

# *Survey of Religious Progressives*



A Report on Progressive Clergy  
Action and Advocacy for Sexual Justice



Rev. Debra W. Haffner

Timothy Palmer

Religious Institute on Sexual Morality, Justice, and Healing  
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## Foreword: Survey and Methodology

This report summarizes the findings of a national, online survey of progressive clergy across a range of faith traditions, conducted in the spring of 2008 by the Religious Institute on Sexual Morality, Justice, and Healing. The survey was designed to measure the attitudes, beliefs and practices of progressive clergy and congregations regarding sexual justice issues, with a particular focus on lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) inclusion.

The Religious Institute is a nationwide network of more than 4,500 religious leaders from more than 50 faith traditions. We sent this survey to all ordained clergy in our network for whom valid e-mail addresses were available. Using the Zoomerang online survey tool, we sent questionnaires and up to three follow-up invitations (by e-mail and phone) to 948 individuals. We received 438 usable surveys, a response rate of 46%.

Of the total clergy who participated, 68% regularly serve congregations in some clerical capacity, and 89% regularly attend congregations. Only those clergy who serve or regularly attend congregations were asked a specific subset of questions on congregational demographics, attitudes and programs.

The Religious Institute survey presents a portrait of clergy and congregations at the forefront of sexual justice. It does *not* represent a statistical sampling of a given population; instead, it measures the extent to which the ordained clergy in the Religious Institute network are engaged in the primary issues this organization addresses – full inclusion of LGBT people in faith communities and society; reproductive justice; and sexuality education.

In addition to providing an overview of results, this report takes a particular look at advocacy and action within two specific subgroups – *Welcoming Congregations*, those that have gone through a specific, denominational process to distinguish themselves as welcoming and inclusive of LGBT persons; and *Inclusive Denominations*, those congregations that are part of a denomination or movement that supports the full inclusion of gay and lesbian people. This report seeks to determine what difference it makes whether a congregation is a Welcoming Congregation, and the influence Inclusive Denominations have on their clergy and congregations.

This report concludes with recommendations for further research and action.

The Religious Institute is grateful to the Evelyn & Walter Haas, Jr. Fund for its funding and support of this survey. May this work inspire renewed leadership and commitment to sexual justice in communities of faith throughout the country.

Rev. Debra W. Haffner  
Director

Timothy Palmer  
Director of Research and Communications

April 30, 2009

## Executive Summary

Clergy in the Religious Institute's national network are strong advocates for full inclusion of lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) people in faith communities. Virtually all embrace a theology of social and sexual justice. They overwhelmingly support civil rights, marriage equality, adoption rights, ordination and other tenets of LGBT inclusion.

Although progressive clergy are speaking out on LGBT issues, there are gaps between *attitudes* and *actions* when it comes to preaching, advocacy and other clergy activities, and to congregational programs as well. For example, four in 10 progressive clergy have not preached on sexual orientation issues in the last two years; nearly half have not been active in their denominational work on LGBT concerns; and only a third of their congregations have organized for LGBT rights or offered study groups on LGBT issues.

Attention paid to LGBT issues and ministries exceeds other areas of sexual justice. The clergy in the Religious Institute's network devote more of their preaching, public advocacy and congregational programs to LGBT concerns than they do to reproductive justice, sexuality education and other sexuality-related issues. A quarter of these progressive clergy have not preached on any sexual justice issue in the last two years, and the majority of their congregations do not provide sex education, AIDS ministries, marriage enrichment programs or pregnancy counseling.

Most of the clergy (64%) believe their congregations should be doing more on LGBT issues. Among the various resources required to do this, clergy emphasize a need for *congregational* leadership and support.

As part of our analysis, the Religious Institute sought to determine what difference it makes, if any, that a congregation is an official "welcoming congregation."<sup>1</sup> The answer: It matters a great deal. Welcoming Congregations are, on the whole, more outspoken and more active around LGBT issues. Across the board, rates of LGBT-focused programs and activities are generally two times higher among Welcoming Congregations than among other congregations. This advocacy extends into other sexuality and political issues as well. Clergy in Welcoming Congregations also report less difficulty talking about LGBT issues in their congregations, and less concern about losing existing congregants or alienating prospective congregants because of their LGBT advocacy.

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<sup>1</sup> In this report, the term "Welcoming Congregation" refers to those congregations that have gone through an official, denominational process to become a welcoming congregation with regard to LGBT persons. The terminology for these congregations varies by denomination – e.g., they are called "welcoming" in the Unitarian Universalist Association, "reconciling" in the United Methodist Church, and "open and affirming" in the United Church of Christ.

The Religious Institute also sought to determine the influence of denominational policies on progressive congregations. This report compares the responses of clergy in Inclusive Denominations – those whose policies support LGBT inclusion – with other mainline traditions, including the Catholic Church and six major Protestant denominations.<sup>2</sup>

It is clear from this analysis that denominational policy has substantial influence on congregational attitudes and actions. Clergy from Inclusive Denominations are more active in LGBT issues in the public square, while clergy in Other Mainlines are more focused within their denominations and congregations. As is evident among the Welcoming Congregations, clergy in Inclusive Denominations report less difficulty talking about LGBT issues in their congregations, and less concern about losing existing congregants or alienating prospective congregants because of their LGBT advocacy. The clergy credit their denominations with helping to foster this degree of harmony: 83% affirm that their denomination’s position on LGBT issues has had a positive effect on their congregations, compared with just 29% of clergy in Other Mainline denominations who say the same.

This report concludes with a set of recommendations to further promote social action for LGBT inclusion among progressive clergy, congregations and denominations.

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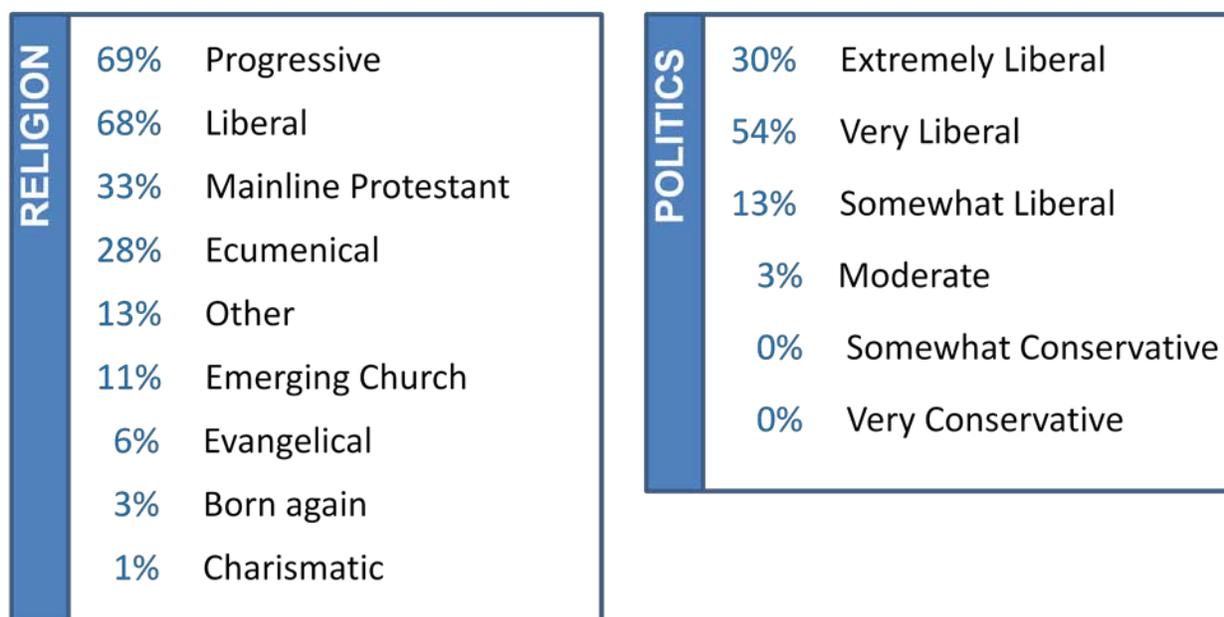
<sup>2</sup> “Inclusive Denominations” are those denominations and movements that are on record in support of gay and lesbian inclusion, with policies authorizing ordination of openly gay and lesbian clergy without celibacy or other special requirements, blessing of same-sex unions or marriages, and support of gay and lesbian civil rights. In this report, these denominations include the Fellowship of Metropolitan Community Churches; the Jewish Conservative, Reconstructionist and Reform movements; the Unitarian Universalist Association; and the United Church of Christ. “Other Mainlines” include the American Baptist Churches USA, the Catholic Church (including Roman and non-Roman traditions), the Disciples of Christ, the Episcopal Church USA, the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, the Presbyterian Church USA and the United Methodist Church.

## Summary of Findings

### Overview of Participating Clergy

This report refers to the clergy in the Religious Institute’s network as “progressives” because that is how most refer to themselves (Fig. 1). Sixty-nine percent of the survey respondents self-identify as “progressive” and 68% as “liberal.” Both terms are more than twice as popular as “mainline Protestant” (33%) or “ecumenical” (28%), and much more common than terms such as “emerging church” (11%), “evangelical” (6%) or “born again” (3%). When asked where they lie along the political spectrum of conservative to liberal, most identify as “very liberal” (54%) or “extremely liberal” (30%). Thirteen percent identify as “somewhat liberal,” 3% as “moderate” and none as conservative.

**Fig. 1: Self-Identity**



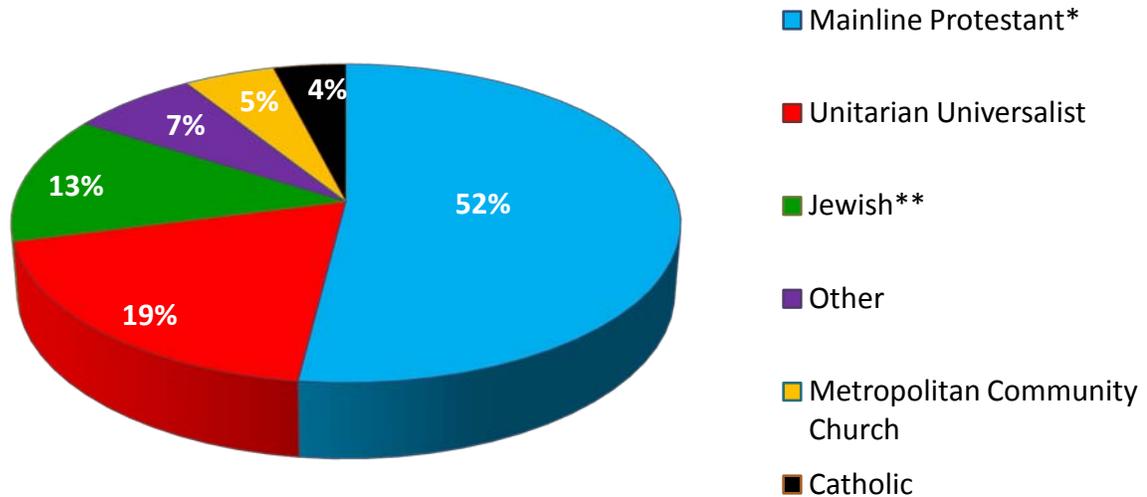
The survey respondents are almost equally split between males (53%) and females (47%), with .05% identifying as transgender. Fifty-eight percent are baby boomers, 27% identify as seniors, and 15% are under age 45.

The respondents are well educated (93% have graduate degrees, including 31% with doctorates) and long-serving. Seventy-two percent have been members of the clergy for more than 10 years. Most are seminary graduates with M.Div. degrees (59%) or post-seminary degrees (31%). Sixty-eight percent currently serve congregations; others are retired (11%), or work primarily in a university or seminary (8%), faith-based organization (8%) or other setting (23%).

