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# Clergy Voices: Findings from the 2008 Mainline Protestant Clergy Voices Survey

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**MARCH 2009**

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## Acknowledgments

The authors thank Dr. John Green, Director of the Bliss Institute for Applied Politics at the University of Akron, for his role as advisor to this project and for his considerable work supervising data collection. We also thank the denominational leaders who made available to us random samples of senior clergy from each of the seven Mainline Protestant denominations in this study, along with the 2,658 clergy who took time from their demanding schedules to answer the survey and share their opinions with us. Finally, we express our deep gratitude to the Evelyn and Walter Haas, Jr. Fund for generous funding that made the survey possible.

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## Executive Summary

**Mainline Protestants are arguably the most-neglected of the major religious groups in the American religious landscape.** But Mainline Protestants make up 18% of all Americans and nearly a quarter of all voters, and they are an important swing constituency in many states.

**Mainline clergy are much more likely to identify as liberal and Democratic than conservative or Republican.** Almost half (48%) of all mainline clergy identify as liberal, compared to about one-third (34%) who say they are conservative. A majority (56%) of mainline clergy identify with or lean towards the Democratic Party, compared to roughly one-third (34%) who claim a Republican affiliation, a 22-point gap.

**The political disposition of clergy varies considerably by denomination.** Three quarters (74%) of UCC clergy identify as liberal, compared to less than a third (32%) of ABCUSA clergy.

**Mainline Protestant clergy are broadly supportive of government's role in addressing social problems such as unemployment, poverty and poor housing.** More than three-quarters (78%) agree that the federal government should do more to solve social problems, and more than 4-in-10 strongly agree.

**Mainline clergy are strongly supportive of government action in the areas of health care and the environment.** More than two-thirds (67%) of clergy agree that government should guarantee health insurance for all citizens, even if it means raising taxes. And nearly 7-in-10 (69%) clergy say that more environmental protection is needed, even if it raises prices or costs jobs.

**On a broad range of issues, mainline clergy affirm equality for gay and lesbian Americans.** Roughly two-thirds of mainline clergy support some legal recognition for same-sex couples (65%), passing hate crime laws (67%) and employment nondiscrimination protections for gay and lesbian people (66%). A majority (55%) of mainline clergy support adoption rights for gay and lesbian people.

**Mainline Protestant clergy are strong advocates of church-state separation.** A majority (65%) of mainline clergy agree that the U.S. should “maintain a strict separation of church and state.” Mainline clergy are more worried about public officials who are too close to religious leaders (59%) than about public officials who do not pay enough attention to religion (41%).

**Mainline clergy are more likely to publicly address hunger and poverty and family issues than controversial social issues.** More than 8-in-10 clergy say they publicly expressed their views about hunger and poverty often in the last year, and three-quarters say they addressed marriage and family issues often. Only about one-quarter (26%) say they often discussed the issues of abortion and capital punishment.

## Introduction: Mainline Protestant Clergy in Context

### *Why Mainline Protestants?*

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 on religion and politics. For example, the 2008 National Election Poll Exit Polls sponsored by the major media networks did not bother to break out Mainline Protestants as a distinct group for analysis.

Mainline Protestants are often overlooked for at least two reasons. First, some analysts have written off even the major mainline denominations because they have suffered significant losses in membership since the 1960s. From their apex in 1965 to 1990, mainline denominational membership declined approximately 20% (Wuthnow and Evans 2002, 6). Although the rate of decline lessened in the 1990s, Mainline Protestants have generally continued to lose members, albeit at a slower rate, into the twenty-first century.

Second, Mainline Protestants have not been prominent in the public spotlight. Their position as the “quiet hand of God,” as Wuthnow and Evans characterized them (2002), is due in large part to differences in theological and cultural posture that in turn lead to a more diffuse public presence. Rather than rallying around one or two cultural issues as their evangelical Protestant counterparts do, Mainline Protestants have focused on a number of issues at once, such as the war in Iraq, the environment, and poverty issues.

Despite membership declines and lower visibility, Mainline Protestants remain a critical part of the American religious landscape.

- Mainline Protestants continue to constitute a large segment of the American religious landscape. They represent 18.1% of all Americans (Pew Forum 2008) and 24% of all voters (2004 NEP Exit Poll). Mainline Protestants account for approximately 40.7 million American adults.<sup>1</sup>
- Mainline Protestants constitute sizeable portions of each party’s vote and have become a potential swing constituency in many states. Once the religious bedrock for the GOP, Mainline Protestants in recent years have drifted away from the Republican Party, decreasing their Republic Party affiliation from 51% in 1988 (NES 1988) to 42% in 2008 (Pew 2008).<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> 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).

<sup>2</sup> 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

- Mainline Protestants retain considerable influence beyond their numbers. With relatively high socioeconomic status, Mainline Protestants wield considerable social capital. Also, the financial resources of the mainline denominations are considerable, topping \$106.8 billion in 1997.<sup>3</sup>

### *Why Clergy?*

Understanding the views and activities of clergy are important for a number of reasons:

- In addition to possessing important political influence, clergy enjoy via their role in the pulpit and in community leadership regular opportunities to influence others.
- The mainline is a repository for theological and social diversity—one of the few places in our society that has the capacity for deliberation between diverse perspectives.
- 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). For example, the Faith and American Politics Survey, conducted by Public Religion Research and sponsored by Faith in Public Life, found significant correlations between what congregants were hearing about homosexuality in church from their ministers and their views on gay and lesbian issues (Public Religion Research 2008).
- While we know something about the shifts among Mainline Protestant congregants, we know little about whether clergy views have shifted over this time period. This study is the first study in seven years to give us a comprehensive picture of mainline clergy. In this study, we built upon two previous surveys of mainline clergy in 1989 (Guth et al. 1997) and 2001 (Smidt, ed. 2004).

### *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. This survey is the broadest survey of Mainline Protestant clergy ever conducted. It builds upon earlier studies of Mainline clergy in 1989 and 2001. 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.

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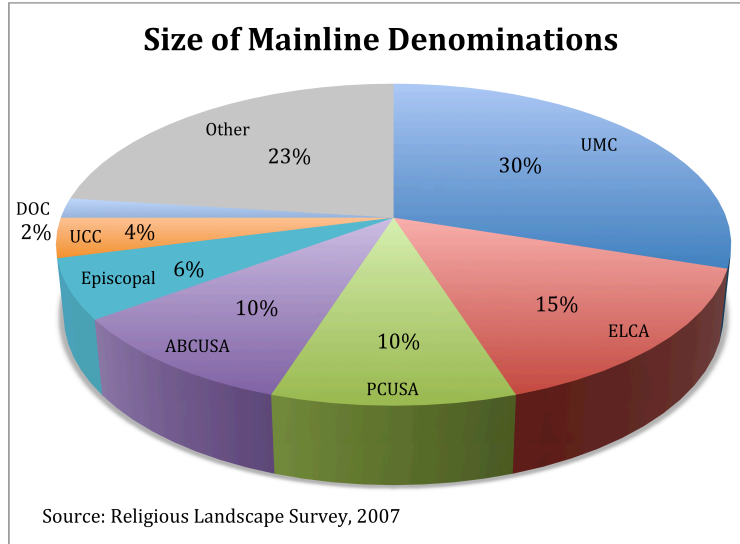
Protestant laity. When Mainline Protestants are defined using denominational affiliation regardless of race, Mainline Protestants are 91% white (Pew Forum 2008).

<sup>3</sup> This number includes \$11 billion in annual spending in 1997, \$63.5 billion in property assets, \$7.6 billion in cash, securities, and other assets, \$2.7 billion in seminary endowments, and \$32 billion in pension funds (Wuthnow and Evans 2002).

## Mainline Protestants and Clergy by the Numbers

### *Denominational Distribution*

Among the seven largest denominations that make up Mainline Protestants, the United Methodist Church (UMC) is by far the largest. Nearly one-third (30%) of all Mainline Protestants in the general population are affiliated with UMC churches. The next largest denomination is the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA), which accounts for 15% of all Mainline Protestants. The Presbyterian Church USA (PCUSA) and American Baptist Churches USA (ABCUSA) each account for 10% of Mainline Protestants. The Episcopal Church, United Church of Christ (UCC), and Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) (DOC) are among the smallest denominations in the study, making up 6%, 4%, and 2% of the Mainline Protestant population respectively. In all, the denominations covered by this survey account for more than three-quarters (77%) of all Mainline Protestant denominations.<sup>4</sup>



<sup>4</sup> In the Religious Landscape Survey a significant number of respondents could only identify the denominational family with which they were affiliated (e.g. Methodist, Baptist, Presbyterian). For ease of presentation, these respondents were reclassified as members of the largest denomination in that family. For instance, a Mainline Protestant who identified as a Methodist but provided no further denominational information was classified as member of the United Methodist Church, the largest Methodist denomination.

