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Sermon Content Review

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The ***Sermon Content Review (SCR)*** is a bi-monthly publication of the **Center for the Study of Information and Religion (CSIR)** at **Kent State University**. The focus of SCR is on the social construction of religious knowledge and the influence of sermons in that process. Its purpose is to provide a snapshot sampling of the topics, issues, and events currently being addressed from pulpits around the country; to document the terminology, scripture texts, and information resources used; and, to discover early indicators, emerging trends, and research questions conducive for advancing the study of information and religion. The sermon texts used for the SCR are gathered from the clergy blogs and congregational websites listed on the ***Sermon Texts Posting Sites Index (STPSI)***. For more information about STPSI go to <http://bit.ly/STPSI> or at this link:

https://docs.google.com/spreadsheet/ccc?key=0AhZGuWv1JoamdE4xLXlnSnVpOTVhUWFURFNxX3VVR1E&usp=drive_web#gid=0

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Please send comments and suggestions for improving ***The Sermon Content Review*** to better suit your research needs to csir@kent.edu.

Demographics:

The number of clergy members whose sermons were collected for this issue of SCR: 123 (30 female clergy)

The number of sermon texts collected for this issue of SCR: 590 (120 by female clergy)

Sermon count by denominational affiliation:

American Baptist (ABC) – 4

Anglican - 7

Disciples of Christ (DoC) – 56

Evangelical Lutheran Church of American (ELCA) – 103

Episcopal – 87

Lutheran Church Missouri Synod (LCMS) - 75

Mennonite USA – 26

Non-denominational - 5

Presbyterian Church USA (PCUSA) – 64

Southern Baptist Convention/Cooperative Baptist Fellowship (SBC/CBF) - 9

United Church of Christ (UCC) – 50

United Church of Canada - 7

United Methodist Church (UMC) – 85

Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod (WELS) - 10

Sermon count by geographical location:

Alabama – 19

Alaska – 1

Arizona - 4

Arkansas - 11

Australia - 7

California – 28

Canada - 10

Colorado – 7

Connecticut – 10

District of Columbia – 13

Florida – 15

Georgia - 6

Illinois – 26

Indiana – 11

Iowa – 10

Kansas – 8

Louisiana – 9

Maine – 5

Maryland - 22

Massachusetts – 16

Michigan – 21

Minnesota - 29

Missouri – 21

Montana – 9

Nebraska - 5

New Mexico – 9

New York – 29

North Carolina – 14

North Dakota – 8

Ohio – 61

Oklahoma - 10

Oregon – 10

Pennsylvania – 14

South Carolina - 6

Tennessee – 10

Texas – 7

Utah - 9

Virginia – 31

Washington – 30

Wisconsin - 17

Current Events and Issues Referenced in Sermons:

Event: Typhoon Haiyan

On November 8 the deadliest typhoon ever to strike the Philippine Islands left more than 6,000 casualties and caused more than \$1 billion in damage. The deadly storm was referred to

in 20 sermons from the data sample on Sundays from November 10 to December 29. The majority of references came on November 17 and often within the context of speaking to the apocalyptic themes of the lectionary lessons for that Sunday. Links to some of the sermons are provided below:

- [The Bottomless Well](#) - Rev. DD Adams, Providence United Methodist Church, Monrovia, MD
- [Five Things to Have in a Spiritual Survival Kit](#) - Rev. John Beddingfield, All Souls Memorial Episcopal Church, District of Columbia
- [Jesus is in the Building](#) - Rev. Lynn Fonfara, Hope Evangelical Lutheran Church, Citrus Springs, FL
- [Faith and Disaster](#) - Rev. Alan Wolkenhauer, St. Mark Evangelical Lutheran Church, Dunedin, FL
- [The Cause of Generosity, In the End](#) - Rev. David Warner, St. John and Trinity Lutheran Churches (LCMS), Fairview and Sydney, MT

Event: The Death of Nelson Mandela

On December 5 Nelson Mandela died from a respiratory infection at the age of 95 years. Sunday, December 8, was a national day of prayer and reflection in South Africa, Mandela's homeland and of which he is widely referred to as its father. The national day of prayer and reflection quickly became an international event. Mandela was remembered in 19 sermons from the data sample, links to a sample of which are included below:

- [Madiba Inspires](#) – Rev. Kurt Huber, St. Peter's Episcopal Church, Monroe, CT
- [Imagining the Impossible](#) – Rev. Ed Kaufmann, Calgary First Mennonite Church, Alberta Canada
- [No Title](#) – Rev. Mary Beard, First United Congregational Church, Brunswick, ME
- [Action, Reconciliation, Transformation](#) – Rev. Christopher Boyer, Good Shepherd Baptist Church, Lynnwood, WA
- [The Light of Hope](#) – Rev. James Harnish, Hyde Park United Methodist Church, Tampa, FL

