

POST-PANDEMIC PASTORAL CARE

A PROPOSAL FOR LONG BEACH CHURCH COLLECTIVE



Long Beach Church Collective

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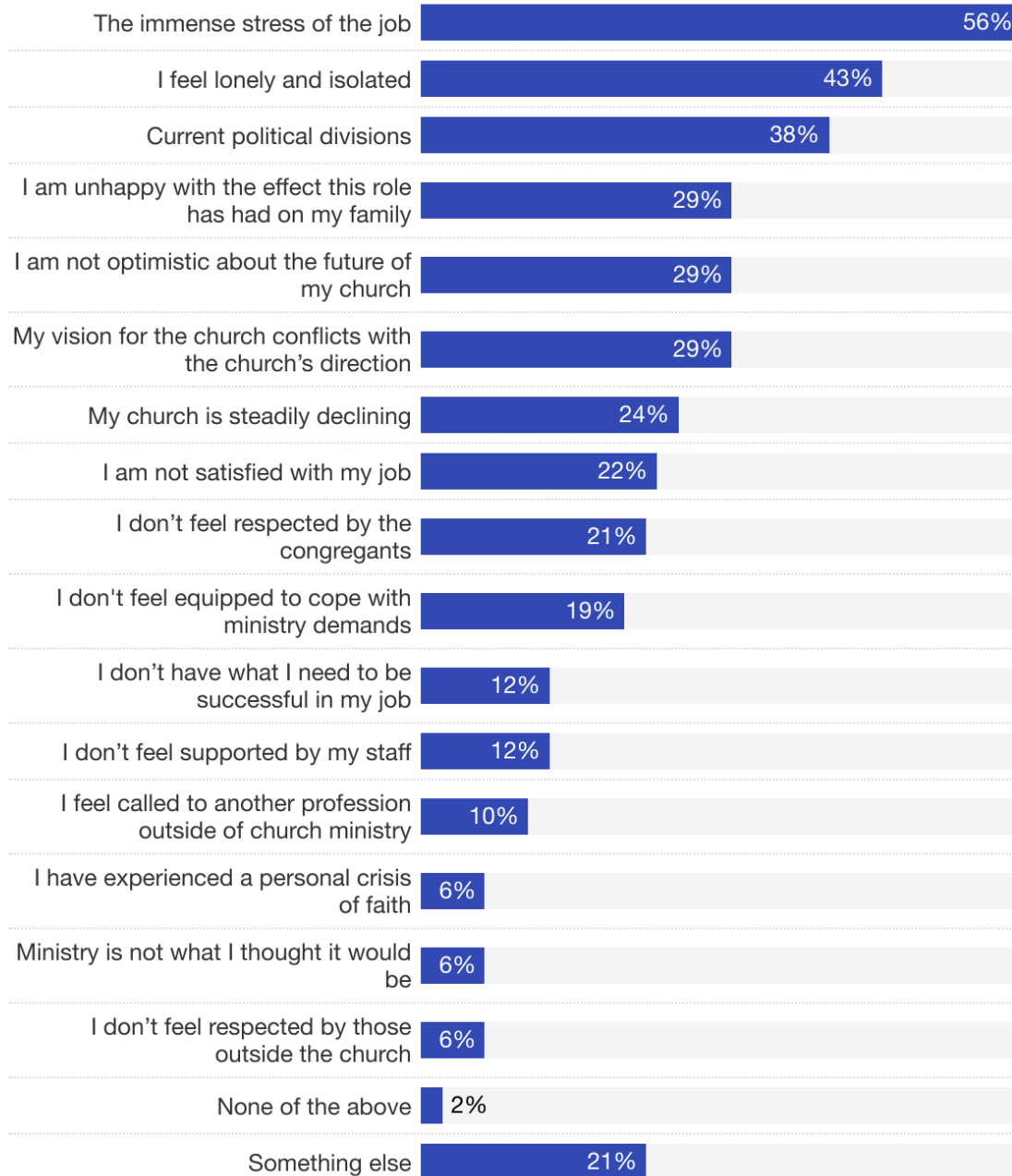


MINISTRY CHALLENGES, BY PASTORS WHO HAVE CONSIDERED QUITTING

Barna

Are any of the following reasons why you have considered quitting full-time ministry?
Select all that apply.

