

Ministry in a House Divided

Finding the Purple Zone

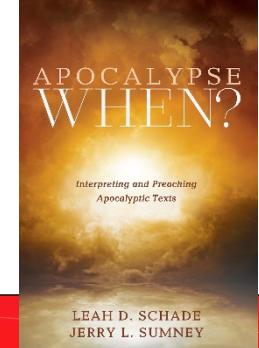
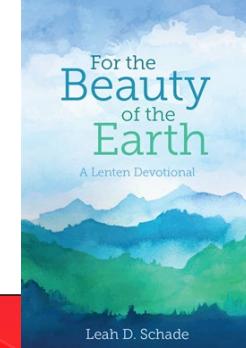
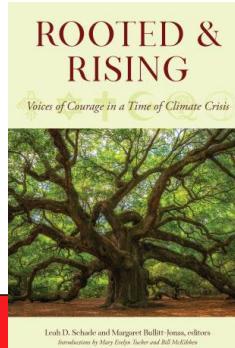
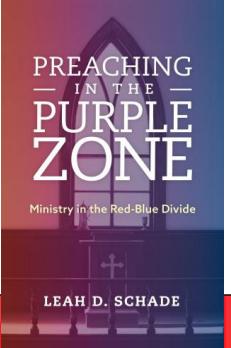
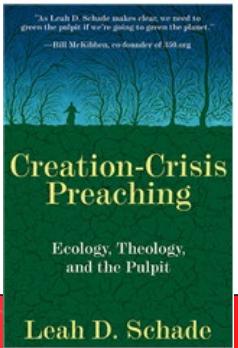
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The Rev. Dr. Leah D. Schade

*Author, Speaker, Educator,
Researcher*



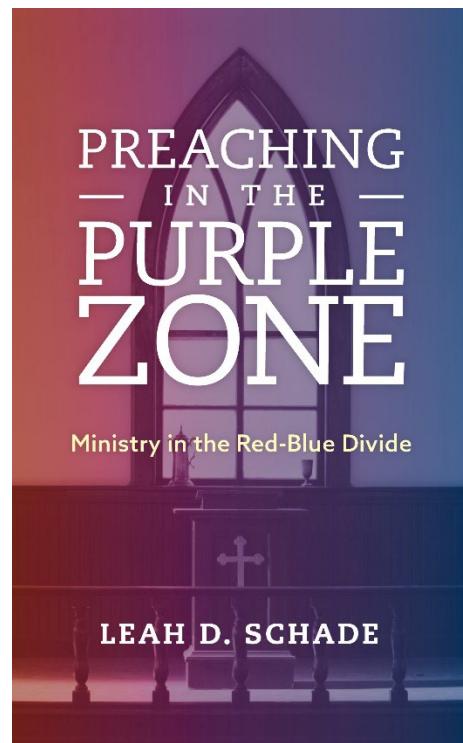
- Assistant Professor of Preaching and Worship, Lexington Theological Seminary
- Ordained Lutheran (ELCA) clergy since 2000
- *Creation-Crisis Preaching: Ecology, Theology, and the Pulpit* (Chalice Press, 2015)
- *Preaching in the Purple Zone: Ministry in the Red-Blue Divide* (Rowman & Littlefield, 2019)
- *Rooted and Rising: Voices of Courage in a Time of Climate Crisis* (Rowman & Littlefield, November 2019)
- “EcoPreacher” blog at Patheos:
<http://www.patheos.com/blogs/ecopreacher/>



Preaching In The Purple Zone: Ministry in the Red Blue Divide

(Rowman & Littlefield, May 2019)

PDF of
Powerpoint
will be made
available



Have
questions or
comments?
Put them in
the chat!



Reformation
Media, PA



Spirit and Truth
Worship Center
Yeadon, PA



United in Christ
Lewisburg, PA



Lexington

THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY





Questions for these controversial topics (implicit and explicit)

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

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

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



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

Preaching and Social Issues Surveys

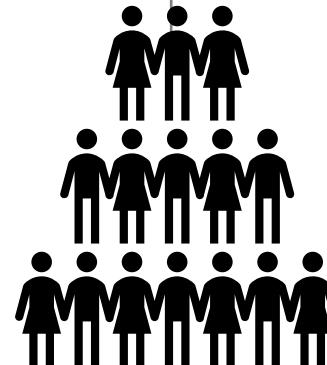
Research team:
The Rev. Dr. Leah Schade
The Rev. Dr. Amanda
Wilson Harper
Dr. Wayne Thompson
The Rev. Dr. Katie Day

