



PC(USA) MINISTER SURVEY

The Call to Ministry Report

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**RESEARCH
SERVICES**

Why conduct a survey of all PC(USA) ministers? Why now?

Research Services regularly receives questions from members, congregational staff, mid councils, and PC(USA) leaders about ministers that cannot be answered with the data that available to us. As data was not available, I decided that a survey should be developed to answer many of these questions and asked Perry Chang, PhD to lead this work. This report is one portion of what has been learned, yet many new questions have been formed. New surveys will follow focusing on clergy of color, retirement, bi-vocational ministry, commissioned ruling elders, and “part-time” ministers.

The success of this first ever survey of Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) minister would have been far less if not for the support our many partners. Here are just a few of them.

- Call to Health, the Board of Pensions’ wellness program that offered points toward the minister’s wellness goal for participation
- Presbyterian Publishing Company offered a discount for a future purchase for all who completed the survey
- Communication’s staff from the Office of the General Assembly, Mission Agency, and Presbyterian Foundation who wrote several stories that included the survey link
- Office of the General Assembly Mid Council relations staff that regularly promoted the survey in its newsletters
- Several denomination-wide committees that shared the link with their constituencies
- Members of the all-agency data group who regularly meet to discuss and improve data and data reporting for PC(USA) and open doors for new partnerships

Why now? Because the church is waiting for the answers.

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Overview

The PC(USA) Minister Survey was a massive 110-question survey which fielded from September to November of 2019. Invitations were sent by postcard to all ministers for whom we had an address. The survey was also one of the Board of Pensions' Call to Health challenges. This partnership contributed to nearly half of all responses.

23% of the denomination's 19,243 ministers (n=4,495) responded to the survey.

This report provides an overview of the call to ministry. It examines types of calls and looks at those going into pastoral positions and specialized ministry such as chaplainship.

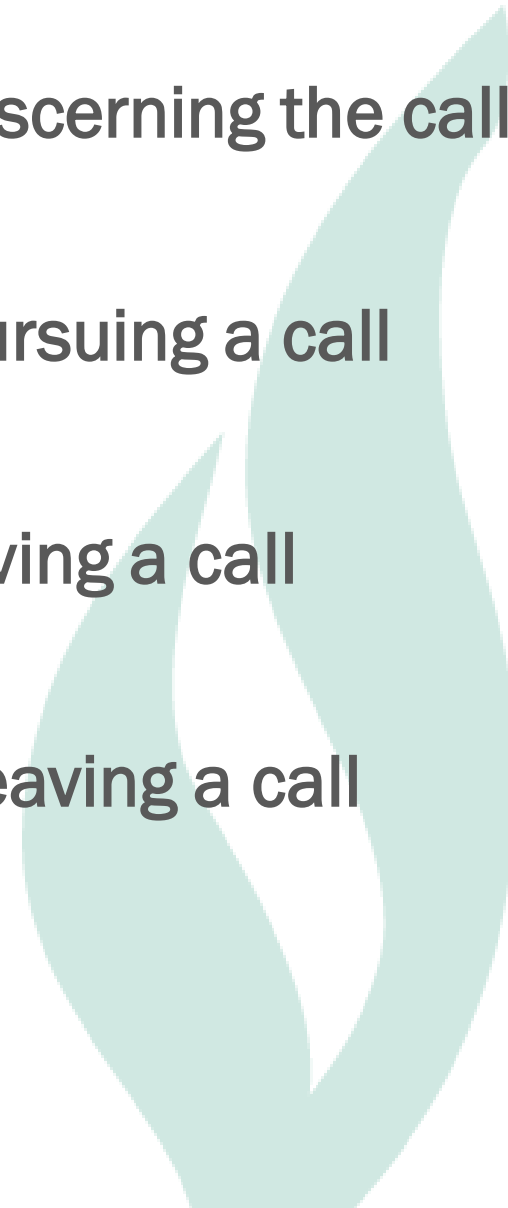
Topics include discerning, pursuing, living, and leaving a call.

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Definitions

The minister of Word and Sacrament is ordained and may work in many places of work.

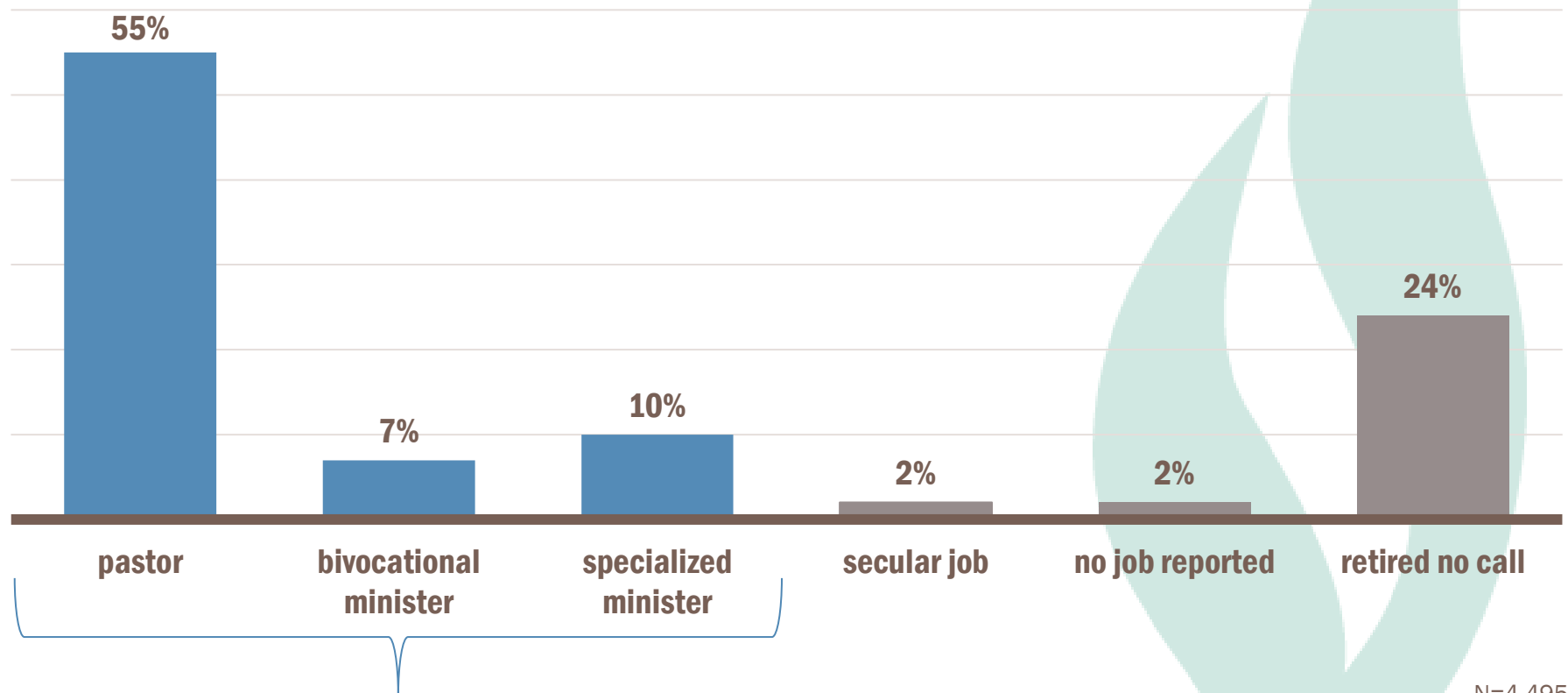
These positions include pastors, but ministers are also ordained into other forms of specialized ministry such as mid council leadership, national agency leadership, chaplaincy, faculty/educators, or staff at a religious non-profit. In this report, we will be using these categories to examine differences in minister wellbeing. This report examines results by the following calls and employment status:

- **Ministers** – all ministers of the Word and Sacrament
- **Pastors** – installed pastors and co-pastors, as well as associate, interim, supply, and organizing pastors
- **Specialized ministers** – ordained into a form of ministry other than leading a congregation, such as chaplaincy or pastoral counseling
- **Bi-vocational ministers** – those who are in a call while also holding a secular job
- **Honorably Retired** – those who report being an Honorably Retired member of their presbytery (and may or may not still be in a call)
- **Secular job** – those who are ordained to ministry but not currently in a call

The many roles of ministers

A minister of Word and Sacrament is ordained into a ministry position.

This chart shows the percentage of individuals who are exclusively in each role. About half of respondents are pastors. The second most common status is retired, not in a call. Although 30% of our respondents are honorably retired, only 24% of respondents are actively retired (i.e., not in a call or working). The percentages of respondents in each call and job include these honorably retired individuals.



72% of respondents are in a call.

N=4,495

Discerning the call

This section examines how Ministers of Word and Sacrament discern the call to ministry. We examine the following topics:

- When and why people go into ministry
- The education of ministers
- CREDO and other ongoing training



When do people decide to go into ministry?

age
20

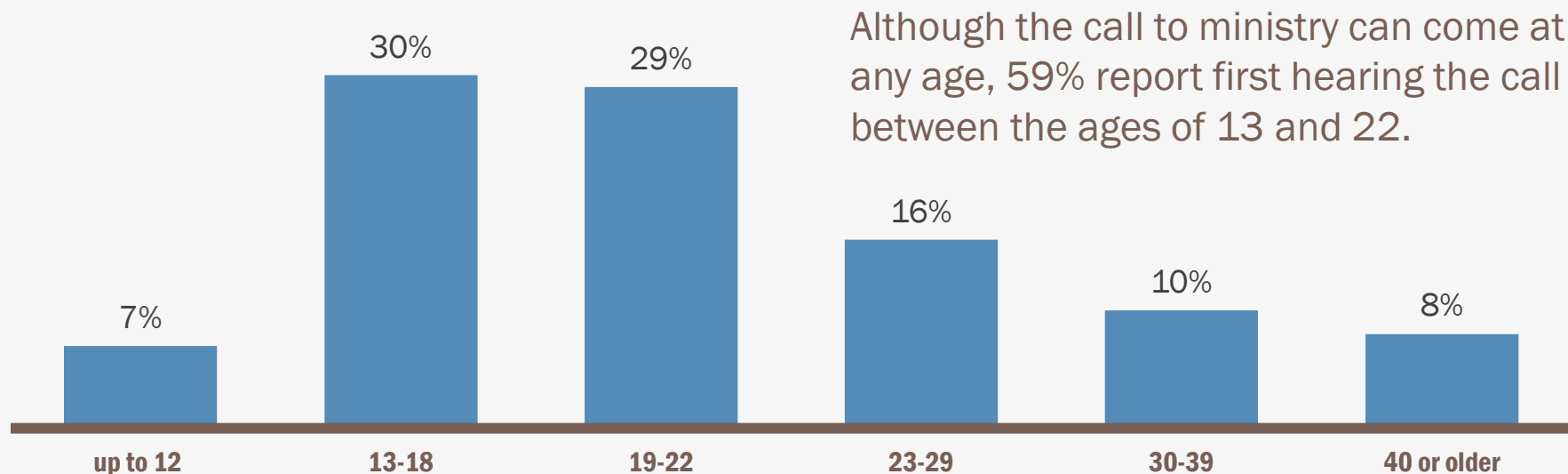
Half of all ministers first considered the Ministry of Word and Sacrament as a calling after age 20.

The ages people report first considering ministry ranges from younger than 12 to 63 years old.

On average, 5 years pass between hearing the call to ministry and either entering the discernment process or deciding to attend seminary.

46% enter the discernment process the same year they decide to go to seminary; however, 32% decide to attend seminary before entering the discernment process, and 22% enter discernment at least one year before making their decision.

At what age did you first consider the ministry of the Word and Sacrament as a calling?



Why do people go into ministry?

3,442 ministers responded to the open-ended question “Who or what was most influential for you in sensing this call?” For many individuals, more than one factor played a role.