More than half (58%) report that they are married, 23% are single, and 18% are in domestic partnerships or civil unions. One in five (22%) is parenting a child under 18. Nearly all (99%) know someone who is LGBT, most often a close friend (78%) or family member (44%).

Survey respondents represent 39 states and 39 faith traditions. Seven mainline Protestant traditions constitute more than half of the survey population (Fig. 2). Other major segments include Unitarian Universalists (19%), Jewish Conservative, Reconstructionist and Reform movements (13%), Fellowship of Metropolitan Community Churches (5%) and Catholic, including Roman Catholic and non-Roman traditions (4%).

**Fig. 2: Denominations**



\* "Mainline Protestant" includes: American Baptist Churches, Disciples of Christ, Episcopal Church USA, Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, Presbyterian Church USA, United Church of Christ and United Methodist Church.

\*\* "Jewish" includes Conservative, Reconstructionist and Reform movements.

Clergy in this survey serve or regularly attend various-size congregations in various-size communities. The survey population is equally split between clergy in congregations of more than and less than 200 members. Sixty percent are in large urban or suburban settings, with another 15% in mid-sized cities and 25% in rural or smaller urban areas. These congregations are generally well-to-do (87% identify as upper-middle class or mixed, compared with 13% as lower-middle or working class) and predominantly white (74%).

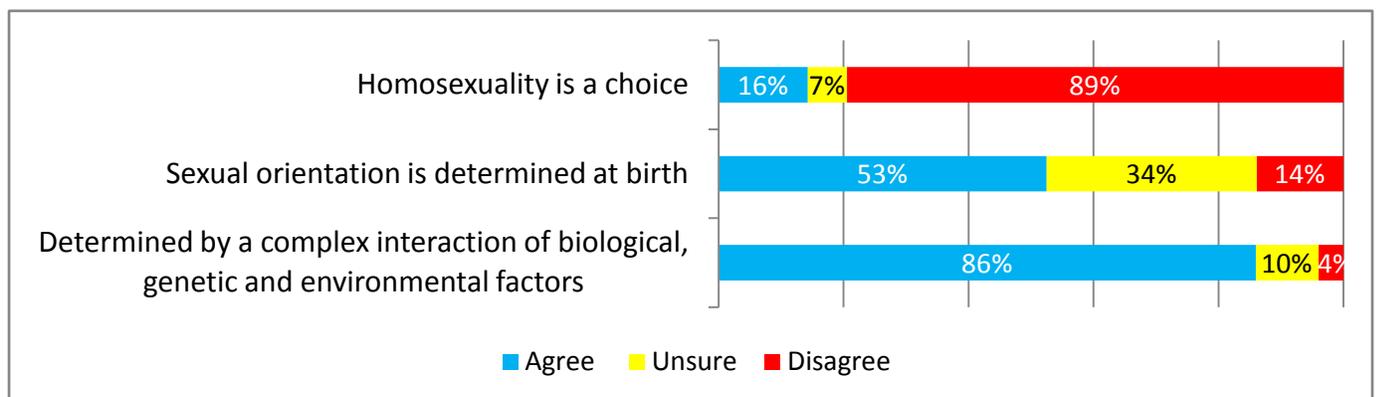
## Attitudes and Beliefs

Because the Religious Institute is a progressive, faith-based organization dedicated to sexual justice, it is no surprise that the members of its network espouse a decidedly liberal theological perspective and near-unanimous support for full inclusion of LGBT persons in communities of faith. More than nine in 10 of the survey participants embrace a progressive theology of social and sexual justice:

- 97% agree that feminist and liberation theologies provide valuable insights into being a person of faith.
- 97% agree that LGBT issues are part of a prophetic social justice agenda.
- 95% do not believe the Bible is the inerrant word of God.
- 94% agree that sexual diversity of part of God's blessing.
- 94% believe social justice is at the heart of religion.
- 90% believe the Bible does not address sexual orientation as we understand it today.
- 90% believe the Biblical message requires full inclusion of LGBT persons in faith communities.

Of note, more than half of the clergy (55%) report that their views on LGBT issues have become more liberal over the last 10 years. A majority of these indicate that prayer and discernment contributed to the evolution of their views (62%). Knowing someone who is gay or lesbian (a family member, congregant, friend or colleague) influenced 67%. But the biggest reason that clergy report that their views on LGBT issues have become more liberal is additional knowledge of human sexuality (82%). Most of the clergy (86%) understand that sexual orientation is not a simple choice between nature and nurture, but the product of a complex interaction of biological, genetic and environmental factors (Fig. 3).

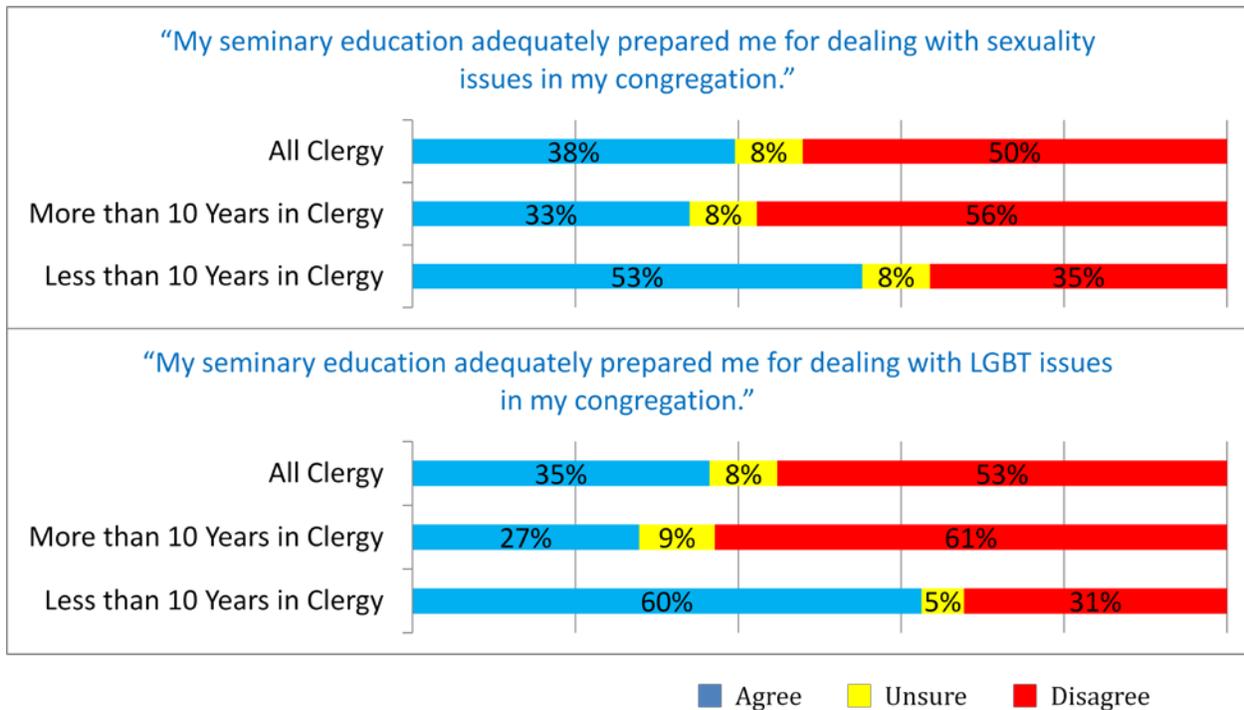
**Fig. 3: Understanding of Sexual Orientation**



The survey revealed that, for many clergy, seminary did not adequately prepare them to deal with sexuality issues in ministry (Fig. 4). Half say their seminaries did not adequately prepare them to deal with sexuality issues in general. Fifty-three percent say their seminaries did not adequately prepare them to deal with LGBT issues in their congregations.

Reports of inadequate preparation in seminary are stronger among longer-serving members of the clergy. More than half of those in the clergy for more than 10 years say that seminary training did not prepare them to deal with sexuality issues (56%) or LGBT issues (61%). By contrast, the majority of those in the clergy for less than 10 years believe their seminary training did prepare them adequately on sexuality issues (53%) and LGBT issues (60%), although significant minorities still report being underprepared (35% for sexuality issues, 31% for LGBT issues).<sup>3</sup>

**Fig. 4: Attitudes on Seminary Education**



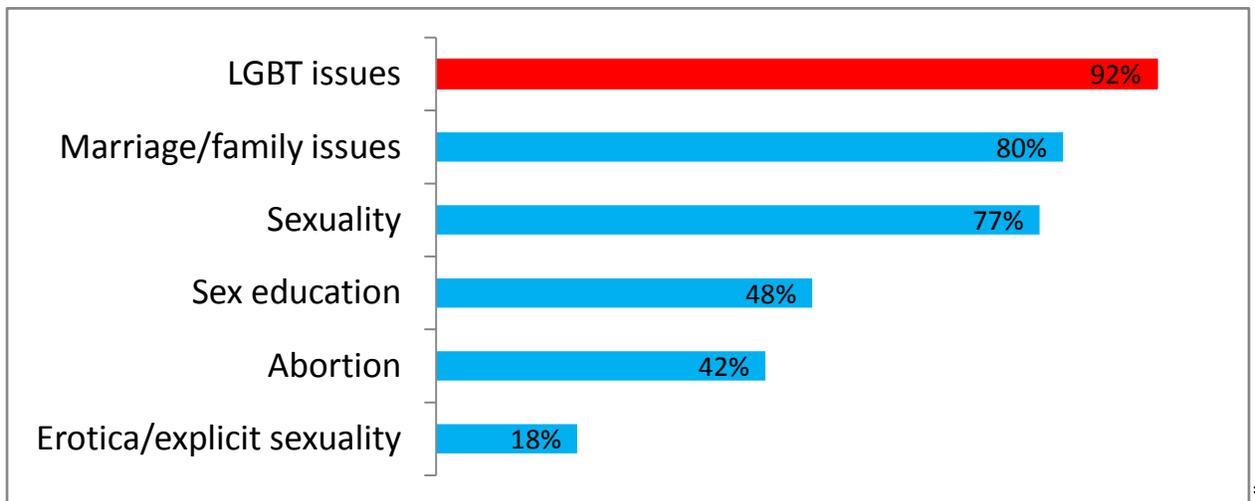
<sup>3</sup> A recent study by the Religious Institute, in partnership with Union Theological Seminary, suggests that the presence of LGBT student organizations and worship services, rather than an increase in formal training, may account for the higher satisfaction rates among newer clergy. This study, *Sex and the Seminary: Preparing Ministers for Sexual Health and Justice*, is available online at [www.religioustheology.org/seminaryreport.html](http://www.religioustheology.org/seminaryreport.html).

## Clergy Action and Congregational Programs

Although the clergy in this survey address LGBT issues more than any other sexuality-related issue, support for full inclusion does not always translate into policies, programs or social action on behalf of LGBT persons. Programs and advocacy in other areas of sexuality are even less common.

