

**Sustaining Pastoral Excellence
Project Evaluation Survey
THIRD WAVE REPORT**



S U S T A I N I N G
Pastoral
E X C E L L E N C E

November 2010



CHRISTIAN
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Sustaining Pastoral Excellence
PROJECT EVALUATION SURVEY
2009 THIRD WAVE REPORT



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Calvin College Center for Social Research:

Neil Carlson, Ph.D., Assistant Director, neil.carlson@calvin.edu

Christina Vanden Bosch der Nederlanden,
Research Associate, cmv22@calvin.edu

Tyler Greenway, Research Assistant, tsg5@calvin.edu

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Table of Contents

I.	Executive Summary	1
II.	Introduction	6
III.	Evaluations of the SPE Project's Effects	9
IV.	Spiritual Formation.....	14
V.	Vision and Mission	18
VI.	Knowing and Communicating the Christian Faith	25
VII.	Healthy Pastoral Identity.....	29
VIII.	Pastoral Leadership	41
IX.	Pastoral Growth Orientation.....	45
X.	Council Feedback and Support.....	50
XI.	Explaining Pastoral Health and Other Key Outcomes	59
XII.	Comments	67
XIII.	Conclusions and Recommendations	69
XIV.	Available Resources.....	71

List of Figures

Figure 1 Map of 2009 SPE survey responses by state or province.....	7
Figure 2 SPE involvement by year and age bracket at time of survey	9
Figure 3 Pastors' ratings of the effect of SPE	10
Figure 4 Pastors' ratings of SPE's effect on CRCNA culture by SPE participation	11
Figure 5 Clerks' ratings of SPE's effect	12
Figure 6 Clerks' ratings of effect on their pastor's ministry by SPE participation	13
Figure 7 Devotional frequency by age group in 2009 and by survey year	14
Figure 8 Devotional frequency by route to ministry	15
Figure 9 Four spiritual formation activities by year.....	16
Figure 10 Vision and mission statements: presence by year; embrace by age; council living by locale	19
Figure 11 Core elements of congregational mission by year	21
Figure 12 Core elements of congregational mission by church size (2005, 2007 and 2009 combined).....	22
Figure 13 Histogram of congregational mission scale (2009 only), shaded by "justice and peace" item.....	23
Figure 14 Understanding of the Reformed faith by year and route to ministry; change since prior survey	25
Figure 15 Disciples per pastor by year	27
Figure 16 Satisfaction with present pastorate by year	29
Figure 17 Feelings of isolation by year and locale	30
Figure 18 Perceived fit with congregation by year	31
Figure 19 Hypothetical new career choice ("if you started over, would you still be a pastor?") by year.....	32
Figure 20 Pastoral responses to life balance items (new in 2009)	33
Figure 21 Spousal support for pastoral vocation	34
Figure 22 Histogram of pastoral health scale (5 items), shaded by percent feeling isolation	36
Figure 23 Histogram of 12-item pastoral health scale (2009 only), shaded by percent feeling isolation	37
Figure 24 Change in pastoral health measures by year and repeat response	38
Figure 25 Pastoral health 12-item scale (2009 only) by tenure (years at current congregation)	39
Figure 26 Leadership skill ratings (11 items) by year.....	42
Figure 27 Histogram of leadership skills scale, shaded by strategic planning competence.....	43

Figure 28 Change in leadership skills scale by year	44
Figure 29 Continuing educations events reported in past year.....	46
Figure 30 Peer learning group participation and meeting frequency.....	48
Figure 31 Mentoring participation	49
Figure 32 Systematic feedback on preaching.....	50
Figure 33 Joint pastor-council reflection on the pastor's role	51
Figure 34 Pastors' and clerks' ratings of council's living out mission and vision	53
Figure 35 Clerks' perceptions of pastors' life balance	54
Figure 36 Continuing education budget presence and size.....	55
Figure 37 Clerks' reports of encouraging meetings, workshops, and seminars; and pastoral support committees	57
Figure 38 Multivariate model results for pastoral health, leadership skills and congregational mission	61
Figure 39 Variables affecting outcome variance (volatility).....	66
Figure 40 Pastor and Clerk open-ended comment themes (percentage of total).....	67

List of Tables

Table 1 Response rates by year and respondent type	6
Table 2 Churches and membership by location type, 2007 (Pq07 by Pq06)	8

I. Executive Summary

With support from the Lilly Endowment Inc., the Christian Reformed Church of North America (CRCNA or CRC) launched the “Sustaining Pastoral Excellence” (SPE) project in 2003. The purpose of the project has been to cultivate and sustain a culture of pastoral excellence in the CRC. To do so, SPE has focused on assisting pastors through peer learning, continuing education events and mentoring (for the first grant, 2003-2007) and peer learning, spousal conferences and couples’ learning events (2008-2011).

The SPE project requested the Calvin College Center for Social Research to conduct a three-wave survey evaluation of the project. The first wave was conducted in fall and winter 2004-2005, the second in spring 2007. This report is based on all three waves, focusing on the third wave completed in early 2010.

A brief review of the 2005 and 2007 reports

This report follows the format of the previous reports issued in the autumn of each of 2005 and 2007.¹ The 2005 report established a baseline, and the 2007 report focused on changes from that baseline.

2005 report

Among the most important baseline findings of the 2005 report were:

- An overall impression of a fairly healthy pastorate.
- Respectable levels of self-reported spiritual formation activity, pastoral satisfaction, and understanding of the Reformed faith.
- Moderately high levels of joint reflection with council coupled with moderately low levels of systematic feedback on preaching.
- Strong self-reported perceived leadership competence in “structures and accountability” and “formal and informal authority” and weak perceived competence in “cross-cultural ministry,” “dynamics of conflict” and “solving vs. learning.”
- Evidence of somewhat weak communication or common perceptions between pastors and clerks of council about the pastor’s participation in continuing education, systematic feedback on preaching and joint reflection on the pastor’s role.

The 2005 report concluded with a suggestion that SPE focus on improving communication between pastors and congregational leaders.

2007 report

Key findings highlighted in the executive summary of the 2007 report were:

- Pastors gave SPE high marks overall for its contribution to their ministry, to themselves personally, and to the denominational culture overall. Those who confirmed they had specific experience of the project were the most positive.
- There was little or no significant change between survey waves in the vast majority of the measures. The overall corporate degree of stability over time was remarkable.
- Improvement was noted on three measures: 1) Pastors reporting systematic feedback on their preaching increased from 37 percent in 2005 to 45 percent in 2007; among repeat respondents, the increase was from 39 percent to 45 percent; 2) reported understanding of the Reformed faith improved, from 50 percent “thorough” in 2005 to 61 percent “thorough” in 2007; 3)

¹ The previous reports are available online. See the CRCNA SPE web link on page 71.

among repeat respondents, pastors' average number of current pre-Christian disciples increased from 1.1 to 1.6; likewise, the average number of mature Christian disciples increased from 2.5 to 2.9.

- Declining measures included five important cases: 1) the proportion of pastors reporting that their councils assisted them in reflecting on their roles as pastors declined; 2) reported personal devotional frequency declined among repeat-respondent pastors who were 55 or younger; 3) pastoral satisfaction among repeat respondents declined slightly; 4) pastors' reported frequency of feeling isolated increased; 5) the average reported number of new Christian disciples fell slightly, and the percentage of pastors with zero disciples grew in each of the three categories (pre-, new, and mature Christians).

Response rates and survey contents

Unlike the 2005 and 2007 paper surveys, the 2009 SPE survey was administered electronically, with a small paper reminder mailing targeted only to non-responding clerks whose pastors had already responded. 807 CRC congregations with a serving pastor were contacted. 521 pastors and 406 clerks responded (64.6 and 48.4 percent, respectively). 322 pastor-clerk pairs responded, and there were 332 "repeat respondents," pastors who had also responded in 2007.

The three surveys posed questions about pastors' spiritual formation, participation in peer learning, mentoring, and continuing education, general satisfaction and personal well-being, discipling others, and related factors such as time use. The second wave added a request for general evaluations of the effects of the SPE project on the pastors and the CRC. The 2009 survey made several substantive revisions. A key step was eliminating a long, tedious time-diary reporting component ("how many hours do you spend in sermon preparation? With family") and replacing it with a five-question battery asking pastors to report "How satisfied are you with your life balance in the following areas?" The five areas were: vocational ministry, personal devotional life, time with spouse, time with children/family, and physical/emotional self care.

General conclusions

There are a lot of "trees" to be seen in this report, details which are highlighted under the following heading. The general overview of the "forest" of survey data is fairly straightforward and consistent with previous surveys: if what we observed in 2005 is regarded as "pastoral excellence," then that excellence is indeed being sustained. Several aggregate measures of the clergy's health and performance are statistically stable; there are occasional hints of improvement or decline, but all are small changes and few are statistically significant. On average, the CRCNA's pastors and churches appear to be weathering hard times well—at least they tell us they are doing so!

However, health "on average" is small consolation to those who are struggling. The survey data alerts us to the constant presence of significant numbers of pastors and churches that are in pain or in crisis. In any given survey year, there are at least dozens of pastors who are dissatisfied with their current pastorate (see **Figure 16** on page 29), frequently feel isolated in ministry (**Figure 17** on page 30), and wouldn't be pastors again if they could start their careers over (**Figure 19** on page 32). Seventeen percent of pastors reported at least some dissatisfaction with their "life balance" in terms of "physical/emotional self care" (**Figure 20** on page 33). These problems are seldom chronic at the level of the congregation; very few pastors who were in the doldrums in one survey are still at the same church and still struggling two years later.² But sustaining excellence

² This is not to say that congregations do not have chronic problems—they do. The observation is driven by the survey data, and we rarely have longitudinal survey data from congregations with serious chronic problems, since such congregations also tend to have empty pulpits and therefore no one to take the survey.

will continue to require attention both to helping struggling churches and to helping itinerant pastors who may be carrying their pain and dissatisfaction with them from church to church.

While we find that pastors are explicitly grateful for SPE in their comments and give the program high marks in their quantitative ratings, we find little evidence that the SPE project's interventions include a "magic bullet" that consistently spurs improvement in key outcomes such as pastoral health, leadership skills or congregational mission fulfillment. Statistical models (reported in **Section XI** starting on page 59) reveal that most of these activities are only small levers for improvement, and a few are sometimes levers for increasing dissatisfaction. If there is anything approaching a magic bullet, a prime candidate for intervention, it is systematic feedback on preaching from the council. But generally speaking, justification for the SPE project to date must be based on the highly positive evaluations of the project from pastors and not on powerful statistical evidence that SPE interventions are consistently creating measurable, substantial change.

A final observation that follows from the previous paragraph is that the survey data we have now puts us in an enviable position: we can in fact observe whether a particular intervention is measurable improving pastoral health and do so with a significant amount of confidence. The planned 2011 survey can readily test hypotheses about specific interventions from the 2009 to 2011 period, and future interventions can be designed with a built-in measurement strategy that leverages this data.

Specific key findings in this report

1. Pastors' reported rates of recent participation in the Sustaining Pastoral Excellence (SPE) Project in the CRCNA rose significantly, from 44 percent in 2005 to 54 percent in 2009. The rise took place entirely among pastors over 35 years old; the involvement of pastors over 50 years old reached 50 percent. See **Figure 2** on page 9.
2. Between 2007 and 2009, responding pastors' ratings of SPE's effect on their ministry, themselves personally, and on the culture of the CRCNA rose slightly, and the proportion able to offer a rating rose substantially. In 2009, over 70 percent of respondents said SPE's effect on culture was positive, 7 percent perceived no effect, 1 percent perceived a negative effect, and 21 percent had no opinion. See **Figure 3** on page 10. Ratings rose most substantially for pastors not currently involved in SPE when evaluating the impact on the culture of the CRCNA. See **Figure 4** on page 11. The ratings are bolstered by strong support for SPE in open-ended comments. See **Figure 40** on page 67.
3. The frequency of personal prayer and meditation ("devotions") was stable across the three waves of the survey, with 46 percent reporting daily devotions in 2009. See **Figure 7** on page 14. A new finding shows that Calvin Theological Seminary (CTS) graduates are substantially less likely than pastors taking other routes to ministry to report daily devotions; for example, 43 percent of CTS grads reported daily devotions in 2009, compared to 55 percent of pastors who took other routes to ministry. See **Figure 8** on page 15.
4. Pastors assessed their congregations' reflection of the five core elements of the CRC mission statement; the most frequently affirmed element remained "We gather to praise God, listen to Him and respond," but this element fell significantly between 2007 and 2009, while the least frequently affirmed element, "We pursue God's justice and peace in every area of life," gained significantly over the same period. See **Figure 11** on page 21. Pastors of larger churches offer significantly more positive assessments of their congregations on three of the five measures. See **Figure 12** on page 22.

5. Pooling all three waves of survey data, we find that CTS graduates were significantly more likely than pastors taking other routes to ministry to evaluate their “understanding of the Reformed faith” as “thorough” (58 percent versus 49 percent). See **Figure 14** on page 25.
6. Discipling rates ticked up slightly but remained statistically unchanged. In 2009, 46 percent of pastors reported no pre-Christian disciples, 35 percent no new Christian disciples, 26 percent no mature Christian disciples, and 16 percent no disciples in any of these three categories; the last number was down slightly from 19 percent in 2005. Total reported disciples rose to 3,358, despite a lower response rate than previous surveys. See **Figure 15** on page 27.
7. Pastoral health was statistically stable but showed signs of worsening slightly over succeeding waves. Pastors’ satisfaction with their present pastorate fell slightly (see **Figure 16** on page 29) and feelings of isolation increased slightly (see **Figure 17** on page 30), though neither trend is statistically significant. Rural pastors were most likely to report feelings of isolation. 10 percent of pastors reported they would not be a pastor if they started their careers over, up from 5 percent in 2005, a statistically significant change (see **Figure 19** on page 32). Analysis shows a distinctive non-linear pattern in pastoral health, which starts with a honeymoon period, dips after a pastor’s first two years at a congregation and then recovers gradually; see **Figure 25** on page 39.
8. A new battery of five questions on “life balance” revealed that pastors are most satisfied with their balance in the area of “vocational ministry” and least satisfied in the area of “physical and emotional self-care.” See **Figure 20** on page 33. Clerks of council perceived things very differently than pastors, perceiving satisfactory devotional lives where pastors were much less frequently satisfied. See **Figure 35** on page 54.
9. Spousal support for pastors’ vocations was stable across all three survey waves; two-thirds of pastors said their spouses were “very supportive” and under 10 percent were lukewarm to “not supportive.” Analysis shows that spousal support is variable and not strictly chronic, but in any given survey wave, there are dozens of pastors whose spouses are not strongly supportive. See **Figure 21** on page 34.
10. Pastors’ participation in continuing education events declined, but SPE participants reported significantly higher average counts of continuing education events per year than non-SPE participants. See **Figure 29** on page 46.
11. There is great room for improvement in council support for pastors. We find that systematic council feedback for pastors on their preaching is a lever for improving both perceived leadership skills and congregational mission fulfillment; see discussion of the statistical model presented in **Figure 38** on page 61. Yet less than half of pastors perceived that they received such feedback in 2009; see **Figure 32** on page 50. In 2009, just 31 percent of responding pastors reported “excellent” or good council assistance in “reflecting with you on your assigned role and your personal sense of calling and vision.” Clerks of council were much more positive than pastors, and the correlation between matched clerk and pastor responses was statistically zero. See **Figure 33** on page 51.
12. The proportion of churches with a continuing education budget for their pastor fell to two-thirds, down from almost four-fifths in 2007 and about three-fourths in 2005. The amount budgeted by those churches with continuing education budgets remained statistically stable at about \$1,421 US or \$1,471 Canadian. See **Figure 36** on page 55.
13. Statistical models suggest that one of the best paths to boosting pastoral health is through boosting leadership skills. Pastors who perceived a boost in their leadership skills also reported a statistically significant boost in their “health” (increased satisfaction with pastorate,

decreased feelings of isolation, etc.). See the discussion of **Figure 38** found under the “Survey scales” heading on page 62.

14. The statistical models also showed that some activities associated with the SPE project do contribute, in small ways, to increasing pastoral health, pastoral leadership skills, and congregational fulfillment of the CRC’s mission. Regularly meeting with others boosts health directly, while health was boosted indirectly through increased leadership skills due to more frequent devotions, being mentored, joining a peer group, and receiving systematic preaching feedback. Pastors perceive that their congregations better fulfill the CRC’s mission statement when pastors set annual personal goals and receive systematic preaching feedback. However, some SPE-promoted factors decrease desirable outcomes as well; for example, mentees’ pastoral health actually *declined* significantly. See the discussion of “SPE-promoted activities” on page 62, which references **Figure 38** on page 61.

Recommendations

In section XII on page 67, we briefly make the following recommendations:

- **Focus SPE on generating leadership skills.** This is not to say focus to the exclusion of other factors, nor would leadership training content replace existing strategies—it might complement them. Significant leverage on pastoral health appears to be available from improvements in leadership.
- **Encourage systematic preaching feedback and other council support.** Of all the potential causal factors with room for improvement and tractability, more explicit and organized council support for pastors is the most evident. Fewer than half of CRCNA pastors say they get systematic feedback, which is a significant contributor to pastors’ perceptions of leadership skill development and congregational mission fulfillment in the statistical models.
- **Focus continuing education on quality, not quantity.** We found no evidence that the number of continuing education events attended has any effect on pastoral health or other desirable outcomes.
- **Offer more ideas for data analysis.** The survey data is a potentially rich source of information about pastors and pasturing, unusual in any denomination. Ideas for new inferences we might draw from it could be very useful.

Resources

The SPE Project at the CRCNA and the Calvin College Center for Social Research both have posted interconnected web pages where you can download more information, including tables and charts of data from the entire survey for both pastors and clerks, the original questionnaires, and this report. See the links in **Section XIV** on page 71.

II. Introduction

About the survey

The Sustaining Pastoral Excellence (SPE) office collaborated with the Calvin College Center for Social Research (CSR) in developing questionnaires for pastors and clerks of all congregations of the Christian Reformed Church (CRC) in North America. This report covers the results for three survey waves: benchmark results gathered in winter and spring 2004-2005³, a follow-up survey conducted in spring 2007, and a third wave collected on the web in the fall of 2009 and early winter 2010. This report focuses on the 2009 wave and on evidence of over-time change between waves. The results are intended to facilitate evaluation of the current SPE project, which has received two multi-year grants from the Lilly Endowment Inc.

From September 2009 through January 2010, 523 Christian Reformed Church pastors and 406 clerks responded to the survey on the Internet (111 clerks responded by mail or fax). The final pastor response rate was 64.6 percent (523/807); the final clerk response rate was 48.8 percent (406/837). Both pastor and clerk responded (referred to here as “paired” responses) from 377 of the 711 churches surveyed, a rate of 53 percent. The responses were processed by the CSR so as to prevent connecting responses with specific persons or churches, preserving pastor and clerk confidentiality. **Table 1** shows these numbers in context.

Table 1 Response rates by year and respondent type

Survey year	Churches surveyed	Pastor responses	Pastor rate	Repeat-response pastors	Clerk responses	Clerk rate	Pastor-clerk pairs	Pair response rate
2005	859	550	64%	n/a	522	60%	399	46%
2007	711	512	72%	353	451	63%	376	53%
2009	807	523	65%	332	406	48%	322	40%

In 2009, 332 pastors responded who had also responded to the 2007 wave of the survey. In 2007, 353 pastors participated who had also responded to the 2005 wave of the survey. In all, there were 228 respondents who responded to all three waves of the survey from the same congregation. We refer to these as “repeat respondents.” Because they are measurements of the same individuals over time, the repeat respondents offer the best means to detect any individual-level changes and thus any measurable effects of the SPE project.⁴

³ For simplicity’s sake, we have begun referring to this as the 2005 wave; earlier reports sometimes call it the 2004 wave, since much of the data was collected in late 2004.

⁴ The survey uses church file numbers, also known as Yearbook ID numbers, to track responses over time. We do not have data on individual pastors. However, we do know from survey data whether the responding pastor in 2009 says he or she has been at their current congregation long enough to have been the same person who responded in the previous wave; those who have been there less than the interval between surveys are not counted as repeat respondents. While there is some opportunity for error (for example, large churches with multiple pastors), this provides a generally accurate way to count repeat respondents.

Figure 1 Map of 2009 SPE survey responses by state or province

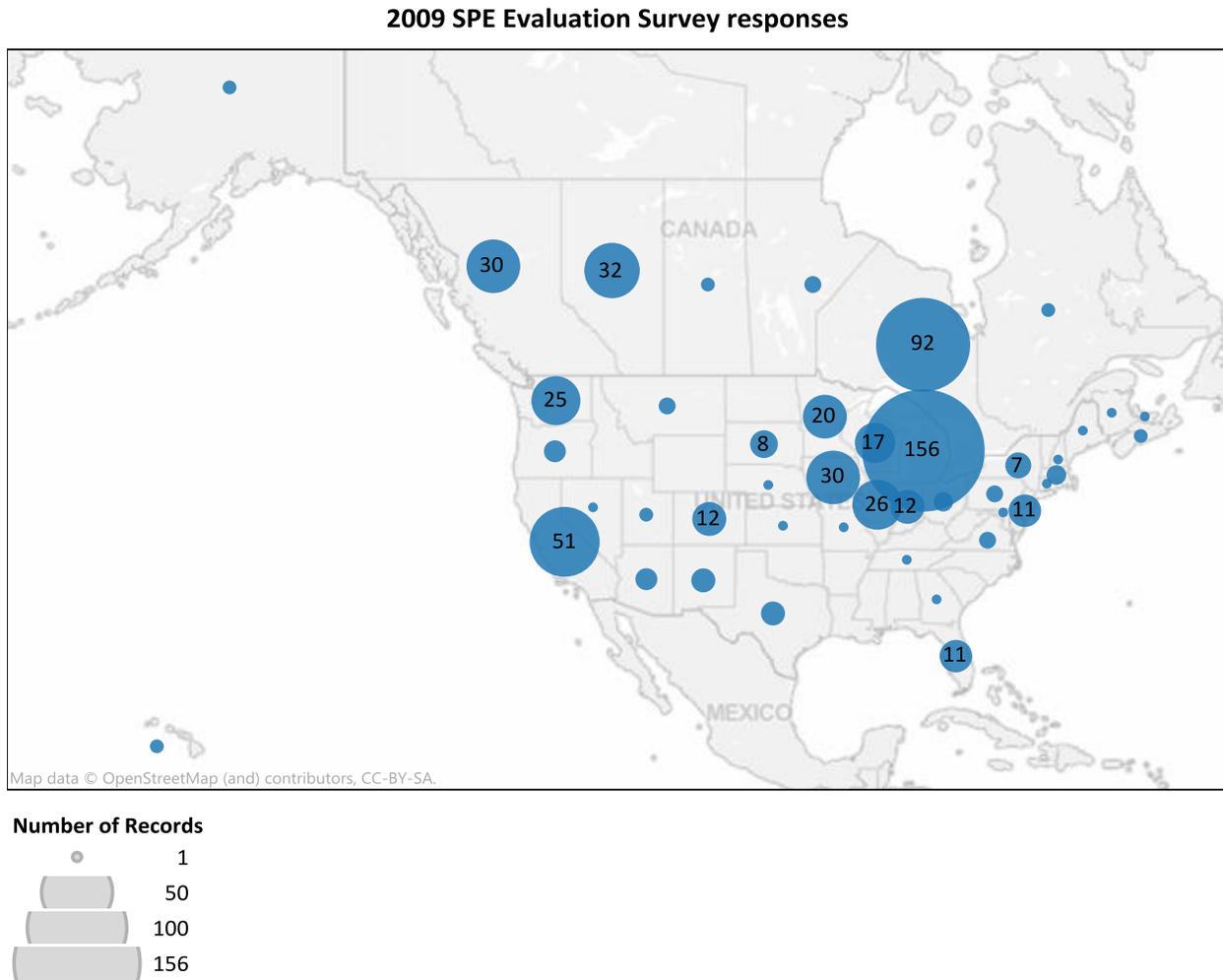


Figure 1 displays the geographic distribution of the responding pastors for 2009. Here are some other summary statistics:

- 87.6 percent of the 523 responding pastors described themselves as white; 10.5 percent are persons of color.⁵ This is compared to an estimated actual distribution in the CRC of 85 percent white. The survey thus under-represents minority clergy, but slightly less so than in the past.
- The ratio of returns from Canada (27.9 percent) over-represents Canada slightly, since 24.2 percent of the invited churches with pastors were Canadian as of September 2009.
- 81.8 percent of responding pastors reported an M. Div. degree, but only 71.3 percent came to ministry in the CRCNA through Calvin Theological Seminary (CTS).⁶ The “typical”

⁵ About 2 percent (10 pastors) selected “other, specify,” half (1 percent) being specific non-white other racial groups and about half being complex white ethnicities or protest responses against racial categories altogether.

⁶ This 71.3 percent rate in 2009 of pastors with the CTS degree route-to-ministry represents a substantial decrease from the 89 percent with the CTS degree route in the 2007 survey; but the difference appears to be the result of a small surge in survey participation from non-CTS grads of all ages, rather than some

responding CRC pastor is male (98.6 percent), was ordained at age 31, has been in ministry for 17.5 years and in his current position for 7.4 years. The last figure increased slightly since 2007, up from 6.9 years, but the change is not statistically significant.

- As shown in **Table 2** below, the “typical” CRC congregation has 324 members and is more likely suburban (40.6 percent) than rural (29.7) or urban (26.2). Due to the larger size of suburban church memberships, almost half of CRC members attend suburban churches. The responding churches are slightly more likely to be rural than in 2004-2005.

Table 2 Churches and membership by location type, 2007 (Pq07 by Pq06)

Ministry Location	Pastors responding	%	Cases		Total membership	%
			reporting membership	Average membership		
Urban	142	27.2%	142	241.8	34,336	22.6%
Suburban	227	43.4%	227	319.3	72,486	47.7%
Rural	154	29.4%	154	294.1	45,289	29.8%
Total	523	100.0%	523	290.8	152,111	100.0%

Section summary

- Section III reviews the subjective evaluations of the SPE Project.
- Sections IV through IX mirror the structure of the original 2005 report. The survey questions covered in these sections were originally conceived and organized in relation to the *Marks of Good Ministry* identified in the original proposal to the Lilly Endowment for “Creating a Culture of Pastoral Excellence.” The proposal’s headline for each mark of good ministry is found in the section headings for sections IV through IX.
- Section X focuses on communication and support issues between pastors and councils.
- Section XI introduces measurement scales for pastoral health introduced with this report and analyzes over-time change in the measure over the five-year period of the surveys (from 2004-2005 to 2009-2010).
- Section XII offers concluding remarks and recommendations.

actual trend among pastors. In fact, the reported CTS degree rate is highest (76.8) among pastors under 40 years old.

