

## CHAPTER 2 THE HIGH CASUALTY RATE AMONG PASTORS

Evidence relating to the clergy in the United States reveals serious problems. Because of those problems, a significant percentage of clergy leave their ministries, their careers and their callings. This grim, under-reported reality is mostly unknown to Christian believers, with the exception of parishioners who have watched their own pastors depart. What are the exact numbers of clerics who are quitting? No one actually knows, but in study after study, surveys suggest the statistics are catastrophically high. According to studies by the Alban Institute and Fuller Seminary, 50 percent, fully one out of every two pastors, drop out of ministry within the first five years, and many never go back to the church again.<sup>45</sup>

In the United States, thousands of churches open and close each year. The Hartford Institute estimates that there are approximately 335,000 religious congregations in the U.S., of which 300,000 are Protestant, and 22,000 are Catholic and Orthodox.<sup>46</sup> The average *congregation* in the U.S. has just 75 regular participants. According to the National Congregations Study conducted by Duke University, surveys from both 1998 and 2006–07 identified that the average *attendee* worshiped in a congregation with about 400 regular participants. Most interesting, the largest 10 percent of the congregations represent about half of all churchgoers in the U.S. “There is a lot to say about congregational size, but one fact is fundamental: Most congregations in the United States are small, but most people are in large congregations. Despite the recent proliferation of

---

<sup>45</sup> K. Meek, M. McMinn, C. Brower, et al, “Maintaining Personal Resiliency: Lessons Learned from Evangelical Protestant Clergy,” *Journal of Psychology and Theology*, 31.4(2009), 339–47.

<sup>46</sup> Fast Facts. [hrr.hartsem.edu/research/fastfacts/fast\\_facts.html](http://hrr.hartsem.edu/research/fastfacts/fast_facts.html) (accessed January 27, 2012).

very large Protestant churches we call mega-churches, the size of the average congregation has not changed since 1998.”<sup>47</sup> Author Jeffrey MacDonald comments:

Mega-churches, with their upbeat worship services and small groups tailored to personal preferences, have figured out a winning formula for growth. Only 310 mega-churches existed in 1990. By 2007, the count had reached 1,250. Mega-churches provide a spiritual home for some 4.5 million weekly attendees, including many newcomers to Christianity.<sup>48</sup>

In a widely quoted report, the Gallup Research organization claimed that 40 percent of all Americans, about 118 million people, attend worship weekly. This is a flawed statistic. An Episcopal Church researcher, Kirk Hadaway, and his colleague, Penny Marler, more accurately report that 20.4 percent of the population of the U.S. (313,000,000)—half the Gallup estimate—attend church weekly. Hadaway and Marler estimate that there are 331,000 congregations, with an average 161.9 persons in attendance, a total of some 53,603,588 weekly worshippers.<sup>49</sup> Martin E. Marty of the University of Chicago Divinity School summarizes the authors’ data:

According to the researchers' findings, if last week was typical, 9,023,693 ‘Mainline Protestants’ were to be found in 82,183 congregations, averaging 110 at each—or 19.4 percent of their constituent population over age five. Roman Catholics? At 19,544 parishes, with average attendance of 854, there were 16,680,804, or 25.4 percent of the constituent population. Orthodox and other Catholics numbered 471,128 in 2,431 churches, with a high rate of 35.9 percent of the constituency at worship. ‘Other Christians’ in 36,450 places were represented by 97.9 people on average, or 3,568,455 at worship, 25.2 percent of the constituency. Non-Christians: 18.2 percent of the constituency in 11,720 congregations, with 138.75 worshippers average, totaling 1,625,564. And

---

<sup>47</sup> American Congregations at the Beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century: National Congregations Study; [www.soc.duke.edu/natcong/Docs/NCSII\\_report\\_final.pdf](http://www.soc.duke.edu/natcong/Docs/NCSII_report_final.pdf) (accessed February 7, 2012).

<sup>48</sup> G. Jeffrey MacDonald, *Thieves in the Temple* (New York: Basic Books, 2010), 91.