### *Church Demographics*

A plurality (45%) of mainline clergy preach to modestly sized congregations between 100 and 299 congregants each Sunday. Approximately 4-in-10 (41%) clergy report smaller average Sunday worship attendance of less than 100. Only 5% of clergy say the average Sunday attendance at worship services is 500 or more.

The racial and ethnic composition of mainline churches mirrors the clergy, with nearly 9-in-10 (87%) reporting that their congregation is primarily white. One-in-ten clergy classify their congregations as mixed race, and less than 5% describe them as predominately minority race churches.

Ministers report that a plurality (43%) of mainline congregations are mixed in terms of socio-economic status. Twenty-eight percent of clergy classify their congregations as primarily working or lower-middle class, while a similar percentage (29%) classify their congregations as upper-middle class.

### *Clergy Demographics*

Mainline clergy are overwhelmingly white (93%) and male (80%). They are also aging, with a median age of 56; because ages are normally distributed in this group, this means that roughly half of mainline clergy are within ten years of a retirement age of 65.

Mainline clergy are highly educated, with 94% holding either a seminary degree or a post-seminary graduate degree. Reflecting their higher educational status, household incomes are fairly high compared to the general population, with 43% of clergy having household incomes \$75,000 or higher.

Despite their relatively high median age and the fact that 62% have been in the ministry for twenty years or more, only about one-fourth (26%) of clergy have been at their present church for ten or more years.

| <b>Clergy Demographics</b> |    |
|----------------------------|----|
| Median Age                 | 56 |
| Race                       |    |
| <i>White</i>               | 93 |
| <i>Black</i>               | 3  |
| <i>Latino</i>              | 1  |
| <i>Other</i>               | 3  |
| Gender                     |    |
| <i>Male</i>                | 80 |
| <i>Female</i>              | 20 |
| Household Income           |    |
| <i>Under \$75k</i>         | 57 |
| <i>\$75k+</i>              | 43 |
| Education                  |    |
| <i>Seminary grad</i>       | 72 |
| <i>Post-seminary grad</i>  | 22 |
| Tenure at Church           |    |
| <i>5 years or less</i>     | 53 |
| <i>6 – 9 years</i>         | 21 |
| <i>10 years or more</i>    | 26 |



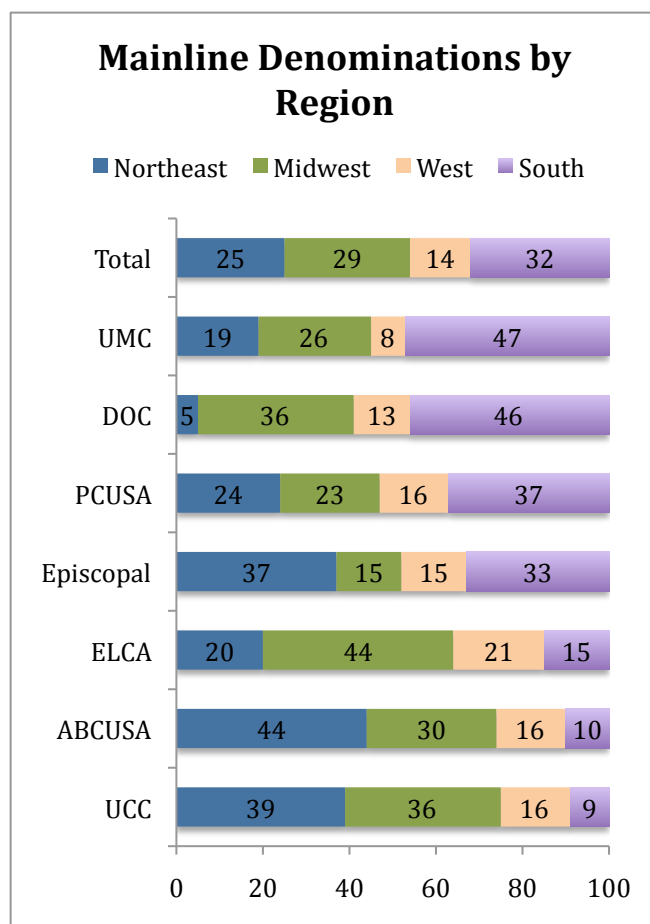
### Regional Distribution of Clergy by Denomination

As a whole, mainline clergy are fairly evenly distributed throughout the country, but there are significant differences between the denominations. About one-third of clergy reside in the South and Midwest (32% and 29% respectively), one-fourth live in the Northeast, and 14% are found in the West.

UCC ministers are principally found in the Northeast (39%) or Midwest (36%); only one-fourth are found outside those regions. American Baptist clergy are similarly found primarily in the Northeast (44%) and Midwest (30%). In contrast, close to half of UMC and DOC clergy are found in the South (47% and 46% respectively). Among ELCA ministers, a plurality (44%) live in the Midwest.

It is also notable that a plurality (41%) of mainline clergy live in rural areas or small towns with under 15,000 residents.

Less than one-third (31%) of ministers live in large urban areas or in suburbs of large cities.



### Religious Identity of Clergy

Clergy from the seven Mainline Protestant denominations included in this survey identified with a broad array of religious labels. These findings point not only to the complexity of clergy identity, but also to the fluidity of labels in the American religious landscape.

Notably, although more clergy identified with the term “mainline” than any other term, only 6-in-10 claimed this label. ELCA clergy are more likely than other denominations to identify as “mainline” (71%). In stark contrast, only one-third of clergy belonging to American Baptist churches say the term “mainline” captures their religious identity.

A sizeable portion of clergy identified with several other labels such as “evangelical” (43%), “ecumenical” (41%), “born-again” (23%), “progressive” (31%), “conservative” (26%), or “liberal” (24%). As the table below shows, there were significant denominational variations.

| <b>Religious Identity of Clergy</b>         |                 |                    |                                 |                     |                   |
|---------------------------------------------|-----------------|--------------------|---------------------------------|---------------------|-------------------|
| <i>Percent of clergy who identify as...</i> |                 |                    |                                 |                     |                   |
|                                             | <u>Mainline</u> | <u>Evangelical</u> | <u>Progressive/<br/>Liberal</u> | <u>Conservative</u> | <u>Born-again</u> |
| Total                                       | 60              | 43                 | 31 / 24                         | 26                  | 23                |
| UCC                                         | 65              | <b>18</b>          | <b>55</b> / 44                  | 9                   | 11                |
| Episcopal                                   | 61              | 25                 | 43 / 33                         | 16                  | 10                |
| DOC                                         | 68              | 24                 | 39 / 36                         | 15                  | 20                |
| PCUSA                                       | 64              | 40                 | 34 / 24                         | 22                  | 17                |
| ELCA                                        | 71              | 35                 | 27 / 27                         | 17                  | <b>6</b>          |
| UMC                                         | 60              | 50                 | 28 / 19                         | 33                  | 30                |
| ABCUSA                                      | <b>33</b>       | 66                 | 24 / 15                         | 39                  | <b>44</b>         |

After the term “mainline,” more clergy identified with the term “evangelical” than any other term. More than 4-in-10 (43%) clergy say that the term “evangelical” represents their religious identity, although there is significant variation by denomination. Half of UMC clergy and two-thirds of ABCUSA clergy say they would describe themselves as “evangelical,” compared to less than one-quarter (24%) of DOC and Episcopal clergy and only 18% of UCC clergy. Twice as many ABCUSA clergy identify as “evangelical” as identify as “mainline.”

UMC and ABCUSA clergy are the most likely to describe themselves as religiously “conservative” (33% and 39% respectively) and least likely to embrace the term “liberal” (28% and 24%). On the other hand, a majority (55%) of UCC clergy say they are “progressive,” and less than 1-in-10 identify as “conservative.” Overall, significantly more clergy identify as “progressive” than “liberal.”

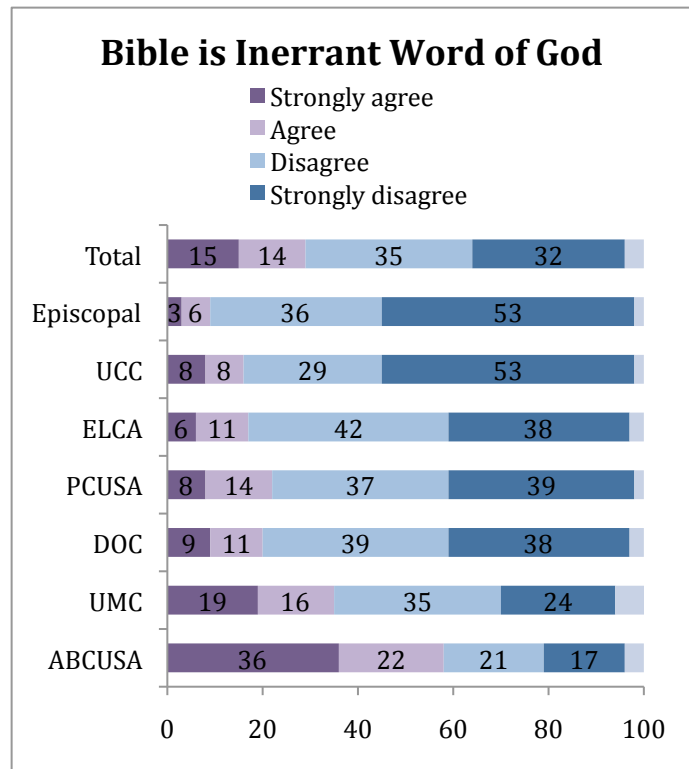
Nearly one-quarter (23%) of mainline clergy say they are “born-again,” although there are also significant differences between the denominations on this measure. More than 4-in-10 (44%) American Baptist clergy identify as “born-again,” compared to just 6% of ELCA clergy.

