

## **ABSTRACT**

### **STAYING POWER: THE INFLUENCE OF THE CALL AMONG MINISTERS OF THE WESLEYAN CHURCH**

by

Joseph G. Liddick

Many pastors are leaving pastoral ministry today due to a high incidence of stress and burnout. At the same time, many others are staying true to their calling all the way to the end of their occupational years. A number of studies have explored the reasons why many pastors have opted for alternative careers, but very few have explored the reasons why the others, who have experienced similar stressors, have endured. The purpose of this study was to investigate how a sense of divine calling contributes to longevity among ordained ministers of the Wesleyan Church.

This research, following up on a 1992 study of Marianne Gonlag among Wesleyan ministers within their first five years of ministry, interviewed twenty-five seasoned pastors within the Wesleyan Church who had served as a senior or solo pastor for more than ten years. The subjects were asked about their understanding of divine calling, their own personal experience of a call to ministry, and the reasons why they have remained in ministry. The conclusions were that all had experienced a divine call to ministry, their experiences had varied widely, they understood their calling as something that was lifelong, they viewed their role within ministry as being somewhat fluid, most had experienced seasons of doubt in respect to their calling, and their call to ministry was the most significant factor that had held them steadfast.

DISSERTATION APPROVAL

This is to certify that the dissertation entitled  
STAYING POWER: THE INFLUENCE OF THE CALL  
AMONG MINISTERS OF THE WESLEYAN CHURCH

presented by

Joseph Gilson Liddick

has been accepted towards fulfillment

of the requirements for the

DOCTOR OF MINISTRY degree at

Asbury Theological Seminary

\_\_\_\_\_  
Mentor

\_\_\_\_\_  
March 12, 2009  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Internal Reader

\_\_\_\_\_  
March 12, 2009  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Executive Director

\_\_\_\_\_  
March 12, 2009  
Date

STAYING POWER: THE INFLUENCE OF THE CALL  
AMONG MINISTERS OF THE WESLEYAN CHURCH

A Dissertation

Presented to the Faculty of  
Asbury Theological Seminary

In Partial Fulfillment  
Of the Requirements for the Degree  
Doctor of Ministry

by

Joseph Gilson Liddick

May 2009

© 2009

Joseph Gilson Liddick

ALL RIGHTS RESERVED

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
CHAPTER 1 PROBLEM .....	1
Introduction.....	1
Statement of the Problem.....	2
Purpose Statement.....	6
Research Questions .....	6
Research Question 1 .....	6
Research Question 2 .....	6
Research Question 3 .....	6
Definitions.....	6
Calling.....	7
Vocation.....	7
Ministry.....	7
Longevity .....	8
Context.....	8
Methodology .....	10
The Participants .....	11
Instrumentation .....	11
Data Collection .....	12
Data Analysis .....	13
Theological Foundation .....	13
Overview of the Study .....	16

CHAPTER 2 LITERATURE.....	17
The Call to Ministry.....	18
The Call to Specialized Ministry .....	18
The Inward Call of God .....	19
The Call of the Church.....	21
The Call of Opportunity.....	23
The Length of a Call .....	23
Perseverance in God’s Calling.....	25
Calling and Profession .....	28
Calling and Longevity.....	31
Calling and Clergy Attrition .....	34
Calling and Burnout.....	42
Ministerial Health .....	48
Qualitative Research.....	54
Sample.....	55
Data Collection .....	56
Data Analysis .....	59
CHAPTER 3 METHODOLOGY .....	62
Research Questions.....	62
Research Question 1 .....	62
Research Question 2 .....	63
Research Question 3 .....	63
Population and Sample .....	64

Instrumentation .....	65
Data Collection .....	66
Reliability and Validity.....	66
Variables .....	67
Data Analysis .....	68
Ethics .....	68
<b>CHAPTER 4 FINDINGS .....</b>	<b>70</b>
Profile of Participants .....	70
Research Question 1 .....	71
The Origin of the Call.....	72
The Length of the Call .....	73
Sources of Confirmation.....	75
Continuing Affirmation of the Call.....	78
Changed Understanding of Calling.....	81
Summary of Cognitive Understanding of the Call .....	83
Research Question 2 .....	84
The Decision to Be a Pastor.....	84
The Experience of the Call .....	88
The Response to the Call .....	93
Summary of Calling Experiences .....	94
Research Question 3 .....	95
Doubts in Relation to Their Calling.....	95
Leaving Pastoral Ministry.....	99

Remaining in Ministry .....	101
Summary of the Influence of the Call.....	105
Summary of the Major Findings.....	105
CHAPTER 5 DISCUSSION.....	107
Major Findings.....	107
A Divine Summons to Ministry .....	107
A Variety of Experiences.....	109
A Lifelong Calling .....	110
A Fluid Understanding of Their Role .....	111
Seasons of Doubt .....	112
Staying Power .....	114
Implications.....	115
Limitations .....	116
Unexpected Observations .....	117
Recommendations.....	118
Postscript.....	119
WORKS CITED .....	120

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I wish to express my deepest appreciation to:

Dr. Joseph Dongell. Your patient guidance through the process of refining the focus of the study along with your constructive suggestions were a tremendous help.

Beeson Institute for Advanced Church Leadership. Dr. Dale Galloway and staff inspired me to press forward and sharpen my ministry skills. All the great churches I learned from, and all the friends I met through the various modules encouraged me to lead a breakaway church. My time is now.

My wife Esther. Your patience and support, especially during my sabbatical away from pastoral ministry, allowed me to take the time I needed to hear a fresh call from God. You have always believed in me, even when I had trouble believing in myself.

Wheaton Wesleyan and Gates Wesleyan Churches. You have both generously allowed me to take time that could have been spent caring for the congregation to work on this study. My greatest joy has been ministering among you.

Mentors and models of staying power—Paul Markel, you gave me a target of staying power to shoot for when I was just starting out in ministry. Bob Zuhl, you showed me how staying power leads to a lasting legacy. Meredith Bailie, you taught me how to open the layers of my soul.

Marilyn E., Marilyn K., Ron and Scott. As my research/reflection team you helped to sharpen my thinking about God's calling and bring this project to a conclusion.

## **CHAPTER 1**

### **PROBLEM**

#### **Introduction**

“I quit!” Those were the toughest words I ever said after entering the pastoral ministry. Nevertheless, the reality I was facing was that my soul was depleted, and I was burned out after having served three different churches over a twenty-seven-year span. What ensued over the next several months of sabbatical was a serious time of reflection over what I wanted to be and do in the next chapter of my life.

Throughout my years of ministry, I had occasionally entertained thoughts of what I might do if I were not a pastor. I had a number of gifts and interests in several other areas. Now, for the first time in many years, I was no longer a pastor. Ever since my teen years, I had sensed that God wanted me to serve him in some capacity of Christian ministry. I pursued education with that calling in mind. Nevertheless, at this stage of my life I was beginning to wonder if that call was indeed a lifelong call, or perhaps only seasonal.

Today, I am pastoring a church once again. The one thing I could not escape in my season of reflection was the fact that God had indeed called me and equipped me for just that task. Lurking somewhere beneath the burnout was a deep satisfaction with the things I had been doing. As Reggie McNeal states, “Spiritual leaders ... describe their whole lives in terms of the call. It involves much more than a vocational expression or function. It goes to the very core of one’s being. It is the pivotal and life-defining decision” (95). My call from God became the anchor that eventually brought me back to my vocation.

### Statement of the Problem

Unfortunately pastors are leaving the parish ministry at an alarming rate. Some are opting for alternative ministry careers such as teaching or working in parachurch organizations, but many are leaving ministry altogether. H. B. London, Jr. indicates that in a survey of pastors he discovered that 40 percent of them say that they have considered leaving the ministry (London and Wiseman, *Pastors at Greater Risk* 26). This exodus has led some watchers of this phenomenon to refer to parish ministers as an “endangered species” (*Your Pastor* 11). A number of studies focusing on specific denominations have highlighted the problem, including those of Gerald Jud, Edgar Mills and Genevieve Burch in the United Church of Christ, and Alan and Cheryl Klaas within the Lutheran Church, Missouri Synod. Dean R. Hoge and Jacqueline E. Wenger conducted a study in 2002 that examined ministers of the Presbyterian Church, Assemblies of God, United Methodist Church, Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod, and Evangelical Lutheran Church of America. These studies are reviewed in Chapter 2.