2017

- 1,104
respondents

2021

- 1,919
respondents



Range of topics included:

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

Survey Methodology

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

Geographic locations of respondents

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



Demographics

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

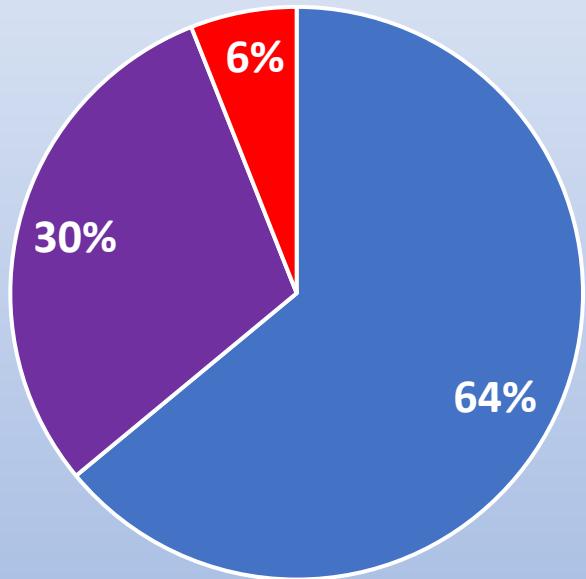
**Other variables tested: Denomination; Year of ordination;
Geographic setting; Job status/title**

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

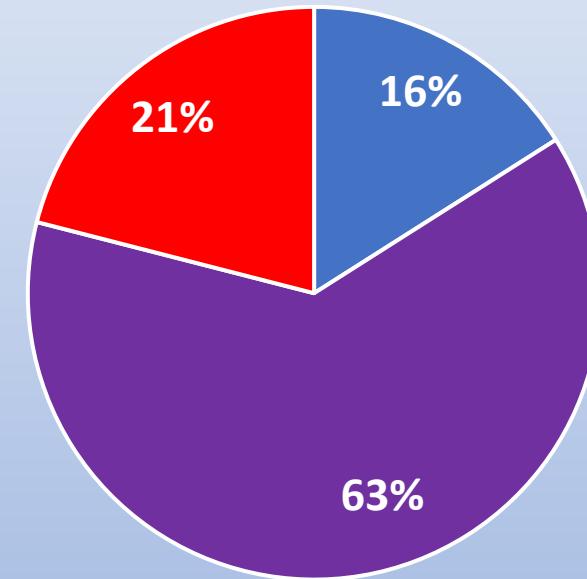
- A. Fear about hurting or dividing their congregation**
- B. Fear about receiving negative push-back for being “too political”**
- C. Fear about loss – loss of members, money, and their own positions**
- D. Fear about compromising their ability to effectively minister in their church**

Political leanings of clergy v. congregations (2021)

Clergy



Congregations



■ Progressive ■ Moderate ■ Conservative

■ Progressive ■ Moderate ■ Conservative

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

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

How often do you preach on social issues?

