

Harkening to the Sound:
The Influence of a Clergyman's Vocal Code on the Homiletical Message
with Recommendations for Transplanted Preachers

by

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Abstract

In the field of homiletics, attention is given to structure, content, and delivery, but previous work has often neglected to consider how the sound of a clergy person's voice impacts the message the audience hears. In the quantitative segment of this project, a study was designed to examine how hearers make assumptions of preachers based on their vocal code, with findings suggesting that hearers do form biases based on the sound of a voice. The qualitative segment reports experiences from a dozen transplanted clergy. These findings are evaluated within a missional contextualization framework, resulting in suggestions for future clergy who are navigating significant demographic transitions.

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Abbreviations

$1-\beta$ = G-power statistic

ANOVA = analysis of variance, a statistical test

cf. = *confer*, compare to

df or DF = degrees of freedom

F = the test statistic for ANOVA

ibid. = *ibidem*, same as above

M or μ = mean (average) (generally M used within the body text, μ used in footnotes)

n or N = number of items, participants, responses, etc.

p = probability statistic

Note: asterisks following the p statistic indicate statistical significant results:

* = significant at .05 level (95% confidence interval)

** = significant at the .01 level (99% confidence interval)

*** = significant at the .001 level (confidence interval greater than 99.9%)

r = the bivariate correlation coefficient, using Pearson's model.

r_s = Spearman's *rho*, a correlation coefficient, used for ordinal data

SD or σ = standard deviation (generally SD used within the body text, σ used in footnotes)

t = t-test of means, a statistical measure for evaluating significant differences

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Chapter One

The Sound of Clergy

Introduction to Code-Switching

Several years ago, National Public Radio aired an episode of *Fresh Air*, in which Terry Gross interviewed comedian Jimmy Fallon. At one point in the interview, Fallon turned the tables and posed his own question to Gross and got her talking about her radio voice persona:

- FALLON: Terry, did you ever have a different voice when you were starting in radio?
- GROSS: Yes.
- FALLON: What was your other voice? Was it wackier?
- GROSS: It wasn't wacky. It was just kind of more like this. I would - when I get nervous, my voice - anyways, this used to be the case. When I'd get nervous, my voice would rise approximately an octave. And I'd speak, like, really super-fast. So - you know, and when I started hosting the show, it was - when I started to host on a college station, I was hosting, like, a feminist radio show, and I - but I was talking kind of like this. So I always thought I sounded kind of like a feminist Minnie Mouse.¹

What Terry Gross is describing is called “code switching” by people who work in the field of sociolinguistics. A code or register is a collective term for the various traits involved in how people say what they say.² One author defines it this way:

An important dimension in nonverbal communication is the *vocal* code, which refers to the manner in which we say things. *Vocalics* or the use of vocal tone,

1. “Late Night ‘Thank You’ Notes From Jimmy Fallon,” hosted by Terry Gross, *Fresh Air*, on NPR, May 23, 2011, <http://www.npr.org/templates/transcript/transcript.php?storyId=136462013>.

2. Cheryl Hamilton, *Communicating for Results* (Belmont, CA: Thomson Wadsworth, 2008), 12.

force, pitch, rate, and volume are all nonverbal in nature, but we use them every day to emphasize certain words or to convey certain meanings.³

The vocal code used by a speaker, that is the way the speaker talks, is quite complex. It even conveys traits and context of the speaker, such as “sex, age, state of health, body build, and geographic location.”⁴ Even pauses, laughter, volume, and idiosyncratic traits of the speaker convey paralinguistic information.⁵

Terry Gross may have trained herself intentionally to sound differently, but many people adjust how they sound unconsciously. Without giving it much thought, most people tend to speak differently in different settings. For instance, one probably speaks differently when doing a presentation in an office conference room than one does with family at the kitchen table. In his seminal work *The Five Clocks*, Martin Joos identified five types of codes, or *registers* (the term he prefers), that are generally used by the average person:

- (1.) **The intimate register**, which is a very informal way of speaking to each other among family and close friends;
- (2.) **The casual register**, which is informal and used within one’s broader social context;
- (3.) **The consultative register**, which is somewhat formal and might be used in a teacher-student, doctor-patient, expert-novice, etc. relationship;

3. Elizabeth Tuleja, *Intercultural Communication for Business*, (Mason, OH: South-Western Cengage Learning, 2009), 30-31.

4. Judee Burgoon, Laura Guerrero, & Kory Floyd, *Nonverbal Communication* (New York: Routledge, 2010), 137.

5. Björn Schuller, Stefan Steidl, Anton Batliner, Felix Burkhardt, Laurence Devillers, Christian Müller, & Shrikanth Narayanan, “Paralinguistics in speech and language—State-of-the-art and challenge,” *Computer Speech and Language* 27 (2013): 4-39.

- (4.) **The formal register**, which is the type of dialogue used between strangers or in more professional environments; and
- (5.) **The frozen register**, which is ritual or religious type of language, like one would encounter in ceremonies, religious rites, or court proceedings.⁶

When shifting from one setting to another, many people automatically adjust their way of speaking to fit their social context. Other times, one might find it advantageous to change the way they sound. Regardless, it is likely that all people adapt their language to fit their social context.

Code-Switching Today

Joos wrote his landmark work on the subject back in 1967, but the subject is still timely for people in all sectors of society today. In fact, in recent years “code-switching” has been in the news frequently, often in terms of the black community in America, and how persons of color may speak differently in front of other persons of color than they do in front of white or mixed-racial groups. For instance, President Barack Obama was criticized at times for speaking and sounding somewhat differently to white audiences versus black audiences; others leapt to his defense, pointing out that such shifts are normal of most people and of public officials in particular.⁷

NPR News now even has a regular weekly podcast called “Code Switch,” in which the reporting team examines various aspects of race, identity, and culture.⁸ It began

6. Martin Joos, *The Five Clocks* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, & World, 1967).

7. Christopher Beam, “Code black: Of course Obama talks differently to different groups. So do most politicians,” *Slate*, January 10, 2010, http://www.slate.com/articles/news_and_politics/politics/2010/01/code_black.html.

8. See their webpage at <https://www.npr.org/sections/codeswitch/>.

as a blog in 2013 with an essay by Gene Demby, which noted, ““Many of us subtly, reflexively change the way we express ourselves all the time. We're hop-scotching between different cultural and linguistic spaces and different parts of our own identities—sometimes within a single interaction.”⁹ The topic resonated with viewers, and by 2016 it had evolved into a regular podcast.

While the racial dimensions of code-switching are perhaps the best known in contemporary culture, changing the way one speaks and sounds occurs for almost everyone on a daily basis, and people seem to start doing it from childhood onwards. Those who have spent time with little children have also likely observed that when young children are in presence of new people and are seeking to get the attention of those new people, children often switch to speaking in higher pitched voices and use words that resemble something more like “baby talk.”¹⁰ Even in infancy, children learn, without instruction or coaching, that changing the way they talk affects how people respond to them.

This adaptive skill continues throughout life. If all behavior is purposeful, then changing the way we speak persists because there are advantages to being perceived a certain way in certain contexts. Some celebrities have said as much. One example is Stephen Colbert, who grew up in Charlestown, South Carolina, but no longer sounds like a Southerner. Instead he speaks with a non-descript accent. Once when asked about it, he

9. Gene Demby, “How code-switching explains the world,” *Code Switch*, on NPR, April 8, 2013, <https://www.npr.org/sections/codeswitch/2013/04/08/176064688/how-code-switching-explains-the-world>.

10. Tatiana Sciaudone, MA CCC-SLP, personal communication with author, August 20, 2019.

acknowledged that he has changed the way he speaks publicly so others would not assume he was unintelligent:

“At a very young age, I decided I was not gonna have a southern accent. Because people, when I was a kid watching TV, if you wanted to use a shorthand that someone was stupid, you gave the character a southern accent. And that's not true. Southern people are not stupid. But I didn't wanna seem stupid. I wanted to seem smart. And so I thought, ‘Well, you can't tell where newsmen are from.’”¹¹

Certainly he is not alone, especially as someone in the news and entertainment industry. Those who work in fields, such as newscasting, radio broadcasting, and acting, have been honing their skills at speaking in a non-descript way since the 1930s.¹² In part, this is because those in the broadcasting industry tried to adopt a standardized pronunciation that would be less regional and more representative of the country as a whole.

Those working in this industry have often had vocal coaching so that they adopt a neutral American dialect (formally called Standard American English or Generalized American dialect), so that they represent not a single part of the country, but the whole country at large, without respect to any particular region. Hollis, in her MFA thesis on teaching “Neutral American Dialect” to contemporary students, notes that “an actor must be able to speak without a detectable dialect to be competitive in the entertainment world.”¹³

11. “The Colbert Report: Morley Safer Profiles Comedy Central's 'Fake' Newsmen,” segment by Safer Morley, *60 Minutes*, on CBS, April 27, 2006, <http://www.cbsnews.com/stories/2006/04/27/60minutes/main1553506.shtml>.

12. Nancy C. Elliott, “Rhoticity in the accents of American film actors: A sociolinguistic study,” *Voice and Speech Review*, 1, 1 (2000): 103-30.

13. Louise Antoinette Casini Hollis, “Code-switching in the Classroom: Teaching the Neutral American Dialect to the 21st Century Student,” (MFA thesis, Virginia Commonwealth University, 2013), p. iv, VCU Scholars Compass.

Of course some people learn that it is beneficial to switch to a non-regional dialect, even without formal training. For instance, an elementary school administrator, born and raised in the Boston area, routinely speaks with a neutral dialect, but when she is tired at the end of day and her guard is down, she reverts to a more urban Boston/Providence dialect, like her mother and siblings. When asked about the shift in her accent, she says, “In college I just learned to do it, because I didn’t want people to assume from my accent that I was stupid.”¹⁴ Despite social media and exposure to a plethora of cultures and voices online, some people are still opting to modify how they speak in an attempt to be perceived in a more positive way.¹⁵

Communicating who we are as a way of what we are saying is nothing new. Aristotle wrote nearly 2,400 years ago that it was a foundational principle in persuasive speaking. In his ancient Greek treatise *Rhetoric*, he describes and identifies *ethos* as one of the three means, the others being *pathos* and *logos*, used in rhetoric. *Ethos* leveraged the speaker’s own character, his/her reputation, wisdom and experience, morality, and goodwill to convince the audience:

Persuasion is achieved by the speaker's personal character [*ethos*] when the speech is so spoken as to make us think him credible. We believe good men more fully and more readily than others: this is true generally whatever the question is, and absolutely true where exact certainty is impossible and opinions are divided. This kind of persuasion, like the others, should be achieved by what the speaker says, not by what people think of his character before he begins to speak. It is not true, as some writers assume in their treatises on rhetoric, that the personal goodness revealed by the speaker contributes nothing

14. Michele Boyer Mongeon, personal communication with author, 2015.

15. Danielle Lavelle, “The rise of ‘accent softening’: why more and more people are changing their voices,” *The Guardian*, March 20, 2019, <http://theguardian.com/society/2019/mar/20/ugly-rise-accent-softening-people-changing-their-voices>.

to his power of persuasion; on the contrary, *his character may almost be called the most effective means of persuasion he possesses.*¹⁶

And, Aristotle says, *ethos* needs to be established from the very beginning. It is something of which the speaker needs to be conscious from the outset.

A Homiletical Lacuna

On the other hand, sometimes it is notable when a public speaker chooses not to disguise or temper his/her accent. For instance, while some southern preachers might try to tone down their southern dialect, in the way Stephen Colbert does for his television audience, others, like the Rev. Dr. William H. Willimon, do not. In fact, he seems to play off of it as part of the way he present his sermon as more of a down-to-earth message with every day, folksy stories and illustrations. In his own way he has learned to leverage his Southern drawl as part of the way he communicates and part of his *ethos*.

Is he typical of preachers? Or is he unique? Should preachers change the way they speak to broaden their appeal? Would it make any difference to hearers? Or, in a spiritual setting like church worship, are church-goers so focused on content of a sermon that the way the preacher sounds does not affect the hearers' perceptions?

There are few homiletical places to turn for answers to these questions. The vast majority of preaching textbooks focus on the content, structure, and narrative flow of a sermon. Sometimes an author will bring in aspects of delivery, instructing the preacher to mindful of breathing, pacing, volume, enunciation, etc. But very few actually discuss to any degree how the *way* a preacher speaks and sounds affects the way hearers receive and perceive the sermon, and by its extension the preacher.

16. Aristotle, *The Art of Rhetoric*, I.2 (emphasis mine).

Those who have are largely writers who specialize in the voices of female preachers, and their chief concern is how women's voices are perceived differently from men's. Although this introduces the differences across gender lines, the questions about differences across cultural, regional, and racial lines are left unknown.

This project sets out to answer these previously unaddressed questions: Does how a preacher sounds influence what hearers think? How do perceptions about a preacher's background, ethnicity, or culture impact what the congregation hears? Should a preacher adjust the way he/she sounds to fit the congregation?

In the next chapter the results of a study designed to test these questions will be shared. That is followed by a chapter dedicated to cases of actual clergy who have navigated demographic transitions and have shared their stories about how they experienced hearers' perceptions. Chapter Four will place this discussion within a theological framework for mission and contextualization. And, finally out of all this discussion, in the fifth chapter some basic principles and suggestions will be provided for clergy preachers who find themselves transferring from one demographic setting to another.

Chapter Two

Quantitative Research Study

Introduction

Literature Review

It is commonly believed that assumptions and judgments are made about speakers based on the way they speak and how they sound. The previous chapter detailed the phenomenon of code-switching across racial lines, as well as how entertainers and newscasters were specially trained to speak with a nondescript American accents. The effect of dialect/vocal code on perception goes beyond those fields, however, and affects many aspects of society.

Decades ago research had established that the human ear is keen at detecting “accents”¹—recognizing them as quickly as 30 milliseconds into a person beginning to speak.² People, as a general rule, hear the sound of a speaker’s voice and immediately begin to draw conclusions about the speaker. For instance, perception based on how a person sounds has been studied in the human resources field, where nonnative English speakers are often prejudged based on sounding like immigrants.

In a study by the University of California, Irvine, nonnative speakers of English were found to be significantly less likely to be considered for midlevel management

1. Technically these are termed “dialects” in the linguistic world.

2. James Emil Flege, “The detection of French accent by American listeners,” *Journal of the Acoustical Society of America* 76, 3 (1984): 692-707.

positions, compared to native English speakers.³ A second study by the same authors found that entrepreneurs who were nonnative English speakers were significantly less likely to receive investments from venture capitalists than were native English speakers.⁴ In these studies, factors like race, communication skill, and collaborative skill did not play a significant role.

Another study also found that nonnative English speakers faced prejudice when it came to hiring decisions, and that lower status groups (like Latin Americans) were more disadvantaged than higher status groups (like Chinese immigrants).⁵ This disadvantage was driven by the perception that the nonnative speaker would be more difficult to understand, even if objective comprehension was not affected. Nonnative English speakers have also reported prejudice based on how they sound to be a particular stressor in work environments.⁶

It is not just immigrants who face prejudice and discrimination based on how they sound. Even among Americans, assumptions are often made about a person based on the regional dialect he/she uses. Several studies have demonstrated that hearers rate a recorded voice using a Standard (Generalized American) English dialect as friendlier, more intelligent, better educated, more attractive, and from a higher socio-economic

3. Laura Huang and Marcia Frideger, "Political skill: Explaining the effects of nonnative accent on managerial hiring and entrepreneurial investment decisions," *Journal of Applied Psychology* 98, 6 (2013): 1005-17.

4. Ibid.

5. Karolina Hansen and John F. Dovidio, "Social dominance orientation, nonnative accents, and hiring recommendations," *Cultural Diversity and Ethnic Minority Psychology* 22, 4 (2016): 544-51.

6. Guillermo Wated and Juan I. Sanchez, "The role of accent as a work stressor on attitudinal and health-related work outcomes," *International Journal of Stress Management* 13, 3 (2006): 329-50.

status than a recorded voice using a southern dialect.⁷ A recent study on higher education by North Carolina State University revealed that students using a southern or Appalachian dialect encountered discrimination on campus based on *how* they sound.⁸ Participants in that study reported peers and sometimes even faculty and staff drawing negative assumptions about their intelligence and academic acumen based on how they spoke.

Research has also indicated gender-related assumptions based on the sound of a person's voice. This has been particularly important for those working with the trans community. A recent report on discrimination experienced by transgender persons noted how members of the trans community have reported prejudice based on the sound of their voices.⁹ Anecdotally, members of the trans community have spoken about training the sounds of their voices to match their gender identities as an important part of the transition process.¹⁰

Clearly hearers make assumptions and judgments about a speaker based on the way he/she sounds when he/she speaks.

7. Megan A. Gold, "Learners' attitudes toward second language dialectal variations and their effects on listening comprehension," *Hawaii Pacific University TESOL Working Paper Series* 13 (2015): 18-30; Taylor Philipps, "Put your money where your mouth is: The effects of southern vs. standard accent on perceptions of speakers," *The Stanford Undergraduate Research Journal*, 9, 1 (2010): 53-7. Retrieved from <https://web.stanford.edu/group/journal/cgi-bin/wordpress/wp-content/uploads/2011/09/SURJ9.pdf>.

8. Stephany Brett Dunstan and Audrey J. Jaeger, "Dialect and influences on the academic experiences of college students," *The Journal of Higher Education* 86, 5 (2015): 777-803.