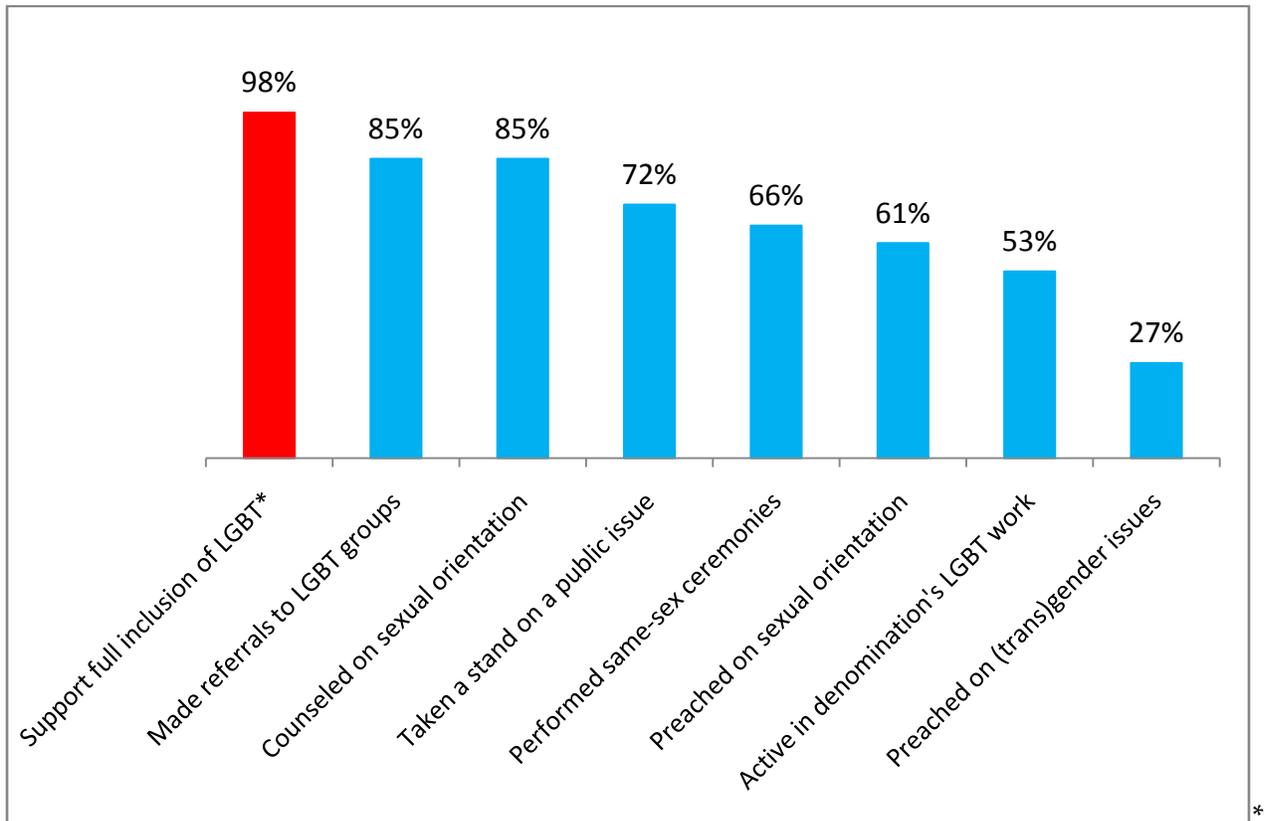
Ninety-two percent of the clergy indicate that they have publicly addressed LGBT issues in some way in the last year (Fig. 5). Many also have addressed marriage and family issues (80%) and sexuality issues in general (77%). LGBT issues were addressed publicly twice as often in the last year as sex education (48%) or abortion (42%).

**Fig. 5: Issues Addressed Publicly in the Last Year**



Even though almost all clergy support full inclusion of LGBT people in their congregations, there are gaps between clergy support and action (Fig. 6). Eighty-five percent of the clergy surveyed have made referrals to local LGBT organizations and provided counseling on sexual orientation issues. Fewer (66%) have performed ceremonies for same-sex marriages or unions, and only half (53%) have been active in their denomination’s activities on LGBT concerns.

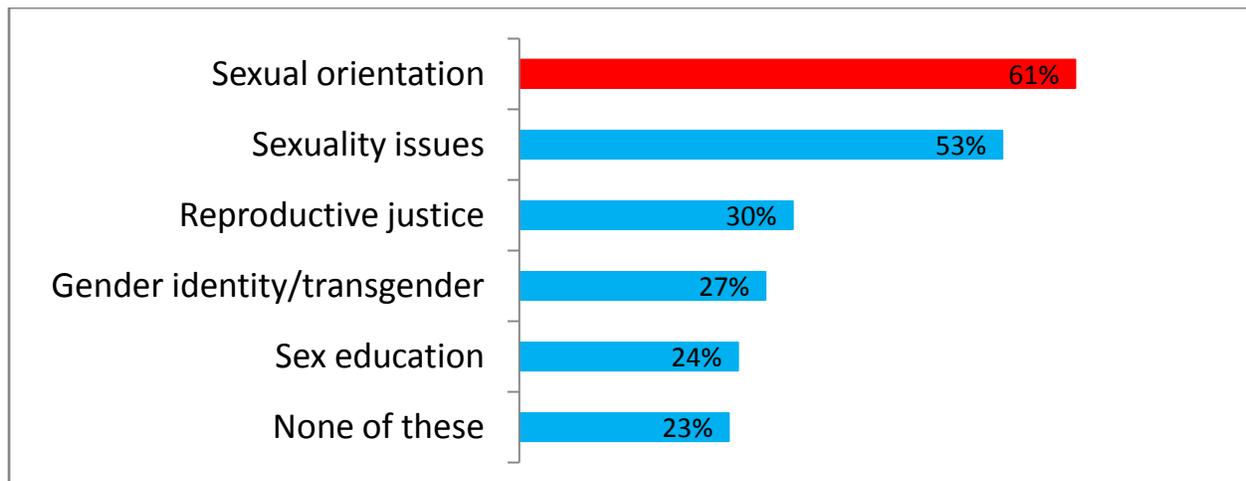
**Fig. 6: Gaps between Clergy Advocacy and Action**



\* “Full inclusion” = Supports gay and lesbian ordination, marriage equality and civil rights.

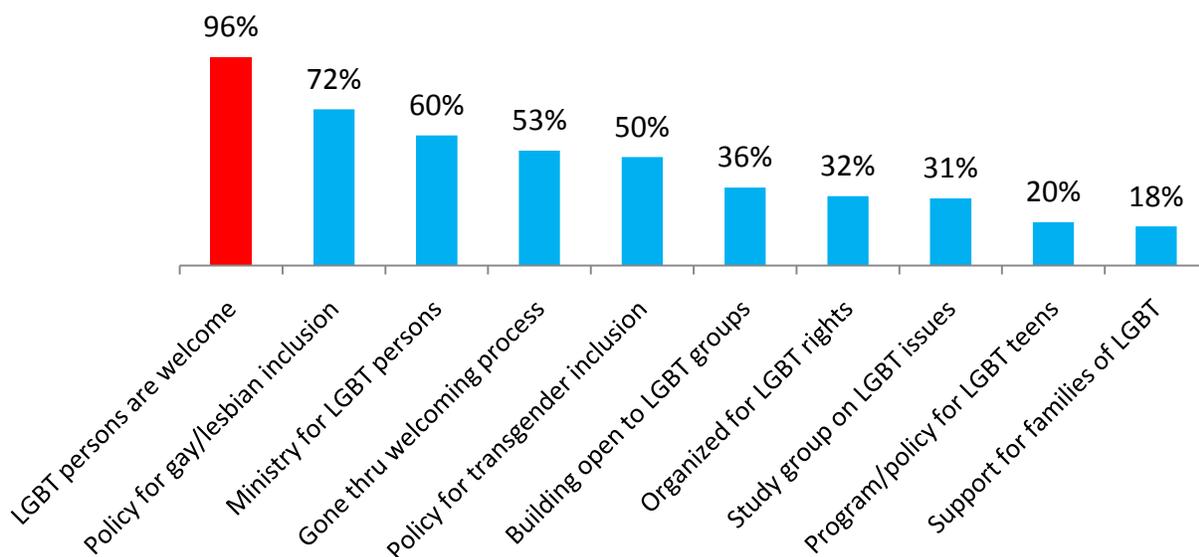
More than half say they have preached about sexual orientation (61%) or sexuality issues (53%), far more than have preached on reproductive justice (30%), gender identity and transgender issues (27%) or sex education (23%). More than one in five of the clergy say they have not preached on any of these sexual justice concerns in the last two years (Fig. 7).

**Fig. 7: Issues Preached About in the Last Two Years**



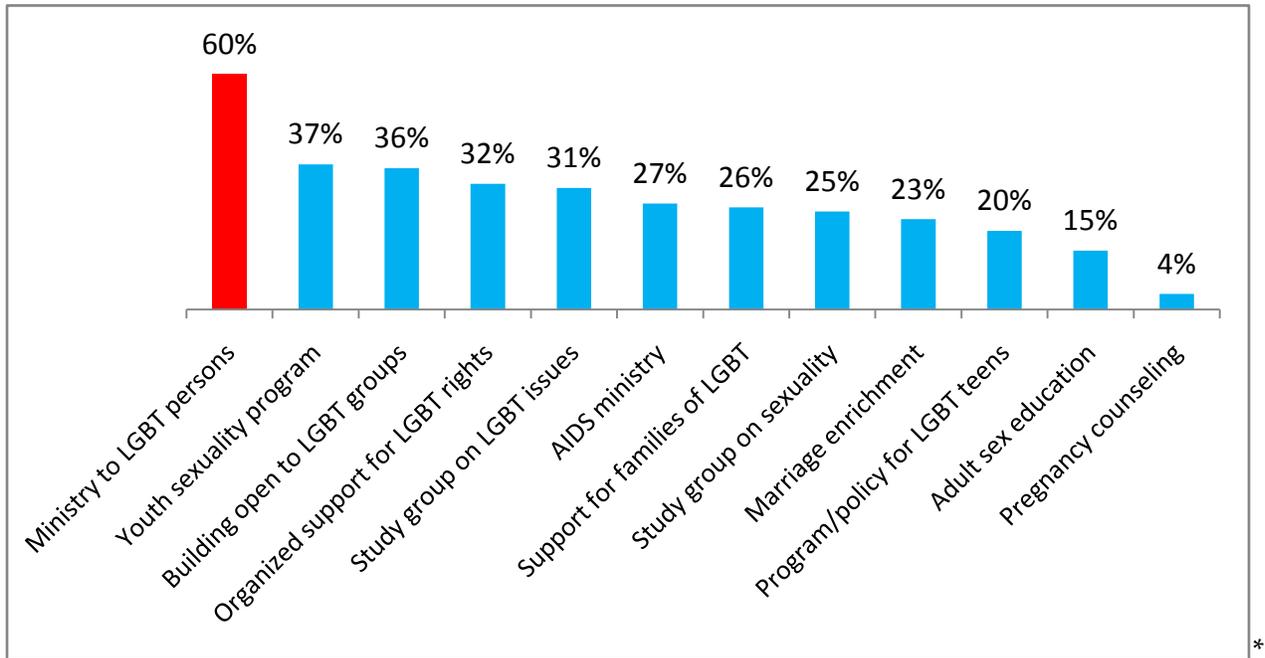
Similar trends are apparent in congregational activity (Fig. 8). While nearly all of the clergy surveyed assert that LGBT persons are welcome in their congregations (96%), fewer (72%) have full inclusion policies for gay and lesbian congregations, and just 60% report that they offer an LGBT ministry. Half of the congregations (53%) have completed the process to become Welcoming Congregations in their denominations. Only one in three indicates that they make their facilities available to LGBT community groups (36%), have organized congregational support for LGBT rights (32%) or conducted study groups on LGBT issues (31%). Just one in five say the congregation has programs or policies to support LGBT adolescents, and only 18% offer support groups for families with LGBT members.