2017

- “Frequently” = 30%

2021

- “Frequently” = 55%

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

2017

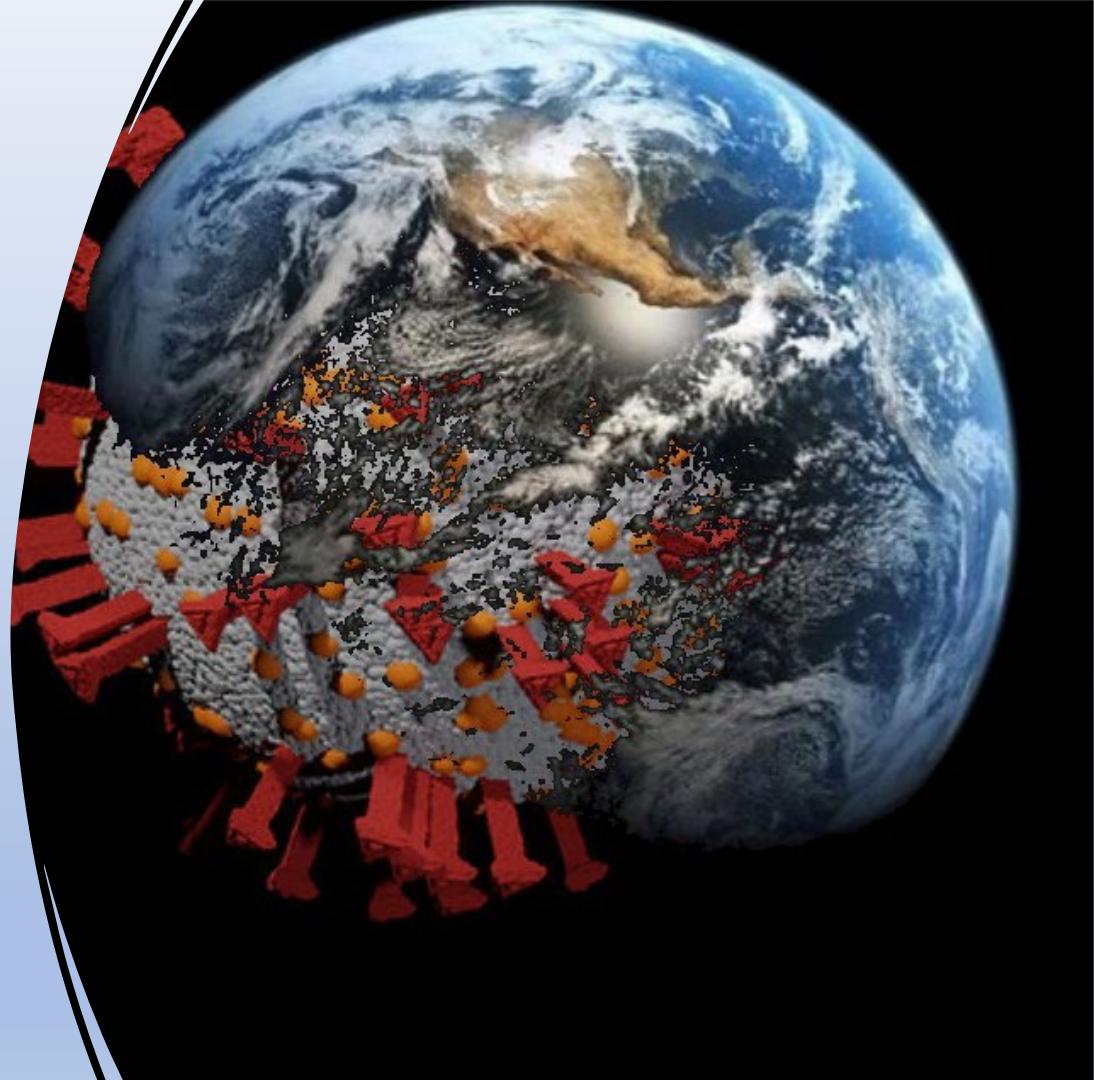
- “More willing” = 39%

2021

- “More willing” = 49%

Stressors on congregations and clergy

- Political polarization
- Social unrest, protests
- Conspiracy theories and disinformation
- Covid-19 global pandemic



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

In your community

- More divided = 48%

In your church

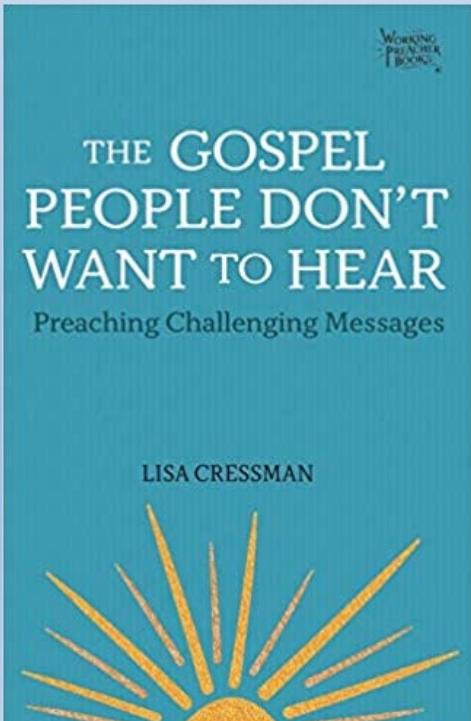
- More divided = 25%

Are you concerned that your church may close?

- Yes = 20%

“Brittleness” in congregations

- When congregations are stressed, they are more “brittle,” meaning that they are emotionally fragile and less receptive to being transformed by the gospel.



