

EXPERIENCES OF PROTESTANT MINISTERS WHO LEFT LOCAL CHURCH MINISTRY

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Presented to the Religious Research Association, Norfolk, VA, October 25, 2003

As part of the Pulpit and Pew Project at Duke Divinity School we were commissioned to gather new data on why numerous ministers are leaving local church ministry today. It is widely felt in Protestant leadership circles that too many ministers are leaving local church ministry today and not enough talented people are presenting themselves to become local church ministers. Why? What is the situation?

This study was not initiated due to any new crisis in numbers leaving parish ministry. The numbers have not changed much in recent years, so far as we can tell with existing information. The best data comes from the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, where 15% of the newly ordained in 1988 left the roster of clergy (which includes both local church ministers and specialized ministers) in the subsequent 13 years. The percentage leaving *local church ministry* was probably higher. There is no information on trends.

In 2001 we enrolled five denominations: Assemblies of God, Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod, Presbyterian (USA), and United Methodist. We defined the target group of persons to study as follows:

“We are interested in everyone who was ordained in the past, who served in parish ministry full-time or part-time, and within the last eight years has left parish ministry in either of two ways: (1) left parish ministry for non-parish ministries recognized by their ordinations, especially hospital chaplaincies, military chaplaincies, campus ministers, teachers, and professors; or (2) left church ministry entirely. It does not matter whether

the persons, when serving in parish ministry in the past, were the senior pastor or not, whether or not they define their current non-parish jobs as their ‘ministry,’ or whether or not they have given up their ordination. It does not matter if the departure was voluntary or involuntary. It does not matter if the persons were seminary graduates. We will not study (1) persons temporarily without a job who are now actively seeking a parish ministry job, (2) persons who have retired or who have moved from full-time to part-time parish ministry, (3) persons who have switched denominations but have remained in local church ministry, and (4) persons who left the parish to take denominational jobs such as presbytery staff or district superintendent.”

METHOD

We aimed for a random sample of about 200 from the total population of ministers who fit the target description in each denomination. Each denomination agreed to construct its own sample from available records and to mail out the questionnaires. All questionnaires were identical (with two minor differences), and all were returned to Catholic University in Washington, not to denominational offices. No names were asked, but on the last page we asked if the respondent would be open to a phone call later, if we needed one. (Seventy-nine percent said yes.)

Questionnaires went out in spring and summer 2002. Response rates varied: Assemblies of God, 19%; ELCA Lutheran, 54%; Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod, 43%; Presbyterian, 38%; and United Methodist, 20%. The reason for the variation is unclear. We believe that these low response rates introduce some bias into the study, in that other information suggests that the angriest and most alienated ministers tended not to return the questionnaires. They are therefore

underrepresented. Another possible explanation is that those currently in specialized ministry did not think they fit the study criteria. Many respondents, some of whom were quite adamant, made it quite clear that they had not “changed careers” but were still involved in pastoral ministry. The number of completed cases was: Assemblies of God, 174; ELCA Lutheran, 291; Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod, 106; Presbyterian, 173; and United Methodist, 219.

We have two other sources of data. The first is that Jackson Carroll included in the Duke nationwide survey of active ministers about 50 of the same questions which we asked in our survey, thus providing us a control group. Also we interviewed 90 of the former pastors by phone, of those who returned questionnaires.

FINDINGS

We will review preliminary findings under five headings: (1) characteristics of the former pastors, (2) why they left local church ministry, (3) stressors and conflicts in their ministry, (4) former pastors compared with current pastors, and (5) seven major motivations for leaving local church ministry. We have re-sequenced the five denominations in the data tables in a way which seems to facilitate comparisons--Methodists, Presbyterian, ELCA, Missouri Synod, and Assemblies of God.

1. Characteristics of the Former Pastors

Table 1 tells us that many of the former pastors are women. In the Methodist sample it was 29%; in the Presbyterian sample, 41%; in the ELCA sample, 17%, and in the Assemblies of God sample, 5%. These figures are higher than in the active clergy of two denominations--18%

of the active Methodist clergy are women and 18% of the Presbyterians--but not in the others. (Twenty-two percent of the active ministers in the ELCA and 17% in the Assemblies of God are women.)

In their age and years of service, the former pastors are not much different from pastors in active service in these denominations--they are not disproportionately young persons or disproportionately second career ministers. Also the levels of education of the former pastors are similar to those of current pastors. Table 1 shows the average age when they began local church ministry and left local church ministry. The main pattern is that the Assemblies of God ministers began earlier and left earlier than the others.

