

Poll: Pastors Uphold Christianity Exclusively

Nearly eight in 10 Protestant **pastors** strongly disagree that **eternal life** can be obtained through religions other than Christianity, according to a survey by LifeWay Research.

The survey of 1,000 Protestant pastors asked respondents for their reaction to the statement, "If a person is sincerely seeking God, he/she can obtain eternal life through religions other than Christianity."

A full 77 percent of **pastors** strongly disagree while 7 percent somewhat disagree. Another 7 percent somewhat agree, 5 percent strongly agree and 3 percent are not sure.

"The exclusivity of the Christian gospel is not popular in the context of American pluralism," said Ed Stetzer, president of LifeWay Research. "But most pastors have concluded that Christianity is the only way and reject the ideas that other faiths lead to heaven."

Pastors' beliefs regarding the exclusivity of **Christianity** differ from those of their parishioners, according to new study conducted for the upcoming book Transformational Discipleship by Eric Geiger, Michael Kelly and Philip Nation. When presented with the same statement, just 48 percent of adults who attend a Protestant **church** once a month or more disagree strongly and 9 percent disagree somewhat. A total of 26 percent agree, including 13 percent who agree strongly and 13 percent who agree somewhat. The survey of laity did not force a choice, and 16 percent indicate that they neither agree nor disagree.

"One fact is clear: pastors are less pluralistic than their church members," Stetzer said. "A few heads nodding or an occasional 'Amen' does not indicate everyone believes

Christianity is the only way. Church leaders will never know where their congregation stands unless they ask.”

According to the survey of pastors, those in large cities are more likely to believe that other religions lead to eternal life than their counterparts in other settings. Eleven percent of pastors in large cities strongly agree. In comparison, 4 percent of pastors in small cities, 4 percent in the suburbs and 3 percent in rural areas feel the same.

Pastors identifying themselves as evangelical exhibit less religious pluralism than those self-identifying as mainline. Compared with mainline pastors, evangelicals are:

- Less likely to strongly agree that other religions can lead to eternal life (2 percent to 11 percent).
- Less likely to somewhat agree (4 percent to 14 percent).
- Less likely to somewhat disagree (6 percent to 13 percent).
- More likely to strongly disagree (85 percent to 57 percent).

Educational level also corresponds with agreement that other faiths can lead to heaven. Pastors with a graduate degree are more likely to strongly agree (7 percent to 3 percent) and less likely to strongly disagree (70 percent to 90 percent) than pastors with a bachelor’s degree at most.