Although the term “charismatic” is most often associated with evangelical denominations and worship styles that are at odds with the character of traditional mainline church services, 11% of all mainline clergy identified as “charismatic,” and among UMC clergy, nearly 1-in-5 (17%) claimed this label. Another term that is more frequently associated with evangelical churches, “fundamentalist,” is not a label embraced by mainline clergy. Only 1 out of 100 ministers identified as fundamentalist.

*Theological Orientation of Clergy*

Less than one-third (29%) of mainline clergy agree that “the Bible is the inerrant word of God, both in matters of faith and in historic, geographical, and other secular matters.” Two thirds (67%) disagree.

With the exception of ABCUSA clergy, a majority of clergy in every denomination do not believe the Bible is the inerrant word of God. Episcopal clergy are least likely to believe in the inerrancy of the Bible; less than 1-in-10 believe the Bible is the inerrant word of God, and 53% strongly disagree. At the other end of the spectrum, nearly 6-in-10 (58%) American Baptist ministers believe the Bible is the inerrant word of God.



## Political Behavior: Affiliation, Ideology, and Voting

### Party Affiliation

Overall, Mainline Protestant clergy are much more likely to identify as Democrat than as Republican. A majority (56%) of ministers identify with or lean toward the Democratic Party, compared to about one-third (34%) who identify with or lean toward the Republican Party. Only 1-in-10 clergy identify as Independent.

UCC Ministers are the most Democratic (77%). United Methodist and American Baptist clergy are split evenly between Democratic and Republican affiliation (45% to 42% and 45% to 46% respectively).

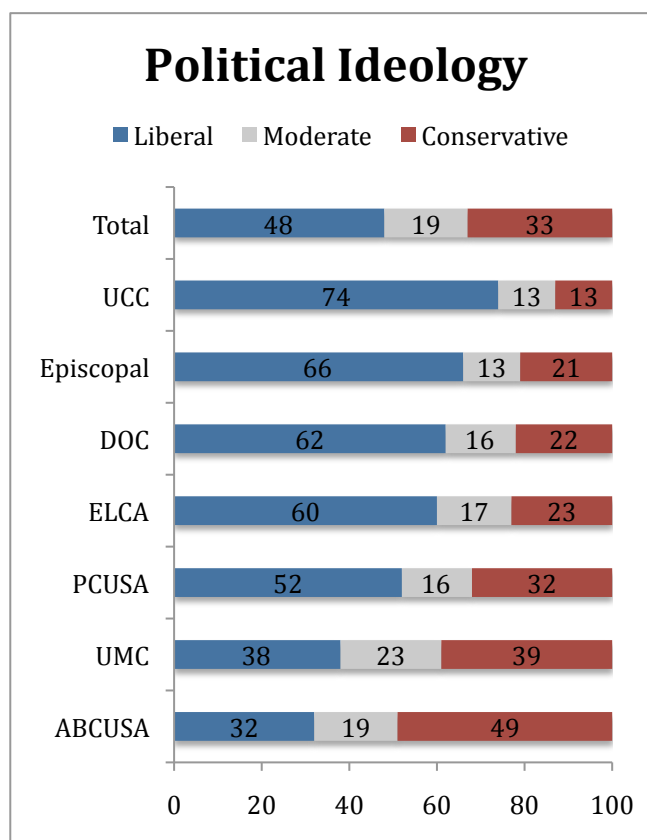
Overall, Mainline Protestant clergy are significantly more Democratic in their political leanings than those in the pews. White Mainline Protestants in the general population are split in their political affiliation, with nearly equal numbers identifying as Democrat (45%) and Republican (42%).<sup>5</sup> Mainline clergy are 8 points less likely to identify as Republican than their congregants (34% to 42% respectively).

### Political Ideology

Almost half (48%) of Mainline Protestant clergy identify as liberal, 19% identify as moderate, and a third say they are conservative.

There are large differences between denominations in the ideological self-identification. With the exception of United Methodists and American Baptists, majorities of clergy in most denominations self-identify as liberal. Among UCC and Episcopal Church clergy, more than two-thirds (74% and 66% respectively) identify as liberal. Among United Methodist and American Baptist ministers, on the other hand, less than 4-in-10 identify as liberal (38% and 32% respectively); almost half (49%) of American Baptist clergy identify as conservative.

Mainline Protestant ministers are significantly more likely to identify as liberal than their congregants but are equally likely to identify as conservative. Nearly half



<sup>5</sup> Party identification data from Pew Research Center for the People & the Press, combined surveys in 2008.

of all mainline clergy identify as politically liberal, compared to just 1-in-5 Mainline Protestants overall. Mainline clergy are half as likely to identify their political views as moderate than Mainline Protestants overall (19% to 41%). Roughly the same number of clergy and congregants identify as conservative (33% and 35% respectively).<sup>6</sup>

#### *Vote Preferences in Recent National Elections*

Consistent with their higher level of Democratic Party affiliation, a majority of Mainline Protestant clergy voted for Democratic candidates in both 2004 and 2006. A majority of Mainline Protestant clergy report supporting Senator John Kerry over President George W. Bush in the 2004 presidential election (56% to 40%). Mainline clergy report supporting Democratic house and Senate candidates at even higher rates in the 2006 midterm elections. Nearly 6-in-10 (57%) mainline clergy supported Democratic candidates, compared to only one-third (34%) who supported Republican candidates.

In the heat of the 2008 primary campaigns, clergy were asked to select their first choice for the Democratic and Republican nominations. Among self-identified Democrats, a majority (51%) reported Barack Obama as their first choice for the presidential nomination. Twenty-five percent reported supporting Hillary Clinton as their first choice, while 17% supported John Edwards. Independent clergy favored Obama over Clinton by a nearly 3-to-1 margin (55% to 19% respectively).

Among clergy who identified with the Republican Party, Governor Mike Huckabee was the favorite, garnering 41% support. John McCain, the eventual Republican nominee, was supported by only a quarter of Republican clergy. Interestingly, nearly 1-in-10 clergy said that none of the GOP candidates was their first choice.

|                        | Among<br>Republican<br><u>Clergy</u> | <i>Dem. Candidates</i> | Among<br>Democratic<br><u>Clergy</u> |
|------------------------|--------------------------------------|------------------------|--------------------------------------|
| <i>Rep. Candidates</i> |                                      |                        |                                      |
| Huckabee               | 41                                   | Obama                  | 51                                   |
| McCain                 | 25                                   | Clinton                | 25                                   |
| Romney                 | 13                                   | Edwards                | 17                                   |
| Giuliani               | 7                                    | Other                  | 5                                    |
| Other                  | 5                                    | None                   | 2                                    |
| None                   | 9                                    |                        |                                      |

<sup>6</sup> Political ideology measures from The Faith and American Politics Survey, 2008, conducted by Public Religion Research and sponsored by Faith in Public Life.

## Political Interest and Engagement

### *Political Interest and Involvement*

Nearly 8-in-10 (78%) Mainline Protestant clergy report that they are interested or very interested in politics. A solid majority (61%) of Mainline Protestant clergy across all denominations say they are very interested in politics. Clergy affiliated with the United Church Christ express slightly more interest in politics than those in the ELCA, United Methodist, or American Baptist churches.

A plurality (45%) of mainline clergy report that they are extremely or very involved in advocating for social and political issues, while 30% report that they are moderately involved, and only one-quarter report that they are somewhat or not at all involved. There are no great disparities in the political involvement of clergy across denominations, but United Church of Christ, Disciples of Christ, and United Methodist clergy report higher levels of involvement than clergy in other denominations.

The majority (56%) of Mainline Protestant clergy report that they would like to be more personally involved with social and political issues. On this question, the distinctions between the denominations are more evident. Less than half (46%) of American Baptist clergy would like to be more involved, compared to two-thirds of Disciples of Christ clergy and 6-in-10 (62%) UCC and United Methodist clergy. When asked about their denomination's political involvement, 38% believe their denomination should be more involved, 38% believe it should stay the same, and 24% believe it should be less involved.

### *Political and Social Activities*

As might be expected, clergy reported that their highest levels of political and social engagement took place through existing church structures. At least 7-in-10 clergy report often participating in a clergy council (72%) or a denominational committee or organization (70%).

