

Barna: Pastors' satisfaction and certainty of call in decline

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VENTURA, Calif. (BP)—Protestant pastors are less satisfied with their jobs and church assignments and less confident in their spiritual callings, Barna Group research said in its latest study on pastoral resilience.

Only 52 percent of pastors are “very satisfied” with their jobs, only 50 percent are just as confident of their calling as they were when they began, and only 38 percent are very satisfied with their current church assignment, Barna said.



“This research underscores the need for major interventions to support and sustain pastors in their work,” Barna Group CEO David Kinnaman said March 15 in releasing the findings. “This drop in vocational satisfaction may cause significant problems for churches in the future.”

The numbers show categorical declines as high as 20 percentage points from seven years ago when Barna last studied pastoral resilience.

“Pastors have been frontline workers of a sort the last three years, and the toll of stress, isolation, resentment and division continues to impact pastors negatively,” Kinnaman said. “It is alarming that the number of pastors experiencing satisfaction in their work continues to decline.”

The highest decline was seen in job satisfaction. In Barna’s previous study conducted in 2015, 72 percent of pastors—a full 20 points higher than now—said they were “very satisfied” with their jobs.

Pastors expressed a decrease in confidence in their calling, with only 35 percent saying they are “more confident” than they were at the beginning of their tenure, a drop from 66 percent who said they were more confident in the previous study.

Overall, 55 percent of pastors in the latest study said they have “gone through a period when they significantly doubted their calling for ministry,” Barna said, compared to 24 percent who said so seven years earlier.

The 38 percent of pastors “very satisfied” with their current church is a drop from 53 percent who said so in 2015, Barna said.

“As pastors feel less satisfied in their jobs and more doubtful of their call to ministry, it seems that the role is now taking a greater toll on church leaders than it used to,” Barna Vice President of Church Engagement Joe Jensen said.

“Looking forward, it is important for church congregations to gain a deeper understanding of the challenges their leaders are facing, and then to encourage, support, and care for them more deeply.”

Barna conducted its online study Sept. 6-16, 2022, including 585 pastors and including quotas ensuring Protestant denominational inclusion.

It was the first data release from Barna’s Resilient Pastor Initiative that will include periodic releases March through May, and is augmented with additional resources.

Barna described the findings as “grim,” but said its aim in the Resilient Pastor series is to offer support and solutions for churches and their leaders.

Researchers acknowledged the continuing impact of the COVID-19

pandemic on the lives of pastors and others internationally.

“The full impact of a crisis of its size probably won’t be truly understood for years or even decades, but we are starting to wrap our heads around some of the ways COVID has shaped new norms,” researchers wrote.

“For instance, many people came out of COVID with very different feelings about their jobs than they had going into it. And pastors are no exception.”