

# SEXUALITY & THE CHURCH IN AMERICA

## I

ARE PASTORS RESPONDING TO  
SEXUAL CHALLENGES WITHIN  
THE CHURCH?



## Introduction

Since the dawn of the Sexual Revolution, cultural sexual attitudes in America have dramatically shifted. Casting off old moral restraints, several generations now have experienced a society that promises sexual freedom, but leaves untold millions of women, men, and children suffering from sexual brokenness of all kinds. Further, sexual abuse, pornography addiction, gender identity confusion, and other sexual struggles are among the most difficult life challenges to address because they are so deeply personal. Shame and fear often prevent people from sharing their struggles with others. As the silence and isolation grows, it becomes increasingly difficult for many people to find the support and healing they need.

The question for many of these people is, *“Will I find support from my church?”*

There is no single answer—and certainly no easy answers—to such a question. Our research reveals that many pastors are not engaged on these issues and most are not well-equipped to handle them. The first in a series of reports, *Sexuality & the Church in America I* explores how Protestant senior pastors are addressing sexual challenges within the church

The Brushfires Foundation  
TrueNorth Freedom Project  
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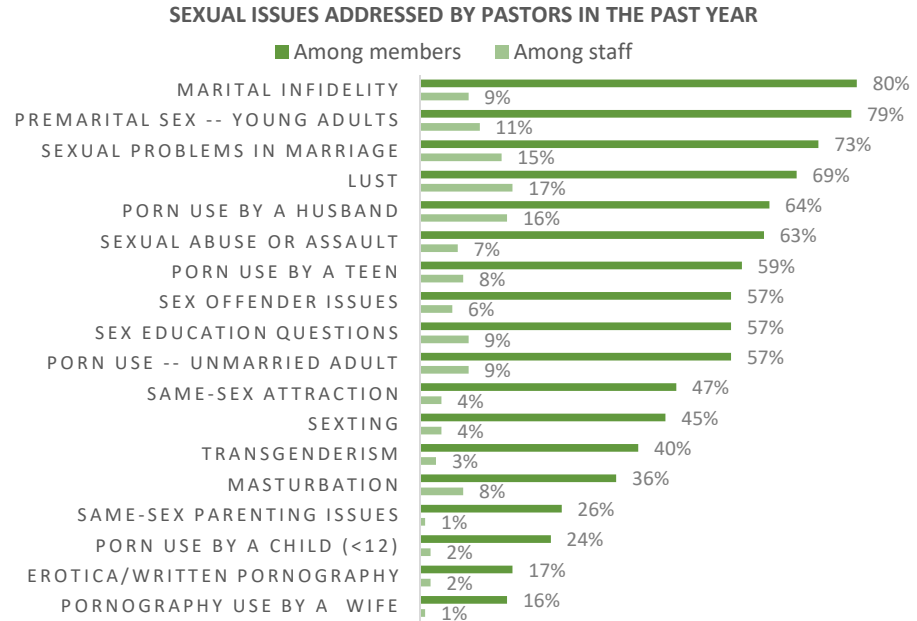
American Family Association  
Be Broken Ministries  
California Family Council  
Changing Lanes Ministries  
Concordia Publishing House  
Delaware Strong Families  
Enough is Enough  
Family Institute of  
Connecticut  
Focus on the Family  
Hawaii Family Forum  
Josh McDowell Ministries  
Love and Truth Network  
Louisiana Family Forum  
Massachusetts Family  
Institute  
Nathan Project  
New Yorker's Family  
Research Foundation  
Regeneration Ministries  
Restored Hope Network  
The Family Foundation  
The Family Policy Council of  
West Virginia  
Wisconsin Family Action  
Wisconsin Family Council

*Sexuality & the Church in America* is a collaborative research project led by The Brushfires Foundation and TrueNorth Freedom Project, along with Covenant Eyes and 22 other organizations dedicated to serving individuals in need, strengthening families, equipping churches to share the truth about sexuality with love, and proclaiming the Gospel of Jesus Christ to the culture.

Learn more at:  
[brushfiresfoundation.org/integrity](http://brushfiresfoundation.org/integrity)

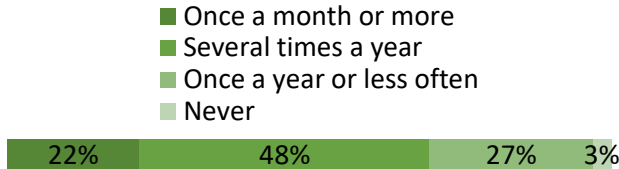
# Research summary

**1. There is much sexual brokenness in churches today.** Four in five pastors (80%) were approached in the past year by a church member or staff dealing with infidelity and three in four (73%) have handled pornography-related questions. On average, pastors were approached by members or staff about *nine of eighteen listed issues over the past year.*



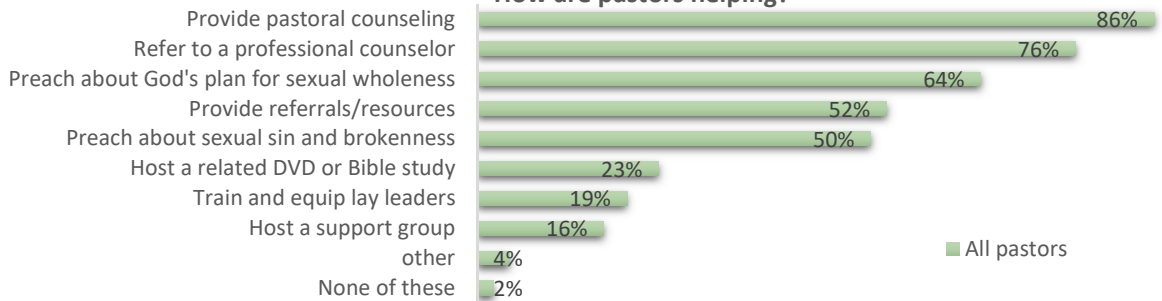
**2. Seven in ten pastors (70%) are approached several times per year or more with concerns about sexual brokenness,** including 22% who are approached once per month or more.

