



## **Executive Summary**

### **Wesleyan Clergy Wellbeing Report**

#### **Notre Dame University Study: *Flourishing in Ministry***

#### **Preface**

##### **A Word from the Notre Dame Research Team**

This report is part of collaborations between the University of Notre Dame, the Lilly Endowment and The Wesleyan Church. The broad purpose of this project is to learn more about how to help clergy and their families thrive in their work.

We asked pastors and participating spouses a variety of questions about life in general, as well as life in ministry. The results of the surveys are not intended to be exhaustive. We hope to provide an overview of the wellbeing of the pastors and families of The Wesleyan Church.

#### **The Purpose of this Report**

This report provides a broad overview of the nature and purpose of the study and the general findings. More specific reports on areas of greatest interest or concern will follow.

#### **Background to the Study**

In the spring of 2013, while attending a conference on clergy care initiatives sponsored by The Lilly Endowment, we attended a seminar presented by Dr. Matthew Bloom, Associate Professor at The University of Notre Dame and Principle Investigator of the Wellbeing at Work Program. Dr. Bloom presented his early findings from his national longitudinal study of clergy wellbeing. We were very impressed with the nature of his study and the report of his emerging findings. Up until that time, we had no data on the wellbeing of clergy in The Wesleyan Church. We had relied on the insights of clergy studies from other denominations or studies that lumped together clergy from many traditions, such as evangelical, mainline, and Roman Catholic. While these studies are helpful, they did not give us a clear, reliable picture of the wellbeing of Wesleyan clergy.

We approached Dr. Bloom and asked if our Wesleyan clergy could be part of his large, national sample. We also asked if we could include a few of our own questions, thereby somewhat tailoring the research to give us some unique data regarding our own Wesleyan clergy. Dr. Bloom warmly received us as part of his study and agreed to tailor certain aspects of his research for our own purposes. We were delighted! This opened the door to an unprecedented body of specific, scientific research into the wellbeing of our own Wesleyan clergy. It would also make it possible to eventually compare and contrast the data from our clergy with Dr. Bloom's national sample of clergy. We believe this total body of data will be invaluable for knowing how best to respond to specific needs of Wesleyan clergy.

The initial survey took place in 2014, with results arriving in 2015. Surveys were distributed to about 3,400 ordained Wesleyan clergy. Of those, over 1,300 clergy actually participated, which is 33% of our ordained ministers. That is a very high response rate and means that the results of this study can be generalized to all our Wesleyan clergy. The results of this study are both valid (it measures what it is supposed to measure) and reliable (consistently measures the various items).

One of the early challenges in disseminating the results of this study was not having an objective standard that would help us to interpret the findings. Recently, Dr. Bloom provided a criterion-based scale that now enables us to interpret the scores in meaningful ways. Most of the scales utilize a 1-5 Likert scale. It has now been determined that scores of 4.0 or higher are deemed to be "healthy"; scores in the 3.0-3.9 range indicate we should start paying attention to the wellbeing of those areas; scores below 3.0 are greater cause for concern and indicate that we should consider strategies for addressing clergy wellbeing in those areas.

### **Demographics**

Total number of clergy who participated: 1308

Categories of clergy surveyed:

- Senior Pastor (with Staff)
- Senior Pastor (solo)
- Executive/Administrative Pastor
- Pastor of Youth
- Pastor of Worship/Music
- Pastor of Children's Ministries
- Pastor of Spiritual Formation/Discipleship
- Pastor of Pastoral Care/Counseling
- Pastor of Evangelism/Outreach/Missions
- Chaplain
- Other

## **Introduction from Dr. Matthew Bloom's 2013 report, "Flourishing in Ministry: Emerging Research Insights on the Wellbeing of Pastors."**

Our research project is called "Flourishing in Ministry" because we are trying to understand the wellbeing of these real and amazing people. We are exploring wellbeing among clergy and their families. We believe that when work is good that it will produce goodness of many kinds, including high levels of wellbeing among those who perform the work. We also believe that work cannot and must not be defined exclusively by measures of performance, such as effectiveness, efficiency, or productivity. Certainly performance matters, but we vigorously affirm that to be considered truly "good," work must also enhance the wellbeing of all people and all creation that are affected by the work being done. The mission of the Flourishing in Ministry project is to understand what constitutes good work for pastors, their families, and the churches these pastors serve.

Our current work is directed toward answering three big research questions. The first is, *what are the signature characteristics of wellbeing for clergy?* We want to know how we can tell whether or not a pastor is flourishing in ministry. One of our most important goals is to be able to measure, with accuracy and fidelity, whether a clergy person has a high or low level of wellbeing. We study a wide variety of indicators of wellbeing, including work satisfaction, meaning in life, personal growth, and work-family dynamics. In the future we hope to include measures of spiritual and physical wellbeing. Our goal is to be holistic and comprehensive. We view wellbeing as comprising a variety of elements, and we want to capture this variety in our research.

