

PASTORS SURVEY REPORT CONVENTION OF ATLANTIC BAPTIST CHURCHES

As a tool to assist Dr. Peter Reid with the Senior Staff Review, a survey was developed with this goal in mind: To give our pastors an opportunity to participate in self-assessment around the topic of soul care; more specifically, to explore issues such as stress in ministry, discouragement, financial issues, burn out, family health, continuing education, resources for pastors, conflict, spiritual formation, denominational support and care for pastoral families.

Towards the end of September, 2009, this survey was sent out to all pastors that have access to email. The decision was made to focus on this group mainly because of ease of access to the internet. Here they are able to complete the survey quickly and efficiently. The option was given to contact the Convention office for a paper copy for any pastor who requested it. There were a few surveys returned that way. There was no intention to exclude anyone. This was the most efficient use of time and resources.

While it is next to impossible to survey the entire population, a survey is designed to take a sampling of the population and, if the response rate is acceptable, the findings are assumed to be representative of the whole population. In this case, the total population of pastors in our database is 949. The number of pastors that have access to email is 693, or 73%. Therefore, our sample was 73% of the number of pastors in our database that have access to email as far as we are aware. When considering survey response rates 30% is considered acceptable. In this case, 32% of pastors responded to the survey. Also note that the percentages given in this report are rounded to the nearest whole number.

Please refer to your copy of the survey which contains the results for each question, many of which will speak for themselves. Please note that in 17 of the 22 questions asked, we gave opportunity for further clarification or comment if needed. Seven of these questions received 40 or more responses (#7, 9, 11, 13, 15, 17, 19).

Here is a brief break down of the respondents:

- *52 % respondents are between the ages of 40-59.*
- *65% are serving in full time positions.*
- *66 % have been in professional ministry for twenty years or less.*
- *66% have been in their current ministry settings between 0-5 years.*
- *33% are the solo pastor in a single church and 12% are the solo pastor in a multi-field church.*
- *15% are the senior pastor in a multi-staff church.*

In general, people seem to have responded very positively to this survey. When given the opportunity to respond with further comments at the end, some replied:

- *“Thanks for giving us the opportunity to vent (both positive and negative) and feel as if our voices are heard!”*

- *“Thank you for the opportunity to reflect upon the Lord's calling in my life. This is a survey which I would have appreciated participating in within our denomination 30+ years ago. It would have been a real asset within my ministry for my life. God bless you all!”*

The issue of a pastor's relationship with their congregation is an important one. 80% reported a good relationship with their congregation(s). 11% reported some tension. And 1% reported the relationship was very unhealthy but they are hopeful that resolution is possible.

When it came to questions about relational health within the family and within the church, the responses were positive. For example, 77% agreed or strongly agreed that *“In general, my marriage has been enriched by my call to ministry.”* That number dropped to 54% when asking the same question about their *“current ministry setting.”* While this is a welcome response, we need to focus on those that disagreed with these statements. And certain questions for our Convention as well as for our local churches will arise as we continue to analyze the responses.

- A few responses (note that even though the majority agreed or strongly agreed, the majority of these comments given were negative):
 - o *“My wife and I do visitation as a team.”*
 - o *“My spouse is much happier and contented since I moved...from church ministry.”*
 - o *“We have sacrificed a lot of personal time to do what we do in this ministry.”*

Questions were asked about the effects of ministry on the family, in particular the impact on children. The responses generally indicated that the children's experiences were positive. 68% of pastors believed that their children's faith has been enriched by their ministry experiences. However, 13% believe that ministry has had a detrimental impact on their children. A few things need to be noted here:

- Pastors/parents can only give their impressions of the impact ministry has had on their children. A more accurate evaluation would be to talk directly to the children.
- When thinking about the impact of ministry on children, there are many factors that need to be considered: age, gender, number of times the family moved, support system
- Also, approximately 22% responded “N/A” to this question either because they had no children or because their children may have been grown before the parents entered the ministry.
- Here are a few responses:
 - *“The way that my children have viewed the way some church leaders treated myself and our family, has been very negative on them, but also has helped them be supportive and understanding of the pastors of the churches they attend.”*
 - *“My kids deserve more of my time. The expectations of ministry make it difficult to spend time with them.”*

- *“Our children see the church as their extended family. They love the church and the church loves them... it's been a great blessing.”*

Another crucial area is stress factors in ministry and relationships. While many have responded that stress was low in many areas, 25-30% of respondents have considered seeking help or have sought help to deal with the pressures of ministry. It is good news that many are doing well in ministry, but our concern is with the significant group that are struggling. We recognize that the reasons some are struggling can vary significantly. Here are some comments:

- *“I am considering taking a sabbatical [or stress leave] at this time.”*
- *“I have seriously considered pursuing another career in ministry, but not professional ministry in the church setting, due to the stress experienced in this setting.”*
- *“I thought about resigning and doing something else but our church family were very supportive of my ministry even when it seemed that things were not moving forward.”*

Questions were also asked that touched on the issue of spiritual health and formation. A strong majority feel they are growing spiritually (80%) and many reported high or very high quality and frequency of practice of various spiritual disciplines. That also leaves 20% that do not feel they are growing spiritually. Here are some comments:

- *“Lately I feel like I've been able to see God do things in people's lives through my life and ministry, but at times it has seemed possible only to see the negatives.”*
- *“I wonder where God is in the midst of my dilemma and why He is not responding to my prayers.”*
- *“Never satisfied but growing.”*

Another important area is preparation for ministry. 51% agreed that their training adequately prepared them for the challenges they are facing. Many feel there were gaps in their training. For some it is a case of “if I knew then what I know now”. Here are some comments:

- *“We are living in a fast changing world, and it is hard to keep up. Some of our ministry methods are either out of date or culturally ineffective.”*
“The Seminary trained me by helping to shape my theology, but any spiritual training has come from self-study and seeking out studies from Universities that offered such courses.”
- *“The bulk of my training was seminary about 30 years ago- consequently, what I have needed to know, I learned on the job and through personal study and experience from peers and through seminars.”*
- *“We have been trained to teach and preach. However, today's pastor needs leadership training and the ability to facilitate and coach their people so that they can equip them for mission and ministry in the 21st century. It is a skill that has to be learned.”*

This was a beneficial exercise for both the pastors who participated and for the Convention. When we evaluate all the responses and the comments given, it is obvious that there is both good

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news and bad news. The good news is that many of our pastors are well equipped and developing spiritually, relationally and emotionally in ways that help them to handle the

challenges they face. The bad news is that there are some of our pastors that are not in that same place. There are many variables to consider why this is happening. And it may be that this will always be the case. But this does not diminish our responsibility to be a help to our pastors. While we found the overall response quite positive it is important to note that as many as 25-30% of our pastors are struggling with issues of stress, burn out, conflict, high expectations or other issues which make ministry very difficult. The Convention needs to be a valuable resource to all pastors and churches and this survey will help to focus our available resources where it is needed the most.

Respectfully Submitted,
Mr. Andrew Myers,
Communications Manager

Present to CAB Council November 2009