

“We are paid to hide the pain.”

LESSONS LEARNED FROM PASTORS’ STRESS STUDIES IN NORTH AMERICA

René Drumm, PhD, MSW University of Southern Mississippi

Petr Cincala, PhD, MDiv, MSW Andrews University

What do we know about Adventist pastor stress?

Pastors experience high levels of concern about their spiritual, emotional, and workplace wellbeing. The following statistics come from the Sedlacek, McBride, & Drumm, et al. study of 2014:

Spiritual Challenges (N=389) Percent

- Making time for personal devotions 67%
- Difficulty with personal prayer 56%
- Trouble maintaining personal connection with God 54%

Emotional Health Concerns (N=389) Percent

- Depression and/or Anxiety 49%
- Media Addiction 45%
- Pornography Use 33%

Workplace Stressors (N=389) Percent

- The free time most families have during the week are times when congregational demands interfere with our family’s time together. 56%
- Our congregation disrupts days off and vacations for reasons other than emergencies. 51%
- We find it difficult to establish times for our marital relationship without having interruptions related to the needs of our congregation. 51%

Financial Stressors (N=389) Percent

- I am concerned about the level of retirement benefits we will have in the later years. 73%
- It is difficult to make it through each month without worrying whether our financial resources will be adequate for our needs. 72%
- Our family’s inability to save money on a regular basis is a worry for me. 71%
- Any unexpected financial demand plays havoc with our family’s financial situation. 70%

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

What did we want to find out?

- What types of stressors lead pastors to leave the ministry?
- How have pastors successfully alleviated their stress levels?
- How can church members and administrators be instruments of healing & support?

METHODS

How did we find answers?

- Examined existing studies on pastor stress
- Conducted five focus groups – North American Division
- Interviewed 14 pastors who left pastoral ministry

CONCLUSIONS & RECOMMENDATIONS

Adventist pastors are self-sacrificing, dedicated, and resilient while simultaneously being overwhelmed, burdened, and stressed.

Therefore, we must:

- Acknowledge the levels of stress that exist among Adventist pastors
- Engage in “pastor role” education for church members
- Provide training on developing healthy boundaries
- Encourage mentoring & coaching
- Provide financial literacy training and support
- Offer emotional health support and education

FINDINGS

Why Did Pastors Leave?

1. Having ongoing challenges with church members
2. Encountering difficulties with conference leadership
3. Feeling dissatisfaction and discord concerning the Adventist Church’s organizational structure
4. Feeling constrained by traditional approaches to ministry
5. Sensing a lack of caring from administration & church members
6. Having spiritual doubts and doctrinal differences
7. Lacking the training needed to do their jobs well.

What helped emotional stress?

- Pastors reported these top ways of alleviating emotional stress:
- Getting counseling
- Working with a mentor or coach
- Engaging in peer support groups

What helped financial stress?

- Pursuing financial literacy
- Budgeting carefully
- Trusting in God’s Provision

What helped spiritual challenges?

- Prioritizing devotional time,
- Going on spiritual retreats
- Using vacation time and days off for spiritual renewal

What helped workplace stress?

- Setting boundaries
- Garnering church member support

