

For first time, majority of Protestant pastors say climate change is real

by [Adelle M. Banks](#) in the [May 20, 2020](#) issue



(Unsplash photo by Markus Spiske)

For years, the majority of US Protestant pastors surveyed about global warming questioned whether it was real and whether it was caused by humans.

But a new LifeWay Research survey shows that, for the first time since the company started asking, a majority of pastors (53 percent) agree with the statement “I believe global warming is real and man-made.” About a third—34 percent—strongly agree.

Sentiments of denial remain, with 38 percent disagreeing, including almost a quarter who disagree strongly. Another 10 percent say they are not sure.

“Fewer pastors are rejecting global warming and climate change out of hand,” said Scott McConnell, executive director of the research firm based in Nashville, Tennessee. “Yet pastors are still split on the subject, likely following along with political divides.”

The latest survey, conducted in the late summer and early fall of 2019, involved 1,000 Protestant pastors.

In previous studies of similar size, researchers found pastors were more skeptical or evenly split. In 2012, 43 percent agreed that global warming was real, compared with 36 percent in 2010 and 47 percent in 2008.

The latest research showed striking demographic differences in views about climate change. For example, African Americans were most likely—more than three-quarters of them—to agree global warming is a reality.

Mainline pastors (71 percent) are much more likely to agree than evangelical pastors (39 percent).

Clergy from Methodist (80 percent), Presbyterian/Reformed (67 percent), or Lutheran churches (63 percent) are more likely to agree than their counterparts from Restorationist movement (43 percent), Baptist (37 percent), or Pentecostal churches (32 percent).

Among pastors who agree global warming is caused by humans and is real, 70 percent say their church has worked to reduce its carbon footprint.

“Climate change can be a difficult issue to address because the causes and effects are not always easily seen where you live,” said McConnell.

“Much like the current coronavirus pandemic, environmental mitigation efforts require trust in the scientists measuring the problem and finding the best solutions that balance all of the concerns involved.”

The latest LifeWay survey has a margin of error that does not exceed plus or minus 3.3 percentage points. —Religion News Service