From the Presiding Bishop

The PAW Reporter is an electronic newsletter intended to inform church leaders of the Pentecostal Assemblies of the World, Inc. It is filled with informational articles, timely resources, and practical how-to applications. It is also very diverse in content and provides information from executive leadership articles and fundraising advice to human resources information, finance and church management tips.

The PAW Reporter is a useful publication that hopefully both clergy and church leaders will look forward to receiving and reading cover to cover. Our readers should feel free to share, in full without modification, any issue(s) of The PAW Reporter with fellow clergy and friends.

In this edition of the eNewsletter, we highlight an issue of particular significance to clergypersons: “What Is The Clergy-Penitent Privilege?”

It is our hope and prayer that our readers will view The PAW Reporter as a consistent and valuable resource, and will provide us with some valuable input and feedback from time to time.

Respectfully,

Bishop Theodore L. Brooks, Sr.
Presiding Bishop

The PAW Reporter
3939 Meadows Drive
Indianapolis, IN 46205
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What is the Clergy-Penitent Privilege?

The clergy-penitent privilege (also known as the clergy privilege, confessional privilege, priest–penitent privilege, clergyman–communicant privilege, and/or ecclesiastical privilege) is a recognized form of privileged communication that protects the contents of conversations between religious advisers and an advisee.¹

In order for the clergy-penitent privilege to apply there must be a communication that is made in confidence. This generally means that there are no other persons present besides the minister and counselee who can hear the communication, and that there is an expectation that the conversation will be kept secret.²

History of the Clergy-Penitent Privilege

The clergy-penitent privilege originated in the Canon law of the Roman Catholic Church. Under Canon law, “the seal of the confessional is “inviolable.” A priest could be excommunicated for disclosing the contents of a confession. England recognized this privilege while the Roman Catholic Church was still prominent, but the privilege dissolved with the power of the Roman Catholic Church, and currently does not exist in England.³

The first known case in America recognizing the privilege is People v. Philips, N.Y. Ct. Gen. Sess. 1813 (unpublished) which was decided in 1813. In Phillips, the New York court held that free exercise of religion provisions would not force a Catholic priest to testify as to a confession made to him regarding a theft. The court stated that to do so would infringe upon the priest’s right to freely practice his religion.⁴

This first recognition of the privilege was followed by People v. Smith, 2 City Hall Recorder 77 (N.Y. 1817), in which the court distinguished a confession made to a Catholic priest, which is required by the Catholic Church, and those made to a Protestant minister, where it was not required but merely made for spiritual guidance. The latter was not afforded protection. Based on this decision it seems clear that the early versions of the clergy-penitent privilege focused not on whether the communications were private or made for spiritual advice/counseling, but whether such “confessions” were mandated by a particular religion.⁵

The Smith decision prompted New York to enact the first clergy-penitent privilege statute in 1828, which provided the privilege to priests, ministers, and similar religious denominations. By enacting the statute to include other religions, New York took an approach (which is now the “Model” approach) to the privilege to include communications that are not required by the mandates of a specific religion, but that were made in confidence to a religious leader.⁶

Today, every one of the fifty U.S. states, as well as the District of Columbia, has some version of a clergy-penitent privilege. These statutes may vary in terms and applicability, but the premise is generally the same. Specifically, jurisdictions sometimes differ on their definition of clergy and/or confidential communications, as well as who holds the privilege. However, the majority of states have substantially similar clergy-penitent privilege statutes.⁷

When considering the clergy-penitent privilege, it is also necessary to be familiar with your jurisdiction’s child abuse reporting law, which can alter the effect of the clergy-penitent privilege or, in some cases, eliminate the privilege in its entirety. Similar to the clergy-penitent privilege, these reporting laws, while similar, vary from state-to-state.⁸