Clergy were less likely to report frequent involvement in other forms of political engagement. Half of all ministers say they often take a stand on a public issue outside of the pulpit. At least 1-in-5 clergy report they often take a stand on a political issue from the pulpit (22%) or often publicly support a political candidate (20%). More than 1-in-10 (14%) clergy say they often write editorials for newspapers, or say they frequently participate in protest marches (11%). When we listed specific issues, however, and asked clergy whether they made their views known publicly on those issues in any way, clergy reported higher levels of engagement. As we show below, for example, 81% reported speaking out on hunger and poverty issues.

There were few generational or denominational differences in the types of political activities in which pastors engaged. One notable exception was that older pastors were much more likely to report participating in a protest march than younger pastors. A majority (54%) of clergy over the age of 60 report participating in a protest march at some

time during their lives, compared to approximately one-third (35%) of ministers under the age of 40.

ELCA clergy were much less likely to speak out on political issues from the pulpit than other denominations. Only 12% of ELCA clergy report regularly speaking from the pulpit on political issues, and nearly half (48%) say they never talk about these kinds of issues from the pulpit. In contrast, nearly a third of UCC clergy and American Baptist clergy report talking about political issues from the pulpit (32% and 30% respectively).

#### *Political Activities at Church*

The vast majority of clergy reported that churches did not host activities to foster direct political engagement by congregants. Approximately 1-in-5 reported that their church planned to distribute materials from denominational sources or to host voter registration efforts (21% and 20% respectively); these numbers represent an increase of 4 points each from reported activity in 2004. While fewer than 1-in-5 reported that their church would make voter guides from outside groups available, significantly more clergy said voter guides would be available from social justice organizations like Bread for the World (18%) as opposed to voter guides from conservative groups like the Family Research Council (11%). Less than 1-in-10 (7%) said their churches would hold candidate forums.

## The Role of the Church in Public Life

### *Public Officials and Clergy*

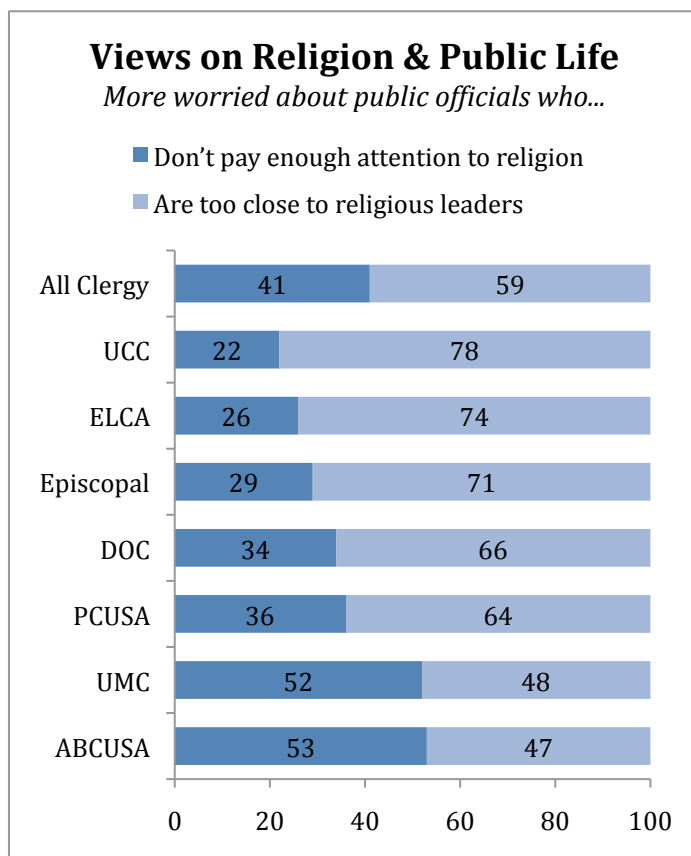
Overall, mainline clergy are more worried about public officials who are too close to religious leaders (59%) than about public officials who do not pay enough attention to religion (41%). However, there are dramatic differences between denominations. Close to 8-in-10 (78%) UCC clergy say they worry more about public officials being too close to religious leaders, while less than half of United Methodist and American Baptist clergy share this view (48% and 47% respectively). Regional differences are also apparent, with Southern clergy significantly more likely to worry about public officials not paying enough attention to religion (49%) than clergy in any other region.<sup>7</sup>

### *Separation of Church and State*

A majority of mainline clergy want to protect the separation of church and state on the one hand, and protect the rights of churches to lobby public officials on the other. A majority (55%) of mainline clergy agree that the U.S. should “maintain a strict separation of church and state,” compared to 30% who disagree. At the same time, 62% of clergy disagree that “churches should not try to influence or lobby public officials,” compared to only 23% who agree. These views are fairly consistent across denominations.

### *The Role and Mission of the Church*

According to prevailing stereotypes, one of the major differences between evangelical and Mainline Protestants is the degree to which each group is more oriented towards social justice vs. individual morality, and sociopolitical action vs. evangelism. These stereotypes suggest that the mainline emphasizes the former focus in each pair, while evangelicals emphasize the latter. We found, however, no such bifurcation. Instead, most mainline clergy preferred both types of activities, rather than adopting a one-sided approach.



<sup>7</sup> In this report the South includes: Alabama, Arkansas, Florida, Georgia, Kentucky, Louisiana, Mississippi, North Carolina, Oklahoma, South Carolina, Tennessee, Texas, Virginia and West Virginia.



Mainline Protestant clergy overwhelmingly (69%) believe that religious communities should concentrate on *both* fostering both social justice and individual morality. About 1-in-5 (19%) say religious communities should focus more on social justice, while fewer (12%) say religious communities should concentrate more on individual morality.

A similar pattern emerges on the question of the relative importance of sociopolitical action vs. evangelism in the mission of the church. A majority (51%) of clergy say *both* are equally important. Contrary to stereotype, nearly four times as many lean toward saying evangelism is more important (39%) than say sociopolitical action is more important (10%) in the mission of the church.

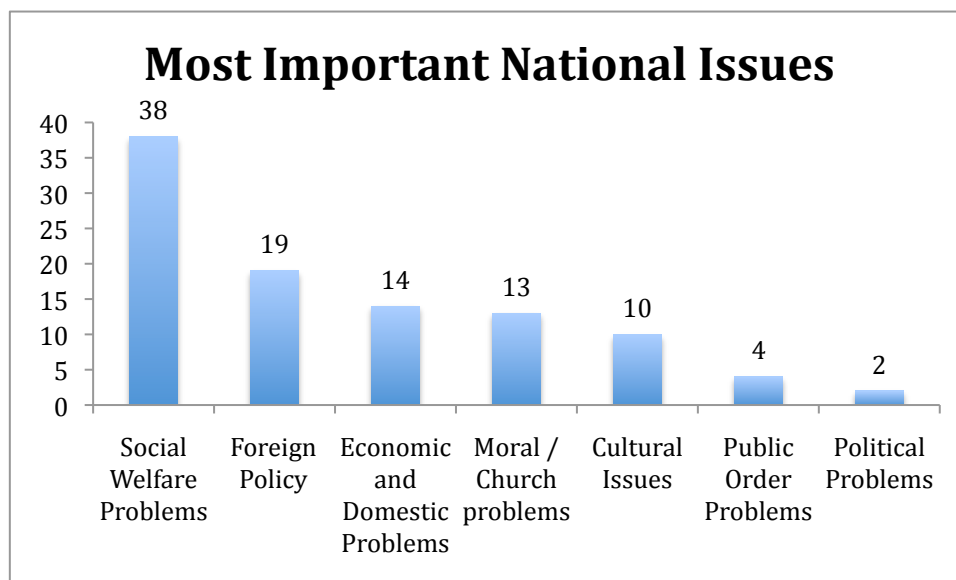
### *Strategies for Social Change*

In their approach to social change in society, a majority of mainline clergy favor steering a middle course between dramatic and more gradual changes. When asked about the best means of fostering necessary social change—incremental reform or fundamental transformation—a majority (51%) of ministers favor both. Roughly even numbers of clergy primarily favor either incremental reform (23%) or fundamental transformation (26%).

When asked about the best way for religious groups to address social problems, most clergy (57%) say religious groups should focus on helping individuals in the community solve their own social problems. Approximately one-third (34%) of ministers say that the best way for religious groups to address social problems is to engage directly in the political process. Less than 1-in-10 (8%) believe that religious groups should only try to help their own members. American Baptist clergy stand out from other denominations in advocating a more insular and less politically active role for religious organizations. Only a quarter say that religious organizations should engage directly in politics, and about 1-in-6 (16%) American Baptist ministers say that religious organizations should only help their own members, more than double that of every other denomination.

