

Information for Your Present and Future Needs



RESEARCH

A Troubled Profession?

*Episcopal Clergy and Vocation
at the Turn of the Millennium*

Dr. Matthew J. Price
*Church Pension Group
Office of Research*

A Troubled Profession?

Episcopal Clergy and Vocation at the Turn of the Millennium

I. Introduction: A Troubled Profession?

In the spring of 1999, the Lilly Endowment, troubled by various signs of weakness within the ordained ministry, awarded Dr. Jackson W. Carroll of the Duke University Divinity School a substantial grant to fund a project that would identify key areas in which the lives of clergy were troubled and would discover new and innovative patterns of congregational leadership. The project was named *Pulpit and Pew: Research on Pastoral Leadership*. A centerpiece of this project was a multi-denominational, international survey of clergy. A national random sample of 1,000 congregational leaders was drawn for *Pulpit and Pew* which would likely have drawn fewer than 50 Episcopal rectors. Thus the Church Pension Fund agreed to make possible a substantial over-sample of Episcopal rectors.¹ In the late spring of 2001, surveys were sent out to 1,200 rectors and 687 were returned. Considering that the survey was 14 pages long and contained almost 500 questions, this response rate is outstanding. I am extremely grateful to all the clergy who took the time to fill out such a lengthy questionnaire. From this study there are ten major findings:

- The modal type of Episcopal rector is still demographically traditional, ordained before 35, male, and Caucasian, but the demographic trends among recent ordinands point to a significant change in the composition of the clergy.
- Both region and background play a role in determining the type of parish in which someone will work. There are major regional differences in the demographics and career patterns of clergy; this is particularly true between the South and the rest of the country.
- The clergy are frustrated by the gap between what they would like to do in their daily work lives and what they actually do. They would like to more “mission”-oriented work and less institutional maintenance. Moreover, doing mission-oriented work makes a real difference and is critically important in a world of dynamic equilibrium.
- We found fewer concerns about money than we expected, but more concerns about time. With the important contribution of spousal salaries, clergy appear to have exchanged stress about money for stress about time.

- Women clergy with children are under particular stress due to being the “second career” in the household, a pattern that will, in all likelihood, spread to male clergy with the growing importance of spousal salaries.
- Clergy suffer from problems of poor health and are overweight in numbers that are disproportionate compared to other professionals. These problems have a significant effect on their congregations.
- A rector’s capacity to lead and, in particular, to execute rather than just inspire a vision for a congregation, is critical to the growth and health of their churches.
- The financial circumstances of a congregation and its surrounding community, along with stress, wellness, and leadership capacities, are all related in positive and negative cycles, making patterns of growth and decline more pronounced and unlikely to respond to “magic bullet” solutions.
- This report recommends that those clergy who are placed in particularly difficult parishes receive substantial diocesan vocational support.
- In the conclusion we return to the Lilly Endowment’s central question: whether the ministry is a troubled profession. The answer is that it is not so much troubled as idiosyncratic. The question then arises: is the church up to the challenge of both selection and preparation of those who will be asked to spend their lives in an idiosyncratic profession in a world of dynamic equilibrium?

Before we go into detail about each of these findings, we will first explore some of the background for ministry today, explaining the Lilly Endowment’s initial concerns and the questions with which the *Pulpit and Pew* project originated.

II. Where We Stand Today: Clergy Wellness in an Era of Dynamic Equilibrium

If there are two works that defined *zeitgeist* for the mainline churches in the aftermath of the upheavals of the 1960s they would be Dean Kelley’s 1972 book, *Why Conservative Churches Are Growing*, and Jackson Carroll and Robert Wilson’s 1978 book, *The Clergy Job Market*. During the 1970s and 1980s, The Episcopal Church saw itself as part of a larger narrative of the decline of the mainline American Protestant church. For clergy, this sense of impending institutional breakdown came into sharp relief with the publication of Carroll and Wilson’s book. A rising number of new clergy ordained each year, coupled with declining church membership, fueled Robert Wilson’s statement, “There will be an Episcopal priest for every lay member... in the year 2004.”² Today we are in a different world, and, while it is not one of large-scale growth in the Church, it is one characterized by a small but steady national increase in attendance at Episcopal congregations. This relative stability, however, may only be true from a big-picture perspective. The life of the Church from the ground up could better be described by what the Rev. Dr. William Sachs, previously of the Episcopal Church Foundation, has described as “dynamic equilibrium.”

What does this “dynamic equilibrium” look like? It is a church situated in a religious landscape that is extremely fluid and characterized by a lessening of enduring ties to denominational identities and structures, both by the congregations as entities relating to dioceses and by individuals in the pews as they relate to their congregation.³ The evolution of the person in the pew from *dweller* to *seeker* and the move away in church statistics from counting members to counting attendance both speak to a world of looser denominational ties. These looser horizontal ties have come at the same time as looser vertical ties so that clergy operate in a world of an empowered laity in a church that emphasizes the ministry of all the baptized. Ironically, clergy thus live in a world in which the laity simultaneously have more power and responsibility, but less investment and loyalty to the institution over which they have so much more control. This is not necessarily all bad news. A world of seekers provides many more opportunities for Episcopal congregations to grow in areas of the country where Episcopalians have not traditionally had a strong presence, just as it means that historic churches can no longer rely upon being part of the “establishment.” And where clergy and laity find a true synergy of energies and responsibilities, the result can be a congregation of tremendous vitality. Thus while some congregations are indeed declining, many others are experimenting and expanding.

Such a landscape presents new opportunities and challenges for clergy, in some ways more challenging than the decline narrative of recent past. While certainly depressing, the decline narrative at least provided clergy with an explanation of why the health and vitality of their congregations did not match their hopes and aspirations. More importantly, it located the cause of their predicament in forces beyond their control. In a situation of dynamic equilibrium, I would argue, clergy perceptions of themselves change to one in which they can affect the destiny of their congregations, but they see no well-defined formulas of how that might happen, a combination that introduces uncertainties and raises anxiety levels. From a diocesan and national perspective the world has also become harder to predict. The decline narrative of the 1970s and 1980s created a straightforward imperative to restrict the supply of clergy, particularly young clergy. A situation of dynamic equilibrium, with pronounced regional and local variations in congregational growth, makes predicting future clergy demand much harder. Thus the issue facing the Church is not simply one of adjusting course back towards encouraging more ordinations. The Church has a responsibility to make sure that those whom we prepare for ordination are ready for the Church they will be serving and ensure that those who are serving the Church currently have the resources, training, and support to meet the challenges and take advantage of the opportunities offered by today’s religious environment.

III. Who Are Our Clergy? Constructing a Composite Sketch

Patterns of ordination have been changing dramatically over the last 25 years, with the ordination of women and the entry of second-career clergy into the ministry. To what degree are these changes in patterns of ordination reflected in patterns of congregational leadership? An analysis of the respondents in comparison with data held on the total population of Episcopal rectors collected by the Church Pension Fund of The Episcopal Church shows that on key measures the respondents closely resemble the overall sample population.

Gender	Pension Fund Data	Pulpit and Pew Survey
Male	79.8%	80.6%
Female	18.6%	17.9%
Missing data	1.6%	1.5%
Compensation	Pension Fund Data	Pulpit and Pew Survey
Male	\$57,369	\$56,794
Female	\$48,645	\$48,957
Age	Pension Fund Data	Pulpit and Pew Survey
Male	54.4	53.1
Female	54.0	53.0

Table 1. Comparison of clergy respondents with sample population.

These points of comparison gave us high degree of confidence in the veracity of our findings. If we create a composite sketch of the clergy, at first sight, we can see that the typical rector in this population still adheres to the “traditional” model of a clergy career. Looking at the male rectors, who represent just over 80 percent of the respondents, their average age of ordination was 31, and they have been stipendiary priests for an average of 21 years. Almost three-quarters of the male rectors are over 50 years of age and approximately 95 percent of all rectors in the sample are white, and over 80 percent of the rectors grew up in households with a parent who had a professional or managerial career and were thus firmly in the middle class. With 61 percent of all the respondents being males who were ordained before the age of 35, the traditional demographic profile of clergy is well represented.

Nevertheless, it is clear that the clergy population is in a process of transition. Respondents ordained in the 1990s are significantly different from those ordained in the 1960s. While 100 percent of those ordained in the 1960s were men, 41 percent of the respondents ordained in the 1990s were women. Significant changes have also taken place in the average age of ordination with a major influx of second-career clergy in the last 20 years. While the average age of respondents ordained in the 1960s was 26, for those ordained in the 1990s it was 41. These older ordinands differ from traditional ordinands in certain significant ways. As can be seen from figure 1, older ordinands, both male and female, are less likely to have grown up in The Episcopal Church.

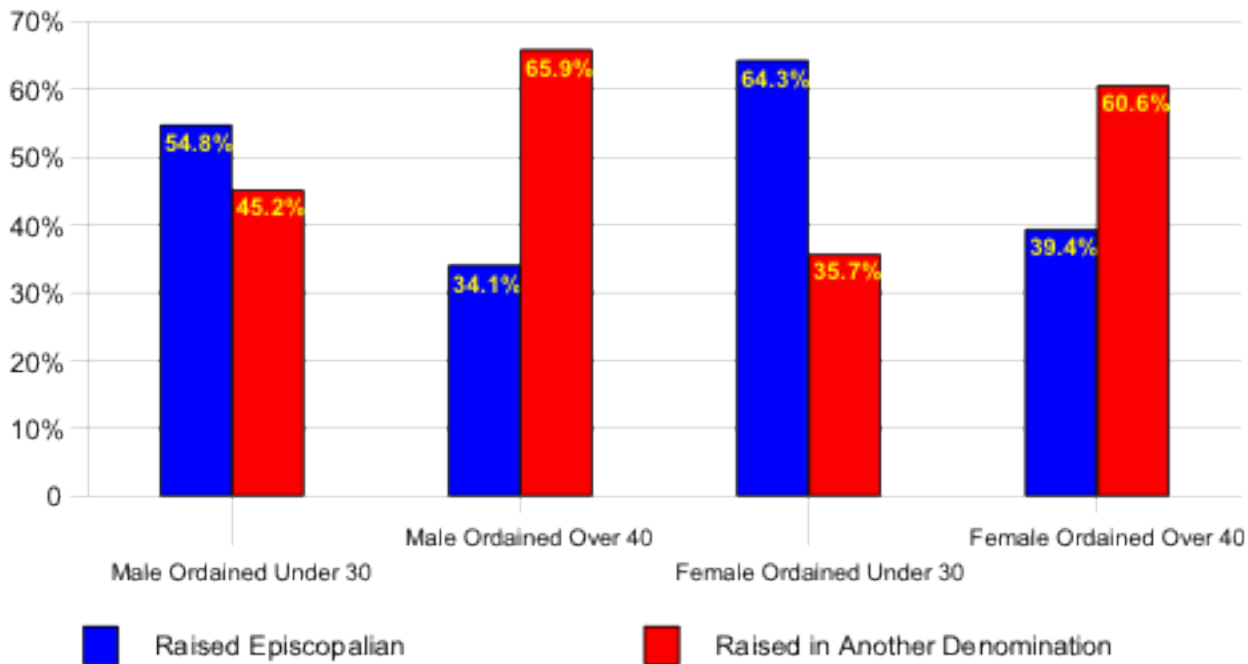


Figure 1. Comparing denomination of origin and age ordained.