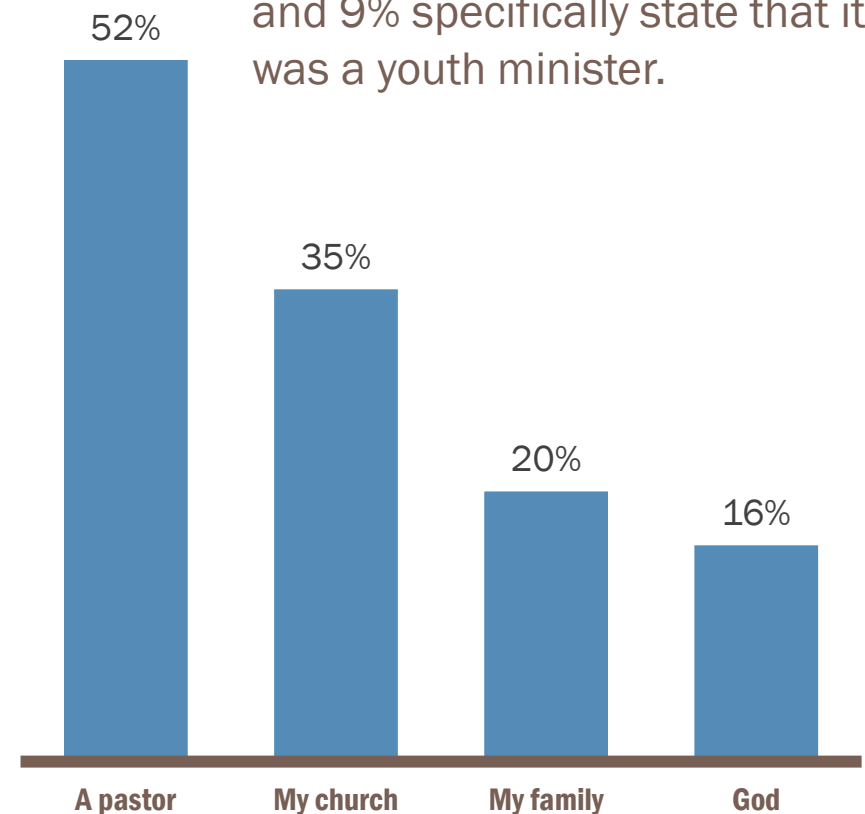
The most common response was the influence of a pastor, followed by a person’s home church, their family, and God. As one might expect, the response of “pastor” and “family” overlap quite a bit. Many ministers were influenced into ministry at least in part because a member of their family (or many members) are pastors. Dads who are pastors are mentioned frequently; however, many women also mention the influential role of female pastors in showing them that such a possibility exists also for themselves. In fact, some women even converted to Presbyterianism after learning that women could be pastors. For example, one reply to what was most influential for you in sensing this calling was:

“Finding out that women were being ordained as pastors! It was while I was working with a youth group, the pastor told me - I wasn't Presbyterian at the time.”

Another said:

“meeting a woman who had been to seminary when I was 9, the summer of 1965 - I had not known such a thing was possible until then, and it was like lights and fireworks going off in my mind!”

Half of ministers say that a pastor influenced their decision to go into ministry, and 9% specifically state that it was a youth minister.



Percentages do not add up to 100 because ministers could name more than one influence.

Trauma and Formative Experiences

Although it was a small number statistically (1%), 30 respondents spoke about the role of past trauma and the death of loved ones as formative in influencing them toward ministry.

A near death experience at age 14 began my process of discernment of what would be the best way to serve God with my life.

The pastors at my church during a time of depression, discernment, change, and figuring out my life. Being able to talk with someone over a number of years, explore ideas, and wrestle with my sense of call as well as my sense of self were so important. The defining event was the suicide of a youth leader and the role I was thrust into as a result.

When one of my very closest friends was killed suddenly in a car accident two weeks after his marriage. (He was going to be a missionary to Brazil...) Philosophy and Psychology provided no answers or significant help (and still to this day, age 79, I don't have the "answers" to meaningless deaths, injustice, suffering or why these things happen; but the Lord, Scripture, life lessons, superb mentors all have helped and my three years at seminary were powerful and tremendous years of growth, searching and feeling a very deep sense of call to a Pastoral Ministry and caring for people.

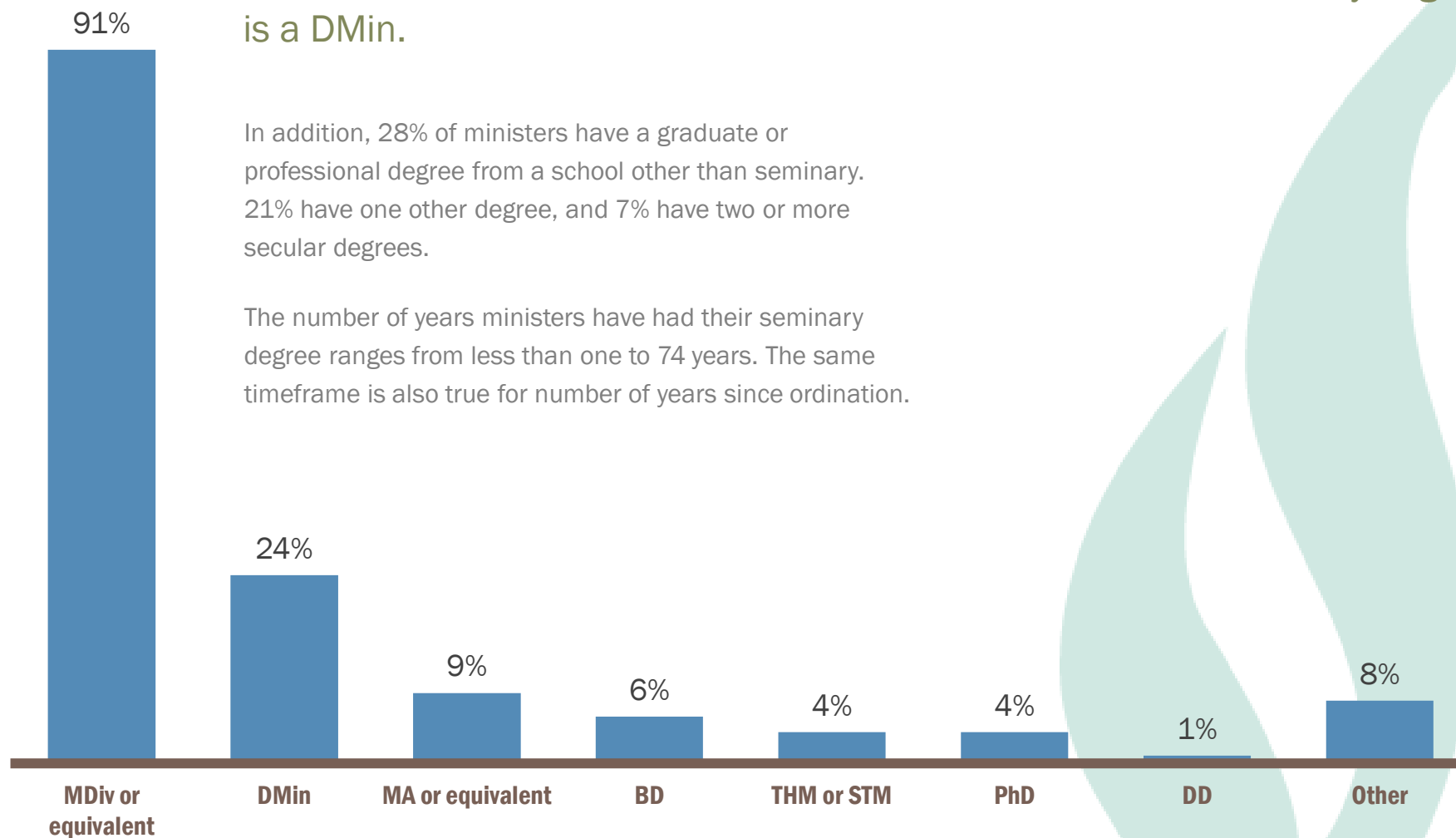
God....I was in an automobile accident in which my car was completely destroyed, and I walked away unhurt. The name of the unnamed driver who hit me was Angel. I had been told for years that I should think about seminary. Angel woke me up!!!