Event: The 50th Anniversary of the JFK Assassination

November 22, 2013 marked the 50th anniversary of the assassination of U.S. President John F. Kennedy. The event was mentioned in seven sermons in the data sample. Five of the seven references were made on Sunday, November 24, Christ the King Sunday in the liturgical calendar, which created a situation of serendipitous juxtaposition:

- [An Unlikely Throne](#) – Rev. Amy Perkins, United Presbyterian Church (PCUSA), Shawnee, OK
- [Fifty Years Ago: What Did We Learn?](#) – Rev. Randy Hammer, United Church, Chapel on the Hill, Oak Ridge, TN
- [Christ the King](#) – Rev. Jamie Parsley, St. Stephen's Episcopal Church, Fargo, ND
- [Thanks/Giving/Thanks](#) – Rev. William Lovin, Congregational UCC, Iowa City, IA

Issue: Homelessness

The issue of homelessness was mentioned in 35 of the 900 or 3.9% of the sermons in September and October 2013 data sample and in at least one sermon for each of the nine Sundays in those two months. The issue continues to be mentioned in sermons for the November and December data sample, being referenced in 21 of 590 or 3.6% of the sermons. The issue was mentioned in sermons delivered on 8 of the 9 Sundays in November and December.

- [Blessed to Be a Blessing](#) – Rev. Lynn Fonfara, Hope Evangelical Lutheran Church, Citrus Springs, FL

- [Be Ready](#) - Rev. Lynn Fonfara, Hope Evangelical Lutheran Church, Citrus Springs, FL
- [Salvation in This House](#) – Rev. Ron Moe-Lobeda, University Lutheran Church (ELCA), Seattle, WA
- [One Body](#) – Rev. Sarah Weaver, Rehoboth Congregational Church, Rehoboth, MA
- [How Will They Know?](#) – Rev. Bill Hayes, Hopewell Presbyterian Church (PCUSA), Florence, SC
- [Love...Gotta Have It](#) - Rev. Robert McDowell, First United Methodist Church, Lancaster, OH

Church Calendar and Themes:

November 3 - All Saints Sunday

All Saints Sunday is celebrated on November 1 or the first Sunday after November 1:

- [To the Praise of God's Glory](#) – Rev. Robert Benke, Jehovah Lutheran Church (LCMS), St. Paul, MN
- [We're Surrounded](#) – Rev. Mary Anne Biggs, First Congregational Church, Eagle River, WI
- [Open the Eyes of My Heart, Lord](#) – Rev. James Brewer-Calvert, First Christian Church, Decatur, GA
- [The Eyes of the Heart](#) – Rev. Carol Devine, Providence Christian Church, Nicholasville, KY
- [Cleaning the Windshield](#) – Rev. C. Eric Funston, St. Paul's Episcopal Church, Medina, OH
- [All Saints Sunday](#) – Rev. Julie Hutson, Luther Memorial Church (ELCA), Seattle, WA
- [Through the Fog](#) – Rev. Fred Kinsey, Unity Lutheran Church (ELCA), Chicago, IL
- [All Saints](#) – Rev. Evan Pederick, St. Michael and All Angels Anglican Church, Perth, Australia

November 10 - Resurrection

The lectionary scripture readings for the last Sundays of the Christian liturgical calendar feature texts that speak to end-of-time themes such as the resurrection of the dead, the second coming, and other apocalyptic events.

- [Think Differently - Resurrection](#) – Rev. Kevin Harbin, The United Methodist Church of Swartz Creek, MI
- [The Resurrection of the Living](#) – Rev. David Hedges, St. Peter's Episcopal Church, Sycamore, IL
- [Do You Have to Eat, or Get Your Hair Cut, in Heaven?](#) – Rev. Bob Lewis, Nativity Lutheran Church (ELCA), Renton, WA
- [God of the Living](#) – Rev. Amy Perkins, United Presbyterian Church (PCUSA), Shawnee OK
- [More Than November Leaves](#) – Rev. Jim Singleton, First Christian Church, Wadsworth OH
- [One Bride for Seven Brothers](#) – Rev. Andrew Eckert, Our Savior Lutheran Church (LCMS), Stevensville, MT
- [I Believe in the Resurrection...](#) – Rev. Jeffrey Smith, Living Word Lutheran Church (WELS), Petaluma, CA
- [All of Them are Alive](#) – Rev. Joel Miller, Mennonite Fellowship, Cincinnati, OH

