



## **NOVEL RESEARCH COLLABORATION FINDS NUANCE IN GEORGIA CHURCH LEADERS ON ABORTION CARE.**

***A study team of researchers and faith leaders interviewed church leaders in middle Georgia about their attitudes and beliefs around sex, pregnancy, abortion, and providing pastoral care.***

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Atlanta, Ga. -- New [research](#) from the Emory University Center for Reproductive Health Research in the Southeast (RISE) found that religious leaders shows nuanced perspectives and a greater need for religious and public health collaboration.

The [study](#) team conducted interviews with 20 leaders who headed Mainline and Black Protestant churches in the Atlanta area about their views on unplanned pregnancy, abortion, and pastoral care. The average age of those interviewed was 48 years-old, and 80 percent were men in senior positions who held a graduate degree.

Most participants had little or no experience or training in providing abortion-related pastoral care in their careers, suggesting a need for more collaborations that are geared towards reproductive justice between public health professionals and religious leaders.

“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,” says study co-author Reverend Rob Keithan.

“Religious leaders are highly respected and influential in many people’s lives, especially in Georgia. Our team sought to understand how leaders’ attitudes toward abortion influenced their pastoral care practices and the abortion norms they promote within their congregations. We found leaders’ religious beliefs and attitudes toward abortion influenced the advice they give their communities about abortion. Many participants express that their duty as spiritual leaders led them to support and “journey with” people facing an unplanned pregnancy, even if their theology led them to be morally opposed to abortion,” says study co-author Jessica Dozier.

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