

Statistics on Pastors

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What is Going on with the Pastors in America?

Here are some startling statistics on pastors; *FASICLD* (*Francis A. Schaeffer Institute of Church Leadership Development*). This quest started in 1989 as a *Fuller Institute* project that was picked up by *FASICLD* in 1998.

After over 18 years of researching pastoral trends and many of us being a pastor, we have found (this data is backed up by other studies) that pastors are in a dangerous occupation! We are perhaps the single most stressful and frustrating working profession, more than medical doctors, lawyers, politicians or cat groomers (hey they have claws). We found that over 70% of pastors are so stressed out and burned out that they regularly consider leaving the ministry (I only feel that way on Mondays). Thirty-five to forty percent of pastors actually do leave the ministry, most after only five years. On a personal note, out of the 12 senior pastors that I have served under directly, two have passed away, and four have left the ministry totally—that is, not only are they no longer in the pulpit, but they no longer even attend a church. And, I run into ex-pastors on a regular basis at conferences and speaking engagements; makes me wonder “what’s up with that,” as my kids would say.

From our recent research we did to retest our data, 1050 pastors were surveyed from two pastor’s conferences held in Orange County and Pasadena, Ca—416 in 2005, and 634 in 2006 (I conducted a similar study for the *Fuller Institute* in the late 80s with a much greater sampling).

- Of the one thousand fifty (1,050 or 100%) pastors we surveyed, every one of them had a close associate or seminary buddy who had left the ministry because of burnout, conflict in their church, or from a moral failure.
- Nine hundred forty-eight (948 or 90%) of pastors stated they are frequently fatigued, and worn out on a weekly and even daily basis (did not say *burned out*).
- Nine hundred thirty-five, (935 or 89%) of the pastors we surveyed also considered leaving the ministry at one time. Five hundred ninety, (590 or 57%) said they would leave if they had a better place to go—including secular work.
- Eighty- one percent (81%) of the pastors said there was no regular discipleship program or effective effort of mentoring their people or teaching them to deepen their Christian formation at their church (remember these are the Reformed and Evangelical—not the mainline pastors!). **(This is Key)**
- Eight hundred eight (808 or 77%) of the pastors we surveyed felt they did not have a good marriage!

- Seven hundred ninety (790 or 75%) of the pastors we surveyed felt they were unqualified and/or poorly trained by their seminaries to lead and manage the church or to counsel others. This left them disheartened in their ability to pastor.
- Seven hundred fifty-six (756 or 72%) of the pastors we surveyed stated that they only studied the Bible when they were preparing for sermons or lessons. This left only 38% who read the Bible for devotions and personal study.
- Eight hundred two (802 or 71%) of pastors stated they were burned out, and they battle depression beyond fatigue on a weekly and even a daily basis.
- Three hundred ninety-nine (399 or 38%) of pastors said they were divorced or currently in a divorce process.
- Three hundred fifteen (315 or 30%) said they had either been in an ongoing affair or a one-time sexual encounter with a parishioner.
- Two hundred seventy (270 or 26%) of pastors said they regularly had personal devotions and felt they were adequately fed spirituality. (**This is Key**).
- Two hundred forty-one (241 or 23%) of the pastors we surveyed said they felt happy and content on a regular basis with who they are in Christ, in their church, and in their home!
- Of the pastors surveyed, they stated that a mean (average) of only 25% of their church's membership attended a Bible Study or small group at least twice a month. The range was 11% to a max of 40%, a median (the center figure of the table) of 18% and a mode (most frequent number) of 20%. This means over 75% of the people who are at a "good" evangelical church do not go to a Bible Study or small group (that is not just a book or curriculum study, but where the Bible is opened and read, as well as studied), (**This is Key**). (I suspect these numbers are actually lower in most evangelical and Reformed churches because the pastors that come to conferences tend to be more interested in the teaching and care of their flock than those who usually do not attend.)

