

# A Survey Of Pastors Serving Congregations

## Computers

Nine in ten pastors consider a computer a necessity for pastors today, and only 6% of pastors do not own a computer. However, over three-quarters of those without home computers have access to a computer at work. Overall, just 1.5% of pastors do not own a home computer *and* do not have access to one at work.

Almost all pastors who own a computer are connected to the Internet. Only 5% of computer owners are not connected to the Internet. The main reason they are not connected (given by 76%) is that they “use the office computer to access the Internet.”

One-third of the pastors (36%) have access to a high-speed telephone (DSL) or cable connection to the Internet.

## Study Leave

Three-fourths of the pastors have taken a study leave at least three times in the last five years. Only 8% have never taken a study leave in the last five years. Women are a little more likely than men to have taken a study leave every year for the last five years.

Of pastors with a family income of \$80,000 or more, a majority (70%) have taken a study leave every year for the last five years. In contrast, 50% of those with a family income of less than \$40,000 have taken a study leave every year for the last five years.

Pastors in smaller congregations are less likely than those in larger congregations to have taken a study leave every year.

## Sabbatical

The vast majority of the pastors have never taken a sabbatical since entering the ministry (86% of women and 80% of men). The remaining 18% have taken at least one sabbatical, including 13% who said their most recent sabbatical was for four weeks or more.

The most recent sabbatical of pastors serving larger congregation was longer than the that of pastors serving smaller congregations.

Of pastors who have taken a sabbatical, most (82%) received financial support from their congregation or another source. Pastors serving small congregations are less likely to have received financial support for their most recent sabbatical.

Almost all pastors who have had a sabbatical describe their most recent sabbatical as helpful to their emotional and spiritual health, and 81% found it to be helpful to their physical health. In addition, 87% reported that it was helpful in improving their ministerial duties.

## **Peer Groups and Mentors**

In the last five years, 75% of pastors have been part of a minister peer group that provides mutual support to participants, and 34% said they had a mentor in ministry. Furthermore, 17% said they had a spiritual director in that period. One-third of the women (31%), but just 13% of the men, have had a spiritual director in the last five years. Younger pastors were also more likely to have worked with a spiritual director.

How helpful do pastors find these sources of support to be? Of those participating in a ministerial peer group, 41% found that experience to be “very helpful,” and 35% found it “helpful.” Among those with mentors, 60% said their mentor had been “very helpful,” and 25% said “helpful.” Among those with a spiritual director, 66% described the relationship as “very helpful,” and 22% said “helpful.”

Among pastors with mentors, 62% of the women and 59% of the men found their mentor to be “very helpful.” For both men and women with mentors, the least helpful mentors were those found through the presbytery.

About 95% of the women with spiritual directors and 85% of the men with spiritual directors found them to be “helpful” or “very helpful.” Younger pastors were more likely than older pastors to find their mentor or spiritual director to be helpful.

## **Health**

Two-thirds of pastors (65%) have had a physical in the last year. At the other extreme, 9% reported their last physical was three or more years ago. Almost half of pastors (45%) describe their health as “excellent”; only 1% says their health is “poor.” Men are a little more likely than women (46% to 40%) to describe their health as “excellent.”

One-half of pastors (50%) engage in physical activity (lasting at least 20 minutes and hard enough to increase heart and breathing rates) at least three times a week, but 22% engage in such physical activity less than once a week.

Three-quarters of female pastors (76%) and half of male pastors (59%) have changed their behavior in the last year to improve their health. Of those who made health-related changes, diets were most common (see Table 1).

**Table 1**  
**Specific Changes Made by Pastors Who Changed Their Behavior in the Last Year to Improve their Health, By Gender**

	<b>Females</b>	<b>Males</b>
Changed my diet.....	69%	71%
Started to exercise regularly .....	48%	39%
Increased the time I spend in prayer/Christian meditation.....	43%	35%
Increased the time I spend with family and friends .....	38%	38%
Increased the time I spend on recreation .....	33%	27%
Changed my consumption of alcohol.....	6%	7%
Decreased my smoking .....	3%	4%

## Weight

The majority of pastors are overweight, and many are obese. Using self-reported height and weight, we calculate each pastor’s Body-Mass Index (BMI), a standard measure for assessing weight relative to height (BMI is calculated as weight in kilograms divided by height in meters squared). The National Institutes of Health provides a Web site that automatically calculates BMI and provides interpretive help (<http://nhlbisupport.com/bmi/>). Table 2 shows the weight distribution of pastors based on calculated BMI scores.