Definition of Clergy

The first step in analyzing the application of the clergy-penitent privilege is to determine who qualifies as “clergy” in the jurisdiction. The definition of “clergy” can vary from state-to-state and completely alter the effect of the privilege. Uniform Rule of Evidence 505 defines “clergy” as “a minister, priest, rabbi, accredited Christian Science Practitioner, or other similar functionary of a religious organization, or an individual reasonably believed to be so by the person consulting him.” The Uniform Rule provides a broad definition; in fact, the privilege would even apply to an individual who is not “clergy,” as long as the parishioner reasonably believed he or she was serving in that capacity. While many jurisdictions have used the Uniform Rule as a guideline, most have altered the definition in one way or another. For example, Michigan defines “clergy” broadly, to include a “minister of the gospel, or priest of any denomination whatsoever, or duly accredited Christian Science practitioner, or other similar functionary of a religious organization, or an individual reasonably believed to be so by the person consulting him.” Conversely, Georgia has adopted a much narrower definition and does not appear to extend the privilege to any religions other than Christianity and Judaism.⁹
**Definition of Confidential Communications**

The clergy-penitent privilege concerns confidential communications. These are private communications that are not intended to be disclosed to others unless necessary for the purpose of the communication. For example, if the individual makes a confession in front of others, this would not be a private or confidential communication and thus the clergy-penitent privilege would not be applicable.\(^\text{10}\)

Also, some churches do not treat confessions privately and instead allow a church member to confess to an elder who then stands up and informs the rest of the congregation as to what the individual has confessed as the entire church prays together for the person making the confession. In these situations, the communication is not considered confidential and the clergy privilege is unlikely to apply.\(^\text{11}\)

**Who May Assert the Clergy-Penitent Privilege?**

In most states, both the person who made the communication and the clergy to whom the communication was made may claim the privilege. Rule 505 of the Uniform Rules of Evidence specify that “the privilege may be claimed by the person, by his guardian or conservator (person appointed by the court to manage the financial affairs and/or daily life of another due to physical or mental limitations, or old age), or by his personal representative if he is deceased. The person who was the clergyman at the time of the communication is presumed to have the authority to claim the privilege but only on behalf of the communicant.”\(^\text{12}\)

Many states permit the person who has made the communication to prevent the minister or any other person from disclosing the communication. However, in some states, only the penitent (person who repents of sin) or “counselor” may assert the privilege, not the minister.\(^\text{13}\)

Many states have law that gives the minister the right to claim the privilege only on behalf of the penitent, meaning that if the penitent waives the privilege and agrees to testify, the minister cannot assert the privilege independently. In other states, the minister can assert the privilege independently of the penitent.\(^\text{14}\)

**When to Assert the Clergy-Penitent Privilege**

The clergy-penitent privilege does not excuse ministers (or counselees) from appearing in court. Rather, it excuses them from disclosing a privileged communication in court against their will. The proper time to assert the privilege is in court (or at a deposition) when asked to disclose communications protected by the privilege. Naturally, the minister does not technical “object” to such a question. The attorney for one of the parties to the underlying legal action ordinarily will object to the question in order to prevent the minister from disclosing the privileged communication. In some cases, no objection is made. In such cases ministers are free to inform the judge that they prefer not to answer the question on the ground that it is seeking privileged communication.\(^\text{15}\)

**Child Abuse Reporting**

After a determination as to what is covered under the clergy-penitent privilege, the next step is to analyze the jurisdiction’s mandatory reporting statute with regard to cases of child abuse. These mandatory-reporting laws can alter, or eliminate, the jurisdiction’s clergy-penitent privilege, so knowledge of the interplay between the two is essential.\(^\text{16}\)

All fifty states and the District of Columbia have mandatory reporting laws for suspected child abuse or neglect. Most states provide a list of specific professionals who are “mandatory reporters,” while some states provide that “any person” who has reason to believe a child is being abused or neglected has a duty to report.\(^\text{17}\)

The law in a large number of states specifically provides that members of clergy are “mandatory reporters.” In these states, and those that make “any person” a mandatory reporter, a clergy member may have an obligation to disclose privileged communications he or she would not otherwise be obligated (or permitted) to disclose under the tenets of his or her religion or the law of the jurisdiction. Thus, the next question is whether the information must be disclosed even if learned in a privileged and confidential manner.\(^\text{18}\)