The second question is, *what factors and conditions foster high levels of wellbeing, and what factors and conditions impede or diminish it?* We are studying factors and conditions at several levels. We will explore how the personal characteristics of clergy are related to their level of wellbeing. For example, we will study how factors such as personality, the nature of an individual's pastoral identity, and variations in life practices (e.g., sleep quality, frequency of vacations, engagement in spiritual disciplines) influence pastors' wellbeing. We are also studying how characteristics of ministry contexts are related to wellbeing. This includes factors such as church size, the fit between the pastor and the local ministry, and the nature of relationships between pastors and their congregations. Finally, we are exploring how denominational factors, such as differences in polity, might be related to wellbeing. Once again, our goal here is to be holistic and comprehensive, so over time we will study a wide variety of individual, ministry-level, and denominational factors that might shape the wellbeing of clergy and their families.

Our third research question is, *how does the wellbeing of clergy and their families change over a lifespan?* A major focus here is to map the ebbs and flows of wellbeing over an entire life in ministry, and to mark the factors that account for those changes. We are studying how the shape and contours of wellbeing changes over time, including such things as whether the wellbeing of younger pastors is fundamentally different from that of older pastors. This

longitudinal approach is regarded among scientists as the “gold standard” for research because it is the only way we can really understand what things influence and shape wellbeing.

Research suggests that there are many wonderful implications of higher wellbeing for both pastors and the churches they serve. This research suggests that fostering higher levels of wellbeing will help pastors be healthier, more creative and innovative, higher performing, more adaptable and resilient church leaders.

### **Summary of Major Findings**

**Quantitative Findings** - Here are five broad findings based on the quantitative surveys. More detailed data of selected measures are presented below:

1. The large majority of the measures found that pastors, overall, in The Wesleyan Church have high levels of well-being.
2. In general, the levels of wellbeing for pastors serving large churches is higher on many of the measures.
3. Pastors who do not have staff versus those that do seem to have overall lower levels of well-being.
4. Pastors seem to need congregational support in order to flourish.
5. Female pastors are flourishing but, in general, feel less supported by denominational leaders. It is also important to note how much variability there is for congregational and leadership support for many of the categories.
6. 1 in 3 Wesleyan pastors experience at least moderate levels of burnout (this aligns with the national average of all clergy).

**Qualitative Findings** - The following six themes emerged in response to the open-ended questions:

#### **THEME 1: Mental Health Issues**

While mental health issues (e.g., depression, loneliness, isolation) do not apply to all pastors and spouses, we noted a recurring theme that the life of a pastor is difficult and it feels that there is sometimes nowhere to turn.

#### **THEME 2: Restorative Niches**

Pastors who take the time to meditate, walk, read, pray, and run (among many other options for restoration), seem to have a more positive posture related to ministry. Many persons in the caring professions have a tendency to sacrifice self for the greater good of the people whom they serve. This can lead to negative sacrifice and psychological wellbeing suffers.

**THEME 3: Support from Denominational Leaders, Congregations, and Family**

Relationships are clearly a source of emotional, instrumental, and informational support. While it may seem intuitive, this is an area where pastors who felt supported by the three categories of support systems seem to be flourishing at a much higher level than those who feel that one or more of the areas are lacking. Important forms of support from leadership may include positive praise, efforts to compensate pastors for their work, and being available to discuss issues that arise within the congregation; congregational support can be bolstered by the leadership. Finally, supporting pastors to engage with and have time for their families is a key to the support pastors can receive. (Editor's note: some are bi-vocational by choice.)

**THEME 4: Financial Strains**

Many pastors who responded to the survey are bi-vocational with, at least part-time, but oftentimes full-time secular careers. While this in itself is not a problem, many pastors are forced to have two 'careers' because they need to financially support their families.

**THEME 5: Identity Paradox**

A recurring theme among pastors was that they sometimes feel torn between the business and personal sides of the church. Pastors noted that sometimes they feel that the leadership wants the church to be run like a business, but leave it up to the pastors to maintain the personal side. It was repeatedly mentioned that pastors are not managers and their leaders are not CEOs.

**THEME 6: Measurement of Success**

The final major theme that emerged is how pastors feel like their success in ministry is measured. While it may not be the case, the general way pastors feel that they are measured is through membership numbers. With that, pastors expressed feelings of disappointment that this removes the element of their commitment to the soul. For example, if a pastor spends three hours in a hospital with a grieving spouse, this is not taken into account when they are evaluated. Instead, size and growth of church is what is reported.

## **Selected Quantitative Findings**

The purpose of the Flourishing in Ministry study is to identify the factors that contribute to or impede clergy wellbeing. The following section provides a brief summary of the data related to specific measures of the wellbeing of Wesleyan clergy. After defining key terms, key measures are presented: five of the most positive, five that should be monitored, and two that call for attention.

**Definition of Terms**

The following definitions are provided to better understand this report. They define some of the statistical measures used and how the data were analyzed. There are other definitions of

the specific items that were measured that will be defined in the body of the report as those items are presented.

**Mean** – The mean (M) is the sum of all scores divided by the total number of those who answered the question. Most of the data scores are in the form of the “mean.”

**Standard Deviation** – The standard deviation (SD) tells us how widely spread out the numbers are that were reported. The larger the number the more varied were the responses. The smaller the number, the less variation between responses. Most responses in this study have very small SD signifying that the responses were consistently reported.