**Fig. 8: Gaps between LGBT Welcome and Congregational Action**



However, LGBT ministries far outnumber other sexuality programs (Fig. 9). Only a minority of these clergy's congregations offer programs characteristic of a sexually healthy faith community<sup>4</sup>: One third offer youth sexuality education (37%). One quarter offer AIDS ministries (27%), sexuality study groups (25%) and marriage enrichment (23%). Fewer than one in six offers adult sexuality education (15%), and only 4% provide pregnancy counseling.

**Fig. 9: LGBT Ministries vs. Other Sexuality Programs**



The survey reveals disparities in the clergy's awareness of gay and lesbian adults in their congregations compared with transgender persons and LGBT youth. This disparity also exists in inclusion policies:

- Ninety-three percent say that there are gay and lesbian adults in their congregations. Thirty-five percent report transgender congregants, 32% report no transgender congregants, and 33% say they are unsure.
- Half (52%) report that there are teenagers in their congregations who are struggling with sexual orientation issues. One in 10 reports no teenagers struggling with sexual orientation issues, and 39% are unsure.
- Seventy-two percent report that their congregations have policies on full inclusion of gay and lesbian persons. Only half have policies on transgender inclusion. Only one in five congregations has programs or policies to support LGBT adolescents.

<sup>4</sup> See Debra W. Haffner, *A Time to Build: Creating Sexually Health Faith Communities* (Religious Institute on Sexual Morality, Justice, and Healing, 2002).

## Doing More on LGBT Issues

Sixty-four percent of these progressive clergy agree that “our congregation should do more to help our members think carefully about LGBT issues.” Among the clergy who responded to the question, “Would any of the following help you lead your congregations in discussing LGBT issues more openly?”, the largest share say congregants willing to share personal experiences (cited by 66%) and congregational leadership and support (cited by 53%).

Other needs include theological resources (e.g., Bible study or sermon materials, cited by 50%); denominational support (40%) and local clergy support (30%). Asked to identify other resources not listed in the question, 31 clergy wrote in some version of the same response – give me more time, money and people (laity and clergy) to help me do the work.

One quarter (27%) of the clergy report that their congregations have difficulty talking openly about LGBT issues. For these clergy, the biggest barriers to open discussion are concerns about creating divisions within the congregation (cited by 87%) and congregational discomfort with sexuality issues in general (cited by 62%).

## Other Findings

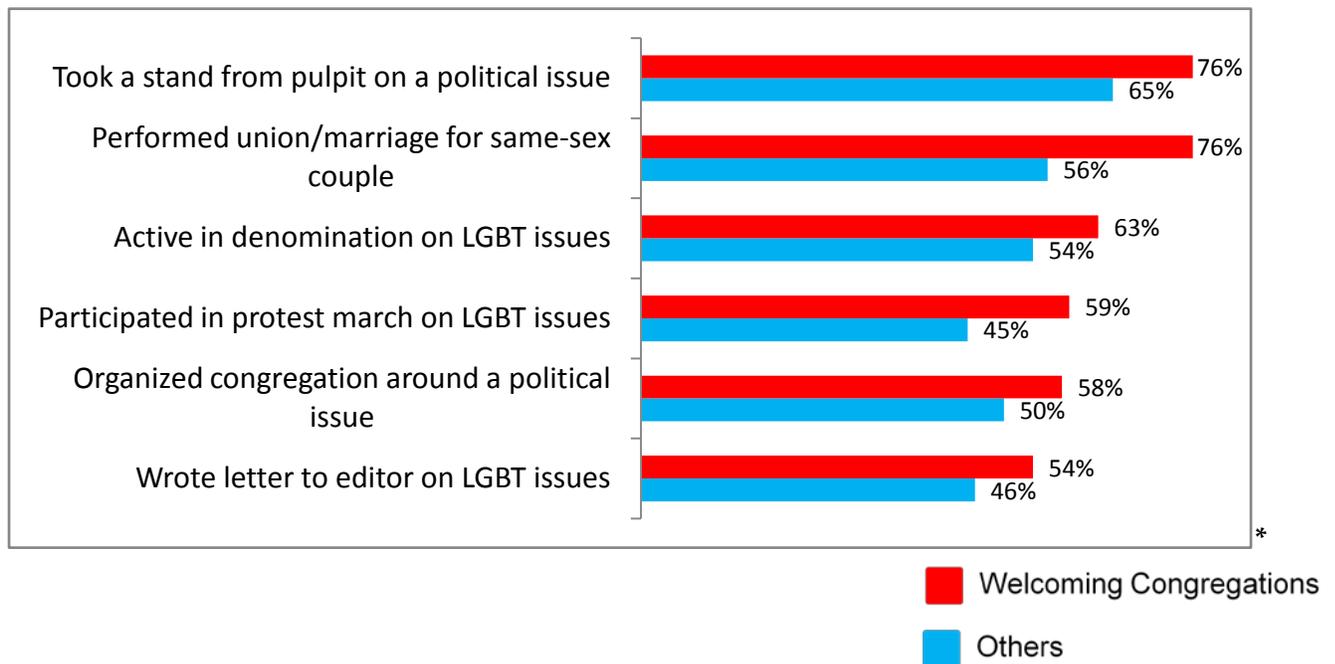
- Just 34% of the clergy report that their congregations have experienced any significant conflict over the last two years. For these clergy, the primary sources of conflict were pastoral leadership (cited by 57%), finances (42%), building/grounds (21%) and worship (20%). Homosexuality was cited by only 21 clergy (16% of respondents to the question).
- Most of the clergy (81%) disagree with the statement that “many mainline congregations are declining because they became theologically liberal.” Fourteen percent are unsure, and 4% agree. By contrast, 73% agree that “many mainline congregations are declining because they have lost the courage to take prophetic stands for social justice.” Eight percent disagree with this statement, and 18% are unsure.
- The clergy were asked how close they feel toward 15 different religious and advocacy groups. They were asked not to respond if they were unfamiliar with a particular group. Only 47% responded to the question about the Institute on Religion & Democracy (IRD), the lowest level of familiarity for any group. (All other groups had response rates of 68% or more.) Most of the clergy with an opinion on the IRD (72%) say they feel far or very far from the organization; 21% are neutral.

## The Impact of Welcoming Congregations

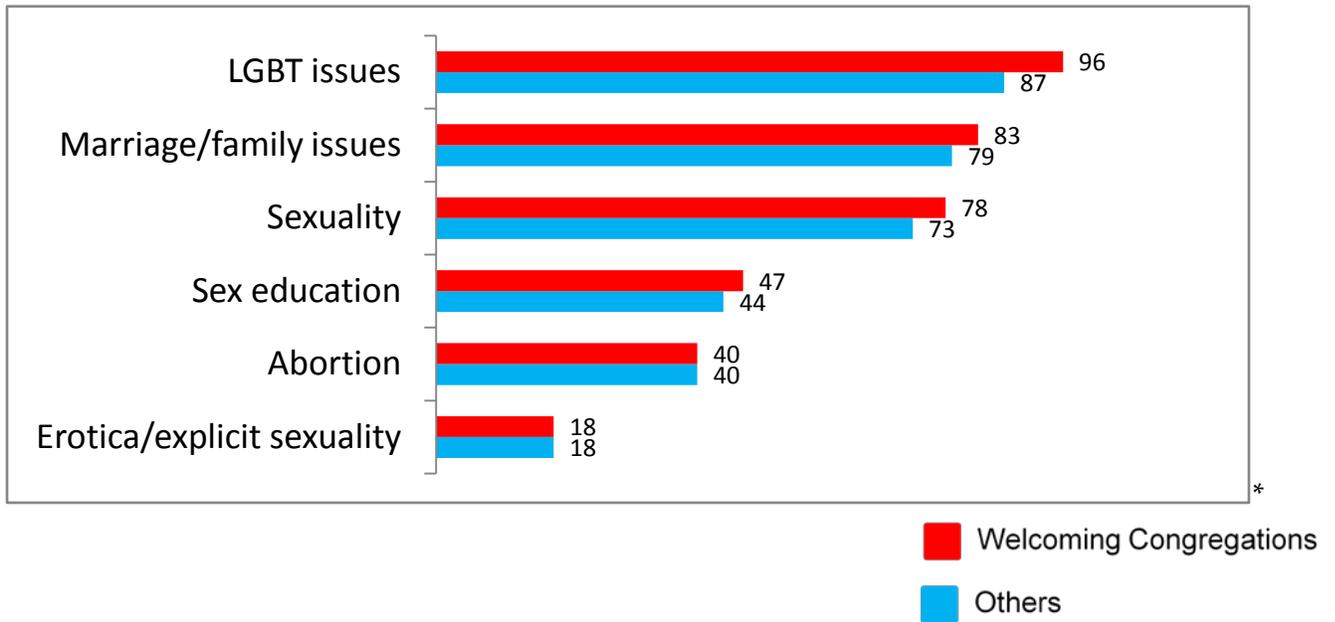
Just over half (53%) of the clergy in this survey report that their congregations have completed a process of becoming a “welcoming and affirming congregation” with regard to LGBT persons. We compared the level of engagement of Welcoming Congregations in LGBT and other sexual justice issues with that of congregations that have not undergone a welcoming process. Although the survey does not reflect a representative sampling of all Welcoming Congregations nationwide, much less of progressive congregations overall, it reveals certain distinctions that additional research might further explore. Among the most important distinctions:

*Clergy in Welcoming Congregations are more outspoken on LGBT issues and other areas of sexual justice than their counterparts in other congregations.* Whether it’s preaching, working within the denomination, protesting or organizing, clergy in Welcoming Congregations indicate higher levels of activity than clergy in other congregations. They are also more active on LGBT issues and political issues generally, and more active on sexuality and sexuality education (Figs. 10-12).

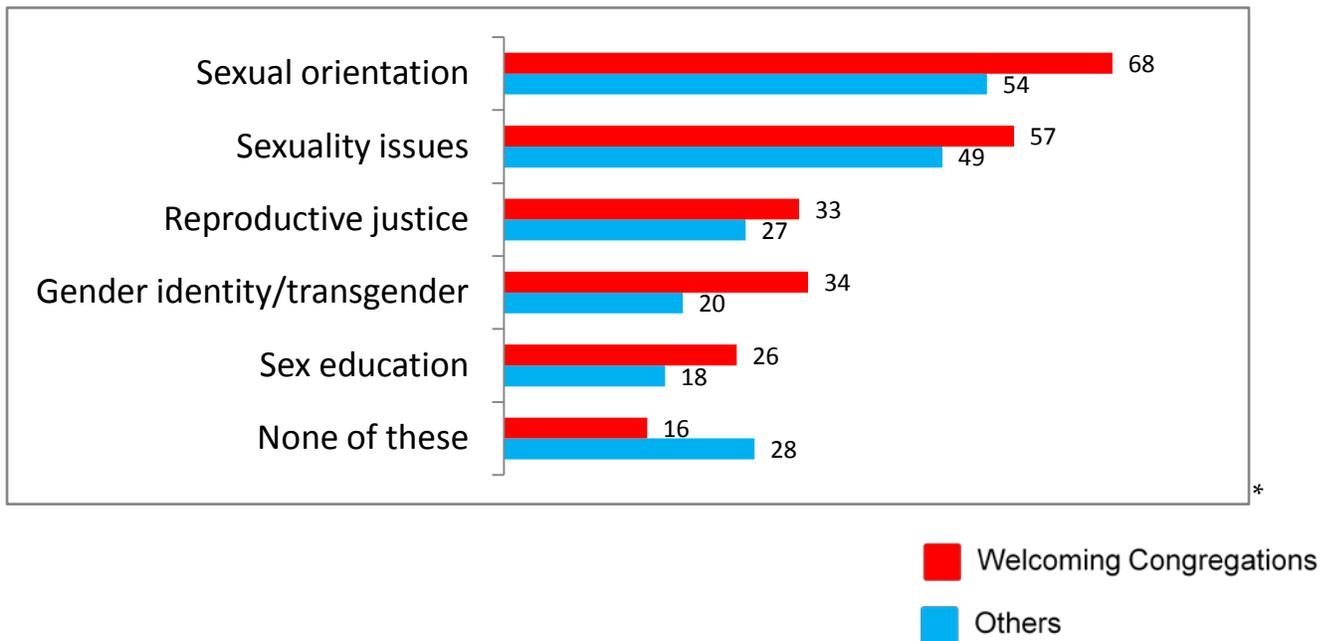
**Fig. 10: Activities Clergy Have Undertaken Most Often**



