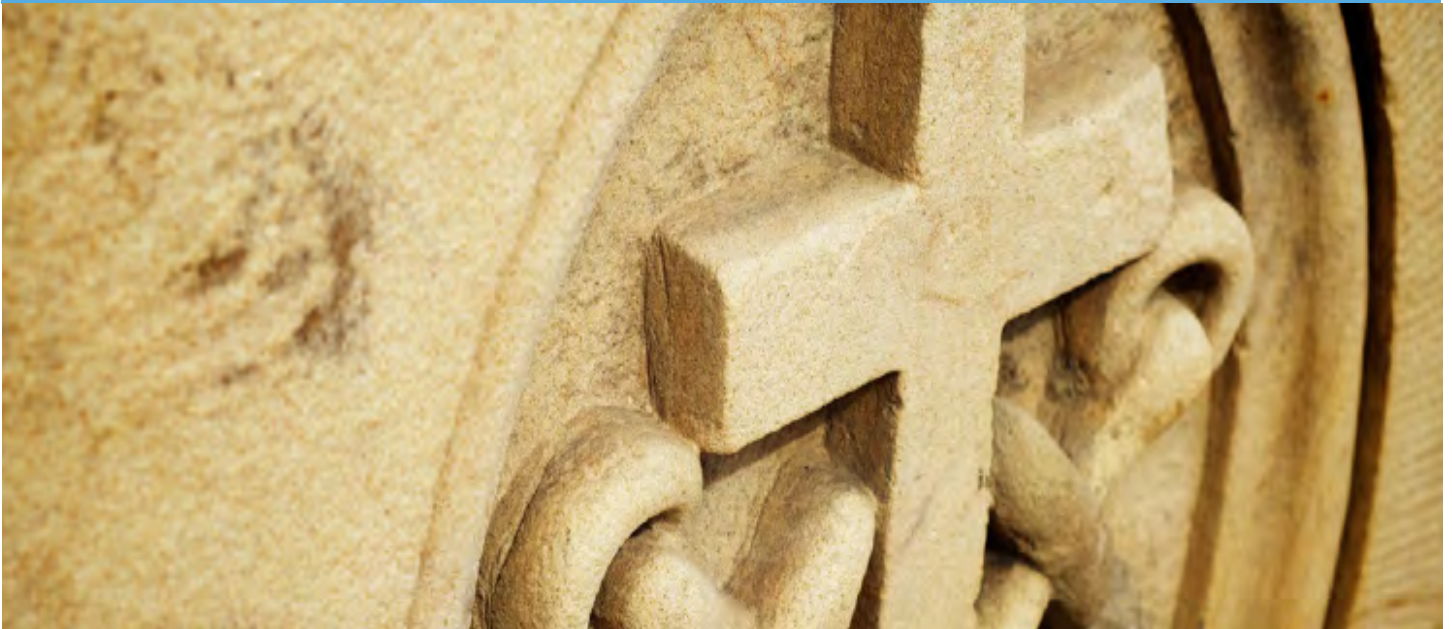


Flourishing in Ministry

Emerging Research Insights on the Well-Being of Pastors



The Flourishing in Ministry Project

Mendoza College of Business

University of Notre Dame



Published 2013

This document is licensed under the Creative Commons, Attribution-NonCommercial. This document may be downloaded, shared and adapted for non-commercial use. We do request that any non-commercial publications or presentations acknowledge the original source and the Flourishing in Ministry Project. No rights for commercial use of any kind are granted.

For more information on this license see <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/3.0/>

CONTENTS

Introduction	2
The Flourishing in Ministry Team.....	6
The Science of Well-Being	7
Daily Happiness.....	7
Thriving.....	11
Benefits of Well-Being.....	13
Thriving at the Expense of Happiness.....	15
Pastoral Well-Being Today.....	16
The Happiness of Pastors	16
Flourishing at Work	17
General Flourishing in Life.....	18
Burnout and Recovery	19
Flourishing and Relationships.....	22
The Vital Community of the Local Church.....	22
The Essential Care Of Significant Others	27
Role Models and Mentors	30
Community of Pastors	34
Well-Being and the Work of Pastor	41
Engagement, Authenticity, & Flourishing.....	44
Institutions and Pastoral Well-Being.....	46
Potential Implications of Our Research	47
Next Steps in Research.....	52

*Good work finds the way between pride and despair.
It graces with health. It heals with grace.
It preserves the given so that it remains a gift.
By it, we lose loneliness:
we clasp the hands of those who go before us, and the
hands of those who come after us¹*

INTRODUCTION

by Matt Bloom

When I was a child my family worshiped at a Methodist church. The pastor was Dr. McClure—he was never called reverend or pastor, at least as far as I could tell. For me, he was a dark, robed figure who was always up front and somehow also always “up there,” a person to be revered, so as a child that meant he was also feared a little. On Sunday mornings, he was a voice I barely listened to because I was spending most of my time trying to maximize

the small amount of white space in the bulletin to fill with my pictures. One Sunday, as my parents were trying to guide my three siblings and me out the door, we were surprised by the smiling face of Dr. McClure which seemed to appear suddenly before us. I was as dumbfounded as my siblings also appeared to be. He spoke -- I have no idea what he said -- and none of us responded. To fill the awkward silence, my mother, perhaps a bit concerned, said to all of us, “You all know who this is, don’t you?” I did, but was not about to say anything. But one of my younger brothers, nodding his head affirmatively, gave the right answer. “Yes,” he said, “it’s God!”

Certainly during my childhood Dr. McClure did represent much of what I understood about God. So too did the kindly Reverend Knowles, whose gentle voice, soft hands, and sincere kindness I still remember vividly. Since those early years I have met many



more pastors and, with few exceptions, they have all shared a certain character that I find hard to define without using words that denote something akin to holy or even divine. Even as I write this, I know that these same men and women would balk at my use of such terms to describe them. To be sure, these are real people who have their own darker sides, and they would be adamant about describing their “ten thousand faults, foibles, and follies,” as one pastor put it. And yet, it is these very real and quite amazing people that fill this challenging, difficult, exasperating but essentially important role of pastor. In his seminal book on the state of pastoral leadership,¹ Jack Carroll describes pastoral work this way:

Being a pastor is a tough, demanding job, one that is not always very well understood or appreciated. Pastoral work is more complex than that which transpires in the hour or so a week that many lay people see the pastor in action as she or he leads worship and preaches. What happens during this time is surely of central importance to clergy and their parishioners, but it is not the only important thing clergy do...[Moreover,] it is a job in flux...It is made increasingly difficult by rapid changes in the pastor's work environment, including the broader culture in which pastoral work is done.

Even as the work of pastors changes and perhaps becomes more difficult and challenging, it remains clear that pastors, the roles they fill, and work they do continue to be of immense value for hundreds of thousands of people and thousands of churches. In other words, pastors matter, and they matter a great deal.

Our research project is called Flourishing

¹ Berry, W. (1990). *Healing. What Are People For?: Essays*, New York: North Point.

1 Carroll, J. W. (2006.) *God's potters: Pastoral leadership and the shaping of congregations*, Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans.

in Ministry because we are trying to understand the well-being of these real and amazing people. We are exploring well-being among clergy and their families. The epigraph of this introduction reflects a core belief that underlies our research. We believe that when work is good that it will produce goodness of many kinds, including high levels of well-being among those who perform the work. We also believe that work cannot and must not be defined exclusively by measures of performance, such as effectiveness, efficiency, or productivity. Certainly performance matters, but we vigorously affirm that to be considered truly “good,” work must also enhance the well-being of all people and all creation that are affected

“Being a pastor is a tough, demanding job, one that is not always very well understood...”

by the work being done. The mission of the Flourishing in Ministry project is to understand what constitutes good work for pastors, their families, and the churches these pastors serve.

Our current work is directed toward answering three big research questions. The first is, *what are the signature characteristics of well-being for clergy?* We want to know how we can tell whether or not a pastor is flourishing in ministry. One of our most important goals is to be able to measure, with accuracy and fidelity, whether a clergy person has a high or low level of well-being. We study a wide variety of indicators of well-being, including

work satisfaction, meaning in life, personal growth, and work-family dynamics. In the future we hope to include measures of spiritual and physical well-being. Our goal is to be holistic and comprehensive. We view well-being as comprising a variety of elements, and we want to capture this variety in our research.

The second question is, *what factors and conditions foster high levels of well-being, and what factors and conditions impede or diminish it?* We are studying factors and conditions at several levels. We will explore how the personal characteristics of clergy are related to their level of well-being. For example, we will study how factors such as personality, the nature of an individual's pastoral identity, and variations in life practices (e.g., sleep quality, frequency of vacations, engagement in spiritual disciplines) influence pastors' well-being. We are also studying how characteristics of ministry contexts are related to well-being. This includes factors such as church size, the fit between the pastor and the local ministry, and the nature of relationships between pastors and their congregations. Finally, we are exploring how denominational factors, such as differences in polity, might be related to well-being. Once again, our goal here is to be holistic and comprehensive, so over time we will study a wide variety of individual, ministry-level, and denominational factors that might shape the well-being of clergy and their families.

Our third research question is, *how does the well-being of clergy and their families change over a life span?* A major focus here is to map the ebbs and flows of well-being over an entire life in ministry, and to mark the factors that account for those changes. We are studying how the shape and contours of

well-being changes over time, including such things as whether the well-being of younger pastors is fundamentally different from that of older pastors. This longitudinal approach is regarded among scientists as the "gold standard" for research because it is the only way we can really understand what things influence and shape well-being. There is a lot of speculation about what matters: a long-term study will provide everyone with the data we all require to know, for sure, what helps pastors to flourish, what prevents them from flourishing, and what can be done to ensure clergy and their families maintain high levels of well-being. There are almost 1,000 pastors from more than eight different denominations who have generously participated in our research. Most have participated in more than one survey, and several hundred have met with us for long, in-depth interviews and conversations. In addition, we have data from about 200 spouses who have helped us to begin to explore what being a partner in ministry is all about. Our study covers a range of denominational polities, from congregation-based to hierarchical. We have pastors from a variety of church contexts, ranging across Mainline, evangelical and Pentecostal affiliations; pastors from small rural churches to large suburban churches and all combinations in between; from very new and very old churches; and from churches with worship styles ranging from traditional to contemporary. While most of our pastors are white males, our data also include female pastors, pastors of many races and ethnic backgrounds, and a very wide range of ages and tenures in pastoral ministry. Most of these pastors live in Indiana, and so in future research we will need to explore what differences, if any, this might make in the well-being of clergy.

This report summarizes across this wide range of pastors, denominations, and local church contexts. As such, this report is an overview of the current state of well-being among these pastors. Our results and insights will continue to evolve as more pastors, spouses, and denominations join our project and as we gather more data and new kinds of information. Even so, we have learned a great deal already. In the chapters ahead, we provide an overview of the science of well-being and discuss what implications we think this science has for clergy and their families. We discuss what we know about the state of pastoral well-being at the present time, and we share some insights into the factors which seem to be related to higher (and lower) levels of well-being. We end by sharing some thoughts about the practical implications of these insights, and our plans for pursuing this research into the months ahead.

Throughout this report we will use the term “pastor” to refer to anyone who is engaged on a full- or part-time basis as a clergy in a local church. This includes those who are formally called pastor (senior, lead, associate), priest, vicar, rector, minister, and various other formal titles. We will also most often refer to pastor in the singular -- to reflect the predominance of pastors serving as the only clergy in a local church -- but our insights and conclusions apply equally to those pastors who serve on a multi-clergy church staff. We think that these insights are also relevant to pastors who are not working in a local church context, such as those working as chaplains, those in leadership roles within their denomination, or the many pastors who are working in or leading para-church or social service contexts.

Our project work certainly stands on the

shoulders of giants including the wonderful work of scholars such as Jack Carroll, Craig Dykstra and Dorothy Bass, Greg Jones and Kevin Armstrong, Dean Hoge and Jacqueline Wenger, and the very recent work of Bob Burns, Tasha Chapman and Don Guthrie. We certainly want to acknowledge the immense amount we have learned from all of these individuals, but we also want to emphasize the differences between our work and theirs. First and foremost, we are social scientists, not theologians. Therefore, we approach all of our work with the tools and lenses of science. We offer no theological interpretations of what we find in our research. We will leave this work to those who are much better prepared and skilled for it. Second, our work is prospective while the research done by these scholars is descriptive. Descriptive research, as the name implies, describes the current state of the world and scholars use that description as the basis for forming ideas about what might be causing things to be as they are. In prospective work, we study phenomena over time so that we can map actual change and therefore gather data about causes and their effects. As such, our work seeks to move beyond description, but longitudinal research takes time, and so results cannot be produced as quickly. This report is a snapshot of what we have learned so far, but we will not be surprised if our understanding changes as we gather more data. Lastly, we use multiple research methods, including tools such as surveys and focus groups that have been utilized in this previous work. We are in the privileged position of also being able to bring more powerful research methods to the study of clergy well-being, including multi-wave surveys, methods to study pastors’ daily-life experiences, and narrative interviews, among others. By combining many different ways of

gathering data together, these multi-method studies will provide greater power to explore well-being and, ultimately, to a much richer understanding of what it means to truly flourish in ministry.

The Flourishing in Ministry Team

This project has been very much a team effort. The current research team includes:

Matt Bloom, Ph. D., Principle Investigator

Mary Bales, Ph. D., Co-Investigator

Amy Colbert, Co-Investigator

Bethany Cockburn, Project Director

Laura Schmucker, Project Manager

Jackie Tachman, Research Intern

We also want to acknowledge and express our gratitude for the help of Kim Bloom, Althea Price, Emily Degan, Jackie Dai, Jackie Rose, Ying Huang, Joe Miller, Ted Dowd, Kate Avery Bloom, and Keaton Bloom. These individuals gave us many hours of hard work, but most importantly they gave richly of themselves to this project.

This research would not be possible without the generous support of the Lilly Endowment, particularly Chris Coble, Craig Dykstra, and John Wimmer. These good people have certainly provided us with the financial resources we need, but even more important has been their kindness, encouragement, and their amazing capacity to help us build a powerful network of resources. They have connected us with a world of fascinating, intelligent, creative people and organizations that have shaped our work in profound ways. They have sowed generously into our project and we aspire to

model that same spirit in our work (2 Corinthians 9: 6-15).

We want to offer our very special thanks and gratitude to the pastors who have participated in our research. You stuck with us through long surveys and made time to meet with us for extended conversations. You have enriched us with your stories, your thoughts, and the rich way you give deeply of yourself to this project. Most importantly, you have blessed us with your grace and compassion. Thanks to you all.

THE SCIENCE OF WELL-BEING

In the early 1990s, a group of leading researchers gathered in the sunny Caribbean to discuss the state of the science of psychology. These leaders gathered because they shared a common concern. While they all recognized that psychological science had led to important discoveries about how to help people who were suffering return to psychological wellness, they were concerned that science had very little to contribute to our understanding of the positive side of life. This meeting proved to be very auspicious because it was the start of a significant new area of research that is now broadly known as positive psychology, but is more properly referred to as the science of human well-being. Research in this area is booming: there are dozens of scholars conducting hundreds of studies on well-being, and their efforts have already produced revolutionary findings. Our research project is part of this effort. In this section, we review the major insights and new knowledge from positive psychology that form the basis for our own research.

One of the earliest and most important of these new discoveries is a new conceptual model of human well-being. This conceptual model has proven to be very powerful because it explains a lot about human well-being in a simple, easy-to-understand package of ideas and concepts. It is also the theoretical framework we are using in our research. The core insight provided by this new model is that there are two types or

forms of human well-being: hedonic well-being (aka, "daily happiness") and eudaimonic well-being (aka, "thriving"). Both types of well-being appear to be very important, yet they differ in significant ways. In this section of the report we describe both types of well-being and discuss how, taken together, these two types of well-being comprise our definition of flourishing in ministry. After describing both types, we present a summary of the many benefits of well-being

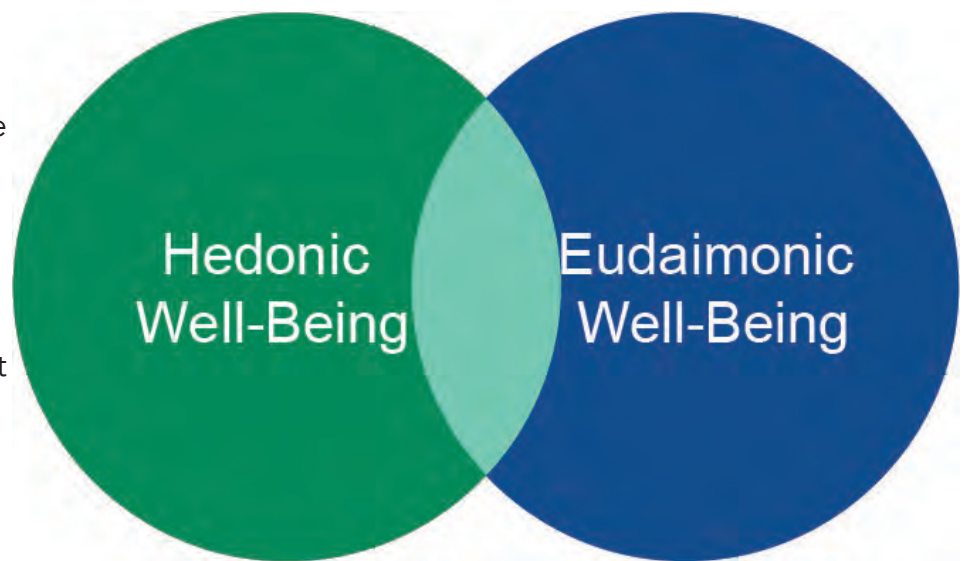


Figure 1

that other researchers have discovered through the hundreds of studies they have conducted. We end this section by discussing a particular challenge that we think pastors might face with regards to achieving sufficient levels of well-being. This potential challenge highlights why it is imperative to bring theology and science together so we can develop a truly deep and comprehensive understanding well-being.