<sup>49</sup> Kirk C. Hadaway, and Penny Long Marler, “How Many Americans Attend Worship Each Week? An Alternative Approach to Measurement” (Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion, September 2005).

the biggie: ‘Conservative/Evangelicals’ in 178,672 places, again 25.4 percent of the constituency, or 22,233,944 worshippers.<sup>50</sup>

### **Southern Baptist Convention**

The largest Protestant denomination in the United States of America, the Southern Baptist Convention, is in decline. Southern Baptist churches reported 332,321 baptisms in 2010, down from 349,737 in 2009, a 4.98 percent decline. Total membership in 2010, reported at 16,136,044, represents a 0.15 percent decline from 2009: this is the fourth straight year of decline. Oddly, the number of churches in the Southern Baptist Convention rose to 45,727 in 2010, an increase of 1.59 percent from the 45,010 identified in 2009. Membership and actual attendance are two different realities. Primary worship attendance in SBC churches mirrored the decline in overall membership, declining 0.19 percent to 6,195,449 in 2010.<sup>51</sup> Nearly 10,000,000 people on SBC church membership rolls are nowhere to be found—they do not attend services (indeed, many of them are probably dead!).

The SBC’s LifeWay Christian Resources, within the Department of Pastoral Ministries, conducts an annual survey compiled in cooperation with the Baptist State Convention Church Ministry Relations Teams and Directors of Missions. In 1999, the survey reported that of senior pastors who left the ministry, only 55 percent returned to

---

<sup>50</sup> [divinity.uchicago.edu/martycenter/publications/sightings/archive\\_2005/0926.shtml](http://divinity.uchicago.edu/martycenter/publications/sightings/archive_2005/0926.shtml) (accessed February 14, 2012).

<sup>51</sup> Russ, Rankin, “Total mission expenditures in 2010 totaled 1.3 billion, down from \$1.3 billion in 2009 (one state not reporting). Total tithes, offerings and special gifts received in SBC churches totaled \$10.68 billion, a decline of \$153 million from 2009 (one state not reporting).” “*Southern Baptists decline in baptisms, membership, attendance*,” (June 9, 2011), [www.lifeway.com/Article/Southern-baptists-decline-in-baptisms-in-membership-attendance](http://www.lifeway.com/Article/Southern-baptists-decline-in-baptisms-in-membership-attendance) (accessed February 16, 2012).

church-related vocations.<sup>52</sup> LifeWay's media relations furthermore reported that more than 1,300 staff within the Southern Baptist denomination were dismissed in 2005. This was the highest total in the 10 years they have kept data. The primary reasons for dismissal included lack of communication, problems related to immorality and unethical conduct, performance dissatisfaction, authoritarian leadership style, power struggles, and personality conflicts. Tragically, "the most shocking statistic from this study is that only 55 percent of pastors who experienced forced termination returned to church-related vocations while 45 percent did not."<sup>53</sup>

This truly presents a staggering picture of U.S. clergy who are being terminated or falling morally, in all probability record numbers of clergy casualties in the history of Christianity. However, Charles Chandler, Executive Director of the Ministering to Ministers Foundation (MTM), based in Richmond, VA, stated to me that there is no scientific data to support the statistics the SBC provides of ministers terminated, and that the numbers are much higher than reported. Over 1,000 ministers have attended MTM's Wellness Retreats. LifeWay, however, dispensed with its LeaderCare program for pastors in need and, amazingly, has no denominational program for pastors in crisis.

The 2008 Forced Termination Survey of the SBC revealed that 735 bi-vocational, full-time, and staff ministers were terminated. Sexual misconduct, number nine on the list of issues, was attributed to 48 clerics. The causes of termination remind us of the significant range and level of skills a pastor requires to succeed in ministry. The following list ranks the reason for and number of pastoral dismissals in a recent year:

---

<sup>52</sup> B. Sheffield, "Forced Terminations," LifeWay Christian Resources of the Southern Baptist Convention, (Nashville, TN, 1999).

<sup>53</sup> R. Croucher, "Forced Terminations: When the Church Asks a Pastor to Leave" (2000), [priscillasfriends.org/studies/terminations.html](http://priscillasfriends.org/studies/terminations.html) (accessed January 30, 2012).