Most jurisdictions have taken steps to clarify a clergy member’s duty in these situations. The majority of jurisdictions expressly maintain the privilege or maintain the privilege conditionally upon meeting certain factors, such as the clergy member being bound to maintain the confidentiality under the tenets of his or her religion. Only a small number of jurisdictions have expressly revoked the privilege with regard to mandatory reporting laws. The remaining jurisdictions do not specify whether the privilege continues to apply in these situations, leaving clergy members in limbo as to their duties under the law in such situations.\(^\text{19}\)

Therefore, it is very important for all persons, including ministers and counselors, wishing to preserve and assert the clergy-penitent privilege to become familiar with and know the law of the state in which they provide ministerial and/or counseling services.

**Waiver of the Clergy-Penitent Privilege**

The clergy-penitent privilege can be “waived” if a minister or counselor voluntarily discloses a privileged communication to another person. If the privilege is waived it no longer protects communications against compelled disclosure in a court of law or judicial proceeding. In *Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints v. Superior Court*, 764 P.2d 759 (Ariz. App. 1988), the court ruled that a counselor waived any privilege when he disclosed to the police the substance of confidential communications he had made to his minister.\(^\text{20}\)

There is some variation among the states regarding a waiver of the privilege. The states are split on the issue of who holds the power to waive the clergy-penitent privilege. Most states allow the counselor to waive the privilege, but in some states only the minister can do so.\(^\text{21}\)
In State v. Szemple, 640 A.2d 817 (N.J. 1994), the court held that a minister was free to waive the clergy-penitent privilege and testify in court regarding a confession made to him by a murderer, even though the murderer did not consent to the disclosure. The minister visited with the murderer (the “defendant”) in prison on 19 occasions. On one occasion the defendant confessed to the minister that he had killed 3 people. The minister later testified at the defendant’s trial, and disclosed the confession. The defendant claimed that his confession to the minister was protected by the clergy-penitent privilege and should not have been disclosed in court. The state supreme court ruled that the confession was privileged, but that the minister had the unilateral right to waive the privilege and disclose the confession in court. The court noted that the purpose of the privilege was to protect ministers from being forced to disclose confidential communications in court and “to curb the potential manipulations of a penitent who, through waiver, could compel a clergyperson to reveal communications that were given purposely to mislead.”

**Exceptions to the Clergy-Penitent Privilege**

Are there things that may be disclosed during a conversation otherwise subject to the clergy/confessor privilege, which the clergy member will nevertheless be compelled to disclose? As mentioned previously, the major example here is that of child abuse, or neglect. States also have their own laws on this subject. The majority of U.S. states do require that clergy report instances of child abuse which have been confessed to them, as clergy.

However, not all states have this requirement, so presumably, the clergy is not required to disclose the confession of abuse in those cases. The Catholic church refuses to recognize exceptions to the privilege.

It is worth noting that trained mental health professionals are generally bound by a duty to report child abuse, and in cases where a clergy member is also a licensed mental health professional, the question comes down to whether the information was revealed to them in their capacity as spiritual adviser.

### Endnotes

1. www.reminger.com
2. www.churchlawandtax.com
4. Id.
5. Id.
6. Id.
7. Id.
8. Id.
9. https://cdn.ymaws.com
10. www.hg.org
11. Id.
13. Hammar at 125.
14. Id.
15. Id.
16. https://cdn.ymaws.com
17. Id.
18. Id.
19. Id.
20. Hammar at 126.
21. Id.
22. Hammar at 127
23. www.legalmatch.com
24. Id.
25. Id.
26. www.regent.edu/acad/schlaw
27. Id.

For more information or professional assistance with church or para-church matters, contact: Dr. Wyatt McDowell (JD, LLM) at (740) 938-4067 or www.clergyzoom.com.
The ecclesiastical abstention doctrine deprived the trial court of jurisdiction to adjudicate (hear and decide) the case.

The plaintiff appealed the decision of the trial court.

**Issue**

Whether the ecclesiastical abstention doctrine deprived the trial court of jurisdiction to adjudicate (hear and decide) the case?

**Discussion**

The state appellate court began its opinion by defining the ecclesiastical abstention doctrine.