Daily happiness

The first form of well-being is referred to as hedonic well-being or subjective well-being in the research literature, but we will use the term

“daily happiness” because of the important role this form of well-being plays in our day-to-day lives. This form of well-being should not be confused with *hedonism* which is an ancient philosophy which advocates that the experience of pleasure is the only intrinsic good. Hedonic, as it is used scientifically, refers to our feelings—our moods and emotions—which researchers lump these together under the term “affect.” Affect is one component of daily happiness. The other component is the degree to which a person is satisfied with the current state of their life. Together, affect plus life satisfaction equals daily happiness. We will discuss each of these components in more detail, and then discuss some of the most important findings from research on daily happiness.

Component #1: Daily affect (i.e., daily moods and emotions). Moods and emotions are a part of every moment of our life; we are always experiencing some feeling, even if it is a rather weak feeling like boredom or calm. Researchers interested in daily happiness study the pattern of moods and emotions that people experience over time to understand what things (e.g., activities, events, interactions, experiences, environments, etc...) cause people to experience positive feelings and what things cause people to experience negative feelings.

The terms “mood” and “emotion” are used by both researchers and lay to describe different

kinds of feelings, and these differences are important for understanding daily happiness. Moods are weaker feeling states than are emotions, and moods form the background of our daily life. In fact, most of our feelings fall into the category of moods. We often find it hard to target the source of our moods, we

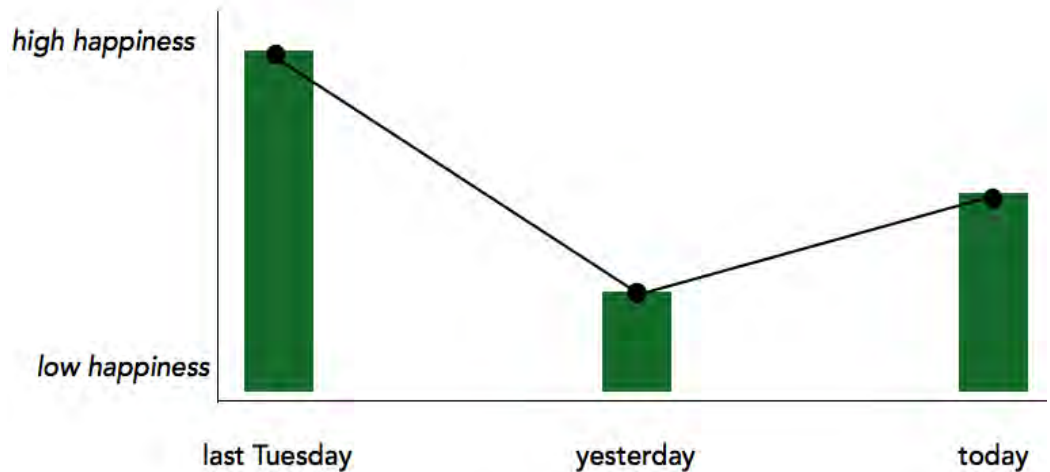


Figure 2

just know we are in a better (more positive) or worse (more negative) mood. Moods also tend to be weaker than emotions, and this is one reason that moods often fade out of our conscious awareness. Moods hang around just out of sight, but they nevertheless influence our behaviors and thoughts in subtle, but important ways. For example, if we are in a bad mood, it is much more likely that we will be impatient and easily frustrated. When we are in a good mood, we tend to be easier to get along with, more inclined to be patient, and less likely to be irritated by minor disruptions in our day.

Emotions, on the other hand, refer to much stronger feelings, and emotions tend to have a specific target or source. That is, we almost always know what caused us to experience a

particular emotion. We are, for example, inspired by a particular speaker, enthusiastic about a specific sporting event, sad at a particular loss, enjoying a certain movie, or frustrated with a specific event. Because emotions also tend to be stronger feeling states than moods, they also tend to influence our thoughts and behaviors in more significant ways. When we are angry, we might act in more assertive or aggressive ways,

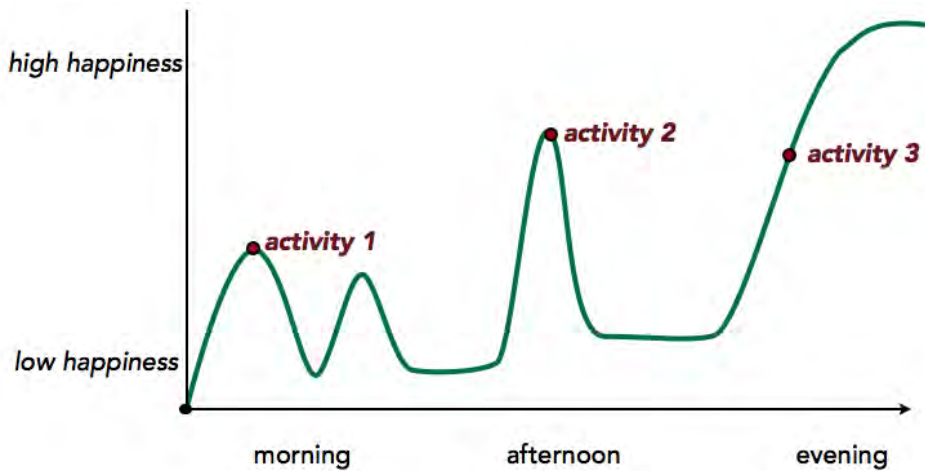


Figure 3

and when we are enthusiastic we might find ourselves capable of working harder and longer than usual.

When scientists measure daily happiness, they assess the extent to which someone is experiencing the presence of positive moods and emotions, and the absence of negative moods and emotions. Said differently, scientists define daily happiness as those moments when people are experiencing mostly positive moods and emotions. Of course, there are moments when people are experiencing mostly negative moods and emotions and not surprisingly, scientists call those refer to these experiences as unhappiness. Although they are more rare, there are times when we experience both positive and negative moods. For example, imagine you are trying to get back home from a long trip, your

flight back home has just been canceled again, when suddenly another passenger cracks a really funny joke about your predicament. At that moment, you are likely to be experiencing both frustration and a little mirth.

Clearly, our moods and emotions vary from day-to-day (Figure 2) and also within a single day (Figure 3). Most people have had experiences

with “good days,” when everything seems to go right, and “bad days,” when we “woke up on the wrong side of the bed.” When we speak about having a “good” or “bad” day, we are—often unconsciously—summarizing the moods and emotions we have experienced over the course of that day. When we have experienced

mostly positive moods and emotions, we summarize this as a good day (see “last Tuesday” in Figure 2) and this would be a day of high daily happiness. Likewise, when we have experienced mostly negative moods and emotions, we label it a bad day (see “yesterday” in Figure 2) and this would be a day of low happiness. On some very difficult days, we might be able to point to a specific loss or harm, but most “bad days” are simply days when we have experienced a preponderance of small annoyances, frustrations, and irritations. On these days it hard to pick out any one thing that made the day so bad, but we nevertheless “know” it has been an unpleasant day.

Figure 3 is the daily happiness profile of the average working adult in the United States. This

figure indicates that most people experience a modestly-happy morning, followed by a dip in happiness as they head off to work (activity 1), a temporary spike when they go to lunch (activity 2), and then increasing happiness as they anticipate quitting time (activity 3) and head home at the end of the work day. Their happiness tends to continue to increase as they spend an evening at home with loved ones. By studying the daily happiness profiles for a group of people—e.g., pastors in our studies—researchers can map the kinds of activities, events, interactions, etc. that are associated with increases and decreases in moods and emotions. This is a very powerful way of understanding what kinds of activities, events, interactions, etc. have the greatest impact on the daily happiness of these individuals. In other words, by studying the daily happiness profiles of people, we can gain a lot of finely-detailed insights into what helps people experience positive (and negative) moods and emotions.

Again, what matters for our daily happiness, and for our overall well-being, is this day-to-day pattern of affect (remembering that affect = moods + emotions). We are happier when we have mostly good days, and less happy (or even unhappy) when we have mostly bad days. Some researchers argue that a healthful level of daily happiness is a 3-to-1 ratio of positive-to-negative moods and emotions. This ratio suggests that for every one negative mood we experience, we need to experience three positive moods of equal strength to balance things out. For now we can think of this ratio as a rough rule-of-thumb that might be useful in helping us map the contours of our own moods and emotions. (It is also important to keep in mind that we need a lot more research to confirm if and when this

ratio applies to well-being.)

Of course, we will have days when the ratio will be less than 3:1. Days filled with frustrations, strife, or grief are days when we may be experiencing far more negative moods and emotions, so our ratio that day might be 3:2 or, if the day is particularly difficult, 1:1. We need not be concerned about these days if they occur occasionally or for a brief period of time. What matters here is the chronic pattern of positive-to-negative moods in our daily life. So, the first element of daily happiness (aka, hedonic well-being) is the chronic or typical pattern of positive-to-negative moods and emotions that we experience over time.

Component #2: Life satisfaction. The second component of daily happiness is life satisfaction, which, as the name implies, is the extent to which a person is satisfied with their life in the current moment. It is typically measured by assessing the extent to which people agree or disagree with statements like, “in most ways, my life is close to my ideal,” “the conditions of my life are excellent,” or “if I could live my life over, I would change almost nothing.” We can assess a person’s satisfaction with their overall life, but we can also assess how satisfied someone is with the important domains of his or her life, such as work, family, social, and religious domains. These same questions can be asked with respect to each of these domains, for example, “in most ways my work life is close to my ideal,” or “the conditions of my family life are excellent.” The satisfaction in each domain contributes in important ways to overall life satisfaction. For example, lower satisfaction with work will likely pull down our overall life satisfaction, but there is a very complex and intricate relationship among these “domain satisfactions.” The dynamics

between the work and family domains is perhaps the most salient example of these complexities. The important point is that there is a great deal more to be learned about the links between domain satisfactions, and their links to overall life satisfaction.

Life satisfaction does change, but not as rapidly as daily moods and emotions. Again, most people have experienced periods of time when everything in life seems to be going well (those are times of high life satisfaction), and other times when, despite the absence of any clear crisis event, life still seems more difficult (those are times of low life satisfaction). Sometimes life satisfaction varies day-to-day, other times it is stable across several weeks or longer. Life satisfaction and daily affect are related to each other in predictable ways, and so they are used together as indicators of daily happiness. When we are experiencing mostly positive moods and emotions, it is likely because things are going well in our life and so, consequently, we are likely to be satisfied with the state of our life. As we mentioned, most research on well-being has studied daily happiness, so there is a fairly large body of knowledge about the kinds of things that foster or impede this form of well-being. In the section "Benefits of well-being" we will review what research tells us about the importance of maintaining daily happiness.

Promoting daily happiness. Research on daily happiness has revealed an interesting paradox: pursuing daily happiness is one of the surest ways to impede or diminish our capacity to experience it. In other words, trying to be happier will tend to make us less happy. There are many reasons that the pursuit of happiness tends to undermine it. First, we tend to be

inaccurate when it comes to predicting what will really make us happy, but we often do not realize or admit this flaw. Happiness does seem to be the natural by-product of certain activities and life choices, but the intentions behind these choices shape whether or not they increase our happiness. For example, expressing genuine gratitude makes us, and also the recipient, happier, but a "thanks" offered to manage impressions or to ingratiate oneself with another does nothing to bolster either persons' happiness. Our expressions of gratitude have to be heart-felt rather than contrived to make us happier. Reflecting on the blessings and good things we have experienced in life puts us in a more positive mood and increases our life satisfaction, but we have to be sincere in counting and appreciating those blessings. Second, we can pursue happiness in artificial ways such as use of drugs and alcohol or chasing after fame and fortune. These artificial pursuits are particularly insidious because they can cause a short-term increase in happiness, but over time they create a long-term deficit. That is, consistent use of artificial methods seems to erode our capacity to experience daily happiness. Perhaps it is the hard return to reality after an artificial high that is so damaging, or perhaps it is the corrosive effects of trying to fool ourselves that we have finally found "true happiness," only to realize how much of ourselves and our resources we have squandered. Ed Diener, one of the leading researchers in this science, reminds us that,



“happiness...is much more of a process than an emotional destination...while the goals that produce happiness are important, understanding that happiness is a process is even more important.”

It is also important to emphasize that this research does not, in any way, assert that negative moods and emotions are, per se, inherently bad. Indeed, episodic negative moods and emotions--sadness, grief, anger, frustration, etc.--can have beneficial effects. They are certainly a normal part of life, and they can (although they do not always) help us change and grow, reconnect to the most important things in life, remind us of our interconnectedness with others, and many other important outcomes. This research does emphasize the importance of understanding our chronic moods and emotions, those that typify our daily life. This research does highlight the many beneficial effects that positive moods and emotions plus life satisfaction have on many aspects of our lives. Again, we will review some of these beneficial effects in the “Benefits of well-being” section below.

Thriving

The second form of well-being, eudaimonic well-being or thriving, is very different from its hedonic counterpart. At its essence, this form of well-being comprises the extent to which people believe they are living a meaningful, good, worthy life. To thrive is to feel that one is living well, living life to its fullest and best. It has several key elements. The first is a sense of meaning and purpose in life. People who thrive understand and can describe the basic meanings of their life. They can state what their life is all about, and they can describe the purposes or

p. 12

cherished goals toward which their life is directed. Most researchers believe that this meaning and purpose arise from a clear understanding of one’s core commitments, which are the values and beliefs that upon which one’s sense of self and the world are based. Core commitments define what kinds of goals, pursuits, thoughts, decisions, actions, etc. meet the criteria of being important, worthy, noble, right, and excellent. Individuals who are thriving have clarity about the core commitments that are at the very center of their lives, and those commitments inform the choices they make about how to live including shaping the goals these people cherish, the life pursuits they consider admirable, the thoughts they view as worthy, the behaviors they regard as virtuous, etc.

The second element is a sense that one is able to invest one’s best personal resources—talents, capabilities, energies, time, etc.—into the attainment of cherished goals, admirable pursuits, worthy thoughts, etc. Thus, people who thrive not only know the meaning and purpose of their life, but they also believe that they are able to spend most of their time, talent, and energy pursuing that meaning and purpose. In other words, thriving people believe the major pursuits and activities of their life—those things in which they are investing their best resources—are virtuous, worthy, important pursuits and



activities. We, very properly, turn to other important people to confirm and affirm whether our core commitments, cherished goals, major life pursuits are, in fact, virtuous. While our own convictions about these things is very important, we somehow know that we cannot be the final arbiter on matters of such importance. Therefore, we turn to our faith tradition, to wise people, to those who know us well, and to those we admire to ensure that we are embracing the right core commitments and investing in the right life pursuits.

This leads us to a third element: thriving people have a clear understanding of their knowledge, skills, and abilities. They know their strengths—they understand what they can do well—and their weaknesses, and because of this self-knowledge, they are able to use their strengths in the major pursuits of their life and not be unduly limited by their weakness. Because they know what are their best talents, capabilities and energies, thriving people know what their best is, and so they can engage that best self in pursuit of their cherished goals. Said differently, people thrive when they are able to invest their very best capabilities and, in fact, their best and fullest self, into purposeful activities and tasks that arise from and are deeply connected with their core life values and beliefs.

Finally, thriving involves a sense of authenticity. Authenticity refers to being able to live in accordance with one's true self, of being able to express one's true self in the various activities, situations, and interactions of daily life. The ancient Greek temple at Delphi had a famous aphorism chiseled on its facade: "To thine own self be true." Authentic people are able to achieve this: they are able to think, act, and speak in ways that feel genuine and faithful

to their true-self and congruent with their deeply held values and beliefs. Authenticity arises from the first three elements, but goes further by reflecting the extent to which those elements are enacted in day-to-day life. Authenticity should not be confused with arrogance, narcissism, or other false perspectives on the self. In fact, authentic people are the kind we often refer to as humble because they have a full, balanced understanding of themselves—both their good points and their bad—and therefore, they are able to "own" their personal experiences, including their thoughts, emotions, needs, wants, preferences, or beliefs. Authenticity comprises a high level of awareness of one's true motives, feelings, intentions, desires, etc. Authenticity also reflects the capacity for unbiased processing of oneself, what we might call objectivity with respect to one's positive and negative self-aspects. It involves the capacity for not denying, distorting, or exaggerating externally based evaluative information. Authenticity means we can receive feedback and criticism in a way that allows us to recognize and use the worthwhile information. As such, authenticity reflects the relative absence of distorted beliefs about oneself (e.g., low defensiveness, little self-aggrandizement). This is why authentic people are often viewed as being humble and "real": they know who they are and, as a result, they are able to more fully accept others for who they are.