## Political and Social Issues: Priorities and Approaches

### *Issue Priorities and the Church*



A plurality of mainline Clergy report that social welfare issues (38%) are the most important issues facing the country that the church should address. Nearly 1-in-5 clergy mention foreign policy issues (19%), and close to 1-in-6 (14%) mention economic problems as the most urgent national problems requiring church attention. Only 1-in-10 cites cultural issues such as abortion or same-sex marriage.

Not all denominations maintain the same priorities. UCC clergy, for example, are twice as likely as American Baptist clergy to cite foreign policy issues (28% to 14%). Nearly 1-in-5 United Methodist and American Baptist clergy say moral or church problems are most important, double most other denominations.

### *Church Problems and the Question of Decline*

As we note in the introduction, the Mainline Protestant denominations have lost a significant share of their membership over the last four decades. Scholars have produced a number of theories to account for the decline, which range from demographic to theological shifts, although no single explanation has become the conventional wisdom. Not surprisingly, the cause of the decline has fueled significant debates among factions within the denominations.

It is notable in the chart above that 13% of clergy report that moral or church problems are the most important problems for the church to address. In this category of this open-ended question, the issue of church membership was mentioned more often than any other problem.

Our survey asked clergy about two possible non-demographic causes of decline—actions (too few stands for social justice) or beliefs (too much theological liberalism). Nearly half of all clergy (47%) and a majority or plurality of every denomination agrees that the decline has been caused by a loss of courage among the churches to take prophetic stands for justice. A plurality (46%) also disagrees that mainline churches are declining because they are becoming theologically liberal, but nearly 4-in-10 (38%) agree. On this latter question, there is wider divergence in opinion among denominations. For example, a majority (51%) of American Baptist clergy credit the decline to theological liberalism in the church, while only 19% of UCC clergy accept this argument.

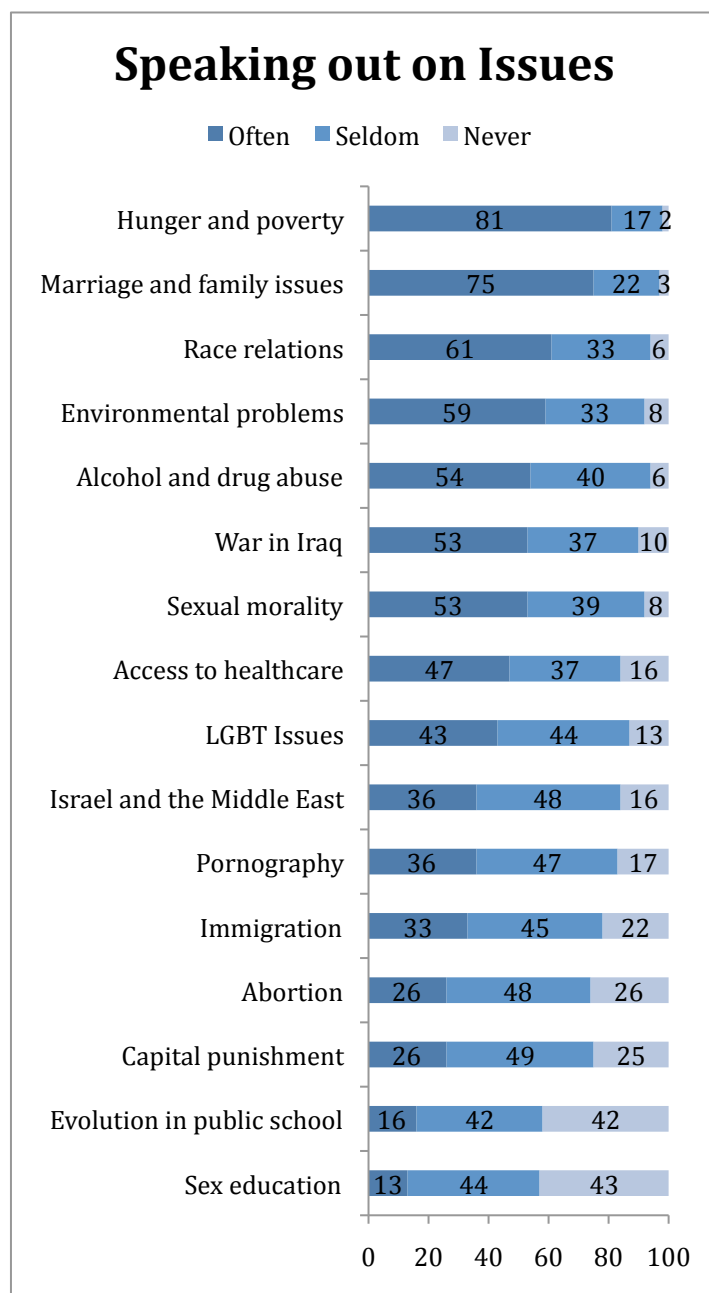
### *Issues Clergy are Publicly Addressing*

Clergy report speaking out often on a wide range of issues that reflect a mix of social justice and pastoral concerns. More than 8-in-10 clergy say they often publicly expressed their views about hunger and poverty in the last year, and a similar number (75%) often addressed marriage and family issues.

Approximately 6-in-10 say they addressed the issues of race and civil rights (61%) and environmental problems (59%) often. Smaller majorities report that they often spoke out on the issues of alcohol and drug abuse (54%), the war in Iraq (53%), and sexual morality (53%).

Paradoxically, although poverty and family issues were often a topic of discussion among mainline ministers, less than half (47%) of mainline pastors report talking about access to health care often.

Mainline ministers are less likely to speak out on more controversial social issues. About 4-in-10 (43%) pastors say they often addressed gay, lesbian, bisexual, or transgender issues. And roughly a quarter (26%) said they often discussed the issue of abortion and capital punishment. Clergy are least likely to discuss their



views on the issues of evolution and sex education. Less than 1-in-5 (16% and 13% respectively) clergy discussed these issues often. More than 4-in-10 ministers say they never talked about them.

The types of issues discussed varied significantly by denomination. In general, ABCUSA and UMC ministers are much more likely to speak about social issues and sexual morality than clergy in other denominations. Two thirds of American Baptist clergy and roughly 6-in-10 (62%) UMC clergy talked about sexuality morality often, compared to about one-third (35%) of Episcopal and UCC ministers. Nearly 4-in-10 ABCUSA ministers say they talked about abortion often while only about 1-in-10 (13%) Episcopal clergy say they discussed the issue frequently.

### *Affinities to Advocacy Groups*

Another way to understand clergy approaches to public engagement is to understand with which public advocacy groups they identify. We asked clergy how close they felt to 25 major advocacy and nonprofit organizations that have been active in public life recently. A clear pattern emerged, with mainline clergy indicating, with two notable exceptions, feeling close to groups that address social justice issues such as poverty and far from conservative Christian advocacy groups.<sup>8</sup>

| <b>Affinity to Advocacy Groups</b> |                               |                |            |           |
|------------------------------------|-------------------------------|----------------|------------|-----------|
| <i>Organization...</i>             | <i>% who say they feel...</i> |                |            |           |
|                                    | <u>Close</u>                  | <u>Neutral</u> | <u>Far</u> | <u>DK</u> |
| Bread for the World                | 56                            | 30             | 8          | 6         |
| NCC                                | 48                            | 24             | 24         | 4         |
| Sojourners                         | 44                            | 35             | 16         | 5         |
| Prison Fellowship                  | 38                            | 42             | 12         | 8         |
| Christian Coalition                | 11                            | 32             | 48         | 9         |
| Focus on the Family                | 25                            | 19             | 55         | 1         |
| Religious Right                    | 16                            | 19             | 60         | 5         |
| Pro-gun rights Groups              | 13                            | 21             | 61         | 5         |

Among 25 major religious and secular advocacy organizations and nonprofits, mainline clergy report feeling closest to Bread for the World. A majority (56%) of clergy say they feel a close connection to the organization, and only 8% said they feel far from this group. Nearly half (48%) of mainline clergy say they have a close affinity for the National Council of Churches, although notably about a quarter (24%) say they feel distant. Clergy affiliated with more liberal denominations are much more likely to feel close to the NCC than those representing more conservative denominations. About three quarters of clergy with the

<sup>8</sup> On this question, respondents who skipped a particular item (i.e., a particular organization) in the battery but did not skip the entire battery were coded as “don’t know” responses. Respondents who skipped the entire battery (N=61) were classified as “missing” and were not included in the analysis.

UCC (76%) and DOC (75%) say they feel close to the NCC, compared to only 4-in-10 ministers with the United Methodist Church and American Baptist Church (40% and 41% respectively).

Forty-four percent report feeling close to Sojourners, and only 16% report feeling far. Perhaps the surprising organization on the list is the Prison Fellowship, founded by conservative evangelical leader Chuck Colson, who was convicted in the Watergate scandal. Close to 4-in-10 (38%) clergy say they feel close to Prison Fellowship.