The ecclesiastical abstention doctrine is derived from the Religion Clauses of the First Amendment to the United States Constitution. Its purpose is to prevent the civil courts from engaging in unwarranted interference with the practices, internal affairs, and management of religious organizations. The ecclesiastical abstention doctrine “prohibits secular courts from determining the correctness of a decision by a religious tribunal on issues of canon law, religious doctrine, or church governance.

Because of the freedom of religion guaranteed in the Constitution, religious organizations may establish their own rules and regulations for internal discipline and government and create tribunals for adjudicating disputes over these matters. When this choice is exercised, the Constitution requires that civil courts accept such tribunals’ decisions as binding. Decisions of the highest church tribunal are binding on civil courts in “all cases of ecclesiastical cognizance. (See Watson v. Jones, 80 U.S. 679, 729. (1871). Claims that a religious tribunal or organization violated its own rules are not reviewable by courts. (See Drevlow v. Lutheran Church, Missouri Synod, 991 F.2d 468, 470-71 (8th Cir. 1993); Travers v. Abbey, 58 S.W. 247, 248 (Tenn. 1900).

When the ecclesiastical abstention doctrine applies, it “functions as a jurisdictional bar that precludes civil courts from adjudicating disputes that are “strictly and purely ecclesiastical” in character and which concern ‘theological controversy, church discipline, ecclesiastical government, or the conformity of the members of the church to the standard of morals required by them. Courts have no ecclesiastical jurisdiction, and do not pass upon questions of faith, religion, or conscience. Because it is a bar to subject matter jurisdiction, the ecclesiastical abstention doctrine may be raised at any time as a basis for dismissal of the lawsuit.

The court went on to state that while the ecclesiastical abstention doctrine precludes courts from adjudicating most questions arising from church activities, it does not apply in every legal dispute regarding religious organizations. Courts may address claims involving religious organizations “as long as they can do so using neutral principles of law and can refrain from resolving religious disputes and from relying on religious doctrine.” In other words, if the trial court could have adjudicated the dispute “without resolving questions of religious doctrine, polity, or practice,” the ecclesiastical abstention doctrine does not bar its jurisdiction. However, if the issue involves resolution of such question(s), the ecclesiastical abstention doctrine “would function as a jurisdictional bar precluding the trial court’s resolution of this matter.”
The gravamen (essence or most serious part) of plaintiff’s complaint is that it is not clear that people who voted were members of the church. This issue involves ecclesiastical government and is clearly within the purview of the ecclesiastical abstention doctrine.

The vote on the church’s name alone is sufficient to amount to “internal affairs” and “management”.

This court does not have jurisdiction to determine whether voters were members of the church. Such an inquiry would require the court to step outside the bounds of neutral principles which would go beyond the narrow circumstances when a court has jurisdiction to hear these cases.

The appellate court agreed with the trial court that the gravamen (essence or most serious part) of plaintiff’s lawsuit is whether the votes on the Church’s name change were cast by members. As set out above, membership requires compliance with religious doctrine and practice. As such, questions of membership are not within the purview of the trial court by operation of the ecclesiastical abstention doctrine. Furthermore, a church’s decision to change its name is a decision regarding the internal affairs and management of the church and is a decision in which civil courts are prevented from interfering. Additionally, a claim that a church violated its own rules is not reviewable by courts. For these reasons, the ecclesiastical abstention doctrine functions as a bar to the trial court’s jurisdiction and the trial court did not err in granting summary judgment (judgment entered by a court without a full trial) in favor of Church and the other defendants.

Conclusion

The state appellate court affirmed the trial court’s decision.

Bottom Line

The ecclesiastical abstention doctrine (church autonomy doctrine) was born in the United States Supreme Court’s 1871 decision Watson v. Jones, 80 U.S. 679 (1871) addressing a church property dispute over the Walnut Street Presbyterian Church in Louisville, Kentucky. The two factions within the church – divided over the issue of slavery – both sought title to the building, each claiming to be the “true” church. In reaching its decision, the Court emphasized the “unquestioned” common law right of churches “to create tribunals for the decision of controverted questions of faith within the association, and for the ecclesiastical government of all the individual members, congregations, and officers within the general association.”