There are many similarities between thriving and another important, foundational facet of human psychological life: identity. A person's identity is their self-concept or self-definition. It comprises a person's core understanding of themselves. Identity includes the meanings and descriptions people ascribe to themselves, their basic understandings and beliefs about

other people, and their understandings of the world and their own place in that world. Identity has been described as containing the answers people provide to basic existential questions about the meaning of existence and life. Among other important elements, a strong and positive identity is one that comprises, among other dimensions, the elements of thriving: a well-developed ideology about the meaning of life, clear and well-defined core commitments, a deep understanding of one's strengths and weaknesses, and a strong sense that the quality of one's major life pursuits and primary life activities are consonant with those core commitments. In other words, people who thrive almost certainly have a strong, positive identity.

Benefits of well-being

As we noted, there is a great deal of scientific effort directed toward exploring well-being, and so the science is growing fast, and changing often. This means that while we know a lot, our knowledge changes. While the information we present in this section represents the best science, but we must be aware that our understanding will change as science continues to make progress.

Higher levels of well-being seem to lead to a variety of very positive outcomes including greater self-confidence, self-esteem, optimism, and self-efficacy (belief in one's ability to complete tasks and achieve goals); greater sociability, higher likability, stronger inclination to see others in positive ways, and greater likelihood of engaging in prosocial (e.g. altruistic) behavior; higher physical and mental energy; more effective coping with challenge and stress; greater creativity, originality and flexibility; and stronger immunity and better physical well-

being. And that list contains just a few of the many positive outcomes that seem to flow from well-being. Well-being also seems to encourage people to approach life with energy, positivity, and a drive to seek out and undertake new goals. That is, well-being seems to create a higher capacity to work effectively, interact with others well, and pursue important goals.

Well-being also seems to foster a desire and capacity to grow and adapt in positive ways. In other words, well-being seems to be a precursor to positive change. When people are experiencing higher levels of well-being, they are ideally situated to "broaden and build". In other words, individuals with higher well-being seem to be naturally inclined to and capable of expanding their personal resources, fostering strong friendships; and building their repertoire of knowledge and skills. They also seem to be better able to rest and relax and thereby rebuild their energy for future use. This broaden-and-build process creates new capabilities they can draw upon in the future, which means they are very likely to be able to sustain or improve their performance. This research challenges an old, and common misunderstanding: as we age, higher levels of well-being seem to help us continue to grow and improve.

We mentioned that well-being seems to foster physical health. It is probably not surprising to learn that happy people report better health and fewer unpleasant physical symptoms: it is harder to feel bad when we are happy and flourishing. But research indicates that they are, in fact, healthier. Higher levels of well-being are associated with stronger and more effective immune responses, lower chronic levels of stress-related hormones (e.g., cortisol), healthier blood-pressure and body

mass index levels. People with higher well-being are much less likely to require emergency room visits or hospital stays, have fewer, common colds, require less medication to control health conditions, and are much more likely to engage in regular physical exercise, eat healthy diets, and engage in other healthy behavior.

Higher levels of well-being are associated with better, more creative thinking. People with higher levels of well-being are more open-minded when they make decisions. That is, they genuinely consider the views of other people, look for a wider range of information, including information that is contrary to their current view, they are more likely to include all of this information in their deliberations, and they seem to be able to focus on the right things when they make decisions. This means that people with higher well-being are likely to make better decisions. People are also more creative when they enjoy higher levels of well-being. They are more curious, more likely to be willing to explore and seek new discoveries, and seem more open to learning new things. Well-being seems to foster mental flexibility and a greater willingness to take the positive, calculated risks that are necessary for innovation. So, research suggest we will think better and more creatively when we are experiencing greater well-being.

Lastly, well-being is associated with more positive and effective relationships. We seem to be drawn toward people with higher levels of well-being, and we are more likely to establish positive, lasting relationships with them. This means that well-being seems to create a greater capacity for us to have positive relationships with more people. Strong, positive relationships are a very important cause of well-being, and we will discuss this in detail below. But well-

being also leads to strong, positive relationships. The implications of well-being for the quality and character of our relationships is one of the hottest areas of research, but we already know enough from science to say, with confidence, that as we flourish, so too will our relationships with others flourish.

Thriving at the expense of happiness

Happiness and thriving appear to be somewhat independent of each other. Our definition of flourishing comprises sufficiently high levels of both happiness and thriving, and research most certainly suggests that these two forms of well-being can exist together very harmoniously. It is also possible to be happy doing meaningless things and leading a rather purposeless life, at least for a while. Researchers have not studied happy-go-lucky people over long periods of time, so we do not know how long someone can maintain this style of living, but it is possible. More importantly for our work with pastors, our research suggests that it is possible to thrive in one's work, but experience very little happiness. This phenomena is a major focus for us because we think that it can create significant problems if left unaddressed for long periods of time.

The work of caring professionals—pastors, humanitarian workers, educators, health care workers, etc. —inherently involves dealing with the pain and suffering of others. To do this kind of work well requires very significant investments of time, energy, thought, and emotion. Members of these professions enter them prepared to sacrifice a great deal of themselves as the work benefit others. In fact, sacrifice seems to be an essential feature of experiencing work as a life calling. As we have noted earlier, thriving involves giving deeply of one's best self to

meaningful life pursuits and activities, and this giving deeply can be thought of as a form of sacrifice.

Even though this work can be deeply meaningful, it is not always fun, enjoyable, happy work. Indeed, it can be demanding, stressful, exhausting work. But doing this kind of work well often requires denying one's own needs as one strives to serve others. This necessary self-denial—what we will call positive sacrifice—is part of the experience of thriving, in part, because it confirms that we are giving our best to something profoundly important. Our research suggests, however, that pastors and other caring professionals can tip from positive sacrifice into negative sacrifice without realizing they have made this transition. By negative sacrifice, we mean experiences which erode well-being. Negative sacrifice looks and feels like its positive cousin, but it is, in fact, a condition in which a person is experiencing too much fatigue, too much stress, and too many resource expenditures. We think that over time, negative sacrifice can lead to a host of problems, most notably burnout. Again, the challenge is that it can be very hard to detect when we have slipped from positive sacrifice into the negative zone even if we are aware of this distinction. But we have found that few caring professionals are even aware of this potential problem.

The amount of time a person spends in this negative zone is likely to be one important factor. Most people can recover from shorter periods of time in experiencing negative sacrifice. The intensity of this negative sacrifice is also likely to be important. Consider, as an example, a humanitarian worker responding to a major natural disaster. Little sleep, constant activity, juggling many different tasks, trying to

meet the needs of many people are all part of an emergency response. The intensity of this experience alone might be enough to cause some people to tip into this negative zone. In our future research, we will explore negative sacrifice in more detail. We want to identify some of the early warning signs of negative sacrifice, and learn more about how people are able to ward-off its potential negative effects. For now, we want to raise awareness about the potential for negative sacrifice because of the detrimental outcomes that it might produce.

We conclude this brief overview of what science tells us about the outcomes of well-being by emphasizing that research suggests that there are many wonderful implications of higher well-being for both pastors and the churches they serve. This research suggests that fostering higher levels of well-being will help pastors be healthier, more creative and innovative, higher performing, more adaptable and resilient church leaders. Again, we will have to conduct research on this topic to gather the data required to confirm this proposition, and we need research to provide more specific insights into how well-being leads to these outcomes. At the present moment, however, we think this research is strong enough to suggest the well-being of pastors will very likely produce many of the same positive outcomes.

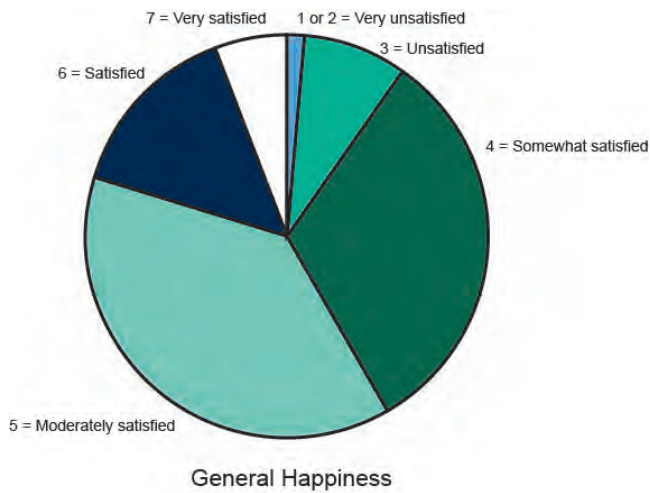
PASTORAL WELL-BEING TODAY

This chapter provides a summary of what our data tell us about the state of pastoral well-being as of 2013. We started collecting data in 2008 and have continued to gather more information each year since that time. The data we present here are the “big picture” view, and the chapters

that follow this review of our project will provide richer, more detailed, and more nuanced information about pastoral well-being. These data are from descriptive analysis of survey data. In the sections that follow, we present insights based upon more complex statistical and qualitative analysis of both survey and interview data.

The Happiness of Pastors

The level of general happiness among pastors in our study matches the levels researchers find among Americans in general. On average, pastors rate their happiness as a 4.9 on a scale



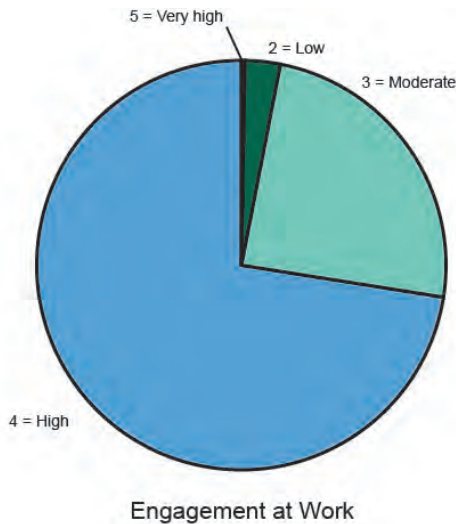
from 1 (extremely unhappy) to 7 (extremely happy). More importantly, we can describe the range of self-rated happiness. Two-thirds of pastors rated themselves between 3.9 (moderately happy) to 5.9 (happy), and 95% fall in between 2.9 (somewhat happy) to 6.9 (very happy). When we asked pastors to assess themselves using the Satisfaction with Life Scale -- one of the most widely-used measures of daily happiness--the average score was 5.1 out of 7. Two-thirds of pastors' self-ratings fell between 3.9 and 6.3, and 95% fell between 2.7 and 7. What these data tell us is that most pastors

report being very satisfied with their lives, but it is important to note that there is a very wide range of scores. Some pastors reported being extremely satisfied with their life, but others reported being slightly dissatisfied. This range is somewhat larger than what researchers find among the general population of Americans. We also asked spouses to rate the pastors' happiness, and these ratings provide a richer picture. While the average rating of pastors' happiness by their spouses was the same -- 4.5 -- the level of agreement between a pastors' self-rating and the spouses' rating was fairly low, a correlation of only .24. What this means is that pastors and spouses do not seem to agree about how happy (or unhappy) a pastor is. At the present time, we do not know very much about why pastors and spouses differ in their views. Clearly, we need to explore these results in the future, and we urge our readers to use a great deal of caution in interpreting this outcome. For example, we might find that these results are anomalies, but even if the results hold-up over time, there is much more we need to learn to understand what really explains these different perspectives.

Flourishing at work

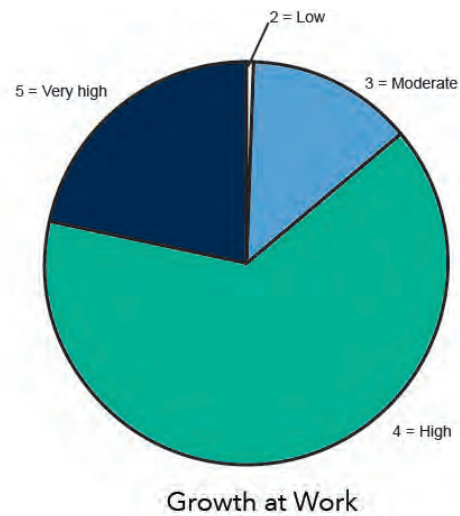
We measured flourishing at work in several different ways to gain a better, more complete picture of the level of well-being pastors experience in their work. Engagement is one of the most researched measures of well-being at work. Engagement captures the extent to which someone is energized and absorbed in their work. Fully engaged pastors are described

as being psychologically present, fully there, attentive, connected, and able to focus fully on their work. The average level of engagement in our data was 4.09 on a 1 to 7 scale. Two-thirds of pastors reported engagement between 3.2 and 4.98, so most pastors are in the range between somewhat engaged and moderately engaged.



Our second measure tapped the extent to which pastors experience a sense of progress, learning, and growth in their work. Pastors who thrive feel that they are able to grow, develop, and strive towards higher levels of excellence in their work. Feeling stagnant erodes our sense of thriving, and over time, it saps our happiness. Being stuck in the same place becomes boring, then frustrating, and can even lead to more serious outcomes such as depression. Pastors in our studies reported an average level of experienced growth and development of 4.1 out of 5. Two-thirds of pastors were at 3.57 or higher, and 95% were at 3 or higher. These results suggest that most pastors feel that they continue to learn and grow in their work. This is a very positive sign of well-being.

Our third measure was directly related to thriving, and assessed the extent to which



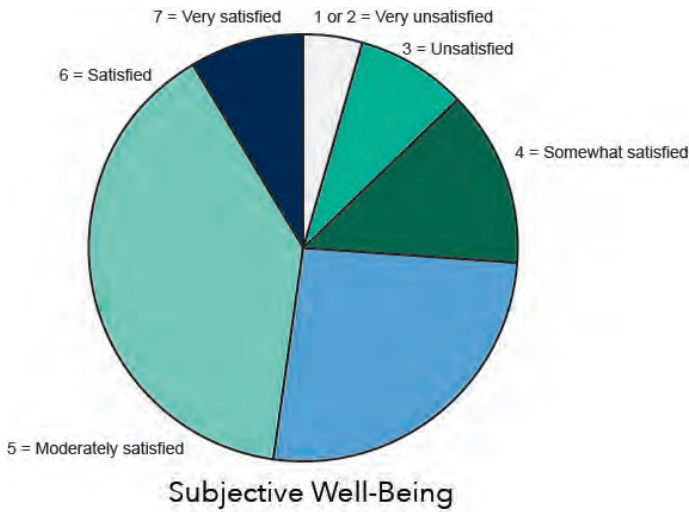
pastors felt they could be authentic in their work. Pastors who experience high levels of authenticity feel they can enact their true sense of call in their current ministry context. They feel they can act in accordance with their true self and expressing themselves in ways that are consistent with their inner thoughts and feelings. Pastors who experience low levels feel that they must conform to some other idea of what it means to be a pastor and hide important aspects of themselves. The average level of authenticity in our data was 3.5 -- a moderate level. Two-thirds of pastors reported levels of authenticity between 3.1 and 3.9, again reflecting a moderate level. These data indicate that most pastors are only able to be somewhat authentic. Evidently, ministry life for most pastors requires a great deal of conforming to other peoples' expectations, so much, in fact, that it has a detrimental impact on the pastors' overall well-being.

Lastly, we asked pastors how satisfied they are with their job. Job satisfaction is, by far, the most widely used measure of well-being at work. In our studies, the "job" refers to the tasks and activities that typically comprise pastors' day-to-day work time. The average job satisfaction

among pastors in our study was 4.35 out of 7, and two-thirds of the scores fell between 3.74 and 4.96, which indicates that most pastors are fairly satisfied with their job.

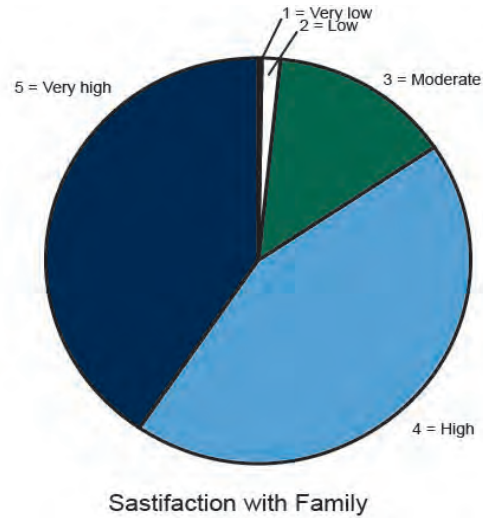
General flourishing in life

Most of our research to date has focused on pastors' work experiences, but we have included some measures of overall flourishing in life. The first was an omnibus measure called subjective well-being or satisfaction with life, which measures happiness, as well as capturing thriving to some extent. Pastors' average rating was 5.4 on a 1 to 7 scale. Most pastors scored



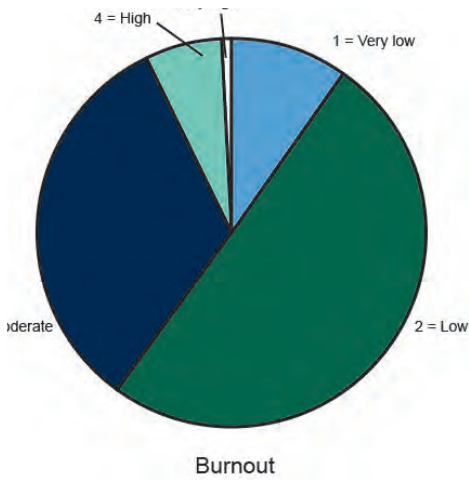
between 4.2 and 6.52, which indicates high levels of subjective well-being. Our second measure was satisfaction with family life, and the average score was 4.22 on a 1 to 5 scale, with most pastors rating their family satisfaction between 3.53 and 4.91, which indicates a very high level of satisfaction. We also measured work-family balance, which is a primary measure of the degree to which pastors feel that they can maintain positive conditions at home. In this case, higher scores represent more work-family conflict. The average score on a 1 to 5 scale was 2.82, with most pastors scoring between 2.01

and 3.5, which indicates low to moderate levels of work-family conflict.