Here is research that we distilled from *Barna*, *Focus on the Family*, and *Fuller Seminary*, all of which backed up our findings, and additional information from reviewing others' research:

- Fifteen hundred pastors leave the ministry each month due to moral failure, spiritual burnout, or contention in their churches.
- Fifty percent of pastors' marriages will end in divorce.
- Eighty percent of pastors feel unqualified and discouraged in their role as pastor.

- Fifty percent of pastors are so discouraged that they would leave the ministry if they could, but have no other way of making a living.
- Eighty percent of seminary and Bible school graduates who enter the ministry will leave the ministry within the first five years.
- Seventy percent of pastors constantly fight depression.
- Almost forty percent polled said they have had an extra-marital affair since beginning their ministry.
- Seventy percent said the only time they spend studying the Word is when they are preparing their sermons (**This is Key**).

Most statistics say that 60% to 80% of those who enter the ministry will not still be in it 10 years later, and only a fraction will stay in it as a lifetime career. Many pastors—I believe over 90 percent—start off right with a true call and the enthusiasm and the endurance of faith to make it, but something happens to derail their train of passion and love for the call.

Focus on the Family has reported (<http://www.parsonage.org/>) that we in the United States lose a pastor a day because he seeks an immoral path instead of God's, seeking intimacy where it must not be found. *F.O.F.* statistics state that 70% of pastors do not have close personal friends, and no one in whom to confide. They also said about 35% of pastors personally deal with sexual sin. In addition, that 25% of pastors are divorced. The statistics I had with church growth resources is even higher. Pastors who tend to be very educated seem to have the ability to embark in sin on Saturday and preach the Word on Sunday without thinking anything is wrong.

Remember, Pride and Arrogance will be the diving board that will spring the pastor into the pool of sin and cause a church to fight amongst themselves!

Out of the 1050 pastors we surveyed during two pastors conferences held in Pasadena, California, 825, or 78% (326 in 2005 and 499 in 2006) said they were forced to resign from a church at least once. Sixty-three percent (63%) said they had been fired from their pastoral position at least twice. In the survey, we asked why they were fired—from the reasons given by the church board versus what they felt the reason was. We laid out 15 categories with a blank space to fill out what we may have missed: *poor leadership, conflict with key staff or lay leadership, gossip, lack of funding, doctrinal divide, hardship on family, not connecting with membership, power plays, church council refusing to resolve conflict, resistance to their teaching, resistance to their leadership style or vision, failure to teach biblically, poor people skills, failure to follow job description, inappropriate relationship, or other sin.* They gave us a top five main explanations on a scale of one to five, with few (8%) reporting on any of the other categories. These stats are based on number one response; at the same time, over 70% of pastors stated three of these five reasons. Here is the order (these findings have

been retested and back up in internet polls done since 1998, and church survey studies done since 1980:

1. Four hundred twelve (412 or 52%) stated that the number one reason was organizational and control issues. A conflict arose that forced them out based on who was going to lead and manage the church—pastor, elder, key lay person, faction, ...
2. One hundred ninety (190 or 24%) stated that the number one reason was their church was already in such a significant degree of conflict, the pastor's approach could not resolve it (over 80% of pastors stated this as number 2 if not already stated as number one, and for the rest, it was number 3!).
3. One hundred nineteen (119 or 14%) stated the number one reason to be that the church was resistance to their leadership, vision, teaching, or to change, or that their leadership was too strong or too fast.
4. Sixty four (64 or 8%) stated the number one reason to be that the church was not connecting with them on a personal level or they could not connect with them, or the church over-admired the previous pastor and would not accept them.
5. Forty (40 or 5%) stated that the number one reason was not having the appropriate relational or connecting skills as a pastor. (It is interesting that no one mentioned lack of teaching ability—only that their teaching was not accepted. Could this be pride?)