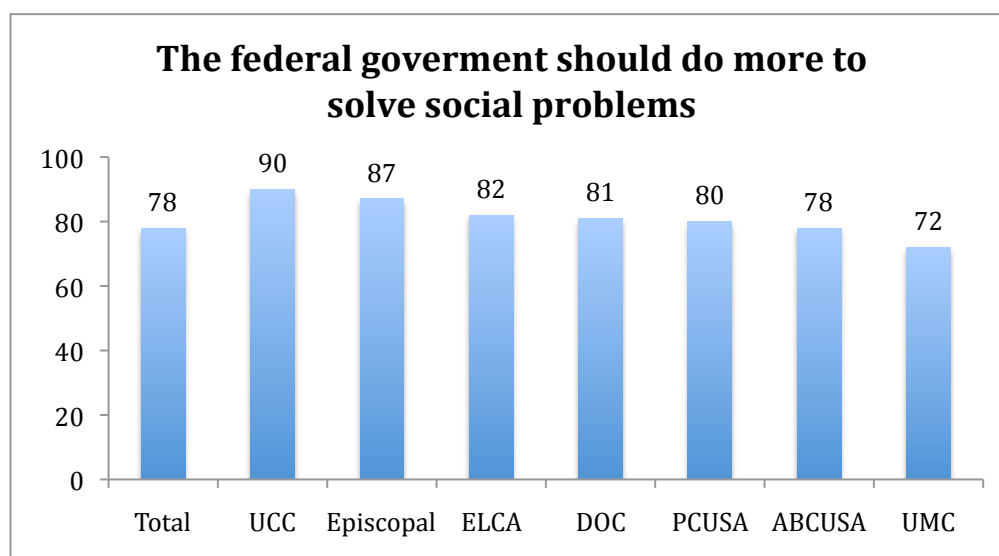
Among the organizations from which clergy feel the farthest, most are associated with the conservative Christian movement. Six-in-10 clergy feel distant from pro-gun rights groups and the Religious Right; fully 44% and 43% respectively report feeling “very far” from these groups. A majority (55%) of mainline clergy say they feel far from Focus on the Family (with fully 41% reporting “very far”), but one-quarter also report feeling close to this organization. Nearly half (48%) also report feeling far from the Christian Coalition. However, American Baptist and United Methodist clergy are much more likely to feel close to conservative organizations like the NAE, Focus on the Family, and Prison Fellowship than clergy in other denominations.

In general, clergy were more likely to report feeling distant from advocacy groups than close. Notably, more than 4-in-10 (a plurality in each case) reported that they feel far from a number of progressive advocacy groups including: the ACLU (43%), People for the American Way, (42%), and the National Organization for Women (40%).

## The Role of Government, Economic Issues, and Foreign Policy

### *Role of Government*

Mainline Protestant clergy are broadly supportive of government's role in addressing social problems such as unemployment, poverty and poor housing. More than three-quarters (78%) agree that the federal government should do more to solve social problems, and more than 4-in-10 strongly agree. This broadly supportive view of government involvement cuts across all denominations. With the exception of UMC clergy, more than three-quarters of ministers in every other denomination say government should do more to solve social problems.



Mainline clergy are also unlikely to believe government is encroaching on areas that should be left to the private enterprise. Less than a third (31%) of Mainline Protestant clergy say that government is providing too many services that should be left to private enterprise, compared to nearly half (48%) who disagree, and roughly 1-in-5 (21%) who say they are not sure. Again, there is broad agreement across the denominations. Even among the more conservative denominations, UMC and ABCUSA, less than 4-in-10 say that government is providing too many services that should be left to the private sector.

### *Economic Issues: Health Care and the Environment*

Mainline clergy are strongly supportive of government action in the areas of health care and the environment. Two-thirds (67%) of clergy agree that government should guarantee health insurance for all citizens, even if it means raising taxes. A majority of every denomination supports this view. Government protection of the environment garners similarly overwhelming support. Nearly 7-in-10 (69%) clergy say that more environmental protection is needed, even if it raises prices or costs jobs.

*Foreign Policy*

Most Mainline Protestant clergy are firmly opposed to the war in Iraq and believe that Israel should make greater concessions to the Palestinians to achieve Middle East peace. Two-thirds (66%) disagree that it was the right decision to use military force in Iraq; nearly half (48%) say they disagree strongly. On the Israeli-Palestine conflict, a solid majority (56%) of Mainline Protestant clergy say that a lasting peace in the Middle East will require Israel to make greater concessions to the Palestinians. On these foreign policy questions, although there was some variability, the response patterns were consistent across denominations.

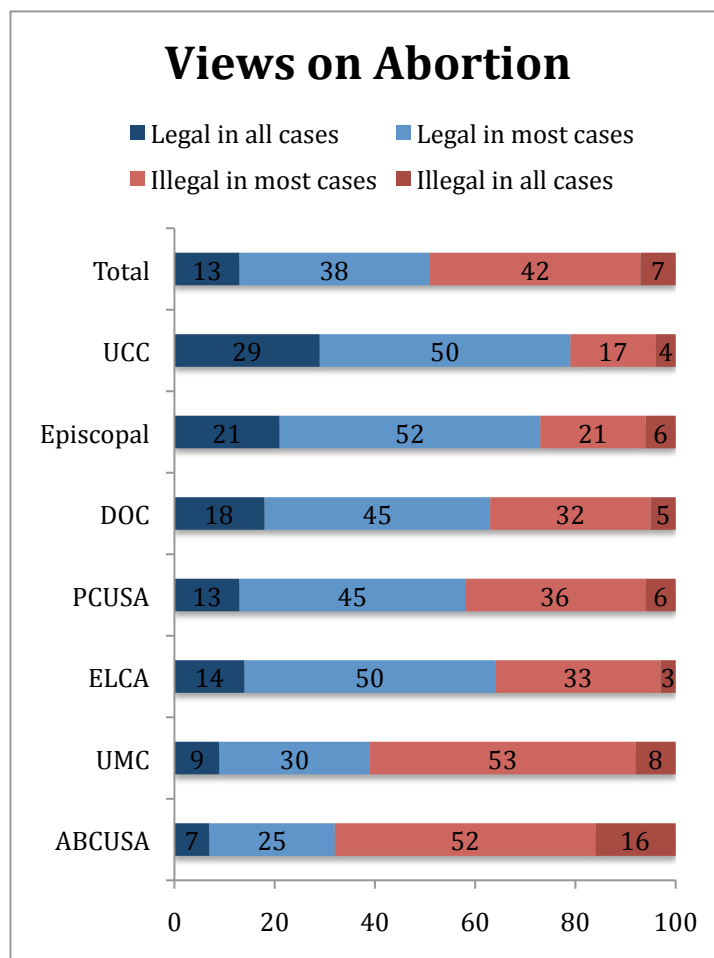
## Social Issues

While there is general agreement about the role of government among mainline clergy, mainline clergy hold a broader range of opinion, largely stratified by denomination, on social issues.

### *Sex Education and Abortion*

Most mainline clergy support comprehensive sex education programs in public schools. A majority (52%) disagree that sex education programs in public schools should teach “abstinence only” until marriage, compared to only 38% who agree.

On the issue of abortion, mainline clergy are divided but lean slightly toward supporting the legality of abortion in all or most cases (51% to 49%). A slim majority of mainline clergy say that abortion should be legal in all (13%) or most cases (38%), while slightly less than half say abortion should be illegal in most (42%) or all cases (7%). It is important to note that most clergy hold nuanced views on this issue, with 8-in-10 clergy occupying one of the middle categories of “legal in most cases” or “illegal in most cases.”



There are remarkable differences on this question between denominations. Nearly 8-in-10 (79%) UCC clergy, three quarters (73%) of Episcopal clergy, and nearly two thirds of ELCA and DOC clergy say abortion should be legal in all or most cases. Among United Methodist and American Baptist clergy, less than 4-in-10 (39% and 32% respectively) say abortion should be legal in all or most cases.



### Gay and Lesbian Rights, Same-Sex Marriage, and Civil Unions

Mainline clergy overwhelmingly support the principle of equal rights for gay and lesbian people. Nearly 8-in-10 (79%) agree that “homosexuals should have all the same rights and privileges as other American citizens.”