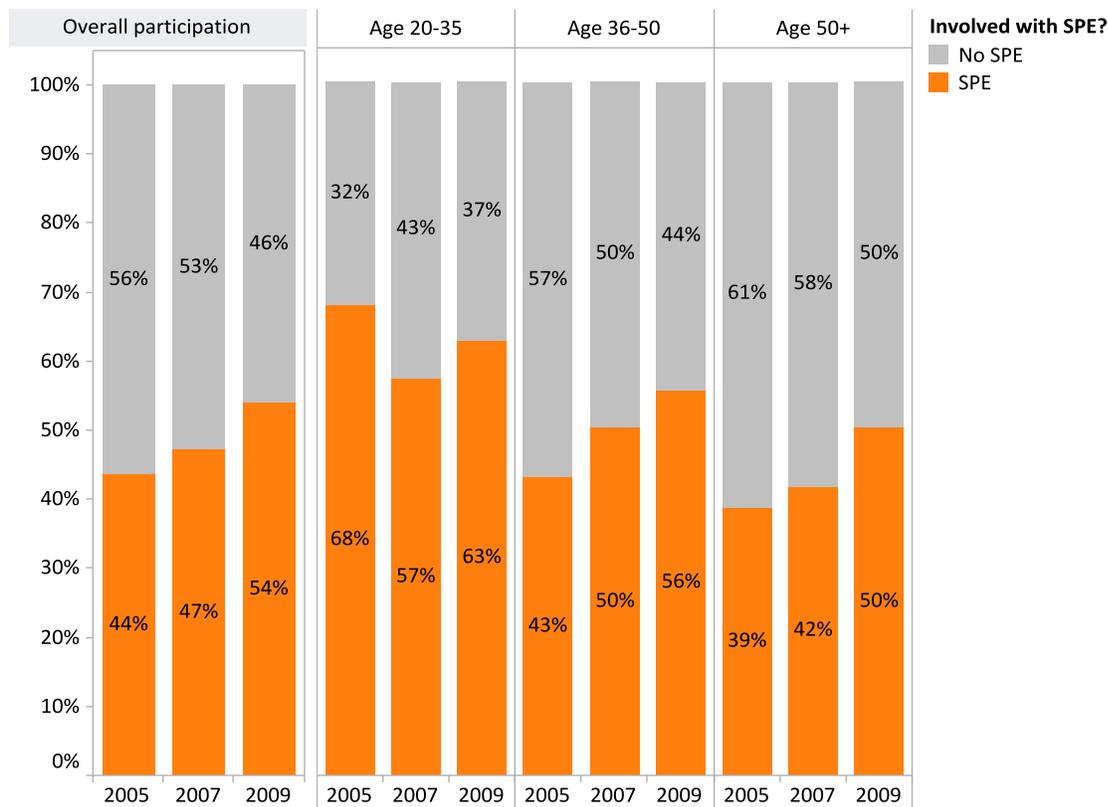
III. Evaluations of the SPE Project’s Effects

SPE participation

The survey asked pastors to report on their recent participation in an array of activities that SPE supports, including peer learning groups, mentoring, etc. Detailed reports on each of these are found in the sections following this one. After recounting their activities, pastors were asked whether any of these activities were connected to the SPE project.⁷

As shown in the leftmost pane of **Figure 2**, the proportion of responding pastors who report some involvement in SPE has risen steadily, from 44 percent in 2005 to 54 percent in 2009. As shown in the three panes on the right, younger pastors were the most likely to participate (63 percent in 2009, up from 57 percent in 2007 but down from the 68 percent figure recorded in 2005), but the increase over time has occurred primarily among older pastors. In 2009, the pastoral population over 50 years old crossed the 50 percent SPE participation threshold for the first time.

Figure 2 SPE involvement by year and age bracket at time of survey



⁷ In 2005 and 2007, pastors were asked “Are any of the above (continuing education, peer learning group, mentor/mentee relationship) connected with the Sustaining Pastoral Excellence program in the CRCNA?” Answer options were “Yes,” “No,” and “Don’t Know.” In 2009, the question was revised to ask, “How many of the above (continuing education events, peer learning groups, mentor-mentee relationships) were/are connected with the CRC Sustaining Pastoral Excellence project (which is funded by Lilly Endowment Inc)?” The new answer options were “3 or more,” “1 or 2,” “None,” and “Don’t know.” About 5 percent said “3 or more.” In this section, we group 2009 answers of “3 or more” and “1 or 2” with “Yes” answers from 2005 and 2007.

Pastors' ratings

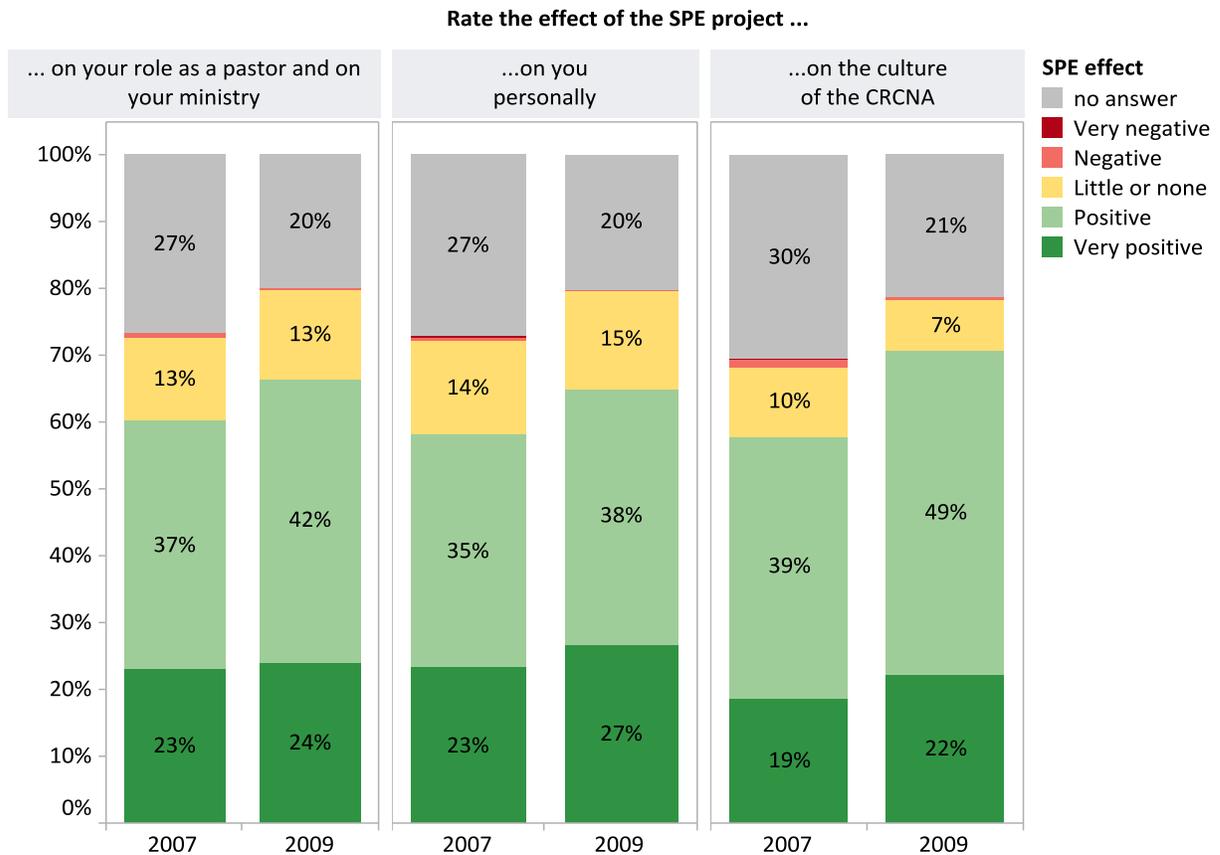
In 2007 and 2009, both pastors and clerks of Council were asked to rate the effect of the SPE program on three objects. Pastors were asked,

“Please rate the overall effect of the Sustaining Pastoral Excellence (SPE) project on each area. SPE has included pastor peer learning groups, continuing education events, mentoring relationships, regional pastor funding, pastor couple learning events, pastors' spouses' peer groups and pastors' spouses' conferences/retreats. You may answer ‘NA’ if you have not been a part of any SPE programs and/or are unaware of their effects. Rate SPE’s effect:

1. On your role as a pastor and on your ministry
2. On you personally
3. On the culture of the CRCNA”

Figure 3 displays the results for all three questions in both years. The percentage of pastors perceiving a positive or very positive effect has risen by about 6 or 7 percent since 2007, primarily due to a decrease in the number of pastors choosing “NA” to indicate that they couldn’t rate SPE’s effect. In 2009, 66 percent said the effect on their ministry was at least “positive,” 65 percent said the effect on themselves personally was at least positive, and 71 percent said SPE’s effect on the culture of the CRCNA was positive.

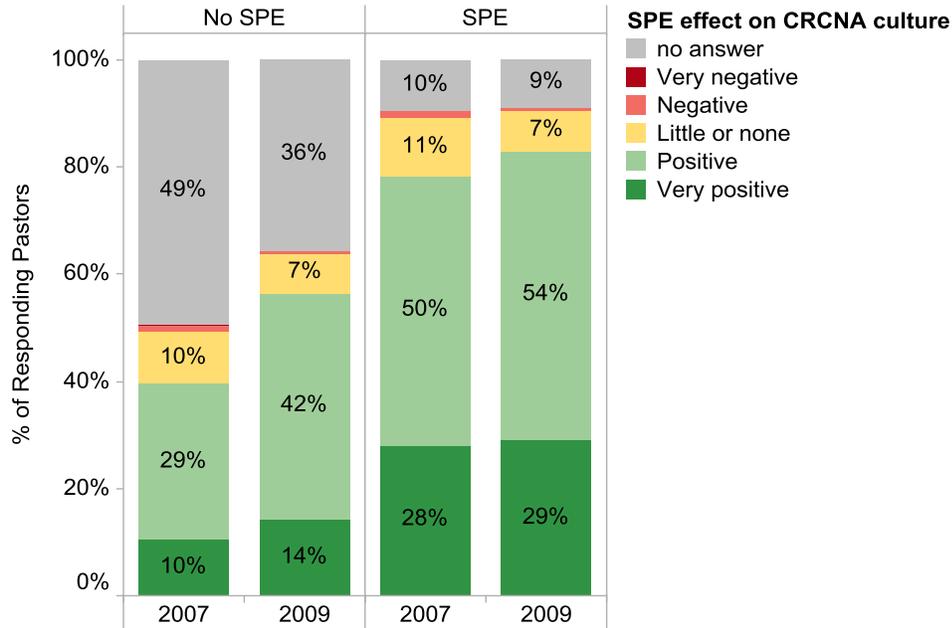
Figure 3 Pastors' ratings of the effect of SPE



The increase in positive evaluations comes from the increase in the proportion of SPE participants found in **Figure 2** above, from improved ratings by SPE participants, and from improved ratings by non-participants that reflect the project’s growing visibility and name

recognition. For example, as shown in **Figure 4**, those reporting no SPE participation were much more likely in 2009 than in 2007 to answer the question and to give SPE a positive rating for its effect on the culture of the CRCNA. Positive ratings rose from 39 percent in 2007 to 56 percent in 2009. Meanwhile, those who participated in SPE also increased their positive ratings slightly, rising from 78 percent positive in 2007 to 83 percent positive in 2009.

Figure 4 Pastors' ratings of SPE's effect on CRCNA culture by SPE participation

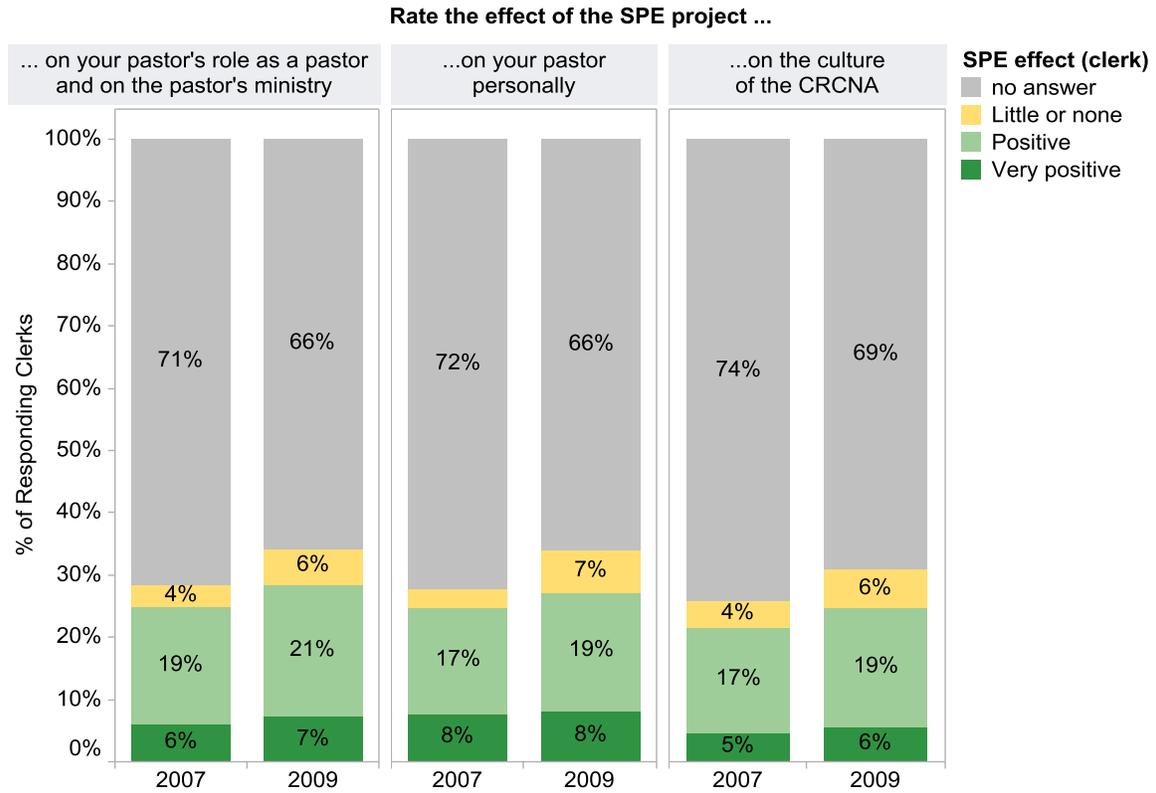


Similar but smaller increases occurred in the other two rating questions (not shown here).

Clerks' ratings

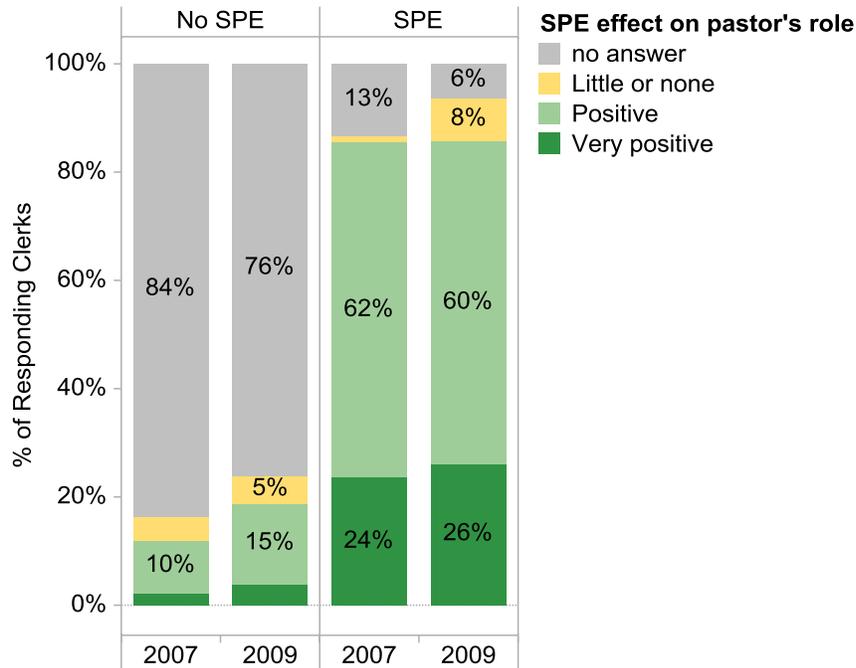
A parallel set of questions was asked of clerks of Council. **Figure 5** illustrates the high proportion of “no answer” cases. Though more clerks were aware of SPE in 2009 and gave the project more positive ratings in 2009 than in 2007, about two-thirds were still unable to offer an opinion.

Figure 5 Clerks' ratings of SPE's effect



For the small share of clerks (23.9 percent in 2007, 21.7 percent in 2009) who knew their pastor was involved in SPE-sponsored activities, the ratings are much more positive. As shown in **Figure 6** below, clerks who indicated knowledge that their pastor was involved in SPE gave the project an 86 percent positive rating in 2009 for the project’s effect on their pastor’s role and ministry. Similarly positive ratings applied to the other two items: ratings were 80 percent positive for SPE’s effect on the pastor personally (9 percent said “don’t know” and none were negative) and 63 percent positive for SPE’s effect on the culture of the CRCNA (27 percent said “don’t know” and none were negative).

Figure 6 Clerks’ ratings of effect on their pastor's ministry by SPE participation



IV. Spiritual Formation

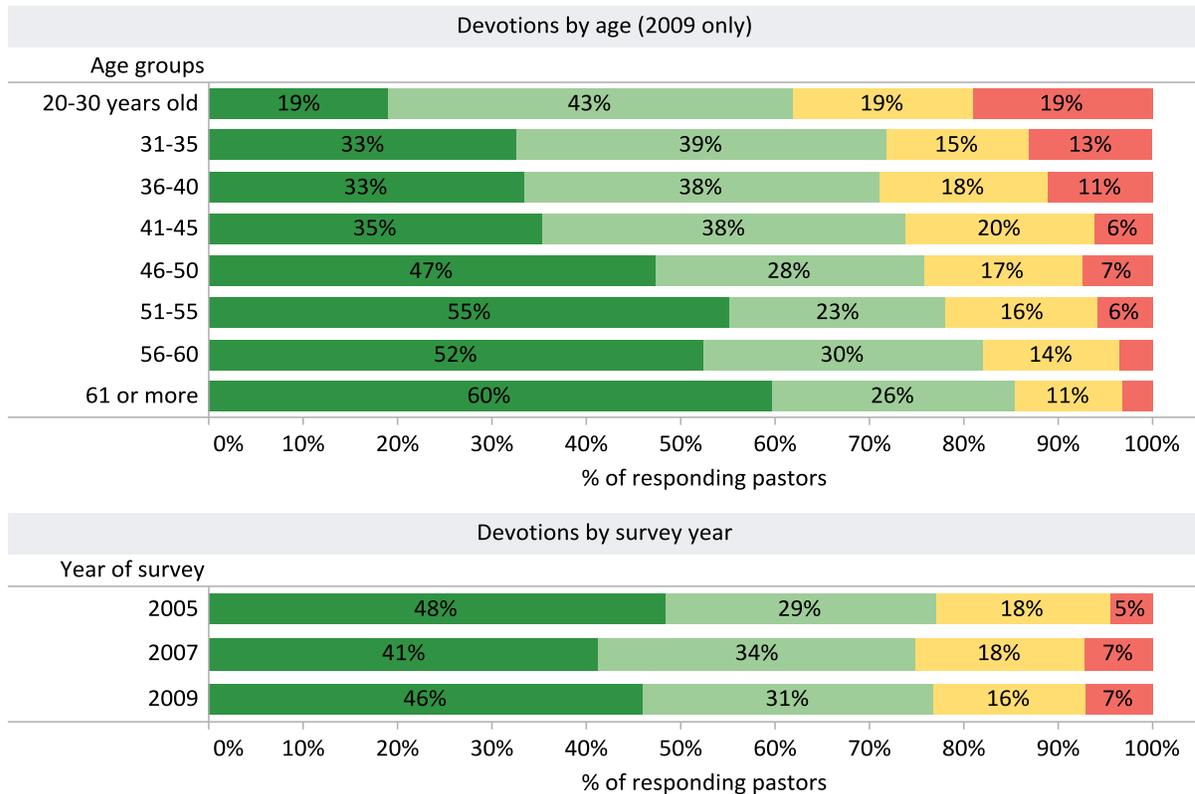
A deep authentic relationship with God marked by prayer, godliness and fruits of the Spirit.

Devotional frequency

Pastors were asked, “How often do you have personal prayer and meditation time (including Bible reading)?” **Figure 7** shows the breakdown of responses by age group for 2009 (top pane) and by survey year (bottom pane). As in previous years, we find that older pastors are far more likely to report daily devotions than are younger pastors. In 2009, just 19 percent of the youngest group (20 to 30 years old; 21 responses in 2009) reported daily prayer, meditation or Bible reading, while 60 percent of the oldest group (61 or older; 62 responses in 2009) did so.

However, the overall frequency of devotions has been fairly stable from year to year, as the bottom pane of the figure shows.⁸ The small decline in daily devotions from 48 percent in 2005 to 41 percent in 2007 now looks like a mere fluctuation, since 2009’s figure came in at 46 percent.

Figure 7 Devotional frequency by age group in 2009 and by survey year



Devotional frequency

- < 3 times per week
- 3 or 4 times per week
- 5 or 6 times per week
- Daily

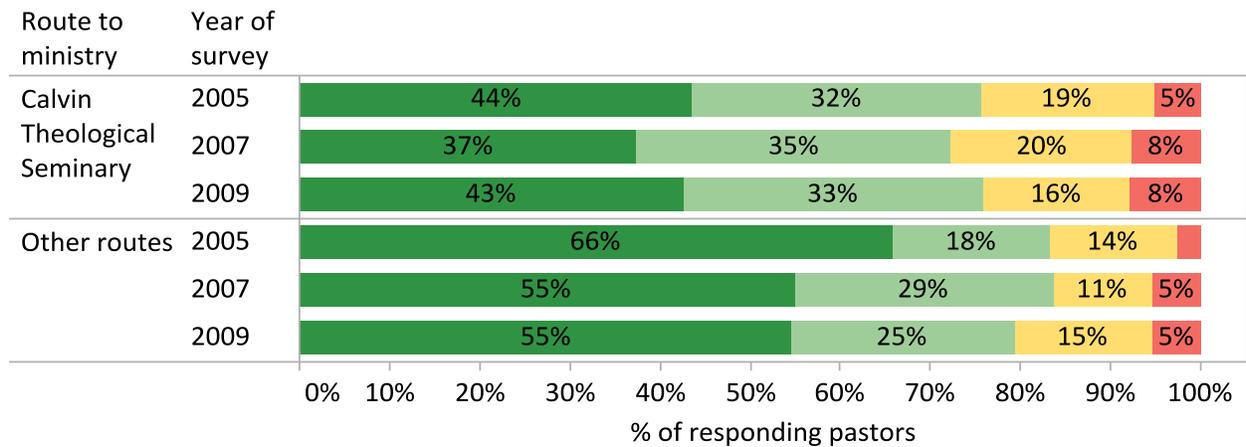
Five short years’ worth of generational turnover among CRC pastors is not yet enough to distinguish life-cycle effects sharply from generational effects. However, the data suggests that

⁸ A chi-square test on devotional frequency by year is not statistically significant ($p = 0.154$).

the life-cycle effects are fairly important; it is probably not the case that the future of the pastorate is one of radically less frequent devotions as the younger generation replaces the older. Repeat-responding pastors 30 and younger have tended to decrease their devotional frequency slightly over time (perhaps reflecting the demands of study, early ministry stresses and early family life), but pastors between 31 and 60 have held steady, and pastors over 60 have tended to *increase* their devotional frequency slightly over time.

One marked difference we discovered is that self-reported devotional frequency is significantly lower for Calvin Theological Seminary graduates than for pastors who followed another “route to ministry.” As shown in **Figure 8**, the daily devotion rate (dark green bar) is higher for non-CTS grads (55 to 66 percent) in every year than for CTS grads (37 to 44 percent).

Figure 8 Devotional frequency by route to ministry



Devotional frequency

- < 3 times per week
- 3 or 4 times per week
- 5 or 6 times per week
- Daily

The difference is similarly large within all age brackets (data not shown), so these differences are not the result of some recent change in the Seminary’s practices or students. In fact, the year-over-year variation in aggregate devotional frequency visible in the bottom pane of **Figure 7** above can be largely explained just by changes in the proportion of respondents who are CTS grads. As noted in footnote 6 on page 7, that proportion dropped from 89 percent in 2007 to 71 percent in 2009, so it’s not surprising that we see an associated small uptick in the reported frequency of devotions.

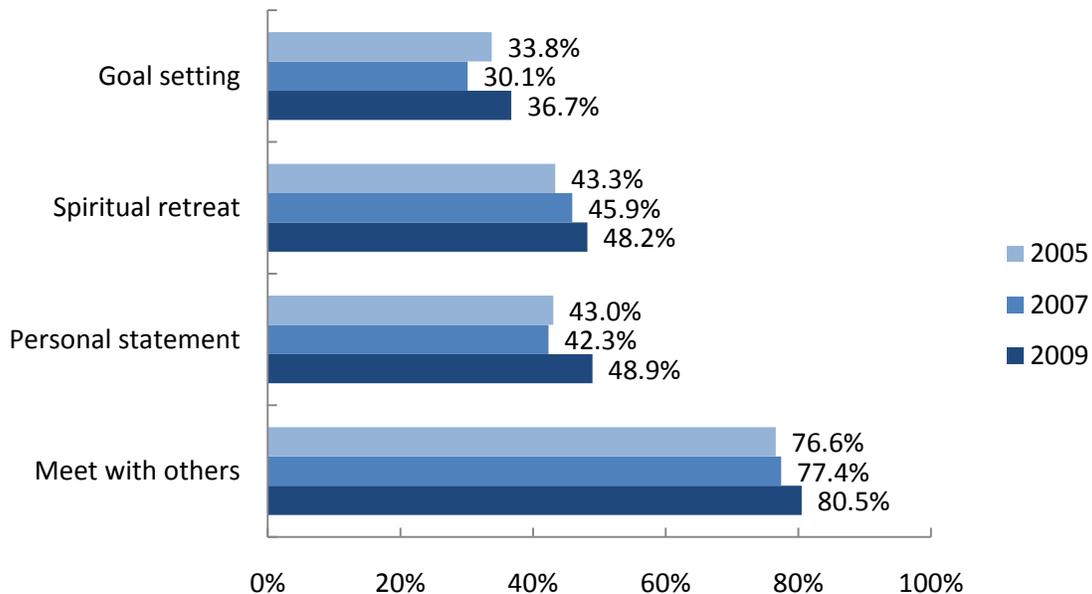
Other spiritual formation activities

Pastors were asked four⁹ yes-or-no questions relating to intentionality in spiritual formation:

1. Have you gone on a spiritual retreat in the last twelve months?
2. Do you regularly meet with one or more other Christians for the purpose of deepening your relationship with God?
3. Do you establish annual, personal goals for spiritual growth and a way to sustain these goals?
4. Have you developed a personal life mandate or statement of personal vision for ministry?

In 2009, all four measures had increased from previous years, though not so much as to be statistically significant changes year-over-year.¹⁰ Most pastors answered “no” to three of the four items; the exception was “meeting regularly ...” to which 80.5 percent said “yes,” up from 76.6 percent in 2005 and 77.4 percent in 2007. Goal setting remained the least employed practice among the four.

Figure 9 Four spiritual formation activities by year



Counting all five practices together (daily devotions, goal setting, retreat, statement and regular meeting), we get a scale from 0 to 5. The mean score for all respondents was 2.45 in 2005, 2.37 in 2007 and 2.60 in 2009—but the increase can again be accounted for merely by the variation in the proportion of CTS grads responding. The median number of “yes” answers rose from 2 in 2005 and 2007 to 3 in 2009. As in previous years, participants in peer learning groups scored substantially higher, with a mean score of 2.85 practices fulfilled in 2009, compared to 2.37 for non peer-learning.

⁹ A fifth practice, journal-keeping, was dropped from the 2009 survey. Only 1 in 5 pastors were practicing it in previous years.

¹⁰ Repeat respondents do not differ substantially from all respondents on these measures.

Selected comments

Here are some comments from survey respondents that relate to this section's topic:

"We are a church that is transitioning from a church that flourished in an environment of strong cultural and social connections to a congregation that is focused on spiritual growth and their relationship to God in an environment where the members' social needs are no longer necessarily centered on the Church."

"The questions posed in this survey have given me ideas about some areas such as a personal mission statement for ministry and setting goals for my personal spiritual life over the course of the year. Putting these on paper then working towards them gives a sense of purpose and direction. Thanks for the insight."

"All I can say for now is that you continue providing this ministry to pastors for their spiritual formation and growth."

"I have also reaped the rewards of living life with others, and am constantly pursuing my personal emotional and spiritual growth."

Conclusions

Reports of spiritual formation practices are largely stable among CRC pastors. There are hints of stable generational replacement and small but statistically insignificant increases in some practices. The apparent increase in devotional frequency in 2009 is explained entirely by a larger share of responses from pastors who are not Calvin Seminary graduates.

V. Vision and Mission

A strong vision of the mission of the church in which the church exists not merely to sustain itself but to serve the world and minister beyond itself.

Vision and mission statements

In all three waves, the survey has asked pastors, “Does your congregation have vision and mission statements?” The leftmost pane of **Figure 10** illustrates that the percentage of pastors answering “yes” has been rising steadily, from 81 percent in 2005 to 88 percent in 2009.