The MDiv or equivalent is the most common seminary degree by far

91% of ministers have an MDiv. The second most common seminary degree is a DMin.

In addition, 28% of ministers have a graduate or professional degree from a school other than seminary. 21% have one other degree, and 7% have two or more secular degrees.

The number of years ministers have had their seminary degree ranges from less than one to 74 years. The same timeframe is also true for number of years since ordination.



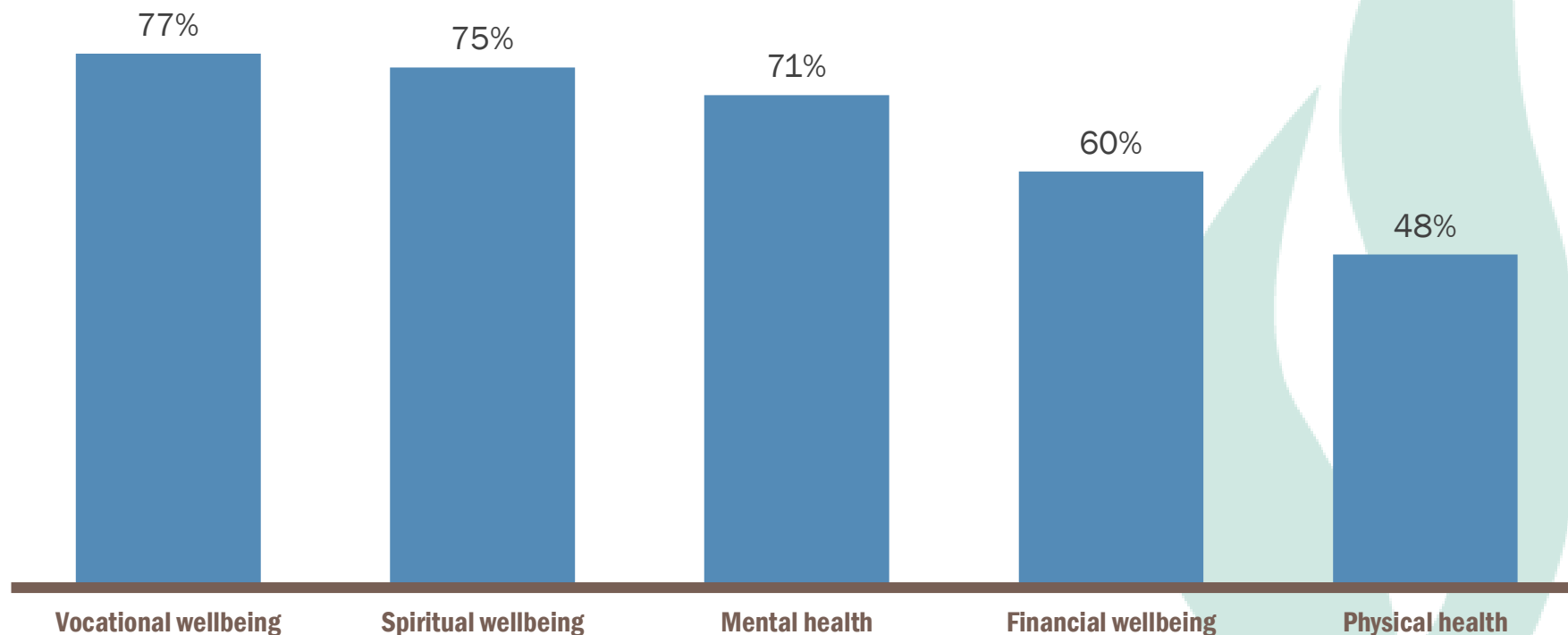
Percentages do not add up to 100 because ministers can have more than one degree.
N=3,732

31% of ministers have attended at least one CREDO conference

45% state that they have never been invited to one.

Most ministers feel that the conference has improved their vocational wellbeing, spiritual wellbeing, and mental health.

Percentage stating that the most recent CREDO conference *improved or greatly improved* the following aspects of their health or wellbeing:



Percentages do not add up to 100 because ministers can have more than one degree.

N=3,732

Other training ministers have received

		Where ministers receive the training					
		% that have received this training	Class or practicum in seminary	Continuing education course	Training sponsored by a religious organization for which they work	Training sponsored by a secular employer	Training in the course of doing their job
Bi-vocational ministry	19%	4%	3%	1%	1%	6%	1%
Building congregational vitality	75%	23%	43%	16%	1%	25%	3%
Combating sexual misconduct and maintaining boundaries	93%	24%	29%	54%	12%	25%	4%
Creating new worshipping communities	39%	10%	14%	11%	<1%	10%	2%
Dismantling structural racism	55%	14%	20%	19%	6%	17%	5%
Doing ministry with people with mental illness	57%	18%	16%	8%	8%	22%	5%
Eradicating systemic poverty	39%	10%	11%	8%	4%	14%	3%
Evangelism	80%	43%	33%	19%	1%	23%	3%
Facilities management	44%	4%	4%	3%	7%	29%	2%
Financial management	64%	10%	18%	11%	11%	31%	6%
Human resources management	55%	6%	12%	6%	12%	29%	5%
Pastoral counseling	95%	76%	33%	15%	5%	28%	5%
Stewardship	18%	31%	37%	24%	3%	33%	3%
Use of social media	54%	5%	15%	8%	6%	31%	4%
Other forms of communication, marketing, and public relations	57%	6%	14%	8%	11%	30%	5%

