

**Reasons for Attrition  
Among Pastors  
QUANTITATIVE REPORT**

**Pastor Protection Research Study**

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## Executive Summary

### Pastor Attrition

- About 1% of pastors leave pastoral ministry prematurely each year (prior to retirement or death).
- Top reasons previous pastor left the pastorate: change in calling, conflict in church, and family issues.
- Most pastors who have served as a senior pastor in another church say they had taken their previous church as far as they could. Family needs and conflict in the church also led many pastors to leave their previous church.

### Conflict

- More than 1 in 3 pastors who pastored in a previous church experienced a significant personal attack at their last church.
- 64% of pastors who pastored in a previous church experienced conflict in their last church.
- 2 out of 10 pastors do not expect they will need to confront conflict in this church in the future.
- 1 in 10 pastors do not listen to people in their church for signs of conflict.
- Over 9 in 10 pastors agree they invest in processes to prevent conflict
- Over 5 out of 10 pastors agree they are often concerned about the financial security of their family.
- 75% of pastors have taken courses on dealing with conflict.
- 72% of pastors have taken courses on interpersonal skills.
- 84% of churches have a process for church discipline.
- 70% of churches have a document that clearly communicates the church's expectations for the pastor.

### Family

- Over 9 out of 10 pastors agree that they consistently protect time with their family (67% strongly agree).
- More than 1 in 3 pastors agree ministry demands keep them from spending time with family.
- More than 1 in 5 pastors agree that their family resents the demands of pastoral ministry.
- More than 9 in 10 married pastors agree their spouse has found a fulfilling ministry in their church (65% strongly agree).
- 94% of married pastors agree their spouse is enthusiastic about life in ministry together (63% strongly agree).
- More than 9 in 10 pastors agree their families regularly receive genuine encouragement from their congregations (59% strongly agree).

## **Burnout**

- Over 8 out of 10 pastors agree they feel they must be “on-call” 24 hours a day.
- 48% of pastors agree they often feel the demands of ministry are greater than they can handle (51% strongly agree).
- 54% of pastors agree the role of pastor is frequently overwhelming.
- More than 1 in 5 pastors agree their church has unrealistic expectations of them.
- More than 1 in 3 agree they feel isolated as a pastor.
- Nearly 9 in 10 pastors agree they feel free to say no when facing unrealistic expectations.
- 85% of pastors agree they have a day of rest at least once a week (59% strongly agree).
- How often pastors are spending time alone with the Lord in a week: almost 6 out of 10 say seven or more times. 1 in 7 do so 4 or less times a week.
- A majority of pastors meet to share their struggles with their spouse (90%), another pastor (71%), and/or a close friend (74%) at least once a month.
- 29% of churches have a plan for the pastor to periodically receive a sabbatical.
- 34% of churches have a pastor support group that invests in the health of the pastor’s family.

## **Moral Lapse**

- Nearly 8 in 10 pastors have another staff member present when counseling members of the opposite sex (62% strongly agree).
- 76% of pastors agree they refer church members to a professional counselor if they require more than two counseling sessions.
- 67% of churches have a list of counselors to refer people to.
- 90% of pastors agree they work hard to protect their image as a pastor (67% strongly agree).
- 76% of pastors agree they deserve the respect of their people.
- 4 in 10 pastors agree their churches would not have achieved the progress they have without them.
- Among the 96% of pastors who are currently married, 98% agree that their spouse is very satisfied with their marriage today (82% strongly agree).

## **Lack of Preparation, Poor Fit**

- 78% of pastors agree that their seminary or ministry training prepared them for the people side of ministry.
- 1 in 5 pastors *disagree* that their search team accurately described the church before they arrived.

## Methodology

This quantitative study is part of a multi-phase pastor protection research project designed to discover why pastors leave the ministry. The objectives for the quantitative phase were: to measure quantitatively how many pastors in 2005 are still in ministry today, to quantify current challenges pastors face in their ministry, to assess how many pastors have specific prescriptions or preventative measures in place, and to identify why the pastor left their previous church.

The study was sponsored by the North American Mission Board (NAMB) and Richard Dockins, MD. A steering team reviewed the methodology and provided feedback on the questionnaire. Many thanks go to Adam Mason, David Self, and Richard Dockins from Houston's First Baptist, Kathy Litton, Richie Stanley, and Kim Robinson from NAMB, and Melissa Haas from Hope Quest Ministries.

The phone survey of pastors of Evangelical and Black Protestant denominations was conducted March 5-18, 2015. The calling list was a random sample, stratified by church membership and denominational groups, drawn from a list of all Evangelical and Black Protestant churches. Each interview was conducted with the senior pastor, minister or priest of the church called with a completed sample of 1,500 pastors.

Responses were weighted by region and denominational group to more accurately reflect the population. The sample provides 95% confidence that the sampling error does not exceed  $\pm 2.7\%$ . This margin of error accounts for the effect of weighting. Margins of error are higher in sub-groups.

The following experts were interviewed between December 2014 and January 2015. Experts identified symptoms of struggles that lead pastors to consider leaving the ministry and specific preventative measures for pastors and churches. Insights from these experts were used in the writing of the questionnaire.

1. H.B. London- President of H.B. London Ministries and Pastor to Pastors Emeritus, Focus on the Family
2. Adam Mason- Minister of Counseling Services, Houston's First Baptist Church
3. Jared Pingleton- Director, Counseling Services, Focus on the Family
4. James Eubanks- Director of Counseling, First Baptist Church Woodstock, Georgia
5. Donald Hicks- President, Church Health Solutions
6. Richard Krejcir- Director, Into Thy Word Ministries
7. Jamie Johns- Corporate Chaplain, Houston, TX
8. Melissa Haas- Direct of Support Groups, Hope Quest Ministries
9. Gary Sweeten- Co-Founder, Sweeten Life Systems
10. Ken Swetland- Sr. Professor of Ministry, Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary

11. Kathy Litton- National Consultant for Ministry to Pastors' Wives, North American Mission Board
12. Lance Witt- President, Replenish Ministries
13. Mike MacKenzie- Clinical Director, Marble Retreat
14. Chuck Shoemake- Director of Care Ministries, The Foursquare Church
15. Kari MacKenzie- Executive Director, Marble Retreat
16. Troy Haas- Director of Restoration Ministries, First Baptist Church Woodstock, Georgia

## Quantitative Findings

### Pastor Attrition

**About 1% of pastors leave pastoral ministry prematurely each year (prior to retirement or death).**

By asking current pastors who was the pastor of their church 10 years ago, we find that 2% have left the ministry completely and 5% are working in ministry other than the pastorate. That is a cumulative known attrition rate of 8% over 10 years or less than one percent each year. 44% of current senior pastors have been serving in this role at their current church for the last 10 years.