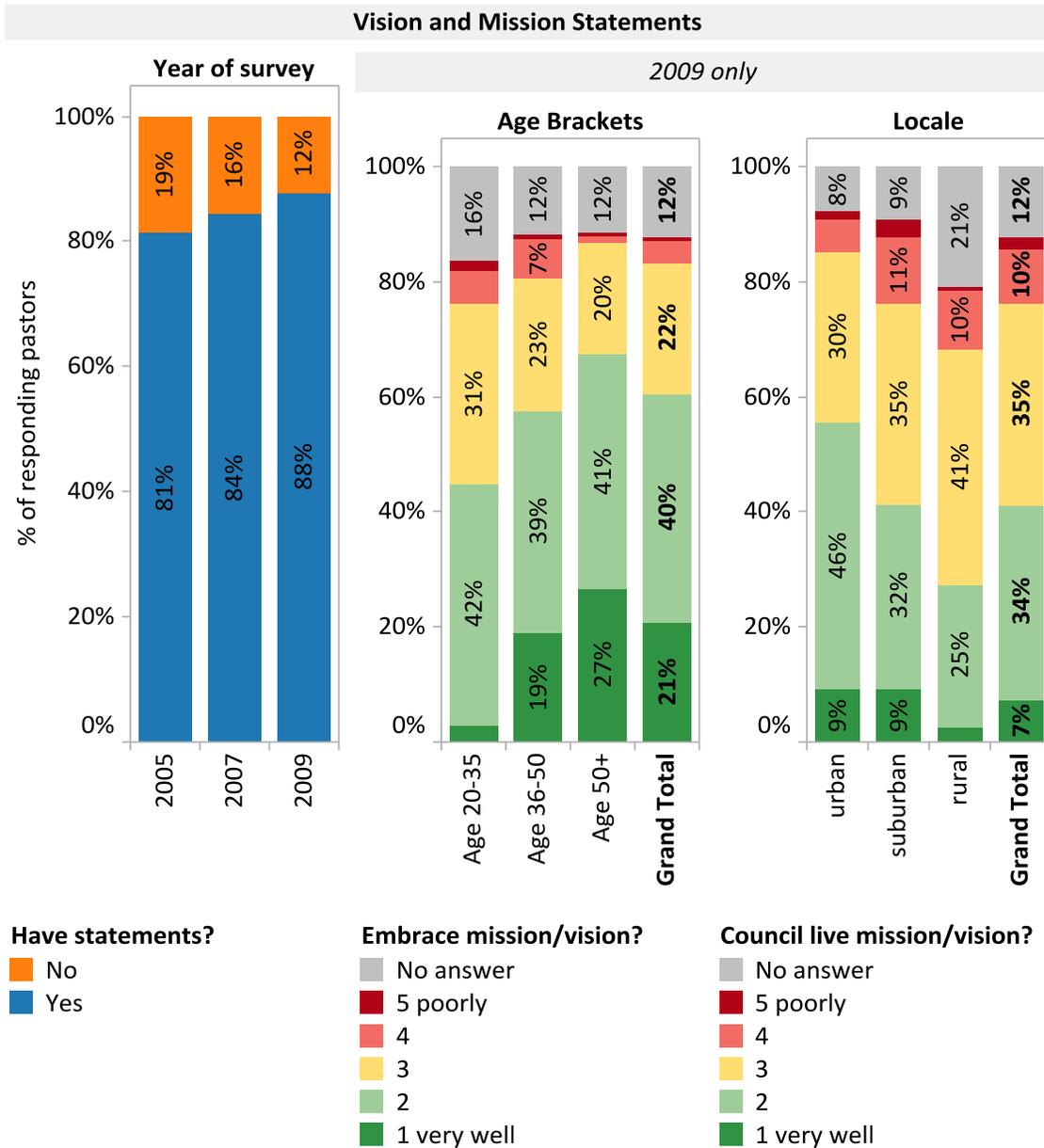
The center and right panes of **Figure 10** show two questions new to the survey in 2009, asked only of those who said “yes” to having vision and mission statements:

1. How well do you embrace and advance your congregation's mission and vision through your preaching, teaching, and personal life?
2. How well do your council leaders live out the congregation's mission and vision through their ministry roles and personal lives?

These new questions can't be compared over time, but a little experimentation shows that the first question varies widely by age bracket: 27 percent of responding pastors over age 50 in 2009 said they embraced their congregation's statements “very well,” while just 3 percent of those age 20 to 35 said the same. Overall, 21 percent say they do this “very well.”

Meanwhile, as the rightmost “Grand Total” bar in the rightmost panel of **Figure 10** shows, just 7 percent of all responding pastors said their council leadership lives out the mission and vision at the “1 very well” level, plus 34 percent more in the “2” level, for a total of 41 percent “in the green.” We found strong variation in this item by locale: 55 percent of urban pastors said their council was “in the green” (1 or 2 on the scale), versus 41 percent of suburban pastors and just 28 percent of rural churches.

Figure 10 Vision and mission statements: presence by year; embrace by age; council living by locale



Core elements of the CRC mission

Pastors were asked how well their congregations reflect the five core elements of the CRC mission statement:

- 24a We gather to praise God, listen to him and respond.
- 24b We nurture each other in faith and obedience to Christ.
- 24c We love and care for one another as God's people.
- 24d We commit ourselves to serve and to tell others about Jesus.
- 24e We pursue God's justice and peace in every area of life.

The pastors ranked each item on a scale of 1 (the congregation reflects the element "very well") to 5 ("poorly"). **Figure 11** on the following page displays the results from each year in two ways: the top pane shows the breakdown among the five answer choices, while the bottom panel shows the average (mean) for all pastors with a confidence interval.

From the top panel of **Figure 11**, we learn that "We gather to praise God, listen to him and respond" was the most frequently affirmed core element, but that there was a precipitous drop between 2007 to 2009 in the percent saying "1 very well," falling from 63 percent in 2007 to 37 percent in 2009. There were similar substantial drops in the percent saying "1 very well" describes two other items: "We love and care for one another as God's people" fell from 33 percent "1 very well" to 24 percent and "We nurture each other in faith and obedience to Christ" fell from 19 percent to 12 percent.¹¹

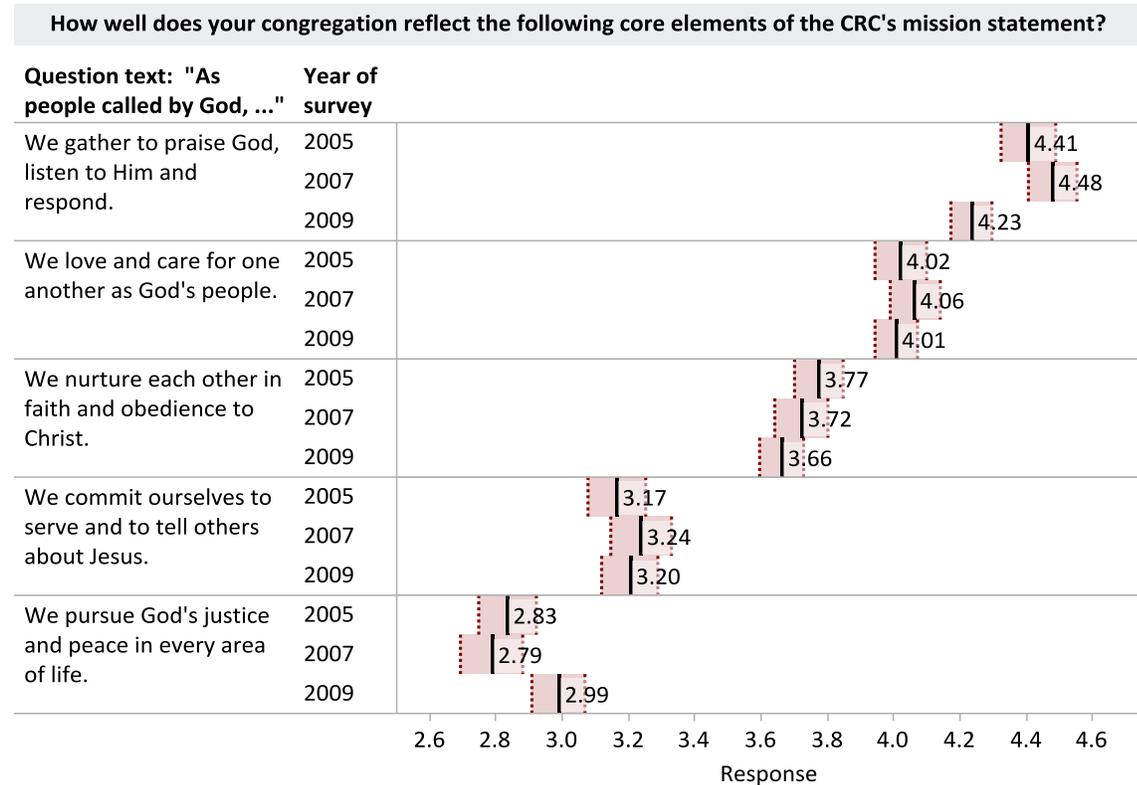
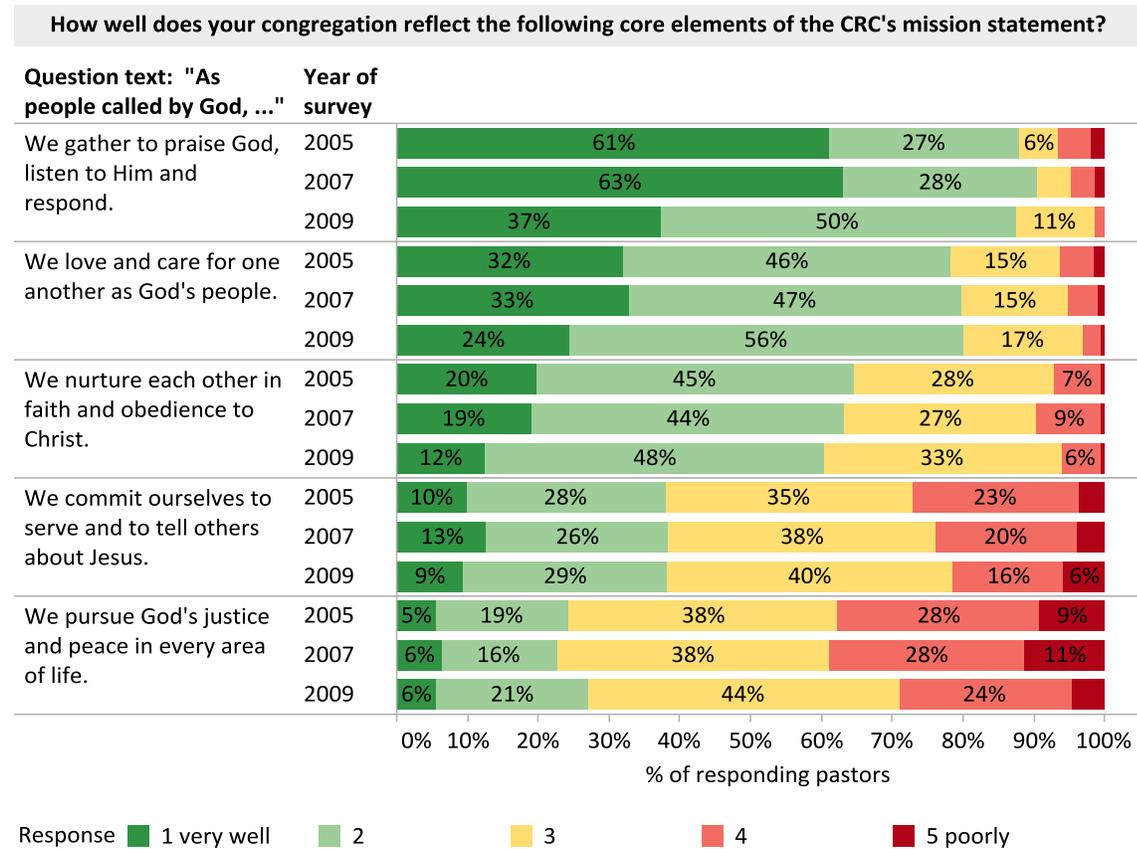
The bottom panel of **Figure 11** shows confidence intervals; when they overlap from year to year, the change is statistically insignificant (that is, likely to occur given random variation); when they do not overlap, the change is statistically significant (that is, probably not due to chance). The black lines reveal that the mean for the first "We gather..." item fell from 4.48 in 2007 to 4.23; the red intervals do not overlap, so it is a statistically significant decline both from 2007 and from 2005. All of the other intervals overlap, except for "We pursue God's justice and peace..." in which the increase from 2007 to 2009 is statistically significant and the change between 2005 and 2009 is very nearly so.¹²

Pastors of larger churches give their churches significantly higher marks on the first three items in **Figure 11** (not shown here), but we find in section XI below that this apparent relationship is likely due to other factors, not church size per se.

¹¹ We must be very cautious in interpreting these changes, since they may be largely an artifact of the change in survey design from paper (on which respondents filled in a blank with a number between 1 and 5) to the web (where respondents saw the entire 5-point range as a visual scale. We know from research that respondents prefer to give moderate responses; respondents in 2009 may have unconsciously understood a "1" response to be "extreme" and therefore less appropriate than a "2" or "3"). This suspicion is strengthened by the increased number of central "3" responses, indicating a middling or "so-so" response. On the other hand, we also know from research that respondents tend to unconsciously prefer the first (leftmost or topmost) answer (a phenomenon called "primacy bias") which should encourage more "1 very well" answers, not fewer.

¹² The upper confidence interval for 2005 is 2.92, while the lower confidence interval for 2009 is 2.91.

Figure 11 Core elements of congregational mission by year

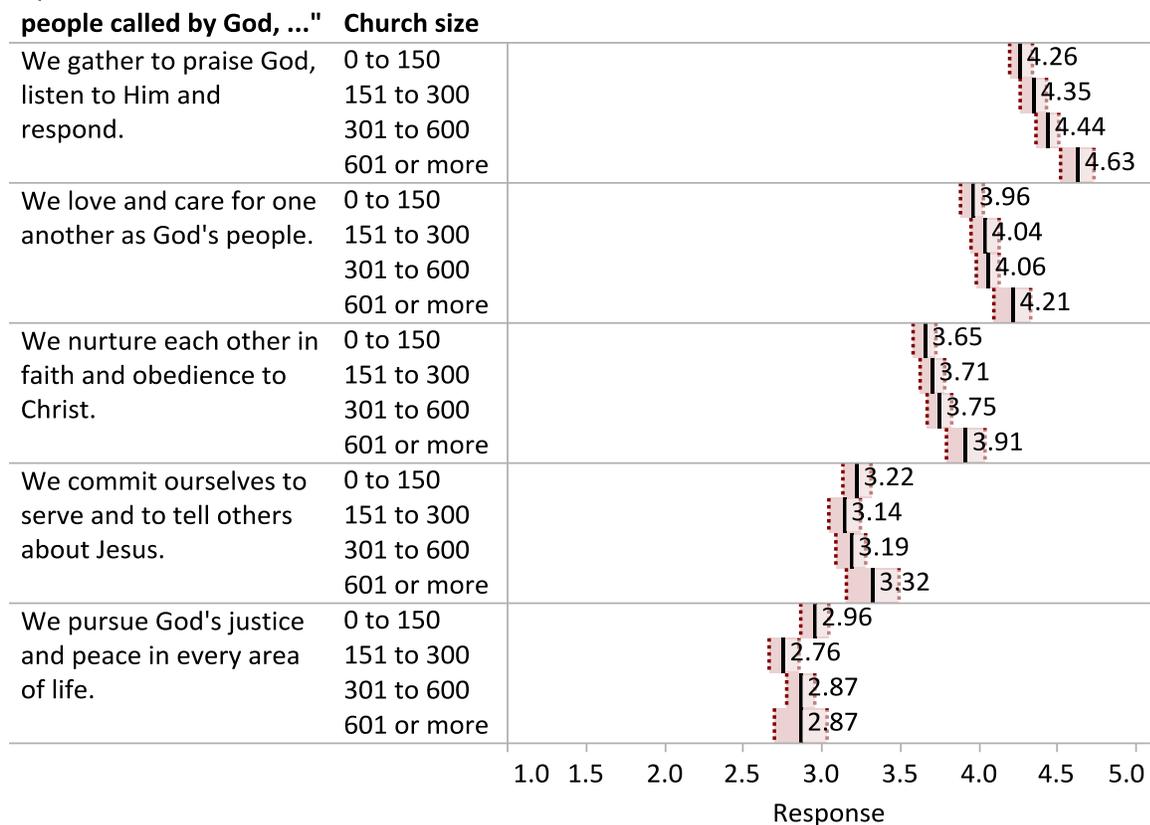


A further observation is facilitated by **Figure 12**, which is similar to the bottom pane of **Figure 11** but substitutes church size in the place of survey year. The figure shows that the average score for the first three core items is significantly higher for larger churches than for smaller churches. For example, the mean score is 4.26 for “we gather to praise God...” for churches with up to 150 members, while those with 601 or more score 4.63; the 95 percent confidence intervals do not overlap, indicating a statistically significant difference. However, larger churches do not report significantly better performance on the “commit ourselves to serve” and “pursue God’s justice and peace” elements.

Figure 12 Core elements of congregational mission by church size (2005, 2007 and 2009 combined)

How well does your congregation reflect the following core elements of the CRC's mission statement?

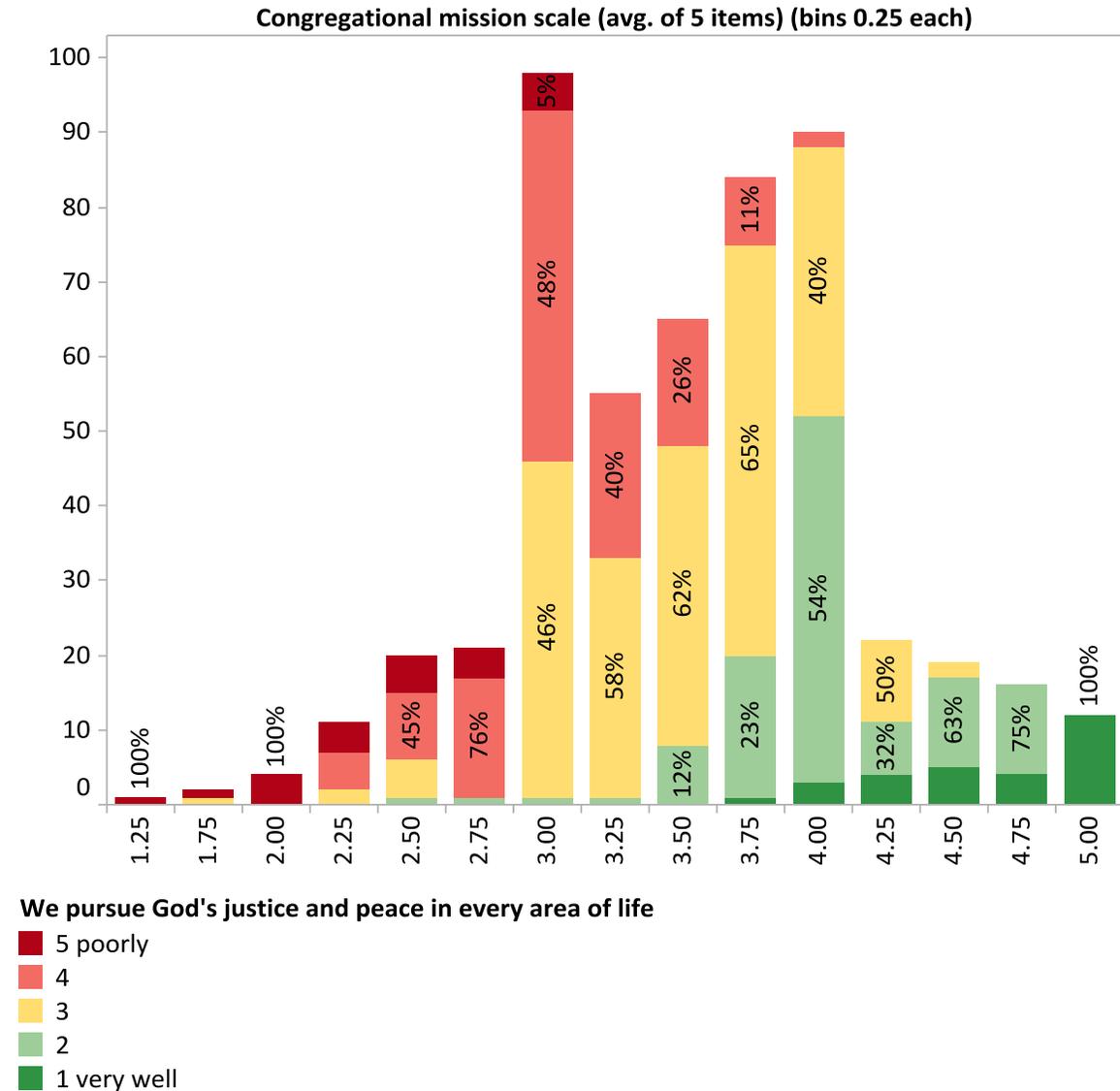
Question text: "As people called by God, ..."



A combined measurement scale for congregational mission

For general reference, but especially for further use in section XI, we created a “congregational mission” scale that combines the five “core mission elements” items. The scale is fairly reliable¹³ and covers a wide range. The values are reversed so that five “1 very well” answers score a high 5.0 on the scale. **Figure 13** shows the distribution of pastors’ responses for 2009. There are tall spikes of 90 or more pastors at 3.0 and 4.0 where many pastors answered all five items the same way. The coloring illustrates how one of the five core element items (“we pursue justice and peace in every area of life”) is related to the scale; naturally, pastors who rated their church more highly on the “justice and peace” item also scored higher on the combined scale. We analyze this scale further in section XI.

Figure 13 Histogram of congregational mission scale (2009 only), shaded by “justice and peace” item



¹³ Cronbach’s alpha is 0.74, less than the ideal of 0.80 or higher, but well above a minimum threshold of 0.60.

Selected comments

"I would like to see some examples of what a personal life and mission statement could look like – I would like to work through that."

"As I reflect on my main challenge as a pastor in an established church, it is managing the tension between discipling and caring for church members, and being involved in God's mission in the world that includes discipling new people. Often, I feel alone in this tension in our church as a person who believes (and hopefully acts) that mission is first Biblical and essential, then practical. We don't do mission to grow the church or because people are not coming to church in our century, we do it because God is missional and sent Jesus to earth. Our church, in general it seems to me, does not see mission as an essential part of being church alongside of worship, discipleship and community. Here, practically speaking, mission has been relegated to an evangelism team, the pastor or deacons; it is not part of every Christian's being in their own way."

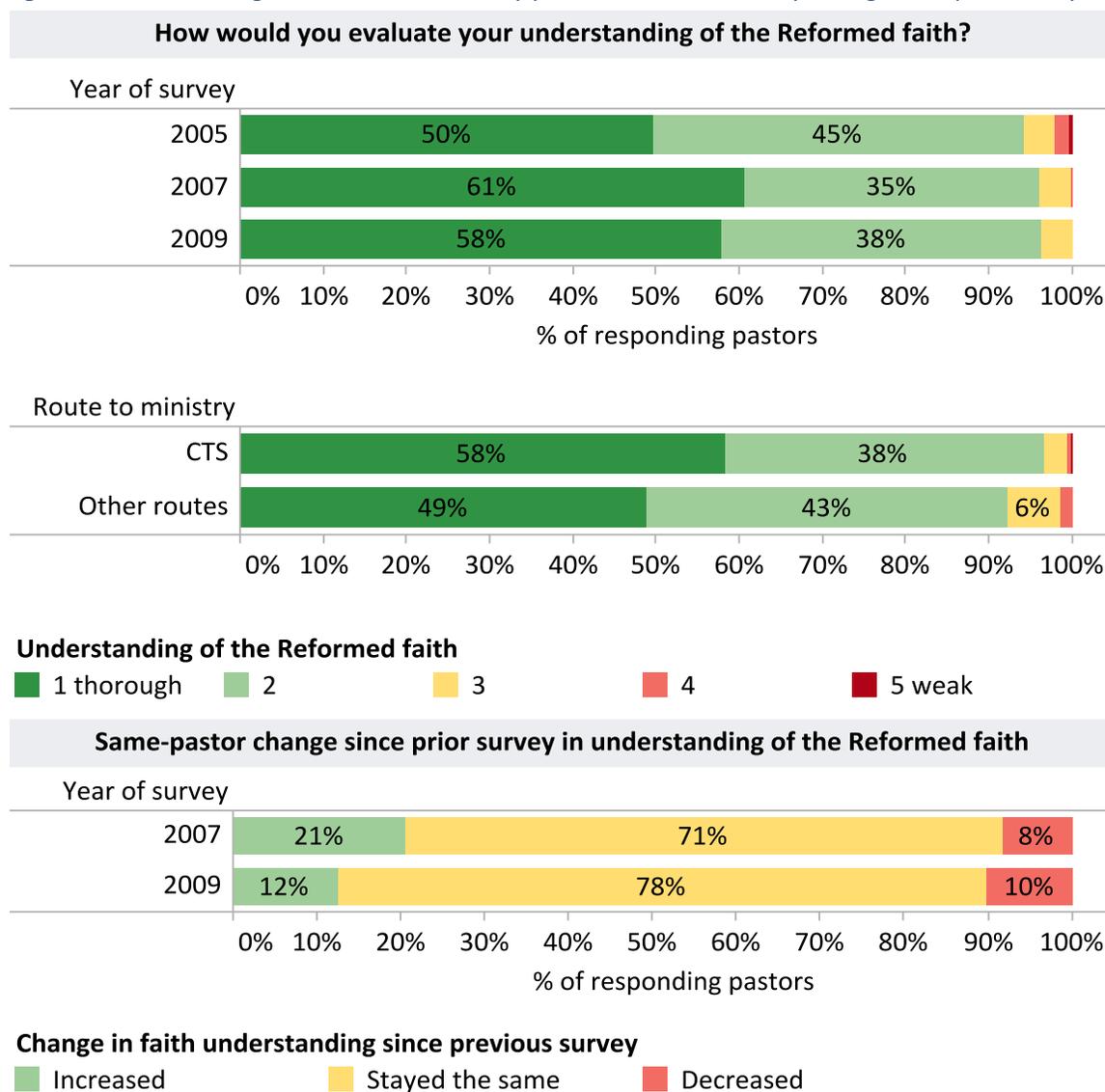
VI. Knowing and Communicating the Christian Faith

A thorough grasp of the biblical, pastoral and theological contours of the Christian faith and church, with an ability to communicate these contours in meaningful, relevant, and integrative ways through sound preaching and teaching, and imaginative pastoral leadership.

Knowledge of the Reformed faith

In 2009, 58 percent of responding pastors reported a “thorough” understanding of the Reformed faith, a small and statistically insignificant decrease from the 2007 value of 61 percent (see top pane of **Figure 14**), which itself represented a substantial, statistically significant increase over 2005’s value of just 50 percent. The middle pane of **Figure 14** shows that 58 percent of CTS graduates report a thorough understanding, as opposed to just 49 percent of non-CTS graduates. Thus the substantial increase in the share of non-CTS graduates among respondents to the 2009 survey (discussed in footnote 6 on page 7) accounts for much of the apparent decline in faith understanding since 2007.

Figure 14 Understanding of the Reformed faith by year and route to ministry; change since prior survey



The bottom pane of **Figure 14** shows that just 12 percent of repeat-respondent pastors reported an increase in their understanding of the Reformed faith since the previous survey, as opposed to 21 percent in 2007. Ten percent reported a decreased level of understanding.

A statistical model of faith understanding (full results not shown here) suggests that the single best predictor of increased faith understanding is age: the older a pastor becomes, the more likely he or she is to increase faith understanding. Many other candidate explanations such as continuing education events, workshops, and seminary education do not explain changes in this measure. However, there appears to be a small average increase in reported understanding associated with being a mentor, while those who reported going on a spiritual retreat were more likely to report a *decrease* in their understanding of the faith.

Much of this lack of explanatory power may be due to the imprecision and skewed distribution of the single “understanding the Reformed faith” survey question being analyzed. The vast majority of respondents report thorough or nearly thorough understanding, so there is little room for improvement. Further, it is commonplace occurrence for educational experiences to reveal our own ignorance to us, such that exposure to continuing education might actually cause us to admit, on a subjective self-evaluation like this question, that we understand less than we previously believed we did. If that kind of constructive disillusionment occurs among CRC pastors, the data might not reflect the actual learning experienced by pastors in continuing education settings.

If educational improvement is an important goal for SPE, future surveys might benefit from a set of questions about specific, objective areas of understanding that can be developed into a scale measuring knowledge of specific key topics. The seminary undoubtedly has a list of such questions that could be put into a rotation. Standardized testing is often unpopular and has serious limitations, but SPE is unlikely to be able to demonstrate concrete educational results without some such tests.