Fifty-three percent of the male respondents attended Episcopal seminaries, as opposed to 40 percent of female clergy, with the highest percentage of those attending Episcopal seminaries being first-career male ordinands. There has also been some change in the class backgrounds of those who have entered the ordained ministry due to second-career ordinations, although the picture is somewhat mixed, differing significantly for men and women. As can be seen in figure 2, while it is generally true that, based on their father's occupation, Episcopal clergy are drawn from a fairly narrow social band, older male ordinands have brought some greater socioeconomic diversity to the clergy population, although late-career female ordinands have backgrounds that are, on average, of a higher economic class than even the traditional clergy population.

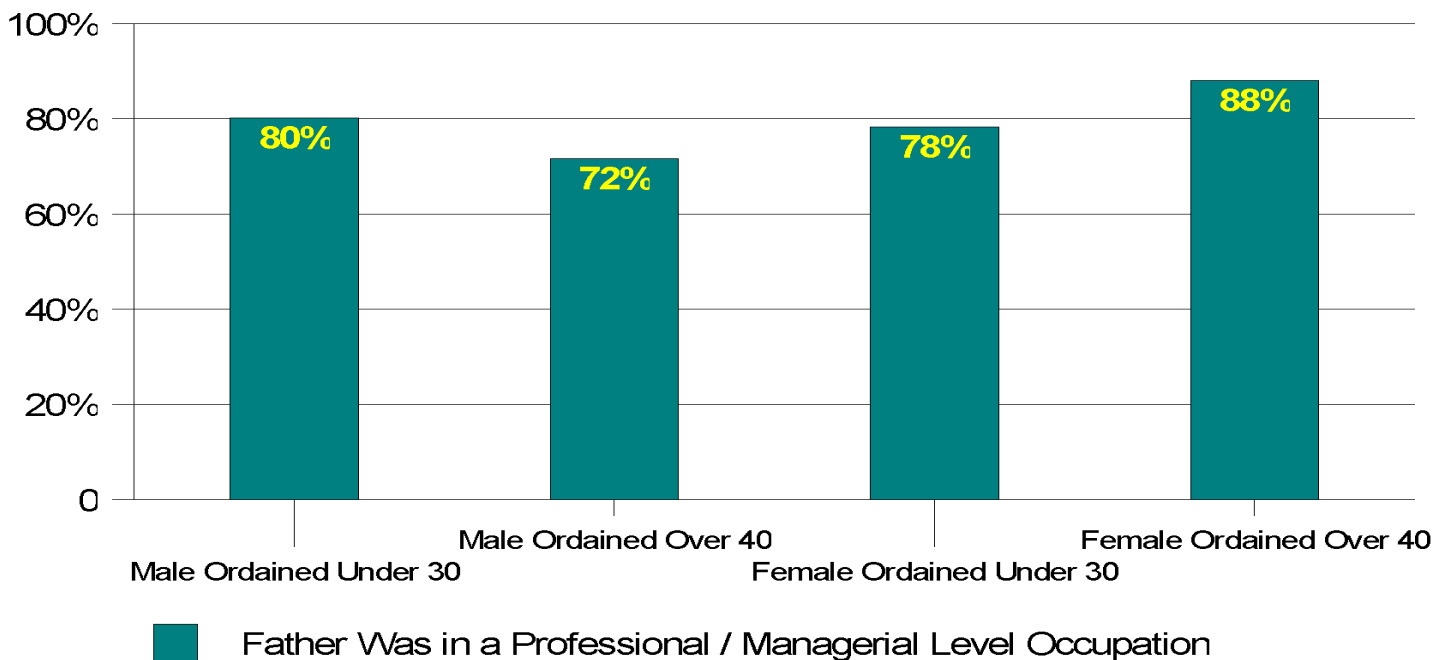


Figure 2. Percentage of ordinands coming from the professional/managerial class.

In certain respects, traditional-profile ordinands and those who break the mold show basic similarities. Rectors, as a group, show low levels of racial and ethnic diversity and this has not been altered by the entry of older ordinands or women into the ranks of the ordained. Interestingly, age of ordination differs more than age of call to the ministry, pointing to a pattern of early call/late vocation among many second-career ordinands. Among those clergy who were ordained after 40 years of age, almost 60 percent reported that they received a call to ordained ministry before they were 25 years old. The average age that all respondents reported as receiving their call to ministry was 20 years old for men and 28 for women. Another characteristic common to the clergy is church attendance when young. Roughly 80 percent of the clergy report that they attended church on a weekly basis, a figure that makes them different from most of those who sit in the pews. This high level of church attendance was true for clergy regardless of age at ordination or gender; Baby Boomers were slightly less likely to have been weekly church attendees than the Generation X or Silent Generation clergy, but the difference is only 6 percent.

One area in which the “traditional” profile of clergy is changing significantly is in patterns of marriage. Eighty-one percent of the clergy are married, but behind that figure are some significant trends. Overall, 25.8 percent of clergy have experienced divorce at some point. While the proportion of married male clergy is higher, at almost 86 percent as compared to just 63 percent of female clergy, this gap is not driven primarily by a difference in divorce rates between male and female clergy. As can be seen in table 2, male clerics have a higher level of remarriage after divorce and thus total divorce rates only differ by 5.4 percent for men and women. In the over-55 age category, one-third of clergy have been divorced. The proportion of clergy who have been divorced is higher for early-ordained male clergy than second-career male clergy, while for women clergy the pattern is significantly reversed, with early-ordained women clergy having the lowest rate of divorce of any group and women ordained over 40 years of age the highest. Eighty-nine percent of male clergy and 78 percent of female clergy have children, with roughly one-third having children at home.

Marital Status	Male	Female
Never married	4.4%	8.2%
In first marriage	64.9%	49.2%
Divorced or separated	5.6%	17.2%
Widowed	0.5%	6.6%
Remarried after death of spouse	1.8%	0.0%
Remarried after divorce	19.1%	13.9%
In a committed relationship	3.6%	4.9%
Total	100.0%	100.0%

Table 2. Clergy marital status.

Another pattern that has changed fundamentally for all groups is spousal employment. Almost all married clergy have spouses who work and the great majority of these spouses work in administrative, business, or professional fields that mean that they are roughly equivalent in social status to clergy. Perhaps the most significant finding is that the “clergy wife,” namely the spouse who works almost exclusively from the home, has almost disappeared and only accounts for 9 percent of female spouses of male clergy. The figure is only raised to

12 percent if the sample is confined to those male clergy families with children in the home.

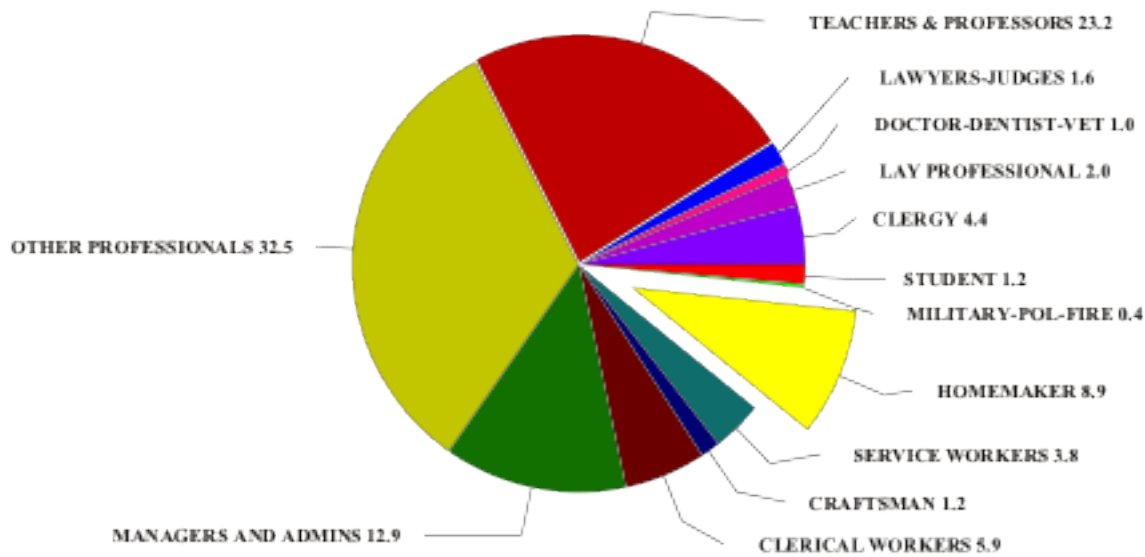


Figure 3. Female spouses of male clergy.

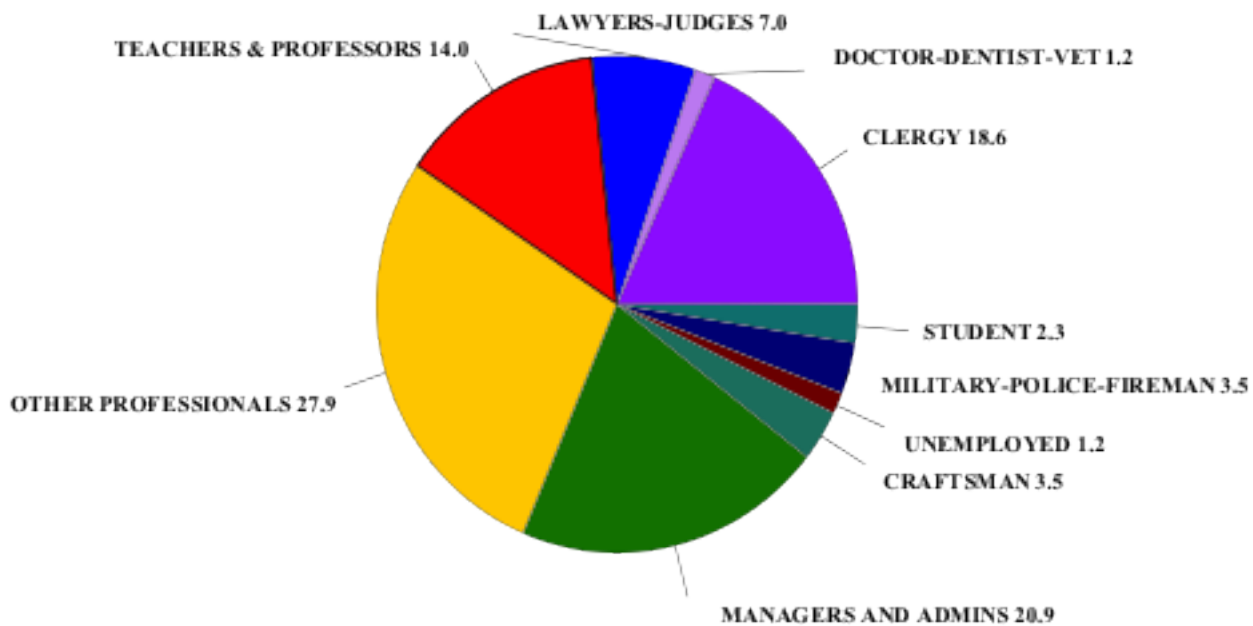


Figure 4. Male spouses of female clergy.

