



FLOURISHING IN MINISTRY PROJECT

Ministry BC

Benchmarking Pastoral Work and
Wellbeing Before the Pandemic



2020 Matt Bloom

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Introduction

As we have been speaking with pastors throughout the coronavirus pandemic, we have heard a lot about about how ministry, pastoral work and their life is changing. Like many of these pastors, we wonder what the “new normal” will be like when the pandemic finally abates.

As part of this project, we are paying attention to how these changes are impacting the wellbeing of pastors and their families. How, for example, has on-line services changed the way pastors experience worship? How are pastors spending their time? How has ministry changed?

To answer these questions, and to track how pastoral wellbeing has changed, we needed to establish some benchmarks about ministry work and pastoral life before March 2020. This report is about life BC—before COVID.



BC Before COVID. In Mid-March of this year a new era began. Massive changes in work and life were underway within a few weeks, and we all knew that things would probably never be like they were **BC**.

At this point in time – July 2020 – we cannot know what the “new normal” will be like, or even when things will become newly normal. Even as we write this report, coronavirus cases are surging once again.

We know for sure that ministry work has changed dramatically as a result of the pandemic. Pastors are preaching to empty churches but full (or partially full) on-line video pews. Care ministry is completely different as pastors struggle to minister to sick and injured people whom cannot be visited in person. Pastors are improvising new ways of officiating at funerals, conducting weddings,

confirming new members. Ministry work, and pastoral life, have changed a lot in just a few months.

We are beginning to map how these changes are impacting pastors. To do this work, we needed to benchmark what some aspects of ministry life were like BC. We returned to several large surveys we conducted between 2015 and 2019. These were national surveys in which we asked questions from pastors across the spectrum of age, years of service, ministry contexts and from a wide variety of denominations. In the pages that follow, we share some important data from those surveys.

You might use this report to reflect on your own ministry and life as a pastor. How have things changed for you? Answering that question requires reflecting on how things were for you BC, and then how things are now. At several places in this report we offer some of our own reflections, based upon what we are hearing from pastors, about how things have changed BC. We hope you will find these helpful as you engage in your own reflections on life now, and what it might be like AP—after the pandemic

Denominational Representation in Surveys: (% of sample)

Catholic:	5.8%
Evangelical:	20.1%
Mainline Protestant:	50.7%
Historically Black:	5.9%
Pentecostal:	7.7%
Nondenominational:	9.1%

Pastor Characteristics: (% of sample)

Years of ministry service:

Less than one year:	4.6%
Two to five years:	13.0%
Six to ten years:	16.2%
Eleven to twenty years:	26.8%
More than twenty years:	39.7%

Black: 13.8%, Latinx: 3.8%, Native Peoples: 3.2%, White: 76.4%

Male: 70.6%

Characteristics of Ministry Work. Average % of weekly time on ministry activities. (Estimates of hours are based on a 40 hour work week)



Preaching and worship
average: 25% or about 10
hours, low=3%, high= 46%

Officiating at rituals and
sacraments: 7% or about 3
hours, low = 1%, high = 12%

Personal spiritual development: 10% or about 4 hours, low = 3%, high = 18%

Spiritual development of others: 12.5% or about 5 hours, low = 5% high = 20%

Communication and evangelism: 9.5% or about 4 hours, low = 4%, high = 14%

Leadership: 8% or about 3 hours, low = 4%, high = 18%

Congregational care: 14% or about 6 hours, low = 6%, high = 22%

Church and other administration: 12% or about 5 hours, low = 4%, high = 22%

Reflections:

We have heard many pastors say that tasks related to using information technology are now taking up a much greater amount of time. Many of these pastors also say they do not have sufficient knowledge or skill in this area, so these IT tasks are especially stressful. Pastors also share that COVID is interfering with their ability to provide congregational care. As a consequence, pastors are both worried about whether their church members are receiving adequate support, and grieving the loss of this important aspect of their ministry.

