

6 Reasons Many Pastors Aren't Addressing Hot Button Issues From the Pulpit

In the wake of what the FBI is now treating as a terrorist attack in San Bernardino, California, coupled with international terrorism acts perpetrated by extremists worldwide, along with a nationwide debate about how to handle a potential influx of 10,000 Syrian refugees, leaders of the country's largest network of pastors is calling on clergy to talk about these important topics from the pulpit.

This month especially, to close out a particularly volatile year in American history, the American Pastors Network (APN) and Pennsylvania Pastors Network (PPN) are encouraging pastors across the nation to take on these tough topics and not shy away from the controversy they may cause. On Sunday night, amidst football games and prime-time television, President Obama addressed the nation for a few minutes regarding the shootings, and APN hopes his address will help elevate the need for the truth to come out in churches across our nation, beginning with church leaders.

"There is no greater calling for these 'Ministers of God' and no greater responsibility to God's people. Especially in these discouraging and sometimes frightening times, the church must be a light, and pastors must be committed to bringing these issues to the pulpit—and to their congregations," says APN and PPN President Sam Rohrer.

"In particular, conversations must begin about how to defend Christianity, especially as more and more Muslim influence reaches our nation—both through indoctrination and violence," Rohrer continued. "We can no longer passively sit by and hope that the world will receive the message of Christ if we don't

rise up to share and defend it.”

Rohrer says he sees six reasons pastors may shy away from addressing these hot-button issues:

1. Fear of controversy or pushback from those in the pews if biblical principles are applied to the issues of the day.
2. Negative theological training regarding talking about impacting the culture or discussion of anything regarding civil government or politics.
3. Unjustified fear of losing their 501(c)(3) status.
4. Being unaware of the historical role of pastors in the history of America.
5. Believing that the primary purpose for preaching is limited to “preaching the gospel” rather than training and “making disciples.”
6. Having more of a fear of man rather than a fear of God.

Added Gary Dull, APN Board Member and Executive Director and Vice President of PPN, “When, as pastors, we forget all that has been entrusted to us—to lead our congregations toward truth and light—there is a severe and costly price to pay. They count on pastors to lead the way when it comes to the most important matters of the church, of society, of the Bible and of the heart. Let’s not lead them astray by not leading them at all.”

Research has shown that pastors are purposefully skirting some controversial topics when preparing their messages for the pulpit, but Rohrer and Dull say the task must be tackled, no matter how uncomfortable it might be.

Last summer, George Barna, founder of the Barna Group, shared research that found that while about 90 percent of theologically conservative pastors believe the Bible speaks to

societal issues, fewer than 10 percent of these pastors are teaching people what the Bible says on these topics.

The research, conducted through the American Culture and Faith Institute, asked pastors across the country about their beliefs regarding the relevancy of Scripture to societal, moral and political issues, and the content of their sermons in light of their beliefs. Barna stated that many pastors are afraid to get involved in political issues because of the controversy it might create. And, he added, "Controversy keeps people from being in the seats, controversy keeps people from giving money, from attending programs."