**Fig. 11: Issues Addressed Publicly in the Last Year**

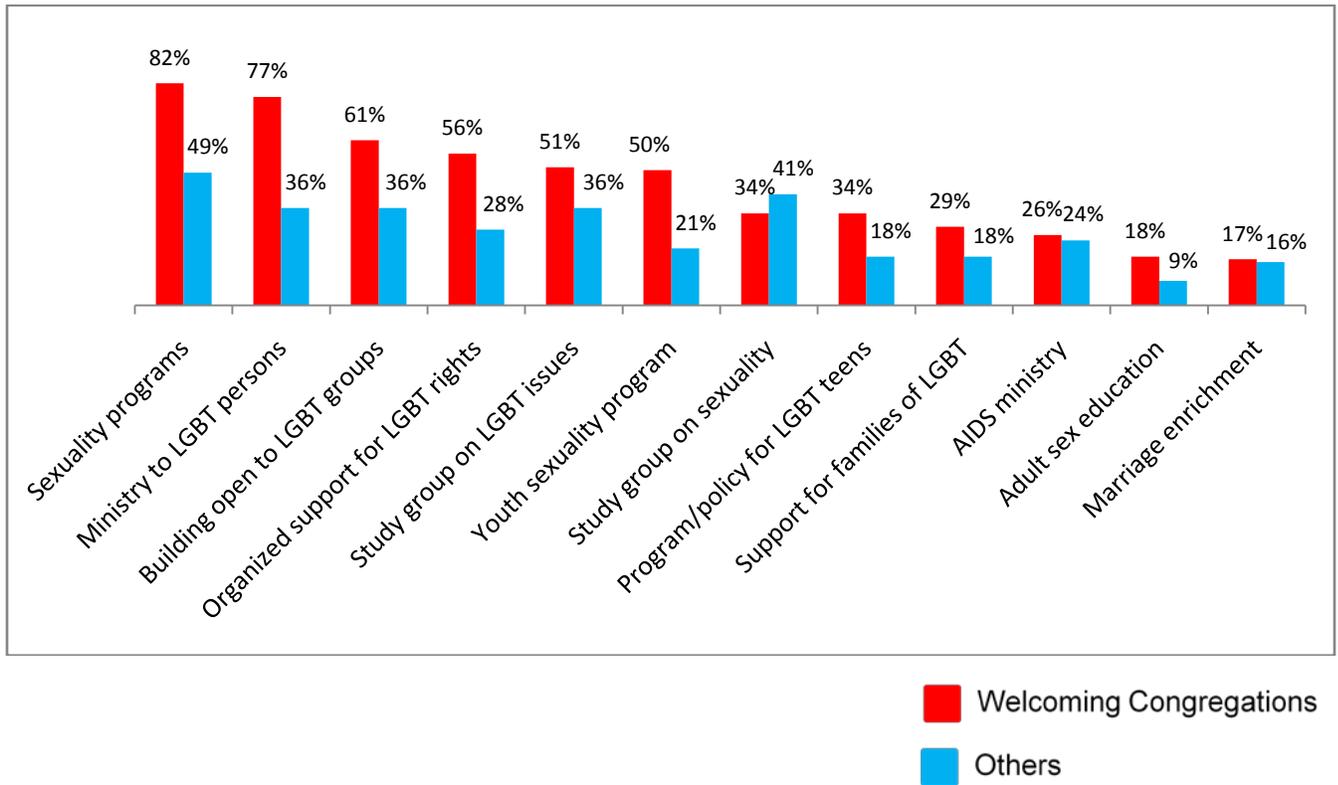


**Fig. 12: Issues Preached About in the Last Two Years**



The “welcome” of Welcoming Congregations is expressed in a greater commitment to LGBT ministries and programs. More than three-quarters (77%) of Welcoming Congregations offer some type of LGBT ministry, compared with just 36% of other congregations who do (Fig. 13). Across the board, rates of LGBT-focused programs and activities are generally two times higher among Welcoming Congregations than among other congregations. These activities include making congregational facilities available to local LGBT groups (61% vs. 36%); organized support for LGBT rights (56% vs. 28%); study groups on LGBT issues (51% vs. 36%); support programs or full-inclusion policies for LGBT teens (34% vs. 18%); and support groups for families with LGBT members (29% vs. 18%).

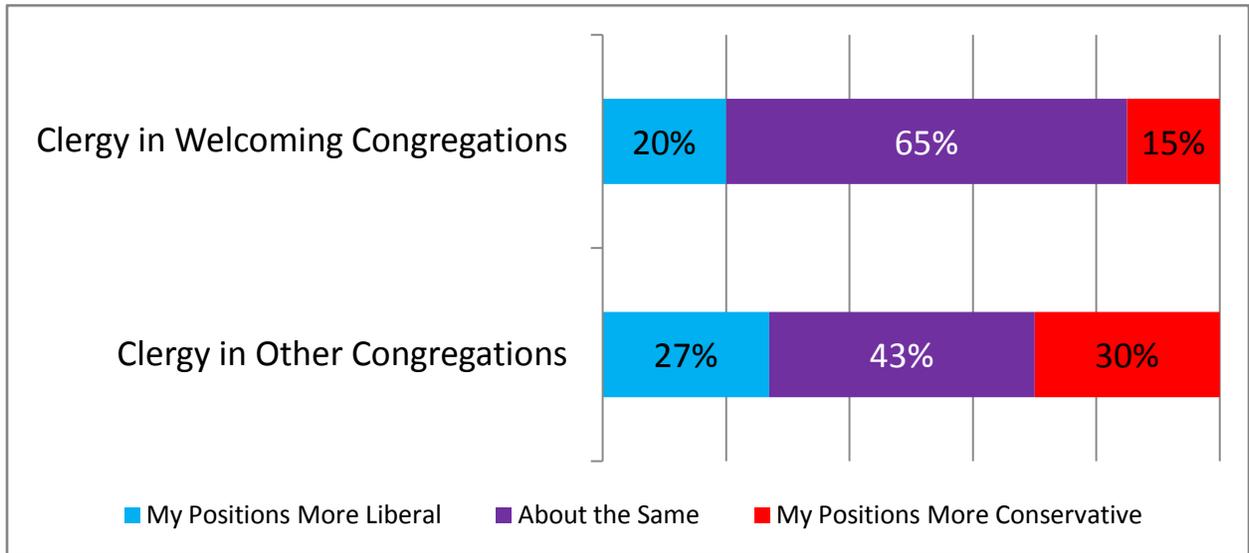
**Fig. 13: LGBT and Sexuality Programs in Congregations**



Welcoming Congregations are more engaged in other sexuality-related programs, in addition to LGBT ministries. Overall, 82% of clergy in Welcoming Congregations say their congregations sponsor sexuality-related programs and activities, compared with just 49% of other congregations who do (Fig. 13). Half of the Welcoming Congregations offer youth sexuality education programs, compared with 21% of other congregations. Other programs offered by Welcoming Congregations – such as AIDS ministries (26%), adult sexuality education (18%) and marriage enrichment programs (17%) – are less common, but are offered slightly more frequently by Welcoming Congregations than by other congregations. Welcoming Congregations trail other congregations in just one area: 41% of other congregations offer study groups on sexuality issues, compared with 34% of Welcoming Congregations.

There is greater congruence in Welcoming Congregations between the clergy’s social views and the congregants’. Asked to compare their own views on social issues to what they perceive their congregants’ views to be, 65% of clergy in the Welcoming Congregations responded “about the same.” Just 43% of clergy in other congregations report the same congruence (Fig. 14).

**Fig. 14: “How Would You Compare the Positions of the Members of Your Congregation On Social Issues to Your Own Positions on Such Issues?”**



Welcoming Congregations are more comfortable with LGBT issues. By substantial margins, clergy in Welcoming Congregations report that their congregants are more comfortable talking openly about LGBT issues, have less concern about “talking too much about homosexuality,” and less concern that being welcoming to LGBT congregants will hinder their ability to reach racial/ethnic minorities:

- “Does your congregation have difficulty talking openly about LGBT issues?”  
 Welcoming Congregations: 14% Yes, 86% No  
 Others: 42% Yes, 58% No
- “Our congregation risks losing many members by talking too much about homosexuality.”  
 Welcoming Congregations: 86% Disagree, 8% Unsure  
 Others: 64% Disagree, 24% Unsure
- “Becoming more welcoming to LGBT persons could hinder the ability of religious communities to reach racial/ethnic minorities.”  
 Welcoming Congregations: 61% Disagree, 26% Unsure  
 Others: 48% Disagree, 38% Unsure

More clergy in Welcoming Congregations report the presence of gay, lesbian and transgender people in their congregations, compared with clergy in other congregations:

- Ninety-eight percent of the clergy in Welcoming Congregations say there are gay and lesbian adults in their congregations, compared with 87% in other congregations.
- Forty-six percent of clergy in Welcoming Congregations report transgender congregants, 28% say they do not have transgender congregants, and 25% are unsure. Among the other congregations, 21% of clergy report transgender congregants, 37% do not, and 42% are unsure.

This is not surprising, given that Welcoming Congregations have gone through a formal process to become more welcoming, inclusive and affirming of LGBT people. However, clergy in Welcoming Congregations are only slightly more likely to report being aware of teenage congregants who are struggling with their sexual orientation. Fifty-three percent of clergy in Welcoming Congregations report “struggling teens,” compared with 50% of clergy in other congregations. Thirty-five percent of clergy in Welcoming Congregations say they are unsure, compared with 42% of clergy in other congregations. As noted in Fig. 13, Welcoming Congregations are nearly twice as likely as other congregations to offer programs or policies for LGBT teens (34% vs. 18%).

In general, the Welcoming Congregations in this survey represent more urban, higher-income populations than other congregations (Fig. 15). Ninety-three percent of the clergy in Welcoming Congregations identify their congregations as upper middle class or mixed, compared with 80% of clergy in other congregations who so identify. Sixty-seven percent of Welcoming Congregations are located in large urban and suburban areas, compared with 52% of other congregations in these locales.