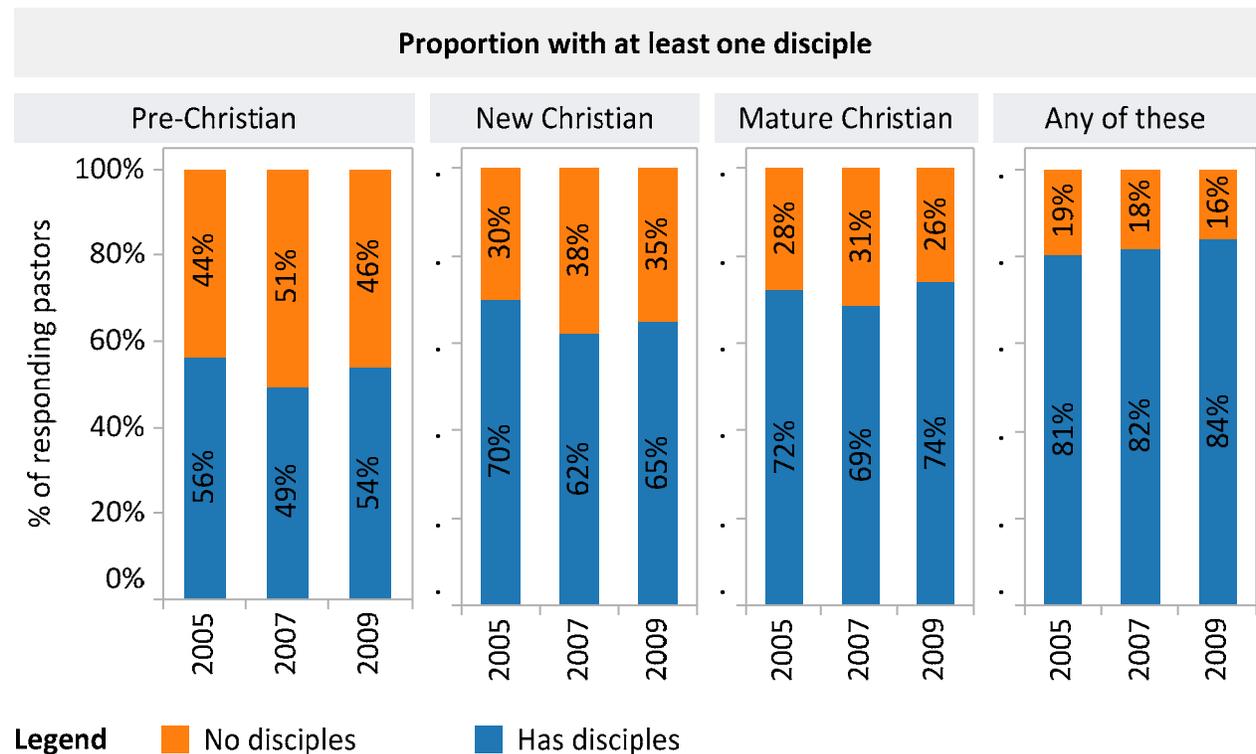
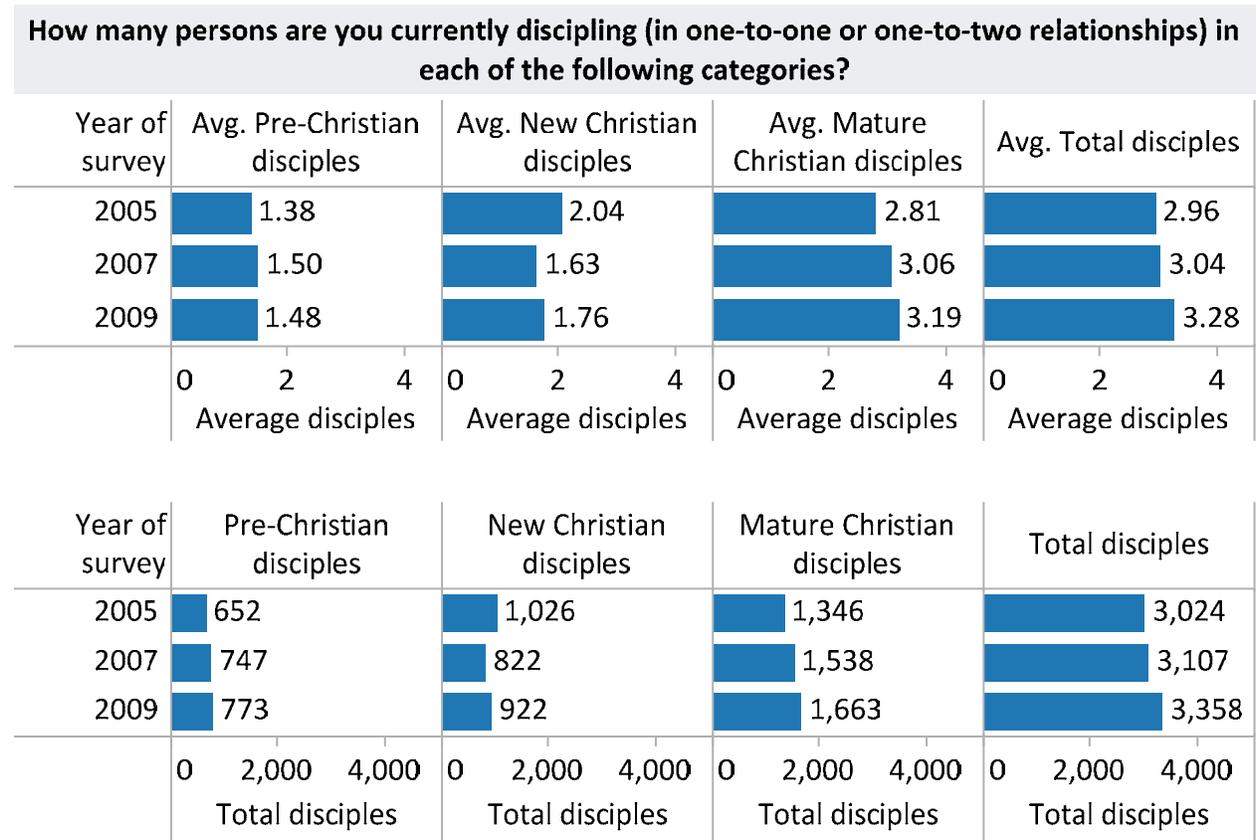
Discipling

As in previous years, pastors were asked, “how many persons are you currently discipling (in one-to-one or one-to-two relationships) in each of the following categories?” The categories offered were “Pre-Christian,” “new Christian,” and “mature Christian.” The top pane of **Figure 15** displays average disciple counts by year; in 2009, the average responding pastor reported 1.48 pre-Christian disciples, 1.76 new Christian disciples and 3.19 mature Christian disciples. The only statistically significant year-over-year change is the drop in new Christian disciples between 2005 and 2007; the rest of the apparent changes could simply represent random noise.

The middle pane of **Figure 15** reports totals by category and overall. The total number of disciples reported increased from 3,024 in 2005 to 3,358 in 2009, an 11 percent increase. However, most of this growth occurred in mature Christian disciples, which increased 23.5 percent, from 1,346 in 2005 to 1,663 in 2009, while pre-Christian disciples increased 18.5 percent, from 642 to 773, and new Christian disciples fell from 1,026 to 922, down 11 percent (though the 2007-2009 period shows a 12.1 percent recovery from 822 to 922). The proportion of all reported disciples who were mature Christians rose from 44.5 percent in 2005 (1,346 out of 3,024 total) to 49.5 percent in 2009 (1,663 out of 3,358).

The bottom panes of **Figure 15** show the percentage of pastors who reported at least one disciple in each category. In 2009, 46 percent reported no pre-Christian disciples, 35 percent reported no new Christian disciples, 26 percent reported no mature Christian disciples, and 16 percent reported no disciples in any of these three categories. None of these figures has changed in a statistically significant fashion, except the decrease from 2005 to 2007 in those with new Christian disciples, as previously noted.

Figure 15 Disciples per pastor by year



Selected comments

These two comments are from clerks of council:

“Our pastor is a tremendous reader; his library overflows. That I think is his biggest asset to great informative preaching and teaching. We are blessed!”

“We appreciate the content of the survey. It should prompt more attention to some areas where our Pastors needs are not being filled. Our concerns about impactful preaching and teaching are top priorities. Any support that can be provided to guide Pastors in self assessment or 3rd party guidelines that can be used to provide effective feedback and guidance in this area are important to our Church. Thank you for this opportunity to respond.”

VII. Healthy Pastoral Identity

A pastoral identity that includes healthy self-understanding, strong relational skills, relationships with significant others that provide mentoring and accountability, and a balanced life with respect to work and non-work.

The marks of good ministry cited above are indicated in part by survey items discussed in other sections of this report. For example, “relationships with significant others” is touched on in section IV in the discussion of spiritual formation, and in section IX on pastoral growth orientation, where participation in peer-learning and mentoring are discussed. In this section, we focus on some useful proxies for healthy self-understanding and balanced life, looking at satisfaction with present pastorate, frequency of feeling isolated, sense of fit with congregation, career contentment, and new items on life balance. We also consider reported support from spouses. Finally, we create statistical scales from these items to use in evaluating the overall health of responding pastors.

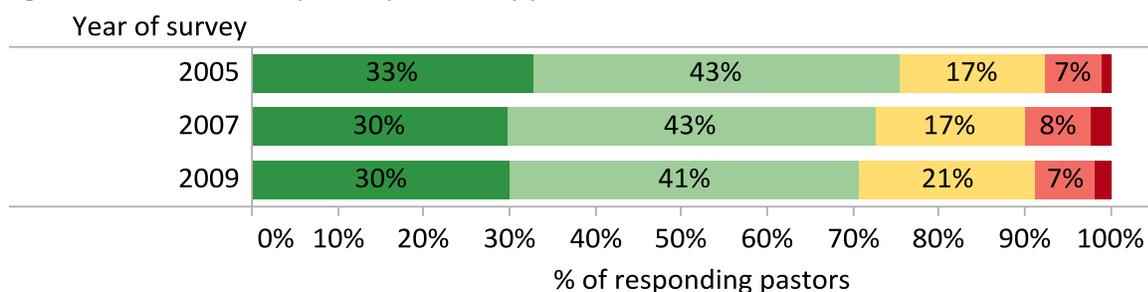
Satisfaction with present pastorate

Satisfaction (or contentment) is an important aspect of self-understanding. It has its limitations: a pastor may be satisfied with his or her pastorate while having an unhealthy pastoral life, and *vice versa*. Dissatisfaction can be healthy at times, if it leads to the pursuit of improvement.

Nevertheless, self-reported satisfaction can provide some insight into pastors’ sense of belonging and calling in their current roles.

Pastors were asked, “What is your level of satisfaction with your present pastorate?” Answer options ranged from “1 very satisfied” to “5 not satisfied.” **Figure 16** reveals that satisfaction has declined somewhat, to the point that about 3 in 10 CRC pastors rate themselves in the bottom three categories. However, the decline is not statistically significant.¹⁴ The proportion of pastors in the top two categories (dark and light green bars) fell from 76 percent in 2005 to 71 percent in 2009, primarily due to an increase in those putting themselves in the middling “3” category.

Figure 16 Satisfaction with present pastorate by year



What is your level of satisfaction with your present pastorate?

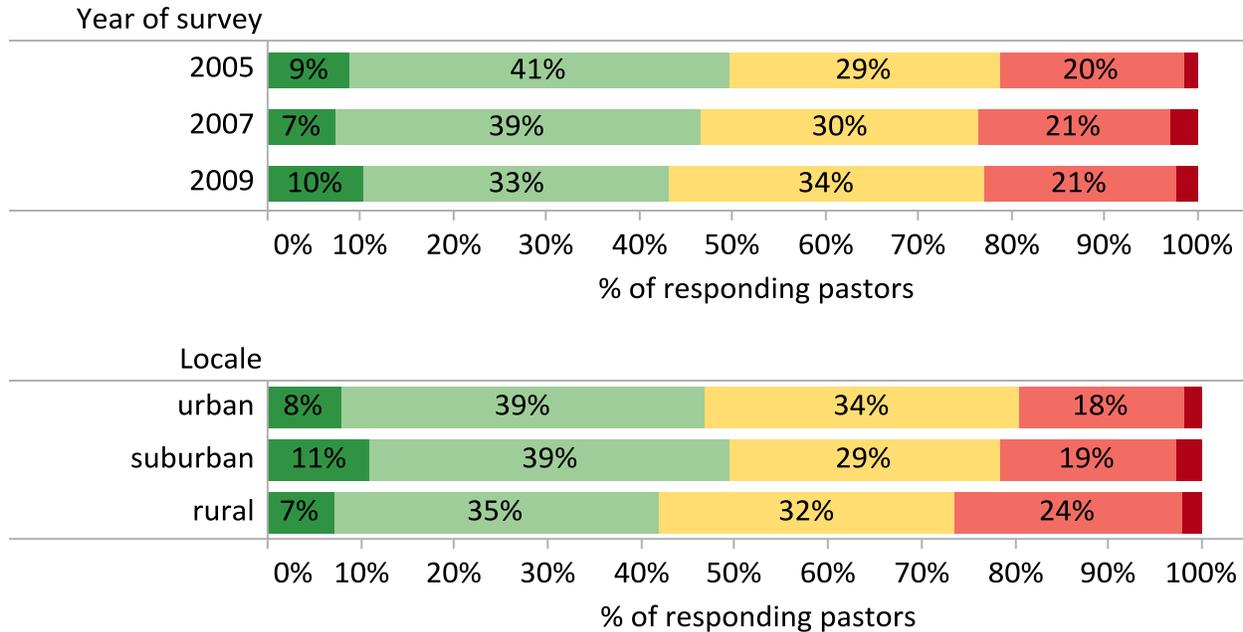
- 5 not satisfied
- 4
- 3
- 2
- 1 very satisfied

¹⁴ That is, the change is not larger than might readily occur due to random sampling error. The chi-square test for the crosstabulation is 6.47 (8 degrees of freedom; $p = 0.595$, meaning almost 60 percent of random samples across years would exhibit a difference this large).

Feelings of isolation

Pastors were asked, “How often do you feel isolated in ministry?” Answer options ranged from “1 never” to “5 always”; the top pane of **Figure 17** shows the results by year. Like the slight fall in satisfaction, there is an increase in feelings of isolation, though it is not (yet) a large enough change to be statistically significant.¹⁵ Over 1 in 5 CRC pastors report constant or very frequent feelings of isolation, and well under half say such feelings are rare or nonexistent. The proportion reporting themselves in the best two categories (dark and light green bars) fell from 50 percent in 2005 to 43 percent in 2009. Like satisfaction, the change is primarily due to an increase in those who place themselves in the middle “3” category, up from 29 percent in 2005 to 34 percent in 2009.

Figure 17 Feelings of isolation by year and locale



How often do you feel isolated in ministry?

■ 1 never ■ 2 ■ 3 ■ 4 ■ 5 always

The bottom pane of **Figure 17** shows isolation is also slightly correlated with location; the difference is almost statistically significant by conventional criteria.¹⁶ Self-described suburban pastors were the most likely to place themselves in the top two categories; the dark and light green bars total to 50 percent (11 “1 never” plus 39 “2”). Just 42 percent of rural pastors put themselves in the top two categories (7 “1 never” plus 35 “2”), and 26 percent put themselves in the bottom two (2 percent “5 always” and 24 percent “4”). Urban pastors were the least likely to put themselves in the bottom two categories, with just 19 percent total “always” or almost always feeling isolated.

Perceived fit with congregation

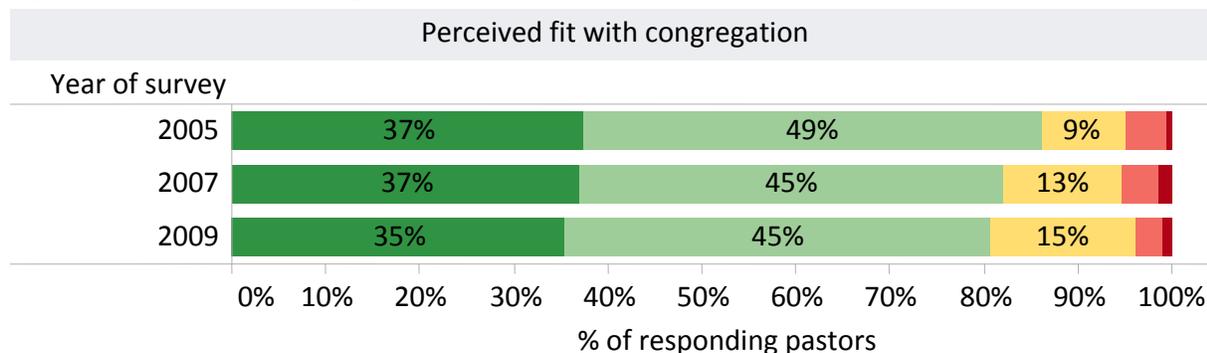
Pastors were asked, “How would you rate your level of fit with your congregation?” Answer options ranged from “1 excellent” to “5 poor.” The top pane of **Figure 18** shows that, like the previous two measures, this indicator is falling. The change nears but does not reach conventional statistical

¹⁵ The chi-square for the crosstabulation is 12.50 ($p = 0.130$; 8 degrees of freedom).

¹⁶ Chi-square (8 degrees of freedom) is 15.28 ($p = 0.054$, where 0.05 is the usual threshold for significance)

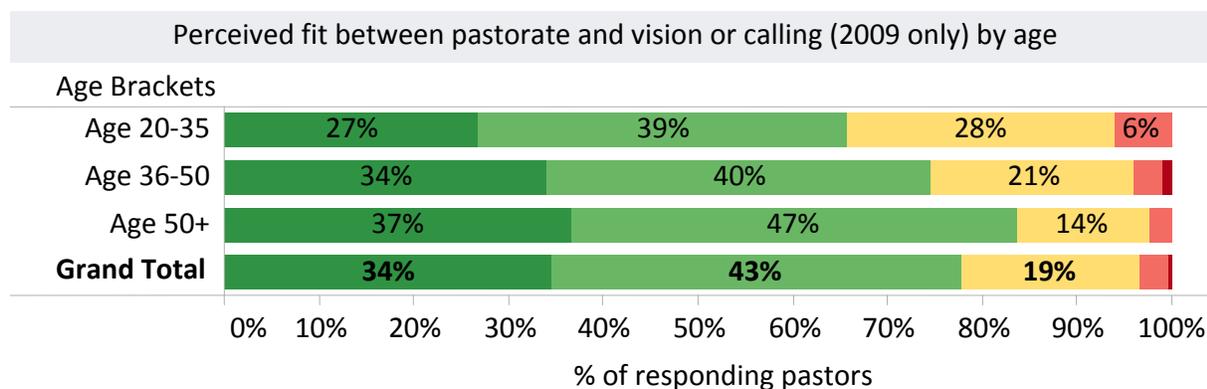
significance.¹⁷ The proportion in the top two categories (dark and light green bars) fell from about 86 percent in 2005 to about 80 percent in 2009. As in other cases, the change reflects an increase in the middle “3” category. About 1 in 5 CRC pastors does not feel a strong sense of fit with their congregations, up from about 1 in 7 in 2005.

Figure 18 Perceived fit with congregation by year



How would you rate your level of fit with your congregation?

■ 1 excellent ■ 2 ■ 3 ■ 4 ■ 5 poor



How would you rate the level of fit between your pastorate and your personal sense of calling and vision for ministry?

■ 1 excellent ■ 2 ■ 3 ■ 4 ■ 5 poor

The bottom pane of **Figure 18** displays results for a new question introduced in 2009, which asked “How would you rate the level of fit between your pastorate and your personal sense of calling and vision for ministry?” Overall (in the “Grand Total” row), 34 percent said “1 excellent” and another 43 percent said “2,” for a total of 77 percent in the top two categories (dark and light green bars). The breakdown by age brackets shows that older pastors are far more likely to perceive such fit than younger pastors.¹⁸

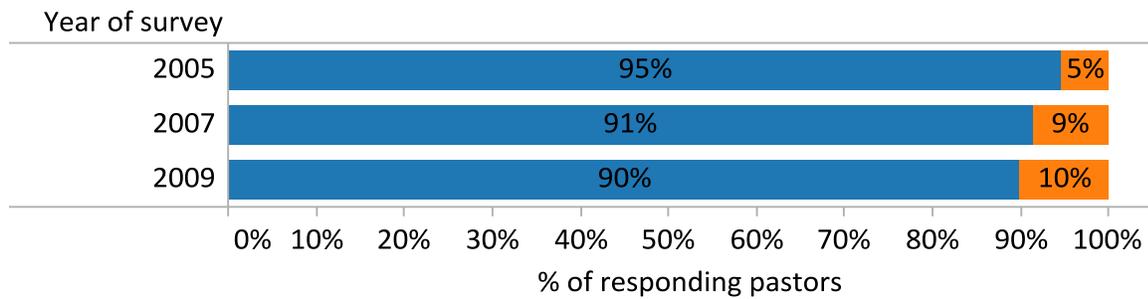
Career contentment (if you were to start over, would you still be a pastor?)

We asked pastors in all three waves, “If you were to start your career over, would you still be a pastor?” **Figure 19** shows that the number responding “No” has doubled since 2005, from 5 percent to 10 percent, a very statistically significant change.

¹⁷ Chi-square (8 degrees of freedom) is 14.45 ($p = 0.071$)

¹⁸ The difference is statistically significant (chi-square [8] 15.50, $p = 0.050$)

Figure 19 Hypothetical new career choice (“if you started over, would you still be a pastor?”) by year



If you were to start your career over, would you be a pastor?

- No
- Yes

On its face, the increase in “no” responses is an ominous warning sign and deserves some concern. However, the change may also reflect relatively benign changes, such as an increasing receptivity among pastors to the validity of alternate career paths, including other ministry roles. It may not be driven by discontent with being a pastor or a decreasing sense of pastoral vocation. Pastors who said they were dissatisfied with their present pastorate (see **Figure 16** on page 29) were more likely than others to answer “no,” but a majority of dissatisfied pastors still say “yes,” they would be a pastor again. Further, the increase we observe in “no” answers is not associated with a corresponding increase in dissatisfaction. A multivariate analysis (not shown in detail to save space) shows that the over-time increase in pastors who say they would not start again is not explained by corresponding over-time changes in satisfaction, congregational fit, age or generational differences, or route to ministry (Calvin Theological Seminary or other).

Life balance

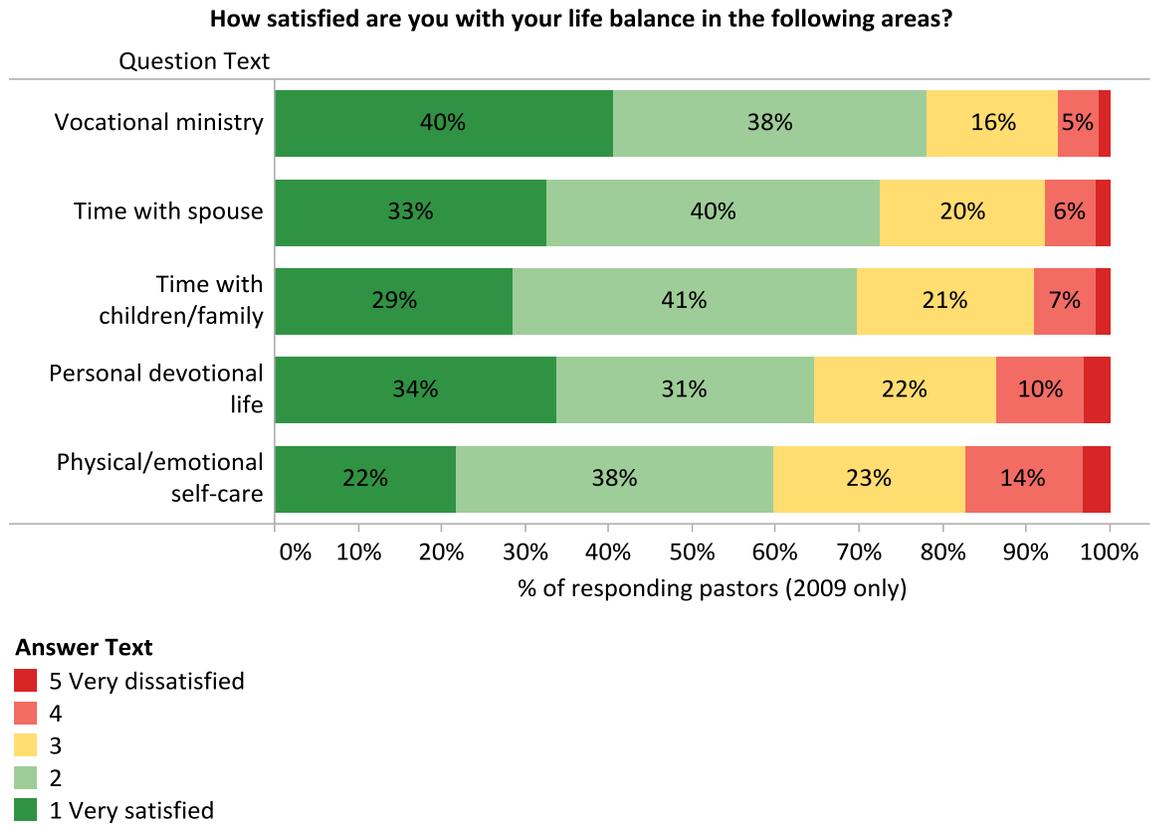
In 2009, the survey questionnaire added five items about life balance, reading “How satisfied are you with your life balance in the following areas:” Five areas were presented: “Vocational ministry”; “Personal devotional life”; “Time with spouse”; “Time with children/family”; and “Physical/emotional self-care.” Answers ranged from “1, Very satisfied” to “5, Very dissatisfied.”

Figure 20 below displays the frequencies of response to each of these items, sorted in descending order of average satisfaction. Pastors appear to be most satisfied with their life balance in areas in which others observe and interact with that balance and least satisfied in the personal and interior matters of devotional life and self-care. On average, pastors were most satisfied with their life balance in the area of “vocational ministry” (40 percent “very satisfied”) and least satisfied in terms of “physical/emotional self-care” (22 percent “very satisfied.”)^{19 20}

¹⁹ Note that 4 percent said time with spouse was “not applicable” and 11 percent said time with children was “not applicable;” 2 percent or less answered “not applicable” to the other three items. These “not applicable” cases are excluded from the figure.

²⁰ Clerks of council also gave their evaluations of these life balance items; that data is discussed in Section X beginning on page 53 and displayed in **Figure 35**.

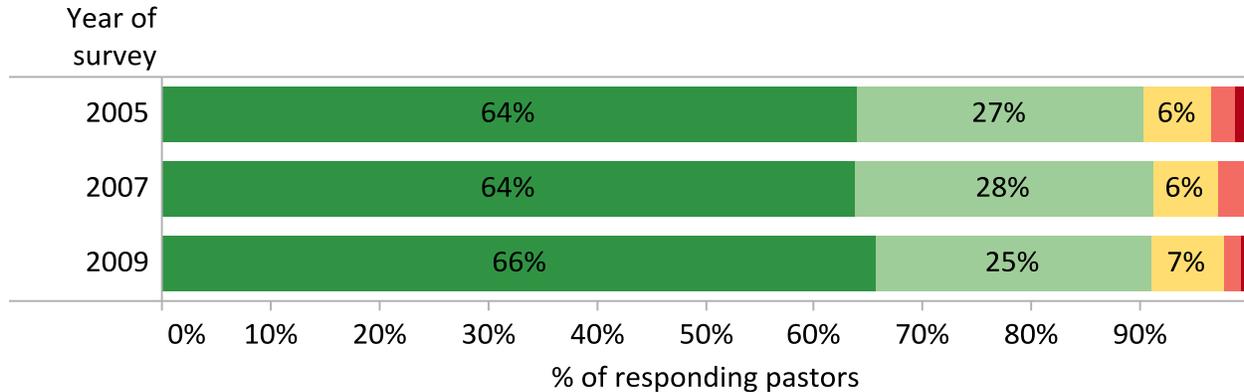
Figure 20 Pastoral responses to life balance items (new in 2009)



Spousal support

In all three waves, pastors have been asked, “how supportive is your spouse of your pastoral vocation?” Answer options were “1 very supportive,” “2,” “3,” “4,” and “5 not supportive.” **Figure 21** displays the results, which are very stable year-over-year. There was a slight uptick in the percentage of pastors replying, “very supportive,” up from 64 percent in 2005 and 2007 to 66 percent in 2009. However, the change does not come close to statistical significance. About 9 percent of pastors consistently report lukewarm or less spousal support (“3” to “5 not supportive,” the yellow and red areas in the figure.)