9. Jaime M. Grant, Lisa A. Mottet, Justin Tanis, et al., *Injustice at Every Turn: A Report of the National Transgender Discrimination Survey* (Washington: National Center for Transgender Equality and National Gay and Lesbian Task Force, 2011).

10. For some particularly interesting examples, see the public radio podcast "Three Transgender Opera Singers on the Risks They Took to Live Authentically," *The California Report Magazine* (Sept. 13, 2019). Retrieved from https://one.npr.org/?sharedMediaId=760772517:760772519&fbclid=IwAR1CGM7uPpvmFBFBIVn1Qd7bru_6bU_OoqFuezg81W156FDBTL01vxZz5Gs.

Some Homiletical Background

Surprisingly, when it comes to preaching, not much attention has been paid in the past to how preachers sound. When homileticians write about preaching, they typically focus on content and/or delivery, but not necessarily on how a preacher sounds, beyond volume, enunciation, and pacing (key aspects of sermon delivery). This has been pointed out previously by a few writers, notably those who focus on feminist and womanist preachers.¹¹

In fact, it seems that almost the only researchers who have focused on this aspect of preaching have been female homileticians or authors who specialize in female preachers. As regards the latter, that is women in preaching, the sound of the voice is not a new concern. Historically, there have been documented cases of women who preached in churches and who did so trying to sound more like men in order to be taken more seriously by congregants.¹²

This Current Study

This study was intended to evaluate how church-goers evaluate clergy preachers based solely on the sound of the preachers' voices, and how those evaluations or judgments vary across regional, gender, cultural, and racial lines.

The first step was to determine along what lines preachers should be evaluated. As of yet, there is no widely-held consensus on, nor single authoritative work on, the list

11. Consider the work of Mary Donovan Turner and Mary Lin Hudson, *Saved from Silence: Finding Women's Voice in Preaching* (St. Louis, MO: Chalice Books, 2014); Jennifer E. Copeland, *Feminine Registers: The importance of Women's Voices for Christian Preaching* (Eugene, OR: Cascade, 2014); and Lisa L. Thompson, *Ingenuity: Preaching as an Outsider* (Nashville: Abingdon, 2018).

12. Catherine A. Brekus, *Strangers and Pilgrims: Female Preaching in America, 1740-1845* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1998).

of attributes of a preacher. Yet, many homileticians in their respective books on the basics of preaching do cover various qualities of a preacher. From a survey of major preaching texts for mainline Christian denominations in America¹³, I compiled a list of ten attributes expected of a preacher:

1. Authority (Does the preacher seem like an authority on the topic?)¹⁴
2. Belief (Does the preacher really believe or have faith in what he/she is saying?)¹⁵
3. Informed/Preparedness (Is the preacher informed and prepared for the sermon?)¹⁶
4. Passion (Is the preacher passionate about the subject?)¹⁷
5. Approachability/Accessibility (Do hearers find the preacher to be approachable or accessible?)¹⁸
6. Pastoral (Does the preacher sound pastoral in the sermon?)¹⁹
7. Relatability/Applicability (Can hearers relate to what the preacher is saying?)²⁰

13. David Buttrick, *Homiletic* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1987); Fred B. Craddock, *Preaching* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon, 1985); David L. Larsen, *Telling the Old, Old Story* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 1995); Thomas G. Long, *The Witness of Preaching* (2nd ed., Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 2005).

14. Buttrick, 239-50; Craddock, 24 & 216-7; Long, 47.

15. Buttrick, 256; Craddock, 14 & 24; Larsen, 134-6.

16. Craddock, 20; Larsen, 62 & 135; Long, 57.

17. Buttrick, 334-5; Craddock, 24 & 220-1; Larsen, 131-2; Long, 35.

18. Buttrick, 187-8; Craddock, 25; Long, 31-3.

19. Craddock, 90-94; Larsen, 169-70; Long, 22-3 & 53.

20. Buttrick, 454-5; Larsen, 256; Long, 40-41.

8. Education (Is the preacher educated about the subject?)²¹
9. Intelligence (Does the preacher sound intelligent?)²²
10. Effective Communication (Does the preacher communicate effectively?)²³

There are many possibilities for demographics to compare in this sort of study, specially when considering not only regional variants, but variants among English speaking countries, racial and ethnic groups, gender, etc. For this study, the scope was narrowed to five target demographic groups. Three of them were regional: Midwestern (using Generalized American Dialect), New England, the Deep South²⁴, and the others focusing on cultural (British vs. American) and racial (Black vs. White).

Based on the available research and informal conversations with preachers and congregants, several hypotheses were formed about preachers from these demographic backgrounds:

1. English preachers are perceived to be more educated than American preachers.
2. English preachers are perceived to be more intelligent than American preachers.
3. Southern preachers are perceived to be less intelligent than Northern and Midwestern preachers.

21. Buttrick, 19-20; Craddock, 184-5; Larsen, 144-146; Long, 57.

22. Buttrick, 459; Craddock, 58-59; Larsen, 56; Long, 13 & 20.

23. Buttrick, 135-40; Craddock, 215-219; Larsen, 66; Long, 19-20 & 30.

24. Interpreted in the more conservative framework to include only Mississippi, Louisiana, Georgia, Alabama, and South Carolina.

4. Southern preachers are perceived to be less educated than Northern and Midwestern preachers.
5. Black preachers are perceived to be less educated than white preachers.
6. Black preachers are perceived to be more passionate than white preachers.
7. Black preachers are perceived to have more conviction/to believe more than white preachers.
8. Female preachers are perceived to be more approachable than male preachers.
9. Female preachers are perceived to be more pastoral than male preachers.
10. Male preachers are perceived to be more authoritative than female preachers.

This quantitative study aimed to test these hypotheses, as well as to identify other significant differences and trends in how people evaluate preachers based solely on the sound of their voice.

Method

Instrument

In designing the study, vocal samples were prepared. A male and a female preacher were selected from each of these demographics. All preachers were ordained presbyters in the canonical Episcopal Church (or, in the case of English preachers, in the Church of England). Each was asked to provide an audio recording, in which the presbyter preached a provided script text as though it was part of his/her own sermon, utilizing his/her own typical cadence, pacing, volume, pitch, etc. The same script text was provided to all the preacher volunteers and was taken from the middle of the Rev. Dr.

Martin Luther King, Jr.'s sermon "But If Not,"²⁵ resulting in a roughly 30-second sound clip:

But let me move now to the basic point of the message. Know this morning, if we forget everything I've said--I hope you won't forget this--It came to the point after saying, "Our God is able to deliver us from the burning fiery furnace, but, if he doesn't deliver us, we still are not going to bow."

To facilitate data collection, a survey was created on the Qualtrics XM platform.

After an informed consent disclaimer, respondents would be asked to complete basic questions about their backgrounds. Then, they would be instructed to listen to the vocal samples and rate each on the previously-mentioned ten attributes of a preacher, using a 10-point Likert-type scale.

Using the data from this present study, these 10 factors, representing 10 attributes of a preacher, demonstrated strong internal consistency (Cronbach's $\alpha = .973$, $n = 1780$) with no clustering of subfactors. The factor loading for each attribute relative to the whole measure is reflected in the Component Matrix, shown in Table 1 below:

Table 1.

Factor	Factor Loading
Education	.900
Intelligence	.909
Pastorality	.883
Passion	.858
Belief	.880
Relatability	.906
Preparedness	.912
Approachability	.880
Authoritativeness	.919
Communication Effectiveness	.926

25. Martin Luther King Jr., "But If Not" (sermon, Ebenezer Baptist Church, Atlanta, Georgia, November 5, 1967), <http://notoriousbiggins.blogspot.com/2010/01/but-if-not-sermon-by-martin-luther-king.html>.

To make the aim of the survey less obvious and thus to minimize the potential for confirmation bias, filler questions about various aspects of preaching were mixed into the survey. To control for question order bias, Qualtrics randomized both the order the attributes appeared for each vocal sample rating and randomized the order of all questions after the introductory demographics section.

The resulting survey comprised 39 questions, including an acknowledgement of the Informed Consent Disclosure; some of these questions had multiple parts, such as the rating of the 10 attributes for a vocal sample. (See Appendix A for the full survey.) All questions were required to be completed before moving forward to the next question. Additionally, the questions featuring audio or visual clips had an embedded timer function, so that a respondent could not click forward without allowing the full clip to play. The average length of time for completing the survey was 29.67²⁶ minutes.

Participants

Episcopal congregations, both urban and rural in location, from the same demographics (the Midwest, the Deep South, New England, Historic Black Episcopal congregations, and Church of England congregations) were invited to complete an online survey via the Qualtrics platform. The Deep South and New England were chosen because of their distinctive dialects, which would help examine potential differences across regional lines. The Midwest was chosen because its residents generally use and are surrounded by those using Generalized American English;²⁷ for this reason they could

26. $M=29.67$, $SD=9.53$.

27. John C. Wells, *Accents of English* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1982); Robert Delaney, "Dialects and Sub-Dialects of American English in the 48 conterminous states," *The Washington Post*, May 24, 2015.

function as a control group, if needed, for some analyses and comparisons. The Historic Black congregations were chosen to examine potential differences across racial lines, and the British congregations were chosen to examine potential differences across cultural and international lines.

Congregations were contacted through their clergy staff, most often through a notice in their email and printed parish announcements. All responses were collected electronically, with participants accessing a web address provided in the announcement that would direct them to the Internet-based Qualtrics software platform. Participants were assured that while demographic questions were added, including the congregation from which they came (for additional demographic data), no other individual identifying information, such as ip addresses, was collected.

In total 94 parishes were invited to participate, and members from 42 parishes actually completed surveys (a 44.7% response rate, in terms of congregations). Qualtrics only recorded data from surveys that were fully completed. As part of the selection criteria, and to avoid potential confirmation bias, only data from lay respondents was included in statistical analyses, meaning that 12 surveys submitted by clergy and quasi clergy (members of monastic societies and seminarians)—who likely preach regularly and whose perspective on preachers might confound the experience and views of lay church-goers—were excluded from the study. The remaining total of 178 surveys from lay respondents provided the data for this study. Table 2 representing the descriptive data of these 178 lay respondents follows:

Table 2. Characteristics of Respondents ($n = 178$)

Variable	<i>n</i>	%
<i>Gender</i>		
Male	55	30.9%
Female	122	68.5%
Other	1	0.6%
<i>Age</i>		
< 25	1	0.6%
25 - 39	20	11.2%
40 - 54	28	15.7%
55 - 73	104	58.4%
> 73	25	14.0%
<i>Education</i>		
High School Diploma/GED or less	7	3.9%
Some college	26	14.6%
Bachelor's degree	54	30.3%
Master's degree	65	36.5%
Doctoral/Professional Degree	26	14.6%
<i>Socio-Economic Status</i>		
Lower	14	7.9%
Lower-Middle	25	14.0%
Upper-Middle	108	60.7%
Upper	20	11.2%
<i>Nationality</i>		
US	140	78.7%
UK	30	16.9%
Other	8	4.5%
<i>Ethnicity</i>		
White	160	89.9%
Black	16	9.0%
Other	2	1.1%
<i>Demographic Category</i>		
Midwest (US)	38	21.3%
New England (US)	52	29.2%
Deep South (US)	45	25.3%
Historic Black Congregation (US)	18	10.1%
British Congregation (UK)	25	14.0%
<i>Parish Locale Type</i>		
Rural	64	36.0%
Urban	114	64.0%
<i>Length of Affiliation</i>		
Lifelong Episcopalian/Anglican	76	42.7%
20 years or more as an Episcopalian/Anglican	58	32.6%
<20 years as an Episcopalian	44	24.7%
<i>Mobility (Are you still residing in the region where you grew up?)</i>		
Yes	122	68.5%
No	56	31.5%

The demographics give a relatively accurate snapshot of the Episcopal Church's active membership. Notably more respondents were women than men (68.5% vs. 30.9%). Even though persons of color were intentionally sought, most of respondents were white (89.9% vs. 10.1%). Baby boomers were by far the most significant generation represented (58.4%) with much lower representation of the youngest generations. The distribution of education and wealth level skewed upwards. All of the demographic trends of respondents follow the general trends observed in the Episcopal Church by polling data.²⁸

Results

At the conclusion of the time window for collecting responses, the dataset was exported from the Qualtrics platform, and version 26.0 of IBM's SPSS was used for all statistical analyses.

Table 3 reports the descriptive statistics for the 178 participants' ratings of each of the preachers who provided sermon samples. In addition to 10 attributes of preaching rated in the survey, a composite score ("Total") was calculated. The means and standard deviations of those scores are provided in the Table, which provides a glimpse into how the various preachers' ratings compared to those of others. Particular note was taken of any instances where a preacher was rated noticeably higher or lower than the others or where the spread of scores (indicated by the standard deviation, in participation) was greater than others.

28. Pew Research Center, *Religious Landscape Study: Members of the Episcopal Church* (Washington, DC: 2019), <https://www.pewforum.org/religious-landscape-study/religious-denomination/episcopal-church/>.

Table 3. Descriptive Statistics for Preacher Attribute Ratings. ($N=178$)

		Education	Intelligence	Pastorality	Passion	Belief	Relatability	Preparedness/ Informedness	Approachability	Authoritativeness	Communication Effectiveness	Total
Midwest (GenAm)	<i>Male</i>	6.63 (2.28)	6.69 (2.15)	5.64 (2.40)	5.20 (2.48)	6.02 (2.50)	5.56 (2.47)	6.28 (2.28)	5.72 (2.37)	5.92 (2.38)	6.11 (2.42)	5.98 (2.13)
	<i>Female</i>	7.01 (1.98)	7.02 (2.11)	6.29 (2.30)	5.87 (2.23)	6.53 (2.22)	6.78 (2.12)	6.71 (2.15)	6.75 (2.08)	6.30 (2.14)	6.85 (2.09)	6.60 (1.94)
New England	<i>Male</i>	5.75 (2.29)	5.89 (2.27)	5.04 (2.34)	5.93 (2.48)	6.18 (2.26)	5.01 (2.46)	6.07 (2.22)	4.80 (2.39)	5.72 (2.17)	5.80 (2.44)	5.62 (2.07)
	<i>Female</i>	7.26 (2.07)	7.29 (2.12)	5.88 (2.35)	6.81 (2.33)	7.21 (2.17)	6.29 (2.48)	7.12 (2.05)	6.14 (2.49)	6.87 (2.12)	7.03 (2.19)	6.79 (2.00)
Deep South	<i>Male</i>	6.24 (2.20)	6.27 (2.12)	5.67 (2.29)	5.84 (2.31)	6.48 (2.23)	5.32 (2.48)	6.43 (2.12)	5.49 (2.33)	6.06 (2.24)	6.35 (2.27)	6.02 (1.99)
	<i>Female</i>	6.18 (2.16)	6.33 (2.13)	5.78 (2.29)	5.77 (2.30)	6.25 (2.26)	5.79 (2.33)	6.26 (2.17)	6.12 (2.27)	5.98 (2.14)	6.13 (2.25)	6.06 (2.00)
African American	<i>Male</i>	5.06 (2.29)	5.04 (2.27)	4.29 (2.25)	4.13 (2.26)	4.72 (2.37)	3.93 (2.25)	5.04 (2.23)	4.21 (2.28)	4.57 (2.19)	4.43 (2.26)	4.54 (2.01)
	<i>Female</i>	6.12 (2.20)	6.12 (2.31)	5.65 (2.34)	5.88 (2.50)	6.32 (2.43)	5.75 (2.52)	6.03 (2.39)	5.89 (2.44)	5.80 (2.27)	6.07 (2.41)	5.96 (2.18)
British	<i>Male</i>	6.43 (2.09)	6.25 (2.19)	5.40 (2.33)	5.10 (2.38)	5.87 (2.27)	5.33 (2.37)	6.24 (2.11)	5.57 (2.36)	5.80 (2.24)	5.83 (2.36)	5.78 (2.00)
	<i>Female</i>	6.07 (2.17)	6.16 (2.19)	5.29 (2.50)	4.45 (2.26)	5.22 (2.35)	5.37 (2.52)	5.76 (2.11)	5.83 (2.48)	5.18 (2.28)	5.40 (2.24)	5.47 (2.07)

* Notes: $N=178$. Means shown with Standard Deviations in parentheses.