Burnout and recovery

We explore several factors that indicate the darker side of life in ministry: job stress, burnout, and fatigue. Burnout is particularly important because many people, including pastors, overlook or ignore signs of burnout. Burnout occurs when people experience chronic emotional and physical exhaustion plus a growing sense of depersonalization in their work. Burnout is accompanied by reduced work effectiveness, difficulty in making decisions, decreased creativity, and increasing difficulty in adjusting to changes. It is also very detrimental to a person's overall well-being and, overtime, can lead to very serious physical and psychological problems. Pastors reported an average level of burnout of 2.44 on a 1 to 5 point scale— a moderate level – with two-thirds falling between 1.7 and 3.1. A closely related experience -- exhaustion or fatigue -- also shows up as important. The average level of exhaustion was 2.4 – again, a moderate level – with most pastors scoring between 1.8 and 3. While these data suggest an overall low to moderate level

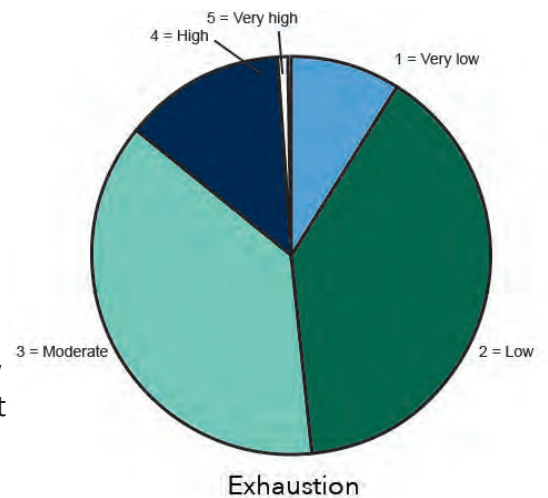


of burnout, we emphasize again that it is hard for most people to detect burnout in themselves. People tend to explain it away as, for example,

just being busy, so these numbers might underestimate the real level of burnout in at least some pastors. For pastors with higher scores, burnout is one of the most detrimental factors to their overall level of flourishing. Burnout seems to be an insidious factor: it sneaks up on us, quietly tearing away at our well-being. It remains a top concern in our work. Job stress, which is a major contributor to burnout, appears to be somewhat high. The average level was 3.4 out of 5 -- a moderately high level -- with most pastors rating stress at a level of 3 or higher.

We also measured the extent to which pastors participate in *recovery experiences* which are activities that research suggests might alleviate burnout, reduce fatigue, and overcome the negative effects of stress. Recovery experiences are a broad class of activities that help people to detach from work, relax, and restore themselves. Detachment refers to disconnecting from and not thinking about work during nonwork time. During detachment, we can disengage from work and so it is an important precursor to relaxation: it is hard to relax when we are still thinking about work. Relaxation refers to physical and mental rest, and it is characterized by a state of low activation and increased positive moods and emotions.

Relaxation may result from deliberately chosen activities, or it can result from good, restful sleep. Research suggests that we need to detach and relax on most work days to help us overcome stressors and to maintain our well-being. In situations where burnout, fatigue, or stress are particularly high, daily recovery experiences are even more important to avoid more serious negative outcomes. Among pastors in our study, the average frequency of detachment and relaxation several times a week. These are moderately levels, and suggest that pastors experience detachment and relaxation on about every-other work day. We have found that pastors who are able to detach and relax on four or more days a week tended to have higher levels of flourishing, and so that frequency seems like a good goal for pastors to strive towards.



The second recovery experience is participating in a restorative niche. This somewhat new concept appears to be very important for people who work in demanding, changing, and stressful work. A restorative niche has two characteristics. First, it is something we can do well, something in which we can acquire and pursue a sense of mastery. Second, a restorative niche is something we do out of intrinsic motivation: simply for the joy we experience from the activity itself. Some might call these hobbies, but we find that word does

not do justice to the essence of a restorative niche. These are activities in which we have deep interest, a passion even, and that we aspire to do with excellence. To be sure, a variety of activities can be restorative niches: knitting, golf, painting, model railroading, gardening, and many more. We have just begun to explore the role that restorative niches play in the well-being of pastors, but we already know that participating in one seems to have many, very positive, benefits including overcoming the detrimental effects of burnout, alleviating stress, and reducing fatigue. We asked pastors if they participated in a restorative niche and about 1 in 4 did. Of those pastors, most participated in it only about once every two weeks. However, the few pastors who regularly engaged in their restorative niche (regularly means at least once a week) were among those that reported the very highest levels of flourishing.

Lastly, we explored the possible benefits of spiritual disciplines for pastors' well-being. Our initial inquiries did not produce clear results, primarily because of the spiritual disciplines we included (and omitted). We adjusted our measures of spiritual disciplines and have some initial data that indicate contemplative and meditative practices might have very positive benefits, both in terms of reducing burnout and increasing well-being (these practices seem to boost both happiness and thriving). These results are consistent with a large and growing body of research in the medical and social sciences on the benefits of meditative practices. In recent years, dozens of researchers have turned their attention to studying the positive effects that meditative and contemplative practices might have on a variety of important outcomes. This research continues to produce results that confirm how important these practices are for



our physical, psychological, and mental health.² There are dozens and dozens of different kinds of meditative/contemplative practices, and all of them seem to have the same or very similar benefits. Researchers group these methods into three categories:

1. Concentrative techniques use an object of focus our attention, which can be a spiritually meaningful word or phrase, your breathing, or a picture or physical experience.
2. Mindfulness methods that emphasize staying present in the current moment and maintaining an alert, aware state in a nonjudgmental way.
3. Guided meditation in which the content of meditation is regarded as very important and is attended to in a mindful rather than analytic or judgmental way.

This means that every pastor--and every other person--should be able to find a practice that works for him or her. Researchers have found that even 5 minutes a day spent engaging in a meditative or contemplative method can have significant benefits. Our initial data support

² For recent research on these practices see Mrazek, M., Franklin, M., Phillips, D., Baird, B., & Schooler, J. (2013). Mindfulness training improves working memory capacity and GRE performance while reducing mind wandering. *Psychological Science*, 24(5), 776-781; Sedlmeier, P., Eberth, J., Schwarz, M., Zimmermann, D., Haerig, F., et al. (2012). The psychological effects of meditation: A meta-analysis. *Psychological Bulletin*, 138(6), 1139-1171.

these research findings: pastors who regularly practiced meditation or contemplation--almost every day--had lower levels of burnout, reported experiencing less stress, and had higher levels of both daily happiness and thriving.

In many ways we think we have just begun to explore the dynamics of well-being among clergy, but the data have already yielded some insights that we regard as important. This brief review of pastoral well-being highlights some of these insights, and it also sets the stage for us to discuss some of the factors which appear to have the greatest impact on happiness, thriving, and flourishing. In the remaining sections of this report, we discuss these factors in detail. We know future research will reveal more factors, but at this stage of our research, these have emerged as among the most important.

FLOURISHING AND RELATIONSHIPS

Pastors are often thought of and talked about as if they operate largely on their own, somehow separated from the rest of the church except, perhaps, on Sunday mornings or during other church activities. To be sure, multi-clergy staff are rare exceptions to the dominant pattern of single clergy leading a ministry, but even multi-staff pastors are often viewed as if they function, for the most part, independent from other people. In terms of well-being, this solo-operator view belies reality. Clergy are, in fact, always deeply embedded and enmeshed in a web of relationships, which have profound and lasting effects on their well-being. Clergy who really do work alone, without vital connections to other people, face among the most powerful challenges to sustained well-being. Our data concurs with a vast body of social science research that strongly suggests no person can

p. 22



photo credit: On Being

withstand isolation very long without suffering serious consequences.³

Our research indicates that four types of relationships are of paramount importance to clergy well-being. In our current research, we ask pastors to indicate how they perceive the quality of the relationships they have with (1) family and personal friends, (2) the congregation of the local church the pastor serves, both (3) formal and informal leaders within their denomination or judicatory, and (4) other pastors within their denomination. As such, the results we have so far view these relationships from the pastors' perspective. As we continue our work, among the several important topics for research will be to assess the views of these relationship partners. For example, we will want to ask both the pastor and the congregation about the quality of the

3 Cacioppo, J. T., Hawkey, L. C., & Thisted, R. A. (2010). Perceived social isolation makes me sad: 5-year cross-lagged analyses of loneliness and depressive symptomatology in the Chicago Health, Aging, and Social Relations Study. *Psychology and Aging, 25*(2), 453–463; Hawkey, L. C., & Cacioppo, J. T. (2010). Loneliness matters: A theoretical and empirical review of consequences and mechanisms. *Annals of Behavioral Medicine, 40*(2), 218–227; Heaphy, E. D., & Dutton, J. E. (2008). Positive social interactions and the human body at work: Linking organizations and physiology. *Academy of Management Review, 33*(1), 137–162.; Stillman, T. F., & Baumeister, R. F. (2009). Uncertainty, belongingness, and four needs for meaning. *Psychological Inquiry, 20*(4), 249–251.

pastor-congregation relationship. While we have much to learn about why these relationships matter and what are the characteristics of good (or bad) relationships of each type, we can combine the data we have collected so far with the rich body of social science research on relationships to draw some initial insights.

The vital community of the local church

While pastors are, most certainly, the spiritual and organizational leader of the local church, they are also, for better or for worse, part of the community that *is* the local church. Pastors flourish when they feel they belong to this community — when they feel accepted, affirmed, and cared for by their local congregation — and their well-being is diminished when they feel in some way outside of the community. We asked pastors a variety of questions about the kind of relationship they have with their congregation. We asked pastors to rate such things as the extent to which the congregation of the church they serve understands their strengths and weaknesses, knows “the real me,” accepts them for who they are, makes them feel that their work is valuable, and helps them grow and develop as both a pastor and as a human being. These are the kinds of experiences that hundreds of research studies on relationships have identified as among the core characteristics of strong, positive social support. When pastors experience these forms of social support from their congregation, they tend to thrive and be happier. In other words, pastors are much more likely to flourish when they experience positive relationships with their congregation. For example, one pastor tells of the wonderful support he received from the congregation of the first church he served:

And even the first church I served in, I look back, and I want to go back and apologize. I look back at the sermons I preached and I want to go back and apologize to them. They were so patient, so kind. Every once in awhile I look back and say I wouldn't preach that

“to be warmly received and accepted...it made all the difference in the world to me.”

today on a bet. But they were very gracious.

Another pastor tells a similar story of how the first church she served helped her live into her call to ministry:

to be warmly received and accepted, to be allowed to lead that study for folks...it made all the difference in the world to me. The positive affirmation, even in the one church, that we got from people, I look back at that time and I've said this before, but had things not gone well there, I don't know that I would still be doing this because that was kind of the first chance I had to get my feet in the water and have people see me in a pastoral role even if I wasn't yet commissioned or



photo credit: On Being

ordained.

It appears, however, that pastors are often discouraged from forming these kinds of relationships with members of their congregation. For example, many pastors tell us that, during their education and training for the pastorate, they were discouraged from forming friendships with members of their congregation. From a social science perspective, this is not good advice. Scientists would say we are hard-wired for relationships—said differently, we are created for relationships—and it is especially hard to resist the need to be in relationship with the people with whom we interact the most. Of course, positive relationships with a congregation include setting appropriate boundaries, just as do positive relationships with one's children or co-workers. But there is a significant difference between appropriate relationships and none at all. It can take huge amounts of personal resources to fend off this deeply-ingrained need to form strong, positive social and emotional connections with people that we interact with often. This could be especially difficult with the community that one serves and loves. Science tells us that to care for others in a group requires some sense that one is also cared for by that group and, similarly, to be able to invest properly in the lives of others and requires having them invest in our own.

We find that churches which create a strong, positive culture of inclusion, one that brings pastors in the same circle of acceptance, compassion, and care in which they include all parishioners, also foster very high levels of well-being among the clergy that serve and lead them. Strong, positive relationships with the congregation a pastor serves seem to be among the most important determinants of

p. 24

well-being. In fact, when it comes to factors that shape well-being in the pastors' work domain, this relationship seems to be the *most* important, apparently outweighing even the impact of family.

On the darker side, churches that fail to include pastors in this circle not only dramatically diminish their pastor's flourishing, but they appear to also be more likely to engage in behaviors that further undermine their pastor's well-being. In other words, this is a double dose of negative. For example, these churches tend to consistently place heavy demands on pastors, or are prone to negative comments, passive-aggressive complaining, and the like. As one pastor described it, being at this kind of church can be like "death from a thousand paper cuts," a regular stream of negativity with very little positive social support.

One of the most common of these negative experiences is what we call "identity demands," which are behaviors that are designed to compel the pastor to conform to *the parishioners'* image of pastoral leadership. As one pastor told us,

my church seems to be constantly trying to recreate me in their own image of what a pastor should be like. Unfortunately for me and for them, that image is not very much like the person God made me to be.

We find that contexts in which identity demands are high can be among the most destructive to pastors' well-being. Our research is clear that a strong match or "fit" between the pastor and the local church he or she serves has very significant implications for the pastor's well-being. We call this pastor-local church fit. In our research, we measured this fit as the degree to which pastors feel that (1) their knowledge, skills, abilities, and personality—pastors often

call these their “gifts and graces” —match the needs and requirements of the church they serve and (2) the extent to which pastors’ perceive that their core values and beliefs match those of their congregation. Pastor-local church fit matters so much that it is likely to be a precondition for high quality relationships with the local congregation. For example, one pastor told us:

My call is in these one-on-one relationships of helping people find themselves and find God and find meaning and be whole. That is a big part of my ministry, wholeness, that if something’s broken in your life, how can we fix that? How do we understand God in the midst of that? If I can’t do this kind of ministry, then I’m not doing what God created me to do.

Another pastor tells this story of a very early experience in her ministry:

I visited with them, and I celebrated communion with them, and I got ready to leave and he grabbed my hands and he looked me in the eye and he said, “You are my pastor, your are our church.” And it was so humbling and profound to me that this couple, who didn’t have any connection anymore to the church, that I could represent God for them and that I could bring the sacred into their life. And so I think maybe that’s why, when I first started getting these inklings about being in ministry, I didn’t reject them outright, because I thought, if this is what a pastor does, I guess I can do this.

When this sense of fit is missing, pastors experience diminished well-being. One pastor described how he experiences poor fit:

I would say, first of all, I guess one is just basically the nature of the church itself, basically being people. And people can be frustrating to work with. Every parish there were folks that I could not connect with. It made me feel like I wasn’t the kind of pastor they wanted, or needed. And quite honestly, that made life difficult. And that’s just tough for me.

Another pastor described how a lack of fit affects him:

And so it then creates a bit of tension for me because I know I’m not a fluff kind of guy. Just to give you an example, I mean I can put humor in a message and usually if I do, people respond but it’s not the kind of thing where somebody would say - oh the pastor is a funny guy. I’m not a comedian. ...That’s just not me. It does create a bit of one of those internal tensions. I mean, should I be who they want me to be, or am I supposed to figure all that out for myself?

This pastor described how a lack of fit creates obstacles to good relationships with her congregation and gets in the way of doing ministry well:

Babysitting. I get very frustrated at having to babysit parents that aren’t onboard with the program and I have to do a lot of hand holding to get parents to see the method behind what I try to do in their youth’s life, that it’s such a consumer mentality that they want this program because it seems to be working at another church, but they want it on these terms. That’s a struggle for me, parents that don’t take the time to really ask the deeper questions, it’s just my child isn’t happy or my child isn’t coming and it’s your fault, pastor. ...Back to the parents, I figure what I’m doing I really understand as having gone through a discernment process of what we’re doing and there’s reasons behind everything we’re doing and part of that is parental feedback but at the end of the day, here’s our program,



and I believe in it.

And finally, this pastor describes that even a small group of naysayers can create significant problems:

Oh very, very small [the group of complainers]. But still it was very loud and it was a big deal. Yeah, it was just that same handful of people before. Yet, overall, the church has been incredibly supportive. But I know that every church I walk into, more than likely, I will be the first female pastor they have ever had and I know that I walk into churches having to face a battle that he's not going to have to face.