Figure 21 Spousal support for pastoral vocation



How supportive is your spouse of your pastoral vocation?

- 5 not supportive
- 4
- 3
- 2
- 1 very supportive

There is some churn in the spousal support data—pastors who perceive weak spousal support in one survey wave often perceive more support later. We do not yet have data that would tell us whether the change can be attributed to involvement in an SPE program for spouses. We do have strong statistical evidence (not shown here) that pastors who perceive better balance in the “time with spouse” item from **Figure 20** on the previous page also perceive more support from their spouses.

Pastoral health scales

In planning this report for 2009, SPE staff suggested a more organized focus on pastoral health. Although the original survey design did not directly plan this focus, we are able to construct some useful measures of self-reported pastoral health. One measure includes five survey items and is replicable in all three survey waves. It combines the following questions:

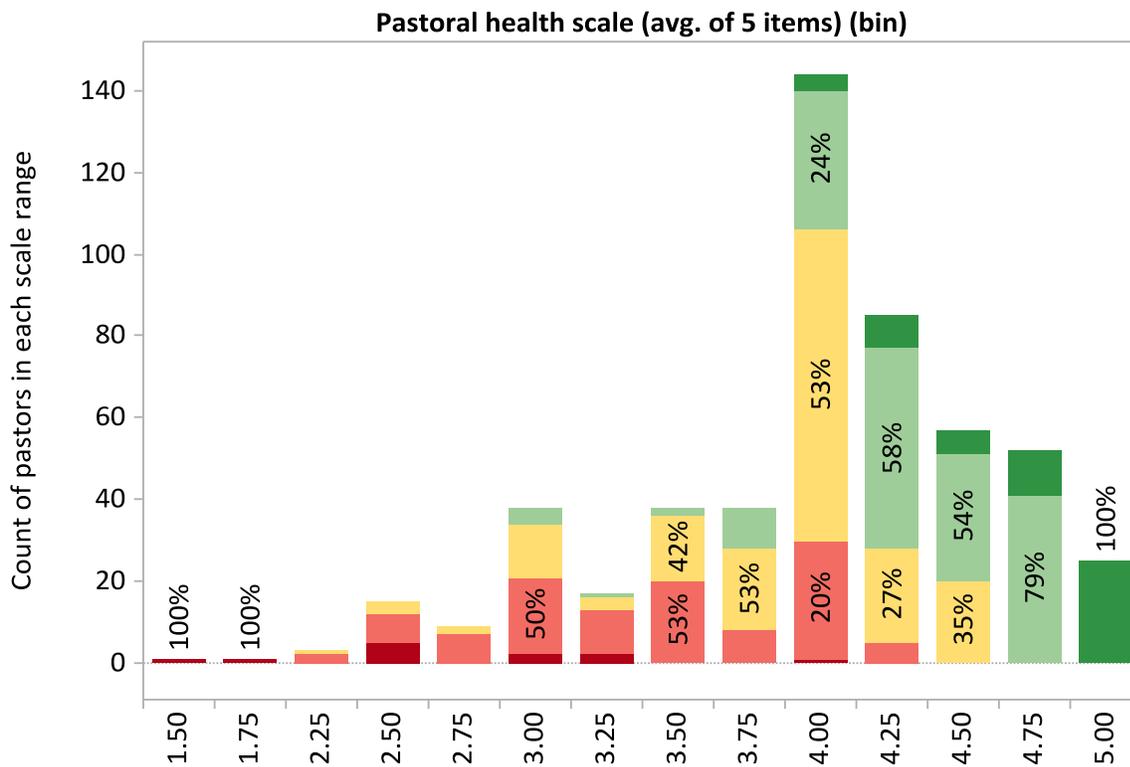
- “What is your level of satisfaction with your present pastorate?” Answers ranged from “1, very satisfied” to “5, not satisfied.”
- “How supportive is your spouse of your pastoral vocation?” Answers ranged from “1, very supportive” to “5, not supportive.” The answer scale was reversed for inclusion in the scale.
- “How often do you feel isolated in ministry?” Answers ranged from “1, never” to “5, always.”
- “How would you rate your level of fit with your congregation?” Answers ranged from “1, excellent” to “5, poor.”
- “If you were to start your career over, would you be a pastor?” Answer options were simply “yes” or “no.”

We reversed the order of each question’s answer scale for inclusion in the scale, so higher pastoral health scores reflect higher satisfaction, greater spousal support, less frequent feelings of isolation, better fit with the congregation, and greater enthusiasm for choosing a pastoral vocation.²¹

Figure 22 is a histogram showing the distribution of the 5-item pastoral health scale; responding pastors are counted in “bins” 0.25 scale units wide. The distribution is skewed toward the high end, with a significant spike around the value of 4.0. To illustrate the relationship between the health scale and its constituent items, the bars are colored by the “isolated in ministry” item. Green indicates infrequent feelings of isolation in ministry, yellow indicates moderate frequency and red in indicates frequent isolation; thus we can see that higher scores are associated with fewer feelings of isolation and lower scores with greater.

²¹ The five-item scale has a Cronbach’s alpha reliability coefficient of 0.666; this figure indicates that the scale is moderately reliable; it is somewhat but not terribly sensitive to specific items in the scale. Values of alpha greater than 0.80 are preferable, but values above 0.60 are often tolerated in survey research. We can drive the alpha up to 0.789 by including only the satisfaction and congregational fit items, but it’s also important for analysis purposes to include the additional items so that the resulting scale has many more possible values and thus much more capability to distinguish finer differences between pastors.

Figure 22 Histogram of pastoral health scale (5 items), shaded by percent feeling isolation



How often do you feel isolated in ministry?

- 1 never
- 2
- 3
- 4
- 5 always

For 2009 responses only (and perhaps for future surveys), we constructed a **second, much richer pastoral health scale** that draws on four of the five items above²² and adds eight additional items:

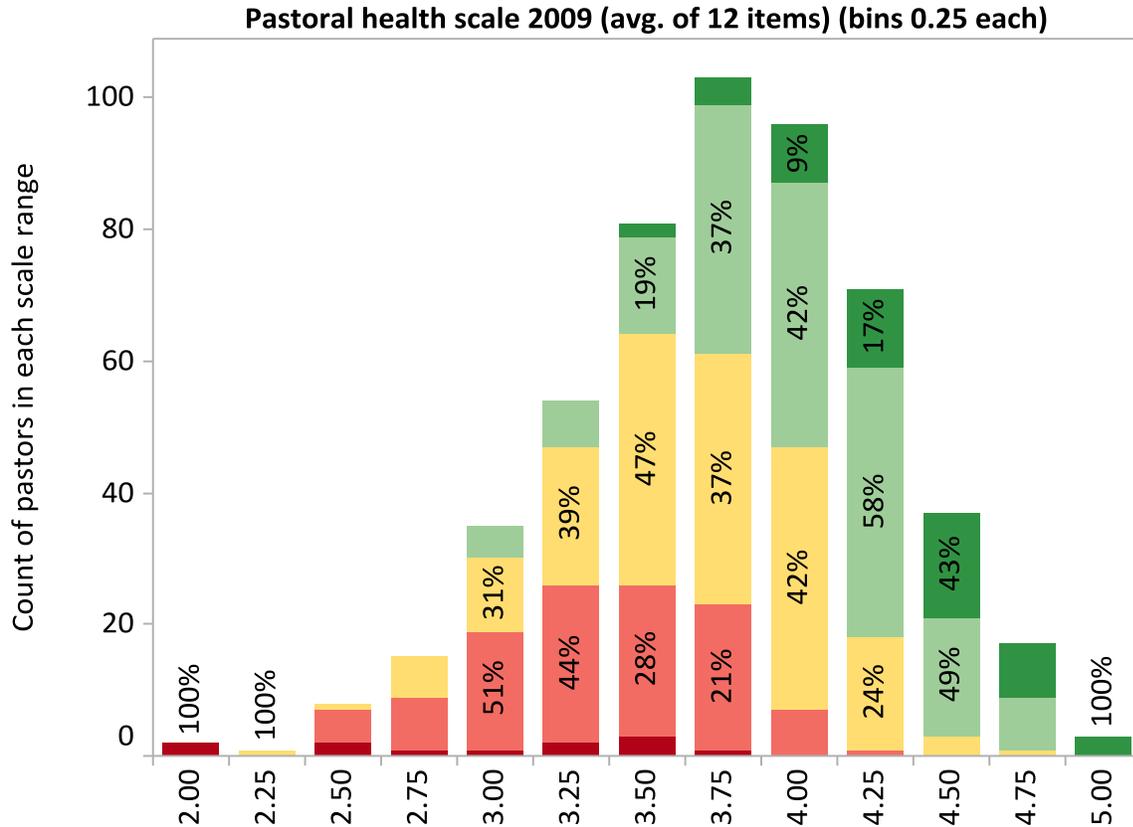
- “How well do you embrace and advance your congregation’s mission and vision through your preaching, teaching and personal life?” Answer options ranged from “1, very well” to “5, poorly.”
- “How would you evaluate your understanding of the Reformed Christian faith?” Answer options ranged from “1, thorough” to “5, weak.”
- The five life-balance items presented in **Figure 20** on page 33.
- A final new item in 2009: “How would you rate the level of fit between your pastorate and your personal sense of calling and vision for ministry?” Answer options ranged from “1, excellent” to “5, poor.”

The resulting fuller 2009 pastoral health scale ranges over possible values from 1 to 5, but the actual scores range from a low of 1.89 to a high of 4.67.²³ **Figure 23** below displays a histogram of

²² The item “If you could start your career over, would you still be a pastor?” was dropped because it decreases the reliability of the larger scale.

the 2009 version of the health scores; the range is wide and the distribution has a useful shape approximately like the normal bell curve. Each column (vertical bar) shows the count of pastors in each two-tenth-wide range of the scale; for example, the tallest bar, with over 90 pastors in it, is near the middle of the graph with middling health scores between 3.25 and 3.50.

Figure 23 Histogram of 12-item pastoral health scale (2009 only), shaded by percent feeling isolation



How often do you feel isolated in ministry?

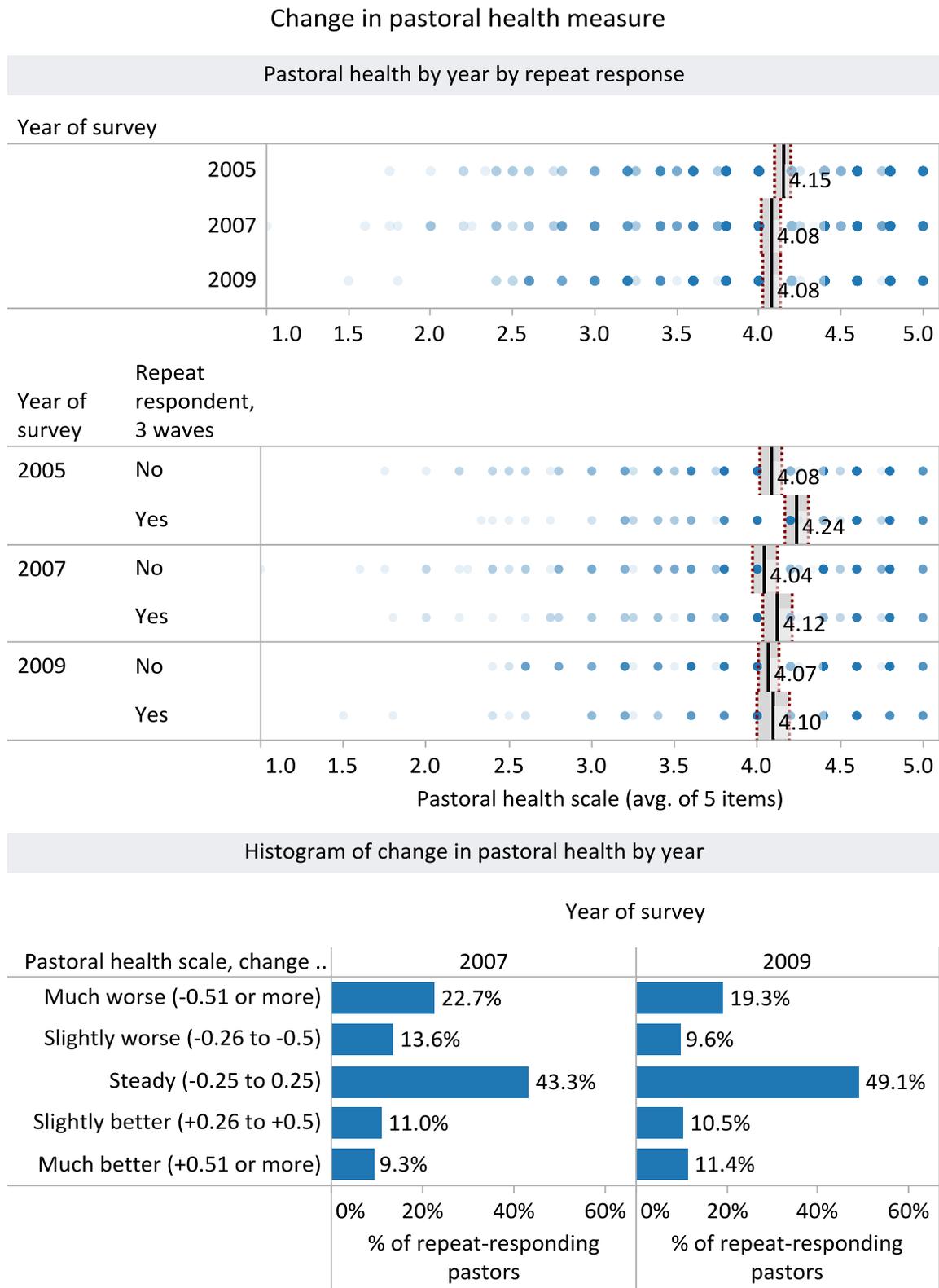
- 1 never
- 2
- 3
- 4
- 5 always

Over-time change in pastoral health

The 5-item pastoral health measure has declined very slightly over 4 years, from an average of 4.15 in 2005 to an average of 4.08 in both 2007 and 2009, as shown in the top pane of **Figure 24**.

²³ The 2009 version of the scale has a Cronbach’s alpha of 0.812, indicating high reliability (that is, the scale does not depend heavily on any one survey item for its value).

Figure 24 Change in pastoral health measures by year and repeat response



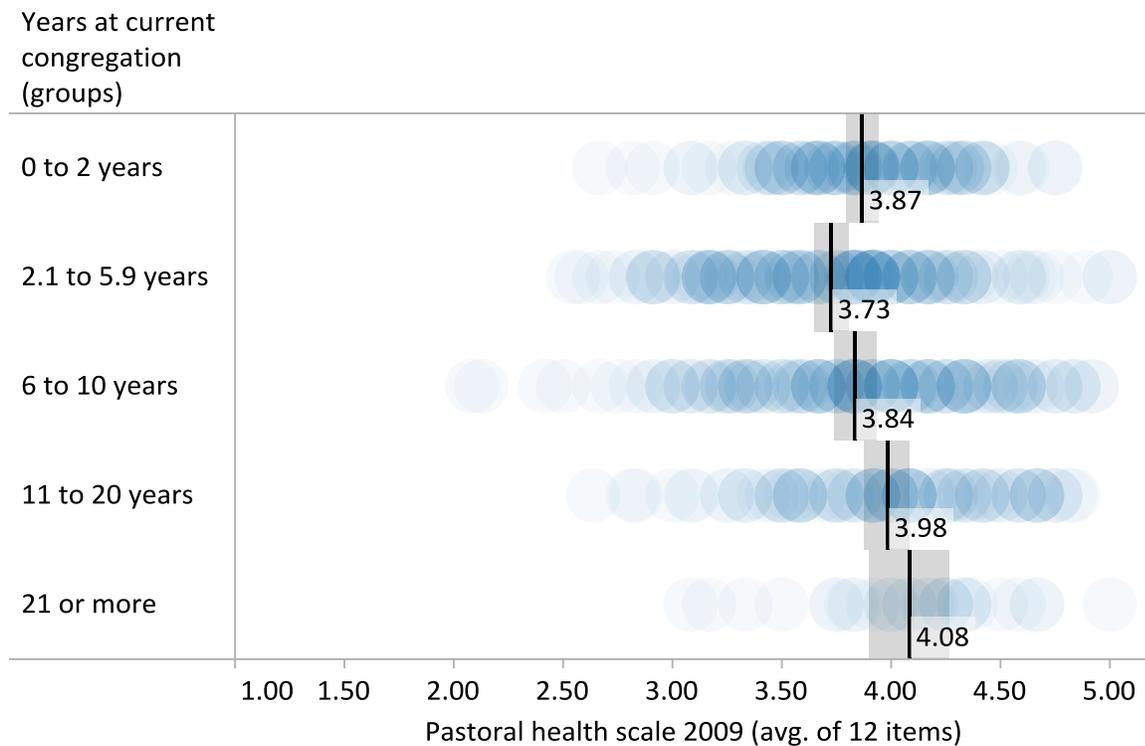
The middle pane of **Figure 24** shows that the group of respondents in 2005 who would eventually respond in all 3 waves are entirely responsible for the change—they were significantly more sanguine in 2005 (average 4.24) than their peers who did not respond in all three waves (average 4.08).²⁴ Non-repeat respondents have been very stable, while repeat respondents have “regressed to the mean.” The pattern suggests a tentative interpretation that the repeat respondents may have begun with an enthusiasm for being surveyed that unconsciously biased their answers upward in the first year, after which the survey has become more humdrum and the bias has melted away.

The bottom pane of **Figure 24** reveals that substantial individual-level change lies behind the aggregate stability of the top two panes; in 2007, 22.7 percent of respondents decreased their scores by 0.51 or more, while just 9.3 percent increased them by a similar amount. The balance was more favorable in 2009, with 19.3 percent decreasing by large amounts and 11.4 percent increasing. These numbers illustrate the individual-level change behind the aggregate change we see in the middle pane, where chronic respondents’ group averages declined while the rest of the sample was fairly stable.

Pastoral tenure and over-time change in pastoral health

Pastoral tenure at the current congregation is an important factor related to the pastoral health scale. There is an interesting non-linear pattern to this scale, as shown in **Figure 25** (dotted red lines show the limits of confidence intervals). Pastors with less than 2 years’ experience in their current congregations report higher average health (3.87 on a scale from 1 to 5) than those with 2.1 to 5.9 years (3.73), though the difference is not statistically significant (the confidence intervals overlap). Pastors with 11 years or more in their current congregations report significantly healthier scores (3.98 and 4.08) than those with 2.1 to 5.9 years (the confidence intervals do not overlap).

Figure 25 Pastoral health 12-item scale (2009 only) by tenure (years at current congregation)



²⁴ The difference is statistically significant only in 2005, as can be seen by the non-overlapping confidence intervals (shaded areas with red dotted-line boundaries).

We will seek a deeper explanation of individual-level changes in pastoral health in section XI below.

Selected comments

Just knowing that SPE is there is a positive. It shows awareness that pastors need support and need to be invested in so they in turn can invest in congregation members.

The question about "If you had to start over, would you be a pastor?" was a big one; thanks for asking it. I almost said No, but I ended up saying Yes. I love preaching, teaching, discipling, evangelizing, giving pastoral care to those in need ... in short, I LOVE gospel ministry, and I truly think there is no better calling/job in the world. And my 'fit' with my congregation would be classified as a good one."

"I grew a lot in my identity through the mentor relationship I had during seminary. I was disappointed when I arrived in this classis and there was no formal mentor program. The denomination recommends, or requires, that new pastors have a mentor for the first five years in ministry. I was basically told to find my own. I would have preferred a little more help from classis in finding one. Maybe this shows a lack of mentor relationships in the classis as a whole.

VIII. Pastoral Leadership

An intelligent appreciation for the congregation as a social system that requires creative and patient leadership in the face of anxieties and conflicts.

Leadership skills

In all three waves of the survey, pastors were asked to rate themselves on 11 leadership skills. As shown in **Figure 26**, year over year changes were small but generally tended toward slight declines over time. The questions are sorted from most highly rated to least. For example, at the top of the figure we see that pastors have consistently been most likely to express a sense of competence in the area of “listening and encouraging,” but the percent calling themselves “very competent” fell from 45 percent in 2005 to 38 percent in 2009. This difference is not statistically significant; the only statistically significant year-over-year change is the one-year spike in 2007 in slightly better ratings of “priority setting.”²⁵ “Communication” and “Maintaining a non-anxious presence” are second and third, respectively.

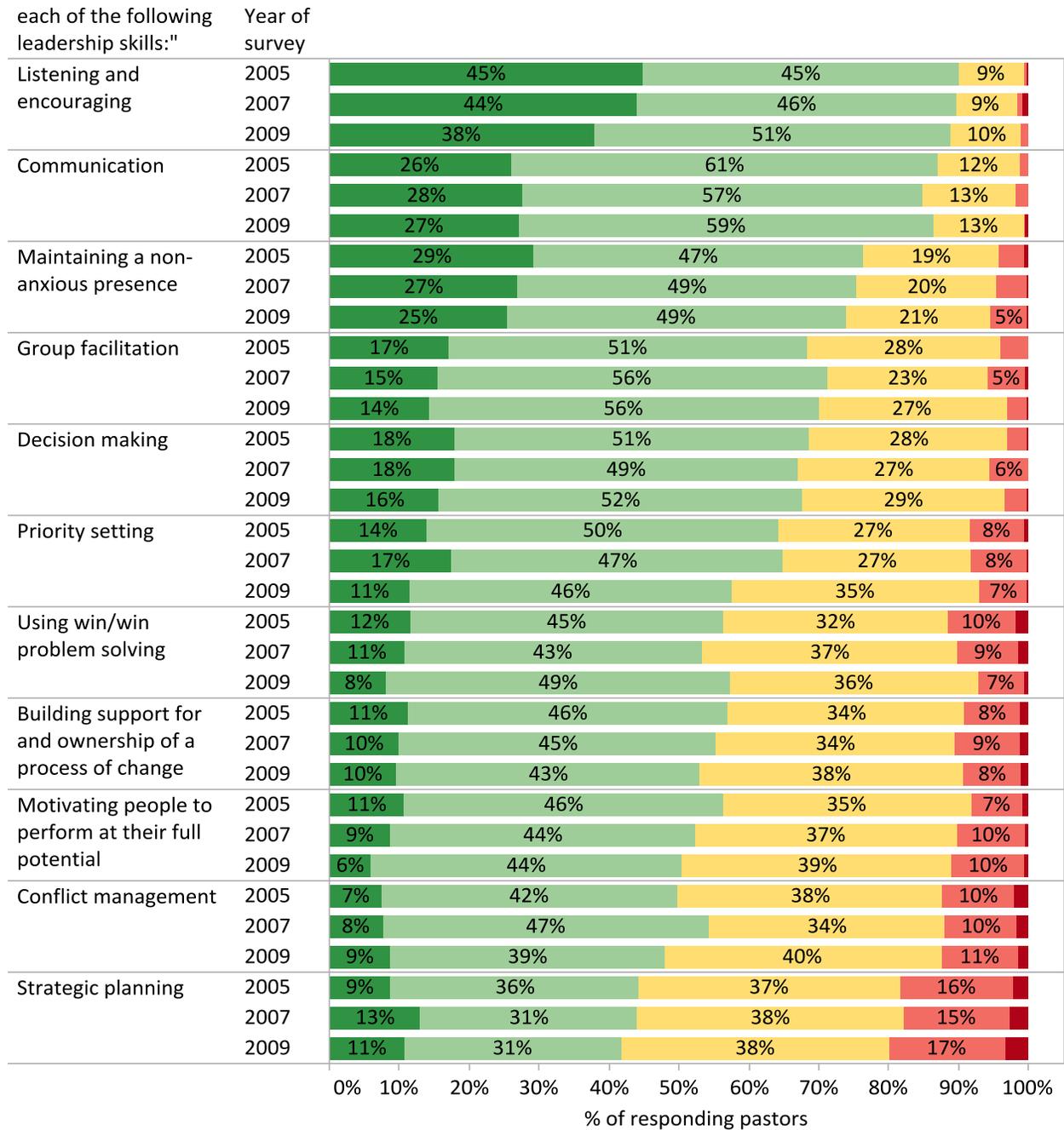
At the bottom of the figure we see that pastors have been least likely to perceive “strategic planning” competence in themselves; these numbers show relatively small changes year-over-year. “Conflict management” is next to last, followed closely by “Motivating people to perform at their full potential.”

Results for the smaller group of respondents to all three waves are virtually identical to **Figure 26**, so we do not reproduce those figures here. However, there is significant individual-level change in these items, as we will examine under the next heading.

²⁵ The chi-square with 8 degrees of freedom is 16.9, $p = 0.031$.

Figure 26 Leadership skill ratings (11 items) by year

Question Text:
 "Please rate your level of ability in relation to each of the following leadership skills:"



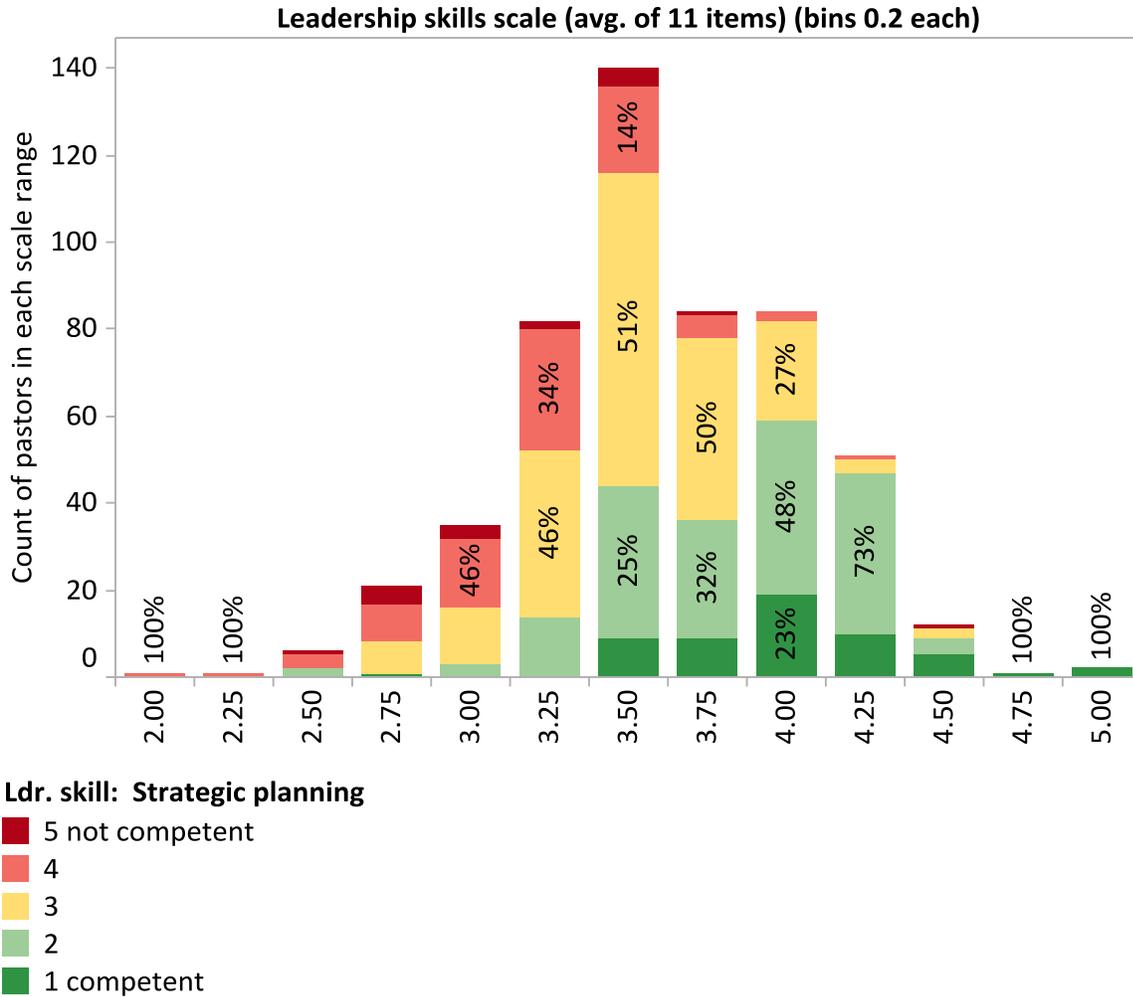
Response

- 5 not competent
- 4
- 3
- 2
- 1 very competent

Leadership skills scale

To facilitate further analysis of over-time change, we created an 11-item scale from the average of these leadership items.²⁶ **Figure 27** is a histogram showing the nearly bell-shaped distribution of these scales, with most respondents scoring in the middle of the range and very few giving themselves the high, omni-competent score of 5.0 or the low, relatively incompetent score of 2.0. As with other scale histograms in this report, we’ve shaded the histogram by the item with the most variation, here “strategic planning,” so it’s clear that high scores on one item are strongly correlated with high scores overall.