1. Control issues—who is going to run the church/354
2. Poor “people skills” on the part of the pastor/221
3. Church’s resistance to change/194
4. Pastor’s leadership style is too strong/156
5. Church was already in conflict when pastor arrived/144
6. Decline in attendance/81
7. Pastor’s leadership style is too weak/73
8. Administrative incompetence on the part of the pastor/62
9. Sexual misconduct/48
10. Disagreement over doctrine/44
11. Conflict with other staff/47
12. Other/42
13. Ethical misconduct—mismanaging monies, dishonesty/42
14. Rapid growth/14
15. Tenure—been at church too long/13<sup>54</sup>

The 2010 Forced Termination Survey indicated that 450 pastors were terminated, an elimination percentage of less than 1.5 percent (the 22 state conventions that provided information to the survey represent a total of 26,620 churches, 60 percent of the 44,696 SBC churches identified in that year). The SBC report stated:

It is estimated that only 15 percent of the churches have a full-time staff minister (associate). If that is close to correct, the measured number of churches where 159 full-time staff ministers (associates) were terminated is 3,987, indicating that the termination percentage for them (associate ministers are referred to as “staff ministers” in this report), is 4 percent, more than twice the termination rate for pastors.<sup>55</sup>

Furthermore, it appears that Associate pastors (“staff ministers”) are fired twice as often as are senior pastors. Most surveys do not even begin to factor in this additional statistic.

“[A] majority of pastors experience loneliness and discouragement. That is the finding of a survey by LifeWay of 1,000 American Protestant pastors August 17–24,

---

<sup>54</sup> Scott McConnell, Director, LifeWay Research of the Southern Baptist Convention, Nashville, TN, “2008 *Forced Termination Survey*” in an email to the author, February 1, 2012.

<sup>55</sup> “If all my assumptions are even close to correct, staff ministers are twice as like to be terminated as pastors. If all of the SBC churches had reported, the projected number of terminations for pastors and full-time staff ministers would be 859, about two percent (2010).” *Terminated Ministers Report*, Scott McConnell, Director, LifeWay Research in an email to the author February 1, 2012.

2011.”<sup>56</sup> But when the pastor is lonely, discouraged, and tempted to sin, where does he go for help? Who ministers to the minister? When pastors are discouraged, think about quitting, and wonder if they have what it takes, to whom do they go to be transparently honest without endangering their career?

A September 2011 study (commissioned by the president of the Southern Baptist Convention) to consider a possible name change for the 166-year-old convention discovered that the SBC is viewed more negatively by the general public than are other churches or faith groups. Discovering that a church is affiliated with the SBC would make four out of 10 Americans less likely to visit and join—many of those are the unchurched: Of these, some 44 percent never attend church; 29 percent are Hispanics; and 25 percent are young adults aged 18–29.<sup>57</sup> Couple that with the exponential impact of thousands of terminations of SBC staff, firings that affect their families and their friends, mix in the cultural elements of decadence opposing the denomination that has adhered to biblical authority, and you have a strong public relations challenge.

---

<sup>56</sup> David Roach, “Survey: Pastors feel privileged and positive, though discouragement can come,” October 5, 2011; [www.lifeway.com](http://www.lifeway.com) (accessed February 9, 2012).

<sup>57</sup> Methodology: The Life Way Research survey was conducted September 23-26, 2011, using an online panel. A representative sample of the U. S. adult population was invited to participate. The sample of 2,114 provides 95 percent confidence that the sampling error does not exceed +2.2 percent. A full PowerPoint of the study can be downloaded at [LifeWayResearch.com](http://LifeWayResearch.com). (December 7, 2011) “Study: Americans have mixed impressions of Southern Baptists’ Identity.”

## Church of the Nazarene

*Why Nazarene Pastors Depart Ministry and How They Feel About It*<sup>58</sup> reported on a survey of ordained Church of the Nazarene ministers who had pastored for at least two years but had been unemployed as denominational pastors for three years or more. The authors of the study, Green and Hunter, who each hold a doctorate in sociology, confessed that some ministers were reticent about participating for fear that it might hinder their future employment in the denomination. More of the pastors who responded (59 percent) left because they were fired rather than because they had quit (41 percent).

Perhaps peculiar to this denomination, the data revealed:

- At five years, the total attrition is 14 percent, at ten years 28 percent, and at fifteen years it totals 41 percent.
- Those who earn a degree from any of the denomination's colleges or its seminary are more likely to persist than those who earn their degrees from other institutions or who withdraw before completing their degrees.
- Ministers who serve most of their career as a pastor are more likely to persist than are associates; however, making a transition from associate to senior pastor makes attrition less likely.<sup>59</sup>

To perceive the raw emotions of these pastors who have been fired or simply given up we must listen to their written responses, which reflect the unique pain experienced in the pastorate:

I feel I have been accused, arrested, tried, convicted and executed without being asked a single question or being permitted to tell my side of the

---

<sup>58</sup> Carl C. Green and Sam Hunter, *An Initial Inquiry: Why Nazarene Pastors Depart Ministry and How They Feel About It* (2010), nazarene.org/files/docs/AttritionNarrativeResearch.pdf. (accessed February 3, 2012).