The bottom of Table 1 tells us that the Methodists had the highest percentage serving two or more congregations, and the Assemblies of God were highest in the percentage working at other jobs in addition to ministry.

In marital status, the Methodists had the lowest percentage in their first marriage and the highest percentage remarried after divorce. The Assemblies of God had the highest percentage currently in their first marriage.

2. Why They Left Local Church Ministry

This is the heart of our inquiry, and we approached it in several ways. We take it as axiomatic that any decision as life-changing as a pastor's decision to leave local church ministry is usually pushed and pulled by more than one influence. Our task was thus to discern and convey the most important factors. One approach we took was to ask the respondents to tell us in their own words their "main feelings and motivations" when they decided to, or were required

to, leave local church ministry. Ninety-one percent wrote in comments, and from them we coded an average of 1.9 motivations. Table 2 has the results listed in order of frequency.

The most commonly mentioned motivation was “an opportunity came for new ministry.” This factor was not always the only one in pushing the decision, since a highly satisfied local church pastor may not be likely to leave even if an opportunity came for new ministry. We need to see it as often acting in combination with other factors, making the task of discerning its importance a difficult one. In any event, it is lower as a motivation for the Methodists and Assemblies of God than for the others, and it is highest for the Missouri Synod pastors.

The second most common comment was that the denomination was not supportive, or that there was conflict with denominational officials. It is similar across denominations. The third most common was that the minister was burned out, discouraged, stressed, or overworked, a feeling voiced by ministers in all the denominations. The fourth--needs of children and family--was slightly higher for the Presbyterians than for others. The fifth--conflicts with church members—and the sixth--doctrinal conflicts over specific issues --occurred similarly in all denominations.

Other comments were less frequent. Note that marital difficulties were disproportionately mentioned by Missouri Synod Lutheran pastors, and financial considerations were slightly more important for Assemblies of God pastors.

A second approach we took was to ask the respondents to rate the importance of 12 motivations we listed in the questionnaire--motivations which had come up in past research and discussions. The results are in Table 3, listed in order of importance. The most common feeling was “I felt drained by the demands on me,” and the second was “I felt lonely or isolated.” Third was “I was not supported by denominational officials.” Fourth most important was “I felt bored or constrained in the position.” The top four all have to do with feelings of excessive demands,

loneliness, constraint, and non-support. We can summarize that this domain of problems--all organizational and interpersonal--is the most important force pushing local church ministers out.

We were surprised that the denominational differences were not larger in Table 3. The overall pattern is that the Presbyterians, ELCA Lutherans, and Missouri Synod Lutherans were fairly similar. The Assemblies of God pastors were unique in some ways, the Methodists less so.

Table 4 contains responses to seven statements about ministry and seminary education. On the first statement, "I felt the demands of laity were unrealistic," the majority agreed, except for the Assemblies of God pastors, who agreed less often than the others. On the fourth, concerning marital problems, the Assemblies of God ministers reported fewer problems than the others.

In the bottom part of Table 4, the majority agree that theological seminary training today is not practical and realistic enough and not deep enough spiritually. The Assemblies of God ministers were unique in a lower level of agreement that seminary training is not deep enough spiritually. The last item states, "The calling and deployment system of my denomination needs to be reformed." The majority agreed in all denominations except the Missouri Synod Lutherans, with the Methodists highest of all.

3. Stressors and Conflicts

Conflict was the biggest single reason why people left. An attendant factor was a feeling of little denominational support. Many former pastors also mentioned burnout and a feeling of constraint--conditions which are similar to conflicts in their source.

It remains for us to get more specific: *what* were the stressors and sources of conflict? We used three kinds of questions to identify them. Table 5 lists five sources of stress, from the most to the least important of the five. Most important was stress “because of the challenges you faced in that congregation.” This is a rather vague statement. Second was stress from feeling lonely and isolated. Third was a feeling that ministry work did not permit the respondent adequate time for his or her children. Fourth and fifth were resentment from the person’s spouse because of undue demands on time and because of low pay. All five denominations were remarkably similar.

If the pastor’s last church had conflicts, what were they about? Table 6 shows questions about the intensity of conflict and the specific issues people fought over. Over one-third of the churches had experienced serious conflict, and denominational differences were small. The specific issues are listed in order of frequency. Most frequent: “pastoral leadership style.” We lack information on what the problems were, but in our phone interviews we got numerous clues. Important sources of problems were innovative young pastors faced with traditional don’t-change-anything older adults and new pastors in churches that had just experienced long, gratifying pastorates.