Table 1 – Combined responses: “In what year did you become the senior pastor of this church?”  
“As far as you know, which of the following best describes where that pastor is today?”

I was the pastor at that time	44%
Not sure who pastor was	16%
Pastoring another church	12%
Retired	10%
Working in another ministry role other than pastor	5%
Deceased	3%
Working in a non-ministry role	2%
Church did not exist	2%
No pastor/interim pastor at that time	2%
Not sure	3%

The minimum estimate above does not take into account possible departures in the churches in which the current pastor does not know where the pastor 10 years ago is today. If the assumption is made that the attrition rate in these unknown cases is the same as those in which the whereabouts of the pastor 10 years ago is known, we can create an estimate for all of these pastors. Among only those churches that existed and had a pastor 10 years ago, 13% of this cohort are estimated to have left the pastorate for reasons other than death or retirement. This is approximately 29,000 pastors over that period of time who moved to another ministry role or have a non-ministry job today. If these pastors left at an even pace over the decade, it is less than 250 leaving each month.

**Top responses for where previous pastors are serving today: pastoring another church, retired, or working in another ministry role.**

Table 2 – “As far as you know, which of the following best describes where that pastor is today?” n=545 *Asked of pastors who were not at the current church in Feb. 2005 and who could name the pastor at that time.*

Pastoring another church	35%
Working in a non-ministry role	7%
Working in another ministry role other than pastor	15%
Retired	28%
Deceased	8%
Not sure	9%

Pastors of other ethnicities (9%) are less likely to answer “Retired” than white (30%) or African-American pastors (29%). Pastors of other ethnicities (16%) are more likely to answer “Deceased” than white pastors (7%). Pastors age 45-54 are the most likely to answer “Working in another ministry role other than pastor” (26%). Pastors of churches with attendance of 250+ (24%) are more likely to answer “Working in another ministry role other than pastor” than pastors of churches with attendance of 50-99 (14%) or 100-249 (13%). Pastors in the Northeast (26%) are more likely to answer “Working in another ministry role other than pastor” than those in the Midwest (12%) or South (13%).

**One out of four pastors surveyed became senior pastor at their current church between 2010-2013.**

Table 3 - “In what year did you become senior pastor of this church?”

1955-1989	10%
1990-1994	6%
1995-1999	11%
2000-2004	17%
2005-2009	21%
2010-2013	25%
2014-2015	10%

**For 57% of pastors surveyed, this is not their first experience as senior pastor.**

Table 4 - “Is this the first church you have served as senior pastor?”

Yes	43%
No	57%



White pastors (41%) are less likely to answer “Yes” than African-American pastors (57%) and pastors of other ethnicities (51%). Pastors age 18-44 (63%) are more likely to answer “Yes” than pastors age 45-54 (45%), who are more likely than pastors age 55-64 (35%), who are more likely than pastors age 65+ (28%). Pastors with no college degree (57%) are the most likely to answer “Yes”. Pastors with a doctoral degree (28%) are the least likely to answer “Yes”. Pastors with church attendance of 0-49 are the most likely to answer “Yes” (51%). Pastors in the Northeast (51%) are more likely to answer “Yes” than pastors in the South (41%) and the West (40%).

## Reasons for Leaving a Church or the Pastorate

**Top reasons previous pastor left the pastorate: change in calling, conflict in church, and family issues.**

Table 5 – “To the best of your knowledge, why did this pastor leave the pastorate?” n=114  
*Asked of those in Table 4 answering that the pastor of this church 10 years ago is “working in another ministry role other than pastor” OR “working in a non-ministry role.”*

Change in calling	37%
Conflict in a church	26%
Family issues	17%
Poor fit with a church	13%
Moral or ethical issues	13%
Burnout	10%
Personal finances	8%
Illness	5%
Lack of preparation for the job	3%
Other	16%
Not sure	12%
None of these	4%

**Most pastors who have served as a senior pastor in another church say they had taken their previous church as far as they could. Family needs and conflict in the church also led many pastors to leave their previous church.**

Table 6 – “Which of the following reasons describe why you left your last church?” n=875  
*Asked of pastors who indicated they are not in their first church as senior pastor in Table 2.*

You took the church as far as you could	54%
Your family needed a change	34%
Conflict in the church	23%
The church did not embrace your approach to pastoral ministry	19%
Were reassigned	18%
Not a good fit for the church	18%
Church had unrealistic expectations	18%
Asked to leave the church	8%
None of these	20%

*You took the church as far as you could*  
No significant differences.

*Your family needed a change*

Pastors with a Master's degree (38%) are more likely to answer yes than pastors with a Doctoral degree (28%).

*Conflict in the church*

Pastors of churches with attendance of 250+ are the least likely to answer "Yes" (8%). Pastors of churches with attendance of 0-49 (31%) are more likely to answer "Yes" than pastors of churches with attendance of 100-249+ (22%). Pastors in the Midwest (30%) are more likely to answer "Yes" than pastors in the South (20%).

*The church did not embrace your approach to pastoral ministry*

African-American pastors (28%) are more likely to answer "Yes" than pastors of other ethnicities (10%). Pastors in the Midwest (22%) are more likely to answer "Yes" than pastors in the Northeast (10%).