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*, 6.

story. To this very day, I do not know the reason(s) why I am being shunned by my DS [District Superintendent].<sup>60</sup> [NRP 2009-2]

You do not need to keep this anonymous. I have nothing to hide and I fear no one. The Church has already hurt me as much as they can hurt me. [NRP 2009-3]

We are still grieving the loss of our ministry and extremely disappointed at the painful outcome. [NRP 2009-5]

As years go by, my hopes diminish that I will ever get that opportunity [to pastor again]. What really hurts is attending ministerial gatherings, and feeling that I don't really belong. [NRP 2009-12]

For seven years we struggled with poverty, shame, bitterness, and feelings of betrayal. Nine years have now passed and no one from my "denominational family" has bothered to contact me. I have no desire to work with the Nazarene Church again, nor do I have any desire to provide any information for follow-up, for fear that the Nazarene Church will again find a way to destroy what God has allowed us to build. [NRP 2009-28]

I am frankly still bitter about the situation. [NRP 2009-32]

There was very little follow up by the DS on us to see if we were OK. Only one pastor from the district has ever made an effort to follow up with me. Since then my wife was diagnosed with cancer and passed away in 07. Again there was very little contact from the district. [NRP 2009-34]

Today, my wife and I attend a non-Nazarene church. I've become the kind of layman I hated. Arrive a bit late; leave a bit early – Sunday morning only types. Every Sunday is a reminder of who I was and what I'm not. It would be far less painful to stay home. [NRP 2009-35]

I'm outside the camp and fear I'll die here, forgiven but displaced. [NRP 2009-35]

I still get grief pangs over the rejection and the hurt I felt at being tossed out with no place to go. I am thankful for my current position [in a non-Nazarene vocation] and confident in God's continuing healing work. [NRP 2009-53]

---

<sup>60</sup> District Superintendent in the Church of the Nazarene.



I am praising the Lord every day that I am no longer a part of the Church of the Nazarene. My kids will not set foot in a Nazarene Church after seeing how their father and other good ministers were treated. [NRP 2009-55]<sup>61</sup>

We can feel the anguish of these pastors. May their remarks forever remind us that ministry in a church is not just to the parishioner; it is also to the pastor. There are no surveys or studies that reveal how many “preacher’s kids” or spouses have forever turned away from Christianity and the church as they watched their ministerial spouse/parent being terminated or witnessed their inability emotionally and spiritually to go the distance, to survive and thrive. The remarks quoted above could have come from pastors of churches across the evangelical spectrum of denominations, pastors who, for one reason or another, could not succeed or survive in the ministry. I have great compassion for them. I feel their heartache and only wish they had the unique opportunity to be mentored by the strong spiritual pastors and evangelical leaders the Lord privileged me first to serve, and learn from, so that I could go minister and endure despite the disproportionate odds that are stacked against a pastor in our contemporary society.

According to Crowell, one in four pastors experiences a forced termination from the pastorate in America’s evangelical churches.<sup>62</sup> Like a pitcher who has learned to throw a deceptive, inviting curveball, a significant percentage of churches that hire then fire their pastors have honed their skill well. Author G.L. Rediger claims, “[A] pastor is fired or forced out every six minutes in the United States.”<sup>63</sup> That may be a difficult statistic to prove; however, the data is undeniable—pastors are departing from the

---

<sup>61</sup> Ibid, 20-23.

<sup>62</sup> R. J. Crowell (1995), “Forced Pastoral Exits: An Empirical Study” (Doctor of Ministry Dissertation, Dallas Theological Seminary: Dallas, Texas, 1995).

<sup>63</sup> G. L. Rediger, *Clergy Killers: Guidance for pastors and congregations under attack* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1997), 31.

ministry at the highest rate of frequency ever. In 2011, Roy Oswald of the Alban Institute stated that within the first ten years of parish ministry, roughly half of all pastors will either be fired by their congregations or forced to move, and another 15 percent will be forced out of their churches during the last ten years of their ministries.<sup>64</sup> An interdenominational study by *Leadership* magazine (Winter 1996) found that 22.8 percent of clerics identified that they had been forced out of a church ministry position at least once during their careers. In 65 percent of cases, the same congregation had forced the previous pastor out as well. Of those pastors who stated that the church had pushed out their predecessors, 41 percent indicated that the church had done it more than twice. Obviously, church polity and governance models influence the termination of pastors.