**Fig. 15: Demographics of Welcoming Congregations vs. Others**

	<b>WC*</b>		<b>Others</b>	
<b>Size (Adult Members)</b>				
Fewer than 100	17%	28%		
101–200 members	33%	22%		
201–250 members	11%	10%		
251–500 members	25%	22%		
More than 500	15%	20%		
<b>Economic Profile</b>				
Working class	2%	7%		
Lower–middle class	6%	13%		
Upper–middle class	44%	37%		
Mixed	49%	43%		
<b>Community Profile</b>				
Farm/rural or small town	7%	19%		
Small city (15–50K)	11%	16%		
Medium city (50–100K)	16%	14%		
Large city (100–500K)	21%	14%		
Very large city (500K+)	23%	21%		
Suburban	23%	17%		
<b>Ethnic/Racial Profile</b>				
White/European	73%	76%		
Black/African American	1%	3%		
Mixed race/ethnicity	26%	20%		

\* WC = Welcoming Congregations

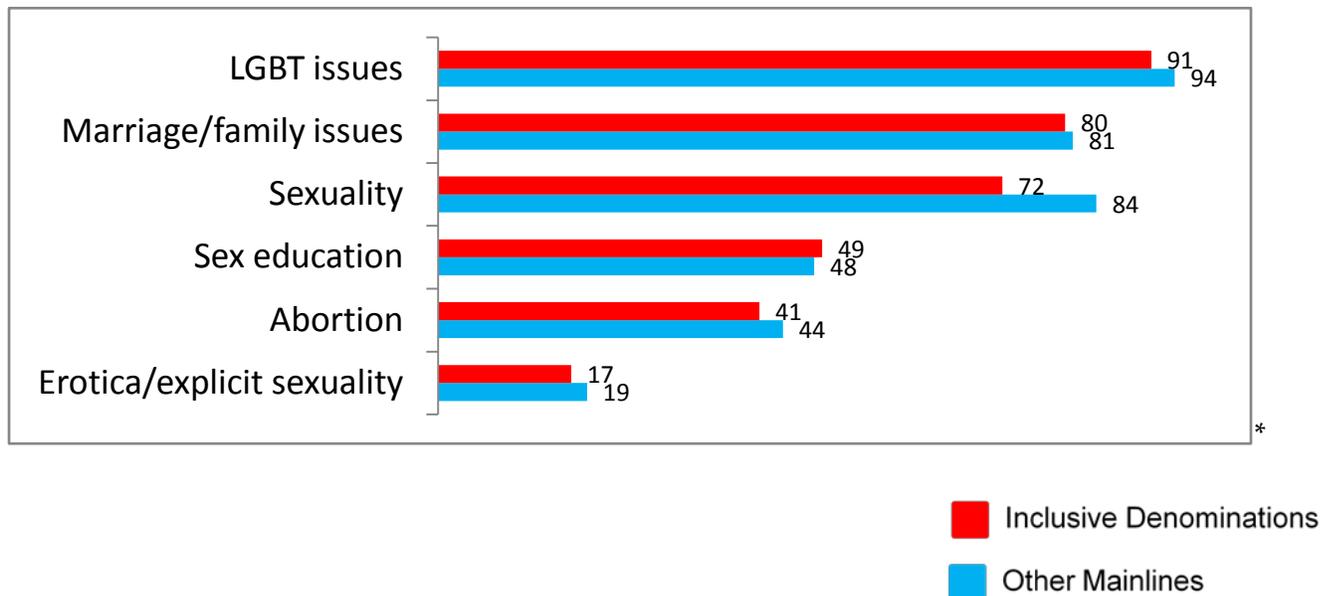
## The Effect of Inclusive Denominations

Some denominations and traditions are more welcoming and inclusive of LGBT people than others. What difference does denominational policy make to individual congregations? Are congregations in what we term “Inclusive Denominations” more engaged in LGBT advocacy and sexual justice than congregations in other traditions?

Six traditions represented in this survey – the Jewish Conservative, Reconstructionist and Reform movements; the Fellowship of Metropolitan Community Churches; the Unitarian Universalist Association; and the United Church of Christ – are fully inclusive of gay and lesbian people in terms of support for civil rights, ordination and the blessing of same-sex unions or marriages. Clergy from these Inclusive Denominations constitute 51% of the survey participants. This report compares their level of engagement with that of clergy from seven other denominations whose policies on gay and lesbian inclusion are more varied. Clergy from these “Other Mainlines” – the American Baptist Churches USA, the Catholic Church (including Roman and non-Roman traditions), the Disciples of Christ, the Episcopal Church USA, the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, the Presbyterian Church USA and the United Methodist Church – represent 33% of the survey population. (The remaining 16% come from other traditions and are not included in this comparison.)

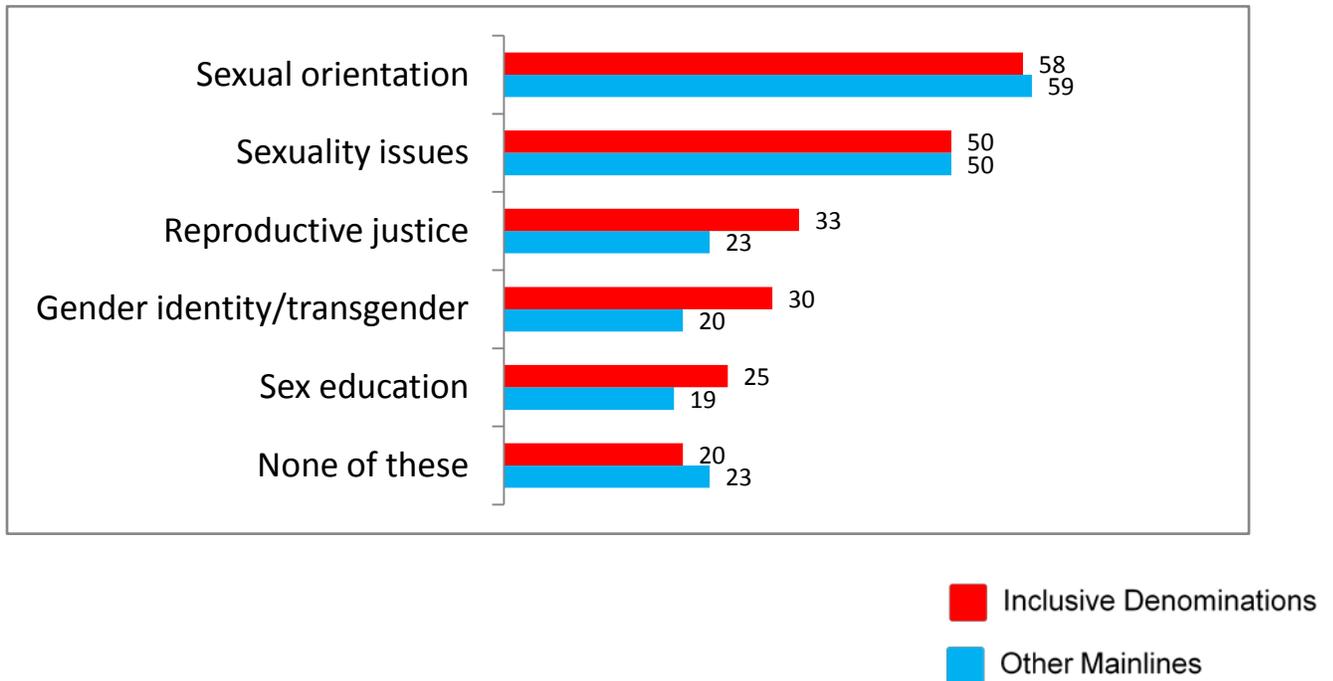
Denominational influence is subtle, but important in some areas. Overall, clergy in Inclusive Denominations are as likely to have addressed LGBT and other sexuality issues in the last year as their counterparts in Other Mainline denominations (Fig. 16) and are as likely to have preached on sexual orientation and sexuality (Fig. 17). In fact, more clergy from the Other Mainlines have addressed sexuality issues than have clergy from Inclusive Denominations.

**Fig. 16: Issues Addressed Publicly in the Last Year**



This may be because Other Mainline traditions are still debating issues of gay and lesbian inclusion. As far as the Inclusive Denominations are concerned, these issues are largely resolved, and the clergy have moved on. For example, clergy in Inclusive Denominations are more likely to have preached on other sexual justice issues, such reproductive justice (33% vs. 23%), gender identity (30% vs. 20%) and sex education (25% vs. 19%), than their counterparts in the Other Mainlines (Fig. 17).

**Fig. 17: Issues Preached About in the Last Two Years**

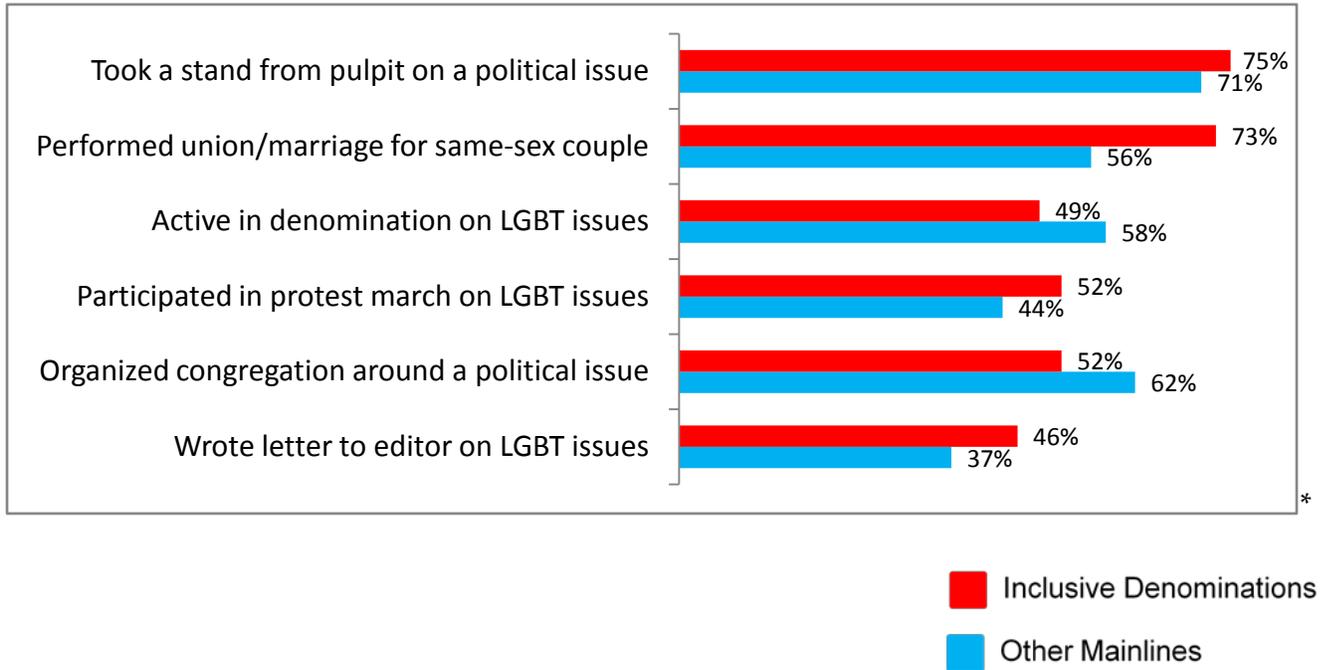


A closer look at clergy activity suggests that clergy in Inclusive Denominations are more active in LGBT issues *in the public square*, while clergy in Other Mainlines are more focused *within their denominations and congregations* (Fig. 18). For example:

- Clergy in Inclusive Denominations are more likely to have performed marriages or union ceremonies for same-sex couples (73% vs. 56%), participated in a protest march on LGBT issues (52% to 44%) and written a letter to the editor on LGBT issues (46% to 37%).
- By contrast, clergy in Other Mainlines are more likely to be active in their denominational activities on LGBT issues (58% to 49%) and to have organized their congregation around a political issue, not necessarily related to LGBT or sexual justice concerns (62% to 52%).