To be sure, there is a balance between pastors expressing their unique call and the

“ When I love the church, and the church loves me and each other...I think that is the abundant life.”

pastor providing the kind of excellent leadership that fits the particular culture, opportunities, and needs of a specific local church. We are in no way suggesting that it is all about the church conforming to the pastor. We are, however, emphasizing that the well-being of the pastor and the church are irrevocably bound together. Of course, pastors should endeavor to nurture the well-being of their congregations through preaching, teaching, caring, and the like. But our research is very clear that churches must also nurture the well-being of their pastors. We might say the best pastor-church relationships are those in which the pastor strives toward excellence

in fostering the well-being of his or her church and, at the same time, the church strives toward excellence in fostering the well-being of each other and the pastor. A pastor shared this story of how the right balance leads to fruitful ministry and flourishing:

One other blessing is just being able to be involved in the lives of people at some of those really difficult times. And it might sound strange but you may understand this because your wife has experienced it. But being with a family at a time when their loved one is dying is a very intimate time and it's very overwhelming for them but it's one of those times where, usually, it's reserved just for the family. So to be allowed into their lives then, ... have that opportunity to share with another family like that. And in my own experiences whenever we've lost someone, having my pastor there has been, even though maybe not a lot of words are exchanged, it's that ministry of presence. I'm here, whatever you need, I'm here. Those are the blessings. I am blessed and I think the church is blessed too.

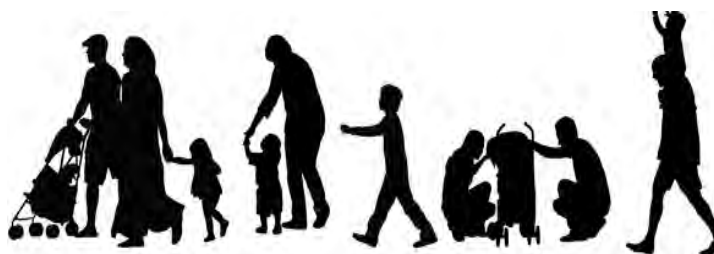
These results make a great deal of sense, when viewed from the perspective of the vast scientific literature on relationships. As we have noted, decades of research show that people want and need strong, positive connections with others, and that it is especially important to have these kinds of relationships with those people whom we interact the most: family, co-workers, those we serve and lead, etc.



This research demonstrates that the most positive and productive social relationships are *communally responsive*, that is characterized by mutual respect, care, and concern. In these relationships, each member views the others' with positive regard, takes responsibility for their welfare, and engages proactively towards others with beneficence. In communally responsive relationships, leaders do not assume an arm's-length posture, but care for, and are cared for by, those they lead. Results from our research are very consistent with this insight. We find that local churches which foster communally responsive relationships with each other and with their spiritual leaders go a long way toward fostering high levels of well-being among the pastors who serve them. Although at this point we do not have data on the well-being of congregations, we expect to find that communally responsive churches will also foster high levels of well-being among their congregations. For now, we can say the most important insight is that the quality of relationships between pastors and their congregations matters a great deal for pastoral well-being.

The essential care of significant others

The term "significant other" has become an idiom in everyday conversation, yet it is often used incorrectly to stand only for one's intimate partner (e.g., spouse). In social science, a significant other is any individual who is or has been deeply influential in one's life and in whom



one is or once was emotionally invested. Our significant others are those people who are deeply important to us, those who have had, and often continue to have, a deep and lasting impact on our lives. As such, significant others can include our spouse, children, parents and other family members, as well as our close, personal, non-family friends. Our data tell us that strong, positive relationships with significant others fosters high levels of pastoral well-being and, likewise, weak or very poor relationships can be very detrimental to pastoral flourishing. Although we have some clarity about *why* these relationships matter, our data suggest some interesting possibilities about *how* they influence pastors. We start with why strong, positive relationships with significant others matters, and then share some of the interesting and paradoxical results about how these relationships might shape pastors' well-being.

It may be fairly clear why relationships with significant others matter so much for pastors' well-being. These are the people with whom pastors have some of the closest personal ties: we seem to be created with an innate need for strong, positive familial bonds. In addition, these are often the people who know the pastor best. These relationships have often been in place for many years, and so these people have journeyed with the pastor through many seasons of life. As such, the love, caring, and compassion of these people has a deep and lasting impact on the pastor.

Significant others can also offer *emotional sustenance* by which we mean their caring, love, and encouragement. Emotional sustenance is likely to bolster both happiness and thriving. Being cared for and loved is a basic human need. It feels good to be loved. Emotional

“Well, the truth is there have been many times that her (my wife) love and support was what carried me through.”

sustenance also serves as a reminder of one’s inherent value as a person, and it reconnects people to relationships from which they derive a sense of meaning and purpose. In addition, the sheer comforting presence of significant others can reduce psychological distress during difficult times of by confirming a pastor’s sense of truly mattering to other people. Significant others can also offer the kinds of personal assistance that all we need during the course of daily life. These are the people that will be there to lend a hand, provide assistance, or offer a kind word and, because they know pastors so well, this support can be offered at just the right time and in just the right way.

How these relationships influence pastoral well-being remains an open research question, and much of our current work is focused on answering this question. One hypothesis is that strong, positive relationships with significant others helps us to be our truest and best selves. The most important function of significant others is that they provide holistic acceptance and care. We can be our fullest, most authentic selves with these people, and in so doing we feel fully accepted and loved because of, and perhaps in spite of, the many rich dimensions of our fullest self. Many years of research attests to the importance of positive self-esteem, and these relationships are among the most important for

p. 28

fostering a strong, positive sense of self-worth.

Furthermore, when relationships with significant others are positive, pastors can be their “off-stage” self with their significant others. They can share joys and sorrows, personal misgivings and triumphs, fears and aspirations. It is with these people, for example, that pastors can enjoy the simple pleasures of life, have a great time, “kick back and let their hair down,” or even be silly every once in a while. And it is these same people that create a safe harbor for the pastor in times of need, self-doubt, ministry challenge, or crisis. These are the people who can provide the right kind of emotional support, sound advice, and true accountability that helps pastors through a difficult time, even encouraging them to use the challenges they face to grow and develop. One pastor describes how significant others helped him work through some challenges in a way that helped him accept his call into ministry:

Christmas of my sophomore year of college I studied abroad and had a lot of time to think and reflect and process because I was completely out of my regular daily life. I think it was over spring break that semester where (his friend’s) words, all these experiences (such as) practicing sermons while I was mowing the lawn, my grandmothers pouring faith into me, (church camp), and how alive I felt doing that...all these experiences just seemed to line up...The sense of clarity more than a lightning bolt (a deep feeling) that, well this is the path that’s been laid out and it’s pretty clear that’s where my passions align, where I had been given opportunities. It all coalesced into a call.

Significant other relationships might be critically important for pastors to understand and live fully into the person and pastor God created them to be. A great deal of research supports the idea that our identity is deeply entangled

with and shaped by the ties we have with significant others, whether these individuals are present physically or only symbolically. For most of us, our sense of self, including our thoughts, feelings, motives, and aspirations are deeply influenced by the people who have mattered the most to us in life. Said differently, most of us define ourselves in part by our most cherished relationships: "I am Kim's husband, Nicholas and Keaton's father, Kate's father-in-law." Because these relationships form a very important part of our identity, the nature and quality of our on-going experience with these people matters a lot for our happiness and thriving. We had many stories of how spouses were of immense importance for confirming that a pastor was, in fact, called by God for a life in ministry. Consider this story about the night a pastor was going to reveal to his spouse that he was being called to become a pastor:

And even before I could say anything, my wife, says, 'You are called into ministry, called to be a pastor. I've just always felt that's what you should do.' I mean, that was all I needed.

We heard many stories very much like this one, stories about how a spouse confirmed a pastor's call to ministry, often *before* the pastor had revealed it.

Another pastor tells this story which is, again, is illustrative of many stories we heard:

She was affirming of that, a sounding board, I guess. In seminary, she was the one working full-time so the breadwinner...especially in those years as I was thinking about ministry, as I was thinking about even working through the curriculum, she was the one who had to listen to me ramble on and on about those various pieces and how that was impacting me...

This story illustrates the powerful role that

significant others play in supporting pastors:

Interviewer: Okay, so we're at the end of this two-year, part-time appointment and you're beginning to get the sense, as you call it, when did you first tell somebody and who did you tell?

Pastor: My wife. Because it was a 45 minute drive each way to this church from where we lived, we had lots of car time together and so on the way down, it was usually me kind of previewing my sermon for her and getting some critique and feedback and on the way back, it was whatever and just, it was one of those kind of growing awareness among both of us so that it wasn't a surprise. I don't know who said it first or when exactly it was said, but it was one of those, you know this seems to be really where I'm finding fulfillment, where I'm feeling that I am called and I just need to pursue and we were both in agreement.

One pastor tells of how a friend she had in high school helped her to pursue ministry:

I had a friend, a very good friend, probably my best friend who was part of our youth ministry. He was a year older than me and he was going into ministry. We talked about the idea that maybe I was also being called by God into ministry. The fact that he was going to pursue it really helped me a lot. It didn't seem that weird, if someone else is already charted this path for you and you see how it goes, then you think, "well, I can do this too!"

The paradox or puzzle in the data we have so far suggests that pastors' reports of the quality of their significant other relationships have only a weak influence on the pastors' work-related well-being, but a very large impact on the pastors' overall well-being. The weak link to work-related well-being is paradoxical, and so we are very cautious about interpreting what it might mean. It could be that this is a wrinkle or gap in our data. One hypothesis we have about why this result has emerged is that some pastors might

The inspirational ideals of role models & the wise guidance of mentors

work hard to segment their work life from their home life. These pastors would strive to keep work from negatively impacting their families. While this separation might help buffer their family, it might also limit how much significant others can provide support in the pastors' work domain. As such, separating or segmenting work and family could buffer the family from possible negative aspects of work, but it would also likely limit the extent to which the family could support the pastor at work.

A second hypothesis is suggested by research on individuals in other occupations. This research suggests that people who experience distress in their home life might be inclined to invest more in work because it is a "refuge" of sorts from the difficulties experienced at home. That research suggest that, with regard to the impact of significant other relationships, pastors might fall into a couple of groups, and we need to disentangle the differences between these groups. The first are those pastors for whom these relationships have a very strong, positive effect on pastors' well-being at work. The second category could be those pastors who experience challenges in their significant other relationships and who, therefore, invest more of themselves at work. This is only speculation and our current data does not allow us to test either of these hypotheses, or other potential explanations. We have much more to learn about the role played by significant others play in foster pastors' well-being, especially pastors' experiences at work. We can say with confidence that our data are clear: positive relationships with significant others foster higher levels of happiness and thriving in life. *Pastors do, indeed, flourish when they feel accepted, loved, and cared for by family members and friends.*

One major focus of our current research is to explore and understand how a person becomes a pastor. We are exploring the rich, complex, and often difficult journeys people go through as they discern a call to ministry and then strive to live into that call. We are gathering stories— what researchers refer to as life narratives— from many pastors about their journey into ministry. We call this project "becoming a pastor," because answering a call to ministry seems to involve a fundamental transformation of a person's core identity. Indeed, many pastors describe this process as living into the person God made them to be, a rich and evocative way of describing this process of "becoming." One major goal of this research initiative is to understand how individuals form a strong, positive pastoral identity and how that identity shapes their life in ministry. We have life narratives from over 200 pastors who represent more than ten different denominations, and many important insights are emerging from our analysis of these stories. Among the most important of these insights is the very significant and important way role models and mentors shape individuals' journeys into the pastorate. Our survey research also points to the importance of strong, positive friendships with other pastors. So far, all the data tell us that relationships among pastors are vitally important for clergy well-being. In this section, we take a closer look at two of these relationships—role models and mentors.

As we define them, role models are real people who represent an ideal of what it means to be an excellent pastor. Role models are living examples of people who have successfully

answered a call to become a pastor, and who have done so in a preeminent way: they are, quite literally, regarded as models of excellence in ministry. As such, candidates for ministry, as well as other pastors, can study and learn from the role model's pastoral identity and life in ministry. Role models are highly credible because they are recognized within a profession for the high quality of their ministry, and so they can provide real, tangible evidence that excellence in ministry is possible. Crucially, role models provide the basis for what researchers call "possible selves" which are specific, individualized images that people form about the kind of pastor they can hope and strive to become. These possible selves are extremely important in the formation of a pastoral identity because they provide real, concrete development goals towards which a pastor-in-training can strive as she or he works to craft their own pastoral identity. What each person needs is an ideal possible self, an image of the kind of excellent pastor they might become that fits both their own personal characteristics and the unique call God has placed on their life. Our research is very clear that role models are



very important for forming such an ideal possible self. We find that the more role models a person has, the greater the number of exemplars from which they can learn. Being exposed to a variety of role models allows a pastor to find a subset that

reflect his or her own personality, style, core commitments, etc. In other words, more role models allows a person to find many real-life examples of the kind of pastor he or she can aspire to become. Although historic figures can serve as role models, our research suggests the best ones are contemporary because pastors-in-training can see them live and in action, over time, and in a variety of situations and contexts. This richer exposure provides opportunities for deeper learning from the role model.

“he just cared about me and thought I was doing a good job and he affirmed that over and over...”

Our research is revealing that mentors also play a very important, but very particular, role in individuals' journeys into ministry. We define a mentor in a very specific way: When a person forms a close, personal relationship with a role model, and when that role model becomes actively involved in helping that person form his or her own identity, the role model has become a mentor. This means that mentors are always first seen as role models, and as such are viewed as exemplars of excellence as a pastor. Mentors are, therefore, individuals who have developed and enacted a very positive pastoral identity, and they have distinguished themselves as being highly effective in their ministry. To become a mentor, these individuals must become deeply involved in the life of a protégé. For this to happen, the protégé and potential mentor must

first sense deep similarity with each other. We found that similarities in sex, gender, race, and ethnicity are less important than are similarities in key personal characteristics (e.g., personality, ministry style), core life values and beliefs, and life experiences. These results are very consistent with the growing body of research on effective mentoring, which also emphasizes the importance of deep similarity rather than the “surface similarity” of demographic factors.⁴ To be sure, some surface factors point to deeper issues. For example, many women or pastors-of-color have unique paths into ministry, and often have important ministry experiences that are directly related to their sex, race, or ethnicity. In this case, it is still the deep similarity of shared ministry experiences that matters.

The essential characteristic of mentors, however, is that they invest deeply into the lives of their protégés. Mentors help protégés develop positive and helpful images of the pastor they can become--we have referred to these as ideal possible selves--and then mentors journey with protégés as they strive to live into that ideal possible self and craft their own pastoral identity. Mentors provide ongoing wise guidance, share deeply from their own experiences, and think with the protégé to help the protégé develop deep reserves of insight and knowledge. It is very common that,

over time, mentor-protégé relationships turn into rich peer friendships. This happens after the protégé has crafted his or her own positive pastoral identity and developed mastery as a pastor. Now, mentor and protégé are equals as colleagues in ministry, and it is from this equality that we see some of the most powerful and positive pastor friendships emerge.

As we have noted, mentors can be especially important to someone who is just entering into the ministry. These new individuals are in the midst of forming their pastoral identities, and mentors are often the most important relationship during this formative time. For example, one female pastor shared this story:

[My pastor] said, ‘what are you going to do after college,’ and I said, ‘I don’t know’ and I should say that I was always a really good student, and I did well academically and all but I just had no clue for my life at all and he said, ‘have you thought about going to seminary,’ and I said, ‘yes, but guys do that,’ (laughing) and he said, ‘no, that’s changing,’ this was, gosh this was in 1988- 89, and he said, but (our denomination) is starting to have some women who serve as pastors, and I could really see you doing that. I think you would be a great pastor.’

But mentors can also be important to pastors who are experiencing a transition in their ministry. These might be pastors who have had many years of fruitful ministry, but are experiencing a change in their ministry. Mentors can, once again, be the vital relationship in this transition. Our research indicates that, whether they realize it or not, among the several difficulties these pastor-in-transition face, chief among them is an identity dilemma. The way these pastors-in-transition have historically viewed themselves in the role of pastor no longer provides a sufficient foundation for them.



4 Eby, L. T. de T., Allen, T. D., Hoffman, B. J., Baranik, L. E., Sauer, J. B., Baldwin, S., et al. (2013). An interdisciplinary meta-analysis of the potential antecedents, correlates, and consequences of protégé perceptions of mentoring. *Psychological Bulletin*, 139(2), 441–476.

What they need is a new ideal possible self that reflects the deep urgings they are experiencing about a change in their ministry. A mentor can help these pastors re-imagine their ministry and themselves, and then mentors can journey with these pastors-in-transition as they create a new, strong, positive pastoral identity, one that, over time, will allow them to once again be fruitful in ministry and to experience high levels of well-being.

During our interviews with pastors, we have heard many stories of the remarkable way mentors shape the lives, identities, and well-being of other pastors. For example, a woman pastor tells this story of a senior male mentor:

He was just so supportive of everything I did and he just, I mean that job didn't pay hardly anything, but he was so affirming. This is one thing that he did, he just cared about me and thought I was doing a good job and he affirmed that over and over. (He) just gave me a lot of freedom to do it the way I wanted to...He was just so supportive of me in so many ways and one of those things he did when I moved out and got my own house, I'd lived in...a one-bedroom, bathroom little kind of place...I had no furniture, no nothing except some of the stuff from our house. So he just invited all of the women in the church to a shower for me and told me to go pick out dishes and silverware and all that stuff which I did...That was the kind of man he was. He was just great.

Another pastor tells of how he was mentored by a more senior pastor:

Then my [denominational leader] for I think five or six years...he is one of the most gracious men that I know...(He) let me screw up, always supported me publicly and then would help me work through how I messed up in private, always did that in private, was always very supportive...At the time I was an associate there..and to let someone fresh out of seminary who really doesn't know all

that much preach regularly...to trust me to do that. And I learned to lead, cause the church at that time was very, very high church, very liturgical, and I learned a lot about quality, if that's the right word, effective traditional worship.