### **Pastor Resiliency**

There are notable percentages of pastors who fight and weather the difficulties, remaining in what may be a turbulent pastorate. The conflict, as we will learn later, takes its toll on these pastors mentally, emotionally, physically, spiritually, and on their marriages and their parenting. Richard Blackmon, Ph.D. is a clinical psychologist who wrote his dissertation with Dr. Archibald Hart in 1985. In it, they documented the high sexual misconduct rates among clergy; they were the first to do so. They commented on troubled clergy, that "... roughly 30 to 40 percent of religious leaders eventually drop out of

---

<sup>64</sup> R. Oswald, *Getting a Fix on Your Ministry: A Practical Guide to Clergy Performance Appraisal* (Bethesda, MD: The Alban Institute, 2001), 24.

ministry and about 75 percent go through a period of stress so great they consider quitting.”<sup>65</sup>

Pastors are among the most educated people at work today and among the lowest paid, but their training is naturally more attuned to matters of the spirit than matters of business. Wharton Business School graduate, George S. Babbes, and business ace, Michael Zigarelli, in their book, *The Minister's MBA: Essential Business Tools for Maximum Ministry Success*,<sup>66</sup> actually recommend an MBA degree as important for pastors! Drs. Mark Smith and David Wright, in their book, *The Church Leader's MBA: What Business School Instructors Wish Church Leaders Knew about Management*, admonish pastors to sharpen up on their business skills. They cite research conducted by Robert Herman and Martin Butler which “... revealed that effective ministerial leaders are managers, problems solvers, planners, delegators, inspirers, change agents, shepherds, communicators, multitaskers, students, servants, and persons of integrity.”<sup>67</sup>

Certainly, all of that is true, but how many pastors have all these qualities? How many pastors know how to read a financial statement, a profit-and-loss statement, understand the value of an annual independent certified audit, the management letter, and how to effectively lead a board of directors? Do not most pastors of local churches “inherit” their board members? Cannot a layperson, who is a church member, regardless if they tithe regularly, read the Scripture, pray and attend faithfully, show up at the church business meeting and become a divisive agent who may give the pastor problems? As we

---

<sup>65</sup> T. Dirmann, “Pastoral Pressures Test Faith: Demands of spiritual leaders leave many suffering from ‘pastor burnout.’ Psychologists say some quit, suffer mental breakdown, even contemplate suicide,” Los Angeles Times, January 29, 1999, B-1, Ventura County Edition.

<sup>66</sup> George S. Babbes and Michael Zigarelli, *The Minister's MBA: Essential Business Tools for Maximum Ministry Success*, (Nashville: B & H Publishing, 2006), 18.

<sup>67</sup> Mark Smith and David W. Wright, *The Church Leader's MBA* eBook, 2010.

will see later, to cure pastoral attrition we must design and congregationally approve more efficient church polity and governance models that provide financial and managerial accountability but also protect the pastor from baseless attacks. And, sadly, the most important single organization in the entire world, the local church, is often led by inept, unqualified people who often “ascended” to the board because they are long-term or lifelong members of the church or because of family or other relationships within the church. Often, they are elected by people who are uncertain of the qualifications necessary for leadership, or elected according to some other criteria than because they possess the spiritual and business skills needed to lead the local church and make critical decisions which affect peoples’ lives and eternities.

The pastor must manage his flock effectively; if he does not, there are often grave problems. After years of postgraduate theological education, it was only during my DMin training (nearly at the end of my academic pursuits) at Acadia Divinity College that an accomplished, veteran business leader taught my colleagues and me a business course with ministry application. Most seminaries do not even have this essential class. This would be like sending a frightened soldier to the front line without having taught him how to shoot a gun! Astute business leaders intimidate most pastors, and that poses a serious problem in pastors’ fulfillment of the duties of their post. A traditional seminary curriculum often focuses on theology, pastoral care, and biblical languages without much attention to the real-life situations that come with the office of the pastor being the CEO, CFO, and many times the COO, of a small organization. Our digital age can deliver the finest pastoral communicators and expositors to church congregations on a variety of platforms with which the “average” pastor must compete. As a pastor, I was always

amazed at the veneration given by laypeople to television preachers, to whom they often sent generous financial contributions, while holding their local church pastor to a much more rigorous standard. As a pastor, I respectfully reminded our church body that “Billy Graham does not make hospital visits or conduct the funerals of your loved ones—we do.”