To test the primary hypotheses, *t*-tests for dependent means were calculated, yielding some interesting results. While it was hypothesized that English preachers would be perceived as both more educated and more intelligent than American preachers, the opposite was actually true among participants in this study. American respondents rated British preachers ($M=6.33$, $SD=1.964$) as less educated than American preachers ($M=6.59$, $SD=1.779$).¹ And, American respondents rated British preachers ($M=6.35$, $SD=1.992$) as less intelligent than American preachers ($M=6.65$, $SD=1.843$).²

The negative stereotypes of Southern voices, however, appeared to persist in this study. Southern preachers ($M=6.30$, $SD=1.917$) were rated as sounding less intelligent than non-Southern preachers ($M=6.72$, $SD=1.764$).³ Southern preachers were also rated as sounding less educated than other American preachers ($M=6.59$, $SD=1.779$).⁴ Among Southern respondents, however, there was no significant difference in how Southern and non-Southern preachers were rated for either intelligence⁵ or education.⁶ In fact, Southern respondents rated the Southern preachers slightly higher for sounding intelligent, though this difference was not statistically significant.⁷

Racial discrimination also occurred among respondents. White Americans rated black preachers ($M=5.66$, $SD=2.028$) as sounding less educated than white preachers

1. $t(134)=-2.731$, $p<.01^{**}$

2. $t(134)=-3.158$, $p<.01^{**}$

3. $t(177)=-4.315$, $p<.001^{***}$

4. $t(177)=-4.343$, $p<.001^{***}$

5. Southern $\mu=6.31$, $\sigma=2.040$; non-Southern American $\mu=6.29$, $\sigma=1.746$; $t(44)=-.114$, $p=.910$

6. Southern $\mu=6.16$, $\sigma=2.075$; non-Southern American $\mu=6.23$, $\sigma=1.635$; $t(44)=-.435$, $p=.666$

7. See footnote no. 33.

($M=6.51$, $SD=1.722$).⁸ Black respondents did not rate them significantly differently.⁹ Unsurprisingly, white Americans also rated black preachers ($M=5.49$, $SD=2.061$) as sounding less intelligent than white preachers ($M=6.49$, $SD=1.744$).¹⁰ Again, black respondents did not rate them as being significantly different.¹¹

Interestingly, despite the common trope of black churches and black preaching, white Americans rated black preachers ($M=5.02$, $SD=1.957$) as sounding *less* passionate than white preachers ($M=5.68$, $SD=1.669$).¹² Black respondents rated them no differently.¹³ When it came to conviction and level of belief or faith, white Americans rated black preachers ($M=5.58$, $SD=1.987$) as sounding less believing than white preachers ($M=6.28$, $SD=1.658$).¹⁴ Here yet again, black respondents did not rate them significantly differently.¹⁵

Interestingly although the UK may be perceived as being further along with racial equality than the US, these same trends were observed among British respondents:

- White preachers ($M=6.14$, $SD=1.428$) were rated as more intelligent than black preachers ($M=5.25$, $SD=1.706$).¹⁶

8. $t(152)=7.862$, $p<.001$ ***

9. Black $\mu=6.81$, $\sigma=1.545$; white $\mu=7.28$, $\sigma=1.375$; $t(17)=1.760$, $p=.096$

10. $t(125)=-7.690$, $p<.001$ ***

11. Black $\mu=6.73$, $\sigma=1.602$; white $\mu=7.53$, $\sigma=1.643$; $t(14)=-1.555$, $p=.142$

12. $t(152)=-5.527$, $p<.001$ ***

13. Black preachers $\mu=5.69$, $\sigma=1.619$; white preachers $\mu=5.98$, $\sigma=1.278$; $t(17)=-7.27$, $p=.477$

14. $t(152)=6.352$, $p<.001$ ***

15. Black preachers $\mu=6.31$, $\sigma=1.775$; white preachers $\mu=6.61$, $\sigma=1.417$; $t(17)=.867$, $p=.398$

16. $t(29)=-3.773$, $p<.01$ **

- White preachers ($M=6.14$, $SD=1.511$) were rated as better educated than black preachers ($M=5.18$, $SD=1.523$).¹⁷
- White preachers ($M=5.96$, $SD=1.513$) were rated as more believing than black preachers ($M=5.17$, $SD=2.159$).¹⁸

There was no statistically significant difference on how they rated the preachers' levels of passion.¹⁹

When it came to gender differences, as hypothesized female preachers ($M=6.14$, $SD=1.760$) were rated as more approachable than the male preachers ($M=5.16$, $SD=1.724$).²⁰ Female preachers ($M=5.78$, $SD=1.818$) were also perceived as more pastoral than their male counterparts ($M=5.21$, $SD=1.730$).²¹ And, contrary to expectation, female preachers ($M=6.03$, $SD=1.714$) were also rated as *more authoritative* than male preachers ($M=5.61$, $SD=1.757$).²² Additionally, the female preachers also outranked the males in several other areas: level of belief,²³ relatability,²⁴ informedness,²⁵ and in effective communication.²⁶ It is worth noting that female preachers were rated significantly higher on all these areas *even* by male respondents.

17. $t(29)=-4.296$, $p<.001$ ***

18. $t(29)=-2.418$, $p<.05$ * ($=.022$)

19. Black preachers $\mu=4.77$, $\sigma=2.092$; white preachers $\mu=5.22$, $\sigma=1.585$; $t(29)=-1.537$, $p=.135$

20. $t(177)=-10.077$, $p<.001$ ***

21. $t(177)=-6.336$, $p<.001$ ***

22. $t(177)=-5.164$, $p<.001$ ***

23. Female $\mu=6.31$, $\sigma=1.741$; male $\mu=5.86$, $\sigma=1.712$; $t(177)=-4.790$, $p<.001$ ***

24. Female $\mu=6.00$, $\sigma=1.812$; male $\mu=5.03$, $\sigma=1.758$; $t(177)=-9.671$, $p<.001$ ***

25. Female $\mu=6.38$, $\sigma=1.758$; male $\mu=6.01$, $\sigma=1.721$; $t(177)=-5.037$, $p<.001$ ***

26. Female $\mu=6.30$, $\sigma=1.659$; male $\mu=5.70$, $\sigma=1.705$; $t(177)=-6.965$, $p<.001$ ***

Some other significant differences became apparent when comparing American preachers with English preachers. Not only were American preachers rated higher for sounding intelligent and educated than English preachers, but they also were rated as sounding more believing ($M=6.22, SD=1.621$ vs. $M=5.54, SD=1.942$),²⁷ more passionate ($M=5.68, SD=1.615$ vs. $M=4.78, SD=1.932$),²⁸ and more effective communicators ($M=6.10, SD=1.602$ vs. $M=5.52, SD=1.980$).²⁹

Some weak, positive correlations between the degree of similarity³⁰ between a preacher and respondent and how that respondent rated that preacher were observed, but caution is needed as these correlations explain only slight amount of the variance in the data:

Table 4. Correlations between Similarity Score³¹ and Attribute Rating ($n=1780$)

Attribute	Pearson's r	Significance
Education	.077	.001**
Intelligence	.089	.000***
Pastorality	.100	.000***
Passion	.063	.008**
Belief	.063	.008**
Relatability	.108	.000***
Preparedness	.088	.000***
Approachability	.115	.000***
Authoritativeness	.066	.006**
Communication Effectiveness	.081	.001**
Overall Rating	.095	.000***

27. $t(177)=-6.896, p<.001$ ***

28. $t(177)=-8.643, p<.001$ ***

29. $t(177)=-4.452, p<.001$ ***

30. A similarity score was calculated by awarding a point (1.0) for each characteristic a respondent shared with a preacher: nationality, gender, ethnicity, geographic region, etc., and this figure was used to look for trends in the data.

31. See previous footnote.

To a limited degree, it seems, the more similar a preacher is to a respondent, the more likely that the respondent is to rate that preacher on an attribute, but again this only factors in slightly in the rating a respondent assigns. Numerous other factors, a number of which may not have been captured in this dataset, influence the rating given by a respondent.

Attempts were made to fit the data to some predictive model in the hopes of finding what factors drive the way a respondent rates a preacher, but no statistically valid models could be found. This means that while a number of significant differences and trends were observed in how respondents of various backgrounds rated different preachers' voices, the data collected did not yield any substantial insights into how one might predict a given respondent's rating of a preacher on any particular attribute.

Discussion

Overall the data from this study demonstrate that hearers do, in fact, make different assumptions about a preacher based solely on the way he/she sounds. In this study's design, every reasonable effort was taken to isolate the sound of the preacher's voice from other factors that might confound the results. (For instance, the preachers all worked from the exact same words in the same script, so their own writing style or creativity would not influence the perceptions of respondents.)

This is not the case with most real life preaching events. The way a church-goer in the pews perceives a preacher and estimates how he/she rates along the various attributes is affected by a number of factors in addition to how the preacher sounds. The quality and length of the relationship between the hearer and the preacher and the hearer's knowledge

of the preacher's background, training, and years of experience undoubtedly affect how the hearer evaluates the preacher's approachability, relatability, pasteurality, etc.

The clergy interviews in the qualitative component covered in the next chapter will examine how transplanted clergy have experienced the transition and the trends observed in this quantitative study. The findings of this research do indicate that *how* a preacher sounds is an important homiletical consideration that should be paid attention to by both preachers and homileticians. How biases represented by these findings might be mitigated will be discussed in the final chapter of this dissertation.

Limitations

It is important to note that this study had its limitations. First, although it had a healthy number of respondents with which to draw reliable statistical results, it did not draw from as many voices as expected. With even more input, especially from immigrants; persons of color, and millennials, other trends might have emerged.

Second, although the study design tried to control for many confounding variables, it did not have any control over the quality of the audio samples prepared by the volunteer preachers. Because these were not collected in a sound studio, the clips presented to respondents varied in quality, volume, level of ambient noise, etc. These factors may also have influenced the respondents as they evaluated the preachers, as pointed out by previous research.³²

32. W. Michael Sowards, "In Defense of Communicating God's Word: Conversational Preaching – How an Understanding of Interpersonal Communications Theory Can Improve Our Preaching," (DMin dissertation, University of the South, 2017).

Further Research Opportunities

To make this study feasible, the scope and number of variables measured had to be limited and focused. Future research might consider how congregants from other demographic regions of the United States might evaluate preachers, how congregants from other Christian denominations evaluate preachers, and how other cultural and ethnic demographic groups (Latinos, European immigrants, etc.) might differ from the predominantly Anglo pool this study drew from.

Chapter Three

Qualitative Insights from Clergy

Introduction

From the data gathered in the quantitative study, it is clear that church-goers do make judgments about preachers based on how they sound. They make assumptions about the preacher's authority, education, intelligence, approachability, pastoral skills, and more.

The next step in this research was to examine the situation from the other side: the preacher's perspective. One of the times these assumptions would be most relevant would be when a congregation received a new clergy person. At that point in the pastoral relationship, the congregation has no previous experience of the particular clergy person to fall back on and members know little, if anything, about the clergy person and his/her background. When encountering those first sermons from this new preacher, the way a preacher sounds may be particularly influential.

The next question at this step of the project was how preachers have recently experienced and navigated those sorts of judgments following a recent demographic transition.

Method

Study Scope and Criteria

For this qualitative piece of the project, the same demographics were targeted as in the previous chapter: Southern US vs. non-Southern US, white vs. persons of color,

and American vs. British. Interviews with persons who had recently experienced transitions to/from one demographic into another were sought.

Several criteria were required for eligibility in these interviews. First, the clergy person had to be a presbyter in good standing with the canonical Episcopal Church or with the established Anglican churches in the UK. Other traditions, no matter how similar to the Episcopal/Anglican Church, might have different experience with clergy deployment, so they were not eligible. The role of deacons and bishops are distinctive and their respective ministries different in nature and character from those of priests in pastoral roles, so only priests in presbyter orders were eligible.

The transition also needed to be more recent, within the past three years or less. The experience and memories of the transition had to be more salient, so that details would be fresher in the clergy persons' minds, but also so that the information gleaned in this study would be relevant to the current state of clergy ministry.

Clergy were recruited by word of mouth and referrals, primarily through diocesan deployment officers. Each clergy person involved was invited, by phone or by email, to participate in an interview, taking around 20 minutes in length. Clergy persons involved were advised of the eligibility criterion during the invitation, so they could confirm that they met the requirements. The clergy involved were also provided with the standardized questions in advance, so they could have lead time to reflect on their transition experience.

Participants

It was more difficult than expected to find clergy who both met the criteria and were able and willing to be interviewed. The most difficult demographic transitions to

canvass were priests of color transitioning into predominantly white congregations and British clergy who had taken on American parishes. There do not seem to be many instances of white congregations recently hiring black or Latino clergy in the Episcopal Church, and the numbers of British-born clergy who have transferred recently into the Episcopal Church from the Church of England is relatively low in recent years.

After roughly four-months of recruitment and interviews in the autumn of 2019, a total of 12 priests were interviewed for this segment of the project. Table 5 below describes the characteristics of these clergy:

Table 5. Characteristics of Clergy Interviewed ($n = 12$)

Variable	<i>n</i>	%
<i>Gender</i>		
Male	9	75.0%
Female	3	25.0%
<i>Generation</i>		
Millennial	4	33.3%
GenX	6	50.0%
Boomer	2	16.7%
<i>Demographic Origin</i>		
Northern US	3	25.0%
Southern US	6	50.0%
Western US	1	8.3%
UK	1	8.3%
Latin American	1	8.3%
<i>Nationality</i>		
American	10	83.3%
British	1	8.3%
Latin American	1	8.3%
<i>Ethnicity</i>		
White	10	83.3%
Black	1	8.3%
Latino	1	8.3%

Among these participating clergy, the average age was 47.¹ These clergy had been

1. $M=46.50$, $SD=12.76$.

serving in ordained ministry for an average of 12 years², with the average tenure at the current congregation being 1.67 years³.

Their transitions represented the demographics mentioned earlier, with a goal of interviewing two clergy for each target transition type. A full breakdown of the transitions represented can be found in Table 6 below.

Table 6. Transitions Studied ($n = 12$)

Demographic Transition			n	%
Southern US	to	Northern US	2	16.7%
Northern US	to	Southern US	2	16.7%
US	to	UK	2	16.7%
UK	to	US	1	8.3%
Person of Color	to	Predominantly White	2	16.7%
White/Non-Latino	to	Historic Black Parish	3	25.0%

Interview

The interviews were conducted via telephone, with the exception of one interview which was done by email correspondence at the request of the interviewee. On average the interviews lasted 27 minutes.⁴ Each interviewee was asked the same basic 13 questions (see Appendix C); at times, some follow up questions were required for clarification or explanation.

Analysis

Interviews were recorded with the permission of the clergy interviewee and the conversations were transcribed through Happy Scribe.⁵ The observations and descriptions from the clergy interviewees were initially sorted into four categories:

2. $M=12.16$, $SD=10.43$.

3. $M=1.67$, $SD=0.74$.

4. $M=27.47$, $SD=9.81$.

5. <http://happyscribe.co>.

- (1) Their **experience** of coming as outsiders, demographically, to the new congregation;
- (2) The **biases** they encountered; primarily biases the congregation made about them as an outsider, but also biases they became aware that they had about the congregation;
- (3) **adaptations** they made to their preaching, whether in content, form, style, or delivery; and
- (4) **advice** they would offer to others who might consider similar demographic transitions.

To help visually illustrate the themes and key words with which participants described their experiences, a word cloud was generated for each of the four categories with the text from the transcripts using online software.⁶ The software removes numbers and common words, and represents each word relative to its recurrence, with the most recurring words in the largest text. Additionally, for this project, the obvious words related to preaching generically, namely “preacher”, “sermon”, “congregation,” and “church” were also omitted. To make trends more observable, the software also aggregates variations of the same word into a single entry, so “story” and “stories” become a single “story”, and “South”, “Southern”, and “Southerner(s)” are all considered under the entry, “South.”

6. <http://www.WordArt.com>.

shows, films, music) each typically consumed, but other differences were more significant.

One preacher described feeling like her experience growing up was entirely different from that of the congregation, saying, “I would never understand completely their experience.” Another described feeling an initial disconnect with parishioners. By way of example, he said that a patriarch of the parish had given him a regional pronunciation guide while smiling, but he noted that it clearly seemed to indicate that he stuck out in that context as an outsider.

Generally speaking, all of the interviewed clergy also indicated that their congregation had its own unique qualities because of its demographic background. A southern priest described her new northern congregation as being more “thoughtfully engaged” with sermons than her previous, southern, congregation. On the other hand, a northern priest noted that his new southern congregation had different sermon expectations than his previous congregation in the north; this southern congregation wanted sermons that were less academic and more practical. Similarly several clergy noted that southern parishioners seemed to be more comfortable talking about Jesus outside of church than northern parishioners, who regarded talking about faith outside of church as distinctively “evangelical.”

When it came to differences between historic black congregations and predominantly white congregations, several characteristics were reported. White preachers experienced more immediate biofeedback throughout the sermon, when preaching at black congregations. White preachers also felt like black congregations gave more priority to Scripture and wrestling with the biblical text than white congregations

they had previously served. One priest, serving a historic black parish in an underprivileged area, noted that it was much easier to preach social justice in a black congregation than in a white congregation, in which he had felt a need to “massage” the congregation to receive Jesus’ more socially radical statements about wealth, power, etc.

All of the clergy interviewed noted that their new congregations had particularly local identity which required some learning and sensitivity on the part of the new preacher. Some of the clergy noted that colloquialisms and slang varied from culture to culture, with some words actually acquiring a completely opposite or sometimes offensive meaning in the new context. They also realized they were watching, listening to, and reading different things than their congregations, and as a result a common stumbling block was the use of illustrative material which did not resonate with local members.

Regardless of their new congregation’s context, the clergy all reported in some way to feeling a need to study carefully the new local culture, to learn new idioms and colloquialisms, and to try to take in some of the local media. One preacher noted that doing so made him feel “more like a part of the community.”

A number of the clergy interviewed noted that, despite demographic differences that do exist, there are also many commonalities in the core issues English congregations face, and that people from one congregation to the next are also alike in many ways.

A congregation’s history also makes a difference. Several clergy also noted that their transition was likely made easier, and the differences less stark, if the congregation had previously been served a clergy person from a different demographic background.

In some regards, female clergy were assumed to be less effective leaders by congregations. One priest particularly noted comments some male parishioners made about women being “poor managers of financial matters” and not being good at fundraising. (The priest in question, however, actually had a proven track record of significant fundraising outcomes and experience cleaning up finances at her previous parish.)