The income of spouses makes a significant contribution to the clergy household, particularly for female clergy, as can be seen in table 3.

Clergy Gender	Median Clergy Household Income	Spouses' Contribution
Male	\$83,000	27.1
Female	\$88,288	50.3
All clergy	\$83,800	29.5

Table 3. Household income by gender.

Just over 70 percent of clergy had full-time jobs before ministry, with this being true for 88.5 percent of female clergy and 68 percent of male clergy.

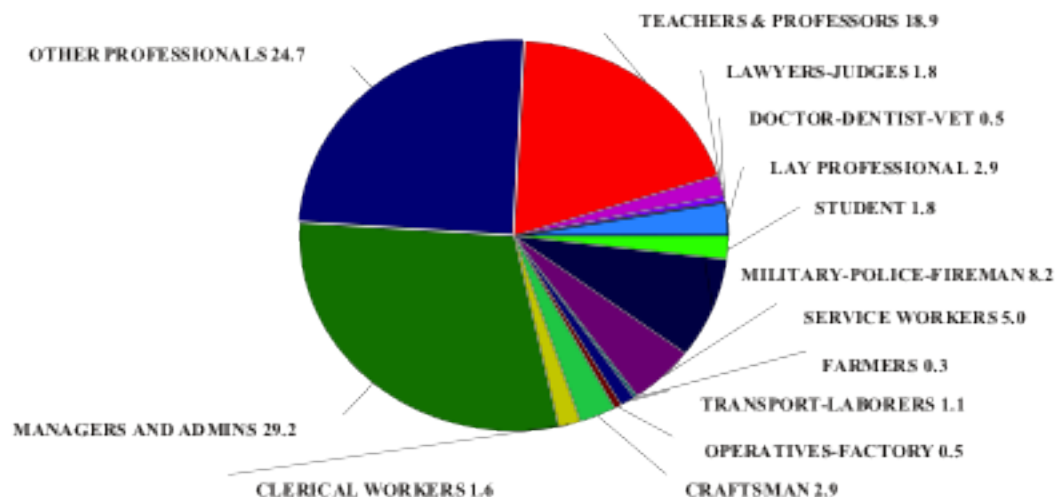


Figure 5. Pre-ordination occupations of male clergy.

When the cleric's last reported salary is adjusted for inflation, most clergy are better off financially than they were in their previous occupations, which one would expect with an average of nearly 20 years in ordained ministry. Nevertheless, while male clergy ordained before 40 years of age are earning almost \$20,000 more than their last full-time job, male clerics ordained after 40 are earning almost \$10,000 less than their last full-time job. Interestingly, women, regardless of when they were ordained, are earning approximately \$10,000 more than their last full-time secular salary.

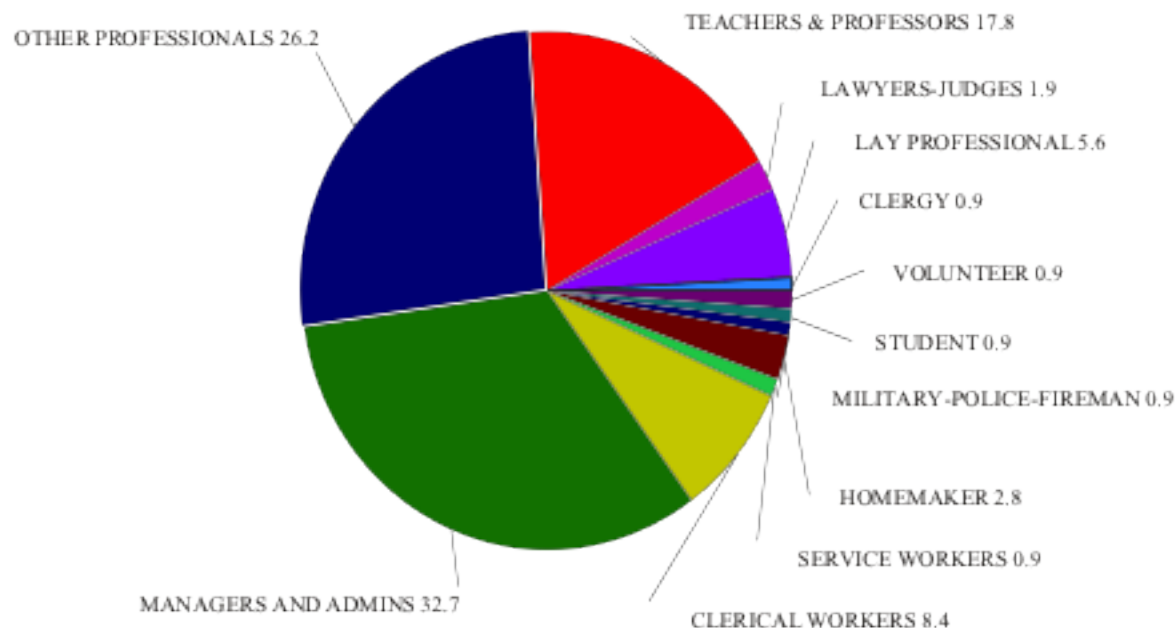


Figure 6. Pre-ordination occupations of female clergy.

Thus for second-career male clergy the call to ordained ministry comes at some financial cost, but for second-career women, the relatively low salaries for women mean that, even with the modest levels of clergy compensation, this is not the case.

What implications do these findings have? First, while the majority of rectors still conform to the traditional demographic profile, recent changes in ordination patterns mean that when the majority group retires, which it will do in the next ten years, congregations are in for a rude awakening. Putting some of these background factors together with the findings of Adair Lummis's report on *What Congregations Want in a Pastor*, we see a major asymmetry between what congregations want in a rector and the future clergy population. According to Lummis, "Typically, search committees want pastors who are married men with children, under age 40, in good health, with more than a decade of experience in ministry." The number of clergy who satisfied all these criteria amounts to just *two* in the entire sample of 682. If we liberalize the criteria a little and push the age limit up to 45 and remove gender as a criterion, the number rises to 21. This is still a minuscule proportion, just one in 32. As the proportion of late-career clergy among the ordained rises, the mismatch between the expectations that a congregation has about who their next rector will be and the pool of available candidates will continue to widen.

These findings also have implications for the topic of a previous report on the possible clergy shortage.⁴ If the great majority of our clergy are drawn from those who attended church regularly when young, then the pool of recruits is vulnerable to a decline in the numbers of young people attending church. Moreover, if a large proportion of the late ordinations from the Baby Boomer generation had an early call, then we have to wonder, does the same reservoir of "early call" potential clergy exist today in the Church among Generation X? Baby Boomer clergy are made up mainly of early call/early ordination clergy and early call/late ordination clergy. What they have in common is the early call. If the dramatic fall in early ordinations among Generation X clergy indicate a general decline in early calls, then there may be relatively few GenX clergy being ordained in mid-life. With mid-life ordinations playing such an important role in sustaining the supply of clergy, a significant decline in their number could present problems for the Church in the future.

Are any of these differences in the backgrounds of clergy consequential in terms of the careers of clergy and the parishes in which they work? We will see in the following section that they have a significant influence.

IV. The World of the Parish and Regional Variations in Ministry

The median weekly attendance of the parishes at which the respondents serve is 141. The type and size of church in which these rectors serve correlates with a number of factors, the most salient of which is gender. The median average weekly attendance of congregations where women are rectors is 110, whereas with men it is 150. Thus there is an over 25 percent difference between the sizes of the cures held by men and women. Even with the addition of other factors that determine cure size, in particular, years in ministry, the effect of gender is only partially diminished, as is seen in table 4.

Years in Ministry	Gender	Median Average Weekly Attendance
1 to 10 years	Male	128
	Female	90
	Total	110
10 to 20 years	Male	141
	Female	117
	Total	135
20 to 30 years	Male	160
	Female	119
	Total	155
30 years +	Male	168
	Female	0
	Total	168
Total	Male	150
	Female	110
	Total	143

Table 4. Gender and church size.

Gender also interacts with regional patterns to produce the overall level of inequality between male and female clergy, as becomes clear when one analyzes differences in cure size by region and gender.

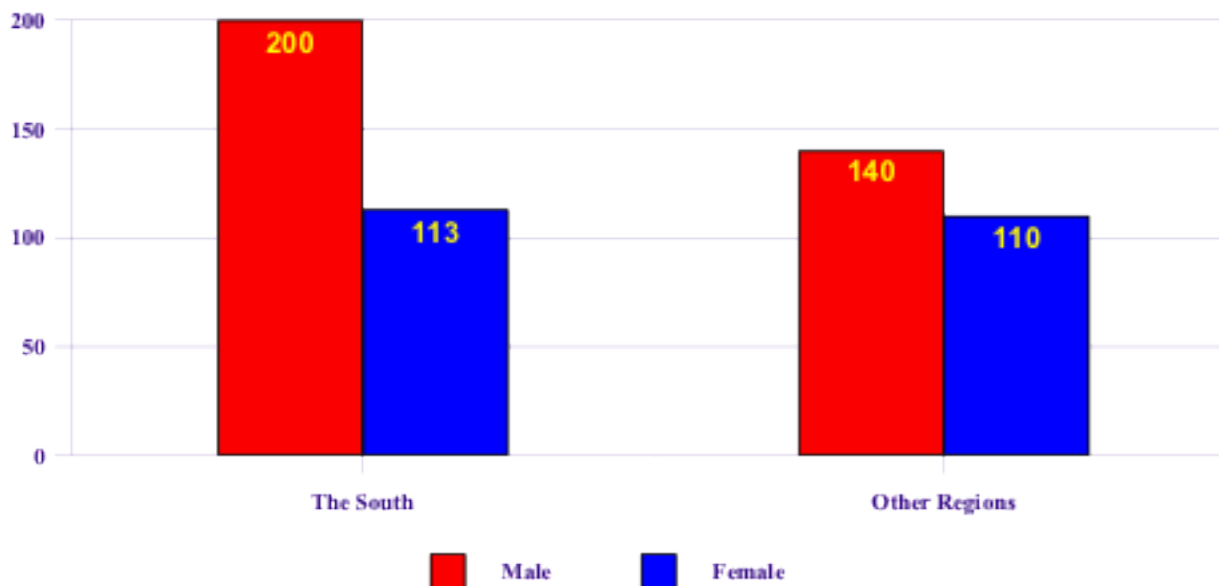


Figure 7. Church size served by region and gender.

Not only is the difference between male and female clergy larger in the South than in the rest of the country, but, as can be seen in table 5, the percentage of female clergy in the South is much lower than in the rest of the country, which means that the block of Southern male clergy with over 20 years experience and relatively large congregations has a major influence on the national figures. Combining experience in the ministry with

gender and region paints an interesting picture of clergy careers and trends in gender-related differences in cure size. As can also be seen in table 5, the percentage difference between the congregational size of male and female rectors inside and outside the South is fairly consistent if years in the ministry is taken into account. Moreover, while the proportion of women priests in the South is lower than elsewhere, among newer ordinands the numbers are rising and appear to be following the trend in the rest of the country. Nevertheless, unless women clergy in the South actually fully catch up with women clergy elsewhere, the South will account for a disproportionate amount of the gender difference in congregational size. This is because the career pattern of male clergy in the South is significantly different from clergy elsewhere.

