

Letter to the Editor

Assessment of Clergy Knowledge and Attitudes

To the Editor:

What do the clergy know about the near-death experience (NDE), and what do they think of it? Lori Bechtel, Alex Chen, Richard Pierce, and Barbara Walker (1992) recently reported their survey of American clergy, suggesting that 98 percent of the clergy had heard of the NDE, 85 percent had counselled parishioners who had had NDEs, and 10 percent had had NDEs themselves, and that respondents had "a moderately positive attitude towards the subject" (p. 161).

Before we generalize even about American ministers of religion, let me offer two *caveats*. First, many of the respondents may have misunderstood what a "near-death experience" was. Some seem to have taken the phrase to mean "any situation in which death may have been imminent" (p. 168). And second, only 320 usable questionnaires were returned out of 2,722 sent out. Perhaps the one in nine who replied were the only ones who had even a "moderately positive attitude," or the only ones who had counselled near-death experiencers, or had an experience themselves. In that case, the 98 percent who had heard of NDEs reduces to 12 percent, the 85 percent who had counselled NDEs to 10 percent, and the 10 percent who acknowledged NDEs themselves to a minuscule 1 percent. Put that way, the data are less than encouraging.

References

- Bechtel, L. J., Chen, A., Pierce, Richard A., and Walker, Barbara A. (1992). Assessment of clergy knowledge and attitudes toward near-death experiences. *Journal of Near-Death Studies*, 10, 161-170.

The Venerable Michael Perry
Archdeacon of Durham
7 The College
Durham DH1 3EQ
England