lost the courage to take prophetic stands for social justice; again, a significant number (20%) say they are not sure.

Separation of Church and State Policy

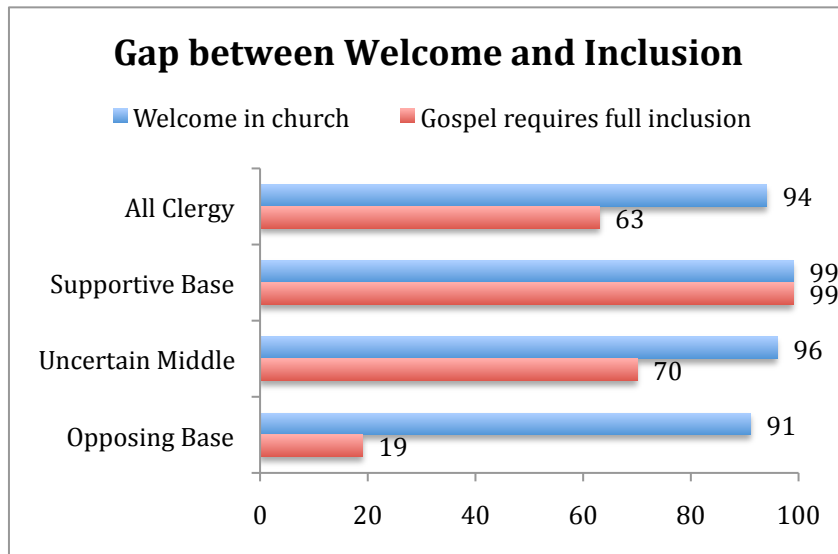
Mainline clergy believe strongly in separation of religious institutions and the state and are willing to differentiate their religious beliefs from their public policy opinions. Overall a majority (55%) of clergy support the maintenance of a strict separation between church and state. Slightly more (59%) clergy in the Uncertain Middle believe that there should be a strict separation of church and state. Among the Opposing Base only 37% believe there should be strict separation of church and state. Among the

Supportive Base nearly three quarters (74%) agree that we must maintain a strict separation of church and state.

With regard to gay and lesbian issues, more than two-thirds (68%) of all clergy believe that opposing homosexual practices on theological grounds does not mean that one has to oppose legal rights for gay and lesbian people. Among the Uncertain Middle nearly three quarters (72%) make a distinction between theological opposition to homosexuality and legal rights for gays and lesbians. Among the Supportive Base a similar number (76%) believe that theological opposition to homosexuality does not preclude supporting legal rights for gays and lesbians. Among the Opposing Base a majority (57%) agree.

The Welcome/Inclusion Gap

There is a significant gap among clergy between support for welcoming LGBT persons in the church and a belief that the gospel requires full inclusion of gay and lesbian persons. Nearly all (94%) clergy say gay and lesbian people are welcome in their church, but significantly fewer (63%) say that the gospel requires their inclusion.



Among Supportive Base clergy, there is no welcome/inclusion gap, while the welcome/inclusion gap among Opposing Base clergy is a remarkable 72 points. Uncertain Middle clergy have a slightly smaller welcome/inclusion gap than clergy overall (26 points compared to 31 points).

Openness to Action

Mainline clergy as a whole, and particularly the Uncertain Middle, are open to being more responsive and doing more to help their congregants think carefully about LGBT issues. Strong majorities of all Mainline clergy say that they would be responsive if congregants requested more discussion of LGBT issues. Six-in-ten (61%) of Uncertain Middle clergy agree that the church should do more to help members think carefully about LGBT issues. This opinion puts them much closer to the 85% of Supportive Base clergy who agree than to the only 37% of Opposing Base clergy who agree.

Conclusion

The Mainline Protestant Clergy Voices Survey is the most comprehensive survey of Mainline Protestant clergy ever conducted, and it provides the most in-depth look at Mainline Protestant clergy views on LGBT issues to date. Mainline Protestants—who make up 18% of all Americans and nearly one-quarter of all voters—are an important but largely ignored part of the American religious landscape. They are important parts of winning coalitions for both the Democratic and Republican Parties and for issue campaigns, and they are a critical swing constituency in key states.

Clergy play an influential role in highlighting issues for congregants and shaping opinion on these issues by linking them to religious values and worldviews. This report allows us to see, in the most comprehensive way yet, the theological orientations of Mainline clergy, and how these beliefs intersect with views on LGBT issues. Thus, this report shows how clergy are navigating these issues both in the public policy arena and within the church, and it provides a glimpse of the course this group may take in the future.

About the Survey

The Mainline Protestant Clergy Voices Survey (CVS) is the largest survey of Mainline Protestant clergy conducted in the last seven years. CVS was conducted by Public Religion Research and funded by a grant from the Evelyn and Walter Haas, Jr. Fund, which aims to fulfill its founders' vision of a just and caring society where all people are able to live, work, and raise their families with dignity. Dr. Robert P. Jones, president of Public Religion Research, served as the principal investigator for the survey. Daniel Cox, research director for Public Religion Research, oversaw data analysis. Dr. John C. Green, Director of the Bliss Institute for Applied Politics at the University of Akron, served as advisor to the project and supervised the data collection. The CVS builds upon previous studies of clergy political and social engagement conducted in 1989 (Guth et al. 1997) and 2001 (Smidt 2004).

The data was weighted to reflect the relative size of each denomination in the general population (e.g., UMC clergy, members of the largest denomination, were weighted more heavily than Disciples clergy from the smallest denomination). This method allows us to have a sense of the relative influence of clergy from each denomination.

CVS was conducted as a mail survey. The sample was generated by obtaining a random sample of 1,000 senior clergy from each of the seven largest Mainline Protestant denominations (UMC, ELCA, ABCUSA, PCUSA, Episcopal, UCC, and DOC). Four waves of questionnaires and a cover letter over the signatures of Dr. Jones and Dr. Green were mailed to clergy between March 3 and September 15, 2008. This process yielded a final data set of 2,658 respondents, representing a 44% response rate. The margin of error for analysis based on the entire sample is +/- 2.0%.

About Public Religion Research

Public Religion Research is a consulting firm specializing in public opinion polling and research-based strategic advice at the intersection of religion, values, and public policy. We also work with clients to develop strategies to engage people of faith for social change. For more information, visit www.publicreligion.org.

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Dr. Jones is a leading scholar and consultant at the intersection of religion and politics. His latest book is *Progressive & Religious: How Christian, Jewish, Muslim, and Buddhist Leaders are Moving Beyond the Culture Wars and Transforming American Public Life*, and he is the author of numerous articles. He sits on the national steering committee for the Religion and Politics Group at the American Academy of Religion (AAR) and is an active member of the Society of Christian Ethics (SCE) and the American Association of Public Opinion Research (AAPOR). Dr. Jones holds a Ph.D. in religion from Emory University, and a M.Div. from Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary.

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Daniel Cox brings extensive experience in surveying religious groups in the United States. Prior to joining Public Religion Research, Cox worked as a Research Associate at the Pew Forum on Religion & Public Life. In 2007, he was part of the core research team for the groundbreaking Religious Landscape Survey, a large public opinion survey on religion and politics that interviewed over 35,000 Americans. Cox specializes in youth politics and religion. He holds an M.A. in American government from Georgetown University and a B.A. in political science from Union College. Dan is an active member of the American Association of Public Opinion Research (AAPOR).

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