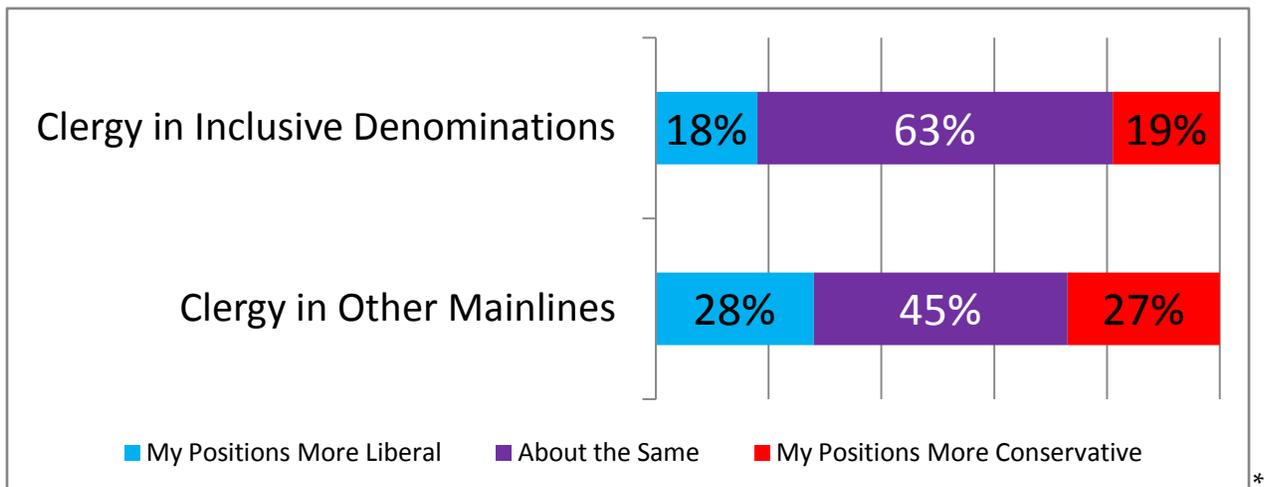
These findings may suggest that, with denominational policy resolved in favor of LGBT inclusion, clergy in Inclusive Denominations are free to take public stands and actions not only on LGBT issues, but on a broad range of sexuality issues.

**Fig. 18: Activities Clergy Have Undertaken Most Often**



Like the clergy in Welcoming Congregations, clergy in Inclusive Denominations report greater congruence with their congregants' views on social issues (Fig. 19). Asked to compare their own views on social issues to what they perceive their congregants' views to be, 63% of clergy in Inclusive Denominations responded "about the same." Just 45% of clergy in Other Mainlines report the same congruence.

**Fig. 19: "How Would You Compare the Positions of the Members of Your Congregation On Social Issues to Your Own Positions on Such Issues?"**



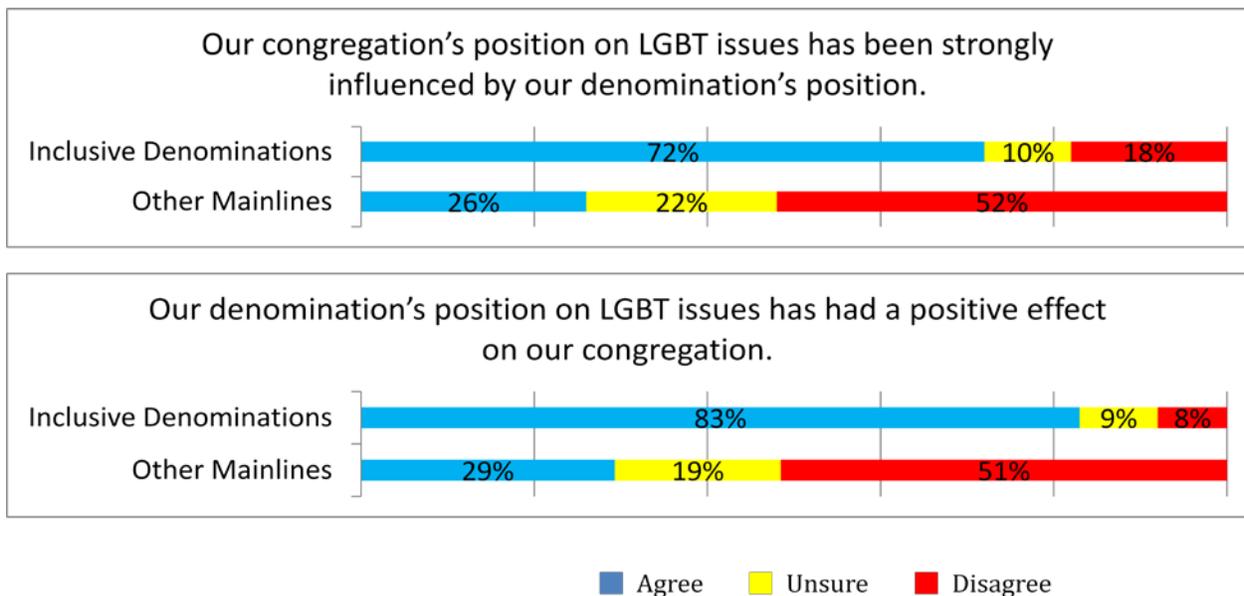
Clergy in Inclusive Denominations report less difficulty talking openly about LGBT issues and less concern about losing members as a result:

- *“Does your congregation have difficulty talking openly about LGBT issues?”*  
 Inclusive Denominations: 20% Yes, 80% No  
 Other Mainlines: 41% Yes, 59% No
  
- *“Our congregation risks losing many members by talking too much about homosexuality.”*  
 Inclusive Denominations: 7% Agree, 81% Disagree, 12% Unsure  
 Other Mainlines: 11% Agree, 69% Disagree, 19% Unsure

Majorities of clergy in both the Inclusive Denominations and Other Mainlines disagree that “becoming more welcoming to LGBT persons could hinder the ability of religious communities to reach racial/ethnic minorities.”

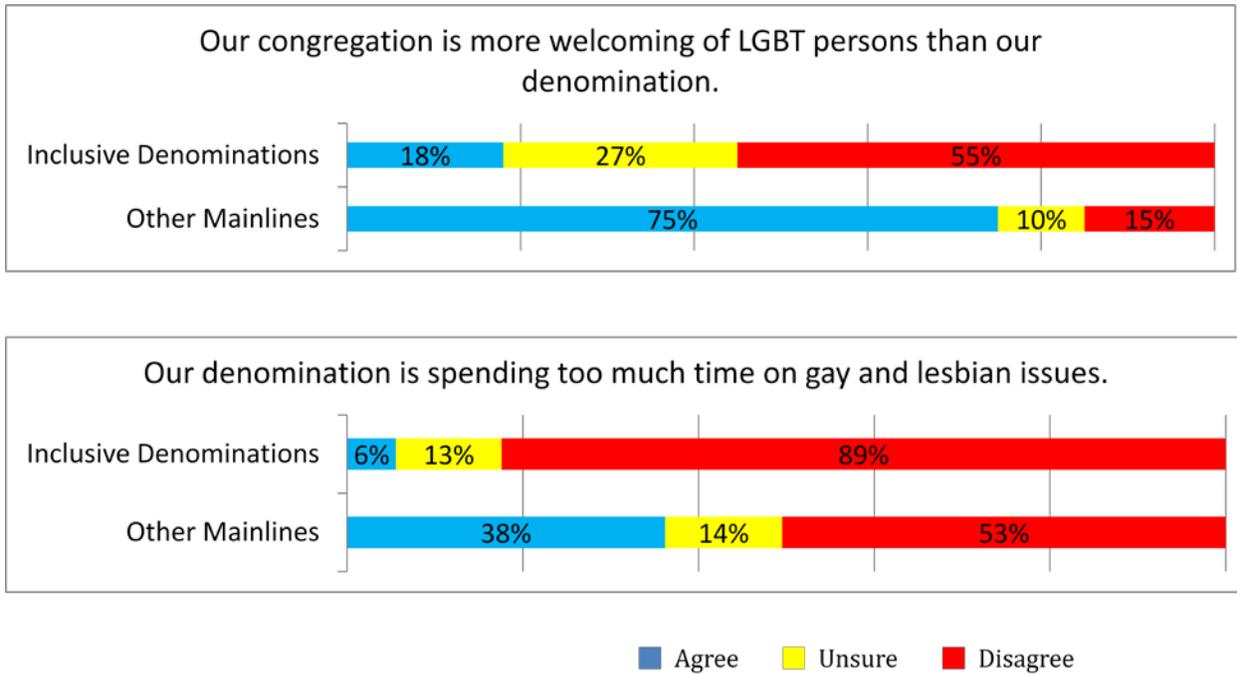
Clergy in Inclusive Denominations credit their denominations’ positions with fostering this degree of harmony where LGBT issues are concerned (Fig. 20). Seventy-two percent of clergy in Inclusive Denominations say their congregations’ positions on LGBT issues have been strongly influenced by their denominations’ positions, and 83% say this influence has been positive. By contrast, just 26% of clergy in Other Mainline traditions say their denominations have strongly influenced their congregations, and only 29% believe the denominational influence has been positive.

**Fig. 20: Influence of Denominational Positions on Congregations**



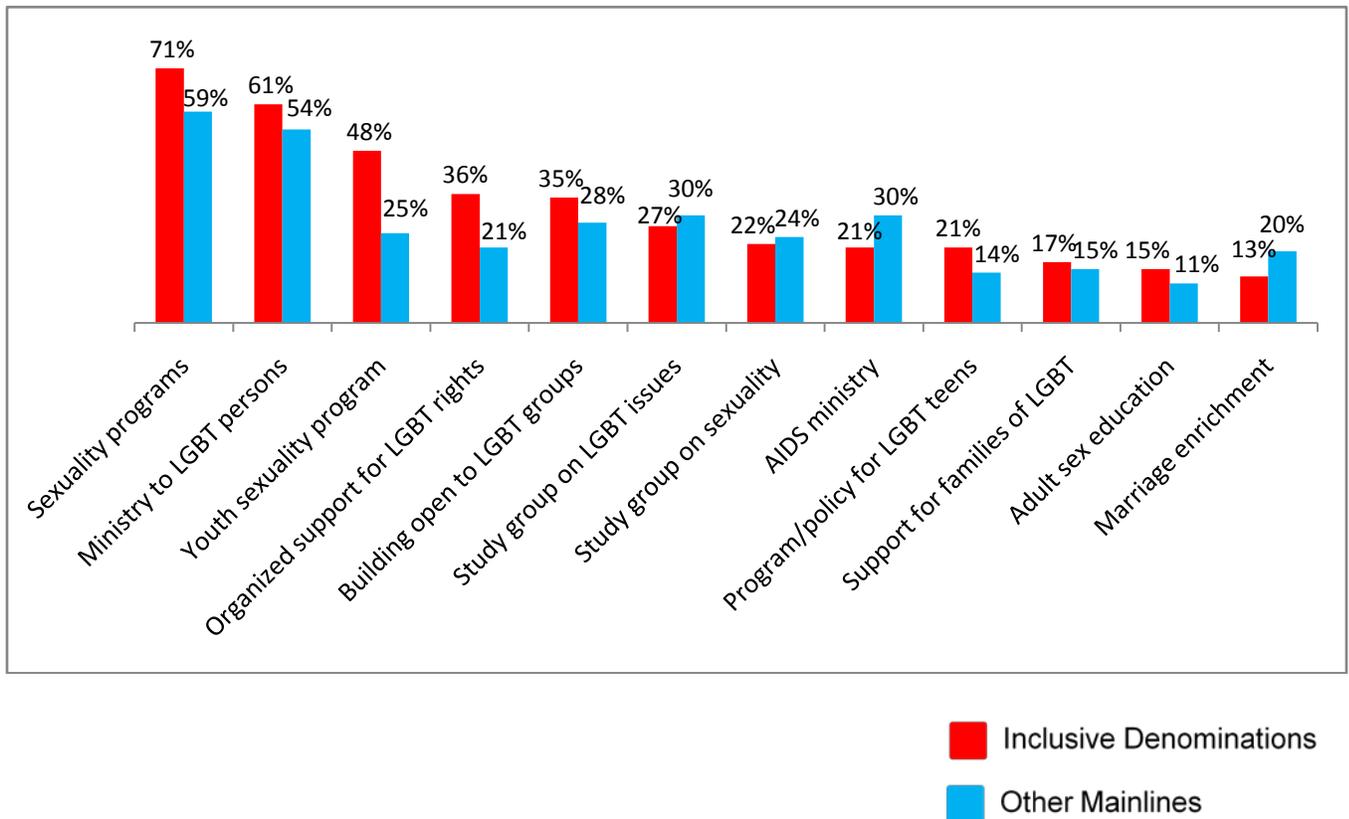
Moreover, 75% of clergy in Other Mainlines say their congregations are more welcoming of LGBT persons than their denominations are (compared with just 18% of clergy in Inclusive Denominations who say this). And, in a possible sign of frustration with denominational politics, 38% of clergy in Other Mainlines believe that their denominations are spending too much time on LGBT issues. Just 6% of clergy in Inclusive Denominations say this (Fig. 21).