Figure 27 Histogram of leadership skills scale, shaded by strategic planning competence

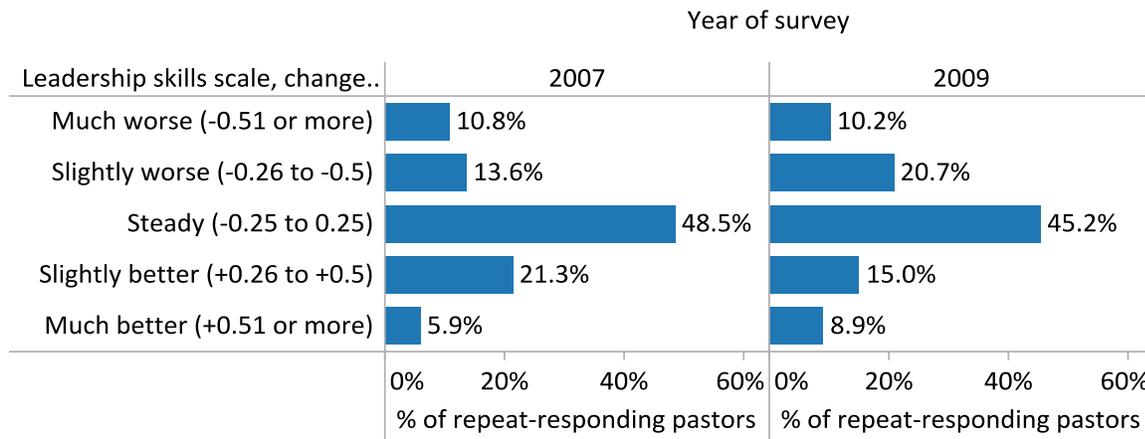


Like pastoral health, this scale exhibits aggregate stability despite significant individual-level volatility. The average respondent declined by about 0.025 points per survey wave between 2005 and 2009, a statistically insignificant net loss of 0.05 points (or just 1.25 percent of the scale range from 1 to 5).

²⁶ Cronbach’s alpha is 0.81, indicating good reliability.

But some individuals made significant gains or endured significant losses. **Figure 28** displays these changes: in 2007, 10.8 percent of repeat respondents had substantially lower scores, while 5.9 percent improved substantially; in 2009, the comparable numbers were 10.2 percent and 8.9 percent. In 2009, pastors whose scores decreased outnumbered those who made gains, 31.1 percent versus 23.9 percent.

Figure 28 Change in leadership skills scale by year



Selected comments

“My leadership style is visionary, but only in the sense that I describe what possible scenarios will come from a decision, it is adaptive in the sense that I try to know who I’m leading, where God is calling them, how fast can they go, what are their hang-ups, etc. and then adapt my leadership to fit”.

“I have learned much about my role as a pastor being involved with S.P.E. I really appreciate the opportunity I had to spend a year reflecting and learning about my personal style of leadership.”

“I am very pleased with the leadership our Pastor provides through her commitment [and being led by the Spirit] in all areas of life.”

IX. Pastoral Growth Orientation

A commitment to life-long learning, including personal, spiritual, intellectual, and professional growth and development.

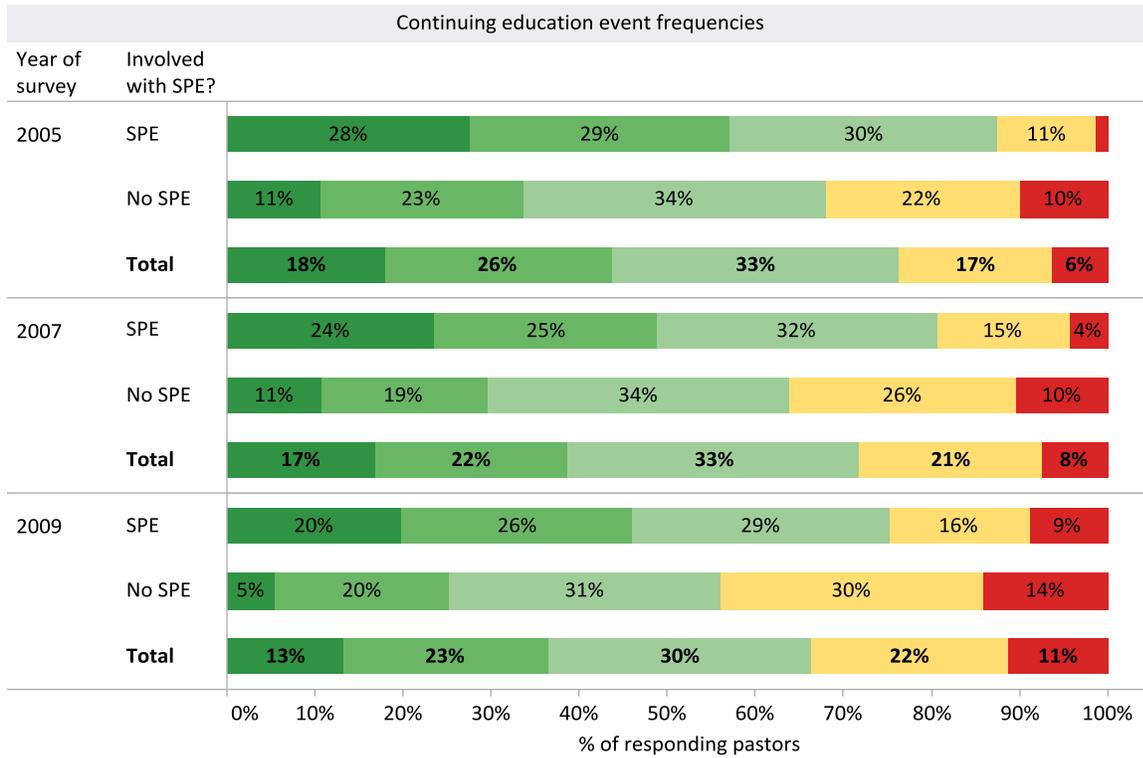
Continuing education

Pastors were asked, “How many continuing education events have you attended in the last year?” Answer options ranged from “None” to “More than six.” As shown the Total rows for each year in the top pane of **Figure 29**, this measure has declined somewhat, with 11 percent reporting “None” in 2009, up from 6 percent in 2005 (red bars). Combining all the green bars, we see a decline from 77 percent with at least two events in 2005 to 66 percent in 2009. At the bottom of the figure, the overall means are shown; 2009’s average of 2.15 events per pastor is significantly lower than the 2005 figure of 2.43.²⁷ This decline might be largely a reflection of the economic recession, tight budgets and travel restrictions.

SPE-involved pastors have routinely reported higher rates of participation in continuing education; in 2005, 88 percent of SPE-involved pastors had two or more continuing education experiences, compared to 68 percent of non-SPE pastors. In 2009, the gap was even wider at 75 percent *versus* 56 percent. SPE participants reported an average of 2.48 events in 2009, compared to 1.77 for non-SPE participants. These figures both fell from highs of 2.87 and 2.10, respectively, in 2005.

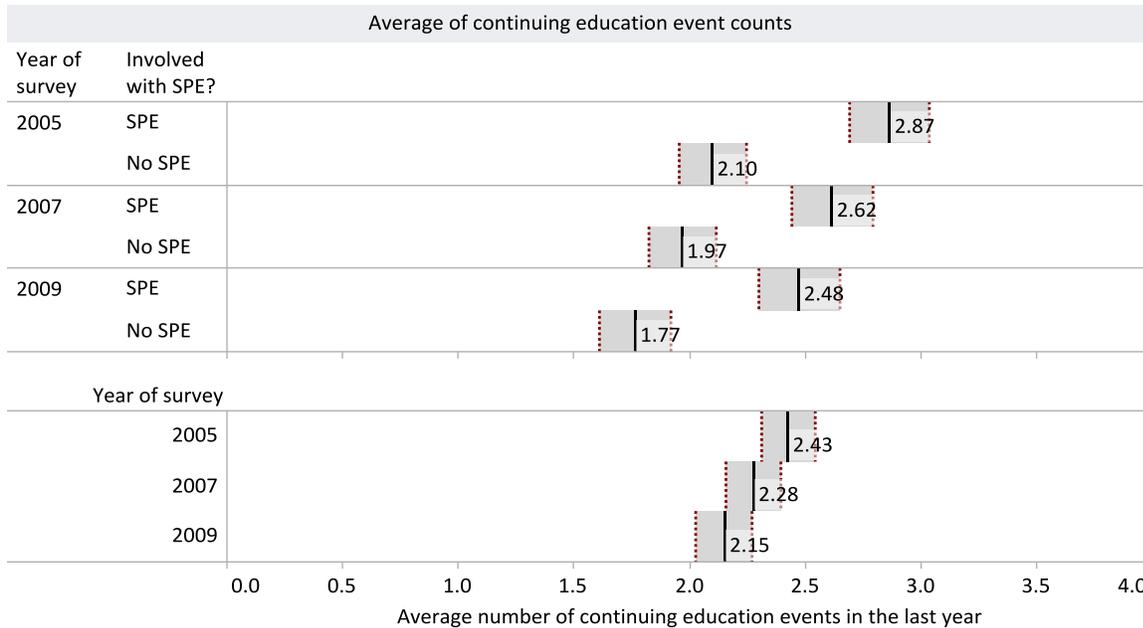
²⁷ The difference is statistically significant, as shown by the 95 percent confidence intervals that just quite don’t overlap ($p = 0.0013$).

Figure 29 Continuing educations events reported in past year



Continuing education events in last year

■ 4 or more ■ Three ■ Two ■ One ■ None



Peer learning groups

In all three years of the survey, pastors were asked whether they were then part of a peer learning group, and if so, how frequently the group met. The top pane of **Figure 30** displays pastors' reported peer learning group participation rates by year, divided both by SPE participation and by country; the bottom pane shows meeting frequency.

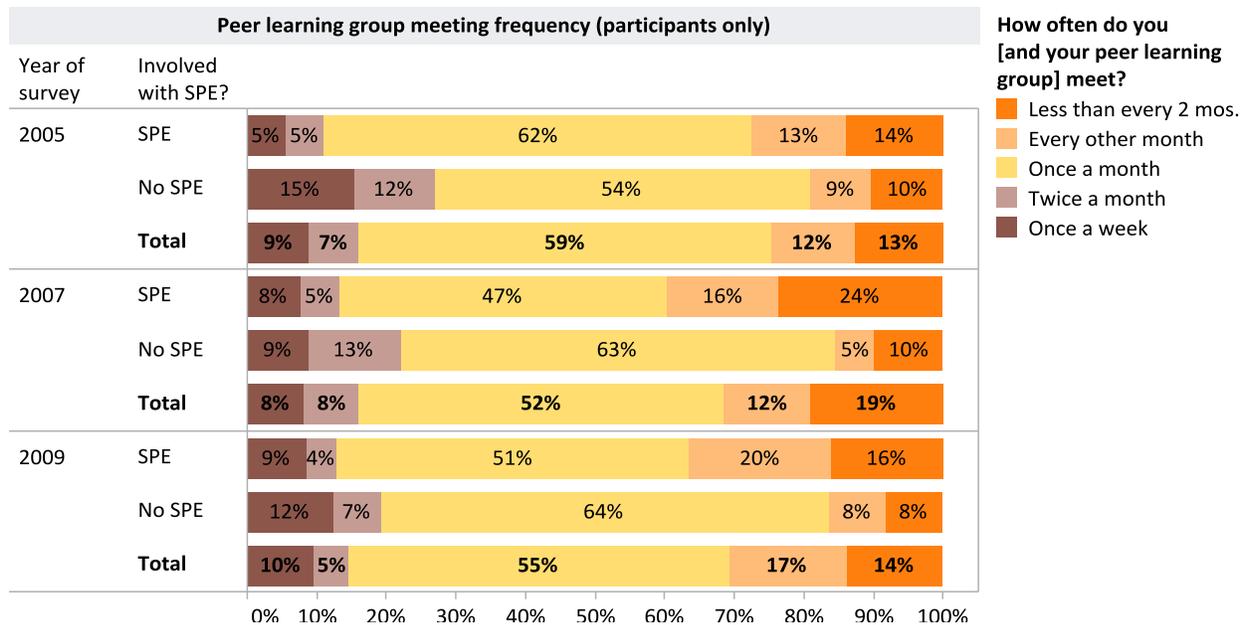
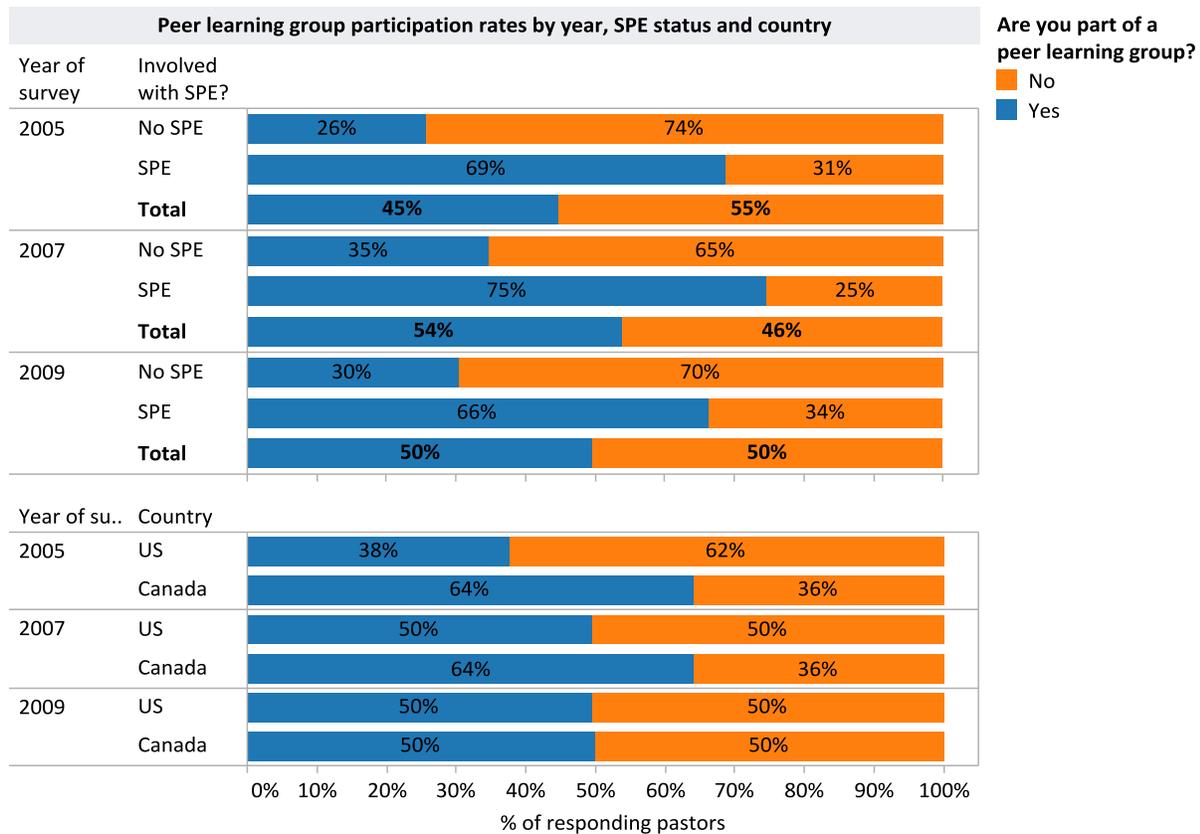
After rising sharply from 45 percent overall in 2005 to 54 percent overall in 2007—a statistically significant change—the participation rate fell back to 50 percent in 2009, a rate which is statistically neither a significant decrease from 2007 nor a significant increase from 2005. Participation rates have been 36 to 43 percent higher for SPE participants than for non-SPE participants (a logical finding, since SPE sponsors such groups). In 2009, two-thirds of SPE participants were involved in peer learning groups, as opposed to just 30 percent of non-SPE participants.

The middle section of **Figure 30** (the bottom part of the top pane) shows peer learning group participation rates by year and country. Peer learning groups have evolved from disproportionate popularity in Canada in 2005 (64 percent participation, versus 38 percent in the US) to parity in 2009, with 50 percent participation in both countries.

Peer learning participants were asked how often their group meets, with options ranging from less than every 2 months to once a week. The bottom pane of **Figure 30** shows this Meeting frequency has been statistically stable across all three years; in 2009, just 10 percent reported meeting weekly, while the majority meet monthly (55 percent). Surprisingly, SPE participants report meeting less frequently on average than pastors with no known SPE involvement, as shown in the figure; the difference is statistically significant.

We hypothesized that this difference might be due to SPE sponsoring groups for more remote pastors who cannot meet as frequently as others, but the data do not support the hypothesis. Meeting frequencies differ by locale (analysis not shown), but rural pastors are both the most likely to meet weekly (17 percent on average over the three survey years) and the most likely to meet very infrequently (18 percent on average).

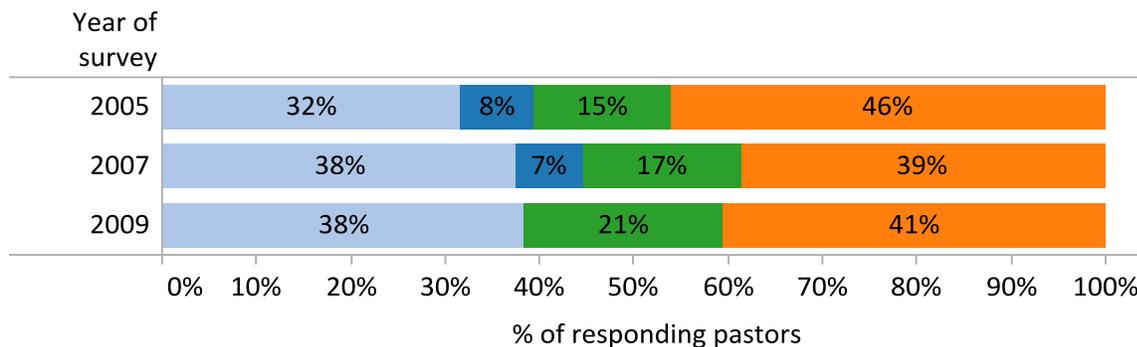
Figure 30 Peer learning group participation and meeting frequency



Mentoring relationships

Pastors were asked, “Are you in a mentor/mentee relationship?” **Figure 31** shows the responses. Paralleling the patterns in continuing education and peer learning participation, mentoring participation peaked in 2007 at 61 percent (mentor, mentee or both) and then fell back slightly in 2009 to 59 percent (mentor or mentee).

Figure 31 Mentoring participation



Note: due to a programming error, the "both" option was not included in the 2009 web survey, so the data are not strictly comparable between years.

Mentoring status

- Neither
- Mentee
- Both
- Mentor

Selected comments

“I have realized more and more over the years how important it is to me (and perhaps other pastors as well) to have strong lay leadership working with me. I have gifts for ministry, but I cannot get anywhere without the corresponding gifts of elders, deacons, and ministry leaders. I have found that rather than trying to develop my skills in a wide range of areas, I need to learn what to leave alone and trust to the gifts of others, while at the same time challenging, encouraging and calling them to ministry.”

“The peer learning group has been the most important part of my life in terms of accountability, growth, and joy as a pastor.”

X. Council Feedback and Support

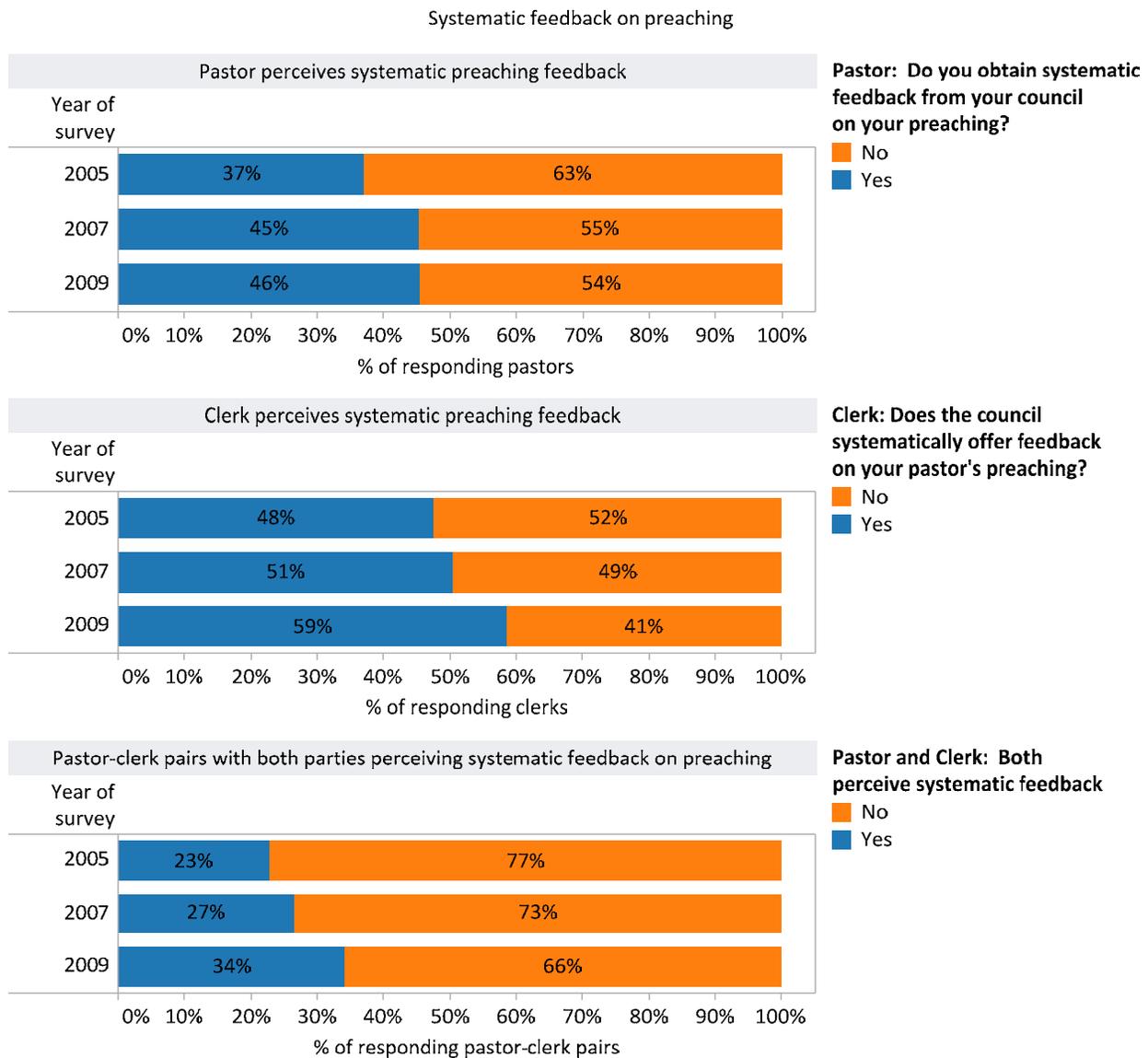
Council feedback on spiritual formation, preaching, pastoral role and function, and training/learning opportunities.

Pastor-council collaboration is an important indicator of congregational health, so the survey design has included a survey for clerks of council as well as pastors. Results continue to be mixed; there has been improvement in some measures, but we still find minorities of pastors experiencing key supports.

Systematic feedback on preaching

In all three surveys, pastors have been asked, “Do you obtain systematic feedback from your council on your preaching?”; clerks were asked a parallel question, “Does the council systematically offer feedback on your pastor’s preaching?” **Figure 32** displays the figures for pastors, clerks, and pastor-clerk pairs:

Figure 32 Systematic feedback on preaching

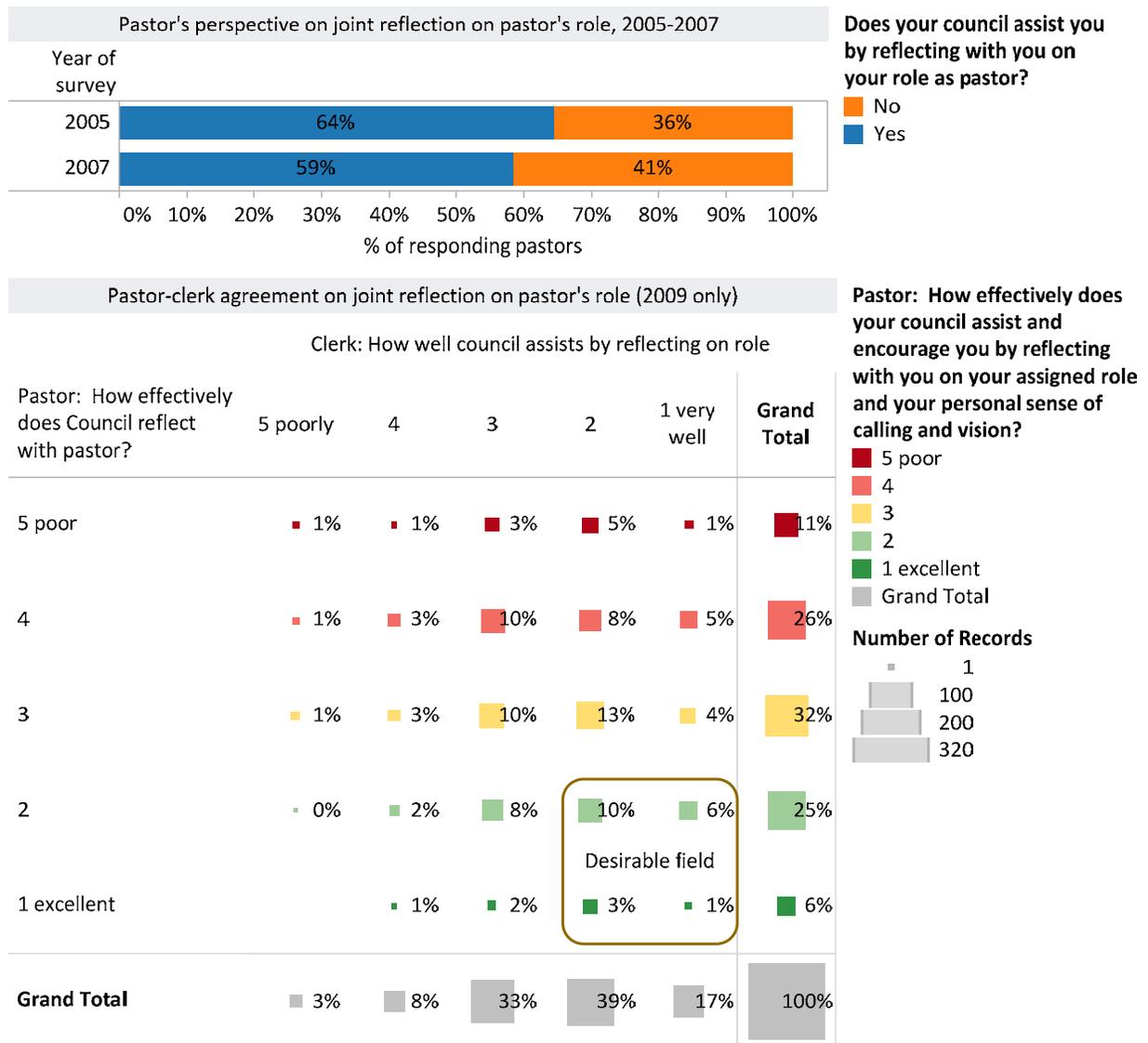


Pastors held steady between 2007 and 2009, a little less than half reporting systematic feedback (46 percent in 2009); however, clerk reports surged by 8 points, increasing to 59 percent in 2009. The result is a marked increase in the number of pastor-clerk pairs both agreeing that feedback is systematic, reaching about a third (34 percent) in 2009. There is a long way to go before this practice is widespread, however.