The Fuller Institute of Church Growth conducted a study in 1991 in which they concluded that “pastors are overworked, underpaid, often work in a conflicted environment, and seem to be some of the loneliest people” (Schaefer). This study uncovered a number of sobering statistics:

- 90% work more than 46 hours a week
- 80% believed pastoral ministry affected their families negatively
- 33% believed ministry was a hazard to their family
- 75% reported a significant stress-related crisis at least once in their ministry
- 50% felt themselves unable to meet the needs of the job
- 90% felt inadequately trained to cope with ministry demands
- 70% say they have a lower self-esteem now compared to when they started in ministry
- 40% reported serious conflict with a parishioner at least once a month

- 37% confessed to having been involved in inappropriate sexual behavior with someone in the church
- 70% do not have someone they consider a close friend.

Given this self-assessment among pastors, many observers are not surprised that some decide to leave parish ministry and pursue other vocations.

The reasons why pastors leave parish ministry are many and varied. Some cite stress or burnout in their decision to leave. Others grow weary from the lack of respect given to clergy in the wider society. Some cite the ever-increasing expectation level within their churches, brought on, in large part, as a result of the rise of the megachurch and television ministries. Some grow disillusioned with the role they are being expected to play or the politics in which they must engage to keep the machinery of the church running smoothly. Still others leave because of tensions within their marriage and family or financial pressures due to inadequate compensation. Some even disqualify themselves from pastoral ministry because of sexual misconduct or some other ethical breach of character.

Pastoral ministry is also increasingly being understood by those entering the ministry as a temporary calling. Today, unlike previous generations, people rarely stay with the same occupation throughout their lifetime, often changing jobs many times. The same is true for pastoral ministry. In many cases it is even a second career for those entering ministry, as the average age of seminarians today hovers around forty. Some studies have even shown that wherever an understanding of a divine calling is missing or inadequate, the pastoral ministry will more likely be regarded as seasonal (Gonlag 2).

Whenever pastors leave the ministry, both the ministers as well as the congregations they served are significantly impacted in a negative way (Cardwell and

Hunt 119-20). One consequence is damage to the ministers' sense of worth and self-esteem. More than in most professions, ministers' identities are generally linked to a sense of calling from God, and to abandon that calling is often perceived as an act of failing God. Additionally they often face significant financial repercussions due to a loss of income as well as, in many cases, a place to live. Also, ministers' education is specialized and usually takes from seven to ten or more years. If they leave that profession, they have not only wasted that investment of time and money but they are also ill prepared academically for any other profession. If they happen to leave the pastoral ministry because of a breach of ethical conduct, the likelihood of their eventual reinstatement is often doubtful or, at best, a lengthy process. The damage to their families in this instance is significant, often irreparable.

Churches themselves also suffer when pastors leave the ministry. They lose their spiritual leaders and the relationships that were formed during their tenure. They lose their sense of vision and direction. One writer cites collateral damage to the church in the areas of evangelism, financial contributions, attendance, joy and zeal, and the church's future (Greenfield 120). Sometimes churches even struggle with guilt and remorse due to congregational failure to support and encourage their pastors. Additionally, whenever a minister leaves due to an ethical breach of character, the congregation's trust in future pastoral leadership is usually significantly damaged.

In contrast to those who have left the ministry are those who have stayed by their calling for a lifetime. Anecdotal accounts, in addition to personal experience, indicate that many of them, like those who have left, have also experienced a number of crises that caused them at some point to doubt or question their call. Nevertheless, something

inside them ultimately stiffened their resolve to continue in their ministry and finish their calling in a strong manner. Wherever I have met them throughout my pastoral career, these men and women have become my heroes.

While a number of studies have explored the various factors that have gone into influencing a minister's decision to leave pastoral ministry, very few studies have explored the inner reasons why some pastors chose to stay. Studies focusing on the failures, while helpful, do not necessarily identify the underlying reasons why others have chosen to stay with their calling. Charles L. Rassieur for one believes that researchers could be helped a great deal by looking at emotionally healthy pastors:

How do we account for pastors like these, who thrive despite the obvious stresses of ministry? What explains their enthusiasm for ministry? Is it the result of extraordinary commitment and spiritual dedication? Has God favored them more than others? Are they more religious or perhaps wiser, or just tougher-skinned? Certainly it is not that they make more money, or that they do not serve difficult pastorates.... If the church could discover what motivates such pastors maybe there could be important lessons to be learned for all who are in the ministry. (35)

The study by Katherine Rhoads Meek et al. also began by posing the following questions:

Most of the psychological literature on clergy life has been focused on impairment.... This literature has been helpful in identifying challenges facing clergy, but has largely ignored the more positive aspects of clergy life and functioning. For example, what is going well for the 20% whose family life is not negatively affected, the 50% who remain in ministry after five years, the 30% who have been able to develop close friendships, and the 63% who are maintaining strong sexual boundaries within their congregations? (340)

Rassieur and Meeks et al. pose the valid question of what enables some ministers to endure while others become casualties.

I believe that, for most of these ministers, their sense of divine calling is a major factor in their ability to endure. Marianne Gonlag concurs:

Understanding the roll of the *call* [original emphasis] in the minister's life is essential to understanding the issues of vocational choice and satisfaction in ministry, and may be related to the further critical issues of competency, effectiveness, and persistence in ministry. (2)

Her 1992 study examined Wesleyan pastors who had less than five years experience in ministry, but she suggested that a complement to her study would be one that examines the attitudes and understandings of the call among "more seasoned pastors" (166).

### **Purpose Statement**

The purpose of this study was to investigate how a sense of divine calling contributes to longevity among ordained ministers of the Wesleyan Church.

### **Research Questions**

In order to fulfill the purpose of this study, three research questions were identified.

#### **Research Question #1**

What is the cognitive understanding of divine calling that ordained ministers of the Wesleyan Church possess?

#### **Research Question #2**

How have ordained ministers of the Wesleyan Church personally experienced a divine call to ministry?

#### **Research Question #3**

How has their understanding and experience of their call influenced ordained ministers in the Wesleyan Church regarding their longevity in pastoral ministry?

### **Definitions**

The following definitions are given in order to provide clarity of the terminology used in this study.

## **Calling**

For the purposes of this study, the call is defined as the inward prompting of the Holy Spirit to vocational ministry, recognized and affirmed by the Church of Jesus Christ. Even though God extends a general call to all believers to be his ministers of grace to a lost world, he extends a particular call to some persons to provide leadership within the Church and equip followers of Christ for ministry:

It was he who gave some to be prophets, some to be pastors and teachers, to prepare God's people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ. (Eph. 4:11-13, NIV)

Calling is discussed at length in Chapter 2.

## **Vocation**

The word *vocation* is sometimes used to describe one's occupation or career. When viewed alongside of calling, a career is "work that is chosen rather than imposed; individuals select the career path, the school, and the job offer that is best for them, and to do otherwise would be considered imprudent, even irrational" (Christopherson 219). In a more pure sense, however, the word *vocation*, coming from the Latin word "vocare" (to call), is more of a synonym for calling. For the purposes of this study, *calling* is the intended meaning of the word.

## **Ministry**

Ministry in the general Christian context simply means service and applies to the responsibility of all believers to carry out the work of Christ in the world. In a more limited theological context, it also refers to specialized ministries performed officially and publicly by persons with unique gifts who are regarded by their fellow believers as

having a special role. The *Discipline of the Wesleyan Church* articulates this understanding of ministry:

He also calls some to a specialized or representative type of ministry. As Christ called unto Him whom He would, chose and ordained His twelve apostles “that they should be with him, and that he might send them forth to preach” (Mark 3:14), so He still calls and sends forth His messengers to be servants of the servants who make up the whole church. (Kelly et al. 250)

For the purposes of this study, *ministry* is used in this more specialized sense.

### **Longevity**

The term *longevity* in respect to ministry has been used by scholars in several ways. One way is to speak of a pastor’s tenure in a particular ministry setting. John H. Hoskins believes that longevity in this sense is a highly desirable quality for effective ministry (8). Another use of the term is to speak of longevity in respect to one’s engagement in the career of ministry (Lane 1). For the purposes of this study *longevity* is used in the sense of John R. Lane, referring to one’s career. Other words used in this study to refer to this trait are *persistence*, *endurance*, and *perseverance*.