		Clergy in the South		Clergy Outside the South	
Years in Paid Ministry	Gender	Median AWA	Number of Clergy	Median AWA	Number of Clergy
1 to 10 years	Male	130	33	120	42
	Female	107	17	73	30
	Total	120	50	108	72
10 to 20 years	Male	174	65	130	83
	Female	113	13	123	40
	Total	155	78	125	123
More than 20 years	Male	232	117	146	178
	Female	159	7	105	9
	Total	226	124	145	187
Total	Male	200	215	140	303
	Female	113	37	110	79
	Total	170	252	134	382

Table 5. Congregation size by gender and region.

In their first ten years of ministry, male clergy in the South and beyond are in charge of congregations that are roughly equivalent in size, with a median average weekly attendance of 130 in the South and 120 outside the South. However, after 20 years in ministry male clergy outside the South are, on average, in charge of a median size congregation of 146, while the median size of congregation for Southern male clergy with over 20 years in ministry is 232.

Congregational size is obviously linked to other important variables such as compensation, and so Southern male clergy experience a very different sense of career advancement than those in other parts of the country. Other factors that had a slight effect upon cure size were the combination of being both raised in The Episcopal Church and attending an Episcopal seminary, a combination which was a measurable, though not substantial, advantage for male clergy (although this is not so clear for female clergy), as was being in a first marriage and having parents who were in professional-level occupations.

When compared to the rest of America, Episcopal clergy are on the whole drawn from one segment of the population and are remarkably similar in terms of their socioeconomic backgrounds, their careers, and the

compensation that they receive. Nevertheless, within the group there are some fairly significant differences in careers and compensation which are influenced by a cleric's gender, age, age at ordination, religious background, and the region of the country in which he or she decides to pursue his or her clergy career.

V. Clergy Daily Life

On the *Pulpit and Pew* leader survey, clergy were asked two detailed questions concerning time use: one about time use outside work and the other about time use at work. The results can be seen in table 6. There are significant differences in time use outside the congregation based on gender, whether there are children in the home, and other, perhaps more surprising differences. One of the more interesting findings is that male clergy report spending more time with family than female clergy, an average of 11.4 hours for men as against 9.1 hours for women. When comparing just clergy with children at home, the differences still persisted, with male clergy spending an average 12.7 hours per week with family compared with 10.8 hours for female clergy. Less time with children does not mean less time at home for female clergy, however; they report spending an average of 8.8 hours per week on household chores, compared to 6.1 hours for male clergy with children in the home.

Activities by the Hour	Male	Female
Family life	10	7
Household chores	5	6
Physical exercise	4	3
Prayer-meditation-Bible reading	5	6.5
Reading	4	5
Recreation	3	3
Searching the web	2	2.5

Table 6. Weekly activities by gender.

One consequence of these domestic duties is that female clergy with children spend less time eating out with friends, reading, and exercising than all male clergy and female clergy without children in the home. Female clergy spend only half the amount of time doing recreational activities in comparison with male clergy with children in the home, an average of 2.2 hours compared to 4.5 hours. As we shall see later when looking at clergy and wellness, these patterns of time use are symptomatic of the issues that face female clergy with children.

Figure 8 shows the average distribution of ministerial duties as reported by the clergy. Unlike the time spent outside the congregation, the reported distribution of hours spent on ministry tasks is not significantly influenced by the gender of cleric. Interestingly, there is a statistically significant difference of two hours in the amount of time spent on administrative tasks by the 25 percent of clergy who live in rectories as opposed to those who receive a housing allowance, with those who live in rectories reporting an average of 13.79 hours per week on administration, as opposed to 11.69 hours for those who receive a housing allowance.

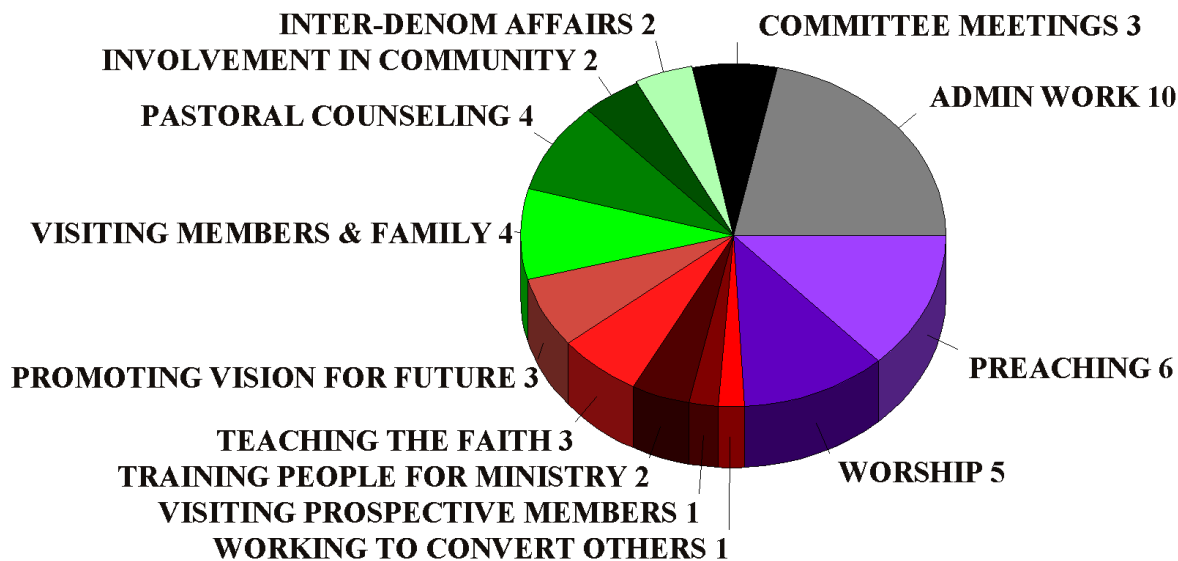


Figure 8. Distribution of ministerial duties as reported by clergy.

The extra hours on administrative tasks are intriguing because those who live in rectories report an average of two hours less in commuting time than those receiving a housing allowance, but this extra time seems to get pulled into administration. This is significant when one looks at those areas in which clergy believe that they do well and those areas in which clergy report they would like to improve their effectiveness, as seen in figure 9. Four of the top five categories selected for improvement—evangelism, training people for ministry, promoting a vision for the congregation and visiting prospective members—represent some of the lowest allocations of time by clergy, with the two key congregational-building activities of evangelism and visiting prospective members scoring the minimum of an hour each. Along with teaching the faith, these activities form the nexus of those areas needed for congregational development, and yet we can see that clergy do not on the whole believe they do these activities particularly well. While they believe that they would like to do better in these areas, their allocation of time shows that there is a limited commitment to this even when, for those living in rectories, such time would seem to be available.

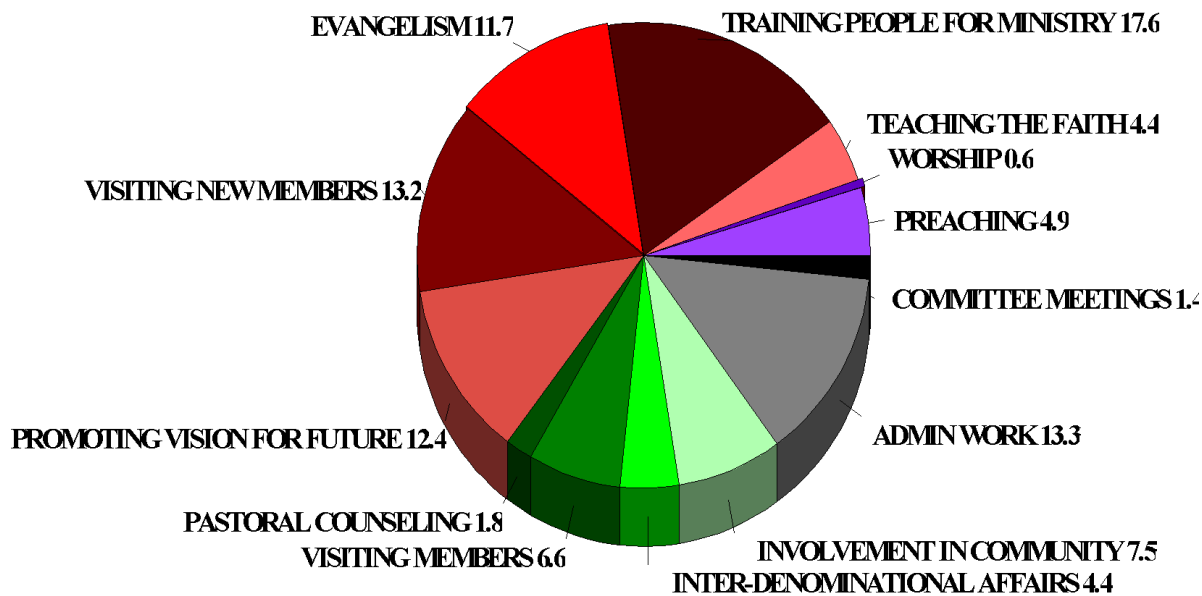


Figure 9. Areas of ministry in which clergy want to improve.

But why should we care about how clergy use their time? The observation that clergy report spending far more time on administration and committee work than they would like has been well documented since Samuel Blizzard’s seminal 1957 *Christian Century* article, “The Minister’s Dilemma.” But time-use choices may have consequences. There is a significant correlation between the percent of time that clergy allocate to the nexus of congregational-building opportunities listed above and the percentage growth rate of the congregation over the previous five years. Of course, correlation does not equal cause. Clergy in areas with strong population growth may find such activities fruitful and thus devote relatively more time to them; nevertheless, allocating more time to these congregational development activities allows clergy to take greater advantage of the favorable circumstances in which they might find themselves. In conclusion, it cannot be claimed that clergy work longer hours than comparable professions, but the variety of very different types of tasks, the way in which clergy have to be almost completely inner-directed about allocating their time, and the sense that such time allocations have consequences—although not predictable ones—is a pattern that has a high level of uncertainty and thus work-related anxiety.

VI. Clergy Health and Wellness

What evidence do we have that clergy are suffering stress both in the workplace and at home? Do the sources of stress in the ministerial calling have particular patterns that stand out? Figure 10 shows that over 50 percent of male clergy and over 60 percent of female clergy experience stress in work related to their congregations, either often or fairly often.