Percentages do not add up to 100 because respondents could select more than one option

Training strengthens skills

	% stating that their training they received <i>strengthened</i> or <i>greatly strengthened</i> their skills in this area	Number that have received the training
Pastoral counseling	89%	3,453
Combating sexual misconduct and maintaining boundaries	82%	3,329
Financial management	80%	2,269
Doing ministry with people with mental illness	79%	1,960
Human resources management	79%	1,889
Stewardship	77%	2,911
Building congregational vitality	76%	2,653
Facilities management	76%	1,512
Forms of communication, marketing, and public relations besides social media	73%	1,820
Dismantling structural racism	71%	1,905
Use of social media	71%	1,886
Evangelism	64%	2,851
Bi-vocational ministry	63%	501
Eradicating systemic poverty	62%	1,300
Creating new worshipping communities	57%	1,288

Percentages do not add up to 100 because respondents could select more than one option

Pursuing a call

This section examines how Ministers of Word and Sacrament discern the call to ministry. We examine the following topics (174-194):

- Types of calls ministers prefer
- What factors would be most important if considering new position

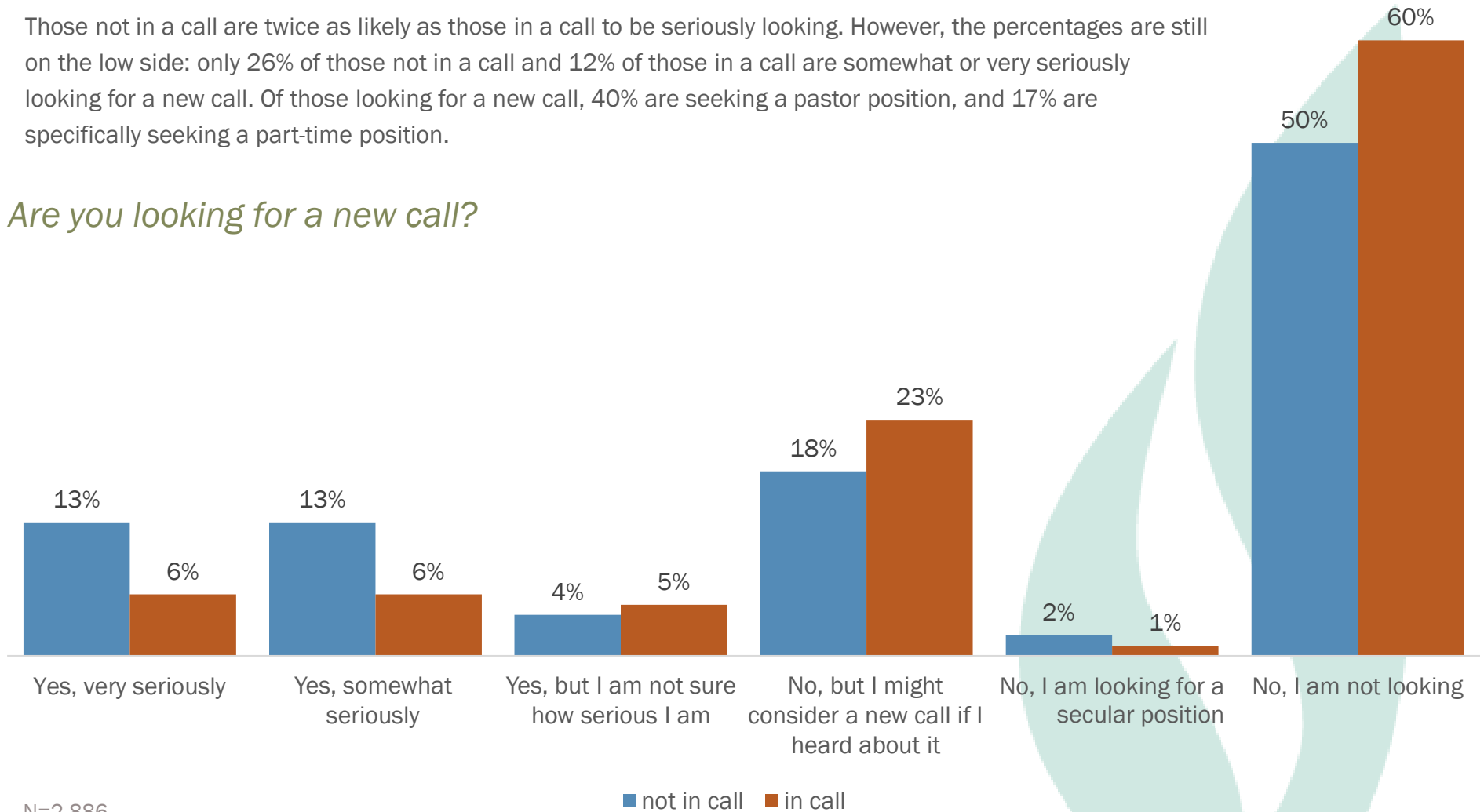


69% of ministers are not seeking a new call

Half of those who are not currently in a call are also not looking for one.

Those not in a call are twice as likely as those in a call to be seriously looking. However, the percentages are still on the low side: only 26% of those not in a call and 12% of those in a call are somewhat or very seriously looking for a new call. Of those looking for a new call, 40% are seeking a pastor position, and 17% are specifically seeking a part-time position.

Are you looking for a new call?



*This analysis excludes those who are Honorably Retired. It is also worth reminding the reader that this survey fielded before the pandemic.

Factors when considering new call

Which of these factors would be most important to you if you were considering a possible new position?

Sense that I was called by God to this position	61%
Proximity to extended family	24%
The ministry in which I work already being healthy	23%
Job opportunity for a spouse, partner, or other family member	21%
Opportunities to be around people with beliefs and values that are similar to mine	16%
Medical and retirement benefits	15%
Situated within a community with racial, cultural, or ethnic diversity	12%
Location in a metropolitan (urban or suburban) area, instead of in a small town or rural area	11%
The presbytery in which I work already being healthy	9%
Access to amenities such as shopping, the internet, and recreational opportunities	4%
Opportunities to be around people who are similar to me in their age or life situation	4%
Vacation time	3%
Eligibility for reimbursement for some or all of any moving expenses I might incur	2%
Other	8%

N=4,116

Respondents were allowed to select up to three factors.

