

Preacher Survey Analysis

Survey results as of October 29, 2013

Questions 1-2. Denomination and congregation size

The PWP preacher survey was administered to 190 self-selected users of the website of the Center for Excellence in Preaching. The majority (65%) of the respondents identified as “Presbyterian/Reformed” (including some Christian Reformed who chose the “other” category). The total “other” category was 14.2% of the respondents, mainly United Church of Christ and United Church of Canada. The remainder from a variety of denominations and traditions. Four respondents (2.1%) were Catholic.

The congregation size was widely varied. 31% reported a congregation size of less than 100, 10% of size greater than 800.

Question 3. How do you typically choose your sermon topics or themes?

1. By following recommended Bible texts in a lectionary
 - (131 responses, average 1.51)
2. By choosing a book or section of the Bible to preach through over time
 - (102 responses, average 1.94)
3. By following the Christian calendar/liturgical seasons
 - (131 responses, average 2.37)
4. By choosing a theme, then finding Bible texts about the theme
 - (87 responses, average 2.49)
5. By reflecting on current events and discerning what Biblical texts speak to them
 - (59 responses, average 3.32)
6. By choosing a current book to have the congregation study and using that to organize preaching themes
 - (35 responses, average 3.97)
7. By asking members of the congregation to identify questions or topics they would like to hear sermons about
 - (42 responses, average 4.29)

Question 4. When you search for sermon preparation resources online, what are you searching for?

The resource types that respondents were looking for were

- Illustration ideas (16.8%)
- Biblical Commentaries (16.3%)
- Reflections/essays by theologians (13.5%)
- Reflections, blog articles (13.3%)
- Full sermons by trusted preachers (10.4%)
- Visual art (6.7%)
- References to popular books (6.4%)
- References to movies (6.4%)
- Movie clips (3.9%)
- Sermon outlines (3.8%)

Using the “other” option, respondents mentioned

- Exegetical studies
- Op ed pieces on culture or such reflections
- Language help
- Historical background
- Practical application
- Bible versions
- Ways in which the culture views key words or themes

Question 5. When you are preparing for a worship service, what kinds of resources do you search for?

The types of worship resources respondents were searching for were

- Liturgical elements (31.9%)
- Songs and hymns (25.3%)
- Visual arts (16.3%)
- Children’s resources (12.3%)
- Complete liturgies (8.%)

Using the “other” options, respondents mentioned

- Illustrations
- Book of common prayer
- Worship sourcebook

In other questions, users identified many kinds of resources desired, but sermon illustrations was #1. “Illustrations, illustrations, illustrations!”

Question 6. What top 3-5 websites to you visit to find these resources?

Respondents mentioned 150 different websites. 53 of them were mentioned at least twice and 31 of them at least three times. The top 31 are shown below.

Website	Count
Textweek.com	73
CEP	56
workingpreacher.org	35
CICW	24
Google	21
Reformed Worship	13
sermoncentral.com	13
Homileticsonline.com	11
preachingtoday.com	10
Google images	9
ministrymatters.com	9
gbod.org (Methodist)	7
Hymnary.org	6
Logos	6
Bible gateway	5
sermons4kids.com	5
Desiring God (John Piper)	4
liturgy.slu.edu	4
thegospelcoalition.org	4
vanderbilt--lectionary	4
youtube	4
American Magazine	3
biblios	3
Christian Century	3
Church of Scotland	3
Episcopal	3
esermons.com	3
selectsong	3
sermonsuite	3
Singing the Lectionary	3
ucc.org	3

Textweek.com is the most popular website, and a resource like that with additional access methods (topic, scripture passage) and better search would no doubt be very popular.

Workingpreacher.org is sponsored by the Center for Biblical Preaching at Luther Seminary in Minnesota. It gives commentary on the lectionary passages in a clean, straightforward fashion as well as other preaching helps.

Homileticonline.com has sermon helps including commentary, bringing the text to life, illustrations, powerpoint, worship resources, movie clip resources, etc. It's a commercial website; subscription costs \$70/year.

Preachingtoday.com is owned by Christianity Today. It has sermon illustrations, sermons, and cultural connections as well as multimedia. It's a commercial site.

Ministrymatters.com is a "magazine, reference library, and social network." Resources recommended include articles, videos, reference tools, commentaries, and more. Some of the reference materials are available free at CCEL and elsewhere. It has a free option and a premium subscription (\$150/year). It has nice design and functionality aspects that we should study.