*You were reassigned*

African-American pastors (40%) are more likely to answer "Yes" than white pastors (17%). Pastors with no college degree (27%) are more likely to answer "Yes" than pastors with a Master's degree (15%). Pastors of churches with attendance of 50-99 (24%) are more likely to answer "Yes" than pastors of churches with attendance of 100-249 (15%).

*You were not a good fit for the church*

African-American (26%) and white pastors (19%) are more likely to answer "Yes" than pastors of other ethnicities (7%). Pastors of churches with attendance of 0-49 (23%) are more likely to answer "Yes" than pastors of churches with attendance of 250+ (14%). Pastors in the South (20%) are more likely to answer "Yes" than pastors in the Northeast (9%).

*The church had unrealistic expectations of you*

Pastors of churches with attendance of 0-49 (24%) and 50-99 (20%) are more likely to answer "Yes" than pastors of churches with attendance of 250+ (10%).

*You were asked to leave the church*

Pastors of churches with attendance of 50-99 (11%) are more likely to answer "Yes" than pastors of churches with attendance of 100-249 (6%) and 250+ (4%).

**More than 1 in 3 pastors experienced a significant personal attack at their last church.**

Table 7 – “Which of the following types of conflict did you personally experience as pastor in your last church?” n=875 *Asked of pastors who indicated they are not in their first church as senior pastor in Table 2.*

Conflict over changes you proposed	38%
Conflict with lay leaders	38%
Experienced a significant personal attack	34%
Conflict with church patriarch or matriarch	31%
Conflict over your leadership style	27%
Conflict over expectations about the pastor's role	25%
Conflict over doctrinal differences	13%
None of these	36%

*Conflict over changes you proposed*

White pastors (39%) are more likely to answer “Yes” than pastors of other ethnicities (26%). Pastors age 65+ (31%) are less likely to answer “Yes” than pastors age 18-44 (45%) and 45-54 (44%). Pastors with a Doctoral degree (43%) are more likely to answer “Yes” than pastors with no college degree (31%). Pastors in the South (41%) and West (38%) are more likely to answer “Yes” than pastors in the Northeast (24%)

*Conflict with lay leaders*

Pastors age 18-44 (41%) and 45-54 (49%) are more likely to answer “Yes” than pastors age 65+ (29%). Pastors age 55-64 (37%) are less likely to answer “Yes” than pastors age 45-54 (49%).

*Experienced a significant personal attack*

Pastors age 18-44 (42%) and 45-54 (39%) are more likely to answer “Yes” than pastors age 65+ (26%). Pastors of churches with attendance of 50-99 (38%) are more likely to answer “Yes” than pastors of churches with attendance of 250+ (26%).

*Conflict with church patriarch or matriarch*

Pastors age 45-54 (38%) are more likely to answer “Yes” than pastors age 55-64 (28%) and 65+ (26%).

*Conflict over leadership style*

Pastors age 18-44 (34%) and 45-54 (35%) are more likely to answer “Yes” than pastors age 55-64 (24%) and 65+ (21%). Pastors in the Northeast are the least likely to answer “Yes” (14%).

*Conflict over expectations about the pastor’s role*

Pastors age 65+ (20%) are less likely to answer “Yes” than pastors age 18-44 (32%). Pastors with a Master’s degree (28%) are more likely to answer “Yes” than pastors with no college degree (18%). Pastors of churches with attendance of 50-99 (30%) are more likely to answer “Yes” than pastors of churches with attendance of 0-49 (21%) and 250+ (20%). Pastors in the Midwest (32%) are more likely to answer “Yes” than pastors in the Northeast (16%) and South (23%).

*Conflict over doctrinal differences*

Pastors with a Doctoral degree (18%) are more likely to answer “Yes” than pastors with a Master’s degree (11%).

**The majority of churches have in place: a process for church discipline, a document that communicates the church’s expectations, and a list of counselors to refer people to. While experts recommend providing pastors with a sabbatical and having a group that invests in the health of the pastor’s family, these are much less common.**

Table 8 – “Which if any of the following does your church have in place today?”

A process for church discipline	84%
A document that clearly communicates the church's expectations of the pastor	70%
A list of counselors to refer people to	67%
A pastor support group that invests in the health of the pastor's family	34%
A lay counseling ministry	34%
A plan for pastor to periodically receive a sabbatical	29%
None of these	2%
Not sure	<1%

*A process for church discipline*

African-American pastors (93%) are more likely to answer “Yes” than white pastors (83%) and pastors of other ethnicities (83%). Pastors age 45-54 (86%) and 55-64 (85%) are more likely to answer “Yes” than pastors age 18-44 (80%). Pastors in the South (81%) are less likely to answer “Yes” than pastors in the Midwest (86%) and West (89%).

*A document that clearly communicates the church's expectations of the pastor*

African-American pastors (79%) are more likely to answer “Yes” than white pastors (69%). Pastors age 55-64 (73%) are more likely to answer “Yes” than pastors age 65+ (64%). Pastors of churches with attendance of 250+ (75%) are more likely to answer “Yes” than pastors of churches with attendance of 0-49 (66%).

*A list of counselors to refer people to*

Pastors age 45-54 (73%) are more likely to answer “Yes” than pastors age 18-44 (62%) and 65+ (64%). Pastors age 55-64 (69%) are more likely to answer “Yes” than pastors age 18-44 (62%). Pastors with a Master’s degree (72%) or a Doctoral degree (76%) are more likely to answer “Yes” than pastors with no college degree (57%) or a Bachelor’s degree (63%). Pastors of churches with attendance of 0-49 are the least likely to answer “Yes” (49%), followed by those with attendance 50-99 (63%), then 100-249 (73%), then 250+ (84%). Pastors in the Midwest (71%) are more likely to answer “Yes” than in the South (65%)

*A pastor support group that invests in the health of the pastor's family*

African-American pastors (46%) are more likely to answer “Yes” than whites pastors (32%). Pastors of churches with attendance of 250+ (41%) are more likely to answer “Yes” than pastors of churches with attendance of 0-49 (30%) and 100-249 (33%).