Reasons Ministers Would Seek a New Call

338 ministers wrote in reasons they would pursue a new call. Here are some of their responses.

challenge that meets my gifts

A sense that the overall health (emotional/physical) of me and my family would be maintained and prioritized in the church and community

Updated policies and procedures such as family leave, sexual harassment training, CPR and safety training, and protocol especially in the children and youth ministries for training

What is important to me is the opportunity to learn and grow as a pastor.

a congregation engaged in the community

a healthy work life balance especially in regards to expectations for pastoral duties

Serve people who are genuinely seek to live truly biblical Christian lives

a call to a congregation that would be accepting of me as an openly LGBT pastor

Living a call

This section examines the calls of pastors and chaplains in the PC(USA).

We examine the following topics :

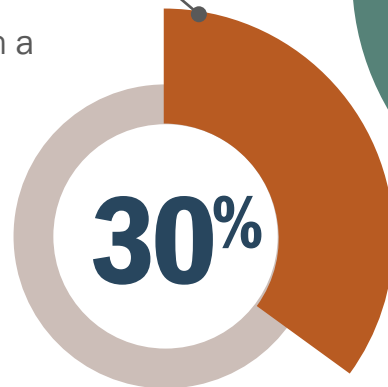
- Pastors in the PC(USA)
- Chaplains in the PC(USA)



Most respondents are pastors

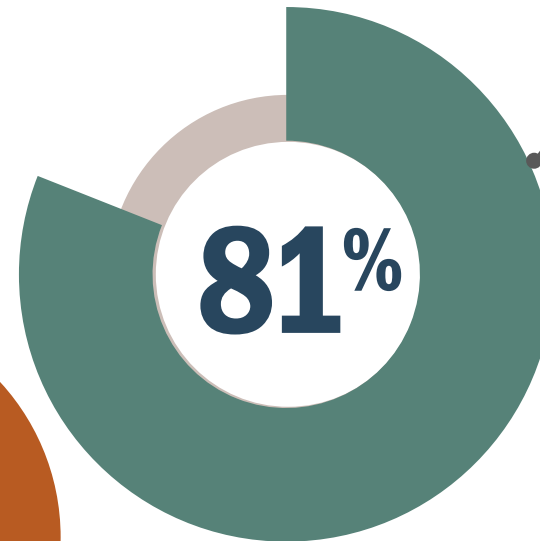
30% are honorably retired

21% of these “retired” individuals are currently in a call. In addition, 4% of the working retired hold more than one position.



81% of employed ministers are pastors

This includes installed pastors, co-pastors, supply pastors, associate pastors, interim pastors serving PC(USA) or another denomination. This does not include the non-working retired.



10% of ministers in a call have more than one type of position

This statistic does not include those who hold multiple calls with the same position (for example, a pastor serving at two churches).



Distinguishing between *minister* and *pastor*

Although the terms *minister* and *pastor* are often used interchangeably, there is a difference. In PC(USA), *minister* is short for *minister of Word and Sacrament*. These are people ordained to serve in any number of positions, like pastor or chaplain. A *pastor*, on the other hand, is ordained to a congregation, and can include ministers of Word and Sacrament (otherwise known as Teaching Elders) or commissioned lay pastors (otherwise known as Commissioned Ruling Elders).

90% of active ministers have a single type of position

8% of ministers have two types of positions, and 2% have three or more.*

The most common position held by ministers is that of pastor.

Of the 81% who are pastors:

- 61% are installed pastors
- 17% are supply pastors
- 10% are installed associate pastors
- 10% are interim pastors
- 3% are with non-PC(USA) congregations
- 1% are organizing pastors or evangelists employed by a presbytery or synod

In addition:

- 24% of respondents are retired and not working
- 3% are working (minister, secular job, or own a business) but not engaged in validated ministry

Position (n=4843)	% Survey	% PCUSA
Installed pastor or co-pastor of a PC(USA) congregation (101 or 191)	36%	22%
Honorably retired member of a presbytery (299)	30%	41%
Supply pastor (108)	10%	4%
Installed associate pastor of a PC(USA) congregation (103 or 193)	6%	6%
Interim pastor or associate pastor of a PC(USA) congregation (105)	6%	3%
Chaplain (641, 701, 741, 751, 761, or 771)	5%	4%
Member at large of a presbytery (797)	4%	11%
Minister in another type of validated ministry (791)	3%	3%
Other presbytery or synod staff (302, 303, 304, 305, or 306)	3%	1%
Faculty, staff (including chaplain), or student at a school, college, seminary, or university (642, 643, or 644)	3%	2%
Paid to do secular work for either a religious or secular organization	2%	--
Own my own business	2%	--
Pastor, co-pastor, associate pastor, or pastor in a temporary relationship with a non-PC(USA) congregation (501, 503, or 505)	2%	1%
Minister not engaged in a validated ministry (795)	1%	0%
Staff of a General Assembly agency (including PC(USA) international mission co-workers) (402, 403, 404, or 405)	1%	1%
Organizing pastor or evangelist (typically of a new church development, fellowship, or new worshiping community) employed by a presbytery or synod (301)	1%	1%
Staff of another type of religious organization (702 or 703)	1%	<1%
Staff of an agency of a non-PC(USA) denomination, ecumenical agency, or non-denominational agency (562 or 565)	1%	<1%

*This statistic does not include those who hold multiple calls with the same position (for example, a pastor serving at two churches).

PC(USA) data is from December 2019.

Percentages may not add up to 100 due to rounding or the ability to select more than one option.

Pastors in the PC(USA)

Although most pastors serve a congregation without the aid of associate pastors, this is because most congregations are small. The average size of a congregation in 2019 (when this survey fielded) was 175, and half of congregations had 75 members or fewer.

