How to Prevent Pastors from Leaving the Ministry

Over the past few decades, researchers, including those from ours, have listed reasons why pastors leave the ministry.  While the results and ranking order may vary with each researcher, they are all basically the same, listing stress, isolation, and the negative affects the ministry has upon them and their family.

Over the last 18 years, we have not seen a noticeable improvement from any statistic.  Secondly, we have noticed researchers have argued their rankings or reasons are more accurate than others.  This mindset is ridiculous and takes away from the real issue.  The real issue lies in the fact that too many pastors have either left or are thinking about leaving the ministry.

Statistics without solutions has always bothered us.  Statistics are great to bring an awareness to any issue or problem, but it does not improve the situation.  I am reminded of the scripture found in James 2:26, which states, “For as the body without the spirit is dead, so *faith without works* is dead also.”   We must support our pastors with proven interventions that will make a difference while they are in the ministry, not at the point of no return.

Pastoral Care, Inc. is a leader in providing encouragement and support for our pastors Nationwide.  Over the last 18 years, we have identified ways to eliminate or reduce these from being factors.

We have chosen a group of pastors for our study.  This was an 8-year study consisting of 480 pastors who had the same issues:

1.  Continual thoughts of leaving the ministry or have taken steps to leave.
2.  Feelings of isolation, no close friends.
3.  Feeling the demands and stress of the ministry was overbearing.

**Interventions used:**

1.  We continued to  stay connected to each pastor by phone, text, or in person 3-4 times per year over the 8-year period.

2.  We consistantly express genuine interest with each pastor, family, and their needs.
3.  We continued to treat every pastor as a "person" not the role they fill.  Pastors have often told us they feel they cannot "be themselves" around other ministers or church members.
4.  We shared a consistent statement with each pastor, “You are very important in the Kingdom of God, never forget that!”
5.  In addition to personal contact, we have ministered, blessed, or helped every pastor in some way with a need in their ministry, personal life, or family of at least **3 times over the last 8 years**.

**Results:**

**99.6%** of these ministers have remained in the ministry!  Additional positive results include:

* Their ministry is stronger.
* They admit of having more confidence and energy to continue God’s work.
* Their self-esteem has improved.
* Their future outlook towards the ministry seems more positive.

Over the last 18 years, Pastoral Care, Inc. have encouraged denominations to do the same.  At the beginning of our ministry, many of our mainline denominations thought pastoral statistics did not pertain to their ministers or they thought they were already providing the resources and support their pastors needed.

**We discovered:**

1.  Pastors report having little or no support from their denominations. (Their feelings and thoughts)
2.  Pastors experience feelings of being alone or isolated, the demands of the ministry seemed overwhelming, and there seemed to be no solutions in sight.

3.  Most pastors felt uncomfortable in sharing feelings of leaving the ministry with their denomination.
4.  Many of the mainline denominations soon discovered they were experiencing an *“empty pulpit crisis”* of not having enough pastors to fill those who are leaving or retiring.
5.  Many of the new credentialed ministers coming into the ministry did not have a desire to become a pastor. They became credentialed for personal reasons or focused on one area of ministry.
6.  Over the last 10 years, denominations are starting to realize the need to offer resources but are perceived as not being personally connected to their pastors.  Pastors still report refusing to share their hurts and needs with their denominations.

We truly believe that all denominations care about the health and well-being of their pastors but in the eyes of a pastor, they feel their denomination has lost the personal connection that is so vitally needed.  Denominational churches also need instruction on how to do more.  Most of our churches have not heard statistics of the ministry, some have not been taught the benefits of honoring their pastors, some do not participate in Pastor Appreciation Day, and some treat their pastors as hirelings.  A lack of connection and appreciation can add stress and isolation to the ministry.

***Ministries like Pastoral Care, Inc.*** have filled this gap and brought a “personal” connection and trust to our pastors, treating them as a “person”, and letting them know they are not alone in their journey.  Perhaps the missing link in ministry has always been not having an effective support network available to our pastors.  There is hardly a church that we go into that a former pastor states, *"This type of ministry is long overdue!  If I had Pastoral Care, Inc. when I was a pastor, perhaps I would still be there today."*

Pastoral Care, Inc. is a safe and confidential place for pastors to call for support and encouragement.  Best of all, our services are free.  We believe that God never expected us to walk this journey alone.  He says, He will never leave or forsake us, Hebrews 13:5, which is reassuring.  But we also know that God often works and supports His ministry through people.

The solution to this never-ending problem of pastors leaving the ministry can be solved through a bonified effort for everyone to support the overall ministry from top to bottom with a theme that we are all in this together.  When pastors feel what they are doing is important and appreciated by everyone including the church, having a support network available to them, having others to come along side of them, and not allowing them to become a statistic, positive results will happen.

**Interventions Needed:**

1.  Pastors need to stay connected to their denomination or affiliation.  Either the pastor, denomination, or both need to take steps to maintain this relationship.

2.  Pastors cannot afford to remain alone, isolated, or ignore fellowship outside of church duties.

3.  A pastor needs a friend, someone they can communicate their hurts, feelings, and needs in a safe and confidential manner.

4.  Pastors need balance and establish a healthy priority in their lives.  God comes first, our family comes second, and our ministry comes third.  **FACT:** Most pastors were married and had children before entering into the ministry.  God placed the responsibility of the family before their role in the ministry.  Neglecting this fact and not establishing priorities will cause problems in the marriage and with family relations.  **FACT:** Some children do not attend church today due to thoughts of their parent(s) loving the church more than they love them or gave priority to the church over their interests.  *By doing so, it gives a clear message to your spouse and other family members they are no longer more important than your work*.  Make time for yourself and your family!  "What would profit a man if he gains the whole world, and loses his own soul", Mark 8:36.  We believe a big part of your soul is your family.  You cannot afford to lose it!

5.  Pastors need rest!  You are not a superhero with endless amounts of energy.  We remind pastors, "even Jesus needed rest, how much more do we need to follow the same example?"  Good intentions on vacations, personal, and family times are often interrupted by pastoral duties (someone has died or in the hospital needing their pastor).   When we get rest, laugh, and put things in the right priority, we are a much better person!

6.  Pastors need to pray with their spouse.  According to one survey, **95%** of pastors report that they do not pray regularly with their spouse and wonder why they are facing issues or problems in the ministry.  There is safety in numbers and praying together can provide protection and unity in your ministry.

Our work is not finished.  We are continually trying to discover new ways to keep our pastors from leaving the ministry and providing a better workplace for our pastors.  If you have any ideas or suggestions, please let us know.  We firmly believe we are all in the ministry together.  Our slogan is, "Individually we can do little, but together, we can make a difference!"  It is not the question of who will get the credit, it is the question of whether we are making a difference in keeping our pastors in the ministry!