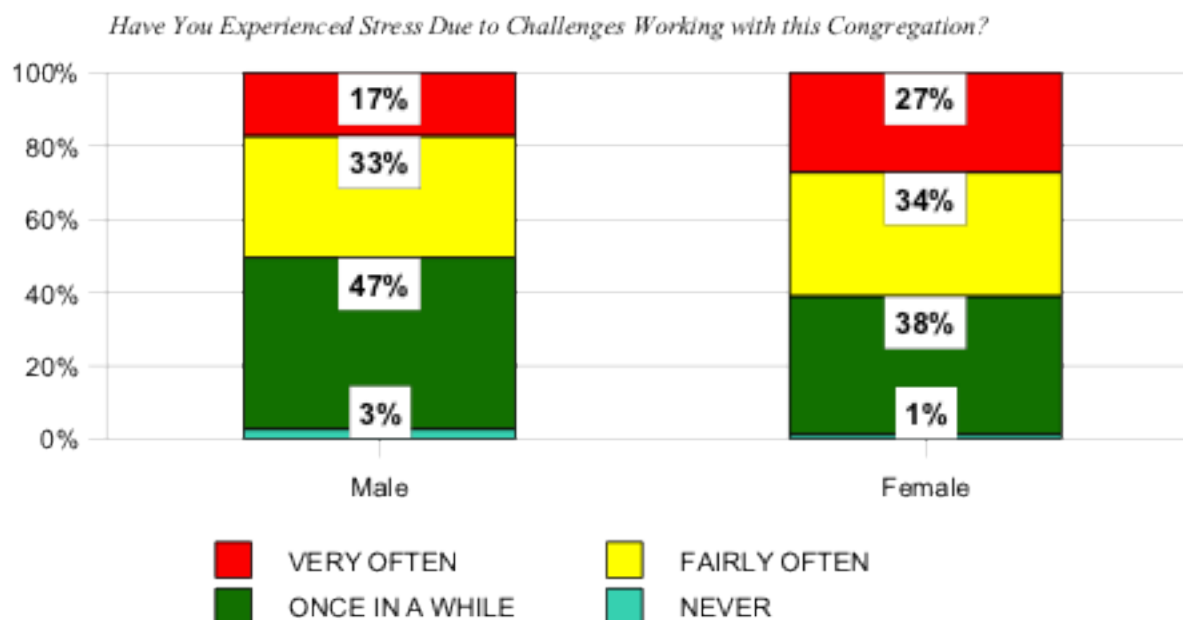


Figure 10. Percent of clergy experiencing stress working with congregation.

The most significant cause of this stress is critical members of the congregation. As can be seen from figure 11, over 30 percent of male clergy and over 40 percent of female clergy regularly (defined as often or fairly often) experience stress because of critical members of the congregation.

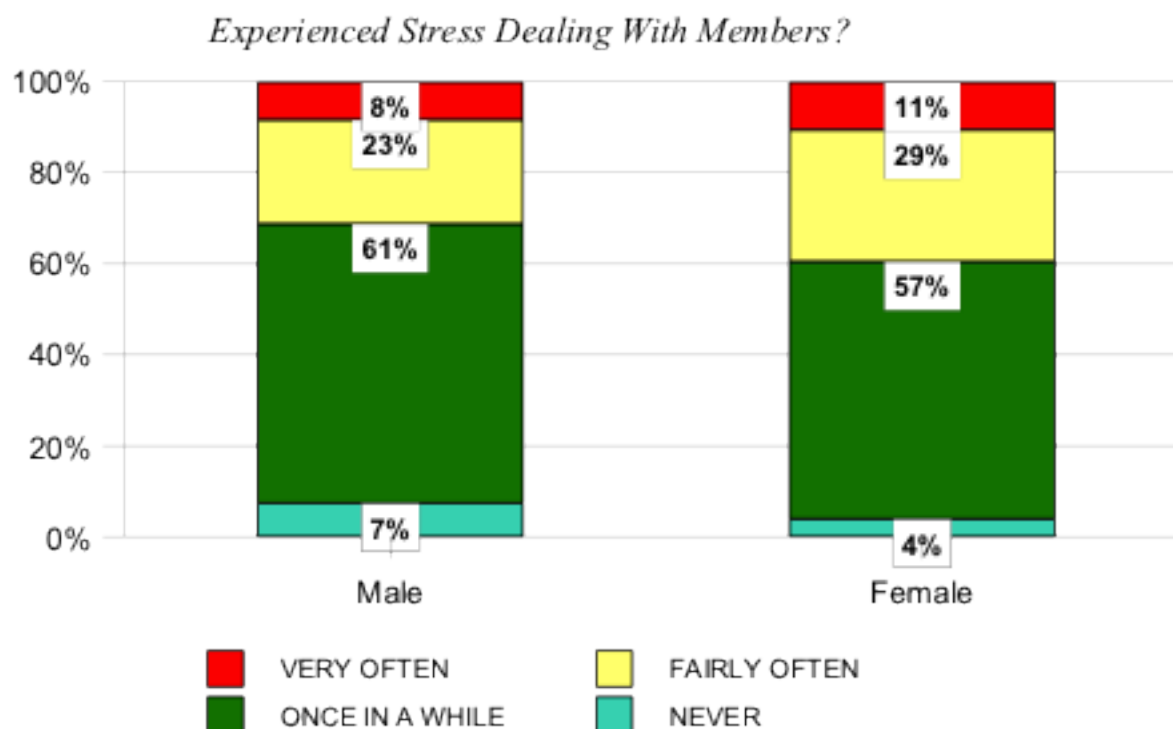


Figure 11. Percent of clergy experiencing stress dealing with members.

Of course, clergy are not unique in experiencing job-related stress, or in working for relatively modest pay compared to other professionals who have graduate degrees, but they are unusual in that they have high

levels of what could be termed “client contact,” but mainly work alone. This problem of isolation can be seen figure 12, where over a quarter of male rectors and over one-third of female rectors report that they regularly feel lonely and isolated at work. The issue of stress, in fact, appears to be more of an issue than money or place within the church, with approximately 60 percent of male and female clergy saying that they were satisfied with their current position in the church, and 45 percent very satisfied with their compensation with only 12 percent dissatisfied.

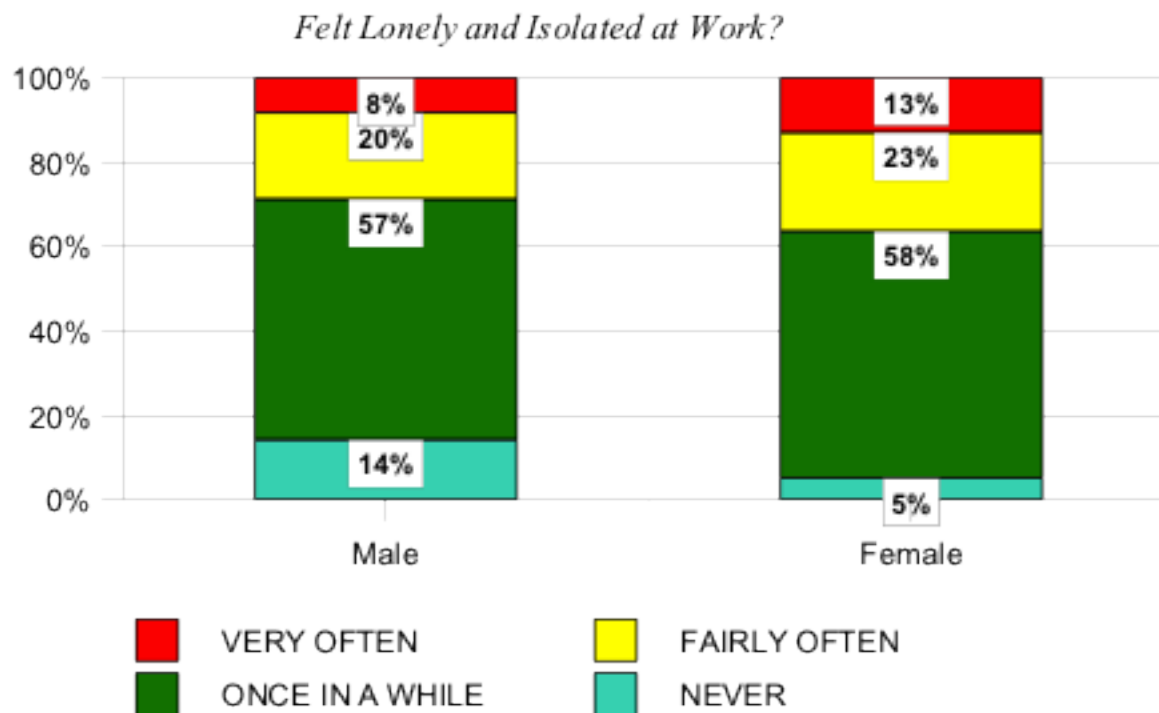


Figure 12. Isolation in the parish.

While we had initially expected to see high levels of anxiety around financial issues, it seems that the medium by which stress is transmuted between the congregation and the home is time rather than money, a problem that particularly affects female clergy with children. The time demands of life in the ministry lead to a certain level of resentment by spouses. As can be seen in figure 13, there is a much higher level of stress around time than money. This is significant because the national church has focused most its efforts regarding improving the life of women clergy on issues of place and position. But as mentioned above, there are no significant differences between men and women in terms of levels of satisfaction for their position and compensation. Moreover, women and men show no significant differences in terms of the way in which they are treated by denominational officials, which makes one wonder whether root causes of the issues women face in ministry are more at the level of daily interactions with members of the congregation and with family, issues that are embedded in the culture of work that pervades the congregation as well as the gender dynamics that are prevalent within two-career families.

The interaction between congregational life and gender is perhaps seen most starkly in figure 13. Over a third of female rectors with children in the home believe that their ministry has had a negative impact on their family, double that of the comparison groups (female clergy with children who have left home and all male clergy with children).

How Has Family Been Affected by Ministry to This Congregation?

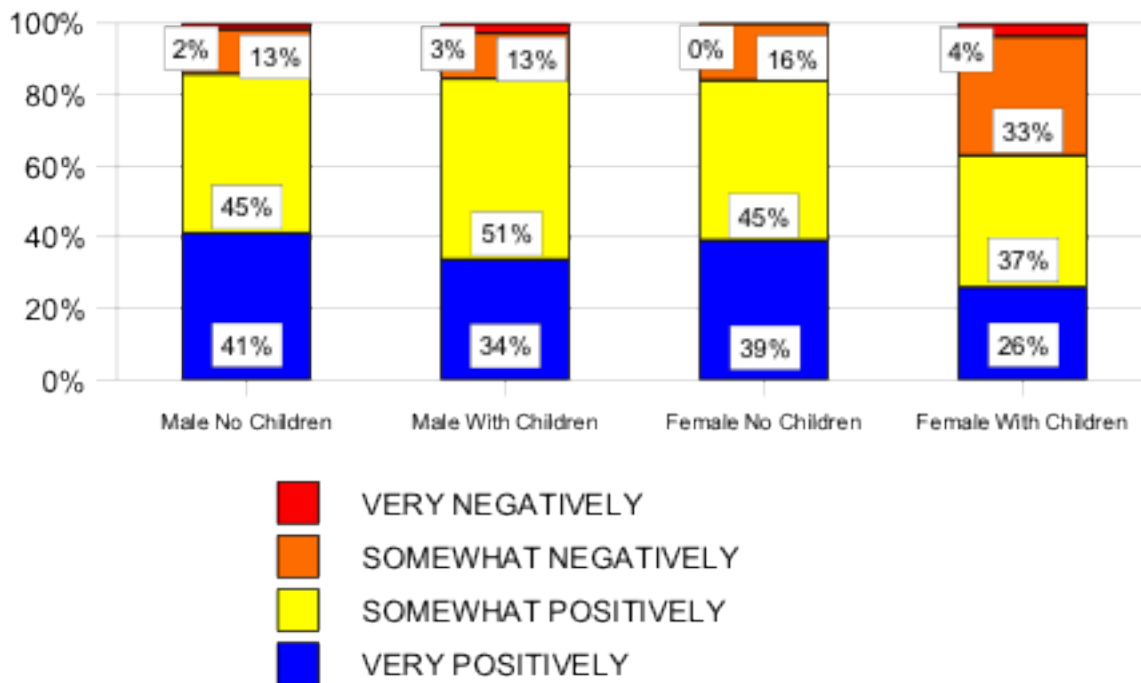


Figure 13. Effect of parish ministry on family life.