Lisa Cressman: “A brittle congregation is highly stressed. The people are anxious, they rarely laugh, and they are probably exhibiting symptoms of grief, including anger, lashing out, withdrawing, isolating, waxing nostalgic, circling the wagons, overreacting, bargaining, making much ado about nothing, targeting you or another leader (or a problem) as *the* problem, and/or displaying passive-aggressive behaviors”

Lisa Cressman, *The Gospel People Don't Want to Hear: Preaching Challenging Messages* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2020), 52-53.

TYPES OF NEGATIVE PUSHBACK TO SERMONS ADDRESSING SOCIAL ISSUES, 2017 V. 2021

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

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

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

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



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

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



QUESTIONS SO FAR?

We can't discuss "politics" in church because . . .

- You're making me uncomfortable.
- I don't agree with your position.
- You're crossing "church-and-state" boundaries that I think should stay in place.
- Don't challenge my comfort zone.
- You're taking sides when you should remain neutral.
- You're challenging me (and the media that informs my position), and I don't appreciate it.
- I come to church to escape or get a break from the world, not to further engage.
- This is too complicated to talk about or hear preached.
- It's too difficult/painful for me to think about this.

WHAT DO WE MEAN BY “POLITICS”?

POLIS = CITIZENRY, COMMUNITY



Political? Yes! Partisan? No!

- While there is ongoing debate about the relationship between government and religion, the First Amendment was intended to prevent the establishment of a state church.
- It did not state that churches could not address issues that involve government.
- Thus, it would be inaccurate for someone to accuse a preacher of violating the separation of church and state by preaching a sermon that addresses contemporary issues of public concern – as long as the sermon was not taking part in *partisan* politics and advocating for a particular party or candidate.

Categories of reactions:

- **Emotional**
- **Relational**
- **Principled**
- **Some combination of the three**

Emotional, Relational, or Principled?

- You're making me uncomfortable.
- I don't agree with your position.
- You're crossing "church-and-state" boundaries that I think should stay in place.
- Don't challenge my comfort zone.
- You're taking sides when you should remain neutral.
- You're challenging me (and the media that informs my position), and I don't appreciate it.
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RECOMMENDATIONS

- Maintain strong pastoral relationships
- Build a “ramp” to avoid misunderstanding allow for more time to engage
- Sermon-dialogue-sermon method
- Support and training from seminaries, denominational offices, clergy colleague groups, organizations that teach healthy civil discourse

FOR TOMORROW...

Assessing Risk and Capacity for Preaching that Addresses Social Issues

A TOOL TO PREPARE FOR PROPHETIC SERMONS

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As you are thinking about if – and how – to approach contemporary issues in your sermons, below are a series of questions to help you assess your level of risk and vulnerability for preaching about social issues as well as the congregation's capacity to receive and engage such a sermon. Keep in mind that this assessment instrument is merely a tool to help you gauge how comfortable you and your congregation might be with a prophetic sermon about an issue of public concern. This, in turn, can help you decide what approach you might take whether you're in a high-risk/high-stress, moderate-risk/moderate stress, or low-risk/low-stress situation. At the end are strategies for all three scenarios.

Note that this assessment instrument is for your own personal use. You are not required to share this with others or disclose your assessment to anyone. This is just a tool to help you think about your own capacity for addressing social issues as well as your congregation's capacity to receive a prophetic sermon.

Part A – Preacher's Vulnerability, Risk, and Capacity for Addressing Social Issues in a Sermon

The points in Part A are assigned according to how much privilege is typically afforded by U.S. society to certain demographics – however, *they are not a reflection of your worth as a person.*

1. What is your gender?

Male = 3 points

Female = 2 point

Other = 1 point

2. What is your sexual orientation and gender?

Heterosexual/cisgender = 3 points

LGBTQIA/cisgender = 2 points

Gender fluid, transgender, gender questioning = 1 point

3. What is your race/ethnicity?

White = 3 points

Any race other than white = 1 point

4. What is your age?

50+ = 3 points

5. How long have you served your current congregation?

6 years or more = 3 points

3 – 5 years = 2 points

Less than three years = 1 point

6. How long have you been in ministry overall?

15 years or more = 3 points

5 – 14 years = 2 points

Less than 5 years = 1 point

7. What is your current position in the church?

Senior pastor, co-pastor, or solo pastor = 3 points

Associate pastor, youth pastor, assistant pastor, etc. = 2 points

- Fill out assessment tool
- No need to share results with anyone else – for your private use
- This is a draft – have feedback? Email:
lschade@lextheo.edu