

Literature Review: Job Satisfaction

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Recently, U.S. News & World Report named Clergy as one of the top 30 careers in 2009 (Nemko 2008a). Five criteria were considered: job outlook, job satisfaction, difficulty of required training, prestige, and pay (Nemko 2008a). Many of the “30 Best Careers” were in helping professions including firefighter, physical therapist, registered nurse, school psychologist, and veterinarian among others (Nemko 2008b). Marty Nemko (2008c) noted that “being a cleric isn’t a job – it’s a life” and that you must be able to inspire others through word and deed, especially at critical moments in life. This may seem to be a tall order and may be one of the reasons many expect clergy to be “burned out.” Much of the research on job satisfaction in clergy has been on burnout and emotional exhaustion. Some of that research is summarized below. Several studies have compared clergy to other professionals and may be especially helpful to this task force:

- “Best Careers in 2009” by Marty Nemko, *U.S. News & World Report*
- “Spirituality, Stress and Work” by Rick Csiernick & David W. Adams, *Employee Assistance Quarterly*
- “Emotional exhaustion and mental health problems among employees doing ‘people work’: the impact of job demands, job resources and family-to-work conflict” by Geertje van Daalen, Tineke M. Willemsen, Karin Sanders, and Marc J. P. M. van Veldhoven, *International Archives of Occupational and Environmental Health*
- “Job Satisfaction in the United States” by Tom W. Smith, NORC, University of Chicago (This report showed that clergy ranked the highest on job satisfaction and general happiness. Firefighters and special education teachers were also ranked in the top twelve on both scales. For this reason, studies of firefighters and special education teachers will be referenced.)

Literature reviews which may also be especially helpful are:

- “Clergy work-related psychological health, stress, and burnout: An introduction to this special issue of Mental Health, Religion and Culture” by Christopher Alan Lewis, Douglas W. Turton, & Leslie J. Francis, *Mental Health, Religion & Culture*
- “Mental Health Issues Among Clergy and Other Religious Professionals: A Review of Research” by Andrew J. Weaver, Kevin J. Flannelly, David B. Larson, Carolyn L. Stapleton, & Harold G. Koenig, *The Journal of Pastoral Care & Counseling*

It is well known that clergy work beyond the regular 40 hour work week and do so during unscheduled times at locations other than their “workplace,” such as visiting the hospital when a parishioner has had a heart attack or attending ballgames of youth in the church. Weaver, Flannelly, Larson, Stapleton & Koenig (2002) compiled a helpful research review on mental health issues among clergy. In it, they note that “on average, United Methodist clergy spend 56.2 hours per week in ministry, and 12 evenings a month away from home on church duties” and that 25% of surveyed pastors work more than 60 hours per week (citing Gallup & Lindsay 1999). Work hours have also been shown to be related to increased job stress, especially related to family, in physicians (Rovik et al. 2007) and to emotional exhaustion in those doing people work (Daalen, Willemsen, Sanders, &

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Veldhoven 2009). These long work hours may be indicative of a strong commitment by clergy to their congregations and community. Personal dedication, investment in one's job, and commitment increase job satisfaction in clergy and religious order workers (Wittberg 1993). Anecdotal accounts can certainly verify this commitment, and it is something clergy have in common with firefighters (Lee & Olshfski 2002).

Uncertainty of job expectations, volume of work, incompatibility of expectations, and work-family conflict increase emotional exhaustion, and uncertainty of expectations decreases job satisfaction (Hang-yue, Foley, & Loi 2005). Influence within the church (Wildhagen, Mueller & Wang 2005) and authority (Miner, Sterland, & Dowson 2006) also seem to relate to job satisfaction. This sense of control in the workplace also contributes to job satisfaction in firefighters (Lourel, Abdellaoui, Chevaleyre, Paltrier & Gana 2008), and autonomy was related to decreased emotional exhaustion in those doing people work (Daalen, et al. 2009). Nelsen and Everett (1976) suggest the members' willingness to be taught is related to job satisfaction, and it has been shown that a feeling of frustration when teaching contributes to low job satisfaction in special education teachers (Stempien & Loeb 2002).

Mental Health, Religion & Culture has a special issue dedicated to clergy burnout (January 2007.) Lewis, Turton and Francis (2007) introduce the issue with a summary of its contents, which may be a helpful resource. All studies included in the issue use the Maslach Burnout Inventory, which seems to be a helpful tool. Within this issue, Miner (2007a) reports that ministers experience stress in their first year related to their relationships with family and friends, including marital stress, and related to ministry expectations, conflicts, and loss of people in the church. Miner (2007b) also reports that openness to change of beliefs may contribute to burnout. It is suggested that theological students are encouraged not only to explore their beliefs but also to integrate them before they enter the ministry. Doolittle (2007) discusses coping strategies and finds that planning, acceptance and positive reframing relate to increased personal accomplishment while self-blame, disengagement, distraction and denial relate to increased emotional exhaustion. A higher spirituality score, however, is also correlated with higher emotional exhaustion and personal accomplishment, suggesting that clergy satisfaction is complicated and that emotional exhaustion may not mean dissatisfaction. Doolittle also finds evidence to support the need for clergy to maintain healthy boundaries. A study by Randall (2007) suggests that younger clergy experience more burnout.

Family stress certainly contributes to job satisfaction (Hang-yue et al. 2005). Marital discord and more children are related to decreased job satisfaction (Rogers & May, 2003). Relocation, which is particularly relevant to United Methodist clergy, may contribute to marital discord, especially when there are children involved. Wives feel more stress than their clergy husbands when relocating, dealing especially with their own and their children's sense of loss and loneliness when leaving their social network (Frame & Shehan, 1994). Clergy generally express excitement about a move while spouses express concern over the financial burden, changing schools for the children, and loss of friends as well as lack of support from the clergy spouse. Both clergy and their wives see a need for more and better family-oriented support services from the denomination, but wives

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reported this in significantly higher levels (Morris & Blanton 1995). A study of physicians, who tend to work more than 40 hours per week as clergy do, also points to family issues relating to job stress (Rovik et al. 2007). Number of children was shown to relate to increased job stress, and spousal support was shown to relate to decreased job stress.

It may be assumed that female clergy have lower satisfaction than do male clergy due to lower pay and respect and more family stress. A gender paradox is found within work satisfaction and clergy, however, and female clergy are generally as satisfied or more satisfied than are their male counterparts despite perceiving the system as unjust, receiving less pay, having fewer opportunities for advancement, and having smaller churches with smaller budgets (McDuff 2001).

While research on emotional exhaustion and burnout among clergy may seem to abound, other reports suggest that job satisfaction and desirability of the profession remains high. One study shows clergy are generally satisfied with their profession and that the perception of “result awareness” and a feeling of performing significant work contribute to this satisfaction (Zondag 2004). Clergy were even among those considering their organizations to produce the least amount of stress, along with hospice workers and pastoral care providers (Csiernik & Adams 2002). Important resources for clergy may be a support network of friends and colleagues (Daalen et al, 2009), spousal support (Rogers & May, 2003), and encouragement from their congregations (Wildhagen et al. 2005; McDuff 2001). Increased age has also been found to be related to increased job satisfaction (Randall 2007; Mitchell 1967), pointing to a need for resources for younger clergy.

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