In international congregations, assumptions about Americans reflected certain depictions of the United States in film and social media. Americans were thought to be “arrogant”, “selfish”, “pushy”, and to be “bullies”. Stereotypes were also evident among Americans when it came to clergy who were foreign nationals. Latin American clergy reported parishioners assuming that the priest was a fan of liberation theology and Oscar Romero. A Latino male priest also reported encountering stereotypes that because he was a man from South America that he was a *machista*, a sexist and a womanizer.

The priest interviewed also related some clear assumptions that American northerners and southerners have about the other. Northern clergy reported the salience of the issue of racism in their new southern context and the lingering memory of the Civil War. One was even asked in the receiving line after church about his views of Robert E. Lee, the great Confederate general in the Civil War. Southern congregations also were perceived by the northern priests interviewed as being somewhat suspicious; one priest said, “It’s like, ‘You Yankees are coming down here to tell us what how to do things?!.’” Northern congregations also made judgments about clergy coming from the south. One southern priest who was interviewed said the congregation, having learned that he was from a very rural southern town, was surprised that he hadn’t been tainted by racism.

There were other assumptions congregations made about clergy. One young priest said he felt parishioners assumed that a young priest coming out of seminary would deliver sermons that were more intellectual and theological but that were less practical or applicable to real life. Another black priest interviewed said he felt like his white congregation expected that “because the rector is _____, we’ll attract people who are _____.”

The congregations were not the only ones with presuppositions. The clergy interviewed admitted that they too had made assumptions about their congregations because of the congregations’ context. One insight reported by many of those interviewed was that the views and personal backgrounds of parishioners were diverse: “The church was not homogenous. Everybody didn’t think the same thing. They were in different places politically even.” Another said it had been a mistake to assume “that this congregation thinks the same way, just because the people look similar.”

One Southern priest, upon taking on a parish in the north, found that in general parishioners in the north were more reserved about talking about the personal faith or mentioning Jesus in conversation, and she made assumptions about their motivations for doing so:

It’s very possible that in the Northeast the faith experience is more of a private thing; it’s lived out in the interior life a bit more. As a southerner, I had a blind spot. I assumed that meant these were people who didn’t share their faith, who believed God only lived in church on Sunday, because there wasn’t cultural conditioning around being expressive and dropping the name of Jesus, the way we’re prone to do in the south. That was an incorrect assumption in my mind.

Similarly, some might assume that racism was more prevalent in the south than in the north, but one of the clergy interviewed discovered otherwise. He was a lifelong southerner who had transitioned to a parish in the northeast. He found that it was not that

story intentionally (and prudently) in sermons, as well as informing their sermon preparation by listening to the stories of parishioners and stories of the local congregation and local community.

When it comes to their own stories, all of the clergy agreed that sharing something about themselves or their background was helpful as they started in their new congregations. It helps the congregation to get to know and trust their new priest. Although a biography might have been published within the new parish, it can be surprising, as one priest said, just how many in the parish are still ignorant about the preacher's background.

But, the clergy interviewed did not advocate using the sermon time to rehash all of their history. Instead, they all agreed that they were careful, intentional, and judicious about what they shared. One priest put it this way, "I do share a few things about my own spiritual life, but not all the warts and all-encompassing family life stuff. But I do use personal anecdotes as people get to know me." Another priest said that she tried to include just a single detail about her life or her background in each sermon in the initial months.

As noted in Chapter 1, Aristotle argued centuries ago that a speaker's character has an impact on the effectiveness of his/her message. In the opinion of at least one of the priests interviewed, confusion or uncertainty about a preacher's background or identity can become an obstacle in the way of congregants fully *hearing* what the preacher has to say. This specific priest, who came to the United States from South America, described it this way, "It's interesting in the United States, there is this need to understand your background before they start digesting what you're saying."

Many of the clergy in this segment of the project had noticeable accents, or dialects, that could indicate their region or culture of origin. Every one of them indicated that, rather than tame that dialect or disguise it, they embraced it as part of their *ethos*. One of the southern priests interviewed said, “I made a point to lean into the fact that I was a Southerner because it was a drastic change for me.” Another southern priest said, “Don’t be afraid of leaning into your southern-ness. It’s sort of charming and interesting, and they’ll get used to it if you present who you truly are.” He said that he even used Southern idioms at times, making sure to define or explain them for the congregation.

In part, their retention of their regional or cultural dialect was for them part of being genuine. One priest put it this way, “This is who I am, and how I interact with people. Because the authenticity is really important in the congregation. There’s no doubt...and actually authenticity can make up for the ways in which your culture is different from their own.” Another priest said that he felt it was best to just embrace the regional background—dialect and all—because “I wasn’t fooling anybody.”

While retaining their own identity and background, they did agree that it was important to study the local culture. In their opinion, preaching that resonates with a congregation must be sensitive to the local context of the hearers. A Latin American preacher working in the US, insisted that understanding the history of a culture was important: “You must know the history of the {place you’re living in}. That’s a dead given...because sometimes we say things that may be hurtful and we just don’t know. There are nuances that are very important to know.” Similarly, a white preacher who had been serving a historic black parish found that understanding history was important for understanding her church: “They had a really strong sense that the black church is

different from the white church, and it really is: Its history is totally different. Its reason for existing is different.”

For the clergy interviewed, the local context also dictated the language that is used and necessitated speaking differently. This is particularly true of colloquial language. A British priest remarked that idioms can be challenging for him when preaching to Americans because some slang phrases have opposite meanings in the UK versus the US. Another foreign national priest noted that some terminology may be acceptable in the preacher’s country of origin but may be considered offensive or derogatory in the States. Both priests said they had adapted their language by creating a sounding board of trusted friends, who could preview the sermon language and make recommendations to avoid potential pitfalls.

The clergy interviewed also emphasized how understanding the local context informed their understanding of what sorts of content would resonate with the lives of the hearers. One priest said that as he settles in, he regularly reassesses whether his sermons are connecting with the congregation: “I’ve gotten into the habit of periodically, every couple of weeks, just doing a check-in, like, ‘You know what sort of sermon I have been preaching lately,’ and doing my best to shift that style....My intention is to really develop relationships and go to deep and painful places together.”

This is especially obvious when it comes to illustrative material in sermons. Nineteenth-century preacher Charles Spurgeon, called “the Prince of Preachers,” wrote to students, “You may build up laborious definitions and explanations and yet leave your hearers in the dark as to your meaning; but a thoroughly suitable metaphor will

wonderfully clear the sense.”⁷ To most help hearers apply the message to their daily life, as illustrations are intended to do, it is important to choose stories, anecdotes, and quotes that will be familiar to them. This can only be done, of course, if the preacher is intentional about digesting the sorts of media that members of the congregation are digesting. But, first the preacher has to immerse him/herself in the local context and begin to seek out media that members of the new parish consume. One American priest now serving in the UK describe it like this, “I’m also learning so much even by contemporary media consumption because there is so much of it. It’s one of the things to be conscious of, like going to the book exchanges in town.” Of course, online social media has made the world seem smaller and has exposed everyone to a broader swath of media, but still there are limitations. A British priest interviewed had this to say, “With Netflix nowadays the world is much smaller, but I still can’t refer to a local soap opera that is purely British.”

More practically speaking, most of the clergy interviewed also reported that they had made adjustments in the delivery of their sermon. Most commonly mentioned was the pace of the sermon. The preachers said that being in a new congregation, from a different cultural or regional background, required them to slow down the speed at which they preached. Several remarked that a voice who sounds *different* to the congregation requires the hearers to listen more carefully and intently. Slowing down, they felt, allowed hearers more time to digest and, in a way, translate what the preacher was saying.

7. Charles Spurgeon, *Lectures to My Students* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1954), 349.

The British preacher interviewed also noted that being cognizant of one's voice went beyond just dialect or accent. He said that in his new parish he had become aware that his voice resonated differently in the new physical space and sounded differently with the new parish's sound system equipment: "I was acutely aware that it's not just my accent but probably more my voice. It resonates a bit more with the sound system. So I had to slow down my delivery a lot more than I was used to. Mainly because the church space is so much larger."

Advice for Others

Finally, at the end of the interview, each clergy person was asked what advice and wisdom they might share with other clergy who were facing a similar demographic transition. Those suggestions will be incorporated with the material in the final chapter of this project.

Discussion

The experiences of the 12 priests interviewed for this project echo the results from the quantitative study in Chapter 2. Clearly there were some assumptions that parishioners made about their new priest, and some of these were based purely on how the person sounded when preaching and presiding. These qualitative observations also remind us that there are assumptions on both sides, with clergy who are outsiders having preconceived notions about what their new congregation thinks or values.

Implications

This qualitative segment is helpful in this project's goal of examining how a preacher's literal voice influences perceptions of hearers because it recounted experiences

of those who were new to their parishes, for whom listening to preaching from their new priest is one of the primary ways most of the parish will get to know him/her. It is in those initial transition months when the biases based on the sound of the preacher's voice will be most influential. By at least being aware of these biases and assumptions, there is hope that a transplanted preacher might, to some degree, mitigate the influence they have. Perhaps offsetting a faulty assumption by tactfully providing factual information in an early sermon. This will be examined more in-depth in the final chapter.

Limitations

While the input gained from these interviews was helpful, it is important to note that it is limited by the representation afforded by these particular clergypersons. It would also be beneficial to consider input from more female preachers and more non-American preachers (British, Latino, etc.).

Chapter Four

A Theological Reflection

In the introductory chapter, three homiletical questions were posed that previously had not been addressed:

- Does how a preacher sounds influence what hearers think?
- How do perceptions about a preacher's background, ethnicity, or culture impact what the congregation hears?
- Should a preacher adjust the way he/she sounds to fit the congregation?

The study in Chapter Two speaks to the first question. Clearly the sound of a preacher does elicit a number of assumptions, or biases, about a preacher from hearers in the congregation. The results may not have been as tidy as the initial hypotheses proposed, but participants in the study did evaluate preachers on various qualities (intelligence, education, approachability, pastorage, etc.) differently based solely on how they sounded.

Practical Implications

One might ask, *But does it really matter what a hearer thinks about a preacher?* Based on the available data from other fields, it would seem so. Looking to research from the medical field, we find studies demonstrating that how a patient feels about a physician affects how well the patient will follow the advice of that doctor regarding a treatment plan.¹ Additional studies have shown that the level of communication by a

1. Willie M. Abel and Jimmy T. Efrid, "The Association between Trust in Health Care Providers and Medication Adherence among Black Women with Hypertension," *Frontiers in Public Health* 1, 66

physician also affects how well a patient sticks to a treatment plan.² There would be reason to believe, then, that the way a hearer feels about a preacher would influence how seriously the hearer takes the preacher's message and follows the preacher's recommendations.

If the hearer regards the preacher as less educated, then the preacher's exegesis of a biblical passage may be viewed with suspicion. If the hearer thinks the preacher does not sound pastoral enough, then the hearer may feel defensive and disregard the sermon's point. If a person in the pew thinks the preacher is less relatable, then that person might disregard the message as out-of-touch or impractical for daily life in the real world.

Moreover, it is possible that a church member's assumptions about a preacher could get in the way of how much of the message the member actually hears and processes. There are studies in the criminal justice field that indicate that one's biases can

(2013), DOI:10.3389/fpubh.2013.00066; Geoffrey C. Nguyen, Thomas A. LaVeist, Mary L. Harris, Lisa W. Datta, Theodore M. Bayless, and Steven R. Brant, "Patient trust-in-physician and race are predictors of adherence to medical management in inflammatory bowel disease," *Inflammatory Bowel Diseases* 15, 8 (2009):1233-910; Raegan W. Durant, Leslie A. McClure, Jewell H. Halanych, Cora E. Lewis, Ronald J. Prineas, Stephen P. Glasser, and Monika M. Safford, "Trust in physicians and blood pressure control in Blacks and Whites being treated for hypertension in the REGARDS study," *Ethnicity & Disease* 20, 3 (2010): 282-9; Keith Elder, Zo Ramamonjarivelo, Jacqueline Wiltshire, Crystal Piper, Wendy S. Horn, Keon L. Gilbert, Sandral Hullett, Jeroan Allison, "Trust, medication adherence, and hypertension control in Southern African American men," *American Journal of Public Health* 102, 12 (2012): 2242-510.

2. Antoinette Schoenthaler, William F. Chaplin, John P. Allegrante, Senaida Fernandez, Marleny Diaz-Gloster, Jonathan N. Tobin, and Gbenga Ogedegbe, "Provider communication effects medication adherence in hypertensive African Americans," *Patient Education Counseling* 75, 2 (2009): 185-91; Antoinette Schoenthaler, John P. Allegrante, William Chaplin, Gbenga Ogedegbe, "The Effect of Patient-Provider Communication on Medication Adherence in Hypertensive Black Patients: Does Race Concordance Matter?" *Annals of Behavioral Medicine* 43, 3 (2012): 372-82; Parvaiz A. Koul, "Effective communication, the heart of the art of medicine," *Lung India* 34, 1 (2017): 95-6.

affect perceptions in vision³ and hearing⁴, and mental health research shows that a patient's biases can negatively impact how much they trust their therapist and embrace treatment.⁵ In another study, researchers found that in situations where it is harder to listen (those with background noise, distractions, etc.), listeners' expectations about what a speaker was going to say determined how well they heard what a speaker actually ended up saying.⁶ By extension, it would make sense that a hearer's assumptions about what a preacher has to offer and what sort of sermon he/she is capable of giving would influence how well the hearer listens during the sermon time.

So, should a preacher be concerned with what those in the pews might be thinking, even if it does impact what they hear or how they understand the message? Or, are those biases just the listeners' concern? For Christian clergy, there is a theological imperative to be concerned about these biases and to respond to them.

A Christian Distinction

Throughout the centuries, especially so in the early Church and in the Reformation, Christianity has been particularly concerned with communicating the Word

3. Keith B. Payne, "Prejudice and perception: The role of automatic and controlled processes in misperceiving a weapon," *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 81, 2 (2001): 181-92; Moshe Bar, "A cortical mechanism for triggering top-down facilitation in visual object recognition," *Journal of Cognitive Neuroscience* 15, 4 (2003): 600-9; Andreana C. Kenrick, Stacey Sinclair, Jennifer Richeson, Sara C. Verosky, and Janetta Lun, "Moving while black: Intergroup attitudes influence judgments of speed," *Journal of Experimental Psychology: General* 145, 2 (2016): 147-54.

4. Molly Babel and Jamie Russell, "Expectations and speech intelligibility," *Journal of the Acoustical Society of America* 137, 5 (2015): 2823-33.

5. Michael J. Constantino, Alice E. Coyne, James F. Boswell, Brittany R. Iles, and Andreea Vișlă, "A meta-analysis of the association between patients' early perception of treatment credibility and their posttreatment outcomes," *Psychotherapy, Evidence-Based Psychotherapy Relationships III* 55, 4 (2018): 486-95.

6. Miriam I. Marrufo-Pérez, Almudena Eustaquio-Martín, Enrique A. Lopez-Poveda, "Speech predictability can hinder communication in difficult listening conditions," *Cognition* 192, 103992 (2019), DOI: 10.1016/j.hears.2019.03.017.

of God as effectively as possible. The importance of the message and communicating it has been a foundational principle of most world religions, but, as Walter Ong notes in the final remarks of his seminal text *Orality and Literacy*, Christianity perhaps places the great primacy of the spoken Word:

For in Christian teaching the Second Person of the One Godhead, who redeemed mankind from sin, is known not only as the Son but also as the Word of God. In this teaching, God the Father utters or speaks His Word, his Son. He does not inscribe him. The very Person of the Son is constituted as the Word of the Father.⁷

As he goes on to note, echoing the spirit of Vatican II,⁸ this belief is intertwined with the belief in Sacred Scripture as the divine Word of God, authored by God. This, of course, is why Christians, and the Protestant tradition in particular, value preaching as so important in the life of the Church.

Ong, in fact, would rank preaching as more important than other, written means of expounding the Scriptures, because in the proclamation of the sermon clergy are doing more than just speaking words aloud. In preaching, they communicate more than words in ink on paper ever could. They communicate something of the preacher's own self, just as God communicated God's self when the Word became flesh in the Incarnation.⁹

Both in the Incarnation and in the sermon, there is an intimate exchange of the word and a giving of one's self. One of the distinctive qualities of Christianity is that it tries to maintain an intimate, personal transmission of God's Word to the person of faith.

7. Walter J. Ong, *Orality and Literacy: Technologizing of the Word* (New York, NY: Routledge, 2002): 175.

8. Second Vatican Council, *Verum Dei*, §13.

9. Walter J. Ong, *The Presence of the Word: Some Prolegomena for Cultural and Religious History* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1967): 179-91.

Throughout time, it has even sought to minimize language as a barrier to understanding God's message.

That is not true of all faiths. Generally speaking, the major world religions sanction only the original languages of their sacred texts as the official texts, even if translations are made into other languages. To wit, the reading of the Torah in any Jewish synagogue is done in Hebrew from the handwritten text that has been painstakingly copied from an older handwritten text. And, to read the official Islamic Qur'an, one has to first know or learn Arabic and then read from the Arabic text. Christianity, however, has always been compelled to convey the Word of God into the common language, in fact into as many common languages as the peoples of the world; and further, the Scriptures are re-translated and re-rendered over time into new colloquial and idiomatic language in an attempt to convey the message in the most meaningful way possible to a reader.¹⁰

Preaching then should be a priority for clergy because they are specially charged with communicating God's Word, and they ought to do so as effectively as possible. The Westminster Catechism captures some of the import of this charge in its introduction to a theology of preaching: "Preaching of the Word, being the Power of God unto Salvation, and one of the greatest and most excellent Works belonging to the Ministry of the Gospel, should so be performed, that the Workman need not be ashamed, but may save himself, and those that hear him."¹¹

10. Robert D. Hughes, III, PhD, email correspondence with author, May 31, 2019.

11. *The Directory for the Publick Worship of God Agreed upon by the Assembly of Divines at Westminster* (Philadelphia, PA: B. Franklin, 1748): 17.