*A lay counseling ministry*

White pastors (31%) are less likely to answer “Yes” than African-American pastors (54%) and pastors of other ethnicities (49%). Pastors age 65+ (40%) are more likely to answer “Yes” than pastors age 18-44 (29%) and 45-54 (32%). Pastors with a Master’s degree are the least likely to answer “Yes” (27%). Pastors of churches with attendance of 250+ are the most likely to answer “Yes” (52%), followed by pastors of churches with attendance 100-249 (64%). Pastors in the Midwest (28%) are less likely to answer “Yes” than pastors in the South (35%) and the West (38%).

*A plan for the pastor to periodically receive a sabbatical*

White pastors (26%) are less likely to answer “Yes” than African-American pastors (50%) and pastors of other ethnicities (44%). Pastors with no college degree (33%) are more likely to answer “Yes” than pastors with a bachelor’s degree (26%). Pastors of churches with attendance of 0-49 (23%) and 50-99 (25%) are less likely to answer “Yes” than pastors of churches with attendance of 100-249 (32%) and 250+ (37%). Pastors in the West (34%) are more likely to answer “Yes” than pastors in the South (27%)

## Pastors Today: Symptoms and Preventative Measures

Experts in pastoral ministry who care for those considering leaving the ministry provided detailed symptoms of problems that if left unaddressed could lead a pastor to leave the ministry. Experts also identified healthy practices that serve to prevent attrition. Each of these are explored through a series of questions about conflict, family, burnout, moral lapse, lack of preparation, and poor fit.

### Conflict

**2 out of 10 pastors do not expect they will need to confront conflict in this church in the future.**

Table 9 – “I expect I will need to confront conflict in this church in the future.”

Strongly agree	41%
Somewhat agree	39%
Somewhat disagree	10%
Strongly disagree	9%
Not Sure	1%

“One can prepare for conflict by understanding the conflict and the fact that it is going to happen.” (Swetland)

Pastors age 18-44 (90%) are the most likely to agree. Pastors age 65+ (64%) are the least likely to agree. Pastors with a Master’s degree (82%) are more likely to agree than pastors with no college degree (75%). Pastors with attendance of 0-49 (72%) are less likely to agree than pastors with attendance of 100-249 (84%) or 250+ (83%).

**88% of pastors agree they are sure they can stay at their current church as long as they want.**

Table 10 – “I am sure I can stay at this church as long as I want.”

Strongly agree	58%
Somewhat agree	30%
Somewhat disagree	5%
Strongly disagree	3%
Not Sure	3%

“And in that insecurity. . . they may be. . . trying to avoid conflict because they don’t handle it well because it threatens their own sense of wellbeing.” (M. MacKenzie)

“When a pastor is insecure...they’re not going to get involved [in conflict].” (Swetland)

African-American pastors (15%) are more likely to disagree than white pastors (8%). Pastors with a Bachelor’s degree (92%) are more likely to agree than pastors with a Master’s degree (87%). Pastors of churches with attendance of 250+ (93%) are more likely to agree than pastors of churches with attendance of 0-49 (86%) and 100-249 (87%)

**1 in 10 pastors do not listen to people in their church for signs of conflict.**

Table 11 – “I consistently listen to people in our church for signs of conflict.”

Strongly agree	53%
Somewhat agree	37%
Somewhat disagree	6%
Strongly disagree	3%
Not Sure	1%

“They have to have their antennae out there and really listening to people and sensing where people are and reading between the lines so that they really are aware of where people are and not just letting it just slide right off.” (Swetland)

Pastors age 18-44 (94%) are more likely to agree than pastors age 55-64 (89%). Pastors with a Doctoral degree (95%) are more likely to agree than pastors with a Bachelor’s degree (89%).

**Over 9 in 10 pastors agree they invest in processes to prevent conflict.**

Table 12 – “I invest in processes and behaviors to prevent conflict.”

Strongly agree	46%
Somewhat agree	46%
Somewhat disagree	4%
Strongly disagree	2%
Not Sure	3%

“You never avoid conflict. Any time I’ve seen a pastor avoid conflict it just gets worse and worse. I think it’s about prevention and intervention.” (Hicks)

Pastors ages 65+ are the least likely to agree (87%). Pastors of churches with attendance of 0-49 are the least likely to agree (86%). Pastors in the West (87%) are less likely to agree than those in the Midwest (92%) and South (93%).



**Over 5 out of 10 pastors agree they are often concerned about the financial security of their family.**

Table 13 – “I am often concerned about the financial security of my family.”

Strongly agree	19%
Somewhat agree	34%
Somewhat disagree	21%
Strongly disagree	25%
Not Sure	<1%
Not Applicable	<1%

“If a person is thinking down the road, their own family security, their own financial security is at stake there. So instead of seeing it objectively and really seeing it as a possibility for growth in ministry and help encourage them to become stronger as a result of conflict, they tend to hide from it out of a sense of their own insecurity and fear of what’s going to happen down the road if they get involved.” (Swetland)

White pastors (51%) are less likely to agree than African-American pastors (66%) and pastors of other ethnicities (62%). Pastors age 65+ are the least likely to agree (43%). Pastors with attendance of 250+ are the least likely to agree (41%). Pastors in the South (56%) are more likely to agree than pastors in the Midwest (47%).

## Family

**Over 9 out of 10 pastors agree that they consistently protect time with their family.**

Table 14 – “I consistently protect my time with my family.”

Strongly agree	67%
Somewhat agree	27%
Somewhat disagree	4%
Strongly disagree	2%
Not Sure	<1%
Not Applicable	1%

“The reason marriages are weak and the reason children are acting out is that he is spending too much time in the ministry and not enough time ministering to his family.” (M. Haas)

Pastors age 45-54 (96%) are more likely to agree than pastors age 65+ (91%). Pastors with attendance of 100-249 (95%) are more likely to agree than pastors with attendance of 0-49 (92%).

**More than 1 in 3 pastors agree ministry demands keep them from spending time with family.**

Table 15 – “The demands of ministry keep me from spending time with my family.”