Second most frequent: “finances.” Third: “changes in worship style.” Fourth: “conflicts between staff and/or clergy.” Fifth: “issues about new buildings or renovation.” Sixth: “changes in music styles.” Slight denominational differences occurred on the first item, “pastoral leadership style,” which was more common for the Assemblies of God and Presbyterian pastors than others. Conflicts over finances were most common among the Methodists and ELCA Lutherans.

Summary: The most important reason for leaving local church ministry was stress and conflict, often coupled with feelings of a lack of denominational support. Conflicts were sometimes within the congregation, sometimes with denominational officials.

4. Former Pastors Compared with Current Pastors

Our analysis was greatly enhanced by having a control group of active pastors in three denominations. It came from the “oversample” of the Duke Research in Pastoral Leadership Survey, and it used questionnaires similar to ours. The response rates were moderately low because the congregations were requested to pass out questionnaires to church attenders to fill out, in addition to having the pastor fill one out. This was a big request, too big for many congregations, and so many refused. But in those who agreed, almost all of the pastors filled out the pastor questionnaire. Overall response rates were 18% for the Methodists, 25% for the Presbyterians, and 35% for the ELCA. The pastor survey was limited to senior and solo pastors, not including associates or interim ministers. Therefore for comparability we compared the current ministers with only senior and solo former pastors in our data. See Table 7.

The age of the former and current pastors was similar. The former pastors were disproportionately female among the Presbyterians, but not the others. As regards marital status, the former pastors were less often in their first marriages, more often remarried after divorce (except for the Presbyterians).

Virtually all of the Presbyterian and ELCA Lutheran pastors, both former and current, had been ordained, but this was not the case among the Methodists.

Table 8 compares the levels of satisfaction felt by former and current pastors. The items are arranged from highest to lowest for the former pastors. Thus (at the top of the table) their

satisfaction with their former housing or living arrangements, their relations with other clergy, and their relations with lay leaders in their congregations were important sources of satisfaction, while support from denominational officials, spiritual life, and salary provided little satisfaction (at the bottom).

Differences between former and current pastors were large on three of these topics: (1) family life --an average difference of 26 percentage points; (2) relations with lay leaders in the congregation--also an average difference of 26 points; and (3) ministry position --an average difference of 25 points.

Stress Felt by Former and Current Pastors

Table 9 includes eight questions about stress. Clearly the former pastors experienced more stress than the current ministers. The first item in the table asks about how often the pastor had felt doubt about whether he or she was called by God to the ministry. Whereas not many respondents reported such doubts, the former pastors did so more than the current ones. The second question has a similar pattern, in that the former pastors had *much more* stress from congregation members critical of their work. The differences are large.

The bottom part of Table 9 continues similar findings--that the former pastors clearly felt more stress than the active ministers. For example, on the question, "Did you experience stress because of the challenges you faced in that congregation?" the Methodist former pastors were 20 percentage points higher than the current pastors, the Presbyterian former pastors were 22 points higher, and the ELCA Lutheran former pastors were 16 points higher. On the question, "Did you feel lonely and isolated in your work?" the Methodist former pastors were 26 percentage points higher, the Presbyterian were 30 points higher, and the ELCA Lutheran were 30 points higher.

These are strong, unmistakable findings. The four last items in Table 9 had similar patterns, but the differences were less striking.

Table 10 asks about five specific problems many clergy face, listed in order of importance. Those at the top of the table are more widely felt. The difference between former and current pastors was greatest on the third item, “Lack of agreement over what the role of a pastor is,” where the difference averaged 20 percentage points in the three denominations. The second largest difference was on the second item, “Difficulty of having a private life apart from my ministerial role,” an average of 16 percentage points. As a summary statement, the top three items in Table 10 are urgent problems driving many local church pastors away.

Summary: The former pastors in many ways were not different from the active pastors. The two groups were similar in age and experience. But the former pastors experienced much more stress, conflict, and alienation--largely due to difficulties within the staff or the congregation. In addition, more of the former pastors reported a lack of clarity about the correct role of a pastor and resentment from their spouses because of the high time demands and low pay of ministry.

5. Subgroups

We divided the data in six ways. First, how do men and women differ? (We compared them only in the three denominations that have women ministers. The Assemblies of God have women ministers but there were too few in this study for analysis.) We found that the women had been ordained a later age than the men (an average of 32, compared with 28 for the men). More women than men had never been married (16% versus 4%), and more had been associate ministers (31% versus 15%).