Joint reflection on the pastoral role

Previous surveys simply asked pastors, “Does your council assist you by reflecting with you on your role as pastor?” and a parallel question for clerks. The 2009 questionnaire introduced new questions for both parties. Pastors were asked, “How effectively does your council assist and encourage you by reflecting with you on your assigned role and your personal sense of calling and vision?”; clerks were asked, “How well do you as council assist and encourage your pastor by reflecting together on his/her assigned role and personal sense of calling and vision?” **Figure 33** displays results for both old and new questions:

Figure 33 Joint pastor-council reflection on the pastor's role



Correlation coefficient $r = 0.08$, $p = 0.14$ (a statistically zero relationship)

In the top pane of the figure, we see the previous years' results, which marked a slight decline in pastors' reports of joint reflection, from 64 percent in 2005 to 59 percent in 2007. In the bottom pane, we learn that the majorities for "Yes" in the top pane masked very low opinions of the quality of the joint reflection; just 6 percent of pastors rated the effectiveness of joint reflection "1 excellent" (rightmost column in dark green row), while another 25 percent responded in the next lower "2" category. Under a third of pastors rated their councils in the top two categories. Clerks had a higher view of their councils' work, with 17 percent giving a "1 excellent" rating and another 39 percent in the next lower "2" category.

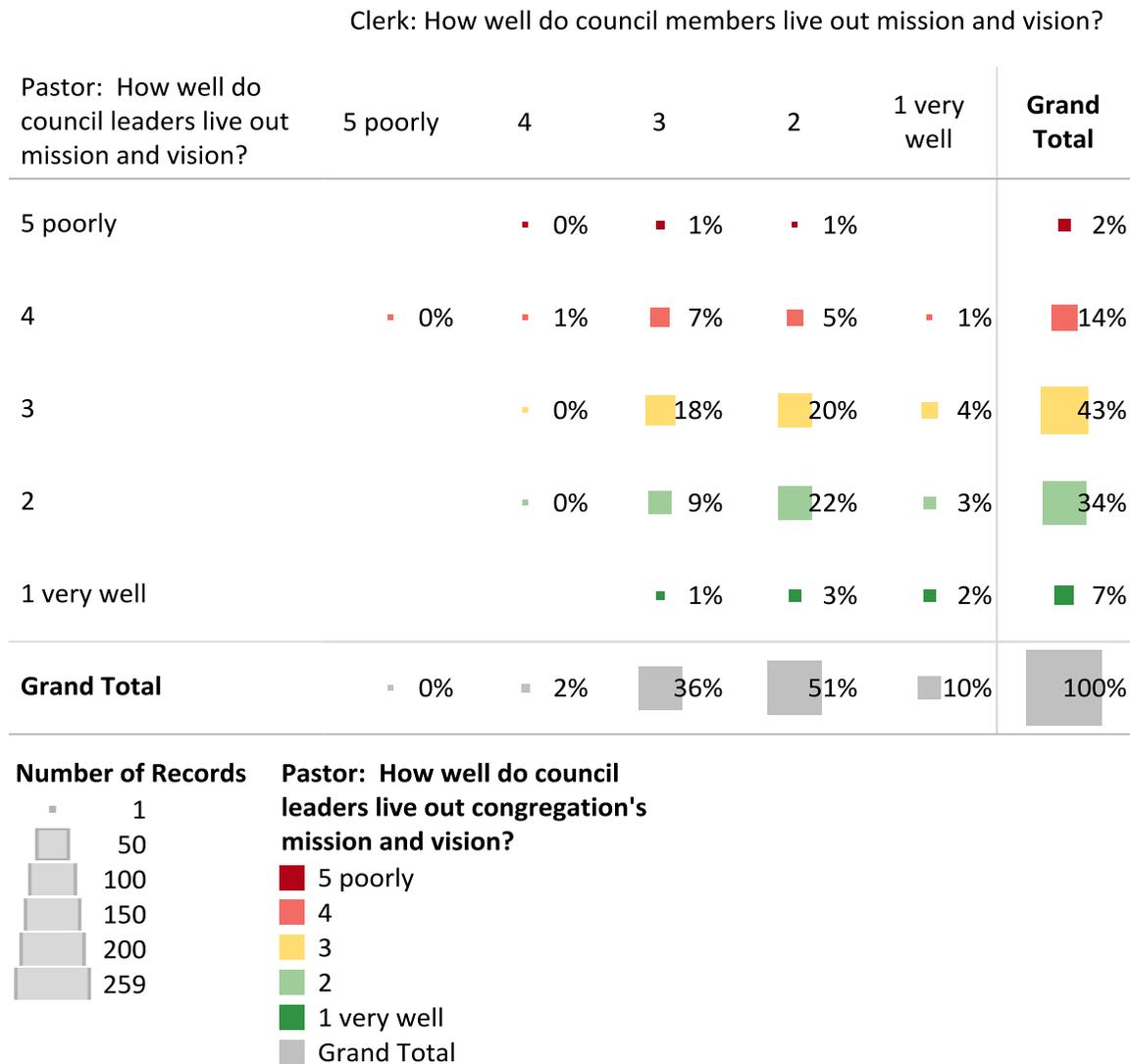
As noted in the text at the very bottom of **Figure 33** and clearly implied by the wide distribution of cases across all the cells of the bottom pane, there is statistically zero correlation between pastors and their paired clerks of council on the effectiveness of Council reflection. This lack of mutual perception is partly due to survey measurement error (we'd have a more accurate measurement with more than just one question each on the topic), but it is still a subject for concern.

Living out the mission and vision

Another new pair of questions was introduced in 2009. Pastors were asked, “How well do your council leaders live out the congregation’s mission and vision through their ministry roles and personal lives?” Clerks were asked, “How well do you as council members live out the congregation’s mission and vision through your ministry roles and personal lives?”

Figure 34 shows the results. Pastors have a lower view of their councils’ consistency than clerks do; the most common pastor’s rating is the midpoint value “3,” with 43 percent in that category (large yellow square in far right column) and just 7 percent in the top “1 very well” category. Clerks are more positive; 10 percent rate their councils in the top “1 very well” category and 51 percent in the next “2” column.

Figure 34 Pastors' and clerks' ratings of council's living out mission and vision



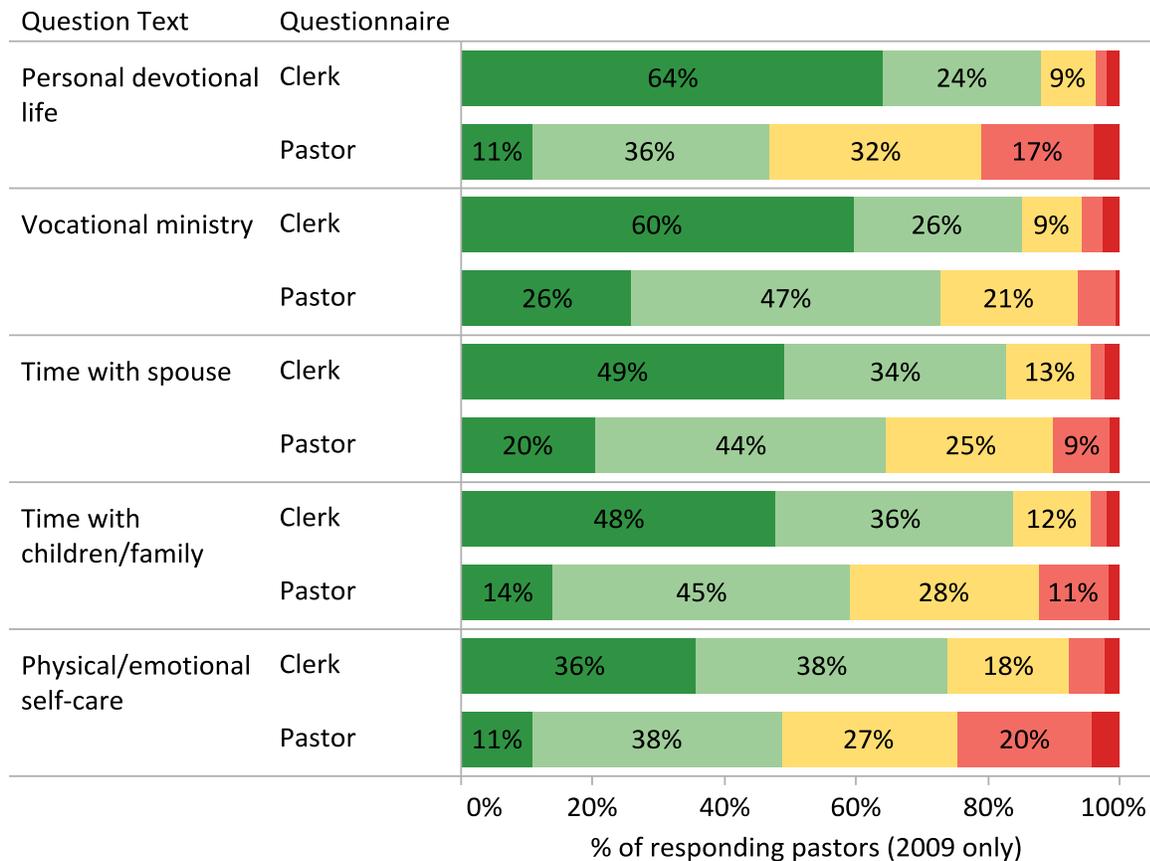
We do find some correlation between the pastors and clerks; the correlation coefficient is a meager 0.30, but it is positive and statistically significant. Overall, however, we have a picture with substantial room for improvement, both in pastors’ perceptions of councils’ consistency and in pastor-clerk agreement.

Clerks' perceptions of pastors' life balance

Clerks were asked to evaluate their pastors' "life balance" in the same five areas in which pastors were asked to evaluate themselves. **Figure 35** shows the clerks' responses alongside the same pastors' frequencies that were displayed in **Figure 20** on page 33.

The most visible feature of the figure is that clerks are far more disposed to give pastors the benefit of the doubt than are pastors themselves, with large majorities giving their pastors life balance ratings in the top two answer categories (dark and light green bars) for all five areas. Clerks and pastors rate these items in the same relative order of best to worst balance, except personal devotional life. Clerks were more likely to rate devotional life highly, while pastors placed it next to last, as we saw back in **Figure 20**. Both pastors and clerks agree that physical and emotional self-care is the area in which pastors need the most help, though clerks are much more sanguine about their pastors' balance than are the pastors. The mismatch in opinions at the individual level is surprisingly bad; the two 5-item scales from pastor and clerk are *negatively* correlated (though the correlation is statistically zero). More communication and mutual understanding are needed!

Figure 35 Clerks' perceptions of pastors' life balance



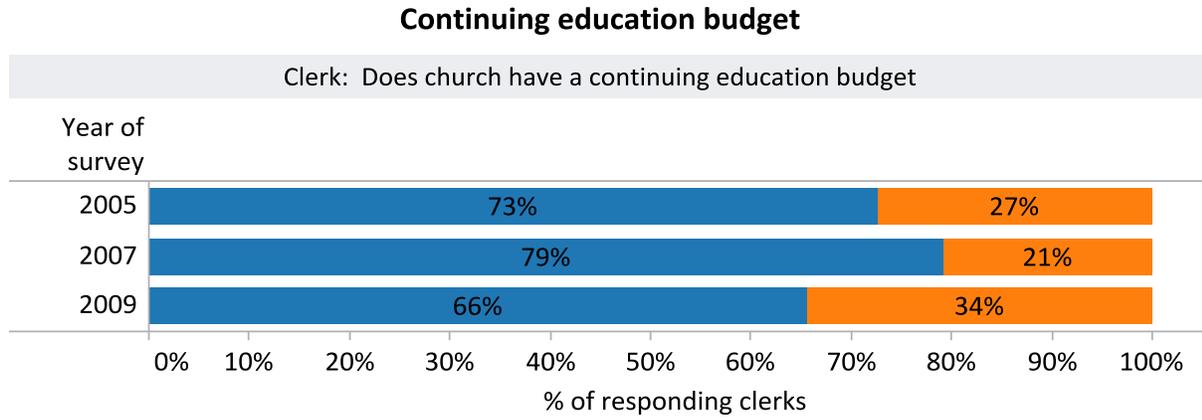
Answer Text

- 5 Very dissatisfied
- 4
- 3
- 2
- 1 Very satisfied

Council support for pastoral continuing education

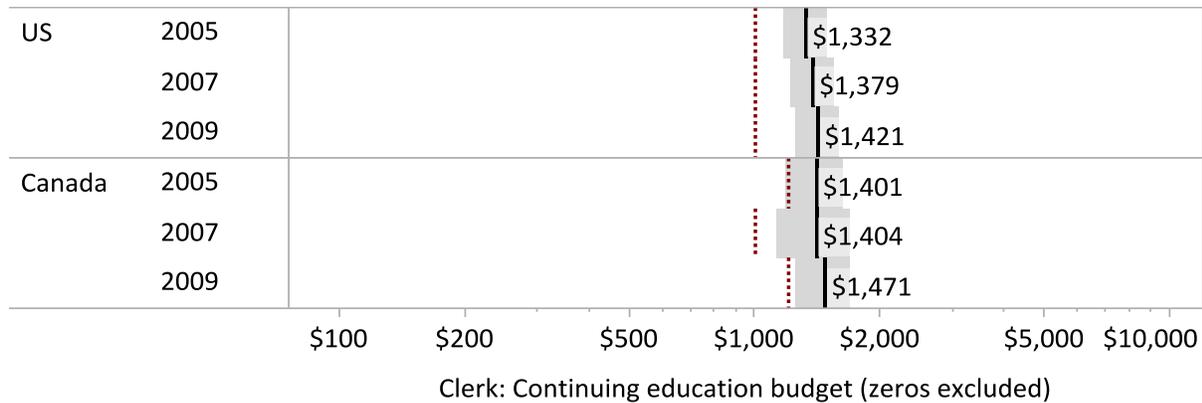
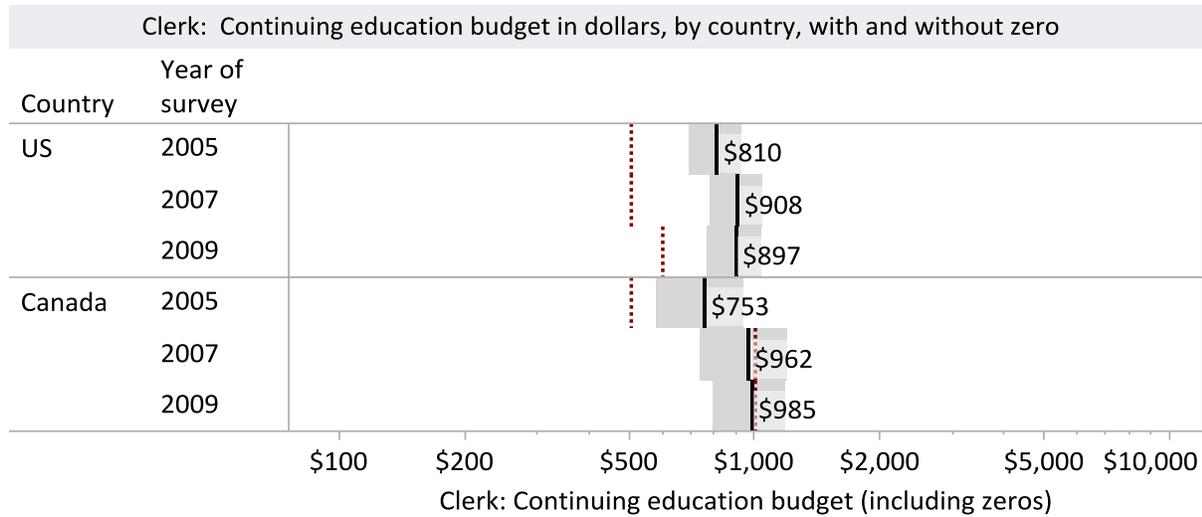
We asked clerks whether their churches had a budget line item for the pastor’s continuing education, and if so, how much was available. **Figure 36** shows the results.

Figure 36 Continuing education budget presence and size



Clerk: Church has continuing education budget for pastor

■ Yes ■ No



■ dotted line: median value ■ Blac line and \$ labels: mean value Gray shadin : 95% confidence interv

With the significant recession in 2008-2009, the proportion of churches with such a budget fell from 79 percent in 2007 to just 66 percent in 2009, a large, significant decrease both statistically and substantively.²⁸ However, typical budget amounts have not changed statistically, as seen by the overlapping gray confidence intervals in the bottom two panels. When the one-third of churches without a budget are counted as zeros, the average continuing education line item in 2009 is \$897 in the U.S. and \$985 in Canada, while the median (midpoint) values were \$600 US and \$1,000 Canadian. When zero budgets are excluded, the 2009 mean averages are \$1,421 US and \$1,471 Canadian, with medians of \$1,000 US and \$1,200 Canadian.

Clerk reports include substantial volatility; current budgets are only moderately correlated with prior surveys' budgets;²⁹ pastors' continuing education remains a marginal and vulnerable fiscal priority for churches.

²⁸ The chi-square with 2 degrees of freedom is 18.854, $p < 0.001$.

²⁹ Pearson's r between same-church current and previous values is only 0.43, where values over 0.80 might easily be expected; of course, the volatility may be partly due to survey response and clerks' lack of information.

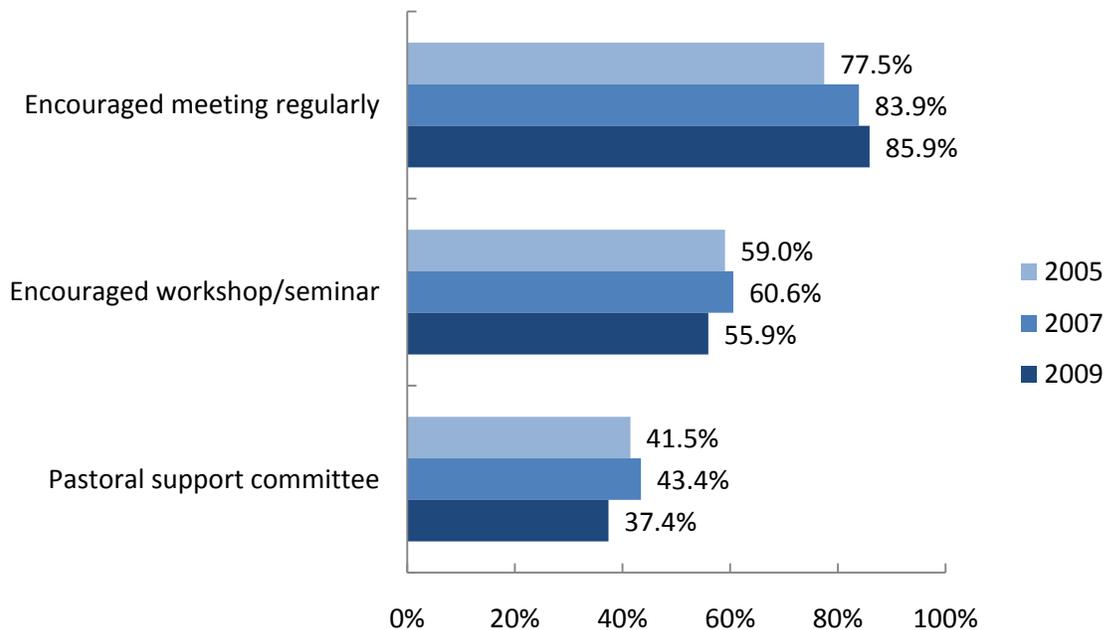
Other forms of council encouragement and support

Three additional forms of council encouragement were investigated with clerks:

- “Does the council encourage your pastor to meet regularly with one or more other Christians for the purpose of deepening his/her relationship with God?”
- “Has the council encouraged your pastor to participate in a workshop/seminar on pastoral preaching and teaching in the last twelve months?”
- “Does your church have a pastor/church committee through which support of the pastor is demonstrated?”

Figure 37 displays the proportion of “yes” responses from clerks by year. The only statistically significant change for 2009 is a slight decrease in the proportion of clerks who said their councils encouraged their pastor to participate in a workshop or seminar.

Figure 37 Clerks' reports of encouraging meetings, workshops, and seminars; and pastoral support committees



The aggregate stability in answers to these questions is not reflected in stability within individual churches; there is extensive volatility. 36 percent of churches whose clerk said “Yes” in one year said “No” at the next survey, and 49 percent of the smaller group who said “No” transitioned to “Yes” in the next survey. This volatility partly represents survey measurement error; but any efforts to improve these and other rates must pursue consistency within individual churches as well as across all churches.

Selected comments

“We have an excellent minister. He meets regularly with the President of Council to ensure that all is going well and to see if there are any issues that need attention. The Executive is very supportive of our minister and if there is a situation, it swings into action immediately. If a situation requires the attention of Consistory, then they respond in a most positive way. We believe in heading things off at the pass. We are also studying your book Marriage and Ministry. We are doing one chapter per council meeting. We are finding it very useful.”

“Our Church Council has a policy of continuous and mutual (360 degree) feedback. We are fortunate that our relationship (Council & Pastor) is strong, with a shared common vision. The SPE materials that are sent to the Council are immediately forwarded to our pastoral staff, with encouragement that these opportunities are actively explored. We will add the ‘overall effect’ evaluation (questions to which I was not able to respond at this time) to a future agenda for discussion.”

“Our pastor is extremely dedicated and active in serving the congregation and the surrounding community. He spends many hours each week at meetings, counseling parishioners, visiting the elderly and those who are sick, preparing for the service, etc.. I am amazed he can maintain his hectic pace with the zeal that he devotes to every task.”

XI. Explaining Pastoral Health and Other Key Outcomes

Multivariate models

The 2009 survey presents a powerful opportunity for new statistical analysis. For the first time, we have over-time data in sufficient quantity to model changes, such as changes in pastoral health by congregation. We have over 300 repeat respondents from both 2007 and 2009, so we can make much stronger inferences about what factors influence change over time. Most models use cross-sectional data (that is, a snapshot in time) and so cannot make strong inferences about cause and effect. As the well-known saying goes, “correlation does not imply causation.” Our data following multiple churches over time (known variously as “longitudinal data,” “panel data” or “cross-sectional time series data”) allows us to analyze change and know with greater confidence that candidate cause A occurred before effect B. We can therefore make a much stronger case for causality rather than mere correlation.³⁰

The value of multivariate modeling is found in the timeless principle that “apples should be compared to apples.” By including a wide range of pastoral and congregational characteristics in the model, we ensure that the effect of one variable (say, continuing education participation) is measured only once all the other attributes of pastors and churches are “controlled” or “held constant.” That is, if we want to know whether continuing education affects pastoral health, we want to compare two groups of pastors who are alike in every possible attribute except for their participation. This is what modeling accomplishes; we are comparing pastors from Canada with Calvin Theological Seminary degrees and 10 years of experience and so forth to other pastors similar to them and judging what difference continuing education (or any other variable in the model) makes after these other factors have already been taken into account.

Here, we analyze over-time changes in three outcomes or “dependent variables”:

1. the 5-item **pastoral health scale**, displayed in **Figure 22** on page 36, measuring pastors’ perceived congregational fit, sense of isolation, and so forth;
2. the 11-item **leadership skills scale**, displayed in **Figure 27** on page 43, measuring capacity to deal with conflict, make decisions, plan strategically, etc.;
3. the 5-item **congregational mission scale**, displayed in **Figure 13** on page 23, measuring how well the congregation reflects the core elements of the CRC mission statement, such as “We gather to praise God, listen to him and respond.”

Modeling methods

Each of the three models is estimated with the following features:

1. The outcome from the previous survey for the same variable (such as pastoral health) is included as a predictor or “independent variable”; this is the “stability coefficient” for each variable. Values close to 1.0 indicate high stability; values close to zero indicate high volatility. The effect of this is that all other variables in the model can then explain only changes in the outcome since the previous survey, not the level itself. The models thus seek the answer to the question “who is getting healthier or less healthy?” rather than just the answer to “who is healthy?”
2. For variables that change over time, we divide them into the survey scales and “SPE-promoted activities” such as devotions, retreats, personal goals, etc. We include both the level from the

³⁰ However, as we will note below, there are still limitations to this confidence. Human beings are often able to anticipate what will happen in the future and act with foresight, a faculty that challenges simple A-before-B-therefore-A-causes-B explanations.

same church's previous survey and the change since the last survey. This strategy allows us to determine whether health, leadership skills, etc. are influenced by changes in levels of these variables or by the levels themselves. For example, imagine that a pastor's overall health has improved since the last survey—the improvement might result either from sustained levels of leadership skills or from an actual increase in leadership skills since the previous survey.

3. Pastors' characteristics and congregations' characteristics are drawn from the current survey, including changes like decades served at the current congregation.
4. The outcome variables have higher within-group variance (or volatility) for pastors with lower levels of pastoral health and other variables. This "heteroskedasticity" (literally "unequal variance") can skew the accuracy of traditional regression estimates, so the models are estimated as heteroskedastic regressions; that is, in addition to explicitly modeling the average of the outcome variables (shown in **Figure 38**), we model the volatility of the variable around that average (shown in **Figure 39**).
5. Many other variables were considered for inclusion in the models but were dropped when they were found to have no meaningful effect. For example, the number of continuing education variables attended by the pastor bears no relationship to any of the three outcomes modeled here, so the count is excluded altogether. The constant (the average outcome when all other values are zero) is hidden to save space.

How to interpret model results

The models produce a lot of information; we've attempted to present it as compactly and comprehensibly as possible, so that we can limit this text to a few important observations, leaving the reader to mine the figures for facts of interest.

Figure 38 shows the model results for pastoral health in the first column of bars, with rows listing all the predictors or "independent variables" in the model. Green bars (extending to the right) indicate variables that caused increases in pastoral health; dark green bars are statistically significant positives. Red bars (extending to the left) indicate detractors from pastoral health; dark red bars are statistically significant. The numbers next to each bar are "coefficients"—they indicate how many units of pastoral health are gained or lost for each unit of the row variable.

For example, the "stability coefficient" at upper left is 0.467 and the bar is dark green. This means that each 1-point increase in the church's pastoral health score from the previous survey predicts just 0.467 points of pastoral health in the current survey, where a coefficient of 1.0 would imply perfect stability. The rest of the score must be explained by something else. This is a modest stability coefficient, suggesting that pastoral health as we've measured it here is both variable and vulnerable.

It's important to recognize that every coefficient is "all else equal"—the effect of that variable among pastors for whom everything else in the model is highly similar. We have to remind ourselves of this constantly. For example, it may well be true that pastors who do devotions more frequently are healthier on average. But older pastors have usually been at their congregations longer, do more devotions than younger pastors and are also healthier on average due to accumulated wisdom and survival skills. When we compare those at the same life stage, as the models do, devotional frequency does not account for any difference.

In the following sections, we'll talk through each of the row sections in the leftmost column.

