

What We're Learning:

Mental health findings from the 2008 and 2010 Clergy Health Initiative Longitudinal Surveys

In 2008, and again in 2010, the Duke Clergy Health Initiative conducted surveys of all active North Carolina United Methodist clergy to assess their mental, physical, and spiritual health. Participation was astounding: in 2008, 95% of clergy took part; 87% completed it in 2010.

The findings from these surveys, combined with insights from pastors who participated in focus groups, provided a compelling view into the state of pastors' well-being. This report focuses on pastors' mental health and some of the factors influencing it.

	2008 Survey	2010 Survey	Compared to Others
Depression	11.1%	10.5%	Higher than United States rate of 5.5%
Anxiety	13.5%	13.6%	Lower than United Kingdom* rate of 20.6% <i>*No direct U.S. comparison available</i>

37% of those qualifying for depression had seen a mental health professional in the previous six months. 30% of those qualifying for anxiety had done so. More than a third of each group had **never** sought care.

Based on the 2008 and 2010 survey data, we found three broad categories that predict whether or not clergy experience depression and anxiety.

External Demands	Internal Demands	Rewards
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Job stress • Life unpredictability • Social isolation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Feeling guilty about not doing enough work • Doubting one's call 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ministry satisfaction <i>Overall satisfaction with multiple aspects of ministry, including one's ministerial effectiveness; salary and benefits; and relationships with fellow clergy, supervisors and congregants.</i> • Financial security

Create **MORE**
depression and anxiety

Protect **AGAINST**
depression and anxiety

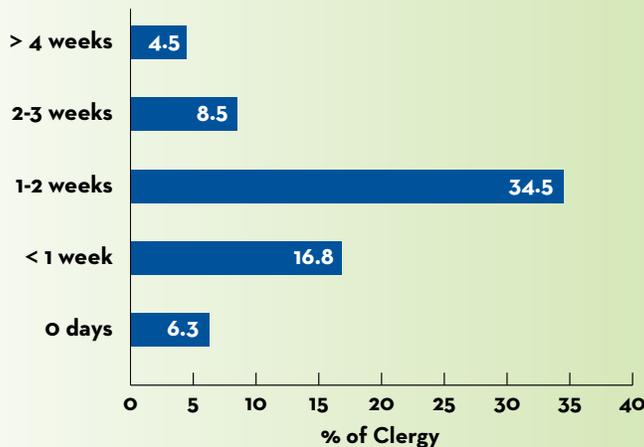
Time to Take a Vacation?

Our survey data indicate that every day of vacation that clergy take now is tied to better health two years later, including:

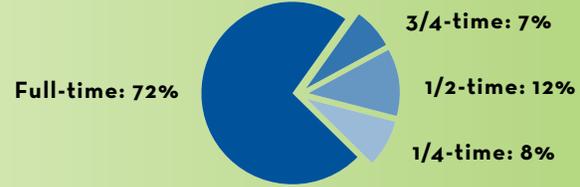
- A lower risk of having high blood pressure
- A better self-perception of health

Taking breaks from work allows the body's sympathetic nervous system to return to balance, reducing stress. Consider taking more this year!

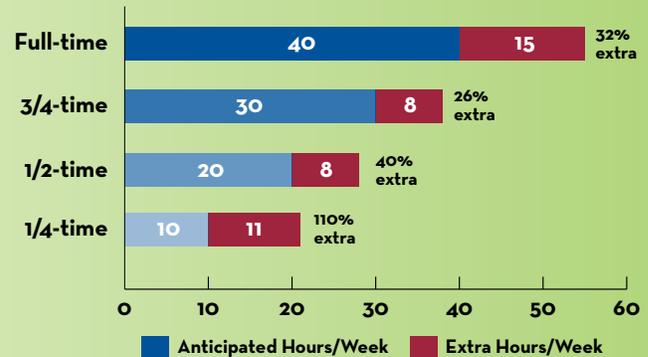
Amount of Vacation Taken in the Past 12 Months



Percentage of Pastors by Appointment Type



Weekly Time Spent in Ministry



While all pastors are working more than anticipated, on a percentage basis, pastors working 1/4-time appointments stretch themselves far more than other clergy.

Do Peer Groups Help?

We compared clergy who had engaged in covenant or peer support groups against the 44.2% of pastors who did not belong to such a group to determine the extent to which peer group participation resulted in better, worse or equivalent states of mental health.

As you can see from the figure, we found that **Stayers** received the greatest benefit overall. Being in a peer group in both 2008 and 2010 was associated with less depression and less mental distress.

Joiners did not experience any change in their mental health. Possibly it takes more than a year to experience a mental health benefit from peer group participation.

Leavers experienced less mental distress and no change in depression or anxiety. It seems likely that clergy are able to judge whether a peer group is beneficial, and stop participating if it is not.

	Joiners	Leavers	Stayers
	Not in a peer group in 2008, but joined one by 2010 13.9% of pastors	In a peer group in 2008, but left it by 2010 13.4% of pastors	In a peer group in both 2008 and 2010 28.5% of pastors
Is your church (relatively) normal in terms of morale and conflict?	↔ Anxiety ↔ Depression ↔ Mental Distress	↔ Anxiety ↔ Depression ↓ Mental Distress	↔ Anxiety ↓ Depression ↓ Mental Distress
Does your congregation have low morale?	↓ Mental Distress	↓ Mental Distress	↓ Mental Distress
Does your congregation have high conflict?	↑ Depression ↑ Mental Distress	↑ Depression ↑ Mental Distress	↔ Depression ↑ Mental Distress

Churches vary in their levels of morale and conflict, so we took a look at the interplay with peer group participation. If your congregation has **low morale**, participating in a peer group even for a short time relates to less mental distress. However, if your congregation has **high conflict**, participating in a peer group has the opposite effect. It

is possible that interacting with peer clergy makes experiencing the church conflict even more stressful, perhaps because you can't successfully enact advice you are given. Something other than a peer group may be needed if you lead such a church. Maybe a long vacation?