Preaching is so important that in many Christian traditions it is part of the ordination liturgy. In the Episcopal Church, it is mentioned more than once at the ordination of a priest. First, in the charge given by the Bishop as part of the Examination of the candidate, the candidate is specifically reminded of the duty to preach:

As a priest, it will be your task to proclaim by word and deed the Gospel of Jesus Christ, and to fashion your life in accordance with its precepts. You are to love and serve the people among whom you work, caring alike for young and old, strong and weak, rich and poor. **You are to preach**, to declare God's forgiveness to penitent sinners, to pronounce God's blessing, to share in the administration of Holy Baptism and in the celebration of the mysteries of Christ's Body and Blood, and to perform the other ministrations entrusted to you.¹²

Then, then it is implicitly mentioned in one of the ordination vows to “minister the Word of God,”¹³ and again it is explicitly mentioned when the Bishop presents a Bible to the ordinand with the words, “Receive this Bible as a sign of the authority given you to **preach the Word of God** and to administer his holy Sacraments. Do not forget the trust committed to you as a priest of the Church of God.”¹⁴ Clearly in the Episcopal Church, as in other traditions, preaching is an essential part of the work of an ordained presbyter. Clergy then ought to seek to fulfill such a duty as conscientiously and effectively as they can.

Scriptural Paradigms

This is not a new development in the life of the Church; it is something the Church understood to be one of God’s priority since the earliest days of Jesus’ movement. Beginning with the descent of the Holy Spirit upon the Apostles on the Day

12. *The Book of Common Prayer* (New York: Church Publishing, 1979): 531. (emphasis mine)

13. *The Book of Common Prayer* (New York: Church Publishing, 1979): 532.

14. *The Book of Common Prayer* (New York: Church Publishing, 1979): 534. (emphasis mine)

of Pentecost, the writer of the Acts of the Apostles tells us that these humble persons, empowered by divine grace, began to speak in foreign languages. More importantly, they spilled out onto the streets of Jerusalem and the diverse crowd of passers-by, having come from all over to the Holy City for the pilgrimage feast of Shavuot, heard the good news of Jesus Christ proclaimed *in their native languages*:

Now there were devout Jews from every nation under heaven living in Jerusalem. And at this sound the crowd gathered and was bewildered, because each one heard them speaking in the native language of each. Amazed and astonished, they asked, “Are not all these who are speaking Galileans? And how is it that we hear, each of us, in our own native language? Parthians, Medes, Elamites, and residents of Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the parts of Libya belonging to Cyrene, and visitors from Rome, both Jews and proselytes, Cretans and Arabs—in our own languages we hear them speaking about God’s deeds of power.”¹⁵

Luke writes that the crowd is amazed, and after a stirring sermon by Simon Peter, thousands decide to follow Jesus as the Messiah. The passage is rich with details, but some scholars point to this multilingual proclamation of the gospel as the primary point of the story: “Pentecost is about God’s insistence on communicating this Good News in the language most appropriate for intimate discourse, one’s mother tongue.”¹⁶

Perhaps it would have been sufficient for these Spirit-filled followers of Jesus to boldly leave the safety of the Upper Room and begin talking about Jesus in their first languages throughout Jerusalem, but, no, the Holy Spirit empowers them to preach in such a way that all hearers receive the message *in their own language*, in the way that

15. Acts of the Apostles 2:5-11 NRSV.

16. Jonathan J. Bonk, “Beyond Babel: Pentecost and Mission,” *International Bulletin of Missionary Research* 30.2 (April 2006): 58.

would have been most meaningful and accessible to them. God seeks for the message to be proclaimed as effectively as possible.

We should also consider that effective preaching requires, to a degree, adapting the essence of a message from one cultural context into another, and here too the New Testament seems to encourage us to contextualize. Most notably, consider the ministry and witness of the apostle Paul, whom some have raised up as a model for this sort of work.¹⁷

In discussions of Paul's theology of mission, scholars often choose from a number of statements Paul makes throughout his letters. Sadly, in the past the passage found in 1 Corinthians 9:22 was often overlooked, and yet, as far back as 1955, Anglican theologian and priest Henry Chadwick noted that this passage contains important principles for evangelism.¹⁸ A few in the field of missiology have tried to reclaim this passage more recently, such as H. L. Richard: "The commentarial tradition of the Church has not applied this Pauline emphasis on the possession of all things to cross-cultural situations, but it clearly is an underlying principle that allowed Paul in practice to become all things to all men."¹⁹ Some have found it to be foundational framework on which to evangelize in new parts of the world.²⁰ And, I would contend that this passage also has much to say about preaching, offering an essential guiding principle for any discussion on how (and

17. Dean S. Gilliland, *Pauline Theology and Mission Practice* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1983).

18. Henry Chadwick, "'All things to all men' (1 Cor. ix.22)," (1955): 261.

19. H. L. Richard, "All things are yours," *Mission Frontiers* May-June (2011): 13.

20. David Thang Moe, "Themes and methodologies in Pauline missiology for a contemporary world," *Missionalia* 45, 2 (2017): 111.

why) preachers might adapt, and contextualize, their sermon messages to better fit their new congregations.

Becoming All Things to All People

In his first letter to the Corinthians (or at least the first one to preserved in the New Testament canon), Paul at one point lays out his credentials as an apostle, trying to demonstrate that he has been engaged in the apostolic work. As part of the qualities he lists, he describes his philosophy about doing ministry, and he says that he adapts to local contexts in order to make the gospel message as resonant as possible with the local peoples:

To the Jews I became as a Jew, in order to win Jews. To those under the law I became as one under the law (though I myself am not under the law) so that I might win those under the law. To those outside the law I became as one outside the law (though I am not free from God's law but am under Christ's law) so that I might win those outside the law. To the weak I became weak, so that I might win the weak. **I have become all things to all people**, so that I might by any means save some.²¹

Perhaps he is responding to some circulating criticism that he is inconsistent in his approach to the various communities he has visited. (And, to be fair, he may have invited such scrutiny after the way he had earlier engaged Simon Peter at Antioch.²²) But, Paul explains, to the contrary, that he is not being inconsistent, but rather he is *contextualizing* the message for the sake of the gospel mission. This he counts as part of the apostolic mandate.

Borrowing from Aristotle's classical categories in the art of rhetoric, some have even suggested that his contextualization approach makes up part of Paul's ministerial

21. 1 Corinthians 9:20-22 NRSV.

22. See Galatians 2:11-14 NRSV.

ethos: “The passage is confounding if we look for Paul’s biography or an insight into his psychology; we should read instead as part of Paul’s *ēthos*—the rhetorical strategy by which a speaker both defines himself and does so in a way that he hopes will draw the audience’s sympathy.”²³ This especially makes sense when one considers the textual context into which this passage is set:²⁴ Paul’s authority and position as an apostle is being questioned by some, and Paul responds by detailing how he has embodied the work of the gospel.²⁵

His response is compelling, and as a result Paul’s approach endured. In the Patristic era, this passage from Paul’s writings was sometimes applied as a method for the practice of Christian ministry, with all that entails, within local contexts. St. Augustine uses it as a guiding principle for pastoral ministry, but he is careful to distinguish between contextualizing one’s ministry and compromising the integrity of the Faith. For example, in writing to St. Jerome, he says,

You do not require me to teach you in what sense the apostle says, “To the Jews I became as a Jew, that I might gain the Jews,” and other such things in the same passage, which are to be ascribed to the compassion of pitying love, not the artifices of intentional deceit. For he that ministers to the sick becomes as if he were sick himself; not, indeed, falsely pretending to be under the fever, but considering, with the mind of one truly sympathizing, what he would wish done for himself if he were in the sick man’s place.²⁶

23. Laura Nasrallah, “1 Corinthians,” in *Fortress Commentary on the Bible: The New Testament* ed. Margaret Aymer, Cynthia Briggs Kittredge, and David A. Sánchez (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2014): 39-40.

24. Daniel P. Leyrer, “All things to all people: An exegetical study of 1 Corinthians 9:19-23 with application to North American outreach,” presentation at the Kettle Moraine, Milwaukee Metro, Shoreland, Winnebago, and Western Lakes Pastoral Conferences, on September 28, 2004.

25. Some have described this embodiment as “full participation” in the gospel: See Moe, 104.

26. Augustine, Epistle 40:4.

Jerome is clear about not advocating for deceit. He is not suggesting that following Paul's advice would require a cleric pretending to be sick when he/she is not, but that through empathy that cleric frames the entire visit, everything that is said and done, to speak specifically through the viewpoint of the sick one who is visited.

Contextualization and Missiology

This is a careful balance, about which those who study missiology have thought a great deal. On the one hand, it is obviously beneficial to have as much in common as those with whom one speaks about Jesus, and yet Christianity has always held steadfastly to some essential truths, which a faithful missionary would never want to compromise. Undoubtedly there will be some disagreement among theologians and missionaries about where that line should be drawn.

So why risk going too far at all? Because a true sense of Christian mission requires us to adapt the context of the message to make it as relevant and urgent as possible. That is what *contextualization*, at least in the world of Christian missiology, is intended to be. A more formal definition was formulated by Hesselgrave and Rommen as, "The attempt to communicate the person, works, Word, and will of God in a way that is faithful to God's revelation, especially as put forth in the teaching of Holy Scripture, and that is meaningful to respondents in their respective cultural and existential contexts."²⁷ Does that not sound very similar to a definition for preaching?

Another writer put it this way, "Foundational to thesis of this study is the conviction that the missionary's ultimate goal is to communicate the supracultural

27. O. S. Olagunju, "An evaluation of Bevans' models of contextual theology and its contributions to doing theology in the 21st Century Church," *Ogbomosho Journal of Theology* 17, 2 (2012): 40-1.

message of the gospel in culturally relevant terms. The gospel is relevant to all ages, cultures, and peoples, but *it must be contextualized in order for it to be experienced as the living message of God.*²⁸ That surely must resonate with any serious preacher, for any good sermon seeks to do just that!

Adapting and applying the message to the hearers' or readers' immediate context is important in helping them to embody the resurrection life of Jesus, which those doing the work of mission invite them to experience. Questions remain, however: Where do we draw the line between appropriate contextualization and compromising the Faith? How do we evaluate our attempts to apply the gospel to local contexts?

Missiologists have provided some helpful framework, which applies to preaching as well as it does to theology. They remind us to be adaptive in how we explain the story of Jesus, but to do so without jeopardizing its integrity.²⁹ They also provide a necessary word of caution, lest any missionary, or preacher, get overly zealous about fitting in and being accepted by the surrounding culture.³⁰ Another concern is that by being overly eager to fit in, a religious leader might reduce Christ to simply another spiritual figure or tool in a syncretistic spiritual toolbox for the audience. Rather, the first and foremost goal of the task at hand, whether it is Scriptural translation, teaching, theology, or preaching,

28. Daniel A. Rodriguez, "Becoming all things to all Latinos: Case studies in contextualization from the Barrio," *Stone-Campbell Journal* 11, 2 (2008): 202.

29. Richard Krause, "All Things to All Men: Where is the Limit? An Exegetical Study of I Corinthians 9:19-23," Lecture presented to the Metro North Pastoral Conference of the WELS, March 20, 1995.

30. David E. Garland, "Mission in a context of idolatry: Accommodation or fidelity?" *Missionalia* 33, 2 (2005): 300.

is to remain faithful to Christ. If anything seems more important than our identity in Christ, we should stop and assess our approach.

Good contextual work, as Bevans noted in his 1985 landmark article, is done intentionally and carefully. In his “Models of Contextual Theology,” he outlined four things that must be considered:

- (1) the spirit and message of the Gospel;
- (2) the tradition of the Christian people;
- (3) the culture of a particular nation or region; and
- (4) social change in that culture, due both to technological advances on one hand and struggles for justice and liberation on the other.³¹

Teachers and preachers must also ensure that their efforts are only to persuade, not to manipulate. Ultimately, in Christian tradition, it is the Spirit of God who moves a person’s spirit to faith; the missionary, or preacher, is only planting a seed and providing an opportunity.³² Some missionaries and preachers can be very skilled at persuasion, taking advantage of people’s needs or emotions, to get a reaction. The teacher or preacher is tasked with presenting a clear and compelling path to Christ, but not to force the person’s down the way.

Contextualization in Preaching

Although those writing about contextualization are primarily interested in evangelism and missions, their observations and principles apply equally to homiletics. Preachers are, after all, charged to communicate the gospel message as effectively as

31. Stephen Bevans, “Models of contextual theology,” *Missiology: An International Review* 8, 2 (1985): 186.

32. Richard Krause, “All Things to All Men: Where is the Limit? An Exegetical Study of I Corinthians 9:19-23,” Lecture presented to the Metro North Pastoral Conference of the WELS, March 20, 1995.

possible so that hearers understand; that is the reason that homiletics has been a mainstay of seminary preparation for clergy. Preaching continues the incarnational nature of the gospel, as Charles Bartow notes, the Word of God came to us as human speech and therefore our proclamation of it must adapt to the circumstances at hand.³³

Any good homiletics course teaches seminarians that in parish preaching clergy must exegete not just the biblical text, but also the congregation to whom the sermon will be delivered. To that end, a preacher should be mindful of the local congregation's culture, history, and background. That is something that all the clergy interviewed in Chapter Three described doing as they settled into their new congregations. Only after considering who the congregation is, can a preacher begin to know where adaptations should be made.

In addition to the usual things, clergy consider when transitioning to a new congregation, I propose that they also would benefit from considering the findings mentioned in Chapter Two. The biases described there represent real obstacles that might get in the way of the people hearing what the preacher is trying to say. Not that all of the biases can be avoided, but they can be mitigated to some degree. Following Paul's model of "becoming all things to all people," preachers should at least try to minimize the noise that might interfere with the most effective proclamation of the message.

One way of doing that would be to adopt a persona, like a character actor. Robin Williams was actor who is famous for code-switching and putting on different personas. Someone could suggest that "becoming all things to all people" means that a northern

33. Charles L. Bartow, *God's Human Speech: A Practical Theology of Proclamation* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1997).

priest in a southern parish should use a southern drawl and that an American priest in a British congregation should try speaking in a British dialect using British slang, but that is not what I am suggesting. Notably the clergy interviewed for this project, even if they were aware of some of the biases their new parishioners had about them as an outsider, did not try to minimize their accents or try to change their voices to fit in. Several of them noted that doing such a thing would be counterproductive. Because they said authenticity was essential, and several of them noted that a congregation can pick up on a fake.

Instead, the Clergy learned more about their congregations and adapted their sermons accordingly. A white preacher serving in an historic black congregation noted that she was careful to look for work by black scholars and illustrative material featuring people of color so that her sermon might resonate most intimately with her parishioners. A Southern priest preaching in a northern congregation mentioned that she periodically tried to mention something about the local region or town that she and her family had discovered and come to love, as a way of communicating that she valued their culture.

In the final chapter that follows, we will review some practical suggestions for clergy who have recently transitioned into a congregation that is regionally, culturally, or ethnically different than themselves.

Chapter Five

Recommendations for Transplanted Preachers

Hopefully as this project comes to a close, there are some takeaway considerations for clergy preachers who themselves are making a transition to a new parish. While the research components of this project focused on transitions across regional, cultural, racial, and gender lines, most of the following recommendations will be applicable and helpful for any transition into a new congregation.

Mitigating Biases

One of the primary purposes of this project at the outset was to help preachers become aware of what presuppositions may exist about them when entering a new congregation, so that they might work through their preaching to minimize the effects of those presuppositions upon the developing pastoral relationship.

Preachers might also minimize the effect of some of the biases highlighted in Chapter Two through careful sermon preparation. If a Southern priest serving in the Northeast knows that parishioners may be assuming she is less educated, perhaps she could offset that assumption by using a sermon illustration from her graduate school experience. If a priest has come to the States from abroad and knows that American ears may be preoccupied with ponderings about where he came from, perhaps he ought to tell them at the outset about his background and from what country he comes.

These adjustments might not be necessary after a priest has been settled in a congregation for some time, but during those initial months of the transition process they could be instrumental in introducing and endearing the new clergyperson to the

congregation and building pastoral rapport. They also might stave off unnecessary misunderstandings and miscommunications.

Ten Recommendations

Having considered all the information in the previous chapters and weighed the wisdom of the transplanted preachers who were interviewed for this project, there are ten suggestions that might help a transplanted preacher to build rapport with the new congregation and minimize misunderstandings:

1. Slow down. One of the first practical instructions that seminarians get in an introductory homiletics course is to slow down when preaching. That is good advice generally, but it is especially important when a transplanted preacher find him/herself preaching to a congregation that is demographically different than his/her origin. This was noticed by more than one of the clergy interviewed. It takes a second for the listeners' ears to "tune in" to the preacher's voice. In a way, it is almost like they have to do some internal translation work, trying to understand the preacher's words which are spoken differently than their own.

2. Be yourself. Or, as some of the clergy interviewed put it, "*Lean into*" your distinctiveness rather than trying to disguise it. There are plenty of reasons they gave this advice, but one of the most important has to do with authenticity. Congregations value authenticity over many things, perhaps even over ease of listening. The preacher is called to speak Truth to them. It is what they have come to church to hear, and if the preacher is not presenting his/her true self, the message of the sermon is not likely to be well received.