**How often do pastors address sexual issues?**



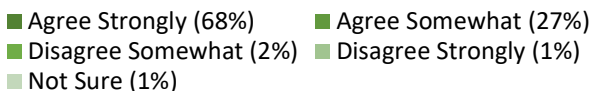
**3. Fewer than one in four pastors involves the larger church community in the healing process** through DVD or Bible studies on sexual topics (23%), training lay leaders to assist with sexual concerns (19%), or hosting related support groups (16%). Most pastors offer pastoral counseling (86%) or refer to a professional counselor (76%) when approached by someone with a sexual concern.

**How are pastors helping?**



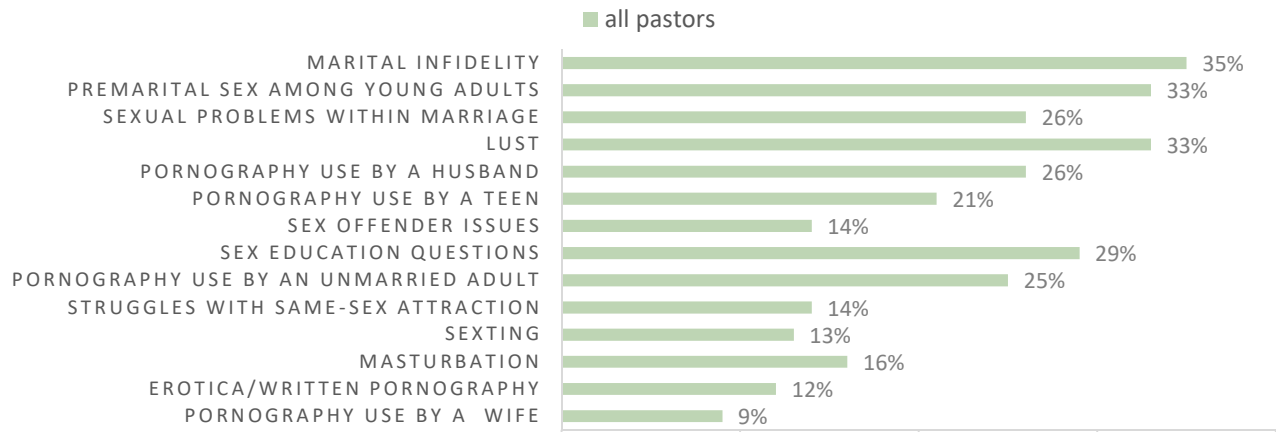
**4. Two-thirds of all pastors (68%) “agree strongly”** that the Christian Church should help people deal with personal sexual challenges. Another one-quarter (27%) “agree somewhat.”

**“The Church should be responsible for helping people deal with issues relating to sexual sin or sexual brokenness.”**



**5. Yet, on 15 of the 18 sexual issues listed in our survey, fewer than one-third of the pastors feel “very qualified” to address them.** Just one-third of pastors (35%) feel “very qualified” to address the most common concern brought to them (marital infidelity) even though 80% of them encountered the issue in the past year. Only seven issues were ranked by at least one-quarter of pastors as being among those they feel “very qualified” to address.

## % of pastors feeling "very qualified" to address these sexual issues



*Q15. How qualified do you personally feel to assist church members with these issues?*

## Moderating factors

**6. Church affiliation matters a great deal.** \*Non-mainline pastors are significantly more likely than mainline pastors to strongly agree that the church should address sexual brokenness (77% vs. 56%); three times more likely to be approached on a monthly basis with sexual concerns (29% vs. 9%); and are far more likely to encounter a wider variety of issues. Non-mainline pastors are slightly more likely than their mainline counterparts to feel “very qualified” to address certain sexual issues, but are far more likely to offer greater support options to those who come to them for care. (\* See full report for definitions.)

**7. Cultural concern drives pastoral engagement.** Pastors who are concerned about the negative impact of a sexualized culture are far more likely than neutral pastors to strongly agree that the church should be involved with sexual issues (81% vs. 44%) and seem to place a greater emphasis on addressing the sexual brokenness they encounter.

**8. Optimistic pastors provide greater support for sexual concerns than pessimistic or neutral pastors.** Pastors who feel optimistic about their ability to minister, teach, and preach on sexual issues connect with

struggling people more often and provide greater support than other pastors.

**9. Church capacity is significantly connected to engagement on sexual issues.** Pastors in smaller churches (<100 people) with smaller budgets (<\$150K) encounter fewer sexual concerns, are approached less frequently by members, are less likely to think the church is responsible to address these concerns, and offer fewer supports than pastors in larger churches (250+ people).

**10. When pastors aren’t regularly approached for help, many act as if sexual problems aren’t a concern.** There is a strong correlation between pastoral inaction and church member silence. When pastors do not regularly and intentionally preach and teach on sexual issues, it becomes much more difficult to create the safety and trust that many people need to talk about difficult sexual issues.

**Learn more:** Detailed findings, conclusions, survey methodology, links to participating ministries and helpful church resources can be found at: [brushfiresfoundation.org/integrity](http://brushfiresfoundation.org/integrity)