### **Context**

The context of this study is ministry within the Wesleyan Church. The Wesleyan Church is a small holiness denomination that was created through the mergers of the Wesleyan Methodist and Pilgrim Holiness churches. Both have their roots in nineteenth-century American Methodism.

Ministers become ordained within the Wesleyan Church through the guidance of a district board of ministerial development. This district board is responsible for monitoring a candidate’s progress through various educational requirements established by the denomination’s department of education and the ministry. The process begins

when a local church recommends one of its members to the district board to be licensed as a ministerial student. The board conducts extensive interviews with the candidate, and forwards transcripts of any previous education to the department of education and the ministry. From there a candidate is guided through a course of study at one of its five colleges, affiliate seminaries, or a nontraditional course of study (FLAME) outlined by the department (General Department 33).

A number of ministers, particularly those who are entering the pastoral ministry as a second career or are serving as bi-vocational pastors, fulfill their educational requirements by means of the nontraditional course of study. A denominational study done in 1987 revealed that at that time 70.7 percent of all Wesleyan pastors had only completed a baccalaureate degree or less as their highest level of education (Haines 3). The department of education and the ministry provides correspondence and weeklong intensive classes at regional sites in the various required courses. Candidates are expected to complete their requirements within a seven-year period, after which they are eligible for ordination.

A majority of all Wesleyan ministers are educated at one of the denomination's five colleges. The Wesleyan Church does not operate a seminary, nor does it require a seminary education for ordination. It does, however, encourage its candidates to attend one of several seminaries where it maintains a foundation in order to provide oversight. Upon completion of all requirements in the course of study, the candidate would be classified by his or her district board of ministerial development as a licensed minister and would be eligible to be called or appointed to serve in a local church. After one year

under appointment (two if the education was from a non-Wesleyan institution), the candidate would be eligible for ordination (General Department 36).

Several factors unique to the Wesleyan Church may have some bearing on a Wesleyan pastor's tenure in ministry. One is the way in which ministers are appointed. Unlike some Methodist denominations, the Wesleyan Church does not guarantee appointments for its ministers. Each pastor is eligible to be called by any church in any district as a type of free agent, subject to the approval of the district conference and the presiding general superintendent. Consequently, if a pastoral call has not been renewed in one church, and the pastor receives no call to go to another, he or she is considered without appointment. Whenever a call to a local church fails to come, some simply do not return to pastoring.

Another factor influencing pastoral endurance is that pastors have no guaranteed salary within the call structure of the Wesleyan Church. Churches simply agree to pay pastors whatever they are able. Smaller congregations often lack the financial resources to pay their pastors a living wage. This economic reality creates a great hardship and strain in many pastoral families, forcing many pastors or their spouses to supplement their incomes in the secular workplace. For some, the demands of the workplace compete with the demands of the ministry until one eventually has to give way. This tension has caused some ministers to question their calling.

### **Methodology**

The methodology used in this study was qualitative in nature. Qualitative research enabled me to listen to people's individual stories and thereby gain greater insight into

their understanding and experience of their call and its influence on their endurance in pastoral ministry.

### **The Participants**

The subjects of the study were either senior or solo pastors within the Wesleyan Church in North America. Length of tenure within a congregation was not a consideration, although it was noted in the comparison of data. The twenty-five pastors I studied had all been ordained in the Wesleyan Church and had served under appointment for more than ten years.

The subjects were selected from three districts of the church. I first contacted the superintendents in each of the districts in order to secure their cooperation. They each then submitted a list of pastors from their districts whom they believed fit the profile of the study. The subjects were then randomly chosen from the selected pool.

### **Instrumentation**

The study was conducted through the use of a semi-structured interview. The instrument used was a short questionnaire followed by several open-ended questions. The questionnaire sought to establish some demographic criteria that would provide an understanding of who the sample was. Among these factors were age, gender, number of years in the ministry, number of years as a senior or solo pastor, number of years at the present church, education, and geographical location. These variables were compared with the responses of the participants to the open-ended questions to evaluate any possible correlation.

The interview consisted of a series of questions that attempted to encourage the subjects to share their various beliefs and experiences related to their call to ministry.

This interview consisted of the following areas of inquiry:

1. How did you make the decision to become a pastor?
2. How did you experience God's call to ministry?
3. Were there any particular things or experiences that helped to confirm the call?
4. Has God reassured you of your call? If so, how?
5. Are there some things you run into in ministry that sometimes make you wonder about your call?
6. While in ministry have you ever given consideration to leaving pastoral ministry for another line of work? Describe the situation.
7. Why have you chosen to remain in pastoral ministry?
8. Do you believe God's call on your life is seasonal, or lifelong? Why?
9. Since you first entered pastoral ministry has your understanding of your call changed significantly? If so, how?

### **Data Collection**

Pastors in the sample were contacted by telephone and given information about the study. Those willing to participate indicated a time that would be most convenient for them to be interviewed later by telephone. Extensive field notes were taken during the interviews, which were also tape recorded with the permission of the subjects for later comparison.

## **Data Analysis**

The interviews with the participants were transcribed and reviewed. Then the data was organized in order to generate categories, themes, and patterns among the responses. Reflection on these coded responses enabled me to build theory, which was then tested by the data. These categories were also compared to the demographic data to ascertain any possible correlation of responses. I discuss the findings of the study at length in Chapter 4 and present my conclusions in Chapter 5.

## **Theological Foundation**

Several important theological foundations support the idea of endurance in Christian ministry. Many scholars believe that a divine summons to the task is probably the most important consideration. McNeal is one of them:

God shapes the heart of a leader through the call. This call is a divinely orchestrated setting apart of the leader for some special task. God's part of the call dynamic is to initiate, guide, position, and intervene. The leader's part of the call drama is to hear, respond, search, and order or reorder life. (95)

McNeal refers to the call as an internal navigation beacon during times of great testing (41). James L. Garlow refers to the call of God as being similar to the flanges on the wheels of a train that keep it on track.

God places a call in the heart of every one of his disciples to follow him. That call is a call "by him, to him, and for him" (Guinness 31). It is a call to obedience and faithfulness. Thus, every person who is a believer in Christ is called to be a saint (Rom. 1:7), called to be holy (1 Pet. 1:5), called out of darkness and into God's glorious light (1 Pet. 2:9), called to live a life worthy of their calling (2 Thess. 1:11), called to take hold of

eternal life (1 Tim. 6:12), called to a life of peace (Col. 3:15), and called to suffer (1 Pet. 2:21). It is also a call to ministry (Eph. 4:12).

The call to ministry is a call to service (*diakonia*). Jesus Christ is himself the perfect model of service, coming to this world “not ... to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many” (Matt. 20:28; Mark 10:45). He glorified his Father by completing the work he had been given to do (John 17:5). The apostle Paul later spoke of himself as a bondservant (*δουλοῦ*) of the Lord Jesus Christ (Rom. 1:1). He viewed his calling as one who had been charged with the responsibility of doing the will of the one who called him.

While God places a general call to ministry on all believers, he places a more specific call of leadership within the church on a more select group (Eph. 4:11). In the Old Testament, God called Moses, Samuel, Isaiah, and Jeremiah among many others to specific ministerial roles. Each of them understood their call from God as a lifelong calling. In the New Testament, Jesus specifically called each of his disciples as well as the apostle Paul to a life of service to God. These calls are explored more in-depth in Chapter 2.

An important aspect of God’s call is the recognition of that call by the church. The New Testament Church recognized the authority of the apostles because they had been with Jesus. Later, however, as the need for other leaders arose, other criteria became important in the Church’s selection of leaders. In Acts 6:3 the Church chose deacons who were “known to be full of the Spirit and wisdom.” Likewise, Acts 13:1-3 describes Paul and Barnabas being set apart for specific ministry as the church received instructions from the Lord. John Wesley refers to both the inner and outer call of God—the inner one

referring to the personal call upon the heart, and the outer one referring to the church's recognition of a person's gifts, graces, and fruit (5: 488).