**Fig. 21: Views on Denominations' LGBT Stance**



Overall, congregations in Inclusive Denominations sponsor more programs and activities relating to sexuality than Other Mainlines congregations do (71% to 59%). Clergy in Inclusive Denominations report higher rates of LGBT ministries (61% vs. 54%), as well as youth sex education (48% vs. 25%), no doubt reflecting the longstanding use of the *Our Whole Lives* sexuality education curriculum in the Unitarian Universalist and United Church of Christ traditions. Other Mainline congregations sponsor more AIDS ministries (30% vs. 21%) and marriage enrichment programs (20% vs. 13%) than the congregations in Inclusive Denominations (Fig. 22).

**Fig. 22: LGBT and Sexuality Programs in Congregations**



More clergy in Inclusive Denominations report the presence of gay and lesbian adults and transgender people in their congregations, compared with clergy in Other Mainline congregations:

- Ninety-five percent of the clergy in Inclusive Denominations say there are gay and lesbian adults in their congregations, compared with 90% in Other Mainlines.
- Forty percent of clergy in Inclusive Denominations report transgender congregants, 31% say they do not have transgender congregants, and 30% are unsure. Among the Other Mainlines, 25% of clergy report transgender congregants, 35% do not, and 41% are unsure.

Again, this is not surprising, given that Inclusive Denominations, by definition, are welcoming and inclusive of LGBT people. More clergy in Inclusive Denominations (57%) also report having teenagers who are struggling with sexual orientation in their congregations, compared with 45% of clergy in Other Mainlines. Thirty-five percent of clergy in Inclusive Denominations say they are unsure, compared with 45% of clergy in Other Mainlines. As noted in Fig. 22, programs or policies for LGBT teens are relatively rare; 21% of congregations in Inclusive Denominations have them, as do only 14% of Other Mainlines.

## Recommendations

### 1. Progressive clergy are a primary audience for increasing full inclusion of LGBT persons in congregations and society.

The Religious Institute survey demonstrates that supportive attitudes about LGBT issues do not always translate into action by clergy or congregations. Although support for a wide variety of LGBT issues is nearly universal among progressive clergy, many are not putting these commitments into activism for social justice or congregationally based programs and policies that would assure full welcome and inclusion. For example:

- Two-thirds have not organized congregational support for LGBT rights.
- Half are not active in denominational efforts on LGBT issues.
- Four in 10 have not preached about sexual orientation in the past two years.
- Four in 10 say their congregation does not have a ministry on LGBT issues.
- 80% do not have programs or policies for LGBT teens.
- Half have not expanded non-discrimination/full inclusion policies to include transgender persons.

These progressive clergy need tools, resources, support and motivation to become more active on these issues and address them within their congregations. Further, this survey indicates that efforts to change the attitudes of mainstream clergy will not be enough to bring about actual change in their activism or their congregational inclusion.

### 2. Congregations of all traditions should undertake a systematic welcoming process.

Clearly, the welcoming process makes a difference. Progressive clergy from a wide range of traditions are twice as likely to offer an LGBT ministry, organize support for LGBT rights and make congregational facilities available to community-based LGBT groups if their congregations have participated in a welcoming process. Clergy in welcoming congregations are more likely to report their views are congruent with their congregants, are less concerned about the impact of being welcoming on their outreach to minority groups, and report being more comfortable with LGBT issues than clergy in other congregations.

Many congregations in Inclusive Denominations believe that they do not need to go through a welcoming process because “everyone knows we are welcoming.” However, the survey data indicate that such a process leads to greater activism and increased programming, *even in the most progressive denominations*. Several denominations or allied organizations have a specific welcoming process (such as the Unitarian Universalist Association, United Church of Christ, United Methodist Church and

Evangelical Lutheran Church in America), and efforts are underway to create welcoming processes for Jewish congregations. But such processes do not exist in all denominations.

Congregations across all denominations would benefit from a new resource, *Building an Inclusive Church: A Welcoming Toolkit*, developed by the Institute for Welcoming Resources of the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force. There is also a need to develop an expanded assessment of welcoming policies, as begun in Debra Haffner's monograph *A Time to Build: Creating Sexually Healthy Faith Communities* (Religious Institute on Sexual Morality, Justice, and Healing, 2002).

### **3. Denominations must pass inclusive policies for LGBT people.**

It is clear from this survey that denominational policies make a difference in both activism and action by progressive clergy. Progressive clergy from denominations that are fully inclusive of LGBT persons are more likely to report public witness on LGBT issues, have less difficulty talking about these issues within their congregations, and are much more likely to offer sexuality programs within their congregations. They are also almost three times more likely to say that their denomination's policies on LGBT issues have had a positive impact on the congregation. Continued advocacy, both within denominations and externally, in partnership with them, is necessary.

### **4. Progressive clergy need more education and resources to serve lesbian, gay and questioning youth, and bisexual and transgender adults.**

A majority of the progressive clergy in this survey demonstrate a sophisticated understanding of the causes of sexual orientation and high awareness of the gay and lesbian adults in their congregations. However, one third is unsure whether there are transgender adults in their congregations, and one third say there are none. Almost half do not believe (or do not know) that there are lesbian, gay and questioning youth in their congregations. This is despite studies that would indicate that as many as 14% of religiously involved youth are lesbian, gay, bisexual or questioning their sexual orientation<sup>5</sup>. Further, almost two thirds of the clergy in this survey serve congregations that do not have sexuality education programs for youth, and 80% do not have programs that target LGBT youth specifically. In addition, the bisexual population is almost never addressed, even in the most progressive congregations. Future efforts must be targeted to developing resources on serving LGBT and questioning youth, and transgender and bisexual adults.

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<sup>5</sup> Clapp, Steve, Kristen Levertton Helbert and Angela Zizak. *Faith Matters: Teenagers, Religion & Sexuality*. (LifeQuest, 2003).

**5. Efforts on full inclusion must be targeted to the laity, not just the clergy.**

A quarter of the progressive clergy in this survey report that their congregations have difficulty talking about sexuality and LGBT issues, and 23% believe that they are more liberal than their congregations on these and other social issues. Indeed, two thirds of the clergy say that congregants' willingness to share personal experiences would help them lead on these issues. More than half of the clergy say they need greater congregational leadership and support.

National LGBT advocacy organizations must continue to encourage their members to speak up in their congregations, ask for greater clergy and congregational commitment to full inclusion, and tell their stories. Organizations such as the Religious Institute and the Christian Community can do more to help heterosexual people understand that they must be "more than allies" in working for full inclusion – they must become advocates as well.

**6. Progressive clergy must be supported in their activities and involvement on LGBT issues.**

Half of the clergy in the survey report that they did not receive adequate preparation in seminary to deal with sexuality issues in general or LGBT issues in particular. The Religious Institute's study, *Sex and the Seminary: Preparing Ministers for Sexual Health and Justice* (2009), found that most seminaries are not offering sufficient coursework in sexuality or LGBT issues<sup>6</sup>. Yet more than half of the progressive clergy say they have become more liberal about LGBT issues in the past 10 years – primarily because of additional knowledge of human sexuality – and half indicate a need for more theological materials on the subject.

The Religious Institute has received a two-year grant to work directly with seminaries on improving the preparation of their students on sexuality and LGBT issues. There is also a need for ongoing, in-service training on these issues for current clergy who did not receive it in seminary. Further, a third of clergy are interested in having local clergy support for these efforts. A national series of interfaith clergy dialogues, coupled with identification of clergy mentors who have successfully done this work, could be a fruitful strategy.

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<sup>6</sup> Ott, Kate M. *Sex and the Seminary: Preparing Ministers for Sexual Health and Justice*. (Religious Institute on Sexual Morality, Justice, and Healing, 2009)

**7. Progressive clergy need support for developing their commitment to a wider range of sexuality issues.**

The Religious Institute clergy network reports being more active on LGBT issues than on other sexuality issues, such as advocacy for sexuality education, reproductive rights and sexual health services. This research presents compelling data for a targeted outreach effort for increasing sexuality education within congregations and for clergy advocacy for comprehensive sex education in the public schools. Further, this research suggests a need to assess in greater detail how congregations are meeting the criteria of a sexually healthy faith community, and for an initiative that encourages and enables denominations to assess their own resources and commitment to sexual health.

### **Closing Words**

Progressive clergy play a central role in many denominations and communities as advocates for full inclusion of LGBT persons. They offer a prophetic voice in the pulpit and the public square. Yet, many progressive clergy and congregations are not fully matching their beliefs with actions. The solution for turning social commitment into social action is not simply to continue “singing to the choir,” or even to sing louder. Rather, the solution must involve providing the resources clergy say they need, as well as engaging progressive allies to help them.

Going forward, it will not be enough for progressive laity to be passive supporters of LGBT inclusion. We must prepare them to be *advocates* as well, co-leaders toward the vision of justice we all share. We must also motivate them to develop and implement programs and policies for full inclusion within their congregations. We are eager to continue to engage progressive clergy and their congregations in this vital work.

## About the Religious Institute

Founded in 2001, the Religious Institute is a national, multifaith organization dedicated to promoting sexual health, education and justice in faith communities and society. The Religious Institute partners with clergy and congregations, denominations, seminaries, national advocacy organizations, and sexual and reproductive health communities to promote:

- Full equality of women and of lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender persons in congregations and communities
- Marriage equality for same-sex couples
- Broader understanding of sexual and gender diversity
- Reproductive justice
- Comprehensive sexuality education
- A responsible approach to adolescent sexuality
- Sexually healthy faith communities
- Sexual abuse prevention
- HIV/AIDS education and prevention

The mission of the Religious Institute is to develop a new understanding of the relationship between religion and sexuality. This mission involves:

- Developing and supporting a network of clergy, religious educators, theologians, ethicists and other religious leaders committed to sexual justice.
- Building the capacity of religious institutions and clergy to provide sexuality education within the context of their faith traditions.
- Helping congregations, seminaries, and denominations to become sexually healthy faith communities.
- Educating the public and policy makers about a progressive religious vision of sexual morality, justice, and healing.

Some 4,500 clergy, professional religious educators and counselors, denominational and interfaith leaders, seminary presidents, deans and faculty members, representing more than 50 faith traditions, are members of the Religious Institute's national network.