Men former pastors reported more marital problems, more resentment from spouses about lack of time or money, and more situations where their spouse did not like the congregation (24%, versus 8% for the women's spouses). Men also reported more feelings of loneliness and isolation.

Second, we compared senior (or solo) pastors and associates. The associates consistently reported leaving more often due to staff conflicts. For example, on whether they had a problem with "relationships with other clergy and staff members in the church," 53% of the associates, compared with 33% of the senior pastors said it was a problem.

Third, we compared young versus old, that is, pastors who left at age 45 or younger versus those who left at age 46 or older. We found surprisingly few differences besides obvious ones--for example, that the former more often were associate pastors. Apparently the young and old had similar experiences.

Fourth, we looked at those who served for many years versus those who served for only a few years. There were few differences.

Fifth, we divided the sample into former pastors who left voluntarily and those who left involuntarily. Let us explain that there are actually three discernible groups. (1) Some left local church ministry voluntarily with no visible "push" factors. Usually they left because they preferred another form of ministry or because they felt they needed to care for their children or family. We estimate them at 15 to 25 percent of our sample. (2) A second group left voluntarily but pressured by strong "push" factors, pre-eminently conflict, stress, burnout, or family problems. They are a somewhat undefined group, but we estimate them at 40 to 50 percent of the total. (3) A third group left involuntarily and had no choice but to leave. Usually they were forced out by denominational officials or by a combination of lay and denominational leaders as

a result of allegations of sexual misconduct, divorce, other misconduct, or uncontrollable conflict. They comprise about 30 to 40 percent overall.

SUMMARY OF MOTIVATIONS

We began this project by asking why many ministers are leaving local church ministry, and what could be done to reduce the numbers. To summarize the main motivations for leaving, we identified the seven most prominent ones and, using all available information in questionnaires and phone calls, categorized as many cases as possible into these seven. Two or more persons in our research team made independent judgments about each case. See Table 11. Due to the difficulties in categorizing some of the cases--either because two or more motivations were strong or because of sketchy information--the reader should see these categories as no more than approximate. The larger categories (#1 through #4) could possibly be inaccurate as much as 5 percentage points. Twenty-two percent of the cases needed to be left in the "other" category, either because of lack of information or because of an unusual motivation. We encountered three identifiable motivations which we left in the "other" group--(1) a few left largely due to financial problems, (2) a few left largely due to ill health, and (3) and a few left because they wanted an open gay or lesbian lifestyle. We estimate that these three would add up to almost half of the cases in the "other" category.

The first four categories are the largest. Categories #1 and #2 are ministers who left largely due to conflicts, either in the congregation or with other staff (#1) or with denominational officials (#2). Category #2 also includes ministers who felt disillusioned with their denomination. These two categories contain about 26% of the cases.

About 12% were in category #3--burned out, disillusioned, felt constrained, or felt a sense of inadequacy. The fourth category was the largest--preferred other kind of ministry, accounting for about 26%.

Categories #5, #6, and #7 are smaller. About 6% left largely due to allegations of sexual misconduct, about 4% left largely to care for families or children, and about 5% left due to problems in their families or divorce.

Since the seven main motivations in Table 11 are not very precise, we hesitate to display the breakdown of each of the five denominations into the seven. We do not want readers to impute more precision to our categorization than is warranted.

Table 11 also shows the breakdown for men and women. The important patterns are that (1) leaving local church ministry for other ministries was more common among men, (2) leaving due to sexual misconduct or divorce is mainly a problem of men, and (3) leaving to care for family or children is mostly done by women.

We have seen that organizational and interpersonal problems were the main forces pushing pastors out of local church ministry. The former pastors told of conflicts, burnout, and feelings of non-support from their denominations. Doctrinal, financial, and health factors proved less important.

RECOMMENDATIONS BY THE PASTORS

In our interviews with former pastors we asked what recommendations they would like to make to their denominations. Pastors identified lack of support as a major difficulty in serving as a local church minister. The two most obvious sources of support are from denominational leadership or from other clergy. Pastors found it difficult to confide their problems in

denominational leaders because they did not want to jeopardize future calls and promotions. They felt constrained in seeking support from other clergy because of the enormous competition that exists among them.

A Presbyterian pastor who resigned at age 62 told us that it is common for parish ministers to feel all alone:

My impression is that ministers often feel that they're kind of out there by themselves. And from other ministers that talked with me too. My brother-in-law was a Presbyterian minister too, and he had some of the same feelings. He was in another presbytery. They put on things with ministers; they have meetings at campgrounds and things like that. But when push comes to shove time, they sort of leave the ministers alone, and that's not good. I have no idea what the percentage is who that hurts, but I know there are ministers who hurt.