3. Don't assume they know anything about you. This is true, even if the preacher sent the congregation a carefully prepared and well thought out biography. This is true even if that biography was published by email, on the website, in the bulletin, and in the monthly newsletter. Part of the introductory period involves the congregation coming to know and trust the preacher. Sometimes preachers step into the pulpit and take the congregations' knowledge of certain details for granted. When preaching to a new congregation, explain who you are talking about and what you are talking about.

4. Use judicious self-disclosure. Related to the previous suggestion, a new preacher, especially when he/she is an outsider, would be wise to work in details about themselves into the sermon so that the congregation can get to know him/her better through the sermon. The caveat is that this must be done very carefully and intentionally. The preacher must not share too many things, lest the sermon seem more about you than about God. The preacher should also exercise prudence about what details to share. The congregation does not need to know *every* intimate detail about the your personal life, family history, or past.

5. Look for common ground. Sometimes in a new context, it is easy to concentrate on how things are different or how the people differ from you. Instead it might be helpful in establishing rapport to focus on the common ground shared with the new congregation's members. Missiologists take this approach when trying to cultivate a local theology and church identity in a new place. A growing awareness will help feed ideas and insights on what the congregation needs to hear in the sermon and what ways might connect with them, including inspiration for illustrative material that they will appreciate.

6. Learn local stories. The congregation will be getting to know their new clergyperson, but the new clergyperson also needs to get to know the congregation. Just as the preacher should share part of his/her story through intentional self-disclosure, the congregation will appreciate the preacher's attempt to hear their stories. Everyone and every place has a story, probably with multiple stories within that larger story. Hearing their stories will help the preacher to connect to the congregation and will inform what the preacher has to say to this particular congregation at this point in their story. One clergy person who was interviewed for the Chapter Three portion said that she liked to regularly share things that she (and her family) had discovered or come to love about their new community. This, too, helps to build a sense of community with the new congregation.

7. Do your research. When preparing sermons for the new congregation, do not assume the congregation hears the Scripture texts in the same way you do. Their experience of the world will not be the same as yours. This is especially important when a preacher is transplanted across racial or national lines. Consider checking out and reading the scholars, writers, local preachers, and poets from their culture that pertain to the sermon's focus. Work some of that new material into the sermon. This sort of approach will also help to avoid the congregation mistakenly thinking that the preacher feels his/her culture of origin is superior to that of the new community.

8. Start taking in the same media the congregation consumes. Watch the television shows your congregation is watching. Enjoy the action of the sports teams they cheer for. Listen to the music they appreciate. Read the books they are reading and talking about. These sorts of mass media will help to build the common ground shared by

you and your congregation. And, they may just introduce you to a new favorite artist or author.

9. Practice Aloud. Our voices resonate (literally) differently from one physical space to another, and different sound systems work with our natural voices differently. Even if a preacher has not practiced delivering sermons aloud in his/her previous cure, it would be a good idea when one is transplanted to a significantly different context.

10. Look for feedback. Language usage, especially idioms, can vary greatly from one place to another. Colloquial and conversational language can go a long way to help the sermon connect with the congregation, but inadvertent missteps could raise defenses, hurt feelings, and alienate members of the congregation. Some terminology varies, and occasionally a slang phrase takes on opposite meanings. Several of the clergy interviewed found it helpful to run sermon drafts past a trusted friend or colleague who was well familiar with the local context, so that this person could help to catch mistakes before the sermon time.

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Appendix A:

Congregational Survey

INFORMED CONSENT STATEMENT

You are invited to participate in a web-based online survey on preaching styles. This is a research project being conducted by the Rev. Jesse Abell, a doctoral student in Preaching at the School of Theology of the University of the South.

It should take approximately 20-30 minutes to complete to the survey, which includes audio and video clips that need to be heard/watched.

PARTICIPATION

Your participation in this survey is voluntary. You may refuse to take part in the research or exit the survey at any time without penalty.

BENEFITS

You will receive no direct benefits from participating in this research study. However, your responses may help us learn more about the effectiveness of different preaching styles and approaches to sermons.

RISKS

There are no foreseeable risks involved in participating in this study other than those encountered in day-to-day life.

CONFIDENTIALITY

Your survey answers will be compiled by the Qualtrics platform and delivered in a data spreadsheet to the researcher. No identifying information such as your name, email address, or IP address will be collected; therefore, your responses will remain anonymous. No one will be able to identify you or your answers, and no one will know whether or not you participated in the study.

CONTACT

If you have questions at any time about the study or the procedures, you may contact the researcher at abelljw9@sewanee.edu.

If you feel you have not been treated according to the descriptions in this form, or that your rights as a participant in research have not been honored during the course of this project, or you have any questions, concerns, or complaints that you wish to address to someone other than the researcher, you may contact the University of the South Institutional Review Board at 931-598-1317 or irbchair@sewanee.edu.

ELECTRONIC CONSENT

Please select your choice below. You may print a copy of this consent form for your records. Clicking on the “Agree” button indicates that

- You have read the above information
- You voluntarily agree to participate
- You are 18 years of age or older

Q1

- Yes
- No

DEMOGRAPHIC SURVEY

Q2

Which congregation do you belong to?

- AL - St. Simon Peter, Pell City
- CT - Trinity, New Haven
- DC - St. Luke's, DC
- GA - Good Shepherd, Covington
- GA - Holy Innocents, Atlanta
- GA - St. Athanasius, Burnswick
- GA - St. Columba, Atlanta
- GA - St. Christopher's, Perry
- GA - St. Cyprian's, Darien
- IA - St. Paul's Cathedral, Des Moines
- IA - Trinity Cathedral, Davenport
- IA - Trinity Church, Iowa City
- IL - St. John's, Decatur
- IL - St. Matthew's, Bloomington
- IN - Holy Family, Angola
- IN - St. Andrew, Kokomo
- IN - Trinity, Indianapolis
- IN - Trinity, Fort Wayne
- LA - Christ Church Cathedral, New Orleans
- LA - Holy Spirit, New Orleans
- LA - St. Matthew's, Houma
- LA - St. Patrick's, Zachary
- MA - Christ Church, Cambridge
- MA - Christ Church Cathedral, Springfield
- MA - St. John's, Ashfield
- MA - St. Michael-on-the-Heights, Worcester
- MA - St. Stephen's, Westborough
- MA - Trinity, Ware
- ME - St. Luke's Cathedral, Portland
- MI - St. Clement's, Inkster
- MS - St. George's, Clarksdale
- MS - St. James, Jackson
- MS - St. Paul's, Corinth
- MO - Metro Kansas City (Diocese of Western Missouri)
- NC - St. Ambrose, Raleigh
- NE - St. Andrew's, Omaha
- NE - St. Stephen's, Grand Island
- OH - St. Paul's, Dayton
- OH - Trinity Cathedral, Cleveland
- OH - Trinity Church, Columbus
- PA - African Episcopal Church of St. Thomas, Philadelphia
- RI - St. John's, Newport
- SC - Holy Cross, Pawley's Island
- TN - Emmanuel, Memphis
- TN - St. Anselm, Nashville
- VT - St. Paul's Cathedral, Burlington
- UK - Christ Church, Oxford
- UK - Wythenshawe Team Ministry, Diocese of Manchester
- UK - St Chad's/St Alkmund's/St Mary's, Shrewsbury
- UK - St. Cuthbert's/All Saints', Ackworth
- UK - St. Edmund's, Roundhay
- UK - St. Martin in the Fields, Trafalgar Square, Diocese of London
- UK - St. Mary's, Stone, Kent
- UK - St. Paul's, Wokingham / St. Nicholas', Emmbrook / Woosehill
- UK - Southwark Cathedral, London
- UK - Torridge Team Ministry, Diocese of Exeter
- UK - United Benefice of the Ramseys and Upwood, Diocese of Ely
- UK - Winchester College

Q3

Gender:

- Male
- Female
- Other

Q4

Choose one or more races that you consider yourself to be:

- White
- Black or African American
- American Indian or Alaska Native
- Asian
- Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander
- Hispanic or Latino
- Middle Eastern or North African

Q5

Based on the year of your birth, which category would you fall in?

- Gen Z (born 1995-2012)
- Millennials (born 1980-1994)
- Gen X (born 1965-1979)
- Baby Boomers (born 1946-1964)
- Silent Generation (born 1925-1945)
- Greatest Generation (born 1910-1924)

Q6

What is your nationality or country of origin?

- | | | |
|---|--|---|
| <input type="radio"/> Afghanistan | <input type="radio"/> Belize | <input type="radio"/> Chad |
| <input type="radio"/> Albania | <input type="radio"/> Benin | <input type="radio"/> Chile |
| <input type="radio"/> Algeria | <input type="radio"/> Bhutan | <input type="radio"/> China |
| <input type="radio"/> Andorra | <input type="radio"/> Bolivia | <input type="radio"/> Colombia |
| <input type="radio"/> Angola | <input type="radio"/> Bosnia and Herzegovina | <input type="radio"/> Comoros |
| <input type="radio"/> Antigua and Barbuda | <input type="radio"/> Botswana | <input type="radio"/> Congo, Republic of the... |
| <input type="radio"/> Argentina | <input type="radio"/> Brazil | <input type="radio"/> Costa Rica |
| <input type="radio"/> Armenia | <input type="radio"/> Brunei Darussalam | <input type="radio"/> Côte d'Ivoire |
| <input type="radio"/> Australia | <input type="radio"/> Bulgaria | <input type="radio"/> Croatia |
| <input type="radio"/> Austria | <input type="radio"/> Burkina Faso | <input type="radio"/> Cuba |
| <input type="radio"/> Azerbaijan | <input type="radio"/> Burundi | <input type="radio"/> Cyprus |
| <input type="radio"/> Bahamas | <input type="radio"/> Cambodia | <input type="radio"/> Czech Republic |
| <input type="radio"/> Bahrain | <input type="radio"/> Cameroon | <input type="radio"/> Democratic People's Republic of Korea |
| <input type="radio"/> Bangladesh | <input type="radio"/> Canada | <input type="radio"/> Congo |
| <input type="radio"/> Barbados | <input type="radio"/> Cape Verde | |
| <input type="radio"/> Belarus | <input type="radio"/> Central African Republic | |
| <input type="radio"/> Belgium | | |

- Denmark
- Djibouti
- Dominica
- Dominican Republic
- Ecuador
- Egypt
- El Salvador
- Equatorial Guinea
- Eritrea
- Estonia
- Ethiopia
- Fiji
- Finland
- France
- Gabon
- Gambia
- Georgia
- Germany
- Ghana
- Greece
- Grenada
- Guatemala
- Guinea
- Guinea-Bissau
- Guyana
- Haiti
- Honduras
- Hong Kong (S.A.R.)
- Hungary
- Iceland
- India
- Indonesia
- Iran
- Iraq
- Ireland
- Israel
- Italy
- Jamaica
- Japan
- Jordan
- Kazakhstan
- Kenya
- Kiribati
- Kuwait
- Kyrgyzstan
- Lao People's Democratic Republic
- Latvia
- Lebanon
- Lesotho
- Liberia
- Libyan Arab Jamahiriya
- Liechtenstein
- Lithuania
- Luxembourg
- Madagascar
- Malawi
- Malaysia
- Maldives
- Mali
- Malta
- Marshall Islands
- Mauritania
- Mauritius
- Mexico
- Micronesia, Federated States of...
- Monaco
- Mongolia
- Montenegro
- Morocco
- Mozambique
- Myanmar
- Namibia
- Nauru
- Nepal
- Netherlands
- New Zealand
- Nicaragua
- Niger
- Nigeria
- North Korea
- Norway
- Oman
- Pakistan
- Palau
- Panama
- Papua New Guinea
- Paraguay
- Peru
- Philippines
- Poland
- Portugal
- Qatar
- Republic of Korea
- Republic of Moldova
- Romania
- Russian Federation
- Rwanda
- Saint Kitts and Nevis
- Saint Lucia
- Saint Vincent and the Grenadines
- Samoa
- San Marino
- Sao Tome and Principe
- Saudi Arabia
- Senegal
- Serbia
- Seychelles
- Sierra Leone
- Singapore
- Slovakia
- Slovenia
- Solomon Islands
- Somalia
- South Africa
- South Korea
- Spain
- Sri Lanka
- Sudan
- Suriname
- Swaziland
- Sweden
- Switzerland
- Syrian Arab Republic
- Tajikistan
- Thailand
- Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia
- Timor-Leste
- Togo
- Tonga
- Trinidad and Tobago
- Tunisia
- Turkey
- Turkmenistan
- Tuvalu
- Uganda
- Ukraine
- United Arab Emirates
- United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland
- United Republic of Tanzania

- United States of America
- Venezuela, Bolivarian Republic of...
- Viet Nam
- Uruguay
- Viet Nam
- Yemen
- Uzbekistan
- Yemen
- Zambia
- Vanuatu
- Zimbabwe

Q7

What is the highest level of school you have completed?

- Less than high school degree
- High school graduate (high school diploma or equivalent including GED)
- Some college but no degree
- Associate degree in college (2-year)
- Bachelor's degree in college (4-year)
- Master's degree
- Doctoral degree
- Professional degree (JD, MD)

Q8

Information about income is very important to understand the background of respondents. (And this survey is anonymous.) Would you please give your best guess? Please indicate the answer that includes your entire household income in (previous year) before taxes.

- Less than \$10,000 (£7500)
- \$10,000 to \$19,999 (£7501 - £14,999)
- \$20,000 to \$29,999 (£15,000 - £22,999)
- \$30,000 to \$39,999 (£23,000 - £30,999)
- \$40,000 to \$49,999 (£31,000 - £38,499)
- \$50,000 to \$59,999 (£38,500 - £45,999)
- \$60,000 to \$69,999 (£46,000 - £53,499)
- \$70,000 to \$79,999 (£53,500 - £61,499)
- \$80,000 to \$89,999 (£61,500 - £68,999)
- \$90,000 to \$99,999 (£69,000 - £76,499)
- \$100,000 to \$149,999 (£76,500 - £114,999)
- \$150,000 or more (£115,000 or more)
- Prefer not to answer

Q9

How many adults are in your household? _____

Q10

How many dependent children are in your household? _____

Q11

How long have you been an Episcopalian/Anglican?

- Lifelong member
- Less than 1 year
- 1-5 years
- 5-10 years
- 10-20 years
- More than 20 years (but not lifelong)

Q12

How long have you been a member of your current parish/congregation?

- Lifelong member
- Less than 1 year
- 1-5 years
- 5-10 years
- 10-20 years
- More than 20 years (but not lifelong)

Q13

Which of these best describes your status?

- Lay person (not ordained in the Episcopal/Anglican tradition)
- Clergy person, monastic, or seminarian

Q14

Is English your first language?

- Yes
- No

Q15

Are you still living in the same community that you grew up in?

- Yes
- No

Q16

Are you living in the same region of the country that you grew up in (New England, the Midwest, the South, etc.)? OR, for UK respondents: Did you grow up, living in England?

- Yes
- No

HOMILETICAL SURVEY

Q17

Theologian Karl Barth is quoted as saying that clergy should preach with “the Bible in one hand and the newspaper in the other.” How do you feel about preachers incorporating current events (for instance: Charleston shootings at Mother Emmanuel Church, the Boston Marathon Bombing, the #MeToo Movement) in their sermons? Check all that apply.

- The preacher should incorporate major events into the sermon, whenever possible.
- The preacher might reference major events in a sermon when they clearly coincide with the message of the appointed readings.
- The preacher should refer to major events, when they happen in the immediate area of the congregation.
- The preacher should avoid current events and stick to the Scripture text(s).

Q18

Please click the play button to listen to the following sermon excerpt. (This questions is timed and the survey will wait until you have had time to listen to the clip and respond to the questions before allowing you to move on.)

*{Audio clip from male preacher using Generalized American Dialect:
But let me move now to the basic point of the message. Know this morning, if we forget everything I've said--I hope you won't forget this--It came to the point after saying, "Our God is able to deliver us from the burning fiery furnace, but, if he doesn't deliver us, we still are not going to bow."}*

After listening to the clip, please rate how well the preacher conveys the following qualities:

	Far below average	Moderately below average	Slightly below average	Average	Slightly above average	Moderately above average	Far above average				
	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Preacher sounds Educated											
Preacher sounds Intelligent											
Preacher sounds Pastoral											
Preacher demonstrates Passion											
Preacher really Believes in what he/she is saying											
I feel I could Relate to this Preacher											
Preacher seems Informed/Prepared											
Preacher sounds like someone I would find Approachable											

Preacher seems like an Authority on the subject matter	
Preacher is an Effective Communicator	

Q19

In a time of intense political debate about an issue, such as detention of illegal immigrant families or transgender bathroom bills or gun control, how do you expect a preacher to respond? Check all that apply.

- The preacher should address these issues in sermons as they come up in national life.
- The preacher might reference a big event in a sermon when one of the appointed readings seem to speak directly to the situation.
- The preacher should address an issue affecting the immediate community in which the congregation is located.
- The preacher should rarely mention any political issue from the pulpit.
- The preacher should never mention anything political in church.

Q20

Please click the play button to listen to the following sermon excerpt. (This questions is timed and the survey will wait until you have had time to listen to the clip and respond to the questions before allowing you to move on.)