### **Pastoral Attrition**

The Barna Research group has reported that the role of the pastor is one of the most frustrating occupations in our nation. A larger report, conducted by Michael Wiese (2004), compared six studies and categorized perspectives and similarities of why pastors were dropping out of the ministry. The *Comparative Report of Six Studies of Pastoral Attrition*,<sup>68</sup> a two-year project, identified strikingly consistent data among the six reports as to the reasons that caused unplanned and unwanted departures from ministry. (The studies included reliable research by the J. M. Ormond Center at Duke University’s Divinity School, Hartford Seminary’s Institute for Religion Research, and Christianity Today International.) The final report to the Louisville Institute, a Lilly Endowment program for the study of American religion, included a narrative that gave a collective voice to thousands of pastors reflecting on the circumstances that had shaped their reasons for leaving the ministry. The studies noted that the former pastors included in the research believed their departure from a career ministry was the result of a variety of causes. The thought-provoking report asked two questions: Why do pastors leave church ministry? What leads to pastors being forced out of ministry in a particular church? The

---

<sup>68</sup> M. Wiese, *Murmurs from the Outside: What former pastors are saying to the church*” *Comparative Report of Six Studies on Pastoral Attrition, 2004*, submitted to The Pastors Institute and Symposium and participants in response to the October 4 and 5 symposium.

study examined churches and Christian communities where pastors were forced out of their ministry and when attrition occurred in the following situations:

- When a pastor, called by the Lord to pastoral ministry and appropriately gifted, is driven out of the pastorate by a congregation with a history of “forced exits” or pastoral terminations.
- When a pastor, called and gifted by God and with a history of effective ministry experience prematurely leaves the pastorate due to frustration caused by recurring conflicts in a number of churches.
- When a pastor, called and gifted for pastoral ministry, prematurely leaves due to chronic loneliness, isolation, and/or the lack of appropriate support systems.
- When a pastor, called and gifted by God for pastoral ministry, is not able to find an appropriate position for ministry and, consequently, leaves ministry as a vocation.

The Wiese study, comparing the data from six different reports, did not find just one single cause for pastors leaving the ministerial profession. Rather, they suggest that it is a multifaceted phenomenon with several contributing factors:

1. Pastors were ill prepared.
2. Pastors were not well connected.
3. Pastors did not see to matters of self-care and self-discipline.
4. Pastors accepted a call and were assigned to a church that was too dysfunctional to be pastored successfully.
5. Pastors could not afford the personal cost to continue to pastor.
6. Pastors were not able to manage or resolve conflict.
7. Pastors simply lost their way.<sup>69</sup>

The following list outlines the elements in church life that contributed to the seven common denominators cited above of why pastors decided to quit the ministry:

1. Conflict and disharmony in the church (conflicting visions, interpersonal relationships with board members or other key laypeople, differences in worship style, doctrinal or lifestyle issues).
2. Family, financial, personal, life situations, and personal calling issues.

---

<sup>69</sup> Ibid.

3. Isolation is common among pastors. A common factor was the absence of a “safety net.” Support from trusted colleagues and denominational leaders can save pastors and pastorates.
4. Strong negative feelings toward denominational supervisors are common among pastors who quit. Inadequate denominational support translates to a loss of trust. An environment of competition characterizes some denominations—concern about being “real” with leaders without fear of reprisal.
5. Serious questioning whether seminary education prepared a pastor to deal and cope with issues.
6. Sociological reality—ministry placement(s) did not match personal preferences and giftedness. This was particularly reported by female clerics.
7. Lack of training, not competency, in conflict resolution, interpersonal skills, administrative skills, and cultural context for ministry.
8. Inattention to and inaction in removing or dealing with a relatively small faction of members, causing the church to be poisonous and toxic for any pastor.
9. Exiting ministry or being terminated hurts. It is interesting though that getting out of the ministry is painful for some, but healing for others.
10. Lack of mediation mechanisms to help resolve conflicts in the church when they arise.<sup>70</sup>

Michael B. Ross, executive director of the Pastors Institute in Anderson, Indiana,

hinted at the crux of the problem as revealed in the research:

In our work, we have listened to many former pastors tell their stories, stories that were accounts of their chronic struggles with their call. Many have told of chronic guilt feelings over not being able to successfully complete their divine mission ... only after we overlaid the six studies did we discover a root source of pastoral attrition. One of the major factors contributing to pastors exiting career ministry is, ironically, also the catalyst for entering pastoral ministry in the first place—their call. Our final report to the Louisville Institute, who funded our study, gave collective voice to many of the thousands of former pastors who had participated: “This may be the most important thing we need to tell you, but it also is the most difficult. Our ministry began with a call—for some mystical, for others awareness formed by time and circumstances. We felt we were affirmed, encouraged, educated and empowered by the church and its institutions. However, we were not led into times of evaluating and understanding our call. We did not realize that our call should not only be validated and reaffirmed but also continually redefined. It was what it was,

---

<sup>70</sup> Ibid.

a trophy on the shelf, and that seemed good enough for us, our families and the church. Our imagination was cradled in naiveté and disproportionate zeal. Our call was absent of a setting and a future that would reconstruct it. Our imagination was not reality, and we became confused about our role.”<sup>71</sup>

Causing further alarm, the pastoral vocation has been identified as potentially precarious to health unless concerted efforts are made to prevent problems. Health problems of clergy are dramatic and on the rise.<sup>72</sup> A published report from the National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health about mortality from ischemic heart disease presents striking new findings about pastors. An analysis of data from death certificates compiled from 27 states during the period 1982–1992 revealed that the ministry was among the top ten occupations in which people died from heart disease.<sup>73</sup> Depression, obesity,<sup>74</sup> hypertension, marital problems, moral failure, burnout,<sup>75</sup> substance abuse, and even criminal behavior<sup>76</sup> plague many pastors trying to fulfill their calling. The decadent culture in which we live provides a bizarre variety of pastoral ministry/care/counseling issues that drain and test the resilience of many ministers. A number of pastors have not

---

<sup>71</sup> Michael B. Ross, Michael B., “Leadership,” October 11, 2008 [www.fteleaders.org/blog/entry/leadership](http://www.fteleaders.org/blog/entry/leadership) (accessed February 2, 2012).

<sup>72</sup> K. J. Flannelly, A. J. Weaver, D. B. Larson, and H. G. Koenig. “A Review of Mortality Research on Clergy and Other Religious Professionals.” *Journal of Religion and Health*, vol. 41, no. 1, Spring 2002. (Morris & Blanton, 1994; Noller, 1984; Orthner, 1986; Krause, Ellison & Wulff, 1998), 65.

<sup>73</sup> Calvert, G.M., Merling, J.M., & Burnett, C.A. “Ischemic heart disease mortality and occupation among 16–60-year-old males.” *Journal of Occupational and Environmental Medicine*, 41/11 (1999), 960–966; *Ibid.*, 64.

<sup>74</sup> One Pulpit & Pew study found that “76 percent of clergy were either overweight or obese.” Bob Wells, “Which Way to Clergy Health?” Duke University [www.pulpitandpew.duke.edu/cergyhealth.html](http://www.pulpitandpew.duke.edu/cergyhealth.html) (accessed 1/30/12).

<sup>75</sup> “Burnout can also be described as a prolonged state of overexertion accompanied by a prevailing feeling of dread regarding future activities.” Bob Sitze, *Not Trying Too Hard: New Basics for Sustainable Congregations* (Herndon, VA: Alban Institute, 2001), 28.

<sup>76</sup> In Independence, MO, New Hope Baptist Church, Pastor David Love later admitted to murdering congregation member, Randy Stone, with whose wife he was having an affair. Love eulogized Stone, “We sit here and we weep not just because of the separation from our loved one, but because of all the questions that death brings, questions like ‘Why?’ ‘Why him?’ ‘Why now?’” Only much later was Love revealed to be his murderer. Brian Burnes and Robert A. Cronkleton, (2011, November 9). “Former pastor David Love admits killing congregation member,” [www.kansascity.com/2011/11/09/v-print/3256188/ex-pastor-david-love-admits-killing.html](http://www.kansascity.com/2011/11/09/v-print/3256188/ex-pastor-david-love-admits-killing.html) (accessed January 17, 2012).



received adequate education or training to enable them to counsel people with such acute and complex needs.<sup>77</sup> Often over-worked, underpaid, and stressed<sup>78</sup> by the complex job description, ministers quit or move frequently. “In denomination after denomination, there is little variation from the national norm of four years for the length of time a pastor stays where he is,” reports Richard Brown.<sup>79</sup>