A United Methodist minister who left at age 49 voiced his concern about division among the clergy:

There needs to be something that builds community among clergy. It may just be in the era when it was all happening to me, but a lot of the trend in the United Methodist Church is toward dividing clergy. The district superintendent can no longer be your support, your shepherd. The bishop certainly is not a shepherd to the shepherds in that structure, where he really becomes the judge, jury and, by and large, the executionist. (laugh) It makes it tough to be a good shepherd. But there need to be some structures, there need to be some ways of giving clergy appropriate avenues to go to for rejuvenation.

An Evangelical Lutheran minister would have welcomed help with conflict negotiation:

Having skilled and effective conflict-helpers on a synod staff would be very, very helpful. In fact I would say, without exception the people in the synod that I served in were not good at it. And maybe part of the reason they get to be where they are, is that people are very uncomfortable with conflict, and so we tend to pick people who are not very confrontational and don't create much conflict to be the synod leaders.

Another pastor, a Presbyterian, looked to the presbytery for support:

I think one of the things that could be done is that when a minister gets into trouble or has a problem situation, he should have the idea that the presbytery is concerned about him as much as they are concerned about the church. And I didn't have that idea at all. And *that* almost has to be done on a presbytery level; I don't see how the General Assembly could do it.

Pastors often were in need of ways to reduce the amount of stress they were experiencing. Table 9 shows the increased levels of stress experienced by former pastors over current pastors. From critical congregation members to loneliness and isolation to family resentments, those who left local church ministry suffered inordinately from the negative effects of stress.

Former pastors also recommended that when pastors are considering a move to a new church, more information about the church should be shared with them. Many felt that neither the congregation nor the denominational leaders were sufficiently candid and honest in their portrayal of individual church needs, history, and expectations.

Finally, several pastors were concerned that their denomination lacks purpose and direction. Conservative pastors thought their denomination had strayed far from their biblical roots. Liberal pastors wanted to see more openness and inclusivity. Both called for more clarity and forthrightness in their denomination's beliefs and attitudes.

CONCLUDING STATEMENT

Already we can come to some conclusions. For example, the main factors pushing local church ministers away are organizational and interpersonal. These pushes have to do with conflict, feelings of being stymied, and isolation. Also the former pastors, compared with active pastors, reported more stress, conflict, and alienation, more unclarity about the proper role of a pastor, and more resentment from spouses.

Pastors who have left do not feel that they had sufficient support from their denominations, especially during times of conflict. They often feel lonely and isolated and have little support from other clergy. They experience communication among denominational

officials, pastors, and local churches as inconsistent and insufficient. Often they feel that they have had little opportunity to voice their opinions or air their positions.

Although we were able to identify the main motivation for leaving among pastors, it is the combination of these many stresses and difficulties that pastors face that result in a pastor's being unable or unwilling to continue to serve the local church.

Table 1
Characteristics of Sample Members

| | Meth | Pres | ELCA | LC-MS | Assem |
|--|------|------|------|-------|-------|
| | (%) | (%) | (%) | (%) | (%) |
| Percent female | 29 | 41 | 17 | 0 | 5 |
| What is the highest level of theological training you have obtained? | | | | | |
| Master of Divinity, Bachelor of Divinity, or more | 94 | 100 | 100 | 99 | 27 |
| Were you ever ordained (credentialed) as a minister? Yes | 90 | 99 | 100 | 100 | 95 |
| Age when began local church ministry | | | | | |
| Average | 30 | 30 | 28 | 31 | 25 |
| Age when left local church ministry | 45 | 44 | 45 | 45 | 41 |
| How would you describe your last local church ministry position? | | | | | |
| Senior pastor or minister | 33 | 12 | 18 | 15 | 47 |
| Solo pastor or minister | 46 | 40 | 50 | 68 | 17 |
| Co-pastor | 4 | 8 | 9 | 2 | 1 |
| Interim pastor or minister | 1 | 8 | 7 | 0 | 2 |
| Assistant or associate minister | 14 | 28 | 16 | 13 | 25 |
| Other | 2 | 5 | 0 | 2 | 8 |
| At the same time did you serve another congregation in addition to this one? Yes | 25 | 10 | 11 | 17 | 2 |
| While serving in your last position, did you work at any job other than as minister of that congregation (or congregations)? Yes | 18 | 22 | 21 | 20 | 49 |

