

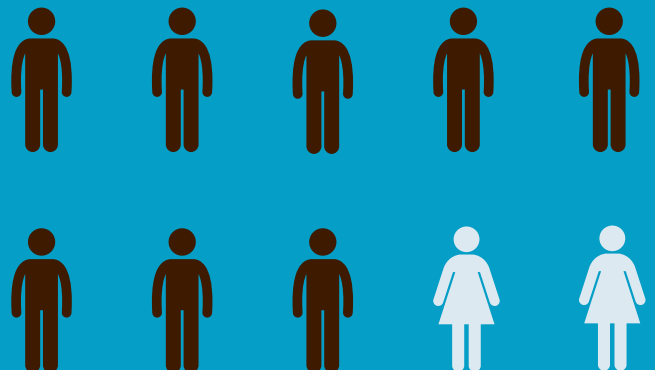
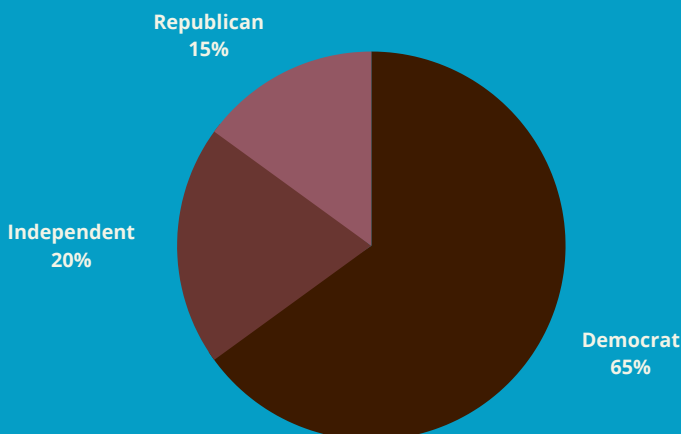
# PASTORAL PERSPECTIVES ON ABORTION CARE: A NOVEL RESEARCH COLLABORATION AT EMORY UNIVERSITY

A study team from the Center for Reproductive Health Research in the Southeast (RISE), including faith leaders, scholars, and researchers, interviewed **20 Mainline and Black Protestant leaders in middle Georgia** about their attitudes and beliefs around sex, pregnancy, abortion, and providing pastoral care.

The study highlighted a rich set of socio-political perspectives on abortion from a diverse group of Southern Protestant church leaders who responded to questions like, **“What are your personal views on abortion”** and **“What advice would you give someone in your congregation considering abortion.”**

## PARTICIPANT DEMOGRAPHICS

- The sample was evenly split between white and Black participants.
- Three-quarters of the participants were between the ages of 35 and 69 years-old and 70 percent were married.
- **Although the majority (65 percent) identified as Democrat, 20 percent identified as Independent, and 15 percent as Republican.**
- Denominations represented included:
  - United Methodist Church
  - African Methodist Episcopal
  - National Baptist Convention USA
  - Presbyterian Church USA
  - Unspecified Black Protestant-Baptist
  - Non-denominational churches.
- **The majority of the interview participants (80%) were men**



## MAIN FINDINGS

Religious leaders' views on abortion fell into a gradient, or "gray area," of nuanced and complex ideas that ranged between "pro-life" and "pro-choice."

Despite a range of abortion views, interview leaders agreed on key elements of pastoral care:

- Recognizing the sanctity of life
- Using scripture to encourage and not punish
- Acknowledging spiritual leaders are called to love and care for people unconditionally.

"There was a very strong theme in that **these clergy want their ministries and churches to be places of support and not judgment.** And they want to respond to each person or situation individually, and holistically," said study co-author Reverend Rob Keithan.

Interviewed leaders often had misperceptions that countered existing scientific evidence, while most had little or no career experience or training in providing abortion-related pastoral care.

"Nearly everyone interviewed noted that it's difficult to talk about sexual and reproductive health issues in church. And very few had received any training on how to do so. At the same time, many agreed that the church should offer more programs and services in this arena. **There's a hunger for engaging these difficult topics in ways that cut through the political debate and allow people to learn and share more openly and honestly.**" –Rev. Rob Keithan

**PRO-LIFE:** "I'm not for abortion . . . you don't give a woman the right to make the decision whether or not to kill when she's pregnant."

**GRAY AREA:** "I tend to be more conservative on this issue. I'm not blockading abortion clinics, but I'm not out waving the banner of pro-choice either. So I guess I'm somewhere in the middle. But I would hold to the sanctity of life, and share that with people, without a doubt."

**PRO-CHOICE:** "I'm a firm believer that it's a woman's right to choose. It's your body...and it's your life...I love adoption. I think that's a great option, but it's an option...I don't know every person's personal story, what they've gone through, what they have to go through."

### Team members suggest pastoral care training and programs should integrate:

- Accurate and evidence-based services and support around abortion
- Dispelling health misinformation
- Reducing stigma around abortion, pregnancy, and reproductive health
- Addressing beliefs about both the psychological and spiritual effects of abortion
- Public health recommendations with Christian beliefs and values around life