At times some individuals whom God called had difficulty in following through on their assignments. Moses' father-in-law warned him at one point: "You and these people who come to you will only wear yourselves out. The work is too heavy for you; you cannot handle it alone" (Exod. 18:18). At times Moses even despaired of the heavy responsibility that he shouldered (Num. 11:11-15). Elijah also showed symptoms of discouragement and burnout (1 Kings 19:4). Peter did so as well. In John 21:15-22, Jesus appeared to him following his resurrection, after Peter and some other disciples had apparently returned to fishing. Peter had lost his motivation for ministry as a result of failing the Lord by denying him after Jesus was arrested; nevertheless, Jesus reaffirmed his initial call upon Peter and instructed him to "feed his lambs" and, once again, to follow him.

Scripture contains many exhortations to persevere. Some are calls not to give up on the faith (e.g., Matt. 10:22). Others are calls to endurance in the midst of persecution (e.g., Rom. 5:3; Jas. 1:3, 12). Nevertheless, at times the call to persevere pertains to the work of ministry itself (e.g., Luke 8:15; 1 Cor. 15:52; 1 Tim. 4:16). Although not explicitly stated, the writers of Scripture seem to assume that the call to ministry is a lifetime call.

Jesus set a wonderful example for his disciples on the subject of endurance in ministry (Heb. 12:2-3). Although his public ministry only lasted a few years, the pressures and demands on him were nonstop. One likely reason that he did not burn out was his regular practice of tending to his spirit (e.g., Matt. 14:23). He also nourished his

spirit by occasionally retreating to Bethany and elsewhere to enjoy the company of some close friends. When the time of his greatest trial came, he emerged triumphant by enduring the cross and loving others to the moment of his last breath.

### **Overview of the Study**

Chapter 2 reviews the various literature pertaining to the call to ministry, studies on ministerial longevity, as well as studies on ministerial attrition and burnout. Chapter 3 presents the methodology used to secure the data from the subjects. Chapter 4 discusses the data collected in the study. In Chapter 5 I discuss my conclusions.

## CHAPTER 2

### LITERATURE

This study attempted to investigate how a sense of divine calling contributes to longevity among ordained ministers of the Wesleyan Church. The literature reviewed in this study focused on a theology of the call to ministry. Additionally, it took a look at a number of studies that examined ministerial longevity as well as studies on ministerial burnout and attrition and ministerial health. Finally, the review considered literature on qualitative methodology.

My concern for this subject arises from personal experience. I participated in leadership on a district board of administration and a district board of ministerial development for many years within the Wesleyan Church and personally witnessed the slow attrition of pastors who had been in the ministry for a while. I wondered what would cause some of them to give up on their calling, to which they had testified in their ordination to ministry. I had personally experienced a number of trying moments in my own ministerial career where I had entertained thoughts of leaving, but my strong sense of God's calling had kept me steady. However, the day eventually did come when burnout and discouragement resulted in a six-month sabbatical from the ministry and a reevaluation of my own call. God did renew it, along with a desire to finish my ministerial career strong, but my experience made me wonder how many of my seasoned colleagues had experienced similar crises. If they had also experienced a time of questioning, I wondered what had held them steady. Because God's calling had played a prominent role in my return to ministry, I wondered if it had also factored into their decision. I also wondered if their experience of calling was similar to my own.

### **The Call to Ministry**

The Wesleyan Church has placed a great deal of emphasis on the importance of the call among its candidates for ministry. Gonlag remarks, “Theologically, the call is critical to the ministerial profession because it roots the minister’s service in a personal relationship with Jesus Christ and response to his direction for one’s life work” (5).

Richard W. Christopherson adds, “The discovery and development of vocation are critical for modern clergy ... because their own identity and personal worth are defined by the call” (222). Calling defines who a minister is as well as what he does.

The idea of vocation or calling actually originated with biblical ministry and was later adopted by other professions as well (Steckel 377). Calling immediately raises the issue of who is calling. If God calls, then those who hear him are simply responders to his call. Calling also raises the issue of what one is called to do, which involves the idea of the nature of ministry itself.

### **The Call to Specialized Ministry**

One definition of calling is “a task set by God with a sense of obligation to work for purposes other than one’s own” (Christopherson 219). This definition suggests that calling is oriented around a task, a specialized ministry. However, a great deal of emphasis within the church today is being centered around the idea that God’s calling involves all people in a relationship with himself:

Calling is the truth that God calls us to himself so decisively that everything we are, everything we do, and everything we have is invested with a special devotion, dynamism, and direction lived out as a response to his summons and service.... Our primary calling as followers of Christ is by him, to him, and for him. (Guiness 29, 31)

God's Spirit calls everyone to be a follower of Christ (Acts 2:39; 1 Pet. 2:9). Believers in Christ are called to share in this heavenly calling (Heb. 3:1), called to be saints (Rom. 1:7), called to be holy (1 Pet. 1:5), called out of darkness and into God's glorious light (1 Pet. 2:9), called to live a life worthy of their calling (2 Thess. 1:11), called to take hold of eternal life (1 Tim. 6:12), called to a life of peace (Col. 3:15), and called to suffer (1 Pet. 2:21). As a follower of Christ, one is essentially called to ministry or service (Eph. 4:12). David J. Ernst even notes that God's calling in Scripture is generally associated with character and position, not occupation (34).

Pastors are actually called to two kinds of ministry. They are called to the general ministry to which all Christians are called, and they are also called to the professional equipping ministry in which ministers spend their professional lives (Drury, *Call of a Lifetime* 29). Every Christian is called to be a minister, but God sets some apart to equip the rest. The Apostle Paul spoke of these specialized ministries as prophets, evangelists, pastors, and teachers (Eph. 4:11).

This divine call to leadership within the church has long been one of the principal marks for all Christian denominations in ascertaining the spiritual qualifications of those they ordain. Historically the church has viewed this call as threefold: the inner or personal call that comes to persons themselves, the call of the church to set oneself apart for ministry, and the providential call of an opportunity for ministry.

### **The Inward Call of God**

In his sermon "A Caution against Bigotry," John Wesley says, "Whoever preaches in his name should have an outward as well as an inward call" (5: 488). John Calvin refers to this inward call as a "secret call" (1063). Martin Luther calls it "God's

voice heard by faith” (qtd. in Mohler). The Bible contains many examples of men and women who were personally and inwardly called by God to specific tasks. Abraham was called to be the father of many nations (Gen. 12:1-3). Moses was called to deliver the Israelites from their bondage to Egypt (Exod. 3:1-4:17). Samuel was called to judge and prophesy to Israel (1 Sam. 3:1-20). David was called by God to rule over Israel (2 Sam. 5:2). Isaiah and Jeremiah, along with many others, were called by God to prophesy (Isa. 6:1-13; Jer. 1:4-10). These all served him faithfully during their entire lifetimes as prophets, priests, and kings.

In the New Testament, God called Mary to be the mother of Jesus (Luke 1:26-38). Through Jesus God personally called the twelve apostles (Matt. 4:18-22; 9:9; John 1:35-51). Perhaps the most celebrated personal call in Scripture is that of the apostle Paul (Acts 9:1-4). His later testimony of this call authenticated his ministry to both the Christians in Damascus as well as the apostles in Jerusalem and was later recited in his defenses before the citizens of Jerusalem and King Agrippa (Acts 22:6-21; 26:12-18).

According to the Wesleyan Church, this specialized call from God may come in one of several ways. One is an instantaneous call in which “in an identifiable and memorable experience God makes the call known to the persons involved” (General Department 13) such as the calls of Moses, Isaiah, and Paul. Another would be a call from birth in which, “as their consciousness dawns, children are also aware that they are called to God’s special service” (13). Some examples of this type of call might be the calls of Jeremiah and John the Baptist. A third would be a progressive call in which “God makes his will clear through a series of experiences or incidents, resulting in a gradually increasing certainty as to what is to be done” (13). Finally one might consider an open

door of God's providential leading in which "obedient believers follow the Spirit's leading through a series of decisions and enter the specialized ministry without any awareness of an event or even a progression but with the conviction that this is where God wants them" (14). No particular method of call, though, should be regarded as normative. In fact, the more dramatic type of call is probably the least prevalent. Nevertheless, the call is no less real, and the certainty about God's call comes because he calls, not because of how he calls.