Base: % among those who have considered quitting full-time ministry



nn=221 U.S. Protestant pastors who have considered quitting full-time ministry in the past year, March 10–16, 2022. | Source: Barna Group

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Post-pandemic Pastoral Care

Long Beach Church Collective

May 2022

Executive Summary

This proposal will use \$500,000 to support 100 pastors in the greater Long Beach area to recover from and prevent further burnout through spiritual and emotional care, mental health resources, social and mentor support, and church board resources to ensure long-term stabilization and sustained ministry to the local church and world. The project is led by a trusted organization with experience providing responsive care to Long Beach pastors through crisis: The Long Beach Church Collective.

Introduction to the Problem

Pastors are in trouble. Anecdotal and data-informed evidence frame an alarming story: American pastors are increasingly burning out, dealing with internal and domestic strife, leaving the ministry, and some are even leaving the faith altogether. Even in a pre-pandemic ministry context, Eugene Peterson observed that “American pastors are abandoning their posts, left and right, at an alarming rate.”¹ What follows is a brief consideration of the driving factors and the devastating costs to a burnt-out pastor.

Objectively speaking, apart from cultural milieu or external influences, the role of a pastor is a complex one. At the turn of the 20th century, renowned theologian Reinhold Niebuhr reflected upon his experience as a pastor in Detroit, stating that the role of a pastor “requires the knowledge of a social scientist and the insight and imagination of a poet, the executive talents of a business [leader] and the mental discipline of a philosopher.”² Even career experts observe the complexity of demands laid upon the shoulders of God’s shepherds. Michigan State University professor Dr. Richard Deshon, an expert in job analysis, studied the local church pastor job and concluded that he has “never encountered such a fast-paced job with such varied and impactful

¹ Peterson, Eugene. *Working the Angles: The Shape of Pastoral Integrity* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1987), pp. 1-2.

² Niebuhr, Reinhold. *Leaves from the Notebook of a Tamed Cynic*, 1929; reissue edition, Westminster/John Knox Press, 1991, 137-138.

responsibilities” that is as complex, varied, and impactful.³ Deshon later determined that performing all pastoral tasks required most church leaders to master **64** different personal competencies, which he concluded is “almost inconceivable to imagine that a single person could be uniformly high on the 64 distinct knowledge, skills, abilities, and personal characteristics.”⁴ Sadly, new ministers are often not prepared for these unmet expectations when they graduate from seminary. Drawing on Barna Group research, Glenn Packiam notes that only 8% of pastors surveyed say that seminary prepared them “very well” for effective church leadership, noting that the “vocational crisis facing pastors seems to be a crisis of alignment: our calling matches our passion and preparation, but not the job itself or the expectations of the congregation.”⁵ Matt Bloom frames pastors as expert *generalists*: highly skilled at performing a range of tasks and activities. On top of this, he noted in 2017, ministry can be high-stakes work with “eternal” consequences; ministry can be complex, continuous, and diverse; ministry can be “punctuated” by unexpected events; ministry can have little set structure or guidance for how to prioritize the work; ministry can be strained by the turn toward more digital and less in-person communication; and ministry is done in the context of rapid external change.⁶

If the last decade was considered a rapidly-changing ministry context and culture, 2022 would legitimately be leaving pastors feeling dizzied. In 2020, 35% of pastors surveyed in a Barna poll said they feel more confident in their calling than when they first entered ministry, almost half as many in 2016 (66%). In a 2021 poll, nearly two out of five U.S. Protestant pastors say they have seriously considered quitting in the past year.⁷ A drop in pastoral credibility has not helped pastors' case for trusted leadership. Whether due to claims of being bullies, hypocrites, alcohol abusers, or womanizers (all rooted in a deeply ungodly misuse of authority), it is no surprise that only about one in five Americans think of a pastor as very influential in their community, and about one in four think they are not very influential or not influential at all.⁸ Where pastors are remaining as stable as possible, the landscape of ministry is not appearing

³ Deshon, Richard P. and Abigail Quinn. “Job Analysis Generalizability Study for the Position of United Methodist Local Pastor: Focus Group Results.” Michigan State University: December 15, 2007.

⁴ — “Clergy Effectiveness: National Survey Results.” General Board of Higher Education & Ministry, Michigan University: December 27, 2010.

⁵ Packiam, Glenn. *The Resilient Pastor: Leading Your Church in a Rapidly Changing World*. Grand Rapids, MI: BakerBooks, 2022.

⁶ Bloom, Matt. “Never Alone: Social Support and Flourishing in Ministry.” Research Insights from the Flourishing in Ministry Project: September 2017. Pg. 52.