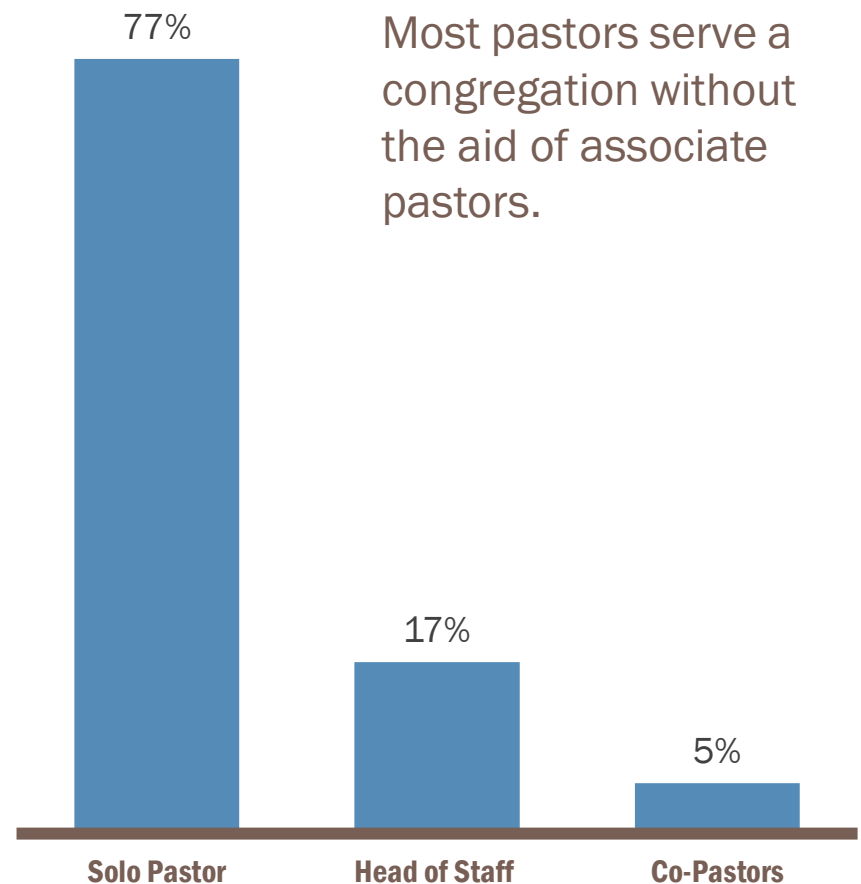
Median membership for congregations served by solo pastors is 161, with a range of 1 to 550. In comparison, the median membership of congregations served by heads of staff is 502, with a range of 23 to 5,500.

Additionally, 93% of pastors report serving a single congregation, 4% serve two or more congregations that are allied together, and 3% serve two or more separate congregations.

On average, pastors spend 39 hours per week working in their call. However, 25% of pastors work 50 hours or more per week, and 10% of pastors report working 60 hours or more per week.

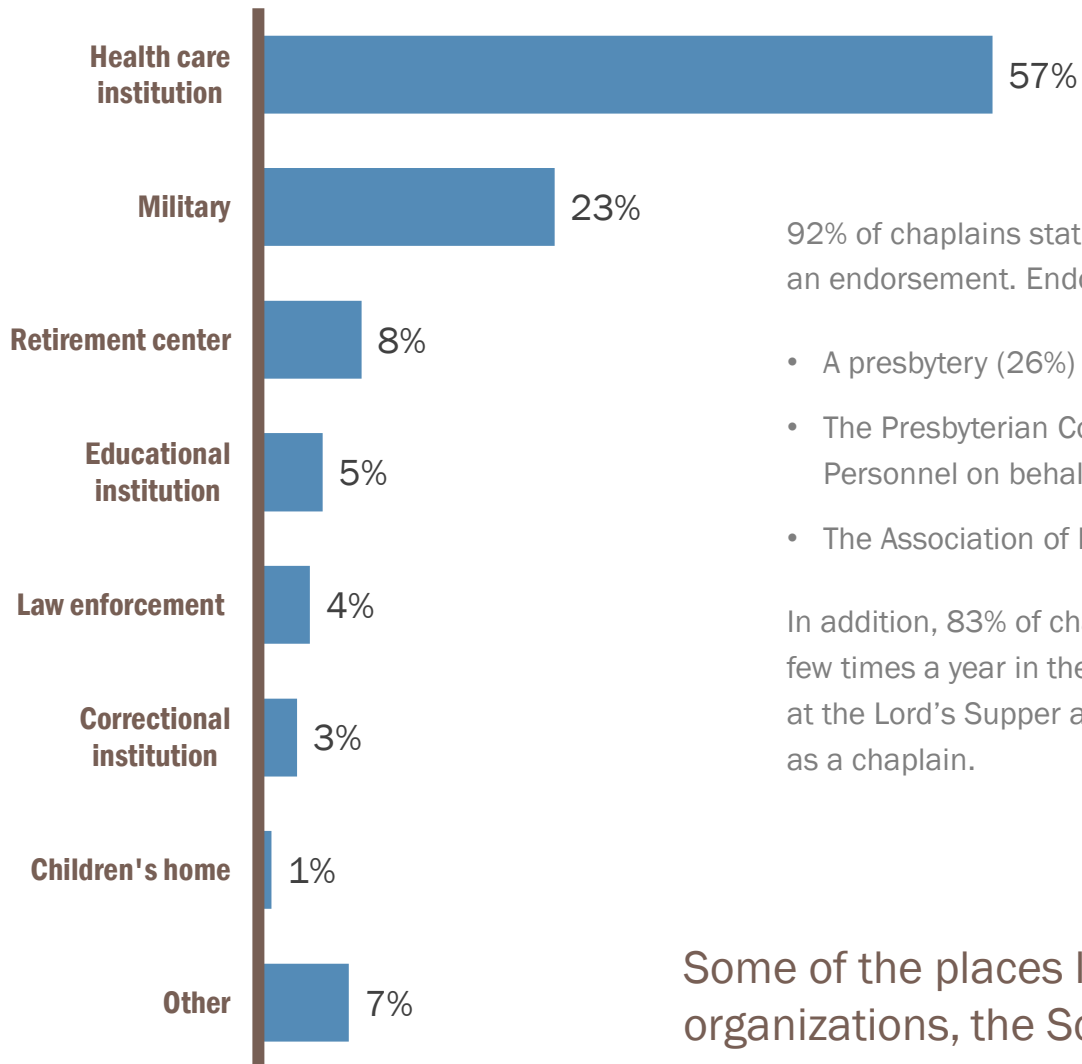
Although we asked if the pastor served a chartered congregation or an unchartered worshiping community, only three respondents are pastors of an uncharted worshiping community, so we are not able to do any analyses of these respondents.