{Audio clip from female preacher using Generalized American Dialect:

But let me move now to the basic point of the message. Know this morning, if we forget everything I've said--I hope you won't forget this--It came to the point after saying, "Our God is able to deliver us from the burning fiery furnace, but, if he doesn't deliver us, we still are not going to bow."}

After listening to the clip, please rate how well the preacher conveys the following qualities:

	Far below average	1	Moderately below average	2	Slightly below average	3	Average	4	5	Slightly above average	6	7	Moderately above average	8	9	10	Far above average
Preacher sounds Educated																	
Preacher sounds Intelligent																	
Preacher sounds Pastoral																	
Preacher demonstrates Passion																	
Preacher really Believes in what he/she is saying																	
I feel I could Relate to this Preacher																	

Preacher seems Informed/Prepared	
Preacher sounds like someone I would find Approachable	
Preacher seems like an Authority on the subject matter	
Preacher is an Effective Communicator	

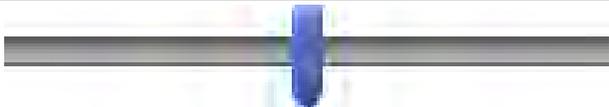
Q21

Imagine that you are a member of a congregation and that it is public knowledge that your rector/vicar is divorced and now remarried. On a given Sunday, you hear the following as the appointed gospel reading:

Matthew 19:3-9

Some Pharisees came to Jesus, and to test him they asked, “Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife for any cause?” He answered, “Have you not read that the one who made them at the beginning ‘made them male and female,’ and said, ‘For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh’? So they are no longer two, but one flesh. Therefore what God has joined together, let no one separate.” They said to him, “Why then did Moses command us to give a certificate of dismissal and to divorce her?” He said to them, “It was because you were so hard-hearted that Moses allowed you to divorce your wives, but from the beginning it was not so. And I say to you, whoever divorces his wife, except for unchastity, and marries another commits adultery.”¹¹⁷

There are also other readings from the lectionary that are read at the service, but how important do you think it is that the preacher address the difficult section in the Gospel reading passage (above) that addresses divorce?

	Not at all important	Slightly important	Moderately important	Very important	Extremely important						
	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
											

Q22

Please click the play button to listen to the following sermon excerpt. (This questions is timed and the survey will wait until you have had time to listen to the clip and respond to the questions before allowing you to move on.)

{Audio clip from male preacher using a New England dialect:

But let me move now to the basic point of the message. Know this morning, if we forget everything I've said--I hope you won't forget this--It came to the point after saying, "Our God is able to deliver us from the burning fiery furnace, but, if he doesn't deliver us, we still are not going to bow."}

117. Text taken from the New Revised Standard Version.

After listening to the clip, please rate how well the preacher conveys the following qualities:

	Far below average	1	Moderately below average	2	Slightly below average	3	Average	4	5	Slightly above average	6	7	Moderately above average	8	9	Far above average	10
Preacher sounds Educated																	
Preacher sounds Intelligent																	
Preacher sounds Pastoral																	
Preacher demonstrates Passion																	
Preacher really Believes in what he/she is saying																	
I feel I could Relate to this Preacher																	
Preacher seems Informed/Prepared																	
Preacher sounds like someone I would find Approachable																	
Preacher seems like an Authority on the subject matter																	
Preacher is an Effective Communicator																	

Q23

In the past, preachers referred to God with a masculine pronoun (He/Him/His). Which of the following statements do you agree with? (check all that apply)

- Today, preachers can continue using masculine pronouns for God.
- Today, it's better to use gender neutral language (like God/God's) to refer to God.
- Preachers should use a range a language referring to God, including masculine pronouns (He/Him/His), as well as feminine pronouns (She/Her/Hers), because God is beyond gender and language.
- It doesn't matter to me.

Q24

Please click the play button to listen to the following sermon excerpt. (This questions is timed and the survey will wait until you have had time to listen to the clip and respond to the questions before allowing you to move on.)

{Audio clip from female preacher using a New England dialect:

But let me move now to the basic point of the message. Know this morning, if we forget everything I've said--I hope you won't forget this--It came to the point after saying, "Our God is able to deliver us from the burning fiery furnace, but, if he doesn't deliver us, we still are not going to bow."}

After listening to the clip, please rate how well the preacher conveys the following qualities:

	Far below average	Moderately below average	Slightly below average	Average	Slightly above average	Moderately above average	Far above average				
	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Preacher sounds Educated											
Preacher sounds Intelligent											
Preacher sounds Pastoral											
Preacher demonstrates Passion											
Preacher really Believes in what he/she is saying											
I feel I could Relate to this Preacher											
Preacher seems Informed/Prepared											
Preacher sounds like someone I would find Approachable											
Preacher seems like an Authority on the subject matter											
Preacher is an Effective Communicator											

Q25

What do you most expect out of a good sermon? Please rank the following:

	Not at all important	Slightly important	Moderately important	Very important	Extremely important						
	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Explains the scripture reading and its background											
Teaches about what Christianity believes (doctrine)											

Applies the scripture reading to our personal spiritual lives	
Relates the message to current contemporary issues or events	

Q26

Please click the play button to listen to the following sermon excerpt. (This questions is timed and the survey will wait until you have had time to listen to the clip and respond to the questions before allowing you to move on.)

{Audio clip from male preacher using a Deep Southern dialect:

But let me move now to the basic point of the message. Know this morning, if we forget everything I've said--I hope you won't forget this--It came to the point after saying, "Our God is able to deliver us from the burning fiery furnace, but, if he doesn't deliver us, we still are not going to bow."}

After listening to the clip, please rate how well the preacher conveys the following qualities:

	Far below average	Moderately below average	Slightly below average	Average	Slightly above average	Moderately above average	Far above average				
	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Preacher sounds Educated											
Preacher sounds Intelligent											
Preacher sounds Pastoral											
Preacher demonstrates Passion											
Preacher really Believes in what he/she is saying											
I feel I could Relate to this Preacher											
Preacher seems Informed/Prepared											
Preacher sounds like someone I would find Approachable											
Preacher seems like an Authority on the subject matter											
Preacher is an Effective Communicator											

Q27

Do you have a preference for where the sermon is delivered from?

- Sermons should be delivered from the pulpit.
- Sermons should be delivered from the aisle/floor.
- It doesn't matter to me.

Q28

Please click the play button to listen to the following sermon excerpt. (This questions is timed and the survey will wait until you have had time to listen to the clip and respond to the questions before allowing you to move on.)

{Audio clip from female preacher using a Deep Southern dialect:

But let me move now to the basic point of the message. Know this morning, if we forget everything I've said--I hope you won't forget this--It came to the point after saying, "Our God is able to deliver us from the burning fiery furnace, but, if he doesn't deliver us, we still are not going to bow."}

After listening to the clip, please rate how well the preacher conveys the following qualities:

	Far below average	1	Moderately below average	2	Slightly below average	3	4	Average	5	Slightly above average	6	7	Moderately above average	8	9	Far above average	10
Preacher sounds Educated																	
Preacher sounds Intelligent																	
Preacher sounds Pastoral																	
Preacher demonstrates Passion																	
Preacher really Believes in what he/she is saying																	
I feel I could Relate to this Preacher																	
Preacher seems Informed/Prepared																	
Preacher sounds like someone I would find Approachable																	
Preacher seems like an Authority on the subject matter																	
Preacher is an Effective Communicator																	

Q29

For you, what is the ideal sermon length?

- Less than 7 minutes
- 7-10 minutes
- 12-15 minutes
- 15-30 minutes
- More than 30 minutes

Q30

Please click the play button to listen to the following sermon excerpt. (This questions is timed and the survey will wait until you have had time to listen to the clip and respond to the questions before allowing you to move on.)

{Audio clip from Southern black male preacher:

But let me move now to the basic point of the message. Know this morning, if we forget everything I've said--I hope you won't forget this--It came to the point after saying, "Our God is able to deliver us from the burning fiery furnace, but, if he doesn't deliver us, we still are not going to bow."}

After listening to the clip, please rate how well the preacher conveys the following qualities:

	Far below average	Moderately below average	Slightly below average	Average	Slightly above average	Moderately above average	Far above average				
	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Preacher sounds Educated											
Preacher sounds Intelligent											
Preacher sounds Pastoral											
Preacher demonstrates Passion											
Preacher really Believes in what he/she is saying											
I feel I could Relate to this Preacher											
Preacher seems Informed/Prepared											
Preacher sounds like someone I would find Approachable											
Preacher seems like an Authority on the subject matter											
Preacher is an Effective Communicator											

Q31

A survey of Episcopal sermons showed that preachers most often preach on the gospel text, sometimes on the Old Testament text, occasionally on the Epistle text, and rarely on the appointed Psalm. Which of these statements do you agree with? (Check all that apply.)

- The Old Testament should be preached on more.
- I would like to hear more sermons about the Psalms.
- The sermon should focus on one of the New Testament readings.
- The Gospel reading should always be the focus.
- All sermons should touch on each of the appointed readings.
- Over the course of time, a preacher should give equal attention to all parts of Scripture.

Q32

Please click the play button to listen to the following sermon excerpt. (This questions is timed and the survey will wait until you have had time to listen to the clip and respond to the questions before allowing you to move on.)

{Audio clip from Southern black female preacher:

But let me move now to the basic point of the message. Know this morning, if we forget everything I've said--I hope you won't forget this--It came to the point after saying, "Our God is able to deliver us from the burning fiery furnace, but, if he doesn't deliver us, we still are not going to bow."}

After listening to the clip, please rate how well the preacher conveys the following qualities:

	Far below average	1	Moderately below average	2	Slightly below average	3	4	Average	5	Slightly above average	6	7	Moderately above average	8	9	Far above average	10
Preacher sounds Educated																	
Preacher sounds Intelligent																	
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I feel I could Relate to this Preacher																	
Preacher seems Informed/Prepared																	
Preacher sounds like someone I would find Approachable																	
Preacher seems like an Authority on the subject matter																	
Preacher is an Effective Communicator																	

Q33

Please click the play button to listen to the following sermon excerpt. (This questions is timed and the survey will wait until you have had time to listen to the clip and respond to the questions before allowing you to move on.)

{Audio clip from male preacher speaking relatively slowly:

Here we want to note that the purpose of our love for one another is not solely to distinguish us as a unique people of God, but for an evangelical purpose which is that your love for one another is so that the world may believe.}

After listening to the clip, please answer the following questions.

	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
How would you rate the pace of the sermon? (1=too slow; 5=ideal; 10=too fast)											
How well do you felt you understood everything the preacher said? (1=poor; 10=well)											

Q34

Please click the play button to listen to the following sermon excerpt. (This questions is timed and the survey will wait until you have had time to listen to the clip and respond to the questions before allowing you to move on.)

{Audio clip from male preacher using an English dialect:

But let me move now to the basic point of the message. Know this morning, if we forget everything I've said--I hope you won't forget this--It came to the point after saying, "Our God is able to deliver us from the burning fiery furnace, but, if he doesn't deliver us, we still are not going to bow."}

After listening to the clip, please rate how well the preacher conveys the following qualities:

	Far below average	Moderately below average	Slightly below average	Average	Slightly above average	Moderately above average	Far above average				
	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Preacher sounds Educated											
Preacher sounds Intelligent											
Preacher sounds Pastoral											
Preacher demonstrates Passion											
Preacher really Believes in what he/she is saying											
I feel I could Relate to this Preacher											
Preacher seems Informed/Prepared											

Preacher sounds like someone I would find Approachable	
Preacher seems like an Authority on the subject matter	
Preacher is an Effective Communicator	

Q35

Please click the play button to listen to the following sermon excerpt. (This questions is timed and the survey will wait until you have had time to listen to the clip and respond to the questions before allowing you to move on.)

*{Audio clip from female preacher speaking relatively quickly:
 “God welcomes us into God’s love and this love is our shelter. But Jesus, in asking the disciples to abide in his love and keep his commandment to love one another, is using a poetic word to ask them to do something that is extremely difficult.”}*

After listening to the clip, please answer the following questions.

	0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
How would you rate the pace of the sermon? (1=too slow; 5=ideal; 10=too fast)	
How well do you felt you understood everything the preacher said? (1=poor; 10=well)	

Q36

Please click the play button to listen to the following sermon excerpt. (This questions is timed and the survey will wait until you have had time to listen to the clip and respond to the questions before allowing you to move on.)

*{Audio clip from female preacher using an English dialect:
 But let me move now to the basic point of the message. Know this morning, if we forget everything I've said--I hope you won't forget this--It came to the point after saying, "Our God is able to deliver us from the burning fiery furnace, but, if he doesn't deliver us, we still are not going to bow."}*

After listening to the clip, please rate how well the preacher conveys the following qualities:

	Far below average	1	Moderately below average	2	Slightly below average	3	4	Average	5	Slightly above average	6	7	Moderately above average	8	9	10	Far above average
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Preacher seems Informed/Prepared																	
Preacher sounds like someone I would find Approachable																	
Preacher seems like an Authority on the subject matter																	
Preacher is an Effective Communicator																	

Q37

Please click the play button to listen to the following sermon excerpt. (This questions is timed and the survey will wait until you have had time to listen to the clip and respond to the questions before allowing you to move on.)

{Audio clip from Youtube sermon by the Rev. Dr. William Barber II:¹¹⁸

When a distorted moral narrative of religious nationalism doesn't follow the call of Jesus that asks nations, "When I was hungry, did you feed me? When I was naked, did you clothe me? When I was a stranger, when I was an immigrant, when I was undocumented, did you care for me?" But instead preach false gospels of division and building walls and say more about what God says so little, and so little about what God says so much, about love and justice and mercy. Rejection and poverty, and the policy violence of denial are still far too real.}

After listening to the clip, in which the preacher references contemporary news and political issues in the sermon, how do you feel about the use of these contemporary news references?

- Appropriate/Relevant
- Indifferent/Unsure
- Inappropriate/Unnecessary/Distracting

¹¹⁸ Washington National Cathedral, "June 3, 2018: Sunday Sermon by The Rev. William J. Barber, II," June 6, 2018, Video, 40:38, https://youtu.be/yOR_mHncUDI. (Clip used runs 24:16-24:51.)

Q38

Please click the play button to watch a video excerpt from a sermon. (This questions is timed and the survey will wait until you have had time to listen to the clip and respond to the questions before allowing you to move on.)

{Youtube video excerpt of a sermon by the Rev. Dr. James Forbes:¹¹⁹

Do you, do you love yourself? And then, does your love come to the place where your cup runneth over? And when you love yourself and your cup runs over with self-affirmation, there's some love in the saucer. The least you can do is take the love that's left in the saucer and pass it on to somebody else. One of the best ways you can tell if you love yourself is how you treat other people. I mean, if you scarcely have enough and you're going to hoard everything for yourself, you're not quite going to have the winning life.}

After viewing the clip, how would you rate this preacher's body language, posture, and gestures?

- Too Rigid (Could use more expression)
- Perfect/Just Right
- Over the top/Distracting (Needs to be toned down)

Q39

Please click the play button to watch to the following video clip from a sermon. (This questions is timed and the survey will wait until you have had time to listen to the clip and respond to the questions before allowing you to move on.)

{Youtube video excerpt of a sermon by the Rev. Dr. Lauren Winner:¹²⁰

The question before us in Paul's text is, I think, just what is this changed love? It is a love modeled on God's love for us, a love expressed in Creation and a loved expressed on the Cross. And it is a love that is always other-directed, directed to an other, or more accurately, it is a love that is always directed to two others: to one's beloved and to the God who created her and sustains her.}

After viewing the clip, how would you rate this preacher's body language, posture, and gestures?

- Too Rigid (Could use more expression)
- Perfect/Just Right
- Over the top/Distracting (Needs to be toned down)

END OF SURVEY MESSAGE

Thank you so much for taking the time to participate in this survey.

Your responses will greatly help in this clergy student's final research project for the Doctor of Ministry in Preaching program at Sewanee and hopefully will help clergy to learn how best to communicate effectively through sermons to members of congregations.

God bless you.

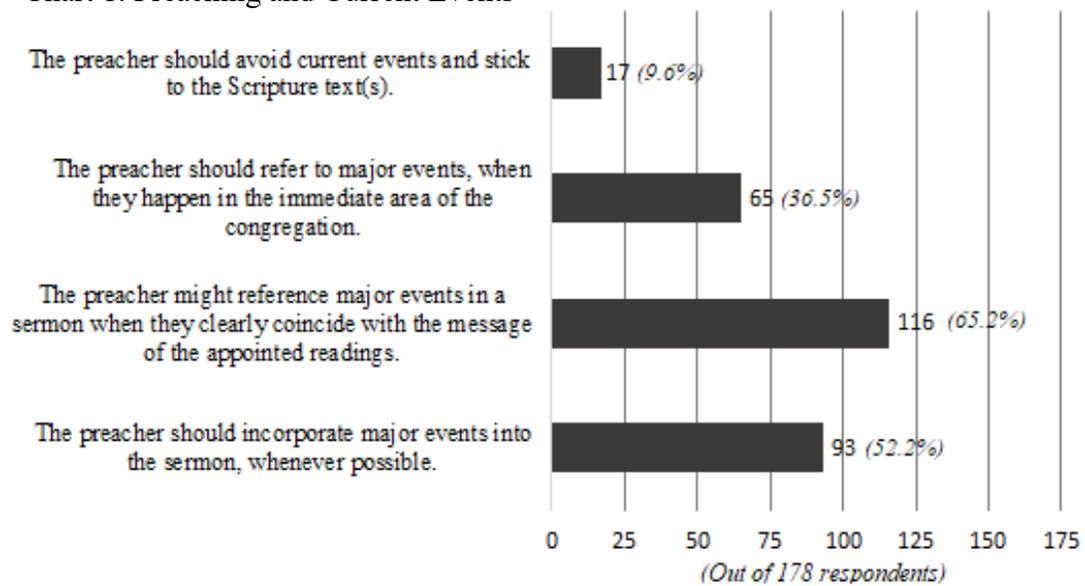
119. The Riverside Church, "Tips on Winning the Game of Life," February 3, 2014, Video, 25:27, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nnSxG4jNDJw&t=716s>. (Clip used runs 13:45-14:16.)