November 17 - Apocalypse:

The lectionary Gospel lesson for November 17, 2013 was [Luke 21:5-19](#). Many clergy members used the text to speak about apocalyptic themes:

- [Seeing What God Sees](#) – Rev. Ken Albright, Grace and Glory Lutheran Church (ELCA), Palmyra, VA
- [Be Very Afraid...Unless You Believe Jesus](#) – Rev. John Bedingfield, St. Barnabas Episcopal Church, Lafayette, LA
- [A Reason to Hope](#) – Rev. Mary Anne Biggs, First Congregational Church, Eagle River, WI
- [When All Seems Lost](#) – Rev. Laura Hutchinson, First Christian Church (Disciples), Anniston, AL
- [...And I Feel Fine!](#) – Rev. Jacob Junker, Wesley United Methodist Church, Culver, IN
- [Rescuing Scripture From Its Despisers, Once Again](#) – Rev. Bob Lewis, Nativity Lutheran Church (ELCA), Renton, WA
- [Awake and Ready](#) – Rev. James Sledge, Falls Church Presbyterian Church (PCUSA), Falls Church, VA
- [How to Live When the World's on Fire](#) – Rev. Jim Singleton, First Christian Church (Disciples), Wadsworth, OH

November 24 – Christ the King Sunday:

The last Sunday in the church calendar is known as Christ the King Sunday and sermons typically seek to summarize the Christian faith by contrasting our knowledge of and experience with earthly kingdoms and power structures with the attributes of a divine kingdom that Jesus offered his disciples.

- [Getting What We Deserve](#) – Rev. DD Adams, Providence United Methodist Church, Monrovia, MD
- [The King Who Needs Nothing is the King Who Wants Everything](#) – Rev. Robert Benke, Jehovah Lutheran Church, (LCMS), St. Paul, MN
- [Lord\(s\) or Servant\(s\)?](#) – Rev. Steven Davis, Central United Church (United Church of Canada), Port Colborne, Ontario
- [One of These Things is Not Like the Other](#) – Rev. Steve Dennis, First Christian Church (Disciples), Minneapolis, MN
- [When Royalty is in Residence](#) – Rev. James Harnish, Hyde Park United Methodist Church, Tampa, FL
- [Remember the King](#) – Rev. Bill Hayes, Hopewell Presbyterian Church (PCUSA), Florence, SC
- [This is the King of the Jews](#) – Rev. Brandon Miles, St. Julian of Norwich Episcopal Church, Round Rock, TX
- [Reign of Christ](#) – Rev. Leanne Walt, First Congregational Church (UCC), Braintree, MA

December 1 – Theme of Hope:

December 1, 2013 marked the beginning of a new year and a new three-year-cycle in the Christian calendar. The new year begins with the season of Advent that leads to the Christmas celebration of the birth of Jesus while primarily focusing on being prepared for the second coming of the Christ. The lectionary lessons for the first Sunday of Advent were [Isaiah 2:1-5](#), [Romans 13:11-14](#), and [Matthew 24:36-44](#). Many clergy members used the texts to speak about hope:

- [Our Town, Our Hope](#) – Rev. Fred Kinsey, Unity Lutheran Church (ELCA), Chicago, IL
- [Hope...Next Year Things Will Be Different](#) - Rev. Robert McDowell, First United Methodist Church, Lancaster, OH
- [Unto You a Child is Given: Hope for Earth](#) – Rev. Maria Tafoya, Delhaven Christian Church (Disciples), La Puente, CA
- [I Hope](#) – Rev. Brian Vinson, Hope United Methodist Church, Wellston, OH

- [Dare We Hope?](#) – Rev. Chris Whitehead, Hebron Christian Church (Disciples), Hebron, OH

December 15 – Theme of Expectation:

The lectionary lessons for December 15, 2013 were [Isaiah 35:1-10](#), [James 5:7-10](#), [Luke 1:46-55](#), and [Matthew 11:2-11](#). Many clergy members used the texts to speak about the Advent theme of expectation:

- [What Did You Expect?](#) – Rev. DD Adams, Providence United Methodist Church, Monrovia, MD
- [Stirred Up for Christ](#) – Rev. John F. Beddingfield, All Souls Memorial Episcopal Church, Washington, DC
- [Joy: Already....But Not Yet](#) – Rev. Christopher Boyer, Good Shepherd Baptist Church (ABC), Lynnwood, WA
- [Tell What You See](#) – Rev. Diane Dulin, First Congregational Church (UCC), Hillsboro, OR
- [Bursting Bubbles of Expectations](#) – Rev. Joseph Holub, Lord of the Mountains Lutheran Church (ELCA), Dillon, CO
- [Advent Adventure: Expectant Living](#) – Rev. Corey Stone, St. Luke's Episcopal Church, North Little Rock, AR
- [Christian Expectations](#) – Rev. Jason Zirbel, Grace Lutheran Church (LCMS), Greenwood, AR

December 22 – Joseph:

The lectionary Gospel lesson for December 22, 2013 was [Matthew 1:18-25](#), which tells the story of Joseph's role in the Nativity story.

- [Joseph's Story](#) – Rev. Bill Hayes, Hopewell Presbyterian Church (PCUSA), Florence, SC
- [Papa Joseph](#) – Rev. Keith Hudson, First Presbyterian Church (PCUSA), La Grange OR
- [Joseph's Role in God's Plan](#) – Rev. James Kniseley, Resurrection Lutheran Church (ELCA), Fredericksburg, VA
- [Name Him "God-With-Us"](#) – Rev. Allison Patton, Saugatuck Congregational Church (UCC), Westport, CT
- [Waiting for Jesus - Joseph's Story](#) – Rev. Alan Wolkenhauer, St. Mark Lutheran Church (ELCA), Dunedin, FL
- [Thank Goodness for Saint Joseph](#) – Rev. Bob Lewis, Nativity Lutheran Church (ELCA), Renton, WA
- [Responding to God's Invitation](#) – Rev. Scott Hamley, Seward United Methodist Church, Seward, PA

December 29 – The Slaughter of the Innocents:

The lectionary Gospel lesson for December 29, 2013 was [Matthew 2:13-23](#), which tells the story of King Herod's effort to eliminate any threat to his throne by ordering the death of infant children in the region. The event is remembered in the church calendar on the first Sunday following Christmas as The Feast of the Holy Innocents.

- [Remembering Rachel: The Slaughter of the Innocents](#) – Rev. Robert Benke, Jehovah Lutheran Church, (LCMS), St. Paul, MN
- [Weeping with Rachel](#) – Rev. Mary Anne Biggs, First Congregational Church (UCC), Eagle River, WI
- [A Map of Kindness](#) – Rev. Diane Dulin, First Congregational Church (UCC), Hillsboro, OR
- [Christmas Death Wish](#) – Rev. Daniel Harrell, Colonial Church, Edina, MN
- [King of the Raft](#) – Rev. Fred Kinsey, Unity Lutheran Church (ELCA), Chicago, IL
- [Immanuel in Distress](#) – Rev. Cynthia Lapp, Hyattsville Mennonite Church, Hyattsville, MD

- [Holy Innocents](#) – Rev. Evan Pederick, St. Michael and All Angels Anglican Church, Perth, Australia
- [Christmas in Jeopardy](#) – Rev. Lee Pittard, St. Paul's United Methodist Church, Burlington, NC

Sermon Series

Cries of the Heart – Rev. Danny Bradfield, Bixby Knolls Christian Church (Disciples), Long Beach, CA:

- [God's Voice - Psalm 29](#)
- [Depression - Psalm 31:9-16](#)
- [Guilt - Psalm 32](#)
- [Devotion – Psalm 25:1-5](#)

Finding God in Unexpected Places – Rev. Matt Reynolds, St. Paul's United Methodist Church, Celina OH

- [Finding God Among the Screw Ups](#)
- [Finding God Above Our Heads](#)
- [Finding God Through the Tears](#)

Creation Care – Rev. Maria Tafoya, Delhaven Christian Church (Disciples), La Puente, CA:

- [Hope for Earth](#)
- [Peace for Humanity](#)
- [Joy Fills the Skies](#)
- [For the Love of Creatures](#)

The Advent Conspiracy – Rev. John Nash, First United Methodist Church, Melrose, NM

- [Worship Fully](#)
- [Spend Less](#)
- [Give More](#)
- [Love All](#)

Immediately – Rev. Beth Quick, First United Methodist Church, Liverpool, NY

- [Man With a Mat](#)
- [A Woman Healed, A Girl Resurrected](#)
- [Jesus on the Water](#)

The Implications of Christmas – Rev. Mark Adams, Redland Baptist Church, Rockville, MD

- [I Can Build My Life on God's Promises](#)
- [I Can Experience God's Presence Now and Always](#)
- [I Can Live a Life of Eternal Significance](#)
- [I Can Have True Friends](#)