Table 2
Reported Feelings When Deciding to Leave Local Church Ministry:
Ideas in Open-Ended Comments

| | Meth | Pres | ELCA | LC-MS | AOG |
|---|------|------|------|-------|-----|
| | (%) | (%) | (%) | (%) | (%) |
| Opportunity came for new ministry | 21 | 33 | 32 | 49 | 24 |
| Denomination not supportive, or conflict with denominational officials | 29 | 26 | 25 | 25 | 23 |
| Burned out, discouraged, stressed, overworked | 18 | 25 | 26 | 20 | 18 |
| Needs of children and family | 11 | 19 | 8 | 6 | 10 |
| Conflicts with church members | 8 | 12 | 9 | 6 | 11 |
| Doctrinal conflicts (service to the poor, homosexuality, women clergy issues, spirituality) | 10 | 9 | 8 | 4 | 6 |
| Domination by senior pastor; conflicts in staff | 5 | 10 | 8 | 5 | 11 |
| Unreasonable expectations from church members | 4 | 11 | 7 | 6 | 7 |
| Marital difficulties or divorce | 6 | 2 | 5 | 14 | 5 |
| Felt constrained by staff or members; church resisted change | 6 | 7 | 6 | 7 | 9 |
| Financial considerations | 5 | 6 | 4 | 3 | 12 |
| Sexual misconduct | 4 | 3 | 8 | 8 | 1 |
| Health issues | 5 | 5 | 6 | 1 | 5 |
| Wished to pursue further education | 2 | 6 | 4 | 2 | 3 |
| Openly gay or lesbian | 2 | 3 | 4 | 2 | 1 |
| Difficulties around co-pastoring with spouse | 1 | 2 | 0 | 0 | 2 |
| Other | 23 | 11 | 12 | 10 | 14 |

NOTE: Up to three ideas were coded, thus percentages add up to more than 100 percent.

Table 3
Reason for Leaving Local Church Ministry

| | Meth | Pres | ELCA | LC-MS | Assem |
|--|------|------|------|-------|-------|
| | (%) | (%) | (%) | (%) | (%) |
| How important were each of the following possible reasons why you left your position in local church ministry? (Percent responding "Great importance" or "Somewhat important" to each) | | | | | |
| I felt drained by the demands on me. | 53 | 63 | 63 | 47 | 56 |
| I felt lonely or isolated. | 48 | 49 | 58 | 54 | 45 |
| I was not supported by denominational officials. | 54 | 35 | 45 | 37 | 38 |
| I felt bored or constrained in the position. | 44 | 49 | 46 | 39 | 32 |
| I found a better job outside of congregational work. | 40 | 40 | 41 | 38 | 26 |
| I had marital problems or personal relationship problems. | 29 | 24 | 29 | 31 | 20 |
| I felt doubts about my abilities as a pastoral minister. | 17 | 22 | 30 | 34 | 30 |
| Lay leaders strongly pressured me to leave. | 14 | 22 | 28 | 16 | 18 |
| My spouse or family did not like the congregation. | 21 | 18 | 19 | 16 | 23 |
| I had health problems. | 18 | 18 | 19 | 13 | 13 |
| I moved because my spouse moved for a new job. | 5 | 13 | 7 | 0 | 4 |
| My regional official reassigned me to a different position. | 18 | 0 | 3 | 4 | 2 |

Table 4
Feelings about Ministry and Seminary

| | Meth | Pres | ELCA | LC-MS | Assem |
|---|------|------|------|-------|-------|
| | (%) | (%) | (%) | (%) | (%) |
| Do you agree or disagree with these statements? (Percent responding "strongly agree" or "somewhat agree" to each) | | | | | |
| In my last pastoral ministry position... | | | | | |
| I felt the demands of laity were unrealistic. | 54 | 58 | 58 | 51 | 43 |
| I felt I could not speak openly and honestly with denominational officials. | 63 | 41 | 47 | 40 | 58 |
| I felt discouraged about being able to find a better ministry job. | 31 | 32 | 33 | 27 | 36 |
| (If married) I was troubled by marital problems. | 30 | 30 | 32 | 33 | 21 |
| My feelings today are... | | | | | |
| Training in theological seminary today is not practical and realistic enough. | 59 | 64 | 55 | 53 | 54 |
| Training in theological seminary today is not deep enough spiritually. | 55 | 58 | 55 | 53 | 40 |
| The calling and deployment system of my denomination needs to be reformed. | 79 | 58 | 60 | 46 | 66 |