In general, the statistics on levels of satisfaction with family life give cause for concern, but they are particularly worrisome when looking at female clergy with children in the home. Overall, 58 percent of clergy are very satisfied with their family life, 31 percent are only “somewhat satisfied” and 11 percent are dissatisfied with their family life. But only 22 percent of clergy women with children at home reported that they are very satisfied with their family life, with 57 percent reporting that they are only “somewhat satisfied,” and 21 percent reporting that they are dissatisfied with their family life. This pattern is also seen when clergy were asked about fatigue and demands made by the congregation. It is certainly a cause for concern that one-quarter of all clergy agree with the statement that “Fatigue and irritation are part of my daily experience,” but this was true for over one-third of women with children at home. Similarly, while one-third of clergy reported that their congregations regularly made too many demands on them, this was true for 54 percent of women with children at home.

VII. Conflict and Strife

Conflict is another dimension of the life-world of the clergy leader.

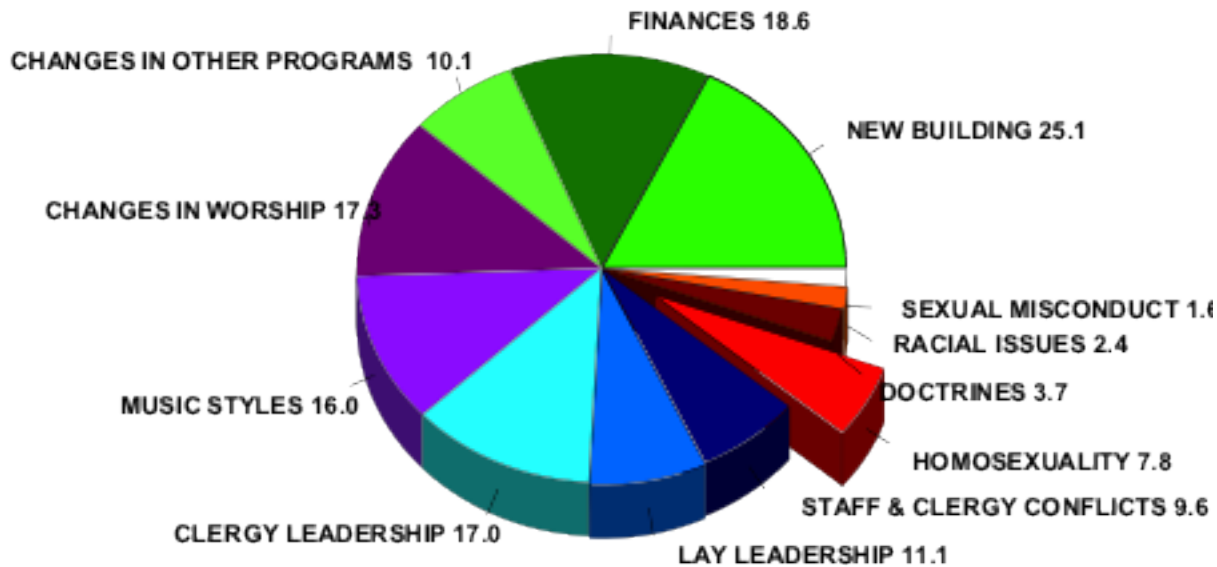


Figure 14. Percent of parishes reporting experience of conflict by type.

Clergy were asked to report whether they had experienced conflict within their congregation in the last two years. Seventy-three percent reported that their congregations had experienced some level of conflict within the previous two years, with 16 percent of congregations reporting serious conflicts within that time period. While 16 percent is not a high proportion overall, it is high in relation to a two-year reporting period. These figures suggest that conflict is a routine part of the rector's life. Not only are the conflicts routine in terms of their frequency, they are also routine in terms of their nature. Figure 14 shows that conflicts at the local level differ markedly from those at the national level, centering around the everyday matters of finance, worship, and personnel and leadership issues. Even when we examine only the most serious conflicts—those that result in a leader or members of the congregation leaving—the “hot button” issues are still secondary to conflicts centering around leadership. The very routineness of these conflicts points, we would argue, to a root cause in the exercise of clerical authority within the congregation, a dynamic that is internal to the workings of the church, rather than an external ideological cause. It may also be that, while not dramatic in nature, these mundane conflicts that focus upon the exercise of authority of the rector gradually erode a priest's sense of vocation and well-being.

VIII. Health, Wellness, and Attrition

Emotional and physical health issues faced by clergy intersect with stress levels and congregational conflict. Fifty-three percent of clergy reported that they accomplished less in last four weeks than they would have wanted due to either emotional stress, such as depression or anxiety, or because of physical health problems. For the majority of the clergy who reported accomplishing less than they wanted, this only occurred “a little of the time” in the preceding for weeks, but 21 percent of clergy reported that this was the case either some, most, or all the time. When asked how much of the time during the past four weeks they were limited in the kind of work or other regular daily activities they could do due to either physical health or emotional problems, only 51 percent of the clergy reported that this was the case “none of the time,” while 15 percent of the clergy reported this was the case either some, most, or all the time. There is also an indication that stress and health issues are interfering with other aspects of clergy lives. Clergy were asked, “During the past four weeks, how much of the time have your physical health or emotional problems interfered with your social activities (like visiting friends, relatives)?” The results can be seen in table 7.

Frequency of Physical and Emotional Problems Interfering with Social Acts	Percent
All of the time	9.5%
Most of the time	5.7%
Some of the time	8.1%
A little of the time	17.7%
None of the time	59.0%
Total	100.0%

Table 7. Issues of ministry and clergy wellness.

As can be seen in table 7, over 15 percent of clergy report that their social lives are disrupted most or all of the time by some kind of physical or emotional problems. When asked whether they had felt downhearted or depressed in the previous four weeks, as can be seen in figure 15, over 20 percent of clergy reported this being the case either most or some of the time. This was the case for over 50 percent of female clergy with children at home.

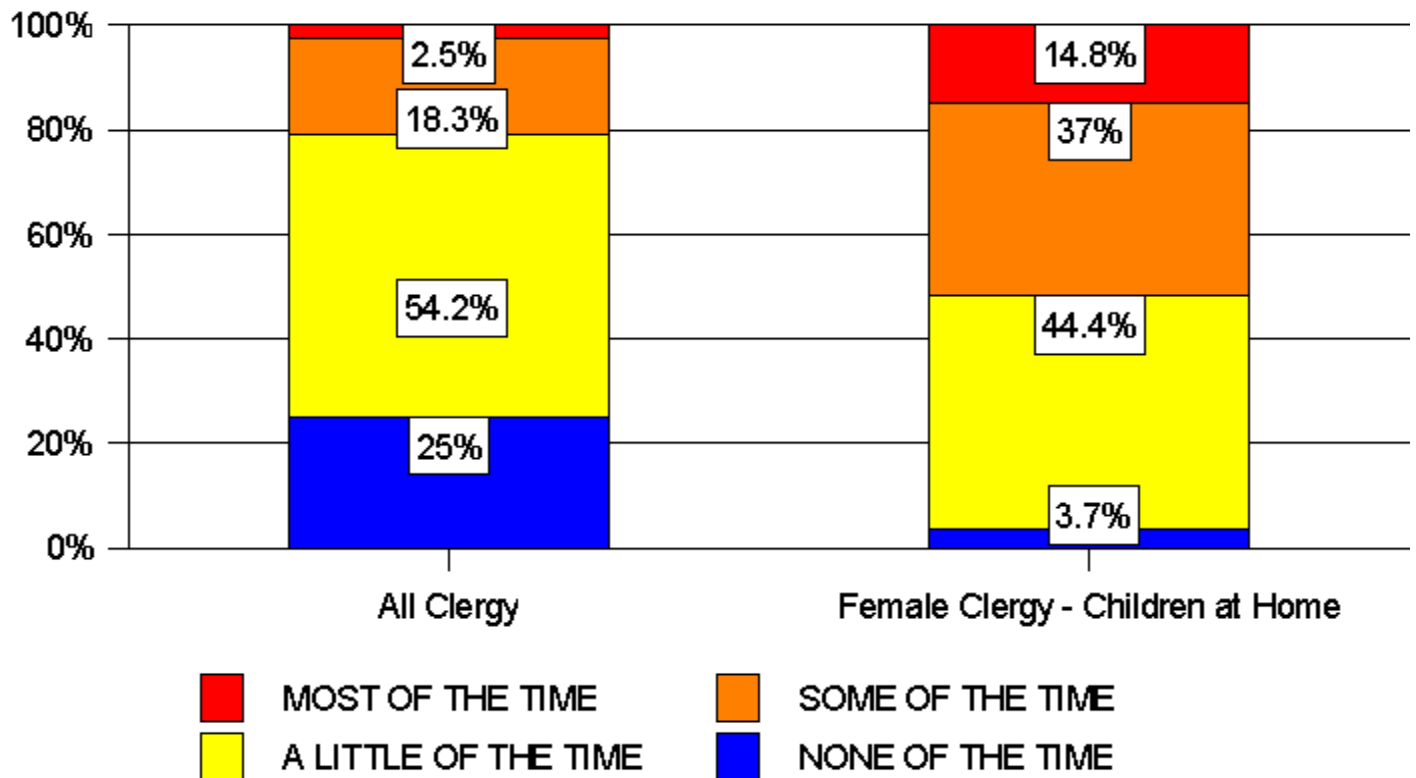


Figure 15. Clergy reporting feeling downhearted or depressed in the last four weeks.

In terms of height and weight, clergy do not differ markedly from the general U.S. population, although the gender distribution of weight ranges differs between the clergy and the general U.S. population, as can be seen in table 8. Thus while 64.5 percent of the U.S. population is overweight or obese, this is true for almost 70 percent of the clergy, but true for just 51.6 percent of all graduates. Of course, clergy have a higher average age than the general population and the probability of being overweight does increase with age. Nevertheless, while approximately 72 percent of all U.S. males between the ages of 45 and 65 years are overweight or obese, this is true for 74 percent of clergy of same age group.

Weight Category	Both Sexes			Male		Female	
	Clergy	US Pop ⁵	US Grads	Clergy	US Pop ⁵	Clergy	US Pop ⁵
Underweight	1.1%	1.9%	2.0%	0.4%	1.2%	4.4%	2.7%
Healthy weight	29.0%	33.6%	46.4%	26.4%	31.8%	40.7%	35.3%
Overweight	46.6%	33.6%	36.0%	47.9%	39.3%	40.7%	28.0%
Obese	23.3%	30.9%	15.6%	25.3%	27.7%	14.2%	34.0%
Total	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

Table 8. Clergy height and weight ratios.

