2023 Clergy Well-Being Survey Highlights
The well-being of United Methodist clergy affects the entire connection, including the families, congregations and communities they serve.

Wespath supports well-being with a focus on five dimensions of physical, emotional, spiritual, social and financial well-being.

To ensure our programs are tailored to the needs of our participants and to keep a pulse on their overall well-being, Wespath conducted its seventh Clergy Well-Being Survey in 2023.
Overview

LAUNCHED IN 2012

This biennial survey provides meaningful feedback on the current state of clergy well-being across all dimensions.

NOW WITH 10 YEARS OF DATA

We are able to identify a significant decline in overall clergy well-being within The United Methodist Church since the survey first originated.
Decline in Overall Perceived Well-Being—10-Year Trends

The number of clergy reporting “very good” or “excellent” health has had a steady decline.
Impact of the Pandemic on Well-Being

More than half of clergy reported the pandemic negatively affected their social and emotional well-being.
Spiritual Dimension—2023

Spiritual vitality and well-being have improved

**Spiritual Vitality**
Feel the presence of God in ministry

- When conducting pastoral visitations: 73%
- When participating in Church-related events: 68%

**Spiritual Vitality**
Feel the presence of God in daily life

- Have a vital relationship with God: 78%
- Feel God’s grace and God’s love as they are, apart from any accomplishments or good works: 70%

*Indicates improvement from 2021 results*
Spiritual Dimension—10-Year Lookback

- Less dramatic decline than other dimensions of well-being
- Over the past 10 years, greatest decline in:
  - “I feel sense of harmony in myself”
  - “I feel peaceful”
Obesity, diabetes and hypertension continue to rise

- 49% Have a body mass index (BMI) > 30 kg/m\(^2\)*
- 28% With diabetes or pre-diabetes
- 34% With hypertension or pre-hypertension

* According to the CDC, adult BMI greater than or equal to 30 kg/m\(^2\) is considered obese and increases risk for a number of health conditions.

Result has worsened since 2021
Physical Dimension—10-Year Lookback

- Physical well-being (obesity, diabetes, pre-diabetes) has worsened since 2013.
- The percentage of UMC clergy who are obese has consistently been over 10 percentage points worse than a matched National Health Interview Survey benchmark.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>2013</th>
<th>2023</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Obesity</td>
<td>40%</td>
<td>49%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Diabetes</td>
<td>12%</td>
<td>14%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pre-diabetes</td>
<td>9%</td>
<td>14%</td>
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Emotional Dimension—2023

Stress and depressive symptoms continue to be a serious problem

- 10% Report suffering from depression
- 35% Report functional difficulties from depressive symptoms

Result has worsened since 2021
Most measures of perceived stress remain at concerning levels similar to 2021:

- 42% Feel things were not going their way
- 39% Not able to control irritations in their life
- 35% Don’t feel “on top of things”
- 25% Feel nervous and stressed

Two measures of depressive symptoms are worse than 2021 and the rest remain at concerning levels similar to 2021:

- 69% Feel tired or have little energy *(worse than 2021)*
- 44% Poor appetite or overeating *(worse than 2021)*
- 52% Trouble sleeping or sleeping too much
- 35% Have little interest or pleasure in doing things
Emotional Dimension—10-Year Lookback

Difficulty functioning due to depressive symptoms is much worse than in 2013

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>2013</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Feeling tired or without energy</td>
<td>59%</td>
<td>69%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Trouble sleeping</td>
<td>40%</td>
<td>52%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Poor appetite/overeating</td>
<td>36%</td>
<td>44%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Little interest/pleasure in doing things</td>
<td>23%</td>
<td>35%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Feeling down, depressed or have trouble concentrating</td>
<td>19%</td>
<td>32%</td>
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- The percent of clergy experiencing functional difficulty from depressive symptoms has been more than twice the National Health and Nutrition Examination Survey (NHANES) benchmark since 2013.
- The number of clergy actually being treated for depression is only up a small amount, suggesting many continue to go untreated.
Social Dimension—2023

