

Pro-evolution project says faith and science are reconcilable

by [Bob Allen](#) in the [February 8, 2012](#) issue

A biologist with a scientific interest in evolution-creation debates attributed a poll saying that three-fourths of Protestant pastors reject evolution—and close to half believe the earth is about 6,000 years old—to a common but false idea that science and faith cannot be reconciled. The survey of 1,000 pastors, released in January, also said that 74 percent agreed that "Adam and Eve were literal people."

Michael

Zimmerman, academic vice president and provost at Evergreen State College in Olympia, Washington, said he doubts that a representative sample of pastors was surveyed by LifeWay Research, an arm of the Southern Baptist Convention—citing, for example, the 73 percent who disagreed with the statement "I believe God used evolution to create people."

Either way, Zimmerman said, "it is a shame that the respondents find that their religion demands that they turn away from the facts of the natural world."

The good news, the biologist said, is that thousands of Christian clergy understand science in a way that poses no threat to their faith. Nearly 13,000 have signed an open letter affirming belief that the timeless truths of the Bible and the discoveries of modern science may comfortably coexist and supporting the teaching of evolution to children in public schools.

"We believe that the theory of evolution is a foundational scientific truth, one that has stood up to rigorous scrutiny and upon which much of human knowledge and achievement rests," the letter says. To reject that truth

or to treat it as "one theory among others," the letter states, "is to deliberately embrace scientific ignorance and transmit such ignorance to our children."

The letter continues: "To argue that God's loving plan of salvation for humanity precludes the full employment of the God-given faculty of reason is to attempt to limit God, an act of hubris."

Zimmerman said the Clergy Letter Project has been officially endorsed by groups including the United Methodist Church, the Southeast Florida Diocese of the Episcopal Church and the Southwestern Washington Synod of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America. Separate letters have come from Jewish rabbis and Unitarian Universalist clergy.

The Clergy Letter Project began in 2004 when Zimmerman worked with clergy in Wisconsin to prepare a statement in support of teaching evolution in response to a series of antievolution policies passed by the school board in Grantsburg, Wisconsin. A large response prompted Zimmerman to launch the project nationwide.

The group sponsors annual Evolution Weekend events on the weekend closest to Charles Darwin's birthday, a date described by Zimmerman as "no better time to demonstrate the ways in which a mature and robust relationship between religion and science might take place." Nearly 425 congregations in the U.S. and ten other countries have indicated they will participate in Evolution Weekend 2012 on February 10-12.

The project recently created a database of 1,000 scientists interested in working with clergy members to answer questions about all aspects of evolution. —ABP