

LIFEWAY RESEARCH: U.S. pastors overwhelmingly view gender change as immoral

NASHVILLE, Tenn. (Special) – A clear majority of U.S. Protestant pastors see gender fluidity as morally wrong, according to a study just released by LifeWay Research, a division of LifeWay Christian Resources of the Southern Baptist Convention in Nashville. Similar numbers of pastors say the same about attempts to physically change genders.



McConnell

“American culture increasingly views morality differently than historic Christianity,” said Scott McConnell, executive director of Lifeway Research. “When pastors articulate Christian teaching, it often sounds very different from the cultural narrative because it rejects a basis for morality centered on the individual.”

Identity issues

Lifeway Research found 72% of pastors believe it is morally wrong for an individual to identify with a gender different from their biological sex at birth. Sixty-two percent of respondents fell into the category of “strongly agree.” Fourteen percent disagreed, and another 10% said they do not believe it is a moral issue.

In an earlier study, Lifeway Research asked the same questions

of Protestant Americans who don't serve on church staffs. Forty-four percent of the Protestant Americans surveyed, and 35% of Americans of other faiths, agreed that it is morally wrong for someone to identify with a gender different from their biological sex at birth.

In the 2020 State of Theology study from Lifeway Research, 79% of American adults agreed God created male and female. "Protestant pastors are more likely than Americans who identify as Protestant to consider it wrong to identify as a gender different from your biological sex," said McConnell. "While most Americans accept the biblical narrative of God designing male and female, pastors take changing that design much more seriously."

Evangelical pastors were more than twice as likely as mainline Protestant pastors to agree that identifying with a different gender is immoral (84% – 32%). Denominationally, Pentecostals (90%) and Baptists (89%) were more likely to agree than pastors in the Restoration movement (69%), Lutherans (60%), Presbyterian/Reformed pastors (45%) and Methodists (43%).

Protestant pastors in the Northeast U.S. were the most likely to say this is not a moral issue (17%).

Gender change

Seventy-seven percent of pastors surveyed agreed that it is morally wrong to change birth gender through surgery or hormones, with 71% strongly agreeing. Twelve percent disagreed. "Whether it is a physical sex change or public identification, a large majority of pastors see a person's biological sex as something a human should not change," McConnell observed.

Evangelical pastors were more than twice as likely as mainline pastors to agree that sex changes are immoral. Nine in 10 evangelical pastors believed attempting to physically change genders is morally wrong, compared to 37% of mainline pastors.

Pentecostals (96%) and Baptists (94%) were more likely to view attempts to change gender as immoral than Restorationist movement pastors (75%), Lutherans (69%), Presbyterian/Reformed pastors (49%) and Methodists (48%).

Personal knowledge

The latest estimation from the Gallup polling organization finds .6% of the U.S. adult population identifies as transgender. Only among younger adult Americans does the amount top one to two percent (millennials) and 1.8% (Generation Z).

The latest LifeWay Research study found close to half of pastors (48%) said they know someone who is transgender. Slightly fewer (41%) said they don't know any individuals who identify as transgender, while 11% reported that they weren't aware if anyone they know is transgender. In 2015, Lifeway Research found 27% of Americans personally knew someone who identifies as transgender.

Mainline pastors were more likely than evangelicals to say they know someone who identifies as transgender (63% – 45%). Methodists (63%) were more likely to know an individual who identifies as transgender than Restorationist movement pastors (47%), Lutherans (47%), Pentecostals (40%) and Baptists (39%).

Pastors of ethnicities other than African American (57%) more likely than African American pastors (36%) to say they personally know someone who identifies as transgender. White pastors are in-between at 48%. Pastors with graduate degrees and pastors of churches with more than 250 people are more likely to say they know someone who identifies as transgender.

“Despite close to half of pastors saying they personally know someone who identifies as transgender, most still view identifying as a different gender as immoral,” McConnell stressed. “As lawmakers debate establishing protections for those who identify as a different gender from their biological

sex at birth, it waits to be seen if Congress will seek to force pastors and their churches to implement changes contradictory to their religious convictions.”

For more information, view the complete report.

Methodology

The mixed mode survey of 1,007 Protestant pastors was conducted Sept. 2 – Oct. 1, 2020 using both phone and online interviews. Phone: The calling list was a stratified random sample, drawn from a list of all Protestant churches. Quotas were used for church size. Online: Invitations were e-mailed to the Lifeway Research Pastor Panel followed by three reminders.

This probability sample of Protestant churches was created by phone recruiting by Lifeway Research using random samples selected from all Protestant churches. Pastors who agree to be contacted by e-mail for future surveys make up this Lifeway Research Pastor Panel.

Each survey was completed by the senior or sole pastor or a minister at the church. Responses were weighted by region and church size to more accurately reflect the population. The completed sample is 1,007 surveys (502 by phone, 505 online).

The sample provides 95% confidence that the sampling error does not exceed plus or minus 3.4% This margin of error accounts for the effect of weighting. Margins of error are higher in sub-groups.