Social connection is significantly worse than 2021

28% Reported not feeling understood by family and friends

Result has worsened since 2021
Social Dimension—
10-Year Lookback

Social connection has worsened over 10 years

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>2013</th>
<th>2023</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Feel understood most of time</td>
<td>81%</td>
<td>72%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Feel understood hardly ever</td>
<td>1%</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
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</table>

Feel understood most of time: 81% in 2013, 72% in 2023
Feel understood hardly ever: 1% in 2013, 4% in 2023
Work-Related Stress—2023

Clergy feel less isolated, but still carry a heavy load

- 33% Feel lonely and isolated at work
- 27% Fewer full-time clergy are working 51+ hours per week
- 33% Feel too many demands from the congregation

Indicates improvement from 2021 results

Result has worsened since 2021
Work-Related Stress—10-Year Lookback

Work-related stress has worsened over 10 years, but percentage of clergy working excessive hours has decreased

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<thead>
<tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Experiencing stress because of challenges in the organization or congregation</td>
<td>46%</td>
<td>52%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Feel lonely and isolated at work</td>
<td>25%</td>
<td>33%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Full-time clergy working 51+ hours/week</td>
<td>42%</td>
<td>27%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Part-time clergy working 41+ hours/week</td>
<td>21%</td>
<td>16%</td>
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Financial Dimension—2023

Financial well-being declined to pre-pandemic levels

- 73% think their financial situation is at least slightly stressful
- 49% are not confident they are on track for a comfortable retirement

Result has worsened since 2021
Financial Dimension—10-Year Lookback

- Financial stress has remained relatively stable
- Wespath began measuring financial knowledge and retirement readiness in 2017, so only six years of data to report on
Executive Summary—Key Demographic Differences

**Men** have higher rates of cardiovascular disease and diabetes and report lower spiritual vitality; **women** have higher rates of asthma and autoimmune conditions, and experience more stress.

**Older** clergy suffer from more physical ailments; **younger** clergy struggle more with stress, depression and spiritual health.

**White/non-Hispanic** clergy have higher rates of depression, score lower on spiritual health and struggle more in their ministry and occupational settings.

**Black** clergy have higher rates of diabetes and hypertension, but report better spiritual well-being, lower levels of stress and depression.

**Asian** clergy have lower rates of obesity, diabetes, and autoimmune conditions, and experience less stress.

**Hispanic** clergy report more occupational stress and conflict over disaffiliation.

**Rural clergy** suffer from more physical ailments; **urban clergy** struggle more with spiritual health.
Executive Summary—Key Vocational Differences

**Part-time local pastors** report less depression, better spiritual well-being and less stress.

**Clergy at smaller churches** have more ailments and take fewer vacation days; those at **larger churches** experience more occupational stress and lower spiritual well-being.

**Full-time clergy** experience lower spiritual vitality, lower well-being and more stress.

**Church planters** report better overall health, better spiritual and social health and more physical activity.

**Associate pastors** have fewer physical ailments and sleep more each night than sole or lead pastors.

Clergy who **frequently change appointments** experience lower overall health, more depression, more stress and lower spiritual health.

Those in **cross-racial or cross-cultural** appointments experience less depression, better spiritual health and more positive ministry settings.
Impact of Disaffiliation

- 37% of clergy reported dealing with conflict or difficulty with disaffiliation in their ministry
- Disaffiliation conflict within The United Methodist Church impacts all dimensions of well-being
- Clergy who reported some or a lot of disaffiliation conflict or difficulty had higher risk of arthritis*, functional difficulty from depressive symptoms, social connection, occupational stressors and financial stress than clergy who reported little or no conflict

* Arthritis is associated with inflammation, which can increase as stress levels increase
What’s Next

• In line with our mission of Caring For Those Who Serve, Wespath takes the results of this survey seriously

• We are taking action to stem these downward trends and better support clergy’s overall well-being. Our efforts are concentrated in several areas:

  ➢ Continuing to cultivate our well-being programs to ensure they are meeting the areas of need for clergy
  ➢ Encouraging utilization of well-being programs that help bolster areas of well-being
  ➢ Fostering and encouraging conversations about clergy well-being with leaders and members across the UMC connection
  ➢ Facilitating listening sessions across the UMC to better understand the decline in clergy’s well-being
  ➢ Working across the denomination to combine energy, efforts and focus on improving clergy well-being