The other significant study of pastors that held similar results as ours was conducted by psychologist Richard Blackmon (with ties to Fuller Seminary and Dr. Archibald Hart), also reported by the Los Angeles Times newspaper. In 1985 as well as more recently too, Blackmon surveyed one thousand pastors from four major denominations in California, USA. His research, which was ongoing up to 2004, revealed that over 75% of ministers are extremely or highly stressed. He even found that 31.75% of the clergy surveyed had sexual intercourse with a church member—who was not their spouse! In addition, he found that 30% to 40% of ministers ultimately drop out of the ministry. His research goes on to say the average insurance costs to churches for dealing with mental breakdowns with clergy is four percent higher than any secular industry. Blackmon states that the significance of the stress is mainly based in the areas of personal finances, church finances, building issues, recruitment of volunteers, counseling issues, and visitation. Sermon preparation and teaching seem to be last on his list!

The stress, according to Blackmon, is a primary result of the continual, intense, care responsibility of pastors compared to a medical doctor who will see a terminally ill patient for an hour or so, then see them again in a few weeks. He suggests that the pastor must set personal limits for himself to maintain balance, develop relationships outside of the church, and to be in a support group with other pastors. Very good advice!

The problem, as we have found (and I agree with Blackmon, but as a symptom and not the prime issue), is that people lose focus on what the mission and central theme of the Church is. Both pastor and churchgoer miss the main theme of what a church is about,

which is to know and worship Christ as Lord. So, when there is no growth from the pastor's personal life, no discipleship, few people in Bible Study, then there is no mission or appropriate purpose for that church, and there are no goals; therefore, there's nothing really to do effectively. The result is the "shearing of the sheep." Instead of being fed, they will feed upon one another, as well as the pastor, in a feast of conflict and strife. Since the church has nothing to do, then all the energies are turned inward to attack one another. I guess it beats being bored.

When I was with another church growth consulting firm, we did a major study of pastors and came up with some astounding statistics. We found that 90% of pastors work more than 50 hours a week. One out of three pastors state that being in the ministry is clearly hazardous for their families. One out of three pastors felt totally burned out within the first five years of ministry. Over 70% of pastors do not have anyone they would consider to be a friend, and hardly any pastors had any close friends. Ninety percent (90%) of pastors feel they were not adequately trained to cope with ministry coordination and the demands of the congregation. Seventy-five percent (75%) of pastors experience a significant crisis that they faced due to stress in the ministry (*Fuller Institute, 1989-1992*). We at the *FASICLD* retested that data by various means starting in 1998 and also retested the results in an internet survey form several times over the last eight years. We found it has slightly worsened. Most pastors now work up to and more than 60 hours a week. Hence, why the divorce rate among pastors is rising and pastor's children rarely stay in the church or keep their faith. In both studies, over 40% of the pastors reported serious conflicts with their parishioners every month. This leaves pastors physically tired, spiritually weary, and even distant from God! Thus, they cannot properly minister or connect with their flock.

There was a poll taken by a sociologist named Jeffrey Haddan ("Prayer Net" Newsletter, Nov. 13, 1998) in which he polled over 7,400 Protestant ministers. He found that 13% to 51% of ministers, depending on their denomination, accepted Jesus' physical resurrection as a fact. His poll states between 19% and 60% of ministers believe in the virgin birth of Jesus. The poll goes on to say between 67% and 95% of ministers believe that the Scriptures are true in faith, history, and practice. These statistics are extremely despairing. What do these ministers think they are doing? What is their purpose? And, what are they trying to accomplish in God's Holy Church? If you are the church leadership and you do not believe in the tenets of Scripture, you have no business being in leadership and certainly no business being the Shepherd and teacher of the flock. What you are is a wolf in sheep's clothing, which will be harshly judged by God.