**Measures** – The measures are the specific items that the study was interested in assessing. There were 30 measures in this study. Two examples of measures include “grit” which is the ability to sustain interest in and effort towards a very long-term goal, and “resilience,” which is the ability to bounce back in response to adversity. Measures are defined in each section of the report.

**The Standard of Wellbeing** – Most of the measures in this study use a Likert Scale, e.g. scores generally range from 1-5, with 1 meaning “strongly disagree” and 5 meaning “strongly agree.” The following legend shows how the scores are interpreted with respect to health or the call for interventions:

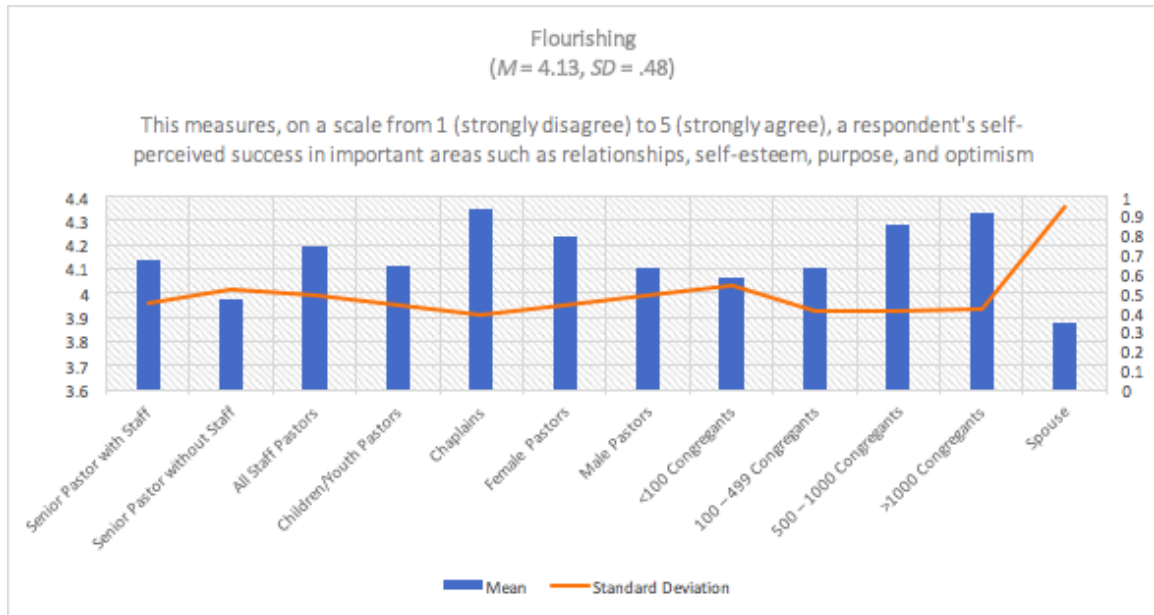
- 4.0-5.0 Indicates positive, healthy wellbeing for those measures.
- 3.0-3.9 Indicates less than strong wellbeing, but not a serious condition. These scores indicate that we should pay attention and begin to determine what initiatives could be enacted to prevent further decline of wellbeing and to increase the wellbeing score.
- 1.0-2.9 Indicates poor wellbeing or worse and the need for immediate action to remedy the situation and increase wellbeing.

## Key Group Comparisons

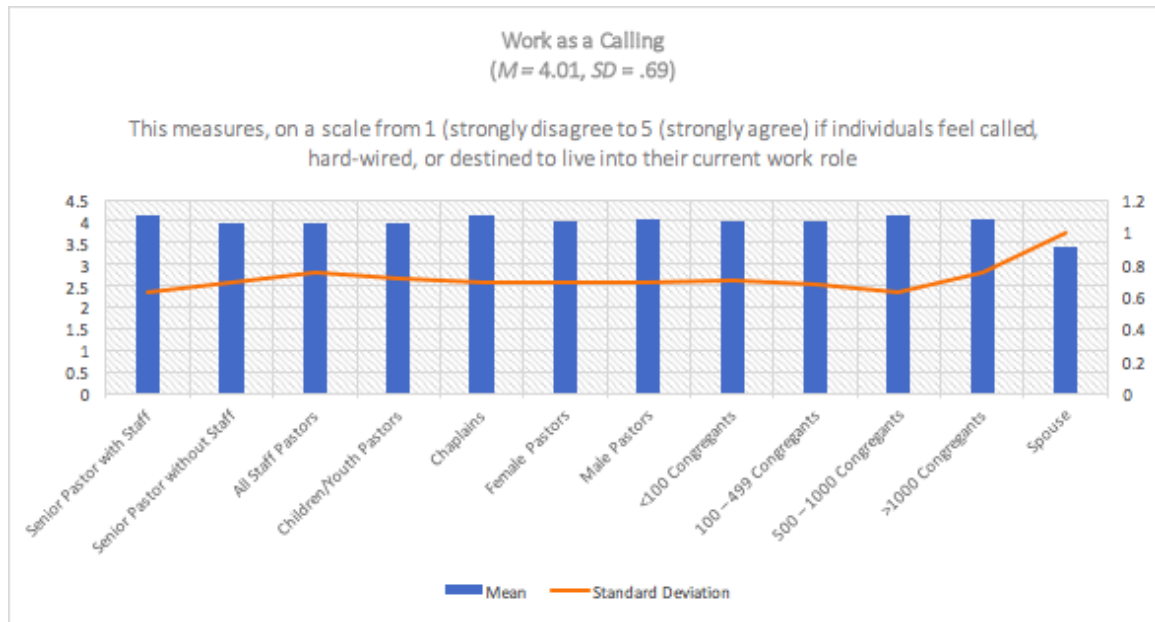
In this section, certain key comparisons between groups are presented for certain measures. For this report, of the 30 total measures, we have selected five of the most positive, five that should be monitored, and two that call for attention. The individual scales are briefly defined. The participation rate was high enough for us to generalize the findings to Wesleyan clergy as a whole, and for the categories of senior, staff, solo, and women pastors. It is more challenging to draw confident conclusions for youth, worship and children’s pastors since we are not sure exactly how many pastors we have in each of those categories. In the data that follows, the Notre Dame research team combined youth and children’s pastors since there was a relatively small number of each that participated. With approximately 300 clergy spouses participating, we can only use those findings for what we call “indicators” of spousal wellbeing. Although we cannot draw confident conclusions about these categories of clergy (youth, children, worship) and spouses, the results we do have can be used to suggest specific areas for further study. Also, there is a church size category of less than 100 and 100-499. Unfortunately, we were not able to change the categories of church sizes to reflect what might be considered a small or medium sized church for us in The Wesleyan Church.