“he always supported me publicly and then would help me work through how I messed up in private, always did that in private, was always very supportive...”

Finally, one pastor offered this wonderful image of mentoring:

For me, when I think of mentoring, it's just life being lived together, that it's not a curriculum, it's not a program, it's just the incarnation, if you will, of the spirit's work in human relationships. So just knowing that folks are counting on you and you can count on them, so there's an accountability and care piece that it's a both and, that I'm giving care but I'm also receiving care and there's a place I know, we meet on Monday night, this group that I would consider being my current mentors, this small group of friends, I know I can count, and if something bombed, they'll tell me about it. They'll be up-front and say that didn't work or what I do now is I present something to them first before I do it, that way they can tell me, no that will bomb, save face in public. So that's been good. And just to have sacred space in a relational way, we've talked about architecturally sacred space and sanctuaries and stuff but just thinking of relational sacred spaces is very important to me and that's all tied into what I

think of when I think of mentoring.

The challenge that seminaries, judicatories, and denominations often face is determining what is the best way to create optimal mentor-protégé relationships. Existing research suggests that most formal mentoring programs do not take deep similarity into account and, instead, rely on factors such as geographic proximity or demographic factors to make mentoring assignments. Instead, this research suggests that the best mentoring relationships developed organically. Our data confirm this research finding. We also find that formal mentoring programs typically are not the source of effective mentoring relationships. Instead, the best mentoring relationships seem to develop when individuals have opportunities to sense deep similarity in each other. A typical pattern is that protégés were exposed to several individuals who became role models and, over time, they had opportunities to interact with these role models in a variety of formal and informal settings. It was from these interactions that a mentoring relationship emerged. The informal interactions seem to be particularly important, most likely because it is in these settings that individuals can really get to know each other and thereby discover the deep similarities they share.

Although we have much to learn about how mentoring relationships form and how they shape pastors' well-being, our data already tell us that mentors are one of the most important factors in shaping pastors' well-being, especially early in a life in ministry. As we have noted, we think they can also be of vital importance throughout a pastors' career, and we will continue to explore them in our future research.

Membership in the community of pastors

At the center of novelist Wendell Berry's *Port William* novels is the concept of membership. Indeed, the people who populate Berry's novels are called The Membership. Here, "membership" refers to the bonds that exist among a group of people, but membership is even more: it is a lived experience, not just an abstract concept. One of the central characters in several of Berry's novels, Burley Coulter, describes membership this way: "The difference ain't in who is a member and who is not, but in who knows it and who don't."⁵ People are members when they recognize their place among—and responsibility for the well-being of—the people, creatures, and land with whom they share life. Membership, then, is a bond of community, fidelity, and mutuality that people enact with each other, and with the created world that lies within the auspices of the membership. Berry asserts that membership also lies at the heart of what it means to be a human well-being. Berry emphasizes that,

I believe that the community - in the fullest sense: a place and all its creatures - is the smallest unit of health and that to speak of the health of an isolated individual is a contradiction in terms.⁶

Without membership, without a community in which to belong, live, and act, individuals have no identity, no sense of self or place in the world, and no sense of the world itself and its purposes. A great deal of scientific research confirms this idea. One group of

5 Berry, W. (1989). *The Wild Birds: Six Stories of the Port William Membership*, New York: North Point Press.

6 Health is Membership, speech delivered at "Spirituality and Healing," Louisville, Kentucky, October 17, 1994

leading scholars frames the importance of membership this way ⁷:

To join a profession is to plunge into a community of people. Much more than the meeting rooms and offices where we work, our relationships with individuals and groups constitute the environment in which we live our professional lives. Such environments can be nurturant sources of learning, inspiration, and enjoyment, or they can be destructive sources of frustration and injury. They send us powerful messages about who we are and how we are valued. They shape our expectations about what our careers can be, or ought to be.

One of the most significant insights from our research is the importance of membership for the well-being of pastors. The degree to which a pastor experiences a sense of belongingness—community, fidelity, and mutuality—with other pastors appears to be one of the most important determinants of that pastor’s flourishing. Pastors who experience a strong sense of membership in the community of pastors are much more likely to experience and sustain high levels of happiness and thriving over many years. They also appear to be the most resilient and are among those most likely to experience a long and fruitful ministry. In other words, membership appears to be one of the essentials for flourishing.

This notion of membership among individuals who share a common vocation has deep historic roots, going back at least as far as the advent of first the three professions in the fourteenth century. The first professions were medicine, law, and clergy, so being a pastor means that one has joined one of the oldest and most venerated professions. Our modern conception of what it

⁷ Gersick, C., Bartunek, J., & Dutton, J. (2000). Learning from academia: The importance of relationships in professional life. *Academy of Management Journal*, 43, 1026-1044., p. 1026.

means to be a professional has become skewed: For many people, to be a professional means to be paid for one’s work. But this understanding belies the essence of what constitutes a profession. A profession has three essential characteristics: (1) near exclusive possession and control of a specialized domain of expertise and skill that are essential to modern life; (2) high standards of competent practice which are established and maintained by members themselves, and (3) a pledge or profession to enact that expertise and skill in service to others.⁸

Among the many benefits of a profession to its members, two stand as among the most important. The first is experiencing Berry’s ideal of membership, or as Sullivan frames it, “participating in the esprit de corps, pursuing personal excellence with the support and structure of a large group of others similarly devoted to that pursuit of excellence.”⁹ The second, what Sullivan (p. 15) calls “the great promise of a profession,” is the privilege of experiencing work as a vocation—that is, as



⁸ Sullivan, W. A. (2004). *Work and integrity: The crisis and promise of professionalism in America* (2nd ed.). San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass. See also O’Day, R. (2000). *The professions in early modern England, 1450-1800*, Harlow, Essex: Longman.

⁹ *Work and integrity*; see also Freidson, E. (2001). *Professionalism: The third logic*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press; Haworth, L. (1977). *Decadence and objectivity*, Toronto: University of Toronto Press.

deeply meaningful and purposeful, and as an authentic expression of one's true self. Sullivan (p. 21-22) describes this benefit this way:

The keypoint is that for a genuine professional the meaning of the work derives from both what it is and the ends toward which it is directed as much or more than from the returns it affords...In genuine professional work, the craft itself is a focus of attention. As Freidson puts it, professional work is defined by a focus on the quality of the performance itself and the belief that it is of value to others...Far from diminishing individuality, this stance...actually frees the practitioner to affirm his or her distinctness as an individual--only in this case, Haworth argues, 'the [kind of] self affirmed is defined by a distinctive manner of relating that matters beyond the self.' That is, the practitioner finds that the demands of the craft and the relationships within which the craft places him or her become challenges that, if well met, spur the growth of individual creativity and his or her sense of self worth...It is situations like these that draw out the practitioner's capacities. They thereby stimulate and enable the growth of the person precisely in and through professional practice...

There are many reasons why membership has such a significant impact on pastors' well-being. First, the opinions of other pastors are the most authoritative evaluations of the effectiveness and excellence of a pastor's ministry. As we have already discussed, the perceptions and experiences of those people whom a pastor serves--parishioners, local communities, etc.--matter greatly for the well-being of pastors, but the opinions of one's peers matter even more when it comes to appraising the quality of one's own practice. Since the profession *itself* establishes standards of excellence, it is other professionals--other pastors--who are in the best position to judge whether or not any pastor has met those standards. And so, acceptance and

affirmation by the larger community of pastors legitimizes the ministry and identity of each member. Membership signals that a member's own expression of ministry and his or her unique pastoral identity are recognized by his or her peers as being proper, authoritative, and genuine for the profession. This endorsement confirms the veracity of pastors' call to ministry, and it also empowers pastors to pursue their own practice of ministry with vigor, dedication, and excellence. One pastor described the importance of this aspect of membership during his early years in ministry:

The community [of other pastors] was big to me, the fact that I was part of a team of people who would lift me up when I was having a bad day. We had a really tight staff that year. I just loved it. It was kind of the feeling of, 'I could do that for the rest of my life and I would be totally, completely happy.'

Second, other pastors can offer the best and most comprehensive support for continued development and growth. Like all professions, the community of pastors provides for, and requires, that members engage in a continuous pursuit of higher levels of excellence. Fellow pastors act as role models, coaches, and teachers, inspiring and admonishing each other in this pursuit. This is very important as candidates for ministry go through training,



credentialing, and socializing processes that transform them into pastors. Other pastors act as (1) teachers to help candidates acquire the knowledge and skill required for ministry, (2) exemplars of excellence in ministry that candidates can emulate, and (3) mentors to help candidates undertake the hard work of forming their own pastoral identity. For example, one pastor told this story about when he suffered a sudden and dramatic injury during seminary:

And so I came really, really close at that point to dropping out of seminary but there was a professor at seminary that just really, I think he sensed a little bit of my frustration, and he stopped me one day in the hallway at seminary and said, 'hey, what's going on with you?' and just pulled me aside and talked to me for a little bit and he said, don't give up, you're going to make it, you're going to get through this and just really, and then every once in a while after that, every couple of weeks or whatever, he would see me and stop me again and say, 'how are you doing? You're hanging in there, you're going to make it, and that whole semester of which was a really, really hard semester for me to get through...

But the practice of any professional, including experienced pastors, is always evolving and changing, sometimes in response to changing ministry conditions, and often in response to the pastors' own desire to become more effective in their work. Here again, it is the community of pastors that holds up ideals of ministry that help members imagine and aspire toward ever-higher levels of effectiveness and service in their ministry. These ideals are shared through the stories the community tells about excellence in ministry, by the examples of members who are held in high esteem, through the accolades and honors used to recognize some members, and through many institutional systems (e.g., selection of leaders,

formal performance evaluation systems, continuing education requirements) that help pastors understand what "gifts and graces" are indicative of a pastor and what kinds of ministry they should pursue.

Third, pastors can offer each other the unique kinds of social support that are needed to deal with the challenges and endure the stresses and strains that typify a life in ministry.¹⁰ Engaging in any profession brings with it crisis, criticism, setbacks, and a host of other negative experiences. Other pastors are best able to provide the deep, empathic understanding that enables peers to deal effectively with their own experiences with difficult situations. In addition, because of their own previous experiences with similar challenges, other pastors have an in-depth understanding of the many dimensions and nuances of a difficult situation and so they can provide assistance that is closely tailored to the nuances of a specific problematic situation. One pastor described it this way:

I couldn't really talk to anybody, I couldn't have friends and stuff because either I was favoring one family over another or something I said would get out to the community and so most ministers period have to be very careful about those relationships so you really are by yourself. So as you're giving pastoral care and I get phone calls, emails, people saying, I'm having trouble with my marriage, I'm having trouble at work, I'm ill with this, whatever it may be, you can have conversations with them cause anything anybody says to me is confidential, they can tell me anything, and I will sit and listen to

¹⁰ Lakey, B., & Orehek, E. (2011). Relational regulation theory: A new approach to explain the link between perceived social support and mental health. *Psychological Review*, 118(3), 482–495; Monin, J. K., Clark, M. S., & Lemay, E. P. (2008). Communal responsiveness in relationships with female versus male family members. *Sex Roles*, 59(3-4), 176–188; Thoits, P. A. (2011). Mechanisms linking social ties and support to physical and mental health. *Journal of Health and Social Behavior*, 52(2), 145–161.

them and work with them and ask them all those things, how does that make you feel? But when it comes to your own stuff, there's no place to go. You just gotta see if somehow you can internalize it and hopefully it doesn't cause you great stress or have a heart attack or stroke or something and most ministers really are in that situation which is really bad, but it's a reality.

Another pastor described how important receiving the right kind of social support can be:

But I think back to the first senior pastor that he had here was a part of my, when I was ordained, committee that I met with. He was the one I went through my sermons and so I knew he had known me through that whole process. With him, he always made himself available. If there was something I needed, he was never too busy, that I could pick up the phone, or I could stop in his office if he happened to be there, and he always made the time to do whatever or to be whatever and so just simply being available, for me, was the biggest thing because I saw, I mean he had great experience, great wisdom, he had a lot to offer and he was willing to offer it. Now he wasn't going to step in and be bossy about it, he wasn't going to say you need to do this, you need to do that, it was just a listening, caring, let me be somebody you can bounce an idea off of, and so when I think of people that have mentored, it's just been people who have made the time, who've been available to listen and he was a great gift through lots of ministry hassles, just from his vast experience and being willing to listen and help.

In addition, other pastors can provide a safe place for members to be their "off-stage selves," to vent their feelings, celebrate joys, share sorrows, laugh about funny experiences, and feel the support of others who share a deep commitment to a common professional life. For example, researchers¹¹ have found

¹¹ Gable, S. L., & Reis, H. T. (2010). Good news! Capitalizing on positive events in an interpersonal context. In *Advances in Experimental Social Psychology* (Vol. 42, p. 38

that sharing good news with important others has many benefits, including bolstering well-being, improving self-esteem, and building self-confidence (i.e., self-efficacy). As a community, pastors can collectively celebrate accomplishments, lament difficulties, have fun together, and care well for each other. Membership brings people into a caring community built on a shared commitment to high standards of professional practice.

Friendships and membership are intricately related. Sometimes pastors make friends because they have first felt connected to the larger community of pastors. Experiencing membership then lead them to participate in larger, denominational events, which then provided the space for friendships with other peers to emerge. One story illustrates this well. A pastor signed up to share a hotel room with another pastor at the annual denominational conference. Pastors were paired randomly to share rooms, but out of this happenstance meeting, a long-term relationship emerged. It was the first peer-friendship for both pastors, and the relationship has lasted for over ten years, growing in depth and richness over that time. The pastor we interviewed said he was comfortable going to this first annual conference because he felt that he belonged there among other "brothers and sisters in ministry." Here membership lead to friendship. Another story was told by a female pastor who, early in her pastorate, had misgivings about how she would be received by the other, mostly male, pastors in her denomination. She was blessed, however, to have a very positive mentor--a male senior to her

pp. 195–257). Elsevier; Gable, S. L., Reis, H. T., Impett, E. A., & Asher, E. R. (2004). What do you do when things go right? The intrapersonal and interpersonal benefits of sharing positive events. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 87(2), 228–245

in experience and age--who accompanied her to district and regional meetings during her first several years. At each conference or meeting, the mentor would introduce and connect her to other pastors and denominational leaders, endorsing her gifts for ministry all the while. The young pastor had most likely already been received into the membership of pastors, but what the mentor most certainly helped this young pastor do, as Burley Coulter might say, was recognize that she was, indeed, a member. In this case, friendship fostered membership. We have been somewhat surprised to learn that some of the best pastor friendship circles are ecumenical rather than composed of pastors from the same denomination. These inter-denominational friendship groups can be very powerful vehicles for creating membership, at least in part, because they so clearly illustrate how broad and deep the community of pastors truly is. Pastors tell us how important and special it is to have their own expression of ministry affirmed by pastors from some other faith tradition. These ecumenical friendship circles also provide rich resources from which pastors can draw for many aspects of their work. As one pastor told us, "Anytime I need a new perspective on a passage of Scripture or a sermon topic, I just call on the people in my pastors' group. There is enough diversity in that group to keep me going a long time!"

While membership does, indeed, have many privileges, the lack of membership carries with it many detriments. We have heard a lot of concern from many people about pastor isolation, which most often is understood as the lack of friendships with other pastors. Our research does indicate that strong, positive friendships with other pastors have many beneficial effects, some of which we have described above. As

such, a lack of such friendships with peers is likely to be associated with the loss of these positive outcomes. A lack of membership also creates feelings of ostracism, rejection, and disapproval which erode well-being in many ways including diminishing a person's sense of call to the profession and undermining their self-confidence about their own capacity for competent practice. A lack of membership leaves individuals adrift, without a sense of communion with other professionals. Perhaps the most detrimental effect is that the individual cannot develop either a deep sense of vocation or the strong, positive identity that seems to be essential to both excellent practice and well-being as a professional. Being excluded from membership is often experienced as having one's legitimacy as professional called into question. For example, one pastor told us:

I hated going to (the annual denomination meeting) because it seemed like none of the senior pastors would even acknowledge those of us that were "just" local pastors. Even the formal system made it clear we were not the same: we had to stand separate from them, and we could not vote on important things, things that affected us and our churches too. I mean, we had all experienced a call from God to go into ministry, but it certainly did not seem like the (denomination) or the (senior pastors) accepted that our call was legitimate. At times, it made me wonder whether or not God really wanted me to be a pastor. Maybe I was just fooling myself, and even worse, fooling my church.

And another shared these thoughts with us:

I don't know how to say this without sounding like I have a problem with authority and I don't have a problem with authority. I know that there's a chain of command, so to speak. But I do know, too, that sometimes that bureaucracy gets in the way of the Work of the Kingdom and that's probably the part that I resent the most because people mistake

the bureaucracy for God. And it's very hard to recover people who have been hurt by the bureaucracy and help them to understand that that's not God. That's the best way I can explain that. The paperwork I can deal with if I have to but it's the getting in the way of people experiencing the God that created that I have a problem with. I don't want any bureaucracy or any kind of wrinkle to come between anybody and God cause that's too important.