According to the Court, “It is of the essence of these religious unions, and of their right to establish tribunals for the decision of questions arising among themselves, that those decisions should be binding in all cases of ecclesiastical cognizance, subject only to such appeals as the organism itself provides for.” Given these considerations, the Court proclaimed that courts should not intervene in religious disputes, but instead should accept the resolution reached by the internal dispute resolution system established within the religious community:

Whenever the questions of discipline, or of faith, or ecclesiastical rule, custom, or law have been decided by the highest of these church judicatories to which the matter has been carried, the legal tribunals must accept such decisions as final, and as binding on them, in their application to the case before them. Source: www.bu.edu/bulawreview

Overtime Law Changes for 2020

An estimated 1.3 million more workers will qualify for overtime pay, if they work more than 40 hours a week, beginning January 1, 2020 under final rules announced on September 24, 2019 by the U.S. Department of Labor.

The federal law will generally require employers, including churches and nonprofits, to pay overtime to employees who earn less than $35,568 per year (the current threshold is $23,660). Employers should also continue to analyze their overtime obligations under state and local law, which may require overtime to more workers than federal law. Source: www.ecfa.org (09/26/19)
Religion

Episcopal Seminary That Benefited from Slavery Creates Reparations Fund

Virginia Theological Seminary took what appears to be an unprecedented step by announcing that it has set aside $1.7 million for a slavery reparations fund—something considered but not yet enacted by other institutions of higher education that historically benefited from slave labor.

Enslaved African Americans worked on the Alexandria-based campus, which was founded in 1823, and at least one building was built with slave labor. Black students were excluded from attending the Episcopal seminary until the 1950s.

Income from the endowment fund for reparations will be put to use in a variety of ways, from encouraging more African American clergy in the Episcopal Church to directly serving the needs of any descendants of the enslaved Africans who worked at the seminary. Source: www.christiancentury.org (09/19/19)

Small, Struggling Congregations Fill U.S. Church Landscape

A recent study from Exponential by LifeWay Research found 6 in 10 Protestant churches are plateaued or declining in attendance and more than half saw fewer than 10 people become new Christians in the past 12 months.

The research gives a clear picture of the state of Protestant churches in America today. Most have fewer than 100 people attending services each Sunday (57 percent), including 21 percent who average fewer than 50. Around 1 in 10 churches (11 percent) average 250 or more for their worship services.

Among denominations, Holiness (56 percent) and Baptist (45 percent) pastors are more likely to say their churches are growing than Methodists (33 percent) and Lutherans (25 percent). Source: https://lifewayresearch.com (03/06/19)

America’s Pastors Are Getting Older

In a recent research article by Barna Group it highlighted the average age of senior pastors in America. The numbers speak for themselves...

- Half of American pastors are older than 55
- Pastors 40 and younger have fallen from 33 percent in 1992 to 15 percent today.

In short, the Church has gone from a time when the majority of leaders were in their 20s, 30s, and early 40s to a time when most are in their late 50s and beyond. Source: www.pushpay.com

Do You Ask Your Pastor for Advice?

According to a new AP-NORC poll, three-quarters of American adults rarely or never consult a clergy member or religious leader before making a major decision, while only about a quarter do so at least some of the time.

Among religious adults who attend services at least twice a month, about half say they sometimes or often consult with a religious leader.

That compares with 16% of religious adults who attend services less often. Source: www.srnnews.com (07/24/19)
American’s Test Their Knowledge of Religion

A new poll from the Pew Research Center concludes that most people know the basics of Christianity and a fair amount about Islam.

But the average American is largely ignorant of the beliefs of Jews, Buddhists and Hindus.

As a bonus, they are also mostly unaware of what the Constitution says about religion.

Amongst the Americans with the HIGHEST religious knowledge?

Ironically they are Evangelical Protestants — and atheists. Source: www.srnnews.com (07/24/19)

Protestant Churchgoers Say They Trust God, Even in Difficult Circumstances

New findings from LifeWay Research show 7 in 10 Protestant churchgoers disagree with the statement: “During difficult circumstances, I sometimes doubt that God loves me and will provide for my life.”