Strongly agree	4%
Somewhat agree	31%
Somewhat disagree	27%
Strongly disagree	37%
Not Sure	<1%
Not Applicable	1%

“When a pastor is so involved in pastoring and the demands of the church are so hard, he doesn’t have time to properly communicate and fulfill his role as a husband and a father.” (London)

Pastors of churches with attendance of 50-99 (36%) and 100-249 (40%) are more likely to agree than pastors of churches with attendance of 0-49 (27%).

**More than 1 in 5 pastors agree that their family resents the demands of pastoral ministry.**

Table 16 – “My family resents the demands of pastoral ministry.”

Strongly agree	8%
Somewhat agree	13%
Somewhat disagree	21%
Strongly disagree	57%
Not Sure	<1%
Not Applicable	1%

“Resentment over the time that dad spends in ministry, feeling un-valuable, insignificant, not mattering, others matter more, that kind of thing. Unfortunately that’s happening all along, but we normally don’t see the results, until kids reach adolescence.” (M. Haas)

African-Americans pastors (31%) are more likely to agree than white pastors (19%). Pastors age 55-64 (23%) are more likely to agree than pastors age 18-44 (17%) and 45-54 (17%).

**More than 9 in 10 married pastors agree their spouse has found a fulfilling ministry in their church.**

Table 17 – “My spouse has found a fulfilling area of ministry to serve in our church.” n=1439

Strongly agree	65%
Somewhat agree	26%
Somewhat disagree	6%
Strongly disagree	2%
Not Sure	1%

A sign of conflict in the family “is the spouse’s lack of interest or lack of attendance in things that have to do with church events or church things.” (Shoemaker)

Pastors age 55-64 (94%) are more likely to agree than pastors age 18-44 (87%). Pastors age 18-44 are the most likely to disagree (12%). Pastors with a Bachelor’s degree (94%) are more likely to agree than pastors with a Master’s degree (90%). Pastors of churches with attendance of 250+ are the most likely to agree (96%). Pastors in the South (93%) are more likely to agree than pastors in the Midwest (89%) and the West (88%).

**94% of married pastors agree their spouse is enthusiastic about life in ministry together.**

Table 18 – “My spouse is enthusiastic about our life in ministry together.” n=1439

Strongly agree	63%
Somewhat agree	31%
Somewhat disagree	4%
Strongly disagree	1%
Not Sure	1%

Regarding marriage: “If I’m noticing that my pastor’s wife is not involved at all in any of the ministry opportunities, not that she is ultra involved because that’s equally unhealthy but she is completely absent from church activities, ministry events, church functions, [would] probably be a big red flag for me that something’s not right in Kansas. (M. Haas)

Pastors with a Bachelor’s degree (96%) are more likely to agree than pastors with a Master’s degree (93%) or a Doctoral degree (92%). Pastors of churches with attendance of 250+ are the most likely to agree (98%). Pastors in the West (90%) are less likely to agree than pastors in the Northeast (96%) and the South (96%).

**More than 9 in 10 pastors agree their families regularly receive genuine encouragement from their congregations.**

Table 19 – “My congregation regularly provides my family with genuine encouragement.”

Strongly agree	59%
Somewhat agree	32%
Somewhat disagree	6%
Strongly disagree	1%
Not Sure	<1%
Not Applicable	1%

“I think for a pastor and his family to know that 1) the leadership is praying for them, 2) they affirm them, 3) they encourage them, and 4) they recognize the work that is being done – those are things that give a pastor hope or give a pastor a sense of being wanted.” (London)

African-American pastors (97%) are more likely to agree than white pastors (91%). Pastors age 65+ (95%) are more likely to agree than pastors age 45-54 (90%). Pastors with no college degree (94%) or a Bachelor’s degree (93%) are more likely to agree than pastors with a Doctoral degree (86%).

## Burnout

**Over 8 out of 10 pastors agree they feel they must be “on-call” 24 hours a day.**

Table 20 – “I feel I must be “on-call” 24 hours a day.”

Strongly agree	51%
Somewhat agree	33%
Somewhat disagree	10%
Strongly disagree	7%
Not Sure	<1%

“So we often violate our own kind of limits and live as though we don’t have any limits which I think is another piece of this equation – bad theology. I think a lot of pastors have been sort of trained in the ‘burnout for Jesus’ mentality.” (Witt)

Pastors of other ethnicities (76%) are less likely to agree than white (84%) and African-American (88%) pastors. Pastors age 18-44 are least likely to agree (76%). Pastors age 55-64 (88%) are more likely to agree than pastors age 45-54 (82%). Pastors with a Master’s degree (80%) are less likely to agree than pastors with no college degree (88%) or a Bachelor’s degree (87%). Pastors of churches with attendance of 0-49 (88%) are more likely to agree than those with attendance of 250+ (80%). Pastors in the South are the most likely to agree (87%).

**48% of pastors agree they often feel the demands of ministry are greater than they can handle.**

Table 21 – “I often feel the demands of ministry are greater than I can handle.”

Strongly agree	16%
Somewhat agree	32%
Somewhat disagree	28%
Strongly disagree	23%
Not Sure	1%

African-American pastors (38%) are less likely to agree than white pastors (49%), who are less likely than pastors of other ethnicities (60%). Pastors age 65+ are the least likely to agree (40%). Pastors of churches with attendance of 100-249 are the most likely to agree (53%). Pastors in the Northeast (58%) are more likely to agree than pastors in the South (45%).

**54% of pastors agree the role of pastor is frequently overwhelming.**

Table 22 – “The role of being a pastor is frequently overwhelming.”

Strongly agree	19%
Somewhat agree	35%
Somewhat disagree	24%
Strongly disagree	21%
Not Sure	1%

“Often the needs of a ministry position are greater than our ability to meet all those needs. Therefore, it’s hard to prioritize what to focus on because the needs are so great.” (K. MacKenzie)

Pastors ages 65+ are the least likely to agree (45%). Pastors of churches with attendance of 100-249 (57%) are more likely to agree than pastors of churches with attendance of 0-49 (50%).

**More than 1 in 5 pastors agree their church has unrealistic expectations of them.**

Table 23– “My church has unrealistic expectations of me.”

Strongly agree	6%
Somewhat agree	15%
Somewhat disagree	31%
Strongly disagree	47%
Not Sure	1%

“Burnout is just the end result of the inevitable, the real issue resides within the pastor and on some level it may also reside in an unhealthy environment in the church that may have unrealistic expectations and demands upon the pastor.” (Eubanks)

White pastors (19%) are less likely to agree than African-American pastors (33%) and pastors of other ethnicities (30%). Pastors of churches with attendance of 100-249 (23%) are more likely to agree than pastors of churches with attendance of 250+ (15%).

**Nearly 1 in 4 pastors agree they frequently get irritated with people at the church.**

Table 24 – “I frequently get irritated with people at the church.”

Strongly agree	4%
Somewhat agree	20%
Somewhat disagree	35%
Strongly disagree	40%
Not Sure	1%

“They begin to really show signs of being irritated with people rather than loving people. They end up feeling that the people are just frustrating, just another thing on their to-do list.” (K. MacKenzie)

Pastors of other ethnicities (32%) are more likely to agree than white pastors (24%).

**More than 1 in 3 agree they feel isolated as a pastor.**

Table 25 – “I feel isolated as a pastor.”

Strongly agree	6%
Somewhat agree	29%
Somewhat disagree	21%
Strongly disagree	45%
Not Sure	<1%

“Loneliness .... most of the time that resides within the psyche of the pastor that I can’t trust others and there’s nowhere to turn. And if I share, it will come back on me, and after all I have to look perfect.” (Eubanks)

Pastors age 18-44 (43%) are more likely to agree than pastors age 55-64 (33%) and age 65+ (28%). Pastors age 45-54 (36%) are more likely to agree than pastors age 65+ (28%). Pastors with a Bachelor’s degree (30%) are less likely to agree than pastors with a Master’s degree (38%). Pastors of churches with attendance of 250+ are the least likely to agree (25%)

**Nearly 9 in 10 pastors agree they feel free to say no when facing unrealistic expectations.**

Table 26 – “I feel free to say ‘no’ when expectations of me are unrealistic.”

Strongly agree	53%
Somewhat agree	36%
Somewhat disagree	7%
Strongly disagree	3%
Not Sure	1%

“Burnout is prevented by a pastor regulating his resources, his resources of time and energy, and when one isn’t regulating those resources there’s a reason for it. Typically it is revolving around the inability to say no.” (Eubanks)

Pastors age 55-64 (91%) and 65+ (91%) are more likely to agree than pastors age 18-44 (85%). Pastors with a Doctoral degree (94%) are more likely to agree than pastors with a Master’s degree (87%)

**85% of pastors agree they have a day of rest at least once a week.**

Table 27 – “At least one day a week I ‘unplug’ from ministerial work and have a day of rest.”

Strongly agree	59%
Somewhat agree	26%
Somewhat disagree	10%
Strongly disagree	5%
Not Sure	<1%

“Firmly insist to recharge, recreate, and reconnect because ... one of the burnout factors is that you give and you give and you give until you give out.” (Pingleton)

White (85%) and African-American pastors (90%) are more likely to agree than pastors of other ethnicities (77%). Pastors with no college degree (80%) are less likely to agree than pastors with a Bachelor’s degree (86%) and those with a Doctoral degree (88%).

**How often pastors are spending time alone with the Lord in a week: almost 6 out of 10 say seven or more times. 1 in 7 pastors do so 4 or less times a week.**

Table 28 – “In the last 7 days, how many times have you had personal time alone with the Lord involving Bible study and prayer, other than sermon or lesson preparation?”

Seven or more	59%
Six	10%
Five	16%
Four	6%
Three	6%
Two	2%
One	<1%
Zero	1%



**A majority of pastors meet to share their struggles with a spouse, another pastor, and/or a close friend at least once a month.**

Table 29 – “Do you meet at least once a month and openly share your struggles with any of the following?”

Your spouse	90%
Close friend	74%
Another pastor	71%
Lay leaders in the church	50%
Mentor	42%
Another staff member	38%
Bible study group in your church	33%
Counselor	9%
None of these	2%

*Your spouse*

Pastors age 65+ are the least likely to answer “Yes” (81%). Pastors of churches with attendance of 100-249 (92%) and 250+ (92%) are more likely to answer “Yes” than pastors of churches with attendance of 0-49 (86%).

*A close friend*

Pastors of other ethnicities (84%) are more likely to answer “Yes” than white pastors (74%). Pastors age 18-44 (79%) and 45-54 (79%) are more likely to answer “Yes” than pastors age 55-64 (73%) and age 65+ (70%). Pastors of churches with attendance of 0-49 (67%) are less likely to answer “Yes” than pastors of churches with attendance of 100-249 (77%) or 250+ (80%). Pastors in the West (49%) are more likely to answer “Yes” than pastors in the Northeast (37%) and the West (39%).

*Another pastor*

African-American pastors (80%) and pastors of other ethnicities (82%) are more likely to answer “Yes” than white pastors (70%). Pastors age 18-44 (77%) are more likely to answer “Yes” than pastors age 55-64 (71%) and 65+ (66%). Pastors with a Master’s degree (75%) are more likely to answer “Yes” than pastors with no college degree (69%) or a Bachelor’s degree (69%). Pastors of churches with attendance of 250+ (75%) are more likely to answer “Yes” than pastors of churches with attendance of 0-49 (66%).

*Lay leaders in the church*

White pastors (51%) and pastors of other ethnicities (59%) are more likely to answer “Yes” than African-American pastors (35%). Pastors of churches with attendance of 250+ (55%) are more likely to answer “Yes” than pastors of churches with attendance of 0-49 (46%) and 50-99 (47%). Pastors in the West (58%) are more likely to answer “Yes” than pastors in the Midwest (49%) and South (48%).

#### *A mentor*

Pastors age 18-44 are the most likely to answer “Yes” (56%), followed by pastors age 45-54 (46%). Pastors of churches with attendance of 250+ are the most likely to answer “Yes” (53%). Pastors in the West (49%) are more likely to answer “Yes” than pastors in the Northeast (37%) and the West (39%).

#### *Another staff member*

Pastors of other ethnicities (49%) are more likely to answer “Yes” than white (38%) and African-American pastors (35%). Pastors with a Doctoral degree (46%) are more likely to answer “Yes” than pastors with a Master’s degree (36%). Pastors of churches with attendance of 250+ are the most likely to answer “Yes” (58%), followed by pastors of churches with attendance 100-249 (46%), then 50-99 (30%), then 0-49 (20%).

#### *A Bible study group in your church*

Pastors of other ethnicities (43%) are more likely to answer “Yes” than white pastors (32%). Pastors age 65+ are the most likely to answer “Yes” (43%). Pastors age 55-64 (35%) are more likely to answer “Yes” than pastors age 18-44 (27%). Pastors in the West (40%) are more likely to answer “Yes” than pastors in the Northeast (29%) and South (31%).

#### *A counselor*

White pastors (7%) are less likely to answer “Yes” than African-American pastors (16%) and pastors of other ethnicities (14%). Pastors age 65+ (13%) are more likely to answer “Yes” than pastors age 18-44 (6%) and age 55-64 (7%). Pastors in the West (11%) are more likely to answer “Yes” than pastors in the Midwest (7%).

## Moral Lapse

**Nearly 8 in 10 pastors have another staff member present when counseling members of the opposite sex.**

Table 30 – “I have another staff member present when counseling church members of the opposite sex.”

Strongly agree	62%
Somewhat agree	16%
Somewhat disagree	10%
Strongly disagree	6%
Do not counsel	2%
Do not counsel members of the opposite sex	1%
Not Applicable	3%

“There needs to be a window in the door and there needs to be a secretary outside that door. And if you don’t have a window in the door and a secretary outside the door, you should not be counseling somebody of the opposite sex, period.” (Mason)

Pastors of other ethnicities (86%) are more likely to agree than white pastors (77%). Pastors age 65+ (75%) are less likely to agree than pastors age 18-44 (82%). Pastors age 55-64 (19%) are more likely to disagree than pastors age 18-44 (14%). Pastors age 65+ (3%) are more likely to answer “I do not counsel” than pastors age 18-44 (1%) and age 55-64 (1%).

Pastors with no college degree (86%) or a Bachelor’s degree (81%) are more likely to agree than pastors with a Master’s degree (74%) or a Doctoral degree (70%). Pastors with no college degree (3%) or a Bachelor’s degree (3%) are more likely to answer “I do not counsel” than pastors with a Master’s degree (1%). Pastors of churches with attendance of 100-249 are the most likely to agree (53%).

Pastors of churches with attendance of 50-99 (18%) and 250+ (20%) are more likely to disagree than pastors of churches with attendance 0-49 (13%). Pastors of churches with attendance of 0-49 are the most likely to answer “I do not counsel” (4%). Pastors in the Northeast (81%) and South (82%) are more likely to agree than pastors in the Midwest (72%). Pastors in the West (4%) are more likely to answer “I do not counsel” than pastors in the Midwest (1%) and South (1%). Pastors in the West (2%) are more likely to answer “I do not counsel members of the opposite sex” than pastors in South (less than 1%).

**76% of pastors agree they refer church members to a professional counselor if they require more than two counseling sessions.**

Table 31 – “I refer church members to a professional counselor when the situation requires more than two sessions.”

Strongly agree	47%
Somewhat agree	28%
Somewhat disagree	13%
Strongly disagree	9%
Not Sure	3%

“Our recommendation here has been that people on a ministerial staff shouldn’t meet with a person more than once or twice. If there’s an issue that is longer than that, that’s beyond a pastoral care or spiritual direction issue, that needs to be referred to either an outside counselor or an in-house counselor if you have it.” (Mason)

Pastors of churches with attendance of 0-49 are least likely to agree (66%). Pastors of churches with attendance of 100-249 (80%) are more likely to agree than pastors of churches with attendance 50-99 (75%). Pastors in the South (77%) are more likely to agree than those in the West (71%).

**90% of pastors agree they work hard to protect their image as a pastor.**

Table 32 – “I work hard to protect my image as a pastor.”

Strongly agree	67%
Somewhat agree	23%
Somewhat disagree	7%
Strongly disagree	2%
Not Sure	1%

“Openness and acceptance – if that is not the culture of the church then many times the opposite is true where there’s a culture of image management, of hiding, of not letting your faults be seen or known about or you stand the risk of complete rejection. And so that keeps the struggles of the pastor and his wife in hiding sometimes for many years.” (Eubanks)

African-American pastors (>99%) are more likely to agree than white pastors (89%) and pastors other ethnicities (87%). Pastors with no college degree (93%) or with a Bachelor’s degree (92%) are more likely to agree than pastors with a Master’s degree (88%) or a Doctoral degree (86%). Pastors in the South are the most likely to agree (93%).

**76% of pastors agree they deserve the respect of their people.**

Table 33 – “I deserve the respect of my people.”

Strongly agree	36%
Somewhat agree	40%
Somewhat disagree	13%
Strongly disagree	7%
Not Sure	5%

“This narcissism that’s expressed as a sense of entitlement and a sense of doing battle against anyone who stands in the way of them getting what they feel like they’re entitled to by virtue of their calling, virtue of the position, virtue of their training. And then the burnout, when they get tired of doing that battle then they just go and seek whatever needs that they want to have met, feeling a sense of entitlement to that.” (Mason)

African-American pastors (94%) are more likely to agree than whites pastors (75%), who are more likely than pastors of other ethnicities (65%). Those with and a Doctoral degree (81%) are more likely to agree than those with a Bachelor’s degree (72%)

**4 in 10 pastors agree their churches would not have achieved the progress they have without them.**

Table 34 – “This church would not have achieved the progress it has without me.”

Strongly agree	11%
Somewhat agree	29%
Somewhat disagree	26%
Strongly disagree	26%
Not Sure	8%

“Pride is a big sign because out of pride is going to be a man that has confidence in himself, and he is going to take liberties, and he’s not going to want accountability. He is very blinded to his weaknesses and his frailties and that sense of entitlement can come out of that too.” (Litton)

Pastors ages 65+ (46%) are more likely to agree than pastors ages 18-44 (36%) and 45-54 (37%). Pastors with a Doctoral degree are the most likely to agree (49%). Pastors with attendance of 50-99 (45%) are more likely to agree than pastors with attendance of 0-49 (35%) and 100-249 (38%).

**96% of pastors indicate they are married.**

Table 35 – “Which of the following best describes your marital status?”

Married	96%
Single, never married	2%
Divorced/separated	1%
Widowed	1%
Refused	<1%

**98% of pastors agree that their spouse is very satisfied with their marriage today.**

Table 36 – “My spouse is very satisfied with my marriage today.” n=1439

Strongly agree	82%
Somewhat agree	16%
Somewhat disagree	1%
Strongly disagree	<1%
Not Sure	1%

“First of all, there needs to be a real commitment to the relationship, that the relationship becomes the most important relationship, not second or third.” (London)

**Most pastors indicate they have received training in counseling and interpersonal skills.**

Table 37 – “Which of the following training, if any, have you received?”

Taken graduate school courses in counseling	52%
Obtained graduate degree in counseling	9%
Read several books or articles on counseling	90%
Attended conferences on counseling	64%
Taken courses on interpersonal skills	72%
Taken courses on dealing with conflict	75%
None of these	3%

*Taken graduate school courses in counseling*

African-American pastors (62%) are more likely to answer “Yes” than white pastors (51%). Pastors with a Doctoral degree are the most likely to answer “Yes” (80%), followed by pastors with a Master’s (69%), then pastors with a Bachelor’s (36%), then pastors with no college degree (21%). Pastors of churches with attendance of 0-49 are the least likely to answer “Yes” (43%).

*Obtained a graduate degree in counseling*

African-American pastors (17%) are more likely to answer “Yes” than white pastors (8%). Pastors age 55-64 (10%) and 65+ (13%) are more likely to answer “Yes” than pastors age 18-44

(5%). Pastors with a Doctoral degree (21%) are more likely to answer “Yes” than pastors with a Master’s degree (12%). Pastors in the South (10%) are more likely to answer “Yes” than pastors in the Midwest (6%).

*Read several books or articles on counseling*

Pastors age 65+ are the least likely to answer “Yes” (85%). Pastors with no college degree are the least likely to answer “Yes” (82%). Pastors of churches with attendance of 0-49 are the least likely to answer “Yes” (81%).

*Attended conferences on counseling*

African-American pastors (75%) and pastors of other ethnicities (76%) are more likely to answer “Yes” than white pastors (62%). Pastors age 18-44 are the least likely to answer “Yes” (49%). Pastors with a Doctoral degree (69%) are more likely to answer “Yes” than pastors with a Bachelor’s degree (59%). Pastors of churches with attendance of 100-249 (69%) and 250+ (68%) are more likely to answer “Yes” than pastors of churches with attendance of 0-49 (57%) and 50-99 (59%).

*Taken courses on interpersonal skills*

African-American pastors (82%) are more likely to answer “Yes” than white pastors (70%). Pastors age 65+ (64%) are less likely to answer “Yes” than pastors ages 18-44 (76%) and 45-54 (74%). Pastors with a Master’s degree (75%) or a Doctoral Degree (80%) are more likely to answer “Yes” than pastors with no college degree (63%) or a Bachelor’s degree (69%). Pastors of churches with attendance of 250+ (77%) are more likely to answer “Yes” than pastors of churches with attendance of 0-49 (65%) and 50-99 (70%).

*Taken courses on dealing with conflict*

Pastors age 18-44 (82%) are more likely to answer “Yes” than pastors age 55-64 (74%) and 65+ (68%). Pastors age 45-54 (78%) are more likely to answer “Yes” than pastors age 65+ (68%). Pastors with a Master’s degree (80%) or a Doctoral degree (84%) are more likely to answer “Yes” than pastors with no college degree (66%) or a Bachelor’s degree (71%). Pastors of churches with attendance of 0-49 are the least likely to answer “Yes” (69%).

## Lack of Preparation, Poor Fit

**78% of pastors agree that their seminary or ministry training prepared them for the people side of ministry.**

Table 38 – “My seminary or ministry training prepared me to handle the people side of ministry.”

Strongly agree	28%
Somewhat agree	50%
Somewhat disagree	13%
Strongly disagree	6%
Not Sure	1%
Not Applicable	3%

“90% of what pastors do is relationships, build relationships, deal with conflict, deal with differences. And they have almost no preparation in it.” (Sweeten)

African-American pastors (89%) are more likely to agree than white pastors (78%) or pastors of other ethnicities (76%). Pastors age 45-54 (74%) are less likely to agree than pastors age 18-44 (83%). Pastors with no college degree are the least likely to agree (68%).

**1 in 5 pastors disagree that their search team accurately described the church before they arrived.**

Table 39 – “The search team or leaders who invited me to my church accurately described the church before I arrived.”

Strongly agree	41%
Somewhat agree	28%
Somewhat disagree	10%
Strongly disagree	10%
Not Sure	11%

“... the church needs to know who they really are. Not what they want to be, but what they really have been and what they currently are. The members of the pastor search committee . . . also have a pulse of the church of where it’s been and where it is and where people desire for it to go.” (Hicks)

“Looking at history, the personalities involved . . . I think a much deeper look at personality and some of those more personality-driven aspects of leadership would be very important to making sure you do not have this lack of fit problem.” (T. Haas)

White pastors (72%) are more likely to agree than African-American pastors (55%) and pastors of other ethnicities (56%). Those age 65+ (62%) are less likely to agree than those age 18-44 (75%) and age 55-64 (69%). Those with no college degree (62%) are less likely to agree than



those with a Bachelor's degree (71%) or a Master's degree (71%). Those with attendance of 100-249 (72%) are more likely to agree than those with attendance of 0-49 (63%). Those in the West are the least likely to agree (60%).