⁷ Packiam, Glenn. — pg. 57; <https://www.barna.com/research/pastors-well-being/>

⁸ *Ibid*, — pp. 107-108; 114.

stable to them. Whether for good or for ill, today's church has directed its efforts to a variety of causes, so the role of pastor has become even more complex *and* more specialized, depending on a pastor's context.⁹ Packiam observes that "between the tectonic shifts of cultural thinking, the surging waters of opposition, and the clutter of fragmented opinions, the church finds itself disoriented and disconnected."¹⁰ Sadly, this is a far cry from the early church. Instead of revolutionary unity and movement building, the church is divided by racism, political tribalism (especially), differing convictions about gender roles in the church, and so much more.¹¹ For example, upon the passing¹² of George Floyd in June 2020, it seems that most Christians would have come together in solidarity against racist actions by those in power; instead, "the dividing lines [were drawn] more deeply."¹³ The pandemic has been heralded as the great revealer of existing inequalities and inefficiencies in the American system,¹⁴ and through it all those "outside" of the church increasingly see Christians as "irrelevant at best" and "dangerous at worst."¹⁵ Pastors are acutely aware of this reality. The weight of political and racial strife are breaking the backs of already burnt-out pastors since half of all pastors surveyed by Barna were already at risk of burnout due to feeling unprepared for handling conflict.¹⁶

Conflict is something pastors are often drawn into, most often within their congregations, but also within the community. Many Christians consider their church pastors as spiritual first-responders, typically face-to-face with human suffering, making their days full of the unhappy experiences of others.¹⁷ Pastors are often the first ones called when a tragedy, conflict, or traumatic experience occurs, directly handling the raw emotion and spiritual fragmentation of others.¹⁸ It is true that many pastors do so out of genuine care and concern for their "flock" or the *Imago Dei* of those outside their immediate community, but many pastors also respond to the lofty expectations from others that their shepherding shoulders are used to carrying the sheep who need it. In the words of Glenn Packiam, "how many of us, in the effort to live up to people's

⁹ (Counseling and Mental Health in the Church, 395)

¹⁰ Packiam, Glenn. — pg. 215.

¹¹ *Ibid*, pg. 165, 175.

¹² Some Christians might even argue about this framing, and use of the terms "passing of" or "murder of."

¹³ *Ibid*, pg. 169.

¹⁴ <https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2020/05/20/magazine/covid-quarantine-inequality.html>

¹⁵ Packiam, Glenn. — pg. 25.

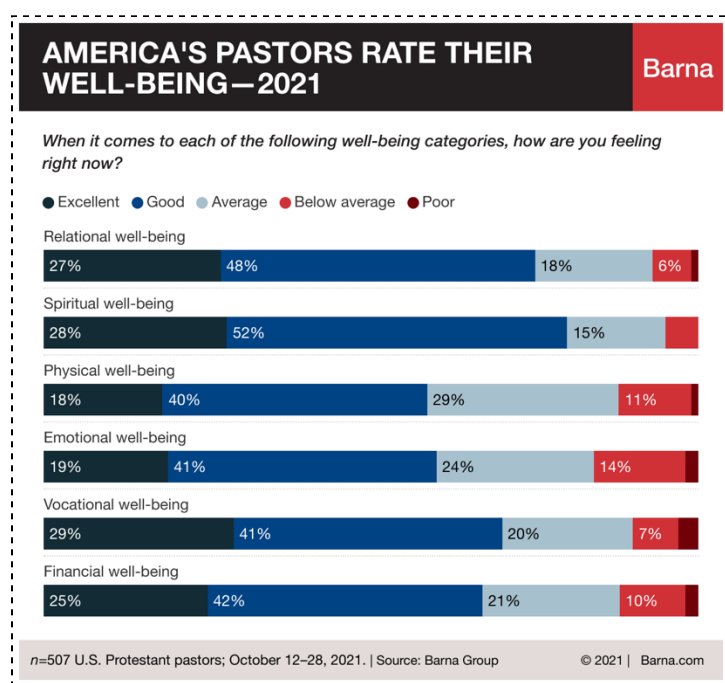
¹⁶ *Ibid*, pg. 147.

¹⁷ Bloom, Matt. "Never Alone: Social Support and Flourishing in Ministry." Research Insights from the Flourishing in Ministry Project: September 2017.