One pastor shared how organizational structures can impede the creation of membership:

“Like divine love, earthly love seeks plentitude; it longs for the full membership to be present and to be joined.”

Because of the way the salary structure happens and the way some people get moved up quicker than other people, it puts this really bad taste in a lot of pastor's mouths and so even if really where you get moved is where your gifts match, you have the skills to do it, you're the perfect fit, there's going to be other pastors who are going to constantly bashing you down because they think you played this game or that you, oh they must have sold somebody out or they must have ingratiated themselves with someone, and then that's another disincentive to being in covenant with fellow pastors is there's always this mistrust that, well they're just getting to know me because they want to move up the ladder and you're the person I've got to make connections to move up the ladder.

One pastor described how the lack of

membership can have profound, detrimental effects on clergy well-being:

Part of that is, I think, a lack of friendships. [John] Wesley was big about that, holding each other accountable in love but if you don't have anybody close to you to hold you accountable and you live this shadow life, who's going to call you to account? There's nobody. So that's what tends to happen with clergy is because they have a lack of friendships, close friendships that then they're more prone to these kinds of indiscretions because they don't. One, they have a lot of access to deal with people under stress and trauma a lot.

Unfortunately, membership appears to be in rather short supply for many pastors. This is one of the most alarming results that is emerging from our study. Sometimes institutional systems seem to get in the way of membership. For example, pastors often express the challenges of forming deep, open relationships with someone who might, at a future time, make decisions about your own future in ministry. As one pastor put it, “it's hard to be too honest today with someone who might be your boss tomorrow.” Of course, some will criticize this view as being untrustworthy, but our data suggest that this view is shared by many pastors, so we think there is something deeper at work than simply an inability of some to trust their peers. We also want to return to our earlier conversation about the benefits of *inter*-denominational pastor groups. One of the benefits many pastors find is that such a group reduces or eliminates any potential for these *intra*-denominational problems that we have been discussing. This creates a powerful sense of psychological safety which then allows pastors to be very candid with each other. This candor and openness then leads to the rich accountability so many pastors seek.

WELL-BEING AND THE WORK OF PASTORS

Pastors are expert-specialists, not expert-generalists

We have much to learn about how membership forms, but one pastor shared these thoughts with us:

if we could just admit our needs to one another and be real or for a pastor to say, I'm really struggling right now with this, I'm burned out, I'm empty, because I'm empty I can't give anything else away and if they would be able to genuinely say that to one another, that would change everything. But we don't. It's a pride thing and part of that is the nature of the beast. We measure two things in the church, attendance and money. Those are the two things we measure. So those are the two ways that you have to excel. God can be doing great things in your congregation but if your attendance and your money are not up, you've got to find an excuse and you gotta find some way to look good among pastors...

Wendell Berry offers a similar, albeit more poetic, understanding of what it means to express membership at its fullest and best: "Like divine love, earthly love seeks plenitude; it longs for the full membership to be present and to be joined. Unlike divine love, earthly love does not have the power, the knowledge, or the will to achieve what it longs for. The story of human love on this earth is a story by which this love reveals and even validates itself by its failures to be complete and comprehensive and effective enough."¹² Membership among community of pastors is, then, nothing more or less than the love members have for each other, and the ways they enact (or do not enact) that love for each and every pastor in that community.

The General Board of Higher Education and Ministry (GBHEM) of the United Methodist Church has worked with one of the leading experts on job analysis to identify the major tasks and activities that comprise the work of a pastor. This project was undertaken as part of a larger project that focused on developing a richer understanding of clergy effectiveness¹³. A job analysis study is a systematic process for determining what are the primary activities, tasks and responsibilities of a job. It requires extensive data collection and involves rigorous analysis. The UMC study revealed 13 task clusters that comprise the role of pastor. These task clusters include a wide variety of activities including administration, care-giving, facility management and construction, preaching and public worship, evangelism, and communication. The U. S. Department of Labor, through its massive O*Net database of occupational information, produces a similar list that breaks down the work of clergy into ten task clusters including assisting and caring for others; developing objectives and strategies; developing and building teams; resolving conflicts and negotiating; thinking creatively; and guiding, directing, and motivating subordinates and volunteers. The expert who led the UMC study, a prominent scholar of industrial and organizational psychology who has deep knowledge of job analysis for hundreds

¹² *Health is Membership*

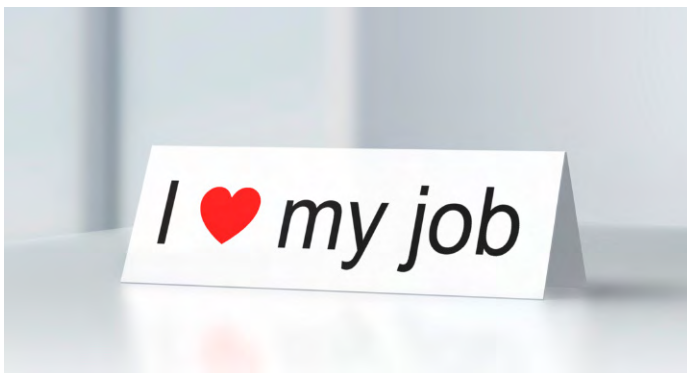
¹³ The final report on clergy effectiveness can be found at www.gbhem.org/sites/default/files/bom_clergyeffectivenessdeshon.pdf

of occupations, concludes his report by stating that, “the breadth of tasks performed by local church pastors coupled with the rapid switching between task clusters and roles that appears prevalent in this position is unique. I have never encountered such a fast-paced job with such varied and impactful responsibilities”.¹⁴ The study goes on to determine what personal characteristics would be required to perform effectively across those 13 task clusters. The job analysis revealed that 64 different personal competencies are required, and the study leader emphasized that “it is almost inconceivable to imagine that a single person could be uniformly high on the sixty-four distinct knowledge, skills, abilities, and personal characteristics.”

From our perspective, this means that the role a local church clergy fills seems to require an expert-generalist, someone who is highly skilled at performing an extraordinarily wide range of tasks and activities. To be sure, the importance of these various task clusters is likely to be different for each local church context, but this job analysis study suggests that all thirteen are important in most local churches. But most individuals are what we call expert-specialists: highly skilled to perform some of these tasks, and less skilled to perform others. Pastors know this about themselves, and so they understand

that the best ministry opportunities for them are the ones in which their highest skills (and lowest skills) fit or match the ministry context. So, pastors highly skilled in evangelism are best suited to start new churches, those highly skilled in teaching will likely perform best in churches that emphasize study and Sunday school, and pastors highly skilled in care-giving will likely serve most effectively at churches with extensive congregational needs.

As we noted earlier, this is known as person-job fit in management research, and we have referred to it in this report as pastor-local ministry fit. The contrast between the requirements to be an expert-generalist versus the reality that all pastors are expert-specialists is very likely to create problems with pastor-local ministry fit. We noted that at least two kinds of fit are recognized in the research literature as being potentially important. The first kind of fit is the degree to which the pastor’s knowledge, skills, abilities, and personal characteristics, match or are suitable for the requirements of the current ministry context. The second kind of fit --values fit--is the degree to which the pastors’ values and beliefs -- what we might call the pastors’ theology--matches the theology of the local church he or she is serving. This is a deeper kind of fit in that it comprises core aspects of the pastor, and the church. We noted that powerful tensions and sometimes irrevocable conflicts emerge when people hold very different core commitments. A mismatch between the pastor’s core commitments and those of the church can make it extremely difficult to form positive bonds and, over time, tend to create rifts that both parties find difficult to mend. On the positive side, a high values fit creates strong, positive relationships and a sense of deep, shared values



¹⁴ The report of the job analysis study can be found at www.gbhem.org/sites/default/files/bom_jobanalysisdeshon.pdf

that allows pastors to express their truest selves in their ministry. Values fit is also energizing: working together with others to enact shared values is powerfully motivating and very fulfilling.

Why might pressures to be an expert-generalist undermine clergy well-being? First, most pastors want to be effective in their work, and so factors that diminish their capacity for effectiveness also diminish their well-being. We have found that most pastors experience the Galatea Effect: they have high expectations for themselves and for the ministries they lead. People who experience the Galatea Effect tend to blame poor performance on themselves, and they also tend to be frustrated by external factors which obstruct their performance. In situations where requirements to be an expert-generalist are high, pastor-local ministry fit will likely be low, and pastors are more likely to feel bad about poor performance and to be discontent with situational factors that impede progress. These experiences bode poorly for the well-being of these pastors.

Second, situations where requirements to be an expert-generalist are high will likely create tensions between pastors and congregation members. Some of this tension emerges from the way people tend to respond to under-performance. Most people dislike performance that falls below their expectations, and this causes concern and frustration. Achieving high performance across all of these task cluster is a very complex and difficult undertaking, and requires the coordinated efforts of many people, so the causes of poor performance are almost always difficult to diagnose. When the source of poor performance is difficult to identify, people struggle to make sense of what is going on and to find a way to make progress

toward improvement. Getting to the roots of complex performance problems requires time, patience, rigorous analysis, and clear thinking. An unfortunate tendency for most people in situations like this is to take an easier path in which they attempt to deflect responsibility from themselves and place it on others. When a blame-game ensues, interpersonal conflict is likely to follow. Conflict on its own undermines well-being, but combined with finger pointing, the mix can become especially toxic.

Third, pressures for expert-generalist performance are likely to be accompanied by what researchers call identity demands and threats. *Identity demands* are the pressures that congregations can exert on pastors to get them to act in a certain way or to be a certain kind of pastor. Identity demands represent a congregation's efforts to get a pastor to conform to *their* image of what a pastor is like, to act in accordance with *their* expectations about what pastors should do, to say what *they* think pastors should say, etc. Demands are not positive aspirations for excellence, but rather potentially detrimental requirements to conform. *Identity threats* are negative criticisms, signs of disrespect, passive-aggressive comments, insults, and other forms of derisive interaction that pastors experience with parishioners, denominational leaders, and other pastors. Identity demands and threats constitute the "ten thousand paper cuts" that chip and nick away at pastors' well-being. Demands and threats can create detrimental conflict, sap a pastors' energy, and undermine a pastor's confidence. More simply stated, identity demands and threats never boost well-being, and they almost always damage it in some way.

We need to distinguish pressures for

expert-generalist performance from high expectations about performance. In fact, our data suggest that high expectations are very *beneficial* for pastoral well-being, and a great deal of research indicates that they are important for achieving high performance. Setting aspirational goals can be very motivating, and we found that these goals are also related to higher well-being. In other words, pastors seem to be happier and thrive more when there are aspirational goals in which they can invest their time and talents. This is one of the pieces of research evidence that leads us to conclude that most pastors want to be very effective in their ministries, and they are very willing to put in the time and effort to be effective.

We need more research to understand the dynamics of pastor-local ministry fit and how pressures for expert-generalist performance might influence both fit and pastor well-being. We want to understand what factors and conditions create better (or worse) fit, how fit affects the well-being of pastors and pastoral effectiveness, and how fit influences the well-being of the members of the local church itself. Of course, a “perfect” fit is likely to be a very rare experience, but we do need to understand how much fit is required to help pastors flourish and be effective. There may be many things pastors, local churches, and denominations can do to respond positively in situations where fit falls below this threshold. One of the positive responses we have seen is when pastors and local church leaders recognize and admit that the match is less-than-ideal, avoid assigning blame, and then work collectively to help fill in the gaps. There are likely to be many other positive ways to deal with less-than-optimal fit, and so there is much for pastors, local churches,

and denominations to learn from each other. We think that this “ecumenical learning and sharing” is an excellent way to learn about “best practices,” that foster well-being of pastors and churches.

ENGAGEMENT, AUTHENTICITY, AND FLOURISHING

Among the most powerful and potent ideas that are emerging from the field of well-being are the concepts of engagement and authenticity at work. These two concepts capture what appear to be very essential and profound dimensions of people’s work experiences that, in turn, give rise to a myriad of important and positive outcomes. Clearly, people are at their most productive, creative, and resilient when they are able to be fully engaged and authentic in their work.

Understanding the concept of engagement begins by recognizing that, over the course of a work day, week, or month, people are constantly bringing in and leaving out various depths of themselves as they enact work activities. That is, people can use varying levels and dimensions of their physical, emotional, spiritual and cognitive resources in the way they enact roles, perform activities, or fulfill responsibilities. In some cases, people are able to bring their fullest and best selves, and when this happens, their performances are more dynamic and inspired, and their experiences of work are more gratifying and fulfilling. In other cases, people are less than fully present, either focusing resources on some other task (e.g., day dreaming, worrying about work) or reserving those resources to use later. In these cases, their experience of work will likely be diminished in so respect. That is, work

is less energizing and fulfilling, and performance is likely to be less inspired, when people either must or chose to hold-back aspects of themselves from their work. Pastors can think about engagement by considering the responses of their congregations during a sermon: some parishioners are really listening and hearing the message – these are the fully engaged members. Others are gazing to the side, or reading something – these are, at best, partially engaged. Some might be sleeping and these would be almost fully unengaged. Engagement captures experiences that occur when people are able to draw upon and utilize their greatest physical, cognitive, spiritual and emotional resources and direct their best energies into their work. When people can give their fullest and best to an activity, given the resources that activity requires, they are fully engaged.

Engagement is a very positive experience: it feels great—energizing, virtuous, fulfilling—to be able to invest one’s full self and best resources into a highly-valued activity. Engagement creates a positive cycle where full investment in work leads to positive performance, which in turn fosters new motivation to sustain or improve that performance, which then creates more opportunities for full engagement. This positive cycle also tends to foster motivation to develop and increase one’s knowledge, skill, and abilities so that even higher levels of performance and engagement can be obtained in the future. Likewise, it can be very depleting and discouraging to try to give fully of oneself only to have those efforts thwarted, or to have one’s work day filled mostly with tedious or meaningless activities. These experiences of disengagement sap one’s energies, erode well-being, and can lead to a negative cycle where

low engagement leads to under-performance and reduced well-being. We expected to find that pastors who are more regularly engaged in their work will not only experience greater daily happiness, but more importantly they will be more likely to thrive. As we noted in our section on the current state of pastoral well-being, our current results support this hypothesis.

Authenticity is a very closely related concept which we have already addressed somewhat in our section on the current state of pastoral well-being. Unlike engagement, however, it has deep historical and philosophical roots. Portrayals of authentic functioning date back to the Ancient Greek philosophers, and this idea has been explored by such diverse thinkers as Descartes, Kant, Kierkegaard, and Hume. At its essence, authenticity is the extent to which a person can express thoughts, feelings and behaviors that reflect and are consistent with their true- or core-self. It is not impulsive or inconsiderate, but it is honest and truthful in terms of expressing deep, foundational aspects of the self. Authenticity is what many people mean when they refer to integrity. A person that has integrity is a person that is true to themselves and, therefore, authentic.

Authenticity first requires an acute, clear awareness of both one’s core values and beliefs and one’s personal strengths and weaknesses. It then is a deep desire to increase knowledge of one’s true feelings, motives, and aspirations, and to assess these critically and candidly in light of one’s core life values and beliefs, and one’s strengths and weaknesses. Authenticity is built upon an unbiased appraisal of what one *can* do, what one *intends* to do, and why one is *investing* time, energy, and talent in the major events that comprise current life. Said differently, to

be authentic, we have to be honest about what we are trying to do with our lives, and honest about what we should be doing with our lives. Authenticity also entails the extent to which one's thoughts and actions are -- across situations and contexts--consistent with these core values and beliefs. Finally, authenticity involves expressing this true self in open and honest ways with in the various activities and interactions that constitute daily life. Authentic people do not "put on airs," but express their true self in ways that remain compassionate and considerate toward others.

Each of our different research studies points to the same conclusion: the degree to which pastors can be engaged and authentic is a very powerful determinant of their flourishing. In some ways this is a straightforward conclusion because engagement and authenticity are important components of thriving. But our data suggest that higher levels of engagement and authenticity also create more experiences of happiness. It seems that pastors experience more positive moods and emotions, and are able to move more quickly past negative moods and emotions, when the regular rhythm of their work lives allows them to express their truest, best self in their work.

While both engagement and authenticity are, to some extent, choices about how to act and live, the degree to which a person can be engaged and authentic is also facilitated (or constrained) by the social contexts in which they work and live. In very strong situations, those in which powerful forces are in operation (e.g., social pressures are great, identity demands from others are high, the threat of sanctions or punishments are severe), people may feel compelled to act in ways that are inauthentic or that cause them to withhold important aspects of

themselves. A classic example from our research is when a local church sends powerful signals about what kind of pastor a person *should be*, or when a denominational leader exerts pressures to coerce a pastor to conform to certain kinds of behaviors or practices. If these demands and pressures are strong enough, the pastor will be compelled to act inauthentically, and thereby severely constrain the extent to which a pastor can be engaged in his or her work.

The challenge for pastors and churches is to find ways to foster high levels of engagement and authenticity among pastors while also meeting the ministry goals and needs of the church. Seasoned, flourishing pastors with many years of experience have often found ways to "craft" their ministry and work activities in such a way that both objectives are met. These pastors have found ways to shape their ministry roles through many minor tweaks and a few larger changes in such a way that they are able to spend most of their time, energy, and other resources on tasks and activities that foster engagement and authenticity. Similarly, the best churches have also found ways to support pastors in this ministry crafting process. We expect that these churches also foster high levels of authenticity and engagement among their members. These are likely to be environments in which everyone—pastor and parishioners alike—are flourishing.