Hispanics and African Americans are the two ethnic groups most likely to exercise faith in times of difficulty.

Black Protestants and evangelical Protestants tend to put more trust in God than mainline Protestants. Source: www.srnnews.com (07/19/19)

Americans Worry About Moral Decline, Can’t Agree on Right and Wrong

A new study from LifeWay Research found a significant generation gap in how Americans view morality.

More than 6 in 10 of those older than 45 say right and wrong do not change. For those 35 and younger, fewer than 4 in 10 make that claim.

Worry about morals differs across demographic lines, but remains consistently high. Most Americans older than 65 (85 percent) are concerned about declining moral behavior, as are those 18 to 24 (71 percent.).

As part of the study, LifeWay Research also asked Americans how they decide between right and wrong on a personal level.

Half (52 percent) say right and wrong never change. A third (32 percent) say whether or not someone gets hurt plays a role in determining if something is right or wrong.

Overall, Americans seem guided more by their internal moral compass than by laws. Almost no one (4 percent) worries about getting caught when deciding between right and wrong. Source: https://lifewayresearch.com (05/09/19)

Most Americans Want Little Influence from Religious Leaders

A recent AP survey found 55% of Americans say clergy members or religious leaders have had at least some influence in their lives, while 45% say they’ve had little to no influence.

Specifically, 21% say religious leaders have had a lot of influence, 33% say some, 25% say not much, and 20% say pastors have had no influence.

Those who identify with a religion are more than twice as likely to say pastors have had an influence compared to the religious unaffiliated (63% to 26%). Source: https://factsandtrends.net (08/27/19)

Another Poll Shows Christianity on the Wane in this Country

This one comes from the Barna Group and it’s pretty stark. 83% of senior citizens self-identify as Christians but only 64% of Millennials do.

As for practicing Christians — a group Barna defines as those who go to church regularly, pray and read the Bible — just 37% of older Americans qualify — 22% of Millennials. Source: www.srnnews.com (07/24/19)
Vast Majority of Churches Still Have Wednesday Night Activities

Nine in 10 Protestant pastors say they have some type of activity on Wednesday night, according to a new study from Nashville-based LifeWay Research. Only 10% say they have no regular events on Wednesday evening.

While the historic roots of Wednesday night church gatherings centered on prayer, the study found the modern usage of a midweek service stretch beyond that.

Almost 6 in 10 churches have small group adult Bible study classes. Most (53%) also have some type of student ministry or youth group gathering.

Around half of the pastors (48%) say they have children’s activities. Slightly less (45%) use the night for a prayer meeting.

A third (33%) say their church has a worship service that night, while 8% say they do something else. Source: https://factsandtrends.net (09/10/19)

New Poll Shows Growing View that Clergy Are Irrelevant

A recently released NORC/AP poll of 1,137 adults shows that doctors, teachers, members of the military — even scientists — are viewed more positively than clergy. The less frequently people attend church, the more negative their views. Among those who attend less than once a month, only 42% said they had a positive view of clergy members — a rate comparable to that of lawyers, who rank near the bottom of the list of professions.

While frequent church attenders still hold clergy in high regard — about 75% viewed them positively — they give them only passing grades on a number of personal attributes. Only 52% of monthly churchgoers consider clergy trustworthy (that number drops to 23% among those who attend less than once a month) and 57% said they were honest and intelligent (compared with 27% and 30% among infrequent attendees). Source: https://religionnews.com (07/16/19)

Can Church Boards Restrict Gifts?

Only givers can “restrict” a gift. And, in an accounting sense, gift restrictions are either temporary or permanent. In certain situations, givers have the power to unrestrict gifts, unless funds have already been committed or expended for a project. In the latter case, the funds may not be redirected or refunded.

As an example, perhaps a giver restricts a gift for a certain project. Later, the ministry asks the giver’s permission to redirect the gift for another purpose, unrestricted or restricted, and the giver agrees. The gift is then reclassified, based on the nature of the giver’s redirection.