Table 5
Sources of Stress in the Person's Last Ministry Position

| | Meth | Pres | ELCA | LC-MS | Assem |
|---|------|------|------|-------|-------|
| | (%) | (%) | (%) | (%) | (%) |
| In the last year of your personal ministry position, how often: (Percent responding "Very often" or "fairly often" to each) | | | | | |
| Did you experience stress because of the challenges you faced in that congregation? | 63 | 65 | 66 | 57 | 59 |
| Did you feel lonely and isolated in your work? | 60 | 52 | 63 | 57 | 54 |
| Did you feel that your work in that congregation did not permit you to devote adequate time to your children? | 32 | 31 | 34 | 35 | 28 |
| Did your spouse voice resentment over the amount of time that your ministry took up? | 25 | 24 | 32 | 32 | 27 |
| Did your spouse voice resentment over the financial situation in which you found yourself by being in pastoral ministry? | 18 | 15 | 17 | 19 | 25 |

Table 6
Conflicts in Last Church

| | Meth | Pres | ELCA | LC-MS | Assem |
|--|------|------|------|-------|-------|
| | (%) | (%) | (%) | (%) | (%) |
| In your last local church ministry position, during the <u>last two years</u> of your service, was there any conflict in the congregation? | | | | | |
| Yes, major conflict | 37 | 38 | 42 | 42 | 37 |
| (If a conflict:) What was the conflict about?(check as many as apply) | | | | | |
| Pastoral leadership style | 29 | 41 | 36 | 29 | 42 |
| Finances | 30 | 19 | 31 | 25 | 19 |
| Changes in worship style | 24 | 27 | 20 | 29 | 24 |
| Conflicts between staff and/or clergy | 16 | 21 | 17 | 18 | 18 |
| Issues about new building or renovation | 25 | 15 | 18 | 18 | 18 |
| Changes in music styles | 18 | 20 | 9 | 24 | 20 |
| Lay leadership style | 15 | 15 | 18 | 15 | 9 |
| Changes in other congregation programs | 16 | 14 | 11 | 16 | 16 |
| Doctrines | 11 | 5 | 6 | 18 | 8 |
| Sexual misconduct | 6 | 6 | 10 | 6 | 10 |
| Issues regarding homosexuality | 10 | 11 | 8 | 2 | 1 |
| Racial issues | 6 | 3 | 4 | 1 | 4 |
| Local outreach programs | 2 | 4 | 4 | 10 | 1 |
| Church growth issues | 4 | 3 | 3 | 2 | 4 |
| Other | 19 | 15 | 11 | 12 | 12 |

Table 7
 Characteristics of Former Pastors and Current Pastors

| | | Methodist | Presby- terian | ELCA Lutheran |
|---|----------------|-----------|-------------------|------------------|
| | No. of former | 177 | 106 | 221 |
| | No. of current | 171 | 416 | 357 |
| | | (%) | (%) | (%) |
| <hr/> | | | | |
| Average age when left (years) | Former | 46 | 46 | 45 |
| Average age at the same time (years) | Current | 47 | 50 | 46 |
| Percent female | Former | 27 | 32 | 13 |
| | Current | 24 | 18 | 15 |
| Marital status | | | | |
| Never married | Former | 7 | 6 | 6 |
| | Current | 6 | 7 | 6 |
| In first marriage | Former | 36 | 62 | 54 |
| | Current | 61 | 67 | 74 |
| Remarried after divorce | Former | 29 | 16 | 18 |
| | Current | 22 | 19 | 12 |
| Any children? Yes | Former | 89 | 83 | 87 |
| | Current | 91 | 85 | 88 |
| What is the highest level of theo- logical training you have obtained? | | | | |
| Master or Bachelor of Divinity or more | Former | 93 | 100 | 100 |
| | Current | 86 | 98 | 100 |
| Were you ever ordained? Yes | Former | 90 | 100 | 100 |
| | Current | 86 | 100 | 100 |
| (If ever ordained:) For how many years? Average at the same time the former pastors left. | | | | |
| | Former | 13 | 16 | 16 |
| | Current | 13 | 18 | 16 |