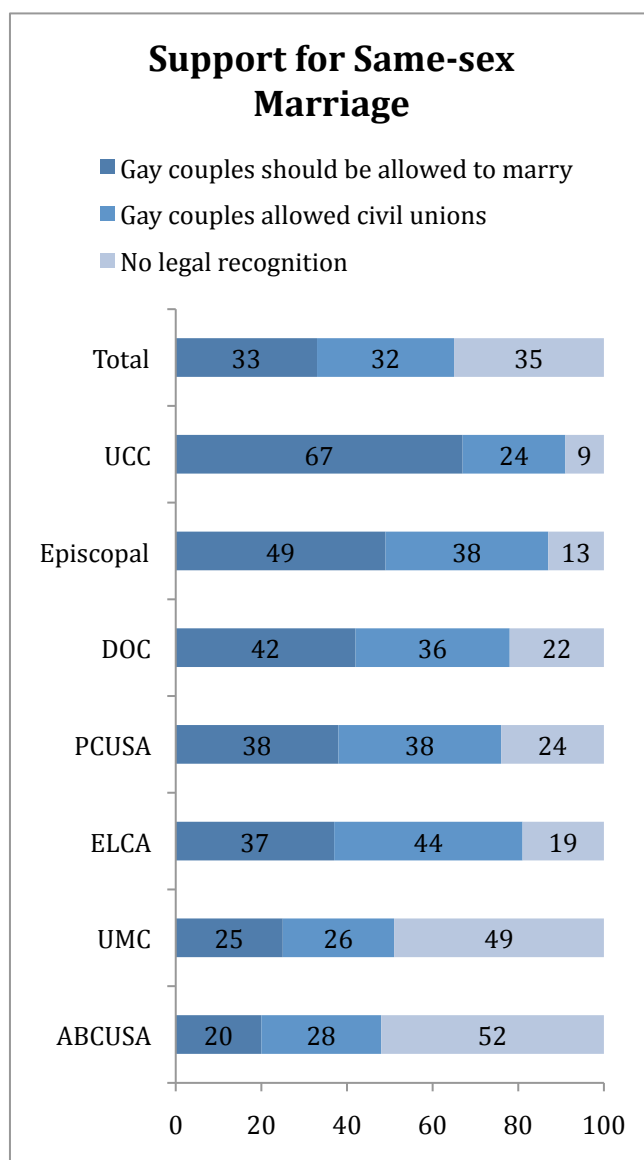
Mainline clergy also strongly support some legal recognition of same-sex relationships. Nearly two-thirds (65%) of mainline clergy support either same-sex marriage (33%) or civil unions (32%).

As with abortion, on this issue the mainline denominations fall into two distinct groups. Among five of seven denominations (UCC, Episcopal, DOC, PCUSA, and ELCA), more than three-quarters of ministers support either same-sex marriage or civil unions. UMC and ABCUSA clergy are more divided. Among UMC clergy, a bare majority (51%) supports either same-sex marriage or civil unions. ABCUSA clergy are the only group where a majority (52%) say there should be no legal recognition of a gay couple’s relationship, compared to 48% who support either same-sex marriage or civil unions.

On the issue of same-sex marriage itself, there is a broader spread of opinion across denominations. One-third of mainline clergy overall support marriage equality. UCC and Episcopal clergy are most supportive; two-thirds (67%) of UCC clergy and nearly half (49%) of Episcopal clergy support same-sex marriage. Among Disciples, Presbyterian, and ELCA clergy, roughly 4-in-10 support same-sex marriage (42%, 38%, and 37% respectively). Support drops significantly among United Methodist and American Baptist clergy (25% and 20% respectively).

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. The heavy gender slant among mainline ministers (80% male) is a key factor in the more conservative profile of mainline ministers overall on the issue of same-sex marriage.

### *Other Gay and Lesbian Issues*

Mainline clergy are strongly supportive of hate crimes legislation to protect gay and lesbian people, employment discrimination protections for gay and lesbian people, and adoption rights.

Two-thirds of mainline clergy support hate crime laws and employment nondiscrimination protections for gay and lesbian people. Sixty-seven percent agree that the U.S. should pass hate crime laws to protect lesbian and gay persons. A nearly identical proportion (66%) of mainline clergy also agree that the U.S. should pass laws that would make it illegal for employers to discriminate on the basis of sexual orientation or gender identity.

**Support for LGBT Public Policy Issues by Denomination**

|           | Support<br>Same-sex<br><u>Marriage</u> | Support<br><u>Adoption</u> | Support<br><u>ENDA</u> | Support<br>Hate<br>Crime<br><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.*

While support is not quite as strong as support for hate crimes and employment nondiscrimination, a solid majority (55%) of mainline clergy support adoption rights for gay and lesbian people. On this issue, however, there are significant differences between denominations. At least 6-in-10 clergy in most denominations (UCC, Episcopal, DOC, PCUSA, ELCA) support adoption rights. Among Methodist clergy, a plurality (45%) support adoption rights. While only a third of American Baptist clergy support adoption rights, nearly 1-in-5 (19%) say they are not sure of their views on this issue.

### *Evolution*

Mainline clergy views of evolution and its place in public school curriculum are complex. On the one hand, the majority of mainline clergy (54%) do not support the teaching of creationism alongside evolution in public school biology classes. On the other hand, mainline clergy are more evenly divided in their views about the theory of evolution itself. Forty-four percent of mainline ministers say that evolution is the best explanation for the origins of life on earth, and a similar number disagrees (43%). United Methodist clergy and American Baptist clergy are most likely to disagree. Seven-in-ten American Baptist clergy (70%) and a majority (53%) of United Methodist clergy say that evolution is not the best explanation for the origins of life on earth.

### *Capital Punishment*

Mainline clergy are strongly opposed to capital punishment. Two-thirds (66%) oppose capital punishment, compared to 27% who support it. However, the strength of opposition varies considerably by denomination. More than 8-in-10 UCC and Episcopal ministers oppose capital punishment (82% and 81% respectively), and about 6-in-10 clergy in these denominations are very opposed. In contrast, a bare majority (53%) of American Baptist ministers oppose capital punishment, compared to more than 4-in-10 who do not.

## Issue Comparisons between Clergy and Mainline Laity

Mainline clergy were asked in the survey to compare the positions of the members of their congregation to their own positions on both social issues and economic issues. In both cases, a plurality of clergy estimated that their views were about the same as their congregants' views (42% on social issues, 47% on economic issues). Clergy who reported differences were significantly more likely to report that their views were more conservative than congregants on both social and economic issues than to report that their views were more liberal. As we show below, clergy are generally in line with or slightly more conservative than Mainline Protestants overall on social issues, but they are generally more progressive on economic issues. These findings, as the chart below demonstrates, suggest that clergy perceptions of their own positions relative to their congregations may be more accurate on social issues, while they may perceive themselves to be more conservative relative to their congregations than they in fact are on economic issues.<sup>9</sup>

### *Social Issues*

With the exception of abortion, mainline clergy views on social issues are more progressive than the general population and mostly in line with Mainline Protestants overall. On the issue of legal recognition for gay couples' relationships, for example, nearly two-thirds (65%) 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).

While mainline clergy views are largely in line with Mainline Protestants in the general population on gay and lesbian issues, clergy are somewhat less supportive of the legality of abortion than Mainline Protestants in the general population. While a majority (51%) of clergy—like the general population (50%)—agree that abortion should be legal in all or most cases, this support is significantly lower than support among all Mainline Protestants (63%). This disparity is almost entirely due to differences of degree; mainline clergy are much less likely than all Mainline Protestants to agree that abortion should be legal “in all cases” (13% vs. 23% respectively) (FAPS 2008).

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<sup>9</sup> We can only make this inference at the aggregate level. The survey question asked clergy to estimate their views relative to their specific congregation, while the aggregate data compares clergy views to all Mainline Protestants in the general population.

*Economic Issues*

Despite clergy perceptions that their views are the same as or more conservative than their congregants on economic issues, clergy generally hold more progressive views than Mainline Protestants in the general population on a number of key measures.

Two-thirds (67%) of mainline clergy agree that government should guarantee health care, even if it means increased taxes, compared to 61% of all Mainline Protestants and 59% of the general population.

Nearly 7-in-10 (69%) clergy say more environmental protection is needed even if it raises prices or costs jobs. This support for environmental policy is significantly higher than among all Mainline Protestants (54%) and among the general population (55%).

### Clergy and Mainline Congregants On Social and Economic Issues

|                                                                | Gen.<br><u>Pop.</u> | Mainline<br><u>Clergy</u> | All Mainline<br><u>Protestants</u> <sup>10</sup> |
|----------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------|---------------------------|--------------------------------------------------|
| <i>Abortion...</i>                                             |                     |                           |                                                  |
| Legal in all cases                                             | 17                  | 13                        | 23                                               |
| Legal in most cases                                            | 33                  | 38                        | 40                                               |
| Illegal in most cases                                          | 29                  | 42                        | 27                                               |
| Illegal in all cases                                           | 18                  | 7                         | 8                                                |
| Unsure / DK                                                    | 3                   | --                        | 2                                                |
| <i>Same-sex Marriage...</i>                                    |                     |                           |                                                  |
| Gay couples allowed to marry                                   | 29                  | 33                        | 34                                               |
| Gay couples allowed civil unions                               | 28                  | 32                        | 36                                               |
| No legal recognition                                           | 37                  | 35                        | 26                                               |
| Unsure / DK                                                    | 6                   | --                        | 4                                                |
| <i>Government should guarantee health care...<sup>11</sup></i> |                     |                           |                                                  |
| Strongly Agree / Favor                                         | 32                  | 38                        | 29                                               |
| Agree / Favor                                                  | 27                  | 29                        | 32                                               |
| Disagree / Oppose                                              | 20                  | 13                        | 20                                               |
| Strongly Disagree / Oppose                                     | 17                  | 8                         | 14                                               |
| Unsure / DK                                                    | 4                   | 12                        | 5                                                |
| <i>More environment protection is needed...</i>                |                     |                           |                                                  |
| Strongly Agree                                                 | 21                  | 28                        | 19                                               |
| Agree                                                          | 34                  | 41                        | 35                                               |
| Disagree                                                       | 24                  | 13                        | 21                                               |
| Strongly Disagree                                              | 19                  | 4                         | 22                                               |
| Unsure / DK                                                    | 2                   | 14                        | 3                                                |

<sup>10</sup> Data for Mainline Protestants came from the Faith & American Politics survey, conducted August 2008.

