

# Christians want more support from churches on faith/work issues, study shows

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Credit: 123rf.com

Christians want more support from their places of worship when it comes to navigating ethical matters and other issues in the workplace, according to a new study from researchers with Rice University's

Religion and Public Life Program (RPLP). In addition, many want churches to offer programming that fits the schedules of working professionals.

"From Secular to Sacred: Bringing Work to Church" will appear in an upcoming edition of *Religions*. Researchers Elaine Howard Ecklund, director of the RPLP and the Herbert S. Autrey Chair in Social Sciences; Denise Daniels, the Hudson T. Harrison Chair of Entrepreneurship at Wheaton College; and Rachel Schneider, a postdoctoral fellow with RPLP, used data from their new research project titled "Faith at Work: An Empirical Study." Their research includes a survey of 13,270 people from across the U.S. as well as more than 200 in-depth interviews.

For their study, the researchers asked:

- How do Christians from different racial and social backgrounds draw on their faith community in relation to what they do at work?
- For those in different social backgrounds, how do discussions about work come up in churches?
- What work-related challenges do Christians experience, and how do Christians want their churches and pastors to address those challenges?

The majority of the people surveyed said skills and habits learned through their faith communities helped them succeed in the workplace, and they noted that faith was a source of support during times of stress or difficulty at work. But they also reported that explicit discussion of work rarely came up at [church](#) and they rarely discussed workplace problems with their faith leaders. The researchers also discovered that evangelicals were more likely than Catholics or mainline Protestants to say their pastor often talked about work.

Ecklund said it was particularly striking to the researchers that Black congregants are nearly twice as likely as whites to hear discussions about the meaning of work and how to behave at work and church.

The vast majority of regularly practicing Christians—those who attend church once or more a month—wanted [church leaders](#) to do much more to communicate the value and meaning of work, to offer more support for church members when it comes to workplace issues, and to provide specific support for certain constituencies (for example, particular job or industry groups, such as law enforcement, health care and first responders, working women and the unemployed). That includes making service times and other church events more accessible and helping congregants navigate workplaces with a diversity of religious backgrounds.

Women in particular described wanting clergy to offer more legitimation of their work choices, as well as sensitivity to the unique time pressures or family challenges they face. And younger workers were interested in conversations about navigating religiously diverse work environments.

"Our data shows that many Christians want faith leaders and clergy to do more to make the topic of work more visible at church, and that many Christians want their leaders to reflect empathy and understanding for the challenges faced by working people in the contemporary work landscape," Schneider said.

"Our findings also show how important it is for churches to be accessible and hospitable to people in a wide variety of jobs—and from a variety of different racial groups and also how important it is for pastors to affirm the worth, value and meaning of a wide variety of jobs," Ecklund added. "Church members want [faith leaders](#) to pay attention to the different occupational groups represented at their church and remain cognizant of the differential impact of work pressures on different social groups

within the church."

The researchers hope the study will help religious leaders effectively address the needs of congregants and formulate specific resources and responses.

"We have already received feedback from pastors and church leaders about how this research will be helpful as they seek to meet the needs of workers in their congregations," Daniels said. "We're glad that we are able to contribute empirical data that can help change and support [faith](#) communities."

**More information:** Elaine Howard Ecklund et al. From Secular to Sacred: Bringing Work to Church, *Religions* (2020). [DOI: 10.3390/re111090442](#)

Provided by Rice University

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