The following measures reflect key areas where Wesleyan clergy as a whole show positive scores of wellbeing:

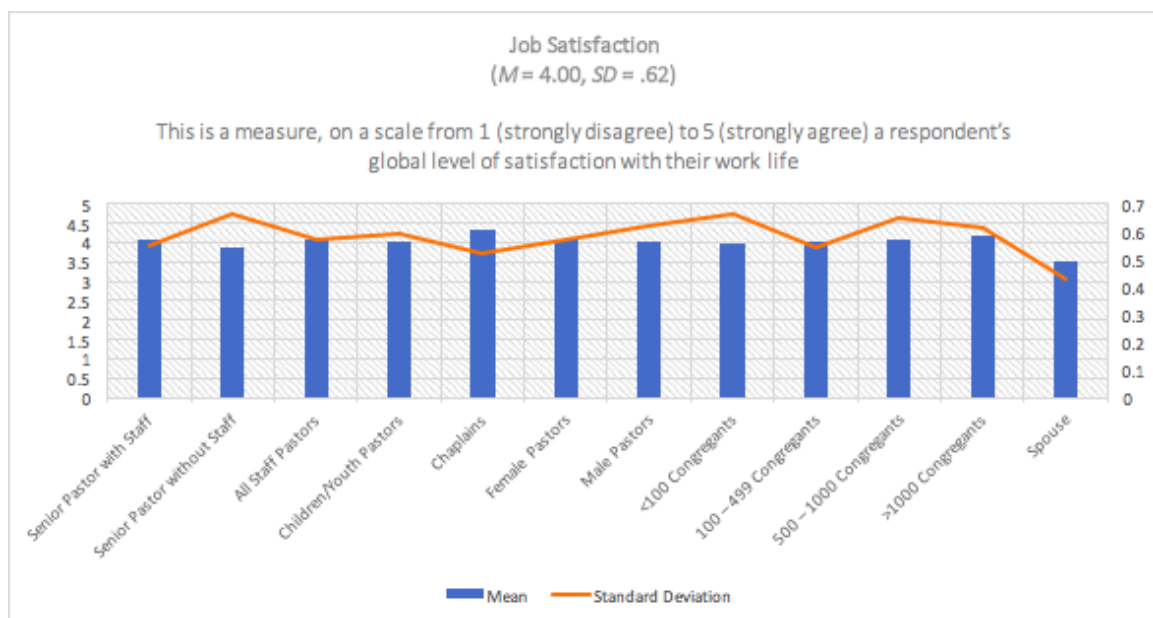
1. **Flourishing**—Flourishing measures essential aspects of psychological health Including the extent to which you feel that you have strong, positive, supportive relationships; whether you feel a rich, spiritual dimension in your life, and the degree to which you experience work or other major life activities as positive and fulfilling. At its core, flourishing reflects the extent to which we feel that there is a deep, profound meaning and purpose to our lives.



2. **Work as a Calling**—This measure assesses if individuals feel called, hard-wired, or destined to live into their current work role. It addresses the question of whether individuals believe their gifts and interests are aligned with their work.