This may not seem so bad until one considers that weight problems are 25 percent more prevalent among the general population than among clergy, so issues about weight are in all likelihood significantly more prevalent among male clergy between 45 to 65 years of age than among males of the same age range and educational level

in the general population. Collectively, clergy exercise habits present a mixed picture, as can be seen in table 9.

Reported Hours of Exercise Per Week	
Number of Hours	Percent of Clergy
0 to 1 hours	26%
2 to 3 hours	26%
4 to 5 hours	24%
6 hours plus	24%

Table 9. Clergy exercise frequency.

Approximately one-quarter of the clergy report doing little or no exercise, about one-half could be described as moderate exercisers, while one-quarter exercise often. Clergy who exercised more than three hours per week scored significantly higher on a combined health measure and also on a combined emotional wellness measure than those who exercised for one hour or less. In fact, as can be seen below in table 10, there is a significant correlation between each of the comprehensive wellness measures created out of a set of standardized response categories measuring health, vocational satisfaction, professional relationships, emotional well-being, relations with family and friends, and financial well-being.

		Health	Vocational	Professional Relationships	Emotional	Family and Friends	Financial
Health	Corr. Coefficient	1.000	.375(**)	.256(**)	.471(**)	.321(**)	.169(**)
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000
Vocational	Corr. Coefficient	.375(**)	1.000	.569(**)	.680(**)	.477(**)	.316(**)
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.	.000	.000	.000	.000
Professional Relationships	Corr. Coefficient	.256(**)	.569(**)	1.000	.570(**)	.422(**)	.368(**)
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.	.000	.000	.000
Emotional	Corr. Coefficient	.471(**)	.680(**)	.570(**)	1.000	.582(**)	.302(**)
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.000	.	.000	.000
Family and Friends	Corr. Coefficient	.321(**)	.477(**)	.422(**)	.582(**)	1.000	.499(**)
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.000	.000	.	.000
Financial	Corr. Coefficient	.169(**)	.316(**)	.368(**)	.302(**)	.499(**)	1.000
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000	.

Table 10. Correlations between combined wellness measures for major areas of clergy life.

These point particularly to the interrelationship of physical health and emotional well-being, which is not surprising, and also to a high correlation between emotional well-being and vocational satisfaction, which while not surprising, is important because it directly impacts the institutional life of the Church.

IX. Consequences for the Church: The Link Between Individual Wellness, Institutional Vitality, and Clergy Leadership

Fourteen percent of clergy have regularly considered dropping out of parish ministry over the last five years. Both the overall numbers and the particular patterns should give cause for concern. Clergy were asked to report on their feelings about staying in parish ministry, not just at this moment in time, or whether they had at some point within the previous five years thought of leaving parish ministry, but whether they had regularly considered this option over the past five years. Moreover, the desire to leave parish ministry correlates highly with other measures of stress and wellness. Of those clergy who *regularly* thought about leaving parish ministry, almost one-third of those in the lowest quartile on a composite emotional well-being measure indicated that they regularly thought about leaving parish ministry, as opposed to just 5 percent of those in the highest quartile. Put another way, of those who regularly thought about leaving parish ministry, almost 80 percent scored below average on the composite emotional wellness measure. As can be seen in table 11, there is a particularly strong relationship between being in the lowest quartile of emotional well-being and the response “Very Often” about considering leaving parish ministry.

Consider leaving pastoral ministry?	Lowest	Below Average	Above Average	Highest	Total
Very often	66.7%	14.3%	14.3%	4.8%	100.0%
Fairly often	49.3%	30.1%	11.0%	9.6%	100.0%
Once in a while	25.2%	29.1%	25.9%	19.8%	100.0%
Never	13.9%	21.4%	29.7%	35.0%	100.0%
Percentage of clergy across emotional wellness quartiles	24.6%	25.5%	25.4%	24.5%	100.0%

Table 11. Leaving parish ministry by quartiles of a composite emotional wellness measure.

The percentage of those who have regularly considered dropping out of parish ministry is significantly higher for female clergy with children at home, as can be seen in figure 16. But two points should be made about this observation. First, the determinant factor is not being female, as it can be seen from figure 16 that female clergy *without* children at home fairly closely resemble male clergy in terms of their desire to stay in parish ministry.

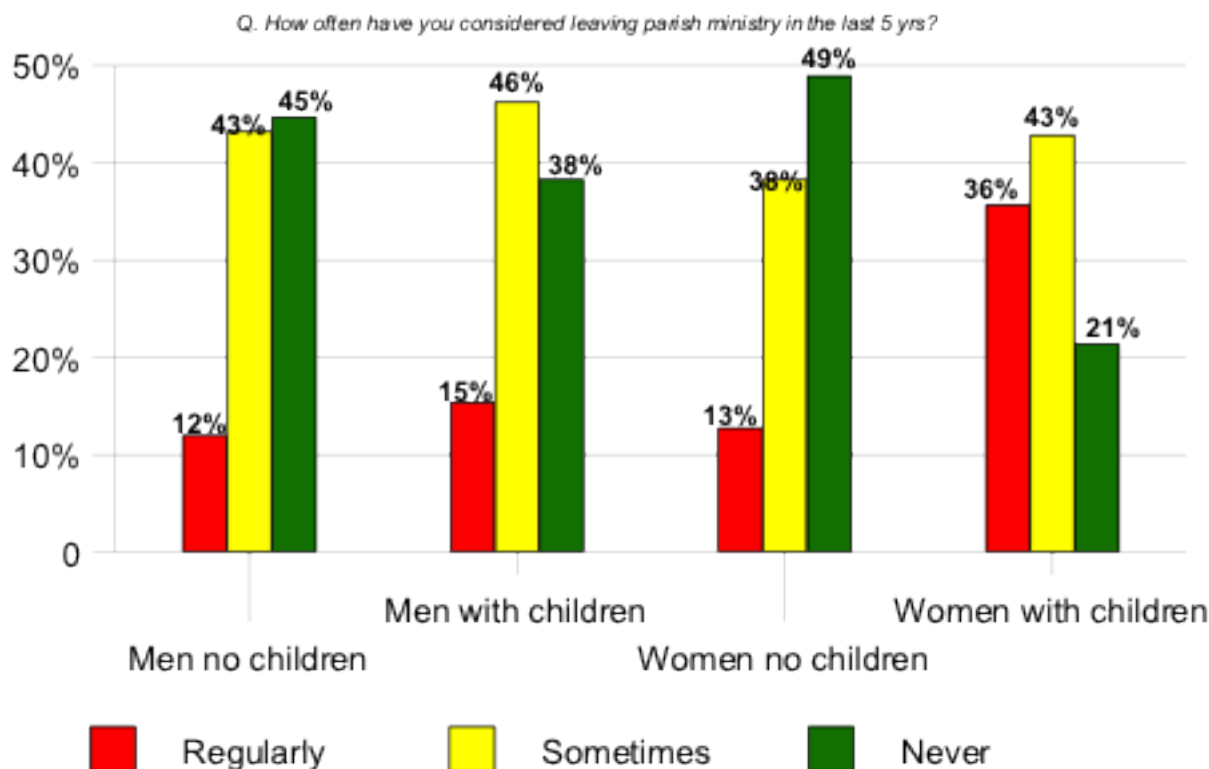


Figure 16. Frequency of clergy thinking of leaving congregational ministry, by gender and presence of children at home.

In fact, they show higher levels of satisfaction than male clergy with children at home and are the most likely of the four categories to respond that they have never thought about leaving parish ministry. Second, it should be noted that this is a problem that is related to parish ministry, rather than ministry in general. While 36 percent of women with children in the home have fairly often considered the possibility of leaving parish ministry, only 12 percent have the same feeling about leaving ministerial work in general for a secular occupation. Looking at figure 17, we can see that women clergy with children at home have come to the conclusion that there simply is not a good “fit” between themselves and their parish.

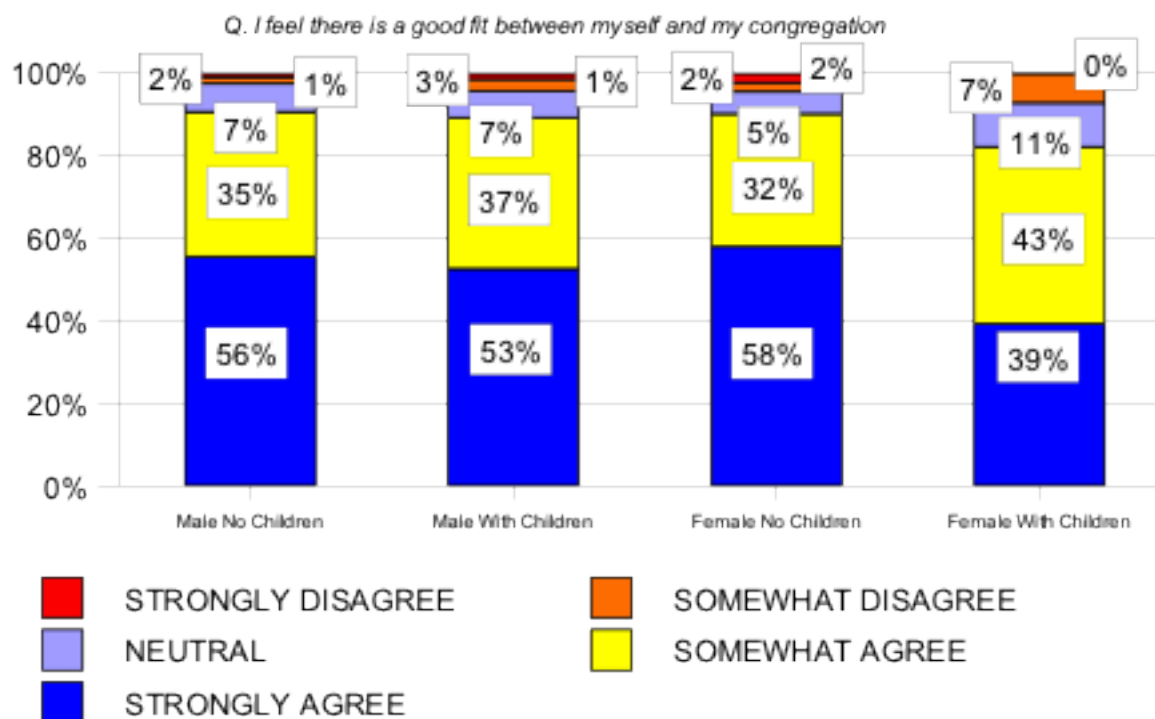


Figure 17. Self-reported congregation-to-rector fit.

Wanting to leave parish ministry is related to having children in the home and affects female clergy more than male clergy because of the well-documented extra work performed by career women with children in the home. The fact that married female clergy tend to have higher household incomes than male clergy, despite their lower levels of remuneration from the church, indicates that the “first career” financially in many households of female clergy is their husband’s, placing the women under enormous time pressure. But as clergy earnings decline relative to other employees with graduate-level degrees, and with the rising costs in health care, housing, and higher education, male clergy, if they wish to stay apace of these rising costs, will have to become increasingly dependent upon the income of their spouses. Thus the higher risk of dropping out of parish ministry that is seen among women rectors with children at home is likely to become more prevalent among their male counterparts.