Table 8
Levels of Satisfaction in Ministry Reported by Former and Current Pastors
(Percent "Very or Somewhat Satisfied")

| | | Methodist (%) | Presby- terian (%) | ELCA Lutheran (%) |
|---|---------|------------------|--------------------------|-------------------------|
| At present (in the final years of your last local church ministry position), what is (was) your level of satisfaction with the following? "Very satisfied" | | | | |
| Housing or living arrangements | Former | 50 | 57 | 54 |
| | Current | 63 | 68 | 66 |
| Relations with other clergy | Former | 27 | 44 | 42 |
| | Current | 34 | 34 | 43 |
| Relations with lay leaders in your congregation | Former | 31 | 31 | 29 |
| | Current | 56 | 57 | 56 |
| Your overall effectiveness as a pastoral leader | Former | 36 | 30 | 32 |
| | Current | 44 | 45 | 42 |
| Your ministry position | Former | 36 | 29 | 30 |
| | Current | 52 | 57 | 62 |
| Your family life | Former | 30 | 27 | 31 |
| | Current | 54 | 58 | 54 |
| Your salary and benefits | Former | 25 | 23 | 26 |
| | Current | 44 | 41 | 45 |
| Spiritual life | Former | 23 | 18 | 23 |
| | Current | 28 | 24 | 22 |
| Support from your denominational officials | Former | 9 | 21 | 24 |
| | Current | 39 | 38 | 40 |

Table 9
Sources of Stress

| | | Methodist | Presby- terian | ELCA Lutheran |
|--|---------|-----------|-------------------|------------------|
| | | (%) | (%) | (%) |
| In the <u>last five years</u> of your last pastoral ministry position, how often did you: ("Very often or fairly often") | | | | |
| Doubt that you are called by God to the ministry? | Former | 14 | 16 | 17 |
| | Current | 8 | 6 | 7 |
| Experience stress as a result of dealing with congregation members who are critical of your work? | Former | 48 | 61 | 50 |
| | Current | 33 | 25 | 27 |
| In the <u>last year</u> of your last pastoral ministry position, how often: ("Very often or fairly often") | | | | |
| Did you experience stress because of the challenges you faced in that congregation? | Former | 63 | 71 | 65 |
| | Current | 43 | 49 | 49 |
| Did you feel lonely and isolated in your work? | Former | 62 | 62 | 65 |
| | Current | 36 | 32 | 35 |
| Did you feel that your work in that congregation did not permit you to devote adequate time to your children? | Former | 31 | 31 | 34 |
| | Current | 14 | 12 | 19 |
| Did your spouse voice resentment over the amount of time that your ministry took up? | Former | 24 | 28 | 32 |
| | Current | 13 | 15 | 21 |
| Did your spouse voice resentment over the financial situation in | | | | |

which you found yourself by
being in pastoral ministry?

| | | | |
|---------|----|----|----|
| Former | 18 | 16 | 18 |
| Current | 10 | 13 | 9 |

My feelings today are:

I am really glad that I entered
the ministry. "Strongly agree or
somewhat agree"

| | | | |
|---------|----|----|----|
| Former | 80 | 84 | 80 |
| Current | 90 | 93 | 91 |

Table 10
Problems and Stressors

| | | Methodist (%) | Presby- terian (%) | ELCA Lutheran (%) |
|---|---------|------------------|--------------------------|-------------------------|
| Clergy face many problems today. How important are (were) the following to you on a day-to-day basis? "Great problem" | | | | |
| Finding time for recreation, relaxation, or personal reflection | Former | 28 | 26 | 23 |
| | Current | 20 | 20 | 23 |
| Difficulty of having a private life apart from my ministerial role | Former | 27 | 26 | 27 |
| | Current | 10 | 11 | 12 |
| Lack of agreement over what the role of a pastor is | Former | 26 | 29 | 30 |
| | Current | 7 | 9 | 8 |
| Having people relate to me differently because I'm a pastor | Former | 11 | 11 | 13 |
| | Current | 7 | 5 | 4 |
| Relationships with other clergy and staff members in the church | Former | 5 | 12 | 8 |
| | Current | 3 | 2 | 2 |

Table 11
Seven Main Motivations for Leaving Local Church Ministry

| | Total | Men | Women |
|---|-------|-----|-------|
| | (%) | (%) | (%) |
| 1. Conflict in congregation, with staff or laity | 16 | 15 | 20 |
| 2. Conflict with denominational officials; disillusioned with denomination | 10 | 9 | 10 |
| 3. Burned out; disillusioned; felt constrained; sense of inadequacy | 12 | 12 | 15 |
| 4. Prefer other ministry | 26 | 27 | 19 |
| 5. Allegations of sexual misconduct | 6 | 7 | 1 |
| 6. Needed to care for family or children | 4 | 2 | 15 |
| 7. Problems in family; divorce | 5 | 6 | 1 |
| Inadequate data or other | 22 | 22 | 19 |