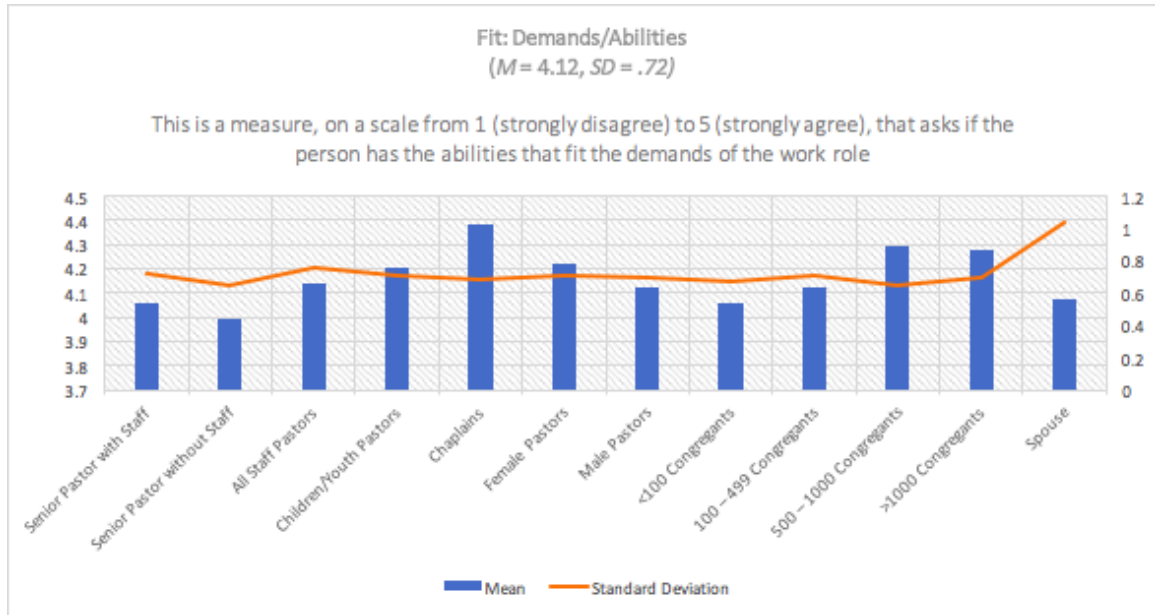


- 3. Job Satisfaction**—Job satisfaction is probably the most widely studied job experience. There is a great deal of research that supports the conclusion that people who are more satisfied with their work are, in fact, better performers, and they are less likely to quit their jobs. It represents a minimum level of wellbeing at work. A boring job is bad enough, but an unhappy work life leads us to experience more stress in our work, and it may undermine our experiences of thriving and authenticity. Many surveys have shown that job satisfaction is an important determinant of our overall happiness in life.

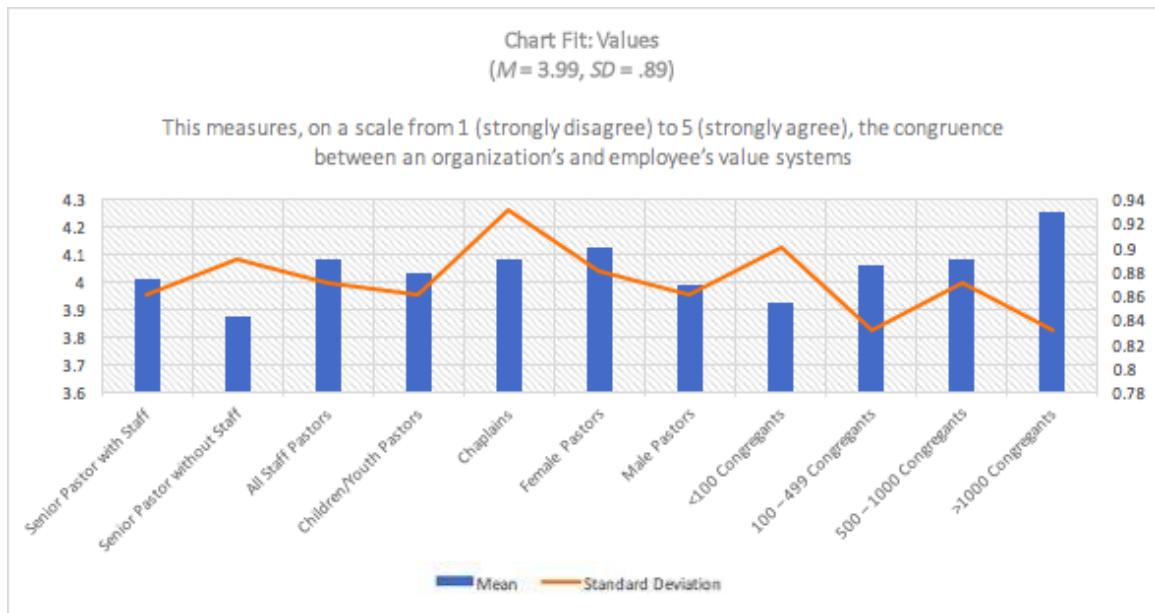




4. **Fit: Demands/Abilities**—This is a measure that asks if the person believes they have the abilities that fit the demands of the work role. If a person feels they do not have the abilities for the work, that can affect their wellbeing.