N=1,854



Chaplains in the PC(USA)

Most chaplains serve in health care institutions such as hospice, hospitals, or nursing homes.



92% of chaplains state that their work as a chaplain requires an endorsement. Endorsements come from the following :

- A presbytery (26%)
- The Presbyterian Council for Chaplains and Medical Personnel on behalf of the PC(USA) Stated Clerk (10%)
- The Association of Professional Chaplains (3%)

In addition, 83% of chaplains lead a worship service at least a few times a year in their work as a chaplain, and 79% preside at the Lord's Supper at least a few times per year in their work as a chaplain.

Some of the places listed as *other* include nonprofit organizations, the Scottish Society, and a truck stop.

Leaving a call

This section examines findings on retired ministers and explores why ministers who are of retirement age may remain in a call. We examine the following topics:

- When do people decide to retire?
- Why do ministers of retirement age continue working?



When do people decide to retire?

age
68

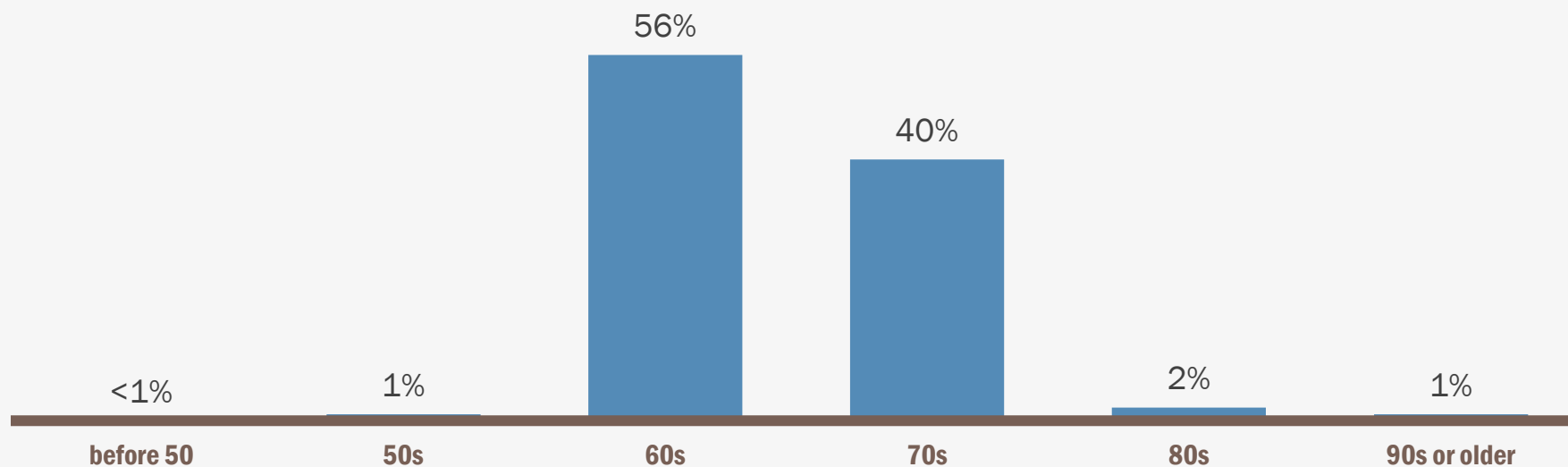
The median age in which ministers expect to retire is 68.

This differs by age; those under 65 generally expect to retire at around 68, but those over 65 and still working expect to retire at around 71.

The median age at which ministers expect to draw pension or social security is 67.

Many ministers expect to continue working for pay after they honorably retire. The median age in which ministers expect to stop working for pay is 70. Additionally, 14% expect to continue working for pay into their 80s and beyond. We did not include an option for people to say they expect to never stop working for pay, but we expect that some respondents indicated this by responding with an age of 100 or more.

At what age do you expect to honorably retire?



Why ministers of retirement age continue working

The most common responses are that God has called them to this work and they enjoy it.

Your responses suggest that you are close to retirement age but continue to work for pay. What keeps you in the workforce?

God has called me to this work	75%
I enjoy my job or business	67%
Opportunity to do vital ministry	59%
I feel that my ministry or other work needs me	52%
I would be bored if I were not working	41%
I like my colleagues	36%
I need the money	35%
Other	14%

The 'other' reasons primarily fall into three categories: (1) explanations regarding why they need the money, (2) explanations regarding why they are still needed, and (3) work is stimulating – emotionally, intellectually, and socially.

“Coming to my ministry career later in life causes me to be really excited about the ministry opportunities before me, and I don't want to miss any of them! I want to go forth to love and serve the Lord my God in all the ways God's Holy Spirit sets before.”

What are we learning?



Call to ministry

For most of the ministers in this study, the call to ministry came early in their lives. They were greatly influenced by their pastors frequently these pastors were family members. For some, it was because of great tragedy or loss that they chose to enter the ministry.

Most ministers serve as solo pastors, are satisfied in their call, and are not seeking a new call. However, when seeking a new call, they seek God's call as to where to serve. Other considerations include the employment opportunities for spouses and proximity to family.

There comes a time in the life of each minister to decide when they should retire from full-time ministry. Many ministers in this study indicated that they plan to retire in their late 60s, maybe 67 or 68 years old. However, this is not true for everyone; some plan to work in their 70s and beyond. The reasons to continue working varies. For many, it is the sense of God calling them to continue to serve. Others like the challenge of their ministry. Unfortunately for some, it is the need for money. This financial need may be related to debt described in two other reports: Finances and Educational Debt.

As a reminder, the minister study was conducted in the months preceding the COVID-19 pandemic. The full impact of the pandemic on ministry and ministers will unfold over the next several years. Will ministers decide to seek new calls, change their retirement plans, or leave the ministry altogether?

It is equally important to ask, as a result of the pandemic, how many will sense and respond to the call to ministry?

Research Services helps the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) make data-informed decisions using surveys, focus groups and interviews, demographic analysis, and program evaluations.

We are social scientists with backgrounds in sociology, public policy, and economics. We serve congregations, presbyteries and synods, PC(USA) national agencies, and other PC(USA)-related organizations. Research Services is a ministry of the Administrative Services Group.

If you have any questions or would like a copy of this report, contact us at 502-569-5077 or research@pcusa.org.



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