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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>

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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: 163 (32 female clergy)

The number of sermon texts collected for this issue of SCR: 900 (155 by female clergy)

Sermon count by denominational affiliation:

[American Baptist \(ABC\)](#) – 1

[Anglican](#) - 5

[Disciples of Christ \(DoC\)](#) – 56

[Evangelical Lutheran Church of American \(ELCA\)](#) – 304

[Episcopal](#) – 107

[Lutheran Church Missouri Synod \(LCMS\)](#) - 78

[Mennonite USA](#) – 46

[Non-denominational](#) - 16

[Presbyterian Church USA \(PCUSA\)](#) – 85

[Southern Baptist Convention/Cooperative Baptist Fellowship \(SBC/CBF\)](#) - 13

[United Church of Christ \(UCC\)](#) – 63

[United Church of Canada](#) - 8

[United Methodist Church \(UMC\)](#) – 105

[Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod \(WELS\)](#) - 9

Sermon count by geographical location:

Alabama – 13

Alaska – 4

Arizona - 9

Arkansas - 20

Australia - 5

California – 48

Canada - 14

Colorado – 23

Connecticut – 31

District of Columbia – 12

Florida – 23

Georgia - 5

Idaho - 19

Illinois – 39

Indiana – 21

Iowa – 25

Kansas – 12

Louisiana – 9

Maine – 9

Maryland - 31

Massachusetts – 12

Michigan – 45

Minnesota - 53

Missouri – 27

Montana – 15

New Mexico – 7

New York – 29

North Carolina – 33

North Dakota – 8

Ohio – 91

Oregon – 19

Pennsylvania – 14

South Carolina - 6

Tennessee – 15

Texas – 14

Utah - 9

Virginia – 36

Washington – 41

Wisconsin - 40

Wyoming - 2

Current Events and Issues Referenced in Sermons:

The vote of the U.S. House of Representatives to cut Food Stamps

On September 19 the U.S. House of Representatives voted to cut \$39 billion from the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP). On Sunday, September 22, 6 clergy members referred to the Vote in their sermons. The vote was referenced in 3 additional sermons in following weeks. Links to some of the sermons are provided below:

- [Where is the Lord?](#) - Rev. Marci Glass, Southminster PCUSA, Boise, ID

- [It's a Wonderful Life](#) - Rev. Timothy Keyl, Bethesda Lutheran Church (ELCA), New Haven, CT
- [A Quiet and Peaceable Life](#) - Rev. Ron Moe-Lobeda, University Lutheran Church (ELCA), Seattle, WA
- [The Life That Really is Life](#) - Rev. David Ensign, Clarendon PCUSA, Arlington, VA
- [Beyond Tears](#) - Rev. Brant Copeland, First Presbyterian Church (PCUSA), Tallahassee, FL

Hunger

While not referencing the legislative vote to cut food stamp funding, several more clergy made mention of food stamps while addressing the issue of hunger in their sermons:

- [Kingdom Stories: Laborers in the Vineyard](#) – Rev. Beth Quick, First United Methodist Church, Liverpool, NY
- [The God Within](#) – Rev. Ron Moe-Lobeda, University Lutheran Church (ELCA), Seattle, WA
- [Preferential Treatment or Loving Discernment](#) – Rev. Allen Harris, Franklin Circle Christian Church (Disciples), Cleveland, OH
- [Is There No Balm in Gilead?](#) – Rev. Matthew Braddock, Christ Congregational Church, Silver Spring MD
- [An Ox Tale](#) – Rev. Monte Johnson, Immanuel Evangelical Lutheran Church, Chicago, IL

Panera CEO Ron Shaich Food Stamp Challenge

For one week in September Ron Shaich, CEO of Panera Bread and president of the Panera Bread Foundation, chose to experience what it was like to live on the average daily food stamp allotment of \$4.50. Three clergy members referenced his experience in their September 29 sermons:

- [Dives and Lazarus](#) – Rev. Christopher Miller, St. Peter's Lutheran Church (ELCA), Logansville, WI
- [Untitled](#) – Rev. Kurt Huber, St. Peter's Episcopal Church, Monroe, CT
- [Untitled](#) – Rev. Abbot Bailey, St. Andrew's Episcopal Church, Richmond, VA

The U.S. Government Shutdown

When the U.S. Congress failed to pass an appropriations bill funding the government for fiscal year 2014, the government went into a partial shutdown for 16 days. The shutdown was referenced in 7 sermons over three Sundays in October 2013:

- [They Devoted Themselves ... to the Breaking of Bread](#) – Rev. Dave Mauer, Bethel Mennonite Church, West Liberty, OH
- [The Arrest, Trial and Crucifixion of the King](#) – Rev. Matt Reynolds, St. Paul's United Methodist Church, Celina OH
- [Naaman's Health Care Plan](#) – Rev. Fred Kinsey, Unity Lutheran Church (ELCA), Chicago IL
- [Where Will Faith Be Found?](#) – Rev. Scott Landis, Mission Hills United Church of Christ, San Diego CA
- [The Hook](#) – Rev. Steve Pankey, St. Paul's Episcopal Church, Foley AL
- [Listening Matters](#) – Rev. Caela Simmons-Wood, First United Church, Bloomington IN

Homelessness

The July-August 2013 Sermon Content Review reported that only four sermons made reference to the issue of homelessness. The issue was mentioned in 35 of the 900 sermons tracked in September and October and in at least one sermon for each of the nine Sundays in the two months:

- [Kingdom Moments](#) – Rev. Christine Faulstich, St. Matthew's Episcopal Church, Austin TX

- [Knit Together as a Family](#) – Rev. Marci Glass, Southminster Presbyterian Church (PCUSA), Boise ID
- [Healing the Blind](#) – Rev. James Sledge, Falls Church PCUSA, Falls Church VA
- [In Search of an Asterisk](#) – Rev. Beverly Glasure-Dempsey, Western PCUSA, Washington DC
- [Thank God I Am Not Like...](#) – Rev. John Bedingfield, St. Barnabas Episcopal Church, Lafayette LA
- [Untitled](#) – Rev. Jason Bense, Lutheran Church of our Redeemer (ELCA), Sacramento CA
- [For What are We Created? Good Works](#) – Rev. Jean Hansen, Faith Lutheran Church (ELCA), Akron OH
- [Faithful in a Little](#) – Rev. Ken Albright, Grace and Glory Lutheran Church (ELCA), Palmyra VA

Human Trafficking

The issue of human trafficking continues to be mentioned in sermons. The issue was mentioned by 2 of 136 clergy members (1.4%) in two sermons in July and August 2013 and by 4 of 163 clergy members (2.5%) in five sermons in September and October:

- [On Earth As It Is In Heaven](#) – Rev. Craig Strobel, First United Methodist Church, Pocatello ID
- [Light the Way](#) – Rev. Lee Pittard, St. Paul's United Methodist Church, Burlington NC
- [Salt is Good for You](#) – Rev. Lee Pittard, St. Paul's United Methodist Church, Burlington NC
- [Exposed](#) – Rev. Beverly Glasure-Dempsey, Western Presbyterian Church, Washington DC
- [Mid-Course Correction](#) – Rev. Mark Adams, Redland Baptist Church, Rockville MD

50th anniversary of 16th Street Baptist Church bombing in Birmingham

September 15, 2013 marked the 50th anniversary of the bombing of the 16th Street Baptist Church by members of the Ku Klux Klan that claimed the lives of four young girls. Four clergy members mentioned the anniversary in their sermons:

- [Rev. Linda Wofford Hawkins](#), St. Barnabas Episcopal Church, Annandale VA
- [Foundings and Fugitives](#) – Rev. Anita Warner, Advent Lutheran Church (ELCA), Morgan Hill CA
- [Seeking, Shining, and Shifting](#) – Rev. Caela Simmons-Wood, First United Church, Bloomington IN
- [Rev. Jamie Parsley](#) – St. Stephen's Episcopal Church, Fargo ND

Church Calendar:

World Communion Sunday

The first Sunday of each October is celebrated as World Communion Sunday and sponsored by the National Council of Churches to promote Christian unity and ecumenical cooperation, which was the theme of many sermons for October 6, 2013:

- [Rev. Danny Bradfield](#), Bixby Knolls Christian Church, Long Beach CA
- [The Power of Community](#) – Rev. Michael Dent, Trinity United Methodist Church, Denver CO
- [When Religion Falls from Grace](#) – Rev. Randy Hammer, United Church, Chapel on the Hill, Oak Ridge TN
- [The Gift of Communion](#) – Rev. Ed Kauffman, First Mennonite Church, Calgary Alberta

- [Eating for Mission](#) – Rev. Phil Kniss, Park View Mennonite Church, Harrisonburg VA
- [The Gospel According to Red Green](#) – Rev. William Lovin, Congregational UCC, Iowa City IA
- [All Four Sides of the Communion Table](#) – Rev. Joel Miller, Cincinnati Mennonite Fellowship, Cincinnati OH
- [Common Place](#) – Rev. Maria Tafoya, Delhaven Christian Church, La Puente CA

Reformation Sunday

The beginning of the Protestant Reformation is celebrated on the last Sunday in October mostly in churches of the Lutheran and Reformed traditions. While considered a lesser festival compared to Christmas and Easter, the historical event is receives significant mention in many sermons:

- [Reformation](#) – Rev. James Batchelor, Good Shepherd Lutheran Church (LCMS), Hoopston IL
- [Water of Freedom](#) – Rev. Lisa Davis Parker, Resurrection Lutheran Church (ELCA), Ankeny IA
- [The Key to Reformation](#) – Rev. Steven Davis, Central United Church, Port Colborne Ontario
- [Reformation Sunday](#) – Rev. John Fitzgerald, Providence United Methodist Church, Charlotte NC
- [Reformation](#) – Rev. Andrew Eckert, Our Savior Lutheran Church (LCMS), Stevensville MT
- [Reformation: It's Not All About You](#) – Rev. Marcus Felde, Bethlehem Lutheran Church (ELCA), Indianapolis IN
- [Reformation Sunday](#) – Rev. Julie Hutson, Luther Memorial Church (ELCA), Seattle WA
- [The Truth Will Set You Free](#) – Rev. Kurt Hering, Trinity Lutheran Church (LCMS), Layton UT

Particular Topical Themes:

Humility:

The lectionary Gospel lesson for September 1, 2013 was [Luke 14: 1, 7-14](#). Many clergy members used the text to speak about humility:

- [Learning What Doesn't Come Easy](#) – Rev. David Avery, Community Christian Church, Jefferson City MO
- [Places of Honor and Humility](#) – Rev. John Beddingfield, All Souls Memorial Episcopal Church, Washington DC
- [Humble](#) – Rev. Thom Burleson, Community in Christ Community Church (PCUSA), Greensboro NC
- [Eating Humble Pie at the Wedding](#) – Rev. Brant Copeland, First Presbyterian Church (PCUSA), Tallahassee FL
- [On Common Sense and True Humility](#) – Rev. Bob Lewis, Nativity Lutheran Church (ELCA), Renton WA
- [Those Who Humble Themselves](#) – Rev. Brandon Miles, Saint Julian of Norwich Episcopal Church, Round Rock TX
- [Living it Up](#) – Rev. Tim Stein, Faith Lutheran Church, Cambridge MA
- [Are You Serious?](#) – Rev. Robin Fish, Shaped by the Cross Lutheran Church (LCMS), Laurie MO

Discipleship:

The lectionary Gospel lesson for September 8, 2013 was [Luke 14:25-33](#). Many clergy members used the text to speak about discipleship:

- [He's Already There!](#) – Rev. Douglas DeVos, First Christian Church, Tiffin OH
- [Shaped for Discipleship](#) – Rev. David Ensign, Clarendon Presbyterian Church (PCUSA), Arlington VA
- [Did He Really Say That?](#) – Rev. Roy Howard, St. Mark Presbyterian Church (PCUSA), North Bethesda MD
- [Sticker Shock](#) – Rev. Keith Hudson, First Presbyterian Church (PCUSA), La Grange OR
- [Counting the Cost, Experiencing the Joy](#) – Rev. Marty Jacobson, Community Lutheran Church (ELCA), Rancho Margarita CA
- [The Cost of Discipleship](#) – Rev. Steve Pankey, St. Paul's Episcopal Church, Foley AL
- [Be Nice, Jesus](#) – Rev. Susan Sloan, St. Stephens Episcopal Church, Huntsville AL
- [Consider the Cost of Discipleship](#) – Rev. Johnold Strey, St. Marks Lutheran Church (WELS), Citrus Heights CA

Wealth:

The lectionary Gospel lesson for September 22, 2013 was [Luke 16:1-13](#). Many clergy members used the text to speak about wealth:

- [Rev. James Batchelor](#), Good Shepherd Lutheran Church (LCMS), Hoopston IL
- [Dr. M. Luther](#) – Rev. Andrew Eckert, Our Savior Lutheran Church (LCMS), Stevensville MT
- [A Problem Parable](#) – Rev. James Kegel, Central Lutheran Church (ELCA), Eugene OR
- [Gospel Whiplash](#) – Rev. Jennifer Linman, Church of the Epiphany (Episcopal), New York NY
- [An Un-Cautious Tale](#) – Rev. Scott Landis, Mission Hills United Church of Christ, San Diego CA
- [God & Money](#) – Rev. Leanne Walt, First Congregational Church, Braintree MA
- [You Cannot Serve God and Wealth](#) – Rev. Susan Sloan, St. Stephens Episcopal Church, Huntsville AL
- [The Crisis of God's New Day](#) – Rev. James Sledge, Falls Church PCUSA, Falls Church VA

Poverty:

The lectionary Gospel lesson for September 29, 2013 was [Luke 16:19-31](#). Many clergy members used the text to speak about poverty. Some clergy spoke about poverty in physical terms, others spoke about poverty in spiritual terms:

- [Navigating the Chasm Between Rich and Poor](#) – Rev. John Beddingfield, All Souls Memorial Episcopal Church, Washington DC
- [The Love Of...](#) – Rev. Thom Burleson, Community in Christ Community Church (PCUSA), Greensboro NC
- [The 'Haves' and the 'Have-Nots'](#) – Rev. Troy Slater, Our Redeemer Lutheran Church (LCMS), Herington KS
- [Open the Gate, Lazarus is Here](#) – Rev. Julie Wakelee-Lynch, St. Alban's Episcopal Church, Albany CA
- [Listen!](#) – Rev. Elizabeth Macauley, Richfield United Methodist Church, Minneapolis MN
- [Pay Attention](#) – Rev. Bill Hayes, Hopewell Presbyterian Church (PCUSA), Florence SC
- [The Rich Man and Lazarus – Then and Now](#) – Rev. Joseph Holub, Lord of the Mountains Lutheran Church (ELCA), Dillon CO

Justice:

The lectionary Gospel lesson for October 20, 2013 was [Luke 18:1-8](#). Many clergy members used the text to speak about justice:

- [Say What?](#) – Rev. Mary Ann Biggs, First Congregational Church, Eagle River WI
- [Rev. Aaron Couch](#) – First Immanuel Lutheran Church (ELCA), Portland OR
- [A Good Right Hook](#) – Rev. Peter Faas, Christ Episcopal Church, Shaker Heights OH
- [Talk to the Hand](#) – Rev. Lynn Fonfara, Hope Evangelical Lutheran Church (ELCA), Citrus Springs FL
- [The Annoying Woman](#) – Rev. Marci Glass, Southminster Presbyterian Church (PCUSA), Boise ID
- [Persistence in our Relationship with God](#) – Rev. Douglas Gunkelman, Divinity Lutheran Church (ELCA), Parma Heights OH
- [Pestering God](#) – Rev. Lois Harder, Lorraine Ave. Mennonite Church, Wichita KS
- [Justice in an Unjust World](#) – Rev. Paul Schwartzkopf, Christ Lutheran Church (ELCA), Nauvoo IL

Sermon Series

Mission Possible – Rev. John Fitzgerald, Providence United Methodist Church, Charlotte NC:

- [September 1 – I Corinthians 12:12-27](#)
- [September 8 – Psalm 150](#)
- [September 15 – Matthew 25:31-40](#)

Be Still – Rev. Jim Parsons, Indian Trail United Methodist Church, Indian Trail NC:

- [Be Still – Psalm 46](#)
- [Knowing and No-ing – Mark 1:29-39](#)
- [Dealing With the Noise – I Kings 19:9-13](#)

The Prayer That Changes Us – Rev. Craig Pesti-Strobel, First United Methodist Church, Pocatello ID

- [Hallowed Be Thy Name](#)
- [Thy Kingdom Come](#)
- [Thy Will Be Done](#)
- [On Earth As It Is In Heaven](#)
- [Give Us This Day Our Daily Bread](#)
- [Forgive Us Our Debts, As We Have Forgiven Our Debtors](#)
- [And Lead Us Not Into Temptation, But Deliver Us From Evil](#)

Growing in the Seasons of Life – Rev. Nathan Thompson, Messiah Lutheran Church (ELCA), Hoffman MN

- [The Season of Loss – Ecclesiastes 8:14](#)
- [The Season of Parenting – I John:7-11](#)
- [The Season of Temptation – Matthew 4:1-11](#)
- [The Season of Fear – Matthew 8:23-27](#)

Jesus, Up Close and Personal – Rev. Matt Reynolds, St. Paul's United Methodist Church, Celina OH

- [The Word Made Flesh](#) – John 1:1-5, 10-14, 16-18
- [The Miraculous Signs of Jesus](#) – John 2:1-11, John 9:1-11
- [The I Am Sayings of Jesus](#) – John 8:56-58, John 14:1-7

- [The Farewell Discourse](#) – John 15:8-10
- [The Arrest, Trial, and Crucifixion of the King](#) – John 19:14-20
- [Eternal Life](#) – John 19:41-42, 20:1, 11-16, 18

Stone Tablets in a Wireless World: The 10 Commandments for Today – Rev. Bob Sanders, Lake Grove Presbyterian Church (PCUSA), Lake Oswego OR

- [The Starting Point](#) – Exodus 20:1-17
- [In “gods” We Trust](#) – Exodus 20:1-3
- [American Idols](#) – Exodus 20:1-6
- [What’s In A Name?](#) – Exodus 20:1-7
- [You. Need. Rest \(God Said So\)](#) – Exodus 20:8-11
- [Taking and Giving](#) – Exodus 20:12-17

Answering Questions People Really Ask – Rev. Ed Varnum, First Christian Church (Disciples), Fulton MO

- [How Can I Have Faith With So Much Tragedy and Suffering?](#)
- [Is the Bible Dependable and Relevant?](#)
- [Why Aren’t Christians More Like Jesus?](#)
- [What Happens After Death?](#)
- [Why Go To Church?](#)