### **The Call of the Church**

In addition to Paul's divine, personal call, the Bible also records the Church's recognition of his gifts and ordination for ministry (Acts 13:1-3). The Church also did the same in its earlier appointment of deacons (Acts 6:1-6). Paul, along with the Church, did this same thing for disciples such as Silas, Timothy, Titus, and many others. Throughout Scripture an individual's personal call to ministry was not to be accepted without verification (Deut. 13:1-3; 18:21-22; Matt. 7:15-23; Gal. 1:8-9; 1 John 4:1-8; 2 John 7-11).

The Wesleyan Church, in line with most denominations, continues this practice:

As the Holy Spirit impresses this call upon the individual involved, He also confirms the call through the Church. It is the responsibility of the Church both to recognize and endorse God's call, providing for the training and employment of those He selects, and to respect the office of the specialized ministry by refusing its exercise to those not called of God. (Kelly et al. 250)

Many pastors have found their way into ministry because someone in their local church recognized their gifts and graces and encouraged them to consider whether God may be calling them. Additionally, others who mistakenly believe that they might have received a

call from God have been spared unnecessary pain by ministry oversight boards that refuse to ordain them when they believe that they lack those gifts and graces.

Wesley used a threefold criterion for verifying an individual's personal call from God:

How shall we try those who think they are moved by the Holy Ghost to preach? Inquire, (1.) Do they know God as a pardoning God? Have they the love of God abiding in them? Do they desire and seek nothing but God? And are they holy in all manner of conversation? (2.) Have they the gifts (as well as the grace) for the work? Have they (in some tolerable degree) a clear, sound understanding? Have they a right judgment in the things of God? Have they a just conception of salvation by faith? And has God given them any degree of utterance? Do they speak justly, readily, clearly? (3.) Have they the fruit? Are any truly convinced of sin, and converted to God, by their preaching? As long as these three marks concur in any one, we believe he is called of God to preach. These we receive as sufficient proof that he is "moved thereto by the Holy Ghost. (8: 324-25)

Wesley's three marks (conversion, gifts and grace, and fruit) have been used by many churches and denominations over the years in their attempts to affirm an individual's divine call and to set them apart for ministerial service. In the Wesleyan Church today, four marks are used as criteria to distinguish a person's suitability for specialized ministry. These are grace (works of grace or conditions of grace—evidence that a person has been converted or sanctified), gifts (gifts of the Holy Spirit necessary for ministry), fruit (effectiveness of their ministry in the lives of others), and an abiding sense of a divine call (Kelly et al. 251).

A recent study by Donald Lee Mason explores the role of the call to ministry as it relates to a minister's persistence. Noting the distinction between a spiritual call (Wesley's "inward call") and a call emanating from one's natural giftings (the church's recognition of a person's gifts and graces), he assumes that one's spiritual call plays a more prominent role in his decision to remain in ministry. He studied three hundred

graduates of Asbury Seminary and their responses on the Theological School Inventory. Surprisingly, he concludes that natural leadings were a stronger motivator than spiritual calling in retention to ministry (85). The role of the church in helping individuals discover and nurture their gifts is highly important in the process of discerning their call to ministry.

### **The Call of Opportunity**

A third component of God's calling of a minister is the call of opportunity. Many pastors have discovered their spiritual gifts as well as their sense of calling by seizing an opportunity that God providentially placed before them. By taking that opportunity they were able to discern the leading of God to a useful field of service. God frequently opens and closes doors of opportunity in order to accomplish his purposes (e.g., Acts 16:6-10).

A number of pastors have questioned their divine call to ministry when the call of opportunity has been absent. Some denominations struggle with clergy shortages, but others have more pastors than they can actually place. Patricia M. Y. Chang believes that a clergy shortage definitely exists in smaller churches, due in most part to their inability to support a full-time pastor (7). Additionally, she claims that "seminary graduates face a tighter labor market than they did a generation ago, and that 35% of them will be unable to find suitable parish work within the first two years after seminary" (7). Some pastors who sense they are called to ministry are denied the opportunity to serve.

### **The Length of a Call**

In Scripture God's call to ministry was generally conceived as being for the life of the individual. Prophets, priests, and kings throughout the Old Testament served the Lord for the duration of their lives. The apostles all understood their calling to be for the

duration of their lives. Admittedly, some church leaders abandoned their calling, even making shipwreck of their faith (1 Tim. 1:18-20; 2 Tim. 4:10). Nevertheless, Romans 11:29 states, “God’s gifts and his call are irrevocable.” Additionally, 1 Corinthians 7:17 states, “Nevertheless, each one should retain the place in life that the Lord assigned to him and to which God has called him.”

Historically, the Church has understood the call to ministry to be a lifetime call. The Roman Catholic Church, viewing the ordination of priests as a sacrament, has argued that once a person has been ordained as a priest, he will always remain a priest. The National Council of Bishops says, “The minister whose life bears the seal of the gift received through the sacrament of Orders reminds the Church that the gift of God is irrevocable” (National Council 7). Even Protestants, though, while not acknowledging ordination as a sacrament, have usually conceived of God’s call to ministry as a lifelong call.

Some have contended more recently that the Scripture never frames the pastoral call in terms of longevity (Ernst 34). Instead, it speaks of the call of all believers to God’s royal priesthood (1 Pet. 2:5, 9). Everyone is called to be a minister of the gospel, no matter what his or her occupation. Because God has given a variety of gifts to people, some are more suited to be pastors, missionaries, or evangelists. Ernst in particular believes that longevity in calling is a moot issue:

It would seem much more positive, helpful, and scriptural to view the call to vocational ministry as a call by God to invest our unique gifting in places, people, and roles for a specified period of time. This may be a lifetime, but not necessarily so. (34)

In this view God calls people to a particular task, and when that task is completed the obligation comes to an end. This view unfortunately does not see a real distinction

between God's call upon all believers and his calling of some to leadership within his Church.

Ed Dobson, Wayne Gordon, and Louis McBurney state that though most of the time the call to ministry is intended for life, some situations require that the call must be set aside, either temporarily or permanently. One of those reasons would be a breach of trust, when a minister makes an ethical lapse in judgment and thereby forfeits his or her right to provide spiritual leadership. Another would be a pause for refreshment, where because of pressures or conflict a pastor feels it is necessary to pull away from the responsibility of ministry for a season in order to gain a new perspective on his or her calling. A third reason, they believe, would be for a new calling where God moves them into a new arena of service.

### **Perseverance in God's Calling**

The Christian ministry is a difficult calling. Those who give their lives to it are often tempted to quit. Perseverance is critical to success in ministry. Craig Brian Larson comments on the role of perseverance in his own ministry when he faced those temptations:

I am overqualified to write this book. Not because I have more pastoral grit than others but because I suspect I have felt like giving up more often than most.... One reason I have not is because of a simple, unshakable conviction that has developed in my soul: perseverance is central to spiritual life and ministry. (9)

Ben Haden adds, "Races aren't necessarily won by the first runner out of the blocks. Winners are determined at the finish line. Ministry is also judged not on short bursts but the total impact of a life" (12). While an understanding of one's divine call can be an

important factor in one's decision to remain in ministry, it is often influenced by one's ability to persevere through difficult times.

One simply cannot look at the subject of ministerial endurance without noting the weight of Scripture on the matter. Nearly every list of virtues contains some form of perseverance (Rom. 5:3-4; 1 Cor. 13:7; Gal. 5:22; Col. 3:12; Jas. 1:3-4; 2 Pet. 1:6). The many passages on perseverance sometimes refer to endurance in the midst of trials. Sometimes they refer to holding on to the faith. Occasionally they even refer to faithfulness to one's calling, even their calling to specialized ministry.

In Matthew 10:22 Jesus spoke to his disciples before sending them out on a mission. He warned them about the dangers and trials they would face. When rebuffed because of their message, they were instructed to "shake the dust from their feet" and simply move on. He warned them, "All men will hate you because of me, but he who stands firm to the end will be saved." The word  $\alpha\upsilon\tau\omicron\mu\epsilon\nu\nu\omega$  is used, which means to stand one's ground, to survive, to remain steadfast, and to persevere (Brown 2: 774). While Jesus probably intended this statement as a warning to his disciples not to abandon their faith in him, their service for him is also implied.

Luke 9:62 is another text that speaks of the importance of perseverance in one's calling. The chapter begins with Jesus sending out his disciples on a preaching and healing mission, and it ends with the offer of several other men to follow him wherever he would go. After spelling out for them the personal costs they would have to endure for the sake of following him, he stated, "No one who puts his hand to the plow and looks back is fit for service in the kingdom of God." Jesus expected that those who made sacrifices to follow him in service would continue to do so.