**Table 2**  
**Weight Distribution of Pastors, by Gender**

	<b>Females</b>	<b>Males</b>
Underweight .....	2%	*
Normal.....	36%	27%
Overweight.....	35%	48%
Obese.....	23%	23%
Extremely obese .....	5%	2%

\* = less than 0.5%; rounds to zero

Two in ten women (18%) and 10% of men report that they are on a formal weight loss program. In general, women who are overweight are more likely than overweight men to have changed their diet and started exercising in the last year.

## Concerns

Pastors were given a list of 18 events and situations and asked to indicate how concerned they were about each item on the list. Keep in mind that not everyone will agree on what it means to be concerned. The 18 items are listed below in Table 3 in order of concern as reported by men pastors. This allows easy comparison of the scores of the various items.

Women are more concerned than men for all items except “educational cost for children.” If the items were ranked in order based on women’s concerns, need for spiritual renewal, finding time for relationships, and managing dual careers would be higher on the list and concern for aging parents and medical cost would be lower.

**Table 3**  
**Pastors’ Concerns, by Gender**

Please indicate the extent to which you are presently concerned about each of the following as they relate to you. Figures show the percent responding “Very Concerned” or “Concerned”; “Not Applicable” responses excluded from the calculations.

	<b>Females</b>	<b>Males</b>
Educational costs for children .....	55%	63%
Retirement planning .....	61%	59%
Medical costs .....	35%	53%
Financial planning .....	56%	51%
Need for your spiritual renewal .....	65%	50%
Your income .....	54%	46%
Time with family .....	53%	45%
Caring for aging parents .....	45%	42%
Finding time for relationships .....	60%	41%
Burnout .....	51%	35%
Debt .....	45%	34%
Physical health .....	38%	33%
Continuing education .....	35%	31%
Housing costs .....	32%	29%
Isolation in your ministry .....	38%	25%
Transition to a new call .....	29%	22%
Difficulty in finding a new call .....	28%	22%
Managing dual careers .....	40%	20%

### **Leaving the Ministry**

Few pastors (15%) have “seriously” or “very seriously” thought of leaving the ministry in the last two years. The largest group (43%) responded “not at all,” and 30% reported that they gave leaving the ordained ministry only “a passing thought.” There was very little difference between the percentage of men and women considering leaving the ministry.

Concern about income is related to whether a pastor has thought of leaving the ministry, with those most concerned about income more likely to have considered leaving. It is hard to tell which came first, though—concern about income or thoughts of leaving the ministry. Statistically speaking, one could make the case that thoughts of leaving the ministry came before concern about income.

## The Finances of their Congregations

Few pastors (3%) serve congregations with annual budgets of under \$50,000. Another 3% said their congregation has a budget of \$3 million or more. Most (66%) report annual budgets between \$50,000 and \$399,999.

Slightly more than half of pastors (57%) reported that their congregation has an endowment. Of pastors serving congregations with endowments, 45% said the endowment was valued under \$200,000, and 18% said the endowment was worth \$1 million or more.

## Personal Finances

One-quarter of pastors (27%) reported that their **total family** income totals less than \$50,000 a year. Another 30% have a family income between \$50,000 and \$69,999, and 13% have family incomes over \$100,000.

About half of pastors (54%) are “satisfied” or “very satisfied” with their current compensation package. Yet 12% are either “dissatisfied” or “very dissatisfied.” A large majority (81%) report that their compensation is fair and reasonable given the circumstances of the congregation (21% said “yes, definitely”; 34% said “yes”; and 26% said “yes, probably”).

Among pastors with children of college age (or whose children will soon be of college age), 28% expect to borrow money personally to help pay their children’s college costs (loans separate from student loans or personal loans taken out by their children). The average debt pastors expect to have when their children have finished college is \$29,542 (the median is \$20,000). Sixty-nine percent of the parents expect their children to have college debt.

Most pastors (64%) have not attended a financial planning seminar (whether offered by the Board of Pensions, by a financial institution, or through some other source). Somewhat surprisingly, it is not just the younger pastors who have not attended financial planning seminars. Among pastors who are 60 years of age or older, 57% have not attended a financial planning seminar, and 61% do not plan to attend one in the near future. In addition, those pastors who expressed concern about debt and educational costs for their children are no more likely to have attended a financial planning seminar than those not concerned about these issues.

A minority of pastors (22%) live in a home owned by the congregation. Most pastors (67%) live in a home they own (either outright or with a mortgage). Of those who currently own their own home, 32% received assistance from their congregation to purchase the home. The most common assistance was a loan from the congregation.

## Who was Surveyed

This survey was sent in October 2002 to a random sample of 1,000 pastors serving PC(USA) congregations. Seventy-five percent returned their survey. Overall, 24% of the respondents were women, and 74% were serving as solo or senior pastor.