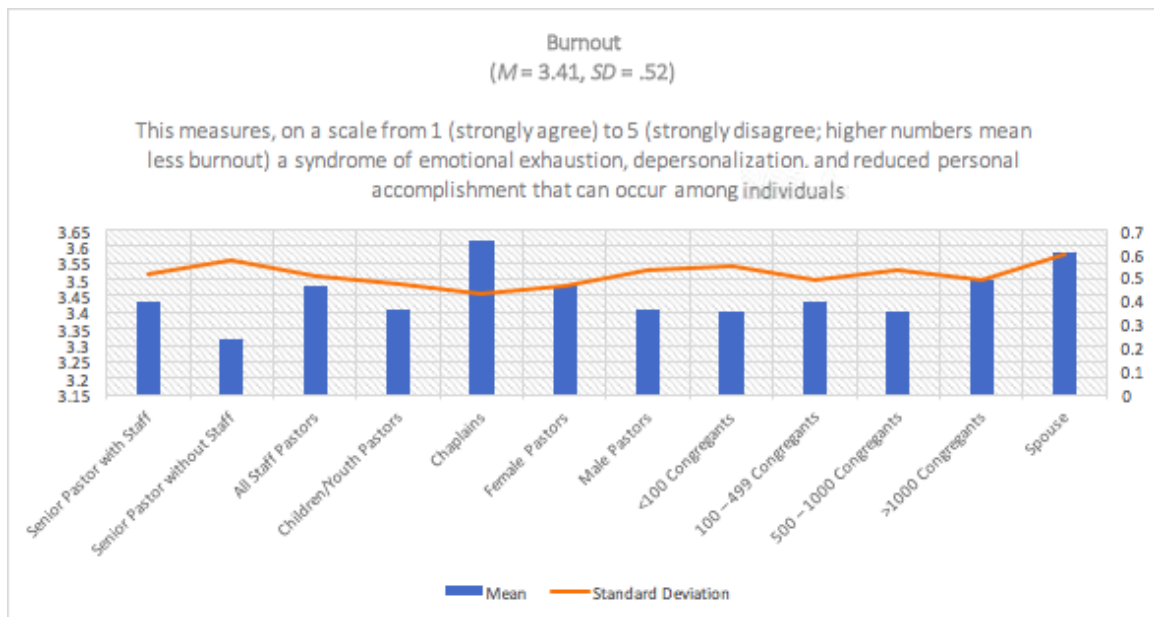


5. **Fit: Values**—This measures the congruence between an organization's and employee's value systems.

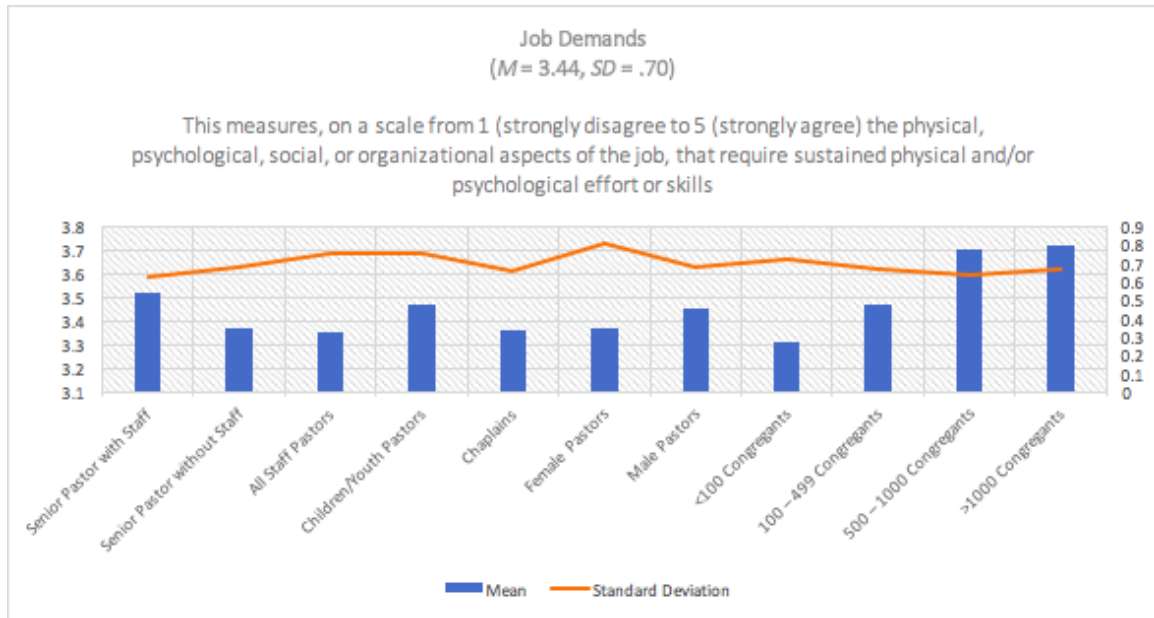


The following selection of measures represent those we should be monitoring to make sure they do not go lower and that we should consider addressing to make them stronger:

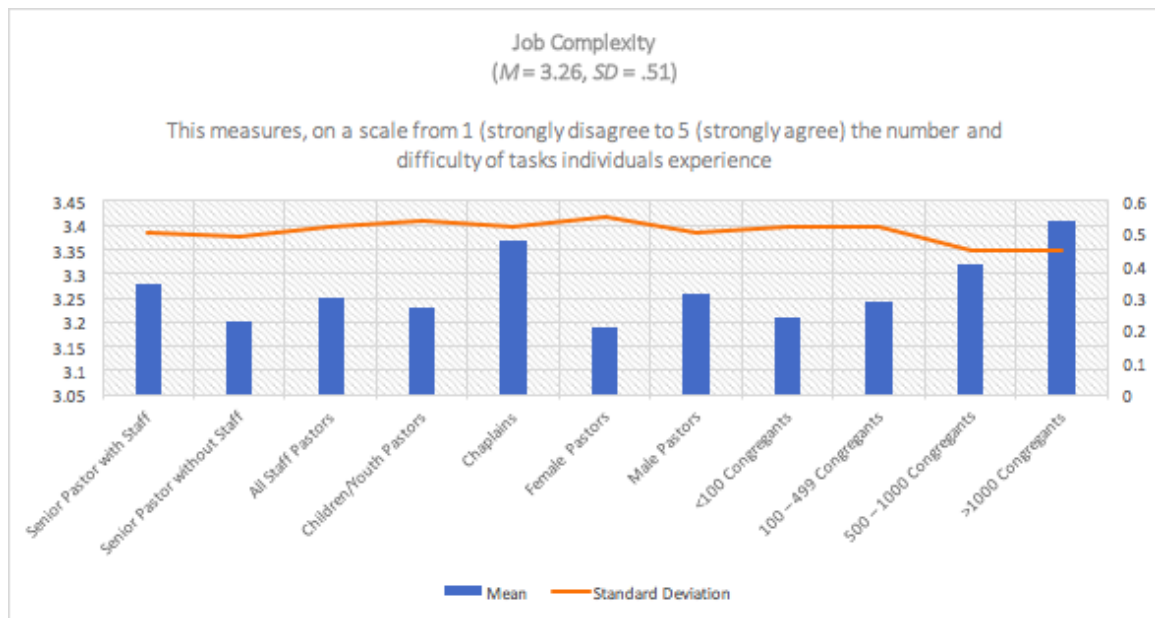
- 1. Burnout**— Burnout, as we measure it, captures experiences of being exhausted, worn-out, and emotionally drained by our work. Often people use the term burnout when they have reached a level of emotional exhaustion, mental weariness, and physical fatigue that they find to be incapacitating. But as we measure it, burnout occurs before people "crash" or "hit the wall." Many people are not aware of the growing levels of burnout they are experiencing, so they continue working in conditions that are detrimental to their wellbeing. Burnout often creeps up on us over time due to chronic exposure to emotional and social stressors on the job, workload, and poor social support, among other factors.



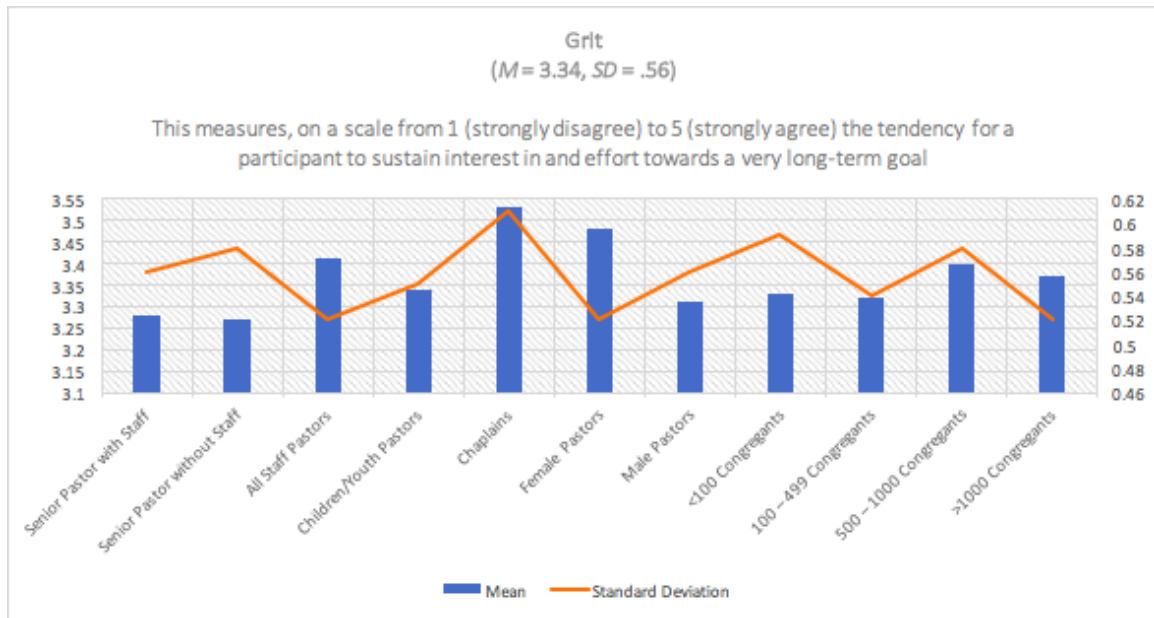
2. **Job Demands**—This includes the physical, psychological, social, or organizational aspects of the job, that require sustained physical and/or psychological effort or skills.