We at *FASICLD* conducted a simpler internet poll in 2005 of 2,245 pastors and another 1050 in person by our surveys in pastor's conferences as seen above. Because we are reaching Reformed and conservative Evangelicals, the stats are very different. We found that over 90% of pastors polled believe in the resurrection, virgin birth, and the validity of Scriptures (we did not get into the various aspects of inerrancy). The significant problem we found is the "buzz" or willingness to go beyond belief into trust, and then model that to their congregations. Being beat up in the ministry wears them down and derails their focus.

The result of both studies is this: the pastor must be theologically sound. A pastor who does not have a good theology is like an engineer who does not know math; he or she would totally be unable to do the job of designing. A pastor that is not theologically sound is like a surgeon who does not know anatomy and physiology; would you want him or her to operate on you? Would you want a lawyer representing you who does not know the law or the court system? When we are in the pulpit proclaiming the truth of Christ, it better be just that—the truth of Christ, not our inclinations, new ideas, or the latest trend in theological thinking. All these new waves of theology just confuse and alienate the body of Christ, who are the parishioners we serve and are called to protect from false doctrine, rather leading to God's truth. Most of these new ideas keep changing and conflicting, and only last a few years until the next latest theological fad comes into play. Why play with the fire of that game when God's truth remains the same and only our creative thinking keeps changing? It's good to be creative as long as it does not go against the teachings of Scripture!

The results of the survey are that pastors face more conflict, more anger, and more expectations than ever before. At the same time, they work long hours and have little pay, little reward, and produce their own dysfunctional families because of their absence. And, to top it off, they are not being adequately trained nor fed spiritually. I need to state clearly that this is not true of all pastors; there are many who are excellent in obeying their call, pastoring great churches, and being there for their families who are growing in the Lord. And, as a pastor, I must be aware of this so I do not fall in these traps myself. The statistics tell us that many more pastors have not learned to balance family and ministry or adequately deal with the immense struggles of the job. Thus, many are not able to lead their church where it needs to go because they have not been where they are seeking to lead others in growth or in spiritual formation. I totally sympathize with them, yet I call pastors to wake up to what they are doing, and why they are doing it. At the same time, *hey church, take care of and respect your pastor!*

The bottom line is this: if you are a pastor your job is to serve Christ first and foremost! Thus, it is imperative that we do not become thoughtless or uncaring concerning the buildup and practice of our personal faith. In so doing, we are also to be aware of and embrace the opportunities Christ has and will still bring for us. Our focus must be on the main thing and Christ is the main thing and at the same intention we are not to negate or neglect our personal faith development or our family. If we do, we personally fail and thus our churches will fail too and our family fails and we create the massive destruction, conflict, chaos and strife that has become so rampant in so many churches. We are called to do the opposite to discord and conflict, we are called to bring cohesion and community and show the character and love of Christ first to ourselves, then our family and then our church. In so doing we bring growth, maturity and love, being in and practicing “true spirituality!”

If we do not have a desire to pursue the call of God, we have to ask ourselves *why* and *what is in the way*. Why are we in ministry? We have to ask, *what is the role of pride and the desire of sin and how is it blocking us from proclaiming Christ as a pastor?* Sometimes, we may not recognize sin and will perhaps rationalize it away. This

happens especially when solid biblical theology or teaching is not being rooted in us and not thus being taught from us, then our churches become just social clubs of gossip and contention or entertainment and not the real effectual Church of Christ where He is model and shown as Lord. Remember, our election is proven by our obedience, fruit, and growth in Christ!

As pastors, it is our call and duty to be on guard against the erosion of biblical values and damage to our and our churches beliefs and biblical mindset (Psalm 123:3; Mark 4:19)!

Remember, churches fail because we as pastors fail; we tend to place our needs and desires over the Lord's. It is His Church and we are His servant. Let our focus be on the right target—that is, His Way and not ours! We are called to a higher purpose. We are not called to ourselves. We are to lead others to Him, not to our self. Ministry is a wondrous call, it can be joyful and fulfilling; it is also a dangerous thing because we are before a Holy God. Yes we have grace, but we have responsibility too!

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