Paul also addressed the subject of perseverance in ministry: “Therefore, my dear brothers, stand firm. Let nothing move you. Always give yourselves fully to the work of the Lord, because you know that your labor in the Lord is not in vain” (1 Cor. 15:58). The word “firm” (εἰσδραϊ`οι) means unshakeable, stable, as a foundation (Brown 1: 661). Also, the use of the present imperative (givesqe) stresses constant Christian stability: “Continue to stand firm;... always abound” (Gaebelein 10: 292). Thus, Paul exhorted believers to persist in the “work of the Lord” to which they had been called and not to give up in the face of opposition and discouragement.

The pastoral epistles also contain a number of relevant texts to the subject of perseverance in ministry. In an encouragement to young Timothy to “set an example for the believers in speech, in life, in love, in faith and in purity” (1 Tim. 4:12), Paul also admonished him not to neglect his gift (v. 14), to watch his life and doctrine closely, and to persevere in them (v. 16). He later charged him to “pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, endurance and gentleness” (1 Tim. 6:11). In his second epistle, Paul spoke of his own endurance in the face of opposition to his preaching (2 Tim. 3:10). Finally, in speaking of his impending death, he stated, “I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race” (2 Tim. 4:7). He implied from this testimony that his calling from the Lord was something that was not concluded until his life on this earth was over.

Another Pauline passage is of special note. In 1 Corinthians 9:24-27 Paul uses athletic imagery to describe the kind of discipline that is necessary to “get the prize,” a “crown that will last forever.” Self-discipline is necessary to success, particularly discipline of the body. An alarming number of ministers have failed to exercise self-discipline over their bodies resulting in sexual sin. Paul says, “No, I beat my body and

make it my slave so that after I have preached to others, I myself will not be disqualified for the prize” (1 Cor. 9:27). A minister must not only preach the gospel but live it out before the people he or she is called to serve. Failure to live up to God’s standards can and should disqualify him or her as a minister.

The writer of Hebrews also addresses the subject of perseverance. “Do not throw away your confidence; it will be richly rewarded. You need to persevere so that when you have done the will of God, you will receive what he has promised” (Heb. 10:35-36). The context of this passage reveals that he is speaking of endurance (υἰρπόμενῳ) in the face of persecution. Nevertheless, the reference to the will of God suggests that just as Jesus was occupied with doing the will of God (Heb. 10:9), endurance can also be applied to occupation with ministry (Gaebelien 12: 111).

Jesus himself set the example of endurance for his followers:

Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy set before him endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. Consider him who endured such opposition from sinful men, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart. (Heb. 12:2-3)

The previous chapter in Hebrews cites many examples of Old Testament saints whose faith would not allow them to give up on the mission and calling they sensed from God. Together they form a “great cloud of witnesses” whose faith serves as an example so that followers of Christ can “run with perseverance (υἰρπόμενῳ) the race marked out for us” (Heb. 12:1).

### **Calling and Profession**

The work of the ministry today is generally regarded as a profession. The professional nature of pastoral ministry has been debated and discussed for many years.

The debate seems to center around whether clergy should be viewed in terms of their office or charisma (Catholic view) or in terms of their function (Protestant view). Clyde J. Steckel concludes, “The ordained (or otherwise certified) ministries of the churches are and must be understood as professions, in the older and more traditional meanings of that term” (377). Thus, the ministry, along with medicine, law, and other classical professions, share the “traditional characteristics of integrating fundamental theory and research with skilled application and disciplined reflection on that application” (378).

Drury, a professor of theology who has been engaged in preparing Wesleyan pastors for ministry, speaks about the understanding of many Wesleyan pastors today:

The ministry is a job, but it is much more than a job. It is also a profession like law or medicine. It is an established occupation with its own vocabulary, way of thinking, and generally accepted code of professional conduct. Yet the ministry is more than a profession, it is a vocation, a calling. (*Call of a Lifetime* 17)

Whether or not the ministry should be considered a profession, however, is not the primary concern of this study. Where it relates is that profession and calling are often seen as conflicting values. Christopherson recognizes this tension when he says, “The work of Christian ministers is precariously poised between the sacred ideals of their ‘call’ and the secular demands and rewards of their ‘career’” (219). He goes on to say, “The immediate problem for clergy is that their vocation must be discovered and developed within a culture of professionalism” (223). When ministry is viewed primarily as a profession (emphases on education, leadership training, institutional advancement), the notion of calling is in danger of being obscured or lost.

One consequence of the contemporary church growth movement is that many pastors have perceived their role within the church as that of a CEO. Whenever the

pastoral role is perceived in this light, the sense of divine calling is diminished. In their study of pastors who had left the ministry Hoge and Wenger remark, “A large number of pastors ... view their ministry not as a calling but as a profession, and themselves as employees more than as persons committed to a call from God. They lack ... a servant attitude” (157). In his book *Calling and Character*, William H. Willimon cites a study conducted by sociologist of religion Robert Wilson among clergy of the Episcopal Church and the Church of God (Anderson) inquiring into their happiness and satisfaction with ministry. He discovered that even though the Episcopal clergy were better compensated, lived in larger parsonages, and had more generous pensions they were far less happy and content when compared to the Church of God pastors. He concluded that the problem lay in the differences between how each group conceived of its ministry. The Episcopalians saw themselves as professionals. The Church of God clergy saw themselves as called by God (22).

Where the occupation of ministry is perceived primarily as professional, the servant nature of ministry is often lost. The nature of the call that Jesus made to his disciples was one of selfless service. J. Oswald Sanders writes, “True greatness, true leadership, is achieved not by reducing men to one’s service, but in giving oneself in selfless service to them” (13). The primary word used in Scripture for ministry (*diakoniva*) means service. Jesus himself served as the perfect example of ministry for his disciples, coming to this world “not to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many” (Matt. 20:28). In the same way that he submitted himself to the will of his Father, so he instructed his disciples to follow him. As servants their calling was to

abandon any selfish interests they might have had. Henry Nouwen embodied this ministerial principle:

The servant leader is the leader who is being led to unknown, undesirable, and painful places. The way of the Christian leader is not the way of upward mobility in which our world has invested so much, but the way of downward mobility ending on the cross. (62)

Ministry, then, is serving Christ by serving those he came to save. Hardships, then, should be embraced as part of the call to ministry.

### **Calling and Longevity**

At several points during his ministry, the Apostle Paul testified to his divine call, demonstrating how it can serve as an anchor for the soul during times of testing. McNeal believes that, like Paul, an understanding and assurance of one's call can help a contemporary pastor remain faithful to his calling:

When Paul's life was on the line, he resorted to retelling his story. Christian leaders of all ages have done the same thing. When the going gets tough, when doubts crowd in, when fear and uncertainty threaten, the called return to the experience of their call. When tempted to quit, to run away, to hide, the memory of the divine intervention beckons them to renewed determination to live up to their call. (41)

David A. Willis echoes similar sentiments:

I believe the most powerful thing for the effectiveness and longevity in ministry is a clearly developed and understood sense of one's call from the Lord. Based upon a passionate desire to faithfully serve Christ, the call is the means whereby our faith becomes supernaturally activated by the power of the Almighty and we respond to the higher calling we have been entrusted with. Not only does our response matter, it solidifies the selection process and allows us to enter the ministry and fulfill the destiny God reveals to us. (168)

Several times during my own ministry experience my understanding of my call from God and memory of that experience was the only thing that held me steady.

A number of studies have been done in recent years that have highlighted the relationship between a sense of divine calling and longevity in ministry. Among these were two studies that explored longevity in terms of a pastor's long-term tenure in a particular church. Hoskins studied a group of longer term Independent Baptist and Bible Church pastors in West Virginia in an attempt to discover what factors were most influential in keeping them from moving to another parish. Every one of the subjects in his study indicated that the call of God had been essential to their longevity (69). Gregory Mark Loomis also studied a group of long-term pastors within the Evangelical Free Church of America and found similar conclusions. He discovered that the number one factor to longevity in a particular church mentioned by these pastors was the call of God. The second most important factor was a commitment to perseverance, which strongly correlated with God's calling.