The picture that is emerging from these initial stories is that pastoral work is shifting, perhaps in fundamental ways, but this shift is opaque. Like tectonic plates moving imperceptibly below the ground on their way to

creating an earthquake, there seem to be deep changes underway as a consequence of the pandemic.

How will pastoral work change AP?

How will churches function AP?

What ministry activities are most prominent for you now?

How have changes in your ministry role effected your wellbeing?

Other Ministry Characteristics:

Paid days off each year: average = 27

Do you get at least one day off each week? 82% say yes

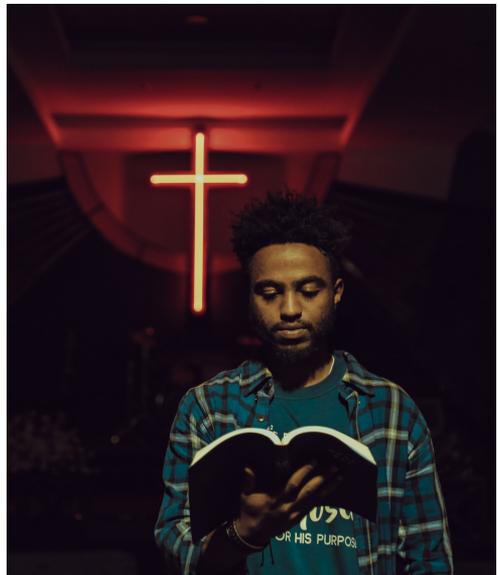
Does your church provide for sabbatical leave? No = 74%

Do you have an annual performance review? Yes = 65%

Who conducts this performance review:

67% pastor and church leaders

23% pastor and denom official



Do you work a second+ job, in addition to ministry? 26% say yes.

These jobs include truck, taxi and school bus driving; teaching of various kinds; accounting; information technology work; being an artist; construction, auto repair and other trademark; chaplaincy; managerial roles in companies; roles in a variety of service industry jobs and more.

Financial Matters:

45% of pastors are regularly concerned about their personal financial condition.

35% of pastors report they do not make enough money to provide adequately for themselves and their dependents.

30% of pastors say it is very difficult for them and their families to live on their current income.

Reflections:

Many local churches are experiencing severe declines in tithing and giving, leaving these churches in a precarious financial condition. This, of course, threatens the pastor's salary and benefits. We expect that many more pastors will have to find a second job to support themselves and their families. This, in turn, will likely increase their stress, create more work-family

imbalances, and further threaten these pastors' wellbeing.

Will denominations offer increased support for pastors?

Will local church members help provide financial resources?

Will bi-vocationalism become the norm for most pastors? If so, what are the consequences for pastoral work and pastor wellbeing?

Congregational Characteristics:

Is your congregation willing to try new kinds of ministry?: 41% say yes

“Only 41% of churches are willing to consider new kinds of ministry and worship.”

Is your congregation excited about future?: 56% say yes

Are church leaders willing to change church?: 53% say yes

Does your congregation have a clear vision for the church and its ministries?: 37% say yes

Is your congregation willing to try new worship?: 35% say yes

Has your congregation experienced experienced major conflict of some kind in the past year?: 20% say yes

Has your congregation experienced experienced minor conflict of some kind in the past year?: 55% say yes

Reflections:

Some of the stories we are hearing are very troublesome. Consider the female pastor who, following the mandates from her state's governor, declined to hold worship services in the church building. Her church fired her as a result. Or the pastor who received almost daily emails chiding her for failing to create an on-line Sunday school program for *all* of the church's children, from infant to high school. Curriculum development requires specialized skills that few pastors possess.

Other pastors tell us that their churches have become more mission oriented and have developed new programs to help people in their community that have been especially hard-hit by the pandemic.

What are the long-term consequences of the pandemic for your church?

How is your church responding?

We think it is likely that some churches will become more active, especially in their local communities, as they find new ways to minister to others. We also think some churches will become more insular after the pandemic ends as they regroup and become more committed to needs and desires internal to their church.

How do you think your church will respond, over the long-run, when the pandemic begins to wane?



