

What Are Global Church Leaders Worried About?

A survey of 2,196 Protestant leaders from around the world highlighted the concerns shared by Christians in 166 countries and the divergent outlooks for the church in the Global North (Europe, North America, Japan, Australia and New Zealand) and the Global South (sub-Saharan Africa, the Middle East and North Africa, Latin America and most of Asia).

On Wednesday, the Pew Research Center's Forum on Religion & Public Life released the results of a survey of those invited to attend the Third Lausanne Congress of World Evangelization, a 10-day gathering of ministers and lay leaders held in October in Cape Town, South Africa. The leaders surveyed expressed agreement on theological and social issues, such as abortion, homosexuality, the authority of Scripture and the uniqueness of Christ, but leaders from the Global North and the Global South expressed differing outlooks for the future of the church in their parts of the world.

While 71 percent of evangelical leaders in the Global South expect that five years from now the state of evangelicalism in their countries will be better than it is today, a majority of evangelical leaders in the Global North expect that the state of evangelicalism in their countries will either stay about the same (21 percent) or worsen (33 percent) in the next five years.

The threats to the progress of evangelicalism cited primarily surround cultural influences that have invaded the church. Only 22 percent cited government restrictions as a "major threat to evangelical Christianity." Of greater concern are secularism (71 percent), consumerism (67 percent), sex and violence in pop culture (59 percent), the influence of Islam (47 percent), theological divisions among evangelicals (30

percent), evangelical leaders leading lavish lifestyles (30 percent) and sexual misconduct among leaders (26 percent).

Other intriguing results of the study are the respondents' views toward Pentecostals, the prosperity gospel and women in ministry leadership. While 92 percent of those surveyed had a positive view of Pentecostals, 90 percent expressed disapproval of the prosperity gospel. Although most responded that men should be the religious leaders in marriage and family (79 percent) and the main financial providers for the family (53 percent), most do not think that women must stay home and raise children (63 percent), and a majority favors allowing women to serve as pastors (75 percent).