The implications of these findings on the Church’s ability to find a sufficient supply of parish clergy go beyond the obvious impact of career burnout. Clergy whose performance is adversely affected by issues of individual wellness will ultimately impact the health of the institution as a whole. This is the case because a cleric’s sense of well-being influences their leadership capacity and leadership is related to congregational growth and vitality. The mechanics of this relationship are seen in the ability to implement change, which is related to a cleric’s sense of well-being and predictive of a congregation’s growth pattern over the previous five years. The capacity to implement change turned out to be an excellent predictor of a parish’s growth over the previous five years. Respondents were asked to pick the descriptive statement that best described their congregation. The response categories listed in figure 18 show the median percentage attendance growth over the previous five years. It is clear that there is a significant difference between those congregations that have a vision and those congregations that have a vision and the ability to implement that vision.⁶ This turns out to be the case even when region is taken into account, although it is clear that region has a strong effect on congregational growth with even those congregations which have no vision or ability to carry it out being able to grow if they are located in the South or the West.

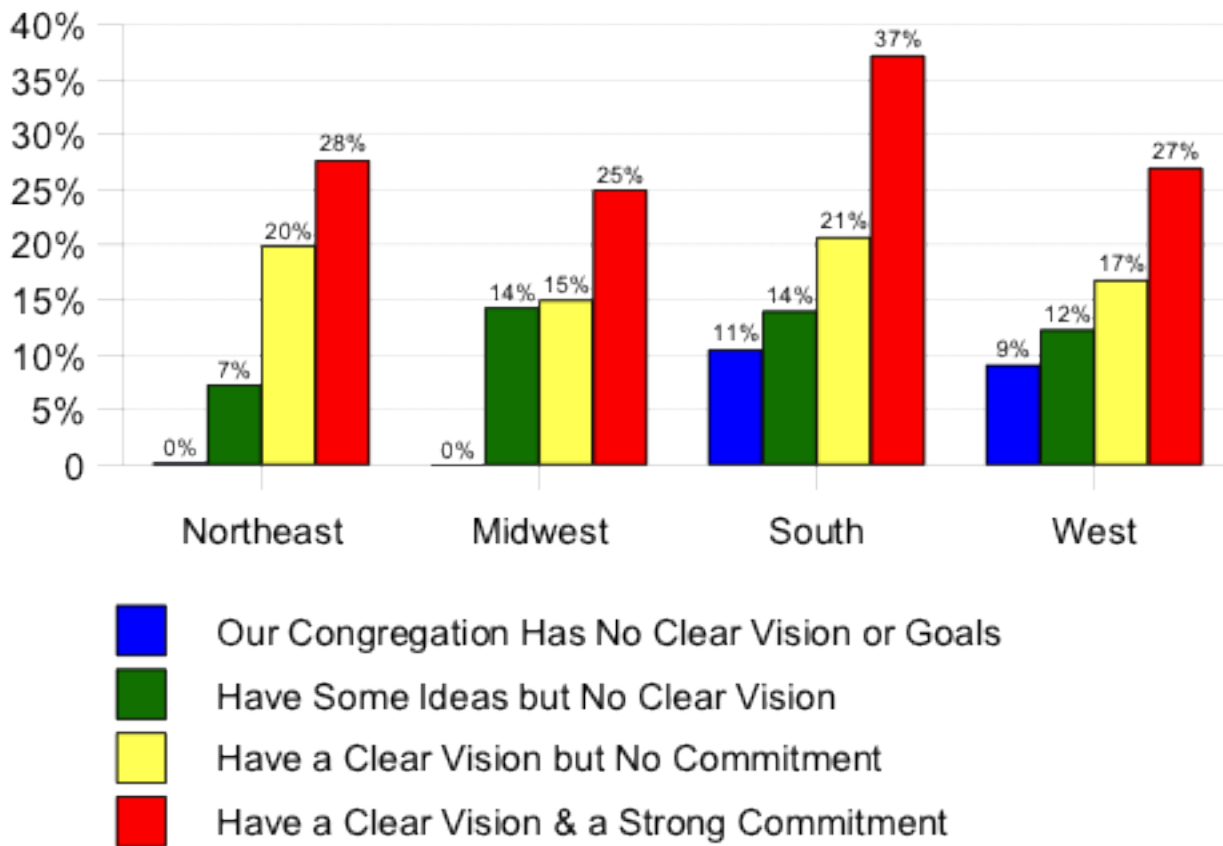


Figure 18. Five-year growth by region and congregational description.

Not surprisingly, a cleric’s ability to implement a vision is also linked to their sense of vocational wellness. But more interestingly, it is also linked to their sense of emotional well-being, as can be seen in table 12, where those in the highest quartile on the emotional well-being measure are more likely to be in a congregation that can both create a vision and implement it. Thus we would posit a positive relationship between emotional well-being and leadership capacity.

	Lowest	Below Average	Above Average	Highest	Total
Our congregation has no clear vision or goals	45.0%	25.0%	10.0%	20.0%	100.0%
We have some ideas but no clear vision	32.3%	24.2%	25.3%	18.3%	100.0%
We have a clear vision but no commitment	30.1%	29.2%	25.5%	15.3%	100.0%
We have a clear vision and a strong commitment	10.7%	23.3%	26.5%	39.5%	100.0%
Percentage of clergy across emotional wellness quartiles	24.6%	25.6%	25.3%	24.5%	100.0%

Table 12. Ability to implement goals by quartile of emotional well-being.

While a strong sense of individual well-being by a cleric can positively impact congregational vitality, conversely, problems within a congregation strongly affect a cleric’s sense of well-being. As can be seen in

table 13, a deteriorating financial situation in a congregation means that it is far more likely that a cleric's personal emotional state—his or her likelihood of feeling depressed or dissatisfied with his or her family life, for example—is negatively impacted. These findings point less to one clear independent variable, but rather toward the intricate interdependencies between the emotional and physical well-being of the cleric and the health of the congregation. These interdependencies can form either positive or negative feedback loops. When a congregation goes through a difficult period financially, a cleric's emotional well-being and thus his or her family life is likely to be affected, problems which will then feed back into his or her ability to be an effective leader of the congregation, further impacting the health of the congregation and deepening the downward turn of the cycle.

Congregation's Financial Outlook	Lowest	Below Average	Above Average	Highest	Total
Improving	17.0%	24.7%	27.0%	31.3%	100.0%
Stable	26.8%	27.3%	24.3%	21.6%	100.0%
Deteriorating	39.4%	24.5%	22.3%	13.8%	100.0%
Percentage of congregations across emotional wellness quartiles	24.1%	25.6%	25.3%	25.0%	100.0%

Table 13. Congregation's financial outlook by quartile of cleric's emotional well-being

These interdependencies, while pointing away from “magic bullet” solutions to either clergy or congregational problems, nevertheless do indicate that there are critical opportunities for intervention. Any program that significantly impacts clergy health and well-being over a sustained period will help in promoting congregational vitality. Dioceses could intervene early in any potentially negative cycles of clergy and congregational wellness, offering support to clergy who are known to be in financially challenged congregations and making sure that clergy are able to gain support for the issues that they face before it begins to impact the congregation. Ideally, those entering financially challenged congregations should have specialized training and a peer support network of similarly trained clergy. Even for clergy who are in healthy congregations, the Church as an organization has a compelling interest in their continued health and well-being. While an individual congregation might benefit from the extraordinary exertions of a rector during a cure, if that same cleric in their next cure suffers from a period of burnout or ill health which has a negative effect upon the congregation, then overall the Church has gained little. What the Church needs is *sustainable* excellence in leadership. While promoting clergy health and well-being is not a sufficient basis for sustainable excellence in clergy leadership, it is nevertheless a prerequisite.

X. Conclusions: An Idiosyncratic Profession

In this concluding section we return to the question that prompted the Lilly Endowment's concern: Is the ordained ministry a troubled profession? Reporting that clergy suffer from stress, work–family balance issues, a sense of being overworked, poorly compensated, isolated, and under-appreciated by those whom they serve begs the question as to whether clergy are any more “troubled” than their fellow professionals. While every profession shares some of the stresses that beset the clergy, for each stress that clergy share with a particular profession, that profession has compensating aspects which clergy do not share. For example, long and sometimes unsocial hours that conflict with family life are experienced by doctors and those who work in the financial sector, but median levels of compensation for these occupations are far above that of clergy. Like clergy, teachers and social workers may feel relatively underpaid in comparison to other professionals, but both these professions tend to have more fixed hours and their contact between themselves and those they serve is more clearly defined. For clergy, the boundaries between their personal lives and their work lives are limited and they have an accountability to those they serve for their personal lives that is unequalled by any other profession. Clergy also experience high levels of isolation, many either working alone or with a limited amount of professional peer contact. While this is true of other professionals who work on a “freelance” basis, these professionals have a far higher level of autonomy in terms of their work lives and do not have the authority structures of bishops or vestries to which to answer. Thus clergy life is made up of a unique constellation of challenges.

It is not that the ordained ministry is necessarily any more stressed or troubled than any other profession, but this unique constellation of occupational stresses combined with the situation of dynamic equilibrium that The Episcopal Church is now experiencing requires a set of people to be called to the priesthood who possess extraordinary skills and gifts combined with deep reserves of emotional strength. The challenge that lies ahead for The Episcopal Church is to find those persons who can thrive in the current ecclesial environment. While the Church may admit such persons to the priesthood, the ordination process used by most dioceses does not have this goal as its focus. If we fail to find the clergy with the gifts needed, nurture their vocational development, and encourage their health and well-being, then the institutional fabric of the church will decline, leading to a truly troubled profession.

Notes

¹ Because the *Pulpit and Pew* study focused on pastoral leaders, the sample we selected included only rectors. Future analysis will enable us to examine the situation of pastoral leaders in The Episcopal Church in comparison with clergy in other denominations and Anglican clergy in Britain, Australia, and New Zealand. We intend to carry out further studies that will focus on associates, assistants, and curates, and those who serve beyond the parish, in order to gain a comprehensive sense of clergy wellness.

² For a summary of the concerns that together sparked the *Pulpit and Pew* study, see James P. Wind and Gilbert R. Rendle, *The Leadership Situation Facing American Congregations: An Alban Institute Special Report* (Herndon, VA: Alban Institute, September 2001).

³ See Robert Wuthnow, *The Restructuring of American Religion: Society and Faith Since World War II* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1988).

⁴ See Matthew J. Price, *Will There be a Clergy Shortage? Analysis and Predictions for Uncertain Times* (Church Pension Group, 2002). Available at www.cpg.org/research.

⁵ Data for the general population comes from the National Institutes of Health, *National Health Interview Survey* (2000).

⁶ The average percentage growth figure was derived from the average weekly attendance figure that was reported for the year of the survey and the four subsequent years and appeared in the Congregational Profile questionnaire which was sent out with the main leader survey. Only congregations in which the cleric had been present for the past five years were selected for this part of the analysis.