Thom Rainer, President and Chief Executive Officer of the Southern Baptist Convention’s LifeWay publishing arm, conducted research that revealed, on the basis of a 2001 survey of pastors throughout the U.S., the average tenure in a local church to be a brief 3.8 years.<sup>80</sup> A successful former pastor, Gordon MacDonald, who committed adultery and was one of the few clerics to be restored to ministry in the wake of such an fall, reflected that the increasing demands and stresses of pastoral leadership would trigger even more cases of moral failure. Paul Vitello, Religion Editor for the *New York Times*, reports that “[m]embers of clergy now suffer from obesity, hypertension, and depression at rates higher than most Americans. In the last decade, their use of antidepressants has risen, while their life expectancy has fallen. Many would change jobs if they could.”<sup>81</sup> In view of this desperate, pastoral landscape in contemporary America,

---

<sup>77</sup> “Studies have shown that pastors often experience stress similar to that experienced by counselors when interacting with those who have been traumatized ... unlike professional counselors, pastors receive little or no training in how to manage this stress.” Margot Holaday, “Secondary Stress, Burnout, and the Clergy,” *American Journal of Pastoral Counseling* 4, no. 1 (2001): 54.

<sup>78</sup> “Other studies of religious professionals found that Protestant clergy had the highest overall work-related stress and were next to the lowest in having personal resources to cope with occupational strain.” C. A. Rayburn et al., “Men, Women and Religion: Stress Within Leadership Roles,” *Journal of Clinical Psychology*, 42/3 (1986): 540-46.

<sup>79</sup> Richard W. Brown, *Restoring the Vow of Stability: The Keys to Pastoral Longevity* (Camp Hill, PA: Christian Publications, 1992), 28.

<sup>80</sup> Thom S. Rainer, *Surprising Insights from the Unchurched* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2001), 25.

<sup>81</sup> “In May, the Clergy Health Initiative, a seven year study that Duke University began in 2007, published the first results of a continuing survey of 1,726 Methodist ministers in North Carolina. Compared with neighbors in their census tracts, ministers reported significantly higher rates of arthritis, diabetes, high blood pressure and asthma. Obesity was 10 percent more prevalent in the clergy group.” Paul Vitello.

does it come as any surprise that the Winter 2012 issue of the *Leadership Journal* includes an article on the two-and-one-half day event, the “Epic Fail Pastors Conference, to talk about the raw, terrifying, and gripping topic of failure”?<sup>82</sup> Pastors are emotionally bruised, battered, beaten, and unable to cope, let alone lead the sheep in local congregations across America.

## **Conclusion**

How can the church exert spiritual influence in the nation when her pastors are fatigued, ill, addicted, immoral, worried, and quitting? Does burnout dull their preaching, leadership skills, and teaching? Are we reaching non-churched people or simply struggling with sheep who keep changing flocks and who bring along their personal emotional baggage and immaturely submit a list of demands to a new church, seeking what their previous church did not provide for them? Can pastors fit into what is often the corporate model now in vogue? After conducting my research on the attrition rates of pastors in the U.S., I clearly detected five areas about which pastors, laity, Elders, and business leaders must be informed, and which will ultimately contribute to the success or failure of clergy, with a consequent impact on the church and Christianity in the United States and the world.

As we will learn in the ensuing chapters, there are many reasons why pastors fail.

One of the most precarious is the growing trend of moral failure among pastors. And

---

“Taking a Break From the Lord’s Work”

[www.nytimes.com/2010/08/02/nyregion/02burnout.html?pagewanted=print](http://www.nytimes.com/2010/08/02/nyregion/02burnout.html?pagewanted=print) (accessed October 24, 2011).

<sup>82</sup> “Within a few weeks, 10,000 people visited the site. The idea was resonating with pastors.” J. R. Briggs, “Epic Fail”

[www.christianitytoday.com/le/channel/utilities/print.html?type=article&id=95116](http://www.christianitytoday.com/le/channel/utilities/print.html?type=article&id=95116)[[www.epicfailpastorsconference.com](http://www.epicfailpastorsconference.com) (accessed January 30, 2012).

rarely does a pastor re-enter ministry in the local church after illicit sexual behavior. The next chapter will introduce six different case studies of very successful young pastors who each committed adultery. It is interesting to note that several of these pastors who failed morally did so around the five-year anniversaries of their successful church plants. In the next chapter, we will look at why this is so, at the causes and cures of pastoral moral failure, and at one denomination that has been a pacesetter in the establishment of restorative procedures for pastors who failed morally.