120. Duke Chapel, "Sunday Service – 1/31/10 – Lauren Winner," February 7, 2010, Video, 1:12:42, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aVMgzALSG34&t=2102s>. (Clip used runs 25:33-26:08.)

Appendix B: Additional Findings

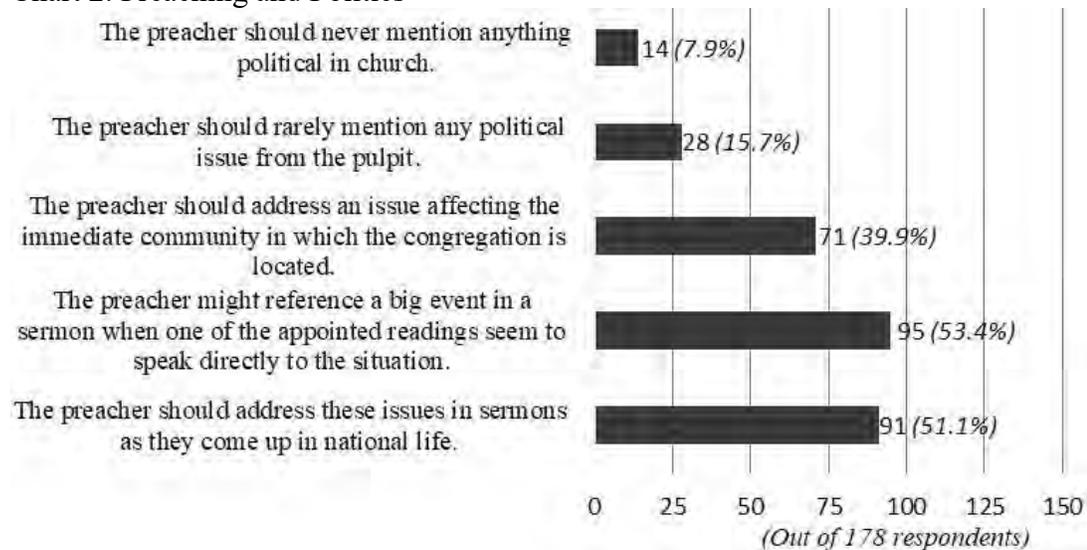
Theologian Karl Barth is quoted as saying that clergy should preach with “the Bible in one hand and the newspaper in the other.” How do you feel about preachers incorporating current events (for instance: Charleston shootings at Mother Emmanuel Church, the Boston Marathon Bombing, the #MeToo Movement) in their sermons? *(Select all that apply.)*

Chart 1. Preaching and Current Events



In a time of intense political debate about an issue, such as detention of illegal immigrant families or transgender bathroom bills or gun control, how do you expect a preacher to respond? *(Select all that apply.)*

Chart 2. Preaching and Politics

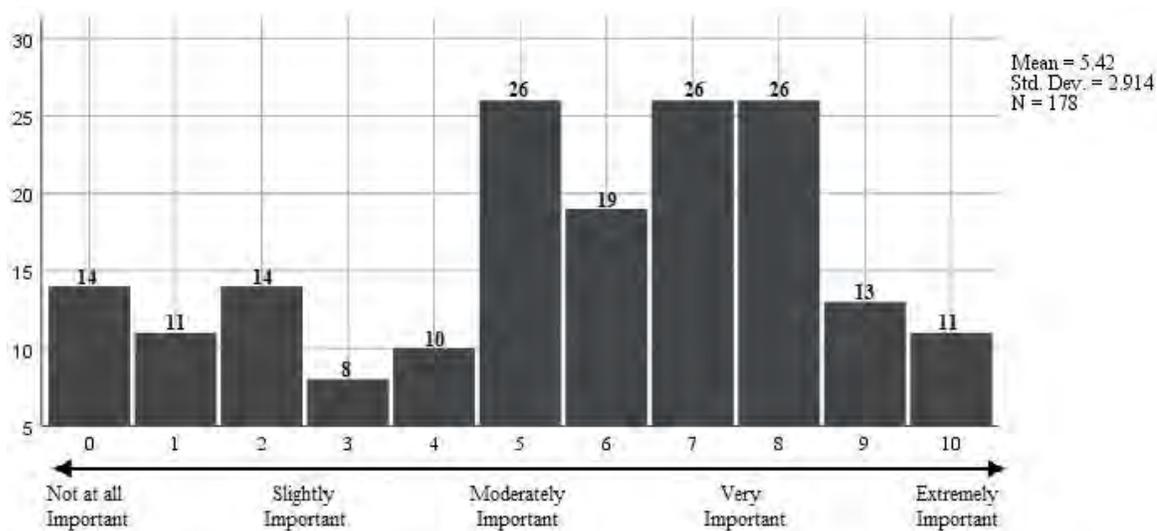


Imagine that you are a member of a congregation and that it is public knowledge that your rector/vicar is divorced and now remarried. On a given Sunday, you hear the following as the appointed gospel reading:

Some Pharisees came to Jesus, and to test him they asked, “Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife for any cause?” He answered, “Have you not read that the one who made them at the beginning ‘made them male and female,’ and said, ‘For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh’? So they are no longer two, but one flesh. Therefore what God has joined together, let no one separate.” They said to him, “Why then did Moses command us to give a certificate of dismissal and to divorce her?” He said to them, “It was because you were so hard-hearted that Moses allowed you to divorce your wives, but from the beginning it was not so. And I say to you, whoever divorces his wife, except for unchastity, and marries another commits adultery.” (*Matthew 19:3-9 NRSV*)

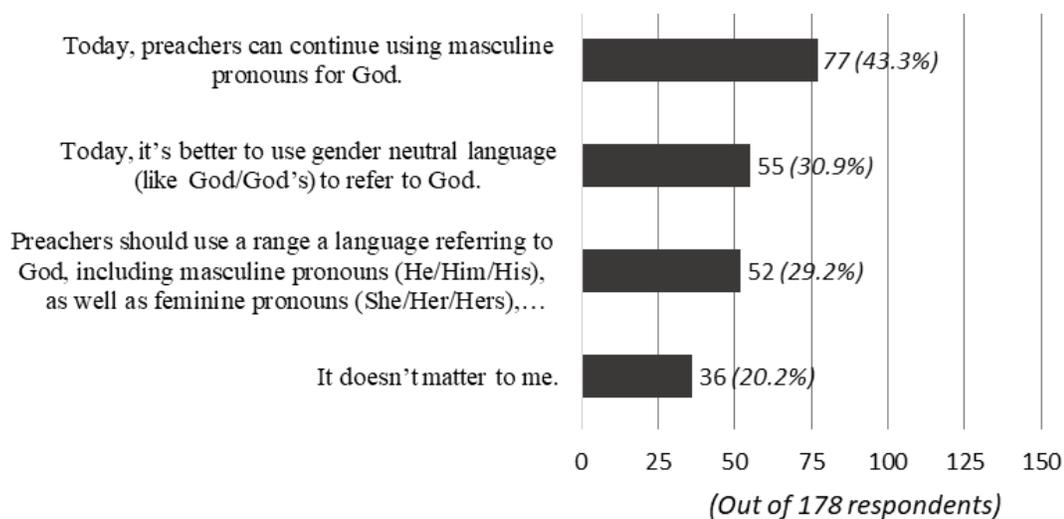
There are also other readings from the lectionary that are read at the service, but how important do you think it is that the preacher address the difficult section in the Gospel reading passage (above) that addresses divorce?

Chart 3. Preaching and Difficult Passages



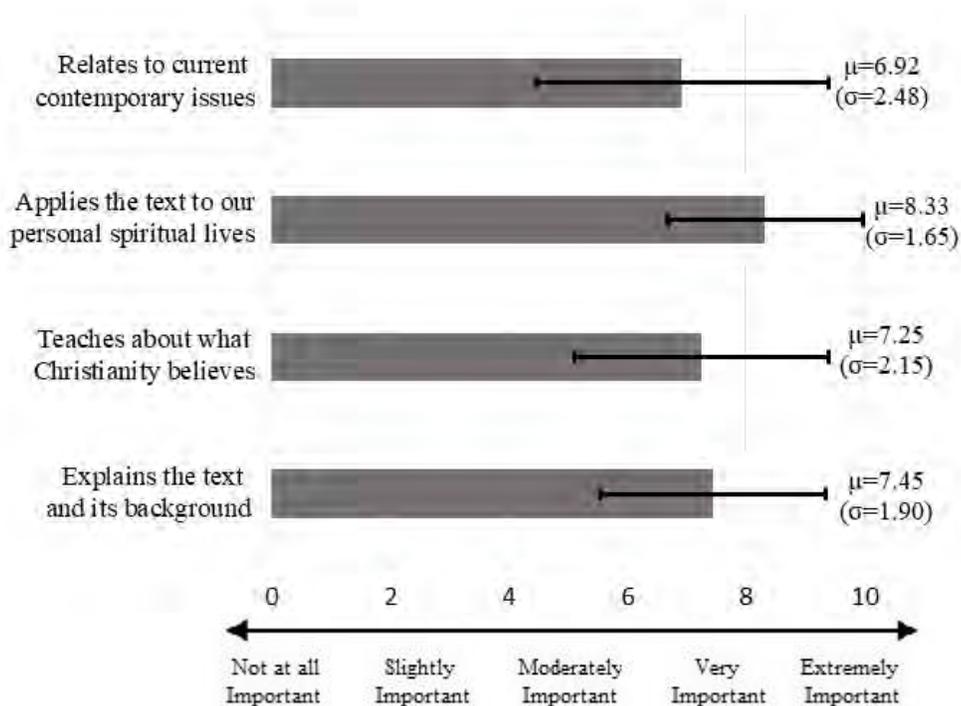
In the past, preachers referred to God with a masculine pronoun (He/Him/His). Which of the following statements do you agree with? (*Select all that apply*)

Chart 4. Preaching and Divine Pronouns



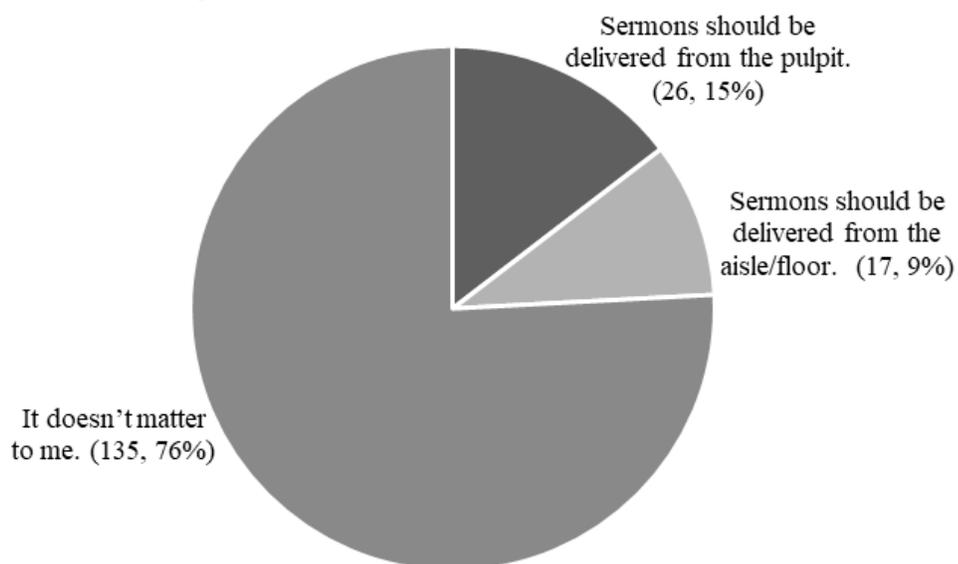
What do you most expect out of a good sermon? Please rank of the following:

Chart 5. Aspects of a Good Sermon



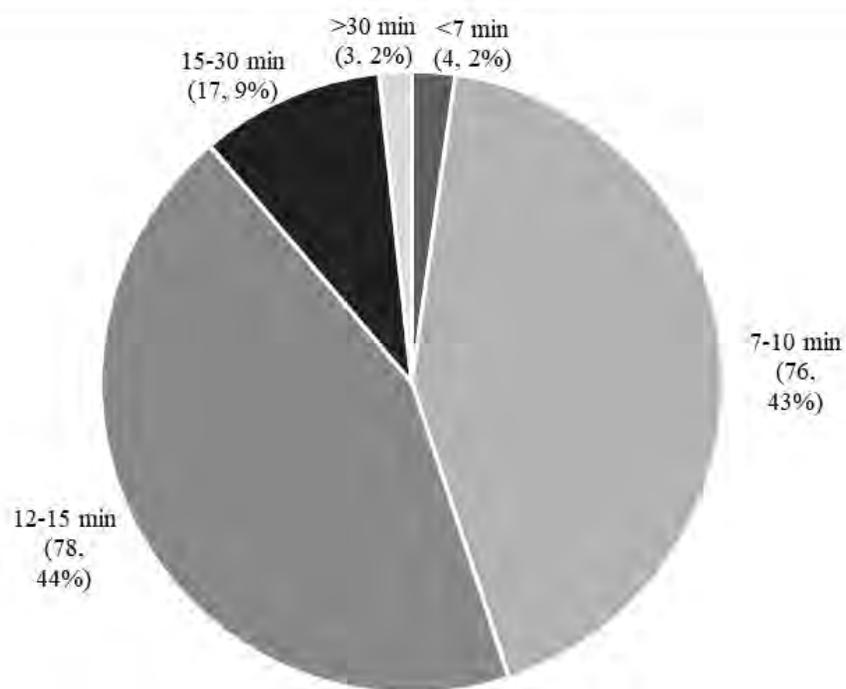
Do you have a preference for where the sermon is delivered from?

Chart 6. Preaching Locale



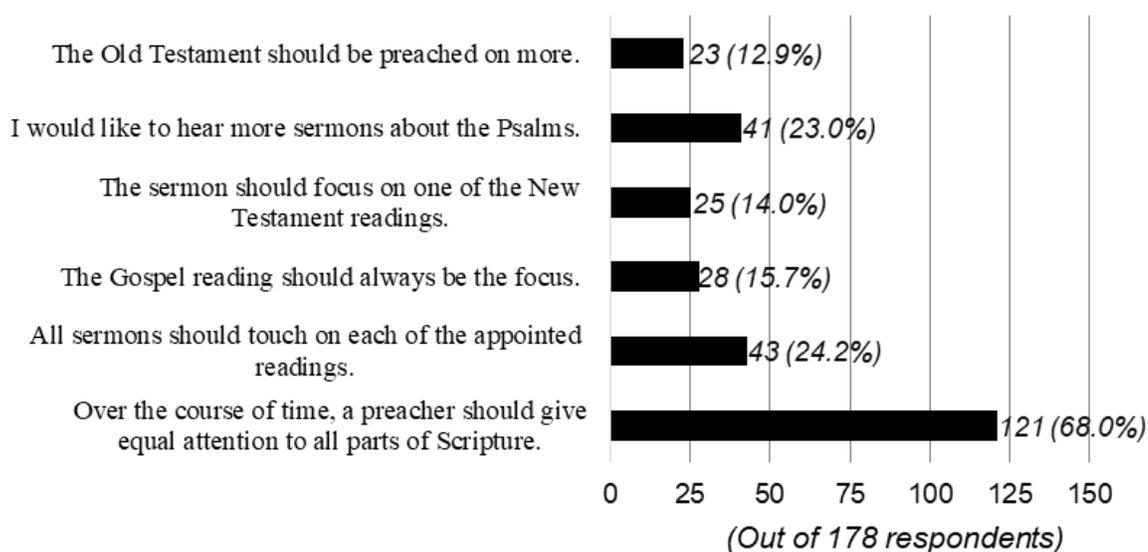
For you, what is the ideal sermon length?

Chart 7. Sermon Length



A survey of Episcopal sermons showed that preachers most often preach on the gospel text, sometimes on the Old Testament text, occasionally on the Epistle text, and rarely on the appointed Psalm. Which of these statements do you agree with? (*Select all that apply.*)

Chart 8. Focal Texts for Sermons



Appendix C:

Clergy Interview Questions

1. What is your age?
2. How many years have you served in ordained ministry?
3. Where were you born/raised?
4. Can you review your professional ministry history (congregation, location, dates/years, length of tenure)?
5. How long have you been at your current cure?
6. Do you remember how your sermons were initially received after starting at your current cure?
7. Did you become aware of any particular perceptions the congregation had about you or your ministry based on your background?
8. Did you adapt how you preach after settling into your current parish?
9. Were there any ways you used your sermon time to help establish yourself there and build rapport with the congregation?
10. Have you changed anything about the way you preach as a result of now having an audience in {focus demographic}?
11. Have you found any challenges with preaching to people in {focus demographic}?
12. If another colleague making the same sort of transition, is there any advice or tips you would give them about preaching in this new context?
13. Is there anything else about preaching that you would like to add?