

# Preaching to the Choir: Faith, Science, and Public Health Outreach



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## Introduction

Religious institutions have been relied upon to be trusted messengers during public health crises. COVID-19 affected Blacks and Caucasians disproportionately and there was a large gap in vaccine uptake among these two groups. Among Black Americans, 59% report that religion is very important to them. The goal of this exploratory study was to explore and understand COVID-19 messaging in faith communities.

## Methods

The study followed a mixed-methods approach and consisted of three participant groups. Faith leaders were identified through snowball sampling.

### Comparison Group

71 community members surveyed without any intervention

### Faith Leader Group

26 faith leaders interviewed with seven in-depth, open-ended questions

### Intervention Group

31 community members surveyed before and after a community program on faith, science, and COVID-19 vaccines



## Preliminary Findings

### Comparison Group

#### FAITH

- Trust Religious Leaders **NEUTRAL**
- Religion/spirituality was an important part of my upbringing **AGREE**
- I can explain one reason why religious people should encourage others to get the vaccine **NEUTRAL**

#### FEELINGS

- Afraid to get vaccine **STRONGLY DISAGREE**
- I am afraid COVID-19 will put me in the hospital **NEUTRAL**

#### SCIENCE

- If I get the vaccine, I will protect others from getting COVID-19 **NEUTRAL**

#### COMMUNITY

- I contribute to where I live **AGREE**

#### PERSONAL RESPONSIBILITY

- I will ask others to get vaccine **AGREE**



\*survey questions used for comparison & intervention



\*interview questions used for faith leaders

## Themes

### Faith Leader Group

“It is not necessarily tying the vaccine to the sermon, but tying the knowledge of vaccines to the sermon, and to rid a lot of the garbage that people are spewing out, that the vaccine is a mark of the beast. And I've quoted scripture, and I've tied that in to let you know that's not, that's something that's made up.”

“And so it's just so important that government be transparent and be supportive financially, especially, when it comes to our communities in helping us to be able to not only get the message out but be able to give our congregants supplies and things they may need to be protected.”

“Because I think we've been brainwashed as an American society and American Christians into thinking so individualistically that it's just me and God, me and Jesus. And it's no, we're part of a community, we're part of a world and God loves the world. And we have to take responsibility to care for our neighbor and part of that is doing what keeps us from passing germs onto others.”

“My role is dual because as a religious leader I have a responsibility to speak to the spiritual man, and I also have a responsibility to speak to the physical man.”

“I believe my role goes beyond just the four walls of the church, but it attacks all surrounding areas around the community that I pastor in.”

## Conclusion

Findings suggest that there may be a discrepancy between our understanding of faith leaders as trusted messengers and community members' perceptions.

- Faith leaders saw themselves as trusted messengers and spoke about involvement in health promotion
- Even when participants followed a faith and frequented a religious institute, they did not always identify faith leaders as trusted partners.

## Future Research

Further research should be carried out to clarify the themes found in this study. Studies should include a larger sample size, spanning across a wider geographic region. Samples should be also be more diverse, across various religions.

## References

Mitchell, T. (2021) *Faith Among Black Americans*, Pew Research Center's Religion & Public Life Project. Pew Research Center. Available at: <https://www.pewresearch.org/religion/2021/02/16/religiou-s-practices/>



Rose Bente Lee Ostapenko Center for Race, Equity, & Mission

This project is supported by a grant from the U.S. Department of Health & Human Services.