Pastor-Congregation Relationships:

Do you, the pastor, get support from your congregation when you are experiencing high stress?: 35% say yes

Do you, the pastor, get developmental support from congregation?: 46% say yes

Do you feel fully accepted by congregation?: 56% say yes

Does your congregation truly cares about you?: 59% say yes

Is there a good match in your ministry values and the church's values?: 76% say yes

Ministry Life and Pastoral Wellbeing

Does your ministry work regularly create imbalances with your home life?: 63% say yes

Does your home life regularly create imbalances with your ministry work?: 23% say yes

How often are you exhausted by your ministry work?: 51% say yes, at least several times a month

How often are you emotionally drained by your ministry work?: 46% say yes, at several times a month



Over half of all pastors say that, at least several times a month, they are exhausted by their ministry work.

Ministry Life

In most ways my life in ministry is close to my ideal: 53% agree, 23% disagree, 24% are neutral

The conditions of my ministry life are excellent: 34% agree, 22% disagree, 33% are neutral

The conditions of my ministry life are excellent: 34% agree, 22% disagree, 33% are neutral

My ministry work inspires me: 87% agree, 3% disagree, 10% are neutral

I am enthusiastic about my ministry work: 85% agree, 3% disagree, 12% are neutral

Even before COVID, more than one-quarter of all pastors say that they seriously considered leaving ministry in the past year.

Is Ministry Your Future?

In the past year, have you:

Doubted your call to ministry?: 19% say yes, at least a few times

Seriously considered leaving ministry?: 27% say yes, at least a few times

Reflections:

We are very concerned that the pandemic may lead to a significant increase in pastors who leave ministry. Some may leave because their relationship with church members eroded during the pandemic. Others because the opportunities and demands of ministry work changed in unfavorable ways. Still others may leave because their ministry context—what their church expects of its pastors and the kinds of ministry the church seeks post-pandemic—is fundamentally different. Some may leave simply because pastoral work is no longer financial viable for them. After all, they have bills to pay, mortgages or rent payments, futures to plan for, just like the rest of us.

What do you think ministry life will look like for you post-pandemic? What might you do now to prepare for those changes? What might your church, especially its leaders, do to prepare for life AP, after the pandemic?

What Does the Future Look Like to You?

I am very optimistic about the future: 82% say yes

There are times when things look pretty bleak and hopeless to me: 25% say yes

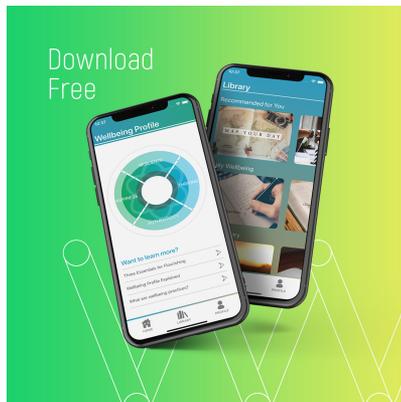
Reflections:

In many ways, these are the questions we are most interested in learning about in the future. Will more pastors be hopeful or hopeless after the pandemic? Will pastors be a source of optimism for their churches? We

have always turned to our pastors to show us the way of hope and faith in the darkest moments of our lives. How can pastors be ready for the “new normal” that will follow the pandemic. What can local churches do to help support and prepare themselves, and their pastors for life after the pandemic (AP)?

How the Flourishing in Ministry Project is Responding

We have launched a brand new, much improved mobile application that is specifically designed to help pastors and other ministry workers. Using this app,



you can take our wellbeing assessment and receive your own, personal wellbeing profile. This will allow you to see where you particular strengths and needs are.

We also provide a new and growing set of wise wellbeing practices, offered by leading experts including Barbara Brown Taylor, Parker Palmer, Robert Franklin and more. Each practice is evidence-

based, meaning there is solid research to support its efficacy.

The app also provides opportunities for you to track your daily wellbeing, and also to track how your overall wellbeing might be changing over time.

Because of the generous support of the Lilly Endowment, these apps are available free.

Please visit our website at flourishinginministry.org to find out more.