¹⁸ (Counseling and Mental Health in the Church, 400)

expectations, step into roles for which we have neither the training nor the calling to perform?”¹⁹ On top of this, pastors are often handling conflict within their congregations that can lead to conflict, or a *perceived sense* of conflict, between congregations. Two different church members will hear the same message from the pulpit and draw drastically differing conclusions, then take up arms over moral or theological principles – and increasingly in recent years, political stances – that lead members to leave and join the congregations of pastors’ friends or community co-ministers. This can perpetuate the false sense that pastors are more competitors than partners.

These factors that pastors step into – complex job requirements, insufficient training, conflict and cultural change, impossible expectations, and emotional weight of the role – lead pastors to burnout with disastrous results that can flood outward, given the high level of influence and visibility of the pastoral role. A general list of pastoral burnout includes anxious perfectionism, compassion fatigue and vicarious traumatization, isolation and withdrawal, depression and burnout, and even physical health risks such as obesity, hypertension, heart disease, stroke, diabetes, arthritis, asthma, and other chronic diseases.²⁰ Even in 2007, Chris Adams (et al.) found that clergy experience levels of burnout that are higher than most working



Americans.²¹ This hasn’t changed much, as Bloom found a similar effect across all denominations in 2019: more than one-third of all pastors reported significant levels of burnout.²² These high levels of burnout have led to significant internal turmoil and social isolation for pastors. A recent study (2020) revealed that nearly 60% of pastors surveyed have experienced depression during their ministry, 20% of pastors frequently feel lonely, and

¹⁹ Packiam, Glenn. — pg. 115.

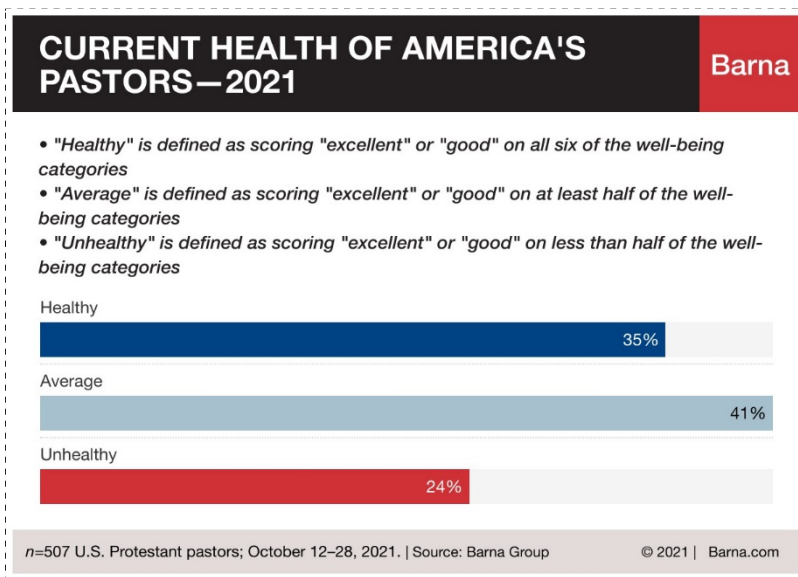
²⁰ (Counseling and Mental Health in the Church, 400-402)

²¹ Adams, C. J., Hough, H., Proeschold-Bell, R. J., Yao, J., & Kolkin, M. (2016). Clergy Burnout: A comparison study with other helping professions. *Pastoral Psychology*, 66(2), 147-175.

²² Bloom, Matt. “Never Alone: Social Support and Flourishing in Ministry.” *Research Insights from the Flourishing in Ministry Project*: September 2017.

25% frequently feel isolated; the latter two figures are an increase of 14% from just a few years earlier.²³ This same study also showed that one-third of all pastors have a low sense of meaning or satisfaction with their friendships. Pastors are not only facing burnout in record numbers, but doing so with a debilitating sense of isolation. Pastoral ministry is lonely work.

When a pastor is struggling emotionally and spiritually, average personal responsibilities can feel all the more arduous. Pastors who attend seminary enter the ministry with high levels of debt, but lower salaries to clear that debt, particularly when comparing the job to other high-stress professions. One-third of pastors in most denominations face significant personal financial challenges, and often their salaries are not inadequate for important needs such as emergencies and children’s education; further, an increasing number of pastors have no health,



life, or disability insurance.²⁴ Emotional, spiritual, and financial strife can produce significant marital strife. According to Packiam (2022), one in three married pastors say they have experienced significant marital problems at some point in their ministry tenure. Several years into their ministry, it is not uncommon that

pastors will look at the demands of their job, the weight of burnout, and strife in their personal lives and wonder why they even got into ministry in the first place. Pastors will easily lose sight of their core values and initial reasons for joining the ministry, which can result in public or private moral falling-out. Packiam (2022) shares the following very honest story of losing sight of one’s original ministry aims:

I began thinking about our years serving at a large church. How easily growth had become an idol! How quickly we spoke of influence and impact as if these were inherently holy things. How prone my heart was to pursue significance with an ungodly ambition... My desire for or obsession with big gatherings and influential work was

²³ Packiam, — pgs. 86-87

²⁴ Bloom, 2017 —

ambition... My desire for or obsession with big gatherings and influential work was what [Eugene] Peterson would, in a later chapter, call 'ecclesiastical pornography' designed to 'excite a lust for domination, for gratification, for uninvolved and impersonal spirituality.' (pp. 46-47)

Oversight & Selection Process:

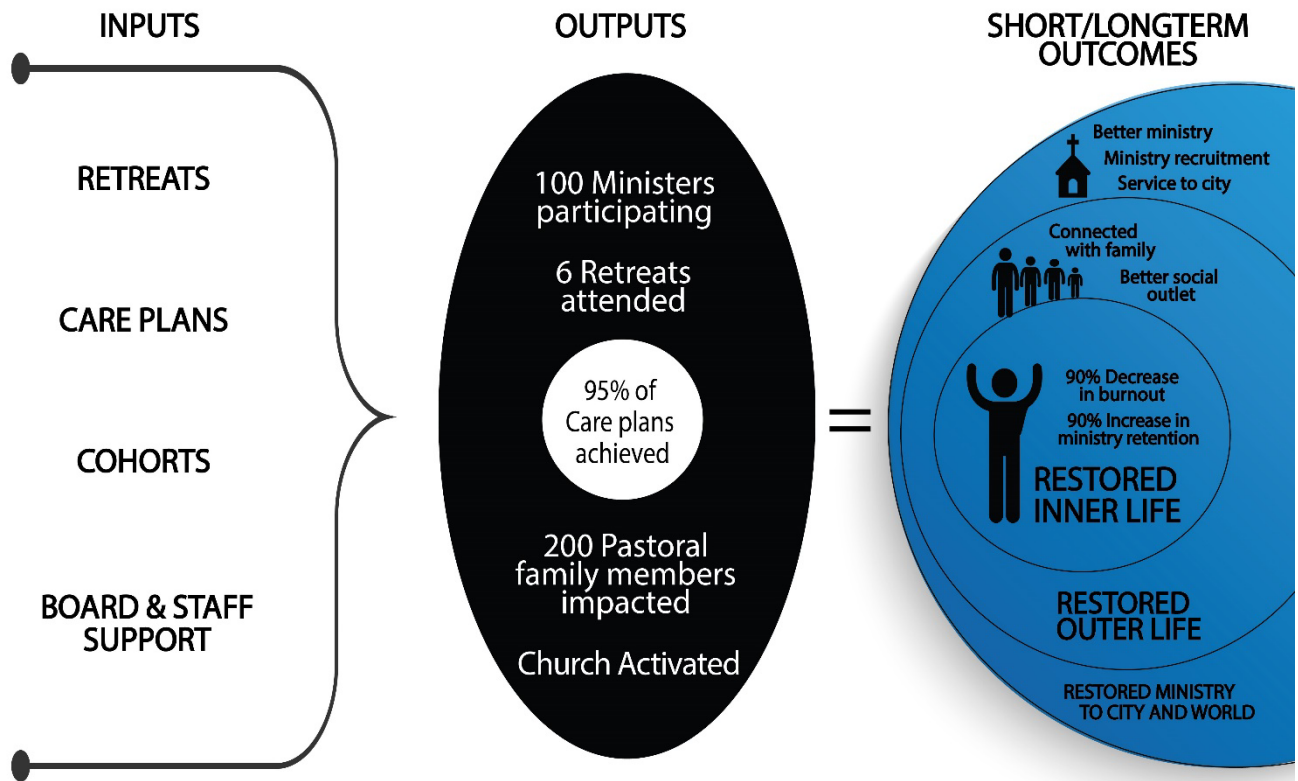
To maintain successful oversight of the project, a Steering Committee has been gathered and began meeting in March 2022 to determine the best way to implement this project. The Steering Committee consists of five individuals who are closely familiar with the needs of local ministers:

- **Beth Balmer** originally hails from Belfast, Northern Ireland. She has been in ministry at Grace Long Beach for the last 25 years, and specifically as co-lead pastor for the last four. With a Bachelor's degree in music from the University of York, she enjoyed a successful touring career prior to stepping into full-time ministry. Beth lives in Long Beach with her husband Eric, and they have three kids: Simon, Cora, Juju.
- **Myesha Chaney** is a soul care expert, author, speaker, and entrepreneur. As a Long Beach native, Myesha earned her Master's degrees in Spiritual Formation and Soul Care, and Christian Leadership and Women's Ministry from Biola University. She has served as Chief Operating Officer and Executive Pastor at Antioch Church for nearly a decade. Myesha and husband Wayne have been married for more than 17 years and have three children: Wayne, Reign, and Cadence.
- **Dr. Keith Douds**: Originally from New York, Keith Douds is a Licensed Clinical Psychologist who received his B.A. in Psychology & Social Relations from Harvard University, Graduate Studies in Counseling & Consulting Psychology from the Harvard Graduate School of Education, and M.A. and PsyD Degrees in Clinical Psychology from Biola University. Keith has a long-standing vocational ministry with over 30 years of outpatient and inpatient mental health services for families, couples, addiction, and grief. The Founder and Director of Alliance Psychology Group in Long Beach, he has been married for 38 years and has two adult daughters.
- **Eric Marsh** has 25 years of pastoral leadership in Long Beach, and currently serves as Associate Pastor at Parkcrest Church. Eric has been the Executive Director for Long Beach Church Collective for over two years now, serving pastors who are on the front lines of serving their communities. Eric holds a Bachelor's degree from Biola University.
- **Ron Ottenad**: is the founder of Rooted Soul Ministries, serves as Staff Spiritual Director at the Center for Spiritual Renewal, and is Adjunct Professor at Talbot School of Theology at Biola University. He served as executive pastor in a large church for 21 years. He has a Bachelor of Arts Degree in Journalism from California State University Long Beach and two Master of Arts Degrees in Organizational Leadership and Spiritual Formation from

Biola. He has been married for 35 years and has two adult children.

Further, the success of the initiative will also hinge on the onboarding of a part-time contracted coordinator to support the coordination of activities and fund distribution for all pastors involved. The successful candidate will be a highly-organized person experienced in operational oversight, budget management, data collection efforts, and effective communication. This coordinator will work with LBCC and the Steering Committee to select a group of 100 pastors to receive burnout restoration services. The coordinator will work with each selected pastor to create and oversee or help institute an Individualized Care Plan that is targeted to the pastor's specific needs, and will contain interventions from the list of services below (care groups, therapy, retreats, etc.).

Theory of Change



Project Details

1. Kick-off Retreats (100 pastors @\$500 each = \$50,000)

The power of this initiative lies in its communing power. It has been made clear that pastors are feeling alone in their work, and key to the goal of long-term healing is re-connecting pastors to themselves, their sense of passion and calling, and to others around them. Therefore, the launch of this initiative will involve a coming-together to identify pastors' personalized plans for care. It will be critical for pastors to be in the chair to receive from others and one another, rather than to be in the "driver's seat," as they are day-to-day. All 100 pastors involved will participate in an initial 3-day kick-off retreat (smaller retreats of 20-25 pastors each spread out over two years) to give allocated space for pastors to craft their Individual Care Plans, under the guidance and assistance of the Coordinator and Steering Committee. Pastors will have three days to retreat, contemplate their recovery plan, and get placed into a peer group that will meet monthly.

2. Individual Care Plan Inputs

a) Spiritual Direction OR Therapy (100 pastors @\$1,000 each = \$100,000)

Unfortunately, because of their position or role as spiritual head to a congregation, pastors often see themselves as immune to mental or emotional instability. 38% of pastors talk with someone about their emotional and mental health at least once a month and 12% of pastors meet with a counselor at least once/mo. Key to this initiative is dispelling this myth, and offering high-quality Christian-based mental health support. The steering committee will create a list of vetted local Christian psychologists and the project coordinator will use this as a reference to offer support for pastors who need it.

b) Care for high-risk situations in pastors' families (\$40,000)

For certain, select situations, there is a pot of money that pastors can draw from if they have found themselves (or members of their family) in a situation that requires more intensive therapy or intervention efforts. As discussed above, significant fallout can occur from a pastor's burnout, such as high-profile moral failing, a child engaging in illegal activities, a family member needing intensive therapeutic intervention, and so forth. This line item anticipates supporting pastors who are in more extreme cases of "implosion" around their burnout.

c) Monthly Peer Group Meetings (10 groups of 10 pastors @\$2,000 = \$20,000)

The initiative has already recruited five seasoned ministers to serve as lead mentors. The goal is to reach 10 mentoring pastors to shepherd 10 groups of 10 pastors. Mentoring pastors are

providing their peer group mentoring for free, and money will be used on coffee, refreshments, books, and training of mentors. Groups will be optional but highly encouraged and plan to meet at least monthly (more at the discretion of the group and group leader). These groups will provide accountability and peer support for pastors feeling isolated in their work.