Figure 38 Multivariate model results for pastoral health, leadership skills and congregational mission

Category	Independent Variable	Timing	Dependent Variable			
			Pastoral health scale	Leadership skills scale	Congregational mission scale	
Survey scales	Pastoral health scale	Previous survey Change	0.467 Stability coefficient	0.099 0.160	0.200 0.250	
	Leadership skills scale	Previous survey Change	0.172 0.325	0.471 Stability coefficient	0.277 0.360	
	Congregational mission scale	Previous survey Change	0.228 0.175	0.135 0.139	0.319 Stability coefficient	
SPE-promoted activities	Devotional frequency	Previous survey Change	-0.016 0.030	-0.005 0.048	0.004 0.002	
	Spiritual retreat	Previous survey Change	-0.042 0.016	0.022 0.011	-0.014 0.049	
	Annual personal goals	Previous survey Change	0.004 0.058	0.050 0.024	0.123 0.116	
	Congregational mission/vision statements	Previous survey Change	0.115 0.119	-0.087 -0.035	-0.010 0.002	
	Mentee	Previous survey Change	-0.143 -0.111	0.029 -0.028	-0.092 -0.013	
	Mentor	Previous survey Change	0.086 0.050	0.107 0.058	-0.116 -0.047	
	Peer learning group	Previous survey Change	-0.057 -0.065	0.032 0.073	-0.166 0.021	
	Personal mandate	Previous survey Change	-0.032 -0.120	0.042 0.052	-0.038 -0.056	
	Regular meeting	Previous survey Change	0.105 0.133	-0.041 -0.023	-0.057 0.005	
	Systematic preaching feedback	Previous survey Change	-0.082 -0.004	0.070 0.097	0.139 0.100	
	Workshop, seminar, reading	Previous survey Change	0.019 0.004	0.004 -0.016	0.077 0.064	
	SPE involvement	Previous survey Change	-0.028 -0.044	-0.024 0.013	0.053 0.017	
	Pastor's characteristics	Age 35 and under	Current survey	0.064	-0.019	0.112
		Age over 50	Current survey	0.006	0.029	0.033
CTS graduate		Current survey	-0.097	-0.018	0.085	
Decades at congregation (logged)		Current survey	0.097	-0.052	0.057	
New pastor to this congregation		Current survey	0.333	-0.070	0.052	
Congregation's characteristics		Canadian congregation	Current survey	0.065	0.030	-0.158
	Pastoral separation last 3 years	Current survey	-0.114	-0.121	-0.002	
	Congregation grew in last 2 years	Current survey	0.069	0.043	0.019	
	Congregation size (logged)	Current survey	0.026	0.006	0.005	
	Rural (vs. suburban)	Current survey	-0.051	0.022	-0.042	
	Urban (vs. suburban)	Current survey	0.020	-0.030	0.149	
General	Year of survey	Current survey	0.031	-0.018	-0.012	

-0.4 -0.0 0.4
Coefficient

-0.4 -0.0 0.4
Coefficient

-0.2 -0.0 0.2 0.4
Coefficient

Sign and Significance (p < 0.05)	N (responses)	596	562	596
Positive and significant	N (churches)	408	386	408
Positive and insignificant	Pseudo R-squared	0.43	0.45	0.40
Negative and insignificant	VWLS Pseudo R-sqd.	0.46	0.52	0.45
Negative and significant				

Survey scales

This section of **Figure 38** tests the relationships between the three outcome variables. It is distinguished by a full set of solid green bars. This means that pastoral health, leadership skills and the pastor's perception of congregational mission and vision fulfillment are highly interrelated. For pastoral health, higher levels of leadership skills (0.172) and of perceived mission fulfillment (0.228) foster improvements in pastoral health over time. The biggest single booster to pastoral health in the entire table is a change in leadership skills (0.325 points of pastoral health for each 1-point improvement in leadership skills).³¹ If we want pastors to feel healthier, boosting their leadership skills seems to be a safe bet.

In the leadership skills column of the figure, we see that the stability coefficient for leadership skills is similarly modest (0.471), and that levels and improvements in levels of pastoral health and congregational mission have modest effects on leadership skills; the four coefficients all range between 0.099 and 0.160. Leadership skills don't seem to be as dependent on the other scales as they are on it.

In the congregational mission column, we find an even lower stability coefficient (0.319), implying significant over-time dependence of this measure on other factors. In fact, the coefficient for change in leadership skills (0.360) is bigger than the stability coefficient. Pastors who perceive their health improving and especially their leadership skills improving are also more likely to perceive their congregations pulling together for the mission.

SPE-promoted activities

This section has been a source of puzzlement in producing this report. We expected to find that the pastoral activities promoted by Sustaining Pastoral Excellence would be consistent contributors to pastoral health. What we find is much more complex and nuanced.

We began the investigation by constructing a scale of SPE-type activities from all of the items in this section. The scale was coherent and reliable, meaning that pastors who do one of these tend to do the others as well. But the scale was a real dud in explaining pastoral health or anything else. We finally realized that this was because some of the activities were pulling in opposite directions. By disaggregating the scale and showing each item independently, we learn something about this complexity.

The only statistically significant effect (dark green bar) in the pastoral health column in this section is for a change in regular meeting with others; those who began meeting with others for the first time improved their health by 0.133 points on average. (Conversely, it is also true that those who *stopped* meeting with others lost 0.133 points on average.)

Strangely, we find that being a mentee (-0.143) and adding a new personal mandate (-0.120) are statistically significant predictors of decreases in pastoral health. There are several possible interpretations of these findings. Mentors may actually damage their mentees, but that seems very unlikely (though we might want to keep an eye out!). It may be that pastors often become mentees because they see trouble coming, or that the mentor's watching eye and ever-present model causes them to evaluate their own situations less optimistically. The latter logics could also apply to the personal mandate—perhaps those who create such mandates see the need to address challenges coming, or the mandate's presence forces a more critical reevaluation of their health. The converse

³¹ The coefficient for new pastors is bigger (0.333), but the new pastor variable can increase by only 1 point, while the leadership skills variable ranges over 4 points (from 1 to 5), though it's unlikely any pastor will ever move from a score of 1 to a score of 5. But the ceiling on the possible improvement in health from improved leadership skills is higher. And moving pastors around just to get short-term boosts in perceived health isn't a practical lever to pull, particularly since the effect is temporary.

is also true. Those who cease to have a personal mandate get a little healthier, perhaps a bit like getting out of the hospital.

In the leadership skills column, there are five statistically significant SPE-type activities, each of which slightly improves perceived leadership skills (dark green bars): increasing devotional frequency (0.048), having a mentor (0.107), joining a peer group (0.073), having systematic preaching feedback from council (0.070) and adding systematic preaching feedback where it did not exist before (0.097). None of these effects are particularly large, but taken together, they can account for about 0.25 points of improvement. Since we learned in the previous section that leadership skills look like a good lever to pull to improve pastoral health, perhaps we can extrapolate a bit and think of these as emblematic of the kinds of things that contribute to leadership skills. Then we might imagine some other, similar activities targeted at leadership skills that would support a consistent focus on improvement.

In the congregational mission column, we see four statistically significant SPE-type factors that improve the outcome and two that decrease it. Setting annual personal goals improves the pastor's impression of the congregation's reflection of CRC mission elements, both as a consistent practice (0.123) and as a new change (0.116); systematic preaching feedback does the same (0.139 and 0.100, respectively). On the reverse, not having or losing these practices results in a loss. Being a mentor (-0.116) and being part of a peer learning group (-0.166) predict lower congregational mission scores. We can only speculate about what the causal mechanisms are here; perhaps participation in mentoring and peer learning calls attention to the achievements of other congregations; or perhaps it calls the pastor away from important tasks needed to maintain these things.

Overall, our findings show that SPE activities are not a simple package in which more is always better.

Pastor's characteristics

In this entire set of pastoral demographics (and others we dropped for lack of findings), just three coefficients are significant, all of them in the model of pastoral health:

- **Calvin Theological Seminary graduates** have slightly but significantly lower pastoral health scores (-0.097).
- **Longer tenures at the current congregation** are strongly associated with greater health (0.097). This is complex to interpret, since the variable is measured in decades and then logged (made exponential). As briefly as possible, the effect is nonlinear with diminishing returns—the more time a pastor stays, the longer the pastor has to stay to get the same increase. Every time a pastor doubles his or her tenure at a congregation, the result is about a tenth of a point of additional health. So moving from 1 year to 2 years adds a tenth, from 2 to 4 adds another tenth, from 4 to 8 another, from 8 to 16 another, from 16 to 32 another, so that in a long career, staying in the same place predicts an increase of about 0.5 points in pastoral health.
- Complementing this observation is our finding of the one-time, temporary **honeymoon effect of starting over as a new pastor** (0.333). Our data follows churches, not individual pastors; this lets us see that pastors who weren't present at this church at the previous survey tend to feel substantially healthier than their predecessors.

It is worth noting that these three factors do not relate significantly to leadership skills or congregational mission, and that pastoral age doesn't matter (apart from tenure at current congregation).

Congregational characteristics

Among all of these congregational attributes (and others we dropped), there are just two significant coefficients, both in the congregational mission column:

- Even after all else is held constant, **pastors of Canadian congregations** see their congregations more or less reflective of CRC mission elements than do U.S. pastors (-0.158). This finding is the first (but slight) evidence we have that we might have been mistaken in our report on the CRCNA 150th Anniversary Survey when we guessed that lower Canadian congregational health scores were due largely to cultural differences in survey response. If the issue were simply a cultural tendency by U.S. respondents to overrate things, we should see similar negative effects here for pastoral health and leadership skills, but we do not. Evidently, pastors of Canadian congregations are more critical of their congregations than U.S. pastors, but not more critical of themselves.³²
- **Urban congregations** are substantially higher rated on congregational mission elements (0.149) than suburban churches (and than rural churches, since rural churches are statistically similar to suburban churches in this model).

One important statistic may be statistically insignificant primarily due to insufficient data. Sixty pastors reported that their congregation had experienced a pastoral separation (Articles 16 or 17) in the last three years prior to one of the surveys (an average of 20 in each survey wave); just 15 of these are cases with repeated data that can be used in the model, possibly because such congregations are often troubled and may again be without a pastor to respond to the survey or may even have closed entirely. **Figure 38** shows pastoral separations predict negative changes in pastoral health (-0.114) and leadership skills (-0.121), but the effect is noisy and statistically indistinguishable from zero. If we were able to get more data from these congregations, we might find statistically significant negative estimates, which would of course not be surprising.

General: there are no residual trends

This section has only one measure in it, but it is an important one: year of survey. The estimates are statistically zero. This finding means that there is no remaining over-time trend in the data that is not being picked up by the other variables in the model—whatever trends we are seeing, they are explicable by the factors in the model. There is thus no strong evidence for an environmental background that is carrying pastors in a particular direction in terms of health, leadership skills and congregational mission, other than what we can already measure in our survey data.

Model statistics

At the bottom of **Figure 38**, to the right of the color legend, we see the model statistics. These show that each model includes from 562 to 596 responses and from 386 to 408 unique churches (some with two, some with three full waves of responses available). The “Pseudo R-squared” statistic is the proportion of variation in the outcome that the model explains or accounts for. The models explain between 40 and 45 percent of variation in the outcomes, meaning that all of this data still explains less than half of the variation in these scales; the rest is either noise or explained by factors we have not measured or cannot measure.

³² The cited report, “Spiritual and Social Trends and Patterns in the Christian Reformed Church in North America,” is available from <http://www.calvin.edu/weblogs/csr/crcsurvey2007/> or from <http://www.crcna.org/pages/research.cfm>.

Variance equation

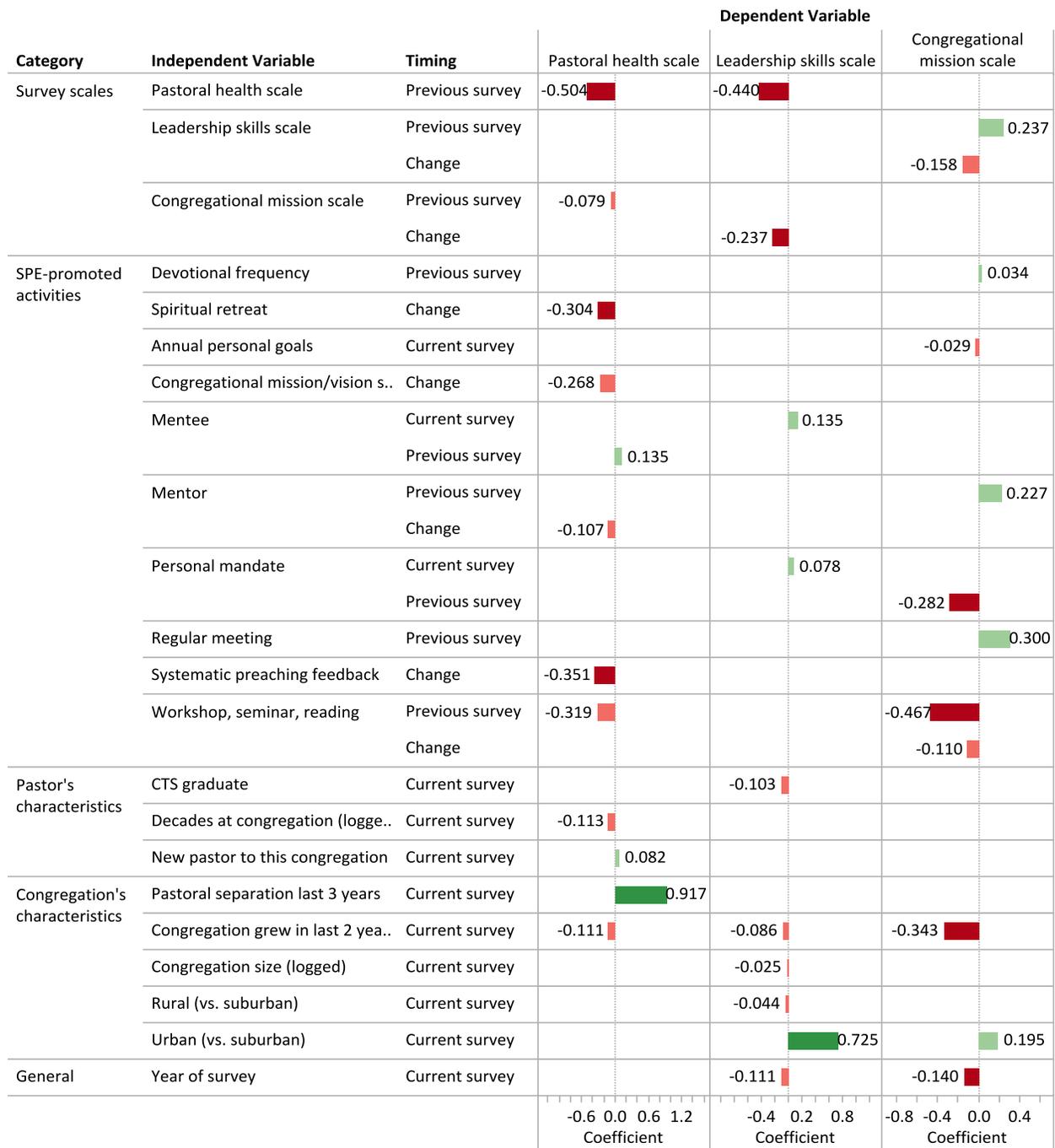
Figure 39 below shows the separate variance equation part of the models shown in **Figure 38**. This feature primarily helps make the estimates above more accurate, but it can be interesting in its own right. In essence, we are trying to explain not the levels of health or leadership skills or congregational mission, but to discover what factors make those levels more or less volatile or predictable within groups. If variance or prediction error falls, that means that the variables in the main part of the model more precisely predict the levels of the three outcomes (pastoral health, *et cetera*).

One complexity is that red bars (extending to the left) here mean less volatility, while green means more. We might be inclined to think of less volatility as “better”; if so, we’ll have to get used to red meaning “better.” For example, the first coefficient at upper left is -0.504 for the pastoral health scale from the previous survey. The interpretation is pretty simple: pastors who were healthier at the last survey time were easier to predict in the current survey; the average prediction error is a full half point smaller. The real-world meaning of this is probably that being healthy also improves the accuracy of the pastors’ self-perception, while those who are less healthy are also less sure of how to evaluate themselves. We see the same phenomenon with leadership skills (-0.440).

We won’t narrate every coefficient in the figure, but we can call attention to a few of the findings.

- Spiritual retreats (-0.304) and systematic preaching feedback (-0.351) reduce volatility and improve accuracy of pastoral health estimates, probably by revealing more clearly how the pastor is doing.
- Those who have been in workshops and seminars have as a group far less volatility in their evaluations (whether high or low) of their congregations (-0.467). Education here may be improving the accuracy of congregational assessment rather than self-assessment.
- Pastors whose congregations had a pastoral separation in the last 3 years had much larger volatility in their pastoral health scores (0.917). Perhaps this reflects the possible range of responses: congregations coming out of strife with the last pastor can embrace and welcome a new pastor as a welcome relief, engendering a feeling of health, or the period of suspicion and conflict can extend and afflict the new pastor as well.

Figure 39 Variables affecting outcome variance (volatility)



Sign and Significance (p < 0.05)

- Positive and significant
- Positive and insignificant
- Negative and insignificant
- Negative and significant

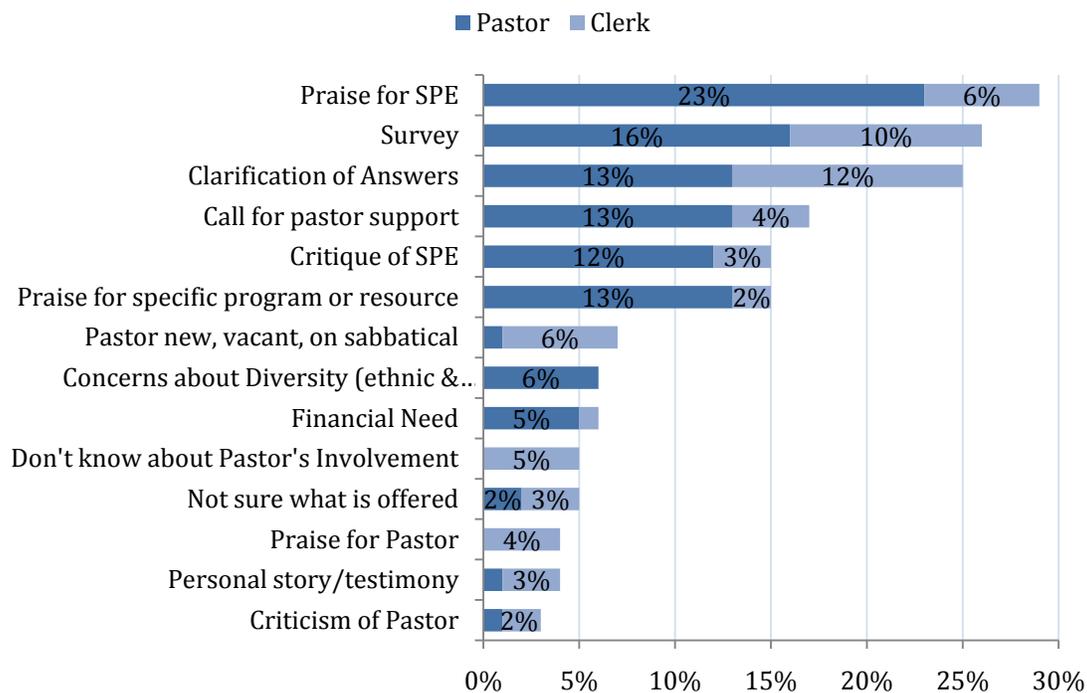
XII. Comments

Survey respondents, both pastors and clerks, were given a chance to communicate any questions, comments, or concerns about the questionnaire or the Sustaining Pastoral Excellence Program in an open-ended question at the conclusion of the survey. In total, 36 percent of respondents chose to provide general comments; 60 percent of comments were authored by pastors. Participants left comments regarding everything from praise for the SPE project to raising concerns about SPE’s geographic and ethnic diversity. Clerks and pastors were able to express thoughts that could not be captured through checkboxes and radio buttons. The following comment highlights the general sentiment of respondents, expressing the need for continued aid to pastors.

I have been in and out, mostly in, council for 40 years. Ministry today is much more difficult than it was 40 years ago. I appreciate the resources the church provides our pastors today, especially in the area of mentoring, counseling, etc...

Comments were coded with 14 themes in order to quantify the overall message from participant comments. Themes were chosen after reading a sample of open-ended responses, pulling out recurring themes, and applying an encompassing label to a set of similar responses. Comment themes are not mutually exclusive, meaning that one participant’s comment can be coded with several different themes. For example, a single participant’s comment could be coded as “Criticism of Pastor,” “Call for pastoral support,” and “Financial Need” at the same time depending on content. This section will focus on the **four most-coded themes** for pastor and clerk responses combined.

Figure 40 Pastor and Clerk open-ended comment themes (percentage of total)



As shown in **Figure 40**, “praise for SPE” was the most cited theme overall. It was more readily mentioned by Pastors, but it was also the third most-frequently coded theme for clerks. Comments coded in this theme explicitly mentioned the value and necessity of SPE and thanked SPE leaders for their efforts to teach and support pastors, their families, and council members. Pastors and clerks mentioned that the very presence of SPE sends the message that “pastors need support.”

Comments coded under this theme highlight the benefit of sharing experiences with peer groups, allowing pastors to connect “with others in healthy and helpful relationships. The following comment portrays the vitality that many pastors mentioned in their comments about SPE:

Affordable, quality based opportunities for continued education have not only been the wind in my pastoral sails but have made the sailing fun (even through rough waters). Not only myself, but everyone with whom I relate and minister, say they are blessed. Thank you!

The second most coded theme was “**survey**.” Comments coded under this theme touched on questions and insights brought to the forefront by the survey instrument itself. Respondents in this category commented on specific survey questions, providing suggestions for clearer wording of question and answer options. Many comments in this category mentioned that by taking the survey, pastors and clerks were forced to think in-depth about their own ministry. One respondent summarizes this theme as follows:

The questions posed in this survey have given me ideas about some areas such as a personal mission statement for ministry and set goal for my personal spiritual life over the course of the year. Putting these on paper then working towards them gives a sense of purpose and direction. Thanks for the insight.

The theme “**clarification of answers**” covers a wide range of comments related to explanations of answers. Most comments for clerks in this category ranged from a lack of knowledge concerning the pastor’s involvement in SPE to the issue of new or young pastors at the congregation. This theme sometimes highlighted either ineffective communication or a lack of communication between a pastor and council. However, some comments highlighted that communication between the pastor and council was good, but the council was unaware of a program’s connection with SPE. For pastors, some commentators in this category found it surprising to themselves that they were not sure how to answer the question asking if they would be a pastor if they could do it all over again. One pastor worked through his/her thoughts writing:

Question #36 asked whether I'd be a pastor if I could start my career over. I had to laugh that the choice of responses was simply either 'yes' or 'no'! That question is tough! [smiley face] Pastoral ministry demands a lot of me. My mental health is affected, and yet I know God is with me. That question is more like a discussion question!

This quote leads to the fourth most coded theme by highlighting the sense of distress in the work of many pastors. The theme “**call for pastoral support**” gets at comments which mention problems the pastor is facing daily. Issues raised in this category vary from unspoken difficulties. A clerk wrote:

Too often our Pastor reports to the Elders, we shake our heads in affirmation of his work, and move on to business. We could use some training in how to be more of an encouragement to him.

A pastor left this short but telling comment in direct response to the question “is there anything on your mind you would like to communicate...?”: “I wish I had the time.” Many comments reference difficulty taking sabbaticals and finding balance between social, spiritual, and work life. This pastor summarizes the needs of fellow pastors writing:

I find that Pastors need the most help in just being human and healthy...We have for the most part given up the interior work for the much easier exterior work.

These comments make clear that programming needs to be in place that will continue to support pastors. Clerks and pastors struggle to know how to help each other and reach out to SPE for help.

XIII. Conclusions and Recommendations

General conclusions³³

A general summary of the survey results is fairly straightforward and consistent with previous surveys: if what we observed in 2005 is regarded as “pastoral excellence,” then that excellence is indeed being sustained. Several aggregate measures of the clergy’s health and performance are statistically stable; there are occasional hints of improvement or decline, but all are small changes and few are statistically significant. On average, the CRCNA’s pastors and churches appear to be weathering hard times well—at least they tell us they are doing so!

However, health “on average” is small consolation to those who are struggling. The survey data alerts us to the constant presence of significant numbers of pastors and churches that are in pain or in crisis. In any given survey year, there are at least dozens of pastors who are dissatisfied with their current pastorate (see **Figure 16** on page 29), frequently feel isolated in ministry (**Figure 17** on page 30), and wouldn’t be pastors again if they could start their careers over (**Figure 19** on page 32). Seventeen percent of pastors reported at least some dissatisfaction with their “life balance” in terms of “physical/emotional self care” (**Figure 20** on page 33). These problems are seldom chronic at the level of the congregation; very few pastors who were in the doldrums in one survey are still at the same church and still struggling two years later.³⁴ But sustaining excellence will continue to require attention both to helping struggling churches and to helping itinerant pastors who may be carrying their pain and dissatisfaction with them from church to church.

While we find that pastors are grateful for SPE and give the program high marks, we find little evidence that the SPE project’s interventions include a “magic bullet” that consistently spurs improvement in key outcomes such as pastoral health, leadership skills or congregational mission fulfillment. Statistical models (reported in **Section XI** starting on page 59) reveal that most of these activities are only small levers for improvement, and a few are sometimes levers for increasing dissatisfaction. If there is anything approaching a magic bullet, a prime candidate for intervention, it is systematic feedback on preaching from the council. But generally speaking, justification for the SPE project to date must be based on the highly positive evaluations of the project from pastors and not on powerful statistical evidence that SPE interventions are consistently creating measurable, substantial change.

A final observation that follows from the previous paragraph is that the survey data we have now puts us in an enviable position: we can in fact observe whether a particular intervention is measurable improving pastoral health and do so with a significant amount of confidence. The planned 2011 survey can readily test hypotheses about specific interventions from the 2009 to 2011 period, and future interventions can be designed with a built-in measurement strategy that leverages this data.

Focus SPE on generating leadership skills

The statistical model presented in the previous section strongly suggests deeper investigation of leadership skills development as a “lever” that can be “pulled” to improve both pastoral health and congregational mission fulfillment. Of all the things that contribute to pastoral health improvements, an increased sense of competence in pastoral leadership is a huge boost to the sense of congregational fit, satisfaction with current pastorate, and reduced feelings of isolation.

³³ This section is identical to the “General conclusions” section of the Executive Summary found on page 2.

³⁴ This is not to say that congregations do not have chronic problems—they do. The observation is driven by the survey data, and we rarely have longitudinal survey data from congregations with serious chronic problems, since such congregations also tend to have empty pulpits and therefore no one to take the survey.

We learned in **Figure 26** on page 42 that the areas with the most room for improvement, in pastors' estimation, are strategic planning and conflict management. These may not be the most important skills to focus on,³⁵ but the perception that these are areas of need does suggest a starting point for training, mentoring and support efforts.

Encourage systematic preaching feedback and other council support

In turn, systematic preaching feedback is one of the few levers that can be pulled to improve leadership skills (as discussed in the section starting on page 62)—yet less than half of responding CRCNA pastors say they get such feedback (see **Figure 32** on page 50). There is lots of room for improvement here and in the other council-relations factors discussed in Section X. Clerks and pastors give wildly differing assessments of the pastors' life balance (**Figure 35** on page 54). Well under half of clerks report the presence of a committee or team to support the pastor (**Figure 37** on page 57). Our surveys are weak detectors for these signals, and perhaps we'd see things better if we had multiple council respondents and more questions; yet we still have some evidence that clerks and pastors too rarely have common perceptions of their ministry challenges and practices. Any focus on leadership skills should probably focus on improving the entire pastor-council relationship, because we do have strong evidence that where this relationship is healthy, lots of good things follow. Pastors and clerks clearly agree on one thing: pastors are most likely to need help with their physical and emotional self-care.

Focus continuing education on quality, not quantity

In **Figure 29** on page 46, we found one of the few statistically significant trends in the data: the average number of continuing education events per pastor has been falling steadily; though SPE participants maintain a higher frequency of such events, their frequency has been falling, too. But in the statistical modeling process, we found no evidence that the simple count of such events attended contributes anything to the scores for health, leadership skills or congregational mission fulfillment. This finding suggests that the Project's focus should be on increasing the quality and effectiveness of such events rather than the quantity that pastors attend.

Chief recommendation: more ideas are welcome

We don't want to make stronger claims for survey research and statistical modeling than can be supported. Data is still just a tool, and God is still sovereign. Statistical patterns are neither sealed fate nor magic wands. But with the three waves of data we have now, and with an anticipated fourth wave coming in the fall of 2011, this data set is becoming a powerful tool that is fairly unique among Christian churches. We may be able to use it to test hunches and propositions the research team has not yet conceived. If you have an idea for us, please contact us at pastoralexcellence@crcna.org and/or csr@calvin.edu.

³⁵ For example, business research strongly suggests that strategic planning *per se* is greatly overrated, while simple disciplined execution is underrated. See the relevant chapter in *Hard Facts, Dangerous Half-Truths and Total Nonsense: Profiting from Evidence-Based Management* by Jeffrey Pfeffer and Robert I. Sutton (Harvard Business Press, 2006).

XIV. Available Resources

The SPE Project at the CRCNA and the Calvin College Center for Social Research both have posted interconnected web pages where you can download more information, including tables and charts of data from the entire survey for both pastors and clerks, the original questionnaires, and this report:

- SPE page: http://www.crcna.org/pages/spe_surveys.cfm
- CSR page: <http://www.calvin.edu/weblogs/csr/report-on-2009-spe-survey>