Lane studied a group of Free Methodist pastors in central Indiana in an attempt to identify a number of controllable factors that contributed to longevity. Instead of longevity referring to tenure within a congregation, he defines it as "an extended length of time to accomplish the will of God in the individual life of the minister" (1). His concern was not tenure in a particular congregation but pastors leaving the ministry altogether. His subjects all had over twenty five years of service. Of the 136 people who responded to his survey, a surprising 46 percent indicated that they had either left the ministry at some point or had considered leaving (103). 90 percent of his respondents also stated that the call of God was the most influential factor in their longevity in ministry (98). In his summary he indicates that the call of God may seem like an uncontrollable factor in longevity, but the determination and consideration of it are

definitely controllable (106). He says, "In order to last in ministry a minister must test their call through the three main Biblical, theological, and historical tests for receiving a call of God" (99).

Gonlag conducted a study of Wesleyan pastors in 1992 in order to ascertain their understanding of the call to ministry and how it was being experienced. Her subjects were ministers in the Wesleyan Church who had been in ministry between two and five years. One of her chief concerns was retention of pastors, citing numerous studies that pointed out the fragile nature of the first five years of ministerial experience (10). Gonlag discovered that nearly 60 percent of her subjects stated that they had experienced doubts about their call to ministry resulting from difficulties in personal relationships, a sense of inadequacy, a sense of futility resulting from a lack of response, and a sense of failure (144). Approximately two-thirds of her subjects indicated that their understanding of their call to ministry had changed (145). She concludes that among Wesleyan pastors in their first five years, their understanding and experience of their call to ministry was a dominant factor in their choice of ministry as a career:

In a day when spiritual experiences are frequently questioned and sometimes scorned, the experience of the call to ministry is still highly valued by pastors in The Wesleyan Church. Virtually all of the pastors in the study recounted an experience of calling by God, either directly, through the Church, or both. The call to ministry was found to be the reason for entry into the profession, the source of confidence and certainty regarding participants' vocational choice, and the proverbial anchor when doubts arose. (157)

Even though the subjects of her study had been in ministry for only a relatively short period of time, the influence of the call on their longevity in ministry was clear.

### Calling and Clergy Attrition

This study sought to discern how pastors' understanding of their calling contributed to their longevity in ministry. Longevity in ministry is significantly impacted by a variety of factors that have been studied at length. In a 1980 article in *Christianity Today*, Gordon MacDonald claims that at least 3 percent often think of leaving the ministry, and 24 percent often contemplate the prospect (19). He also states that the highest proportion of pastors seriously contemplating leaving the ministry are those aged thirty to forty nine, and that more pastors of large churches contemplate leaving than those pastoring churches of less than three hundred members.

Most pastors enter pastoral ministry with idealistic expectations for their congregations born out of their understanding of their call and their ministerial training. When those ideals clash with the harsh realities of parish ministry, they often begin to question their call. Some even decide to abandon their calling and find another line of work. Two observers of this phenomenon clarify the issue:

Today's pastors face crises unknown to any other occupational groups. Contemporary parish ministry, without anyone intending to make it so, has become an emotional and spiritual H-bomb, ready to explode any second. Demands are up. Credibility is down. Suspicions are up. And needs are up. Comrades are going AWOL at the front lines, choosing to become therapists, gas station attendants, or carpenters instead of pastors. (London and Wiseman, *Your Pastor* 15-16)

Consequently, some denominations are becoming increasingly concerned today over the rate of attrition among their clergy.

In truth, not all losses to the ministerial ranks should be viewed negatively. Some pastors unfortunately find their way into the ministerial profession for the wrong reasons. Some lack the gifts necessary to succeed. Others with serious character flaws have not

been scrutinized adequately by their ordaining body. Willimon believes that some ordained ministers should be allowed to leave the profession:

In some cases the most ethically responsible act for some pastors is for them to cease being pastors, to leave the pastoral ministry and to assume some other form of Christian ministry.... We must challenge the medieval notion that one is “a priest forever,” once a priest, always a priest. (*Calling and Character* 122)

For the sake of pastors and their families, or the sake of congregations, some pastors must be allowed a graceful exit.

One theory regarding the loss of pastors within a denomination is that the number of opportunities for advancement of one’s career is declining (Chang 5). Viewing the profession of clergy as a labor market system Chang claims that denominations are pyramid shaped, with the best opportunities at the apex. She states that because fewer larger churches are available for pastoral appointments along with an increasing number of smaller churches that cannot afford to hire full-time pastors, fewer people are able to rise higher and, consequently, end their careers somewhere midway through their upward ascent.

One of the first extensive studies of pastoral attrition was that of Jud, Mills, and Burch who examined the reasons why ministers in the United Church of Christ were leaving parish ministry. They discovered that among the 241 former pastors they studied only 13.9 percent considered themselves as having left the ministry, while 62 percent saw themselves as performing a ministry in their current jobs (39). That fact correlates with the more recent study of Hoge and Wenger who discovered that the most common reason for leaving local church ministry was actually preference for another kind of ministry, accompanied with resentment for not being considered “real ministers” by some pastors

and officials (65). A significant number of clergy who leave pastoral ministry do not consider themselves to have abandoned the ministry.

Nevertheless, the reasons why ministers do leave pastoral ministry are many and varied. Willimon observes that some pastors leave the pastorate because they have difficulty making sense of the complicated, even messy, nature of the work of ministry. Some of the reasons he cites are that the work of the church is never done, the church's expectations are unclear, pastors are exhausted as a result of dealing with failure in people's lives, the ministry is declining in value in the surrounding culture, the institution of the Church is in decline, and many pastors do not manage their time well and are overworked (*Pastor* 316-25).

Elizabeth A. Pector discusses in her study of pastoral burnout several common reasons why pastors leave their churches. The factors she cites include pastoral communication difficulties, conflicting visions for the church, personality clashes, power struggles, and unrealistic expectations. Pector also notes that clergy families are stressed by frequent relocation, and spouses often work outside the home. Churches create stress through bureaucracy, poor support, and budget problems. Additionally, declining respect for clergy and isolation from peers exacerbate pastors' problems. A British study of pastors who had left Baptist ministry arrived at a similar conclusion, stating that one-fourth of the pastors had left the ministry over a fifty-year period. The reasons they cited were marriage difficulties, isolation, stress and burnout, lack of encouragement, and conflict in relationships (Randall 21).

The Jud, Mills, and Burch study examined a sample of both pastors and ex-pastors within the United Church of Christ. They compared them in respect to a variety of

measures and found them to have had many similar experiences; however, they also discovered that the ex-pastors had experienced less support and more disillusionment. They discovered that pastors had left the ministry because of a sense of personal and professional inadequacy, inability to relocate when necessary, problems with spouses and children, lack of opportunity to put training and skills to fullest use, personal illness or breakdown, dissatisfaction with parish work, discouragement over churches' spiritual growth and relevance, divorce and separation, money problems, and more attractive job opportunities. In short, they concluded that the ex-pastors they studied had no real hope that their lives as ministers could improve.

Chang agrees with the assessment that some ministers abandon their calling because of the lack of opportunity afforded them to advance their careers. She observes a clergy shortage in smaller churches, due in most part to their inability to support full-time pastors. She writes, "Some clergy choose not to accept calls to small churches, even when these churches can afford a full time pastor, because the congregations are located in isolated rural areas where jobs for spouses and other opportunities are limited" (7). Of those who take secular jobs, roughly one-third will remain there. Economic factors, she believes, play a large part in determining whether or not individuals will follow their calling. However, Chang's assumption that upward mobility is a primary goal of clergy careers ignores the prominent role that calling plays in the process as well as the servant nature of ministry itself.

The idea that ministers might leave their profession for financial reasons brings into question whether or not they sensed that they had been called by God to serve others. Elaine M. McDuff and Charles W. Mueller claim in their study that ministers tend to

change churches and ministry settings as a result of economic factors but make decisions to leave the profession itself based on their sense of calling:

For professionals in occupational labor markets with systematic and routinized mechanisms for between-employer movement, clergy intentions to leave one church for another are based on a rational assessment of work conditions in their current church and on their human capital investments, whereas their intentions to leave the ministry are based mainly on their level of professional service orientation or calling. (107)

The subjects of their study were ministers who operated in a free market setting rather than ones who were subject to placement by their superiors. While the various push-pull factors of individual churches weighed heavily on whether they chose to remain with a particular congregation, their sense of divine calling proved to be the overriding factor on their decisions regarding leaving the ministry altogether.