3. Group / Cohort Plans

a) Social Events (\$10,000 per summer @ 3 summers = \$30,000)

Play and relaxation together is critical for the healing process for a pastor. As mentioned in the problem statement above, pastoral work is lonely work. LBCC will invest \$10,000 per summer to throw parties for pastors, cover baseball game tickets, provide for cooking evenings with couples, and facilitate day trips with groups of pastors.

b) Psalms Retreats (\$10,000 @ 3 retreats total = \$30,000)

Grace Long Beach will host three follow-up Psalms retreats for pastors in this initiative. The Psalms Retreat model is one that encourages participants to write their own psalm of praise, lamentation, grief, and so forth to give back to God whatever they are experiencing at the time. 75 pastors will attend 3 retreats (note: approximately 25 local pastors have attended a Psalms Retreat already).

d) Sabbatical support (50 pastors @\$500 for pulpit support, \$500 for retreat = \$50,000)

According to the Harvard Business Review, research has shown that all organizations benefit when employees take sabbaticals. When comparing 129 university professors (where sabbaticals are most common) who took a sabbatical in a given term with 129 peers who didn't, those who took sabbaticals experienced reduced stress and an increase in psychological resources and overall well-being. Those positive impacts often remained long after the sabbatical-takers returned to work. When studying non-profit executives who have sabbatical programs at their organization, most leaders surveyed said the time away allowed them to generate innovative ideas, helped them gain in confidence as leaders, and they reported better collaboration with board members. Church leaders in our rapidly changing, technological society are no different. Pastors, too, can get swept up in the flaw of constant movement— “the inability, or unwillingness, to slow down and evaluate” (*Counseling and Mental Health in the Church*, 404). Sabbatical funds will be provided on a sliding scale based on budgets and needs of each pastor and church.

c) Learning together: Pastor-in-Residence (\$10,000 per year @ 3 years = \$30,000)

LBCC plans to invite a “pastor-in-residence” to provide strength, wisdom, inspiration, and

comradery to local pastors. The goal is to encourage pastors to renew their minds along with their hearts and souls. For 2022, LBCC has confirmed that it will host Rich Villodas, a Brooklyn-born lead pastor of New Life Fellowship and author of the very relevant book to burnt out pastors, *Good and Beautiful and Kind*, which offers a compelling vision of wholeness for broken lives and a fractured world.

4. Investment in Pastor's Church Context (\$80,000)

a) Board and Associate Pastor / Staff Development

(\$100 per 100 churches = \$10,000; Associate Pastor/Church Staff - \$70,000)

In order to maintain long-term change, the change needs to be reflective at the top. If a pastor goes through an intensive program that instills personal, spiritual, holistic change, but the context in which they serve does not reflect the support to maintain that change, the investment will be lost over time. Therefore, LBCC will invest in each pastor's church board to resource and equip them to advise them and protect their time and emotional bandwidth moving forward. Similarly, in order to support pastors in their retreats and time away from their congregation, LBCC will provide funds to the support pastors and associate staff to help cover while pastors are undergoing this initiative.

What Does Success Look Like?

For the purpose of this initiative, Long Beach Church Collective follows the Barna Group's "resilient pastor" definition: "resilient leaders must be filled with realism about the actual, tangible, brutal reality of leading the church and forming people into Jesus' image... in addition to realism, resilient pastors must be anchored to *hope*. *Hope* in the Lord's work in the world. *Hope* in a God who knows us and hears us. *Hope* in the reality of a resurrected Jesus. *Hope* that all this work and effort and toil really does amount to something both here and now and in eternity. Resilient pastors hold realism and hope in beautiful tension." (Packiam 2022, p. 13) LBCC would add to this definition a renewed *hope that the church can still make a difference in the city and the world*, and is excited to spark this transformational renewal for area leaders.

Regarding measurable change, this initiative will yield several short-term and long-term positive outputs and outcomes:

Anticipated Short-term Outputs:

- 100 ministers participating.
- 6 retreats attended.
- 95% of all activities in each care plan completed.
- at least 200 pastoral family members impacted.