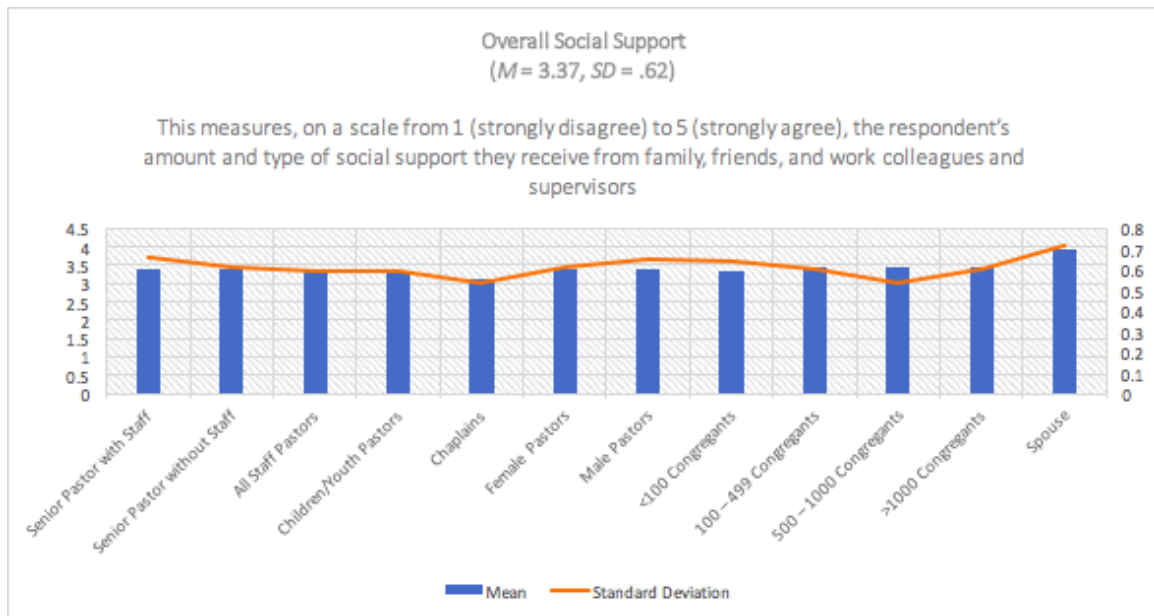
3. **Job Complexity**—This measure seeks to understand the number and difficulty of tasks individuals experience. Pastoral ministry is, by nature, a very complex job where most pastors experience high “switching costs” of moving from one activity (e.g., a finance meeting) to another that requires very different skills (e.g., caring for a family experiencing the death of a loved one).



4. **Grit**—This measure addresses the tendency for an individual to sustain interest in and effort towards a very long-term goal.

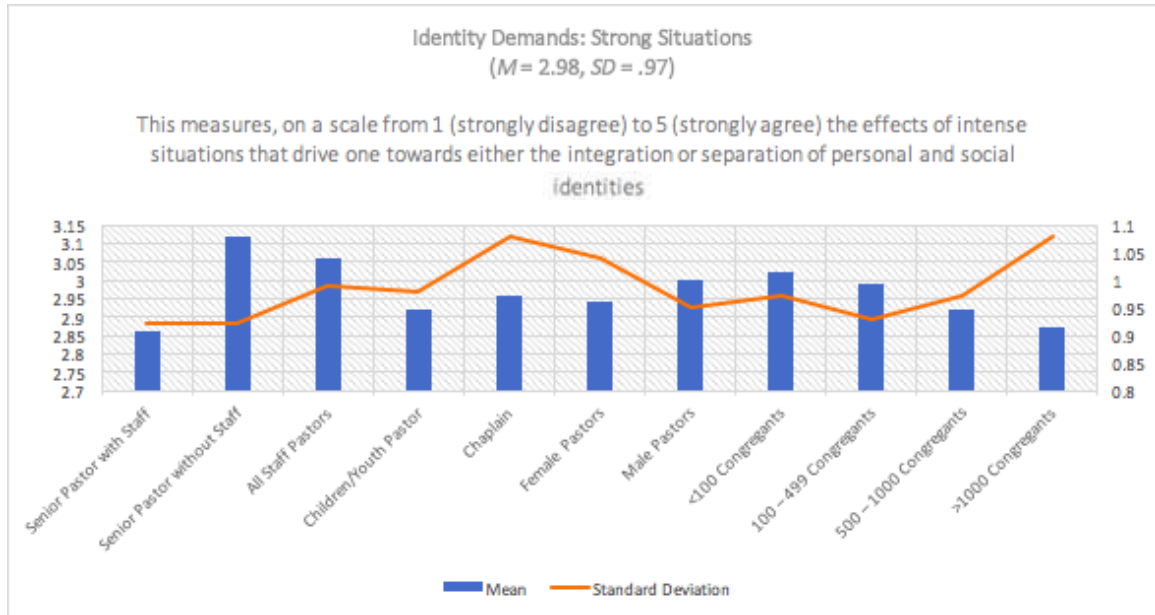


5. **Social Support**—This series of questions intends to develop an understanding of the amount and type of social support clergy receive from family, friends, work colleagues and supervisors.



The following measures reflect the only two areas of this study where Wesleyan clergy as a whole showed poor scores of wellbeing and where action should be considered:

1. **Identity Demands: Strong Situations**—This measure intends to measure the effects of intense situations that drive one towards either the integration or separation of personal and social identities.



2. **Identity Demands: Identity Expectations**—Identity demands measure the strong expectations that local churches might impose on pastors. For example, local churches might send subtle but powerful signals that a pastor should be charismatic, strong, and commanding. Among those pastors who do experience strong expectations and pressures, their wellbeing is significantly lower.