Question 7. Give some examples of recent search terms you have used in your sermon preparation process.

A study of the queries suggests several common approaches to search:

1. Topical (entity) searches. Topics included prayer, justice, persistence, gratitude, trust, suffering, anger, Amalekites attack Israel, death, grief, justification, infant baptism, ethnicity, busyness, peace, meek, justice, righteous, depression and faith, money, sexuality, power/politics, technology, war and violence response, labor, stewardship, employment, spiritual discernment, Pope Francis, loneliness, servanthood, obedience, sacrifice, church, justification, burden, heart, judge, archangels, thanksgiving, seven churches, jacob's ladder, mt moriah, noah's ark, etc. User may be looking for
 - a. sermon prep resources such as illustrations, sermons, blog posts, etc.
 - b. photos, paintings, movie clips, quotes, books (e.g. "image of hyssop")
 - c. bible passages relevant to the topic
 - d. background information, maps, definitions, cultural references

Some of the search terms entered were entities that may not be theological topics, e.g. people, places, terms (for definition), etc., but they could be treated in the same way.

2. Bible passages. Many of the queries centered on entering a bible passage in order to find text study resources—commentaries, exegesis, study notes, Strong's, Greek word studies, theological word studies, etc. These were searched by entering the passage, and possibly a resource name or website name. A topic, desired result type, or source website may be added to the query, e.g.

- a. “Illustrations for [text]”
 - b. “sermons on [text]”
 - c. text + topic, e.g. “John 3 atonement”
 - d. compassion sermoncentral
 - e. Sermon on the mount, decalogue
3. Holidays, seasons, and occasions, lectionary weeks, e.g. reformation Sunday, childbirth, thanksgiving, sanctity of human life Sunday.
 4. Liturgical elements for a worship service, “call to worship”, “prayers of confession”, “prayer of approach”, a prayer for humility

Some queries were ambiguous, of course. Users searching for “decalogue” could be after a bible passage, definition, theological discussion, litany, etc.

Users are used to finding material by lectionary week, at sites like Textweek and CEP, to the extent that that didn’t show up in the sample queries. That should also be one of the access methods we support.

Question 8. For sermon research and worship service preparation online, what services and resources would you like to see?

The goal of this question is to find out what needs are not being fully met by other websites and how we could meet needs more effectively. Examples:

Common requests and themes:

- Bible study tools with multiple Bible versions, multiple commentaries, original language tools, exegesis resources, all in one spot (Calvin seminary beta?)
- Sermon series ideas and resources, for sermon series on a book of the bible or a season, e.g. advent or lent (six requests)
- “Worship sourcebook website”—prayers, litanies, etc. searchable by theme, text, season, lectionary week
- A social aspect where participants share ideas and resources, explore lectionary texts together
- Being able to search for resources that are “reformed”
- Resources for special days, occasions, groups, current events, contemporary issues (All saint’s Sunday, world communion Sunday, Sanctity of Human Life Sunday, blessings for animals, prayers for urban Christians, worship services for senior homes)

Other requests:

- Rituals or experiential/reflective ideas, e.g. reflective activities for Good Friday, preparing for the coming of the Christ child

- Sermon/worship resource connections to confessional resources
- Connections to literature and poetry
- Connections to children’s literature
- Classic quotes on current subject
- Service ideas and resources that are child-friendly for the part of the service where children are present
- Musical arrangements that match liturgical moments
- Sermon resources accessible by liturgical season
- Maps for PowerPoint
- Textile art
- Art and images, with information about them, how they are related to a topic
- Background and context—historical information, cultural context, political scene
- List of major biblical themes and how they are developed in scripture

Lessons and Questions

Many of our earlier thoughts were right on target:

- Users want to find resources by theme and scripture passage as well as lectionary week. Other access methods requested include special days, occasions, events, people groups, current events, contemporary issues
- Many would like to see liturgical and worship resources along with sermon preparation resources
- A comprehensive bible study tool with commentaries, original language tools, and the like, would be popular, especially with recommended commentaries and other resources

Questions

1. Should there be a social aspect to the website? Discussion groups? Resource upload and sharing?
2. A bible study tool would either have to license good commentaries or use public domain tools. It would also get away from the “link to other sites” philosophy and tend to keep users on-site. Approach?
3. Is there a limit to scope? Do we want to index contemporary music? Hymns? Children’s resources? Textile art?
4. Should we make it possible to search for resources that “are reformed” or are appropriate for other traditions?