<sup>11</sup> In the Faith & American Politics survey respondents were asked whether they strongly favored, favored, opposed or strongly opposed "the U.S. guaranteeing health insurance for all citizens, even if it means raising taxes." In the current CVS, respondents were asked whether they completely agree, mostly agree, mostly disagree or completely disagree with the following statement: "The government should guarantee health insurance for all citizens, even if it means raising taxes."

## Over-time Comparisons (1989-2008)

Because our survey was designed in part to build upon two previous surveys of Mainline Protestant clergy, we are able to make some meaningful comparisons over time.<sup>12</sup>

### *Political Ideology and Affiliation*

Mainline Protestant clergy have exhibited a remarkable degree of continuity in their political profile since 1989. In 1989, a slight majority (53%) identified with or leaned toward the Democratic Party. A second survey conducted in 2001 found the same pattern of affiliation, with 53% of clergy identifying with or leaning Democrat. In the current 2008 survey, we found a similar though slightly larger majority (56%) identified with or leaned toward the Democratic Party.<sup>13</sup> Roughly the same proportion identified as independent across all three time periods.

The political ideology of mainline clergy has also exhibited a remarkable degree of stability over time. In 1989, 45% identified as liberal, compared to 46% in 2001 and 48% in the current 2008 survey.

### Over-time Comparisons in Mainline Clergy Political Orientation

| <i>Party Affiliation</i>  | <u>1989*</u> | <u>2001**</u> | <u>2008^</u>   |
|---------------------------|--------------|---------------|----------------|
| Democrat                  | 53           | 53            | <b>56 (53)</b> |
| Independent               | 9            | 11            | <b>10 (10)</b> |
| Republican                | 38           | 36            | <b>34 (37)</b> |
| <i>Political Ideology</i> |              |               |                |
| Liberal                   | 45           | 46            | <b>48 (45)</b> |
| Moderate                  | 26           | 18            | <b>19 (20)</b> |
| Conservative              | 29           | 36            | <b>33 (35)</b> |

\*Source: 1989 Clergy survey (Guth et al. 1997).

\*\*Source: 2001 Cooperative Clergy Survey (Smidt 2004).

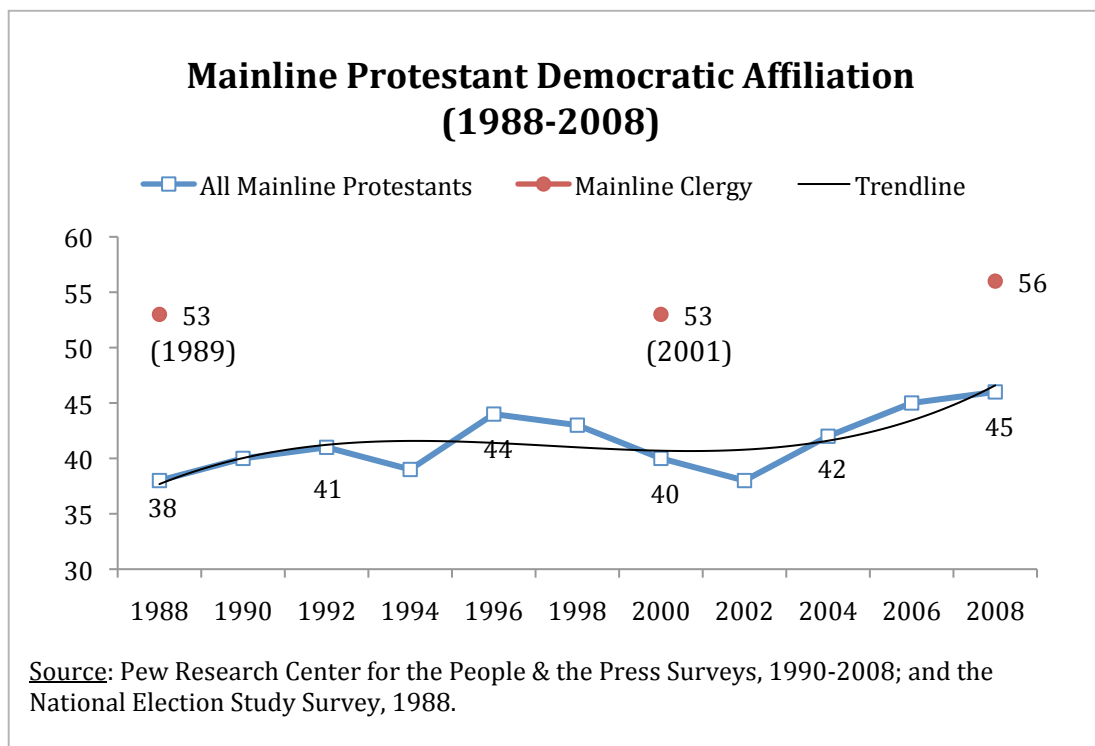
^For 2008, the first number represents results for all seven denominations in the CVS. The number in parentheses represents results excluding the UCC and Episcopal Church, making it consistent with denominational makeup of the 2001 study.

Over the last twenty years, mainline clergy have consistently reported stronger Democratic leanings than Mainline Protestants overall. One notable finding is that the gap between clergy and congregants is closing, down from 15 points in 1989 to 11 points in 2008. In 1989, 53% of clergy identified with the Democratic Party, compared to 38% of congregants in 1988, a 15-point gap. In 2001, the gap in Democratic affiliation was only 13 points (53%

<sup>12</sup> 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 are not directly comparable, each of these constitutes the best snapshot of Mainline Protestant clergy opinion for that time period.

<sup>13</sup> In order to ensure that the comparisons are not simply an artifact of the broader sample composition of the 2008 data, we removed the two denominations that were not (UCC and Episcopal) and recalculated the results, which appear in parentheses in the table above. The new results show a slight shift in the conservative and Republican direction, but confirm our initial findings that party identification and political ideology have largely remained stable between 1989 and 2008.

in 2001 to 40% in 2000 respectively). And in 2008, 56% of clergy, compared to 45% of congregants, identified as Democrat, an 11-point gap. The shrinking gap is most attributable to the rise in Democratic affiliation among Mainline Protestants overall, which increased from 38% to 45% over this time period.



### *Political and Social Issues*

On political and social issues, mainline clergy generally report more progressive views in 2008 than they did in 2001. More than three-quarters (78%) of mainline clergy currently agree that the federal government should be doing more to solve social problems such as unemployment, poverty and poor housing, up 10 points from 2001 (68%). Nearly 7-in-10 (69%) clergy agree that more environmental protection is needed, even if it raises prices or costs jobs. This level of support is 9 points higher than in 2001 (60%).

Similar patterns are found on important social issues. Today, nearly 8-in-10 (79%) clergy agree that homosexuals should have the same rights and privileges as other Americans. Among clergy in 2001, 7-in-10 supported equal rights for homosexuals, a 9-point difference. On the issue of capital punishment, two-thirds (66%) of clergy oppose it currently, compared to 58% in 2001, an increase of 8 points.

### *Role of Religion in Public Life*

On the issue of religious engagement in public life, there is more stability in views over time. In both 2008 and 2001, most mainline clergy favored an active role for churches on public policy issues. Only about a quarter of clergy agreed that churches should not try to influence or lobby public officials (23% in 2008 and 24% in 2001), compared to a majority who disagreed (62% in 2008 and 56% in 2001).

## **Conclusion**

The Mainline Protestant Clergy Voices Survey is the broadest survey of Mainline Protestant clergy ever conducted, and the only comprehensive survey of mainline clergy conducted since 2001. Mainline Protestants are an important but largely ignored part of the American religious landscape. Mainline Protestants make up 18% of all Americans and nearly one-quarter of all voters. They are important parts of winning coalitions for both the Democratic and Republican Parties, 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 survey allows us to see, in the most comprehensive way yet, how Mainline Protestant clergy are navigating the current political waters; and it provides a glimpse of the course this group may be following 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 under the signature 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](http://www.publicreligion.org).

## About the Authors

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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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Dan brings extensive experience in surveying religious groups in the United States. Prior to joining Public Religion Research, Dan worked as a Research Associate at the Pew Forum on Religion & Public Life. In 2007, Dan 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. Dan specializes in youth politics and religion. Dan 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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