Conversely, the giver may approach the ministry and request the redirection of a gift previously restricted by the giver. The organization could approve the gift being used for another purpose, based on the giver’s request for redirection, as long as the funds have not already been committed or expended for the original project. Source: www.ecfa.org (07/11/19)
**Miscellaneous**

**2020 Average Salary Increase Projections**

The Social Security and Supplemental Security Income (SSI) beneficiaries will receive a 1.6 percent increase in 2020 – down more than 1 percent from last year.

The Social Security cost-of-living adjustment (COLA) is based on the percentage increase in the Consumer Price Index.

Many organizations use COLA as a measure to determine pay increases but there are other organizations predicting percentage pay increases for 2020.

According to these predictions, employees should be seeing an average of 3.3% salary increase – with better performing employees earning a slightly higher pay increase.

According to SHRM, employees can expect an average base salary increase of 3.3% in 2020 – up from 3.2% in 2019. It is also expected that a base salary increase – COLA, general increase or merit increase will be given to all employees in 2020. Source: [https://smartchurchmanagement.com](https://smartchurchmanagement.com) (10/15/19)

**How U.S. Gun Culture Compares with the World**

With the population in the United States equivalent to 4.27% of the total world population, Americans own nearly half (46%) of the estimated 857 million civilian-owned guns in the world.

The number of firearms available to American civilians is estimated at more than 393 million, according to a 2018 Switzerland-based Small Arms Survey (SAS) report.

Americans own the most guns per person in the world, about four in 10 saying they either own a gun or live in a home with guns, according to a 2017 Pew Center study. Forty-eight percent of Americans said they grew up in a house with guns. Seventy-two percent of Americans said they have shot a gun.

According to the survey, a majority (66 percent) of gun owners in the United States own multiple firearms, with nearly three-quarters of gun owners saying they couldn’t imagine not owning one.

Gun homicide rates are 25.2 times more in the U.S. than in any other high-income countries. Source: [www.cnn.com](http://www.cnn.com) (08/06/19)

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**The Rate of Abortions Drops to its Lowest Level Since 1973**

The US abortion rate dropped to 13.5 abortions per 1,000 women aged 15–44 in 2017, the lowest rate recorded since abortion was legalized in 1973,” the Guttmacher Institute said.

The newly released information found that between 2011 and 2017:

- The number of abortions **fell by 196,000**—a 19% decline from 1,058,000 abortions in 2011 to 862,000 abortions in 2017

- The abortion rate (the number of abortions per 1,000 women aged 15–44) **fell by about 20%**, from 16.9 in 2011 to 13.5 in 2017

- The abortion ratio (the number of abortions per 100 pregnancies ending in either abortion or live birth) **fell about 13%**, from 21.2 in 2011 to 18.4 in 2017.

But even with the declines, “one in four women of reproductive age nationally will have an abortion in her lifetime,” the institute said. Source: [www.cnn.com](http://www.cnn.com) (09/18/19)
Church Administration Policy Tip

An emerging issue that a number of churches have confronted in the last couple of years is that of requests by visitors or church attendees to use “restroom facilities” other than that of their gender at birth. Most of these churches have not been prepared for this kind of request and have struggled to develop a proper policy response.

Kindly find set forth below, a sample policy statement (short form) for your church to use in the event you have a need for some help and assistance with this kind of challenge.

First Apostolic Church, Inc.

Restroom Use Policy Statement

We are happy that you are with us today for church service.

Here at First Apostolic Church, we have some sincerely held religious beliefs regarding restroom use. While we do not wish to offend or insult anyone, we only permit restroom use in accordance with our sincerely held religious beliefs and policy, on the basis of a person’s naturally born sex or gender at birth. (Genesis 1:27; Matt. 19:4).

Consistent with our sincerely held religious beliefs and our restroom use policy, when you have need to use the church’s restroom, you are required to only use the men’s or women’s restroom based on your gender at birth. If you need help or special assistance, please notify one of our church ushers.

We deeply appreciate your cooperation and compliance.

The Leadership Team
First Apostolic Church, Inc.