Anticipated Short-term Outcomes:

- 90% (9/10) pastors report a decrease in overall burnout.
- 90% (9/10) pastors report growth in ministry retention.

To measure the above outputs and growth, LBCC will utilize a number of tools. Attendance will be tracked to ensure participants are utilizing all resources provided to them through the initiative. LBCC will also want to gauge the wider impact to not just the minister, but to the families and churches they serve. Thus, family size and church population will also be monitored.

To measure change, pastors will take short pre- and post- surveys to assess growth in feelings of connectedness to God, self, and others, and thus measuring an impact to one's "inner life" and "outer life." Measures will also include growth in ministry retention and decreased feelings of overall "burnout." Objective observation is also highly valued, and so care leader (mentor, group leader, therapist) input will be useful to measure against pastor survey feedback.

Barriers to Success + Mitigation Efforts

Envisioning success with this project means weighing and planning for barriers. The most likely barriers to this initiative are as follows:

1) Stigma around pastors seeking help

As noted in the “Problem” section above, pastors might be reluctant to seek mental health support because there is a misconception in the church that church leaders are “superhuman” and shouldn’t need to reach out for support. This is why it will be critical to offer pastors involvement in “care groups,” or other opportunities for pastors to meet with peers to know they aren’t alone. Breaking through the veil of isolation and a mis-guided self-image as The Healer (and thus not needing healing him or herself) should open the pastor up to further education about how common and dangerous untreated burn-out can be. LBCC will use other pastor’s testimonials in promotional efforts to cut through any stigma that could delay or detract the pastor from seeking help.

2) Lack of tested models or initiatives

With the rising awareness of the importance of caring for one’s mental health, particularly following the pandemic, more and more institutes are giving rallying cries to support pastors. However, most initiatives that directly support the care for pastors are newly-created. In order to ensure its responses to this need for Southern California pastors to address their self-care are rooted in research-based models, the planning team has looked to academic and vetted research institutions who are starting to take action in this sphere. This initiative will lean upon the lessons learned from the work of key noted institutions, such as:

- Duke University has established a Clergy Health Initiative as a response to overworked pastors. Duke has invested \$21 million in the Clergy Health Initiative since 2007, which includes restoring stress-reducing habits for pastors, data collection around pastors’ well-being, clarifying the pastoral role, and developing field guides of best practices. For more, see: <https://www.dukeendowment.org/project-details/clergy-health-initiative>
- Notre Dame: Flourishing in Ministry at Notre Dame addresses similar core attributes of this initiative: a restoration of identity, calling, relationships, and transcendence (or, sense of conviction). The Wellbeing at Work project at the University of Notre Dame with funding from the Lilly Endowment has been engaging with clergy, through various research methodologies, to understand the “rapid changes” of clergy work and how people manage and navigate these changes throughout a life in ministry. For more, see:

3) *Participant Attrition*

Pastors are busy, and most can struggle with fully letting go of their obligations in order to prioritize stabilizing their inner life and outward ministry. Peer groups will serve to not only support pastors as they heal, but will also allow for accountability both during the program and afterward. LBCC will also plan to maintain regular communication with participants to check in on progress and identify if any new needs arise but also to ensure commitment and follow-through for the program.

4) *Lack of “stickiness,” or having a dwindling impact over time*

Clearly, the activities listed in this proposal will have very strong short-term outcomes if participants adhere to the activities laid out. But as anyone who has experienced that “mountain top” experience during a retreat or sabbatical will tell you, the effect can wane over time. In order to increase longer-term effectiveness of the healing activities for the pastor, LBCC will utilize regular check-points to reach out to former participants to ensure they have whatever resources needed to ensure long-term impact (therapeutic tools, accountability or mentor groups, etc). Further, it is the goal and plan of LBCC to seek more funding after two or three years to institute short refreshers that will require less funding and less time commitment for the pastor, and therefore, the coordinator will be experienced in fundraising.

Budget

| | |
|-----------------------------|------------------|
| Kick-off retreats | \$50,000 |
| Individual care inputs | \$100,000 |
| Care for high-risk families | \$40,000 |
| Peer group meetings | \$10,000 |
| Social events | \$30,000 |
| Psalms Retreats | \$30,000 |
| Sabbatical Support | \$50,000 |
| Pastor in residence | \$30,000 |
| Board development | \$10,000 |
| Associate pastor support | \$70,000 |
| Staff leadership | \$80,000 |
| | \$500,000 |