The problem of a limited labor market entered into the study by Barbara Brown Zikmund, Adair T. Lummis, and Patricia M. Y. Chang of both men and women ministers in fifteen denominations. They discovered that women clergy leave church positions more frequently than men with similar training (13 percent of women and 8 percent of men surveyed). An additional 12 percent had seriously considered leaving within the last year. The women ministers were more frequently single than their male counterparts, and they more frequently pastored in small rural settings and had less economic support. The researchers concluded that those who left the ministry were not part of a clergy support group, did not believe a better position could be easily obtained, and felt that denominational executives did not recognize their abilities (165).

The Wesleyan Church conducted a study in 1989 that examined the details of ministerial attrition among its ranks. Looking at the conference years 1987-88 and 1988-

89, Kenneth R. Heer discovered that the Wesleyan Church loses approximately 6 percent of its ministers each year. Half of that loss is due to natural attrition (death, retirement) and transfers to other denominations. The other half, almost 3 percent of the total number of pastors, was due to factors such as changed occupations, unresolved interpersonal relationships, emotional and physical problems, sexual impurity, and marriage and family problems (1).

The Klaas and Klaas study was conducted in 1999 for the Lutheran Church, Missouri Synod. The results of their study were much more negative than most other studies, possibly owing to some systemic issues within that particular denomination. In interviews and focus groups among pastors, pastors' wives, resigned pastors, seminary students, and children of pastors, they discovered a high level of burnout. The reasons they cited were little or no support from denominational leaders or other pastors, no recognition and few successes in their work, too much criticism from laity, low pay, and inadequate preparation. Additionally, the wives cited loneliness, too frequent residential moves, low family income, and too much stress on their husbands. Those who left the ministry were often the victims of mismatches between ministers and congregations. They concluded that the lives of parish pastors were generally too difficult and unrewarding (qtd. in Hoge and Wenger 226).

Hoge and Wenger's recent study, commissioned by the Pulpit and Pew Project at Duke University, is one of the most comprehensive and enlightening on the subject. They studied former pastors from the Presbyterian Church USA, Assemblies of God, United Methodist Church, Evangelical Lutheran Church of America, and Lutheran Church, Missouri Synod in order to explore the main reasons why clergy left pastoral ministry.

First, they discovered that the main factors pushing pastors away from local church ministry are both organizational and interpersonal. Second, they found that ministers are experiencing a lack of support and support systems, especially when they are coping with problems. Third, they discovered that a combination of stresses and difficulties is responsible for influencing pastors to leave (198-99).

Of those pastors who did leave the ministry, Hoge and Wenger discovered that 15-25 percent left voluntarily, 30-40 percent were forced out, and the remaining cases were the result of a combination of motives (49). Conflict within the congregation was cited as one of the most common reasons for leaving. The prevalence of conflict also correlates with the Klaas and Klaas study (Hoge and Wenger 226). Guy Greenfield also interviewed a number of ministers who had left the ministry as a result of conflict:

Talk to any group of ministers, and you will hear stories of tragedy and heartache. In recent years I have interviewed a considerable number of former ministers, now in secular work, and nearly everyone I talked with told me a similar story that resulted in forced termination. Many of them are now cynical, bitter, angry, and discouraged. Most tell me they will never return to a full-time paid church position. (15)

Ministers are often “people pleasers” who strive to be peacemakers. Most are not adequately prepared for the harsh realities of interpersonal conflict, particularly among people claiming to follow Christ. Personal attacks on their leadership and character inevitably result in discouragement and often lead to voluntary or forced termination.

Conflicts within a congregation are not the only reason that pastors sometimes decide to quit. Some also give up because of conflict with their denominational leaders or because of disillusionment with their denomination. Of the five denominations included in the Hoge and Wenger study, disillusionment with the denomination was predominately true for United Methodists (98). Willimon, a United Methodist bishop, agrees, attributing

some pastoral attrition to institutional decline and the need for pastors and laity to be in general harmony with the denominational value system, theological stance, and priorities (*Pastor* 321, 325).

Burnout and discouragement are also key reasons why some pastors leave the ministry (Hoge and Wenger 115). As mentioned, discouragement is often a result of conflict within the congregation, but discouraged pastors revealed that they were more prone to blame themselves rather than some other person or group within the church. Burnout, as a larger category of pastoral attrition, is discussed further later.

Unfortunately some pastors also leave the ministry because of sexual misconduct (Hoge and Wenger 130). Sexual misconduct was a factor for at least 6 percent of those in Hoge and Wenger's study, although the researchers believe the true number to be higher. Injoy Ministries' report on clergy sexual ethics states that 20 percent of pastors indicate they view pornography at least once a month, 33 percent confess to inappropriate sexual behavior with someone in the church, and 20 percent admit to having an affair while in the ministry ("State of Ministry" 1). Widespread scandals (e.g., in Roman Catholics) and the fall of certain high-profile pastors indicate that no pastor is beyond sexual temptation. Also, the state of clergy marriages in Protestant churches may be partially responsible for sexual misconduct.

The Hoge and Wenger study reveals that some pastors leave the ministry due to divorce or marital problems (143). Marital problems leading to ministerial attrition are not surprising because 80 percent of pastors believe that pastoral ministry affects their families negatively (London and Wiseman, *Pastors at Greater Risk* 86). The Jud, Mills, and Burch study also found marital problems as a significant reason why some pastors

give up their calling (98-100). Church work demands a great amount of time away from one's family and often creates stress in family relationships. While some denominations do tend to work redemptively with a pastor going through a divorce, some others actually view it as grounds for relinquishing one's ministerial credentials.

### **Calling and Burnout**

One of the major reasons that some pastors question or abandon their calling and drop out of ministry is burnout. G. Lloyd Rediger states, "An epidemic of burnout, depression, role confusion, and physical-mental ills plagues our profession. Further, we are targeted for abuse by spiritually unhealthy parishioners in nearly one-half of our congregations" (13-14). Roy M. Oswald, who ministers to pastors, says, "In my stress and burn-out seminars, one in five clergy scores high on the burnout rating scale. Among clergy who have been in their parish for ten years or more, the number doubles" (67). Those numbers are comparable to the Klaas and Klaas study that indicates, among Lutheran Church, Missouri Synod pastors, 30 percent are happy, another 30 percent are ambivalent, 20 percent are well on their way to burnout, while 20 percent are actually in advanced stages of burnout (Hoge and Wenger 225). One survey indicated that 45.5 percent of pastors actually state that they have experienced depression or burnout to the extent that they needed to take a leave of absence from ministry (London and Wiseman, *Pastors at Greater Risk* 172).

The Bible contains a number of examples of burnout among religious leaders. One would be Moses. When his father-in-law observed that he was carrying more responsibility than he could bear, he stated, "You and these people who come to you will only wear yourselves out. The work is too heavy for you; you cannot handle it alone"

(Exod. 18:18). Moses made adjustments at that time to his leadership, but he later expressed his frustration to the Lord:

Why have you brought this trouble on your servant? What have I done to displease you that you put the burden of all these people on me.... If this is how you are going to treat me, put me to death right now. (Num. 11:11-15)

Moses simply became worn out from all the responsibility of leading the children of Israel by himself.

Elijah is another example of a burned-out leader. After his victory over the prophets of Baal on Mt. Carmel, Queen Jezebel threatened his life. Elijah went off into the desert and cried out to the Lord, “I have had enough, Lord.... Take my life; I am no better than my ancestors” (1 Kings 19:4). The apostle Paul possibly even showed signs of burnout when he said, “We were under great pressure, far beyond our ability to endure, so that we despaired even of life” (2 Cor. 1:8).

Burnout affects many different aspects of personhood:

Looking at burnout from a wholistic perspective, this malaise touches us at four levels: biologically—specific physical symptoms appear; psychologically—our emotional make-up is measurably altered; sociologically—a dysfunctional relationship exists between ourselves and our work, and possibly between our family and our church; spiritually—our worldview or view of reality is significantly altered. (Rediger 59)

According to Jonathan Golden et al. burnout among clergy, in addition to posing a threat to their vocation, threatens even their “life calling and identity as a pastor” (115). C. W. Brister observed a generation ago that stress and