INSTITUTIONS AND PASTORAL WELL-BEING

We have been told many times that we would see significant differences across denominations in the well-being of pastors or in the factors that shape pastoral well-being.

As we noted earlier, we continue to find that the average level of well-being is statistically the same across denominations. Although we have *much* more to learn, so far we have not found any such big differences, although small variations have surfaced. We have seen similar phenomena in somewhat different guises, yet the pastors in these different denominations seem to be very much alike in terms of how these factors and conditions foster (or diminish) their well-being. For example, we have discussed that pastor-local church fit is a very significant factor in shaping pastoral well-being across denominations, but it does show up in somewhat different ways depending on polity. In hierarchical polities, fit is much more the responsibility of denominational leaders, and so poor fit for pastors in these polities also brings with it tensions with these leaders. In congregational polities, fit matters just as much, but this time the relationship tension is between pastors and the local church that hired them. This difference in relationship tension does matter, but the impact of poor fit seems to be the same, regardless of the source. Furthermore, as we have discussed, the quality of the pastor's relationship with the congregation of the local church matters a great deal for pastors in all polities, and the importance of this relationship is virtually the same across all denominations in our study.

This example does point to an important caveat to these initial findings: there are differences in organizational or system-level factors across denominations, and some of these might prove to be of great importance for pastoral well-being. By "system-level" we are referring to factors such as the way pastors are trained, the processes by which pastors are

placed in local churches, the way pastors are paid and the procedures through which that pay is determined, the process by which pastoral effectiveness is (or is not) monitored and the way any such effectiveness information is used, and the mechanisms through which denominations help (or do not help) foster a strong sense of community and shared identity among pastors. It is very likely that some of these system-level factors have a sizable impact on pastoral well-being, and we need to study many more of them to understand which ones matter most. But we think that it is very unlikely that any of these important system-level differences will be due to fundamental denominational characteristics such as doctrine or beliefs. Said differently, it appears very likely that any denomination will be able to use and adapt high-quality system-level practices. Take, for example, the quality of training and education pastors receive in the early years of their ministry work. The quality of this developmental experience does appear to have a very big and potentially long-term impact on pastors' well-being. We have already pointed to the importance of role models and mentors during this formative time. Indeed, the type of training pastors receive does vary across denominations, yet the characteristics of quality pastoral development seem to be the same.

This "surprising" lack of difference means that there is much that denominations, seminaries, judicatories, local churches, and pastors can learn from each other across what we will call "ecumenical boundaries." As we mentioned, pastors in ecumenically diverse pastoral friendship groups are among those with the highest levels of well-being, and they credit this group as being a key part of both their well-being and effectiveness. The

Sustaining Pastoral Excellence and Transition Into Ministry initiatives sponsored by the Lilly Endowment are outstanding examples of the many positive outcomes that can be produced by working across ecumenical boundaries. We believe that similarly positive outcomes can be obtained by seminaries, judicatories, and even churches in the same geographic area working across ecumenical boundaries to learn more about how to foster high levels of clergy well-being. Forming these groups can be undertaken immediately, and so this represents a possible “quick win” for clergy and judicatories.

CONCLUSIONS

Thoughts about practical implications of our research

- 1) We have tried to emphasize that relationships of many kinds seem to matter a great deal to pastors, and these relationships also matter for the pastors’ well-being. We want to offer some thoughts about pastor isolation, which is a concern we have heard expressed often. Our data suggest that isolation might come in several forms. One form—the one we hear about most often—occurs when pastors do not have good friends who are also in the ministry. As we noted in our section on “membership,” there are many unique and important benefits from having a friend who is also a pastor. Efforts to encourage friendships among pastors, however, must recognize that friendships begin with deep similarity, a connection between individuals that expresses a match between

something essential in both people. These relationships are hard to create from the outside; the best approach might be to give pastors many opportunities to “bump into each other,” as one pastor put it. The more pastors are exposed to each other, the more likely that a friendship will emerge.

A second form of isolation that emerged in our research occurs when the pastor does not feel he or she is accepted into the community of pastors. We have worked with pastors who do have friends in ministry, but nevertheless still feel ostracized by the larger community. This kind of isolation has many facets and it is experienced through many different gestures of acceptance and affirmation (or rejection and ostracism). For example, isolation can show up in the way a pastor is treated by denominational leaders (e.g., bishop, presbyter, district superintendent, regional minister, administrative minister), more senior pastors and those pastors who are held in high esteem. It can perhaps be most powerfully created by the way an individual is received and treated at larger gatherings of pastors. It can also be discerned from the outcomes of major decisions (e.g., the kind of church to which a pastor is appointed). This is a subtle, but powerful form of isolation, in part because it seems to influence a person’s pastoral identity. Isolation from the community of pastors seems often to cast doubt on the veracity and authenticity of the pastor’s call to ministry. As such, it would likely have devastating effects on a pastor’s thriving.

The last form we see in our research is isolation from the community of the local

church the pastor services. Given the huge impact pastor-local congregation relationships have on well-being, fostering positive relationships with the congregation that the pastors serves would be one way to increase the well-being of virtually all pastors, even those who are flourishing. Of course, the quality of these relationships results from the efforts of many people, but pastors and lay leaders could be key. In point #2 below we offer a few ideas about what might be done to foster positive pastor-congregation relationships, so here we offer one brief thought. Many resources, and our own research, suggest that the quality of relationships among pastors and lay leaders is often a model that other parishioners look to as an example of the relationship they might foster with the pastor. Therefore, fostering positive relationships among these individuals could be a good place to start.

2) When asked about how our research might inform practice, we always emphasize that we think there is a significant need for congregational education around pastoral well-being. We think that lay leaders and members of local churches would benefit greatly from training on such foundational topics as core concepts of human well-being, how churches can foster positive pastor-congregation relationships, and the role local churches play in shaping the identities of newer pastors. There seems to be a general lack of awareness about pastoral well-being which we think stems, in part, from a general lack of knowledge about human well-being. Training that addresses this

topic from multiple views, including both theological and scientific perspectives, could open new possibilities for positive action. Denominations might also consider education around other specific topics that could bolster pastoral and congregational well-being. For example, training for both pastors and local church leaders on collaboration, negotiation, and conflict resolution could help foster more positive, productive pastor-congregation relationships, especially for pastors and churches who are struggling to overcome their conflict. The negative effects of poor pastor-congregation relationships seem so profound that addressing them early may yield some of the quickest, positive changes. On a darker note, we have heard a great deal about “pastor-killer” churches, and if these do exist, we wonder why more concerted efforts are not put into identifying and addressing these churches. Changing these churches would likely require significant resources, and yet allowing them to continue to undermine pastors may create even greater costs in terms of the lives and well-being of the individuals tasked with leading them.

3) Recovery experiences can also be a quick win for pastoral well-being. We discussed three types of recovery experiences: (a) relaxation and detachment, (b) restorative niches, and (c) contemplative/meditative practices. As we noted, there is a large and growing body of research that provides compelling evidence that engaging in each of these kinds of recovery experiences seems to have the double benefit of increasing well-being and, at the same time,

reducing burnout, fatigue, and stress.

- a) Relaxation and detachment can happen on a daily basis through designated time away from work-related activities (e.g., the pastor gets to turn off his or her cell phone), but engaging in them for extended periods of time—such as what happens during a real vacation—can have significant salutary and restorative effects. Said differently, pastors would be well-served by being able to take several days of real vacation, by which we mean time away during which they will not be contacted for work-related matters *and* when they know their congregation is in the good care of other qualified individuals.
- b) Restorative niches represent a new concept in the research literature, so we need to study them in more depth, but our early results indicate that finding and engaging in a meaningful, enjoyable activity that one can practice with mastery might be especially beneficial. These activities create “flow experiences,” that wonderful and rarefied state in which we find ourselves lost in the joy of the activity itself.¹⁵ Flow states happen when we see an activity as (i) voluntary and enjoyable (what researchers refer to as intrinsically motivating), (ii) as one that requires skill and mastery, as well as (iii) one that challenges us enough that we must stretch and immerse ourselves

in performance. Of course, engaging in restorative niches takes time, and pastors’ schedules may need to be adjusted to provide space for such a practice. In addition, some pastors may find themselves in contexts where restorative niches are considered to be “hobbies,” and therefore viewed as a frivolous practice. Again, church education might help lay leaders understand the value of these practices for their pastors, and the church itself.

- c) Lastly, we have already emphasized that even five minutes of meditation or contemplation can be very beneficial.¹⁶ One of our team members uses red lights at traffic signals as an opportunity to meditate. What was, in the past, a frustrating experience—“stopped by another red light!”—has turned into an opportunity to improve well-being. Of course, practicing more than five minutes will produce even more positive results, but the main point is even small amounts of meditation or contemplation are worthwhile endeavors. There are many religious and spiritual resources for these practices, and they are becoming increasingly easy to find.

- 4) There appears to be a great deal of support and help that pastors, churches, and denominations can provide by working across what we called ecumenical

15 Csikszentmihalyi, M. (1997). *Finding flow: The psychology of engagement with everyday life*, New York: Basic Books; Csikszentmihalyi, M. and J. Hunter (2003). Happiness in everyday life: the uses of experience sampling. *Journal of Happiness Studies*, 4, 2, pp.185-199.

16 Resources from scientists include Kabat-Zin, J. (2001). *Full catastrophe living: using the wisdom of your body and mind to face stress, pain, and illness*, New York: Delta; Kabat-Zin, J. (2005). *Wherever you go, there you are: Mindfulness meditation in everyday life*. New York: Hyperion Books; and Zajonc, A. (2008). *Meditation as contemplative inquiry: When knowing becomes love*, New York: SteinerBooks.

boundaries in a new spirit of radical collaboration. Even informal “sharing” sessions could produce valuable new ideas, but more could be obtained by working together to solve difficult problems (e.g., improving pastor-congregation relationships) and develop effective new system-level initiatives (e.g., a truly effective pastor performance development program). Again, the Sustaining Pastoral Excellence (SPE) and Transition Into Ministry (TIM) programs sponsored by the Lilly Endowment are not only excellent examples of the power of this collaboration, but the output of these programs is also a treasure-trove of ideas that can lead to significant improvements in pastoral well-being.¹⁷ These resources might be best utilized in the context of what is known as “radical collaboration” where pastors, lay leaders, and denominational leaders can work together to imagine how the insights from these various resources can be turned into good practice.

- 5) We want to emphasize our belief that any initiative to bolster pastors’ well-being that does not account for its interconnected nature will likely fail to produce lasting improvements. Well-intentioned expenditures of resources

¹⁷ Useful resources include the books we referenced in our introduction, the Insights Into Religion gateway (www.religioninsights.org), the Fund for Theological Education’s TIM resources (<http://www.fteleaders.org/pages/TiM>), insights from Austin Presbyterian Seminary on SPE programs (http://www.austinseminary.edu/uploaded/continuing_education/pdf/SPE_Survey_Report_and_Analysis_April_2010.pdf), the Calvin College surveys about SPE programs (the 2011 report can be found at http://www.calvin.edu/admin/csr/projects/crcspe/spe_survey_report_2011.pdf), and the Duke Faith and Leadership initiative (<http://www.faithandleadership.com>).

might lead to short-run improvements, but they might also create negative side effects. For example, a change to the way local church or pastor effectiveness is assessed must at the very least take into account relationships between pastors and local churches, the resources of each local church, and system-level policies related to pastor pay, the way pastors are placed at local churches, and training opportunities. Measures of effectiveness that tap such things as changes in church membership or amounts received through weekly offerings (giving) are impacted as much by the actions of congregation members as they are by the actions of the pastor. In the best situations, pastors and members will work together to be more effective, but in less-than-ideal situations, additional pastor training along with sufficient congregation education might be needed to ensure that collaboration is high and that positive pastor-congregation relationships are maintained. Our experience suggests that, when new church or pastor effectiveness systems are put into place, pastors often bear the brunt of low effectiveness ratings.

- 6) Finally, we want to emphasize that, even at this relatively early stage in our research, the data are already clear that improving pastoral well-being will require several, perhaps many, system-level changes. By our use of the word “many,” we mean that there is no single change, or even a small set of changes, that will result in significant improvements in pastoral well-being.

For example, consider again the implementation of a new process for assessing pastoral effectiveness (these are

often couched as a process for improving local church effectiveness, but the focus of such programs often ends up being on the pastor who leads the church). Such programs can be highly-effective, but only if they are combined with (a) highly-effective pastoral training programs paired with (b) long-term coaching for pastors, (c) state-of-the-art educational and training programs that lay leaders of local church actually participate in and use, (d) provision of the financial and other resources that are necessary for local churches to actually undertake significant change, and most importantly, (e) a commitment by the denomination and its leaders to a long-term vision for improvement. Said differently, any significant change at the local church level will take significant time, sufficient resources, committed and capable lay leaders, strong and enduring support by denominational leaders, and well-trained, engaged, and dedicated local pastoral leaders. A pastoral effectiveness program on its own, no matter how well-designed, is unlikely to create the positive changes it was intended to produce, but it is likely to cause a myriad of unintended consequences, and our data already suggest one of these will be a significant decline in pastoral well-being.

Positive change does not come easily for individuals, nor does it come easily to organizations. At the Flourishing in Ministry Project, we have much to learn about what changes might be the most important, or which ones might lead to the quickest gains in pastoral well-being. We want to encourage pastors, local churches, and denominations to take the long

view of change. Rather than large-scale, more drastic changes, we think the state-of-science about pastoral well-being suggests that careful, measured initiatives to improve well-being are the best approach right now. The wrong changes can have unexpected and detrimental outcomes. Smaller changes can improve things, and they also tend to have fewer and less costly side-effects. Our recommendation is to build well-being through many small changes, and a few bigger ones.

Next steps in our research.

We are in the fourth year of this research project, and in many ways we feel that we have just started to understand the well-being of clergy. We have many aspirations for the future, but in this section we very briefly highlight the next major research initiatives that we will pursue in the months ahead.

- 1) More pastors! We want to expand the scope of our research to include pastors from more denominations, and pastors from a wider range of demographic groups and backgrounds. In the next months we will launch several large-scale survey studies that will bring a greater variety and diversity of pastors into our project, and we continue to look for opportunities to develop research partnerships with more judicatories, denominations, seminaries, and other organizations.
- 2) Spouses and partners. We will very actively seek the involvement of many more spouses and partners. We have much to learn about how a life in ministry shapes the well-being of clergy families.

Our current sample of spouses and partners is too small for us to analyze. We also hope to learn why spouses and partners have been reluctant to participate so that we can find better ways of making them feel welcome and comfortable. We need to hear from you!

- 3) Well-being of churches. We are currently working toward launching a new project that would allow pastors to invite the congregations of the churches they serve to participate in studies of well-being. These studies would allow individual parishioners to learn about their own daily happiness and thriving. For our purposes, we could explore how the well-being of pastors is related to the well-being of the congregations they lead. We want to understand whether flourishing pastors do, in fact, tend to foster flourishing congregations and similarly whether flourishing congregations foster high levels of flourishing among clergy.
- 4) Well-being and ministry effectiveness. In the months ahead we will also launch studies that allow us to explore how pastoral well-being is related to ministry effectiveness. Pastors who chose to participate will be able to invite members of their congregation to assess the pastor's effectiveness using one of the several high-quality tools that are currently available.¹⁸ We can then match this data, and the pastor's own self-assessment of effectiveness, with the pastor's well-being profile. These studies would provide

rich information about how well-being is related to important ministry outcomes, and individual pastors would be able to explore their own strengths in ministry as well as developmental opportunities they might pursue.

- 5) Daily life in ministry. We are very excited to launch studies that will allow us to explore the daily lives of pastors to understand the ebbs and flows of pastoral well-being. These daily life studies will be among the most important research we conduct, but they do require more involvement of pastors because we need richer data about the nuances of daily life. When combined with survey and interview data, we will be able to delve into the factors that foster or diminish well-being.
- 6) Narratives of life in ministry. Finally, we will also continue our project in which we work with pastors to collect rich stories of life in ministry. This narrative project will involve working very closely with pastors over months and, we hope, years so that we can gain deep insights into the richness of an unfolding life as a pastor.

Beyond these six projects, we have many more aspirations. For example, we hope to study seminarians to learn more about the early years in ministry. We need to work with individuals who have left ministry to learn more about factors which shaped their experiences. And, most important, we hope to study a group of pastors over many years so that we can continue to gain deeper and more useful insights into the well-being of clergy.

We will continue to post updates, research insights, and other information on our project web-site: flourishing.nd.edu. Please let us know

¹⁸ e.g, the Lewis Pastoral Leadership Inventory (<http://www.lpli.org>); Profiles of Ministry from the Association of Theological Schools (<http://www.ats.edu/Resources/Student/Pages/default.aspx>), the UMC measure we mentioned previously.

if we can help. Give us a call (574.631.4803), send us an email (happy@nd.edu), or stop by the campus of Notre Dame.

We hope you are flourishing!

*Please visit our website:
flourishing.nd.edu*



Flourishing in Ministry Project

website: flourishing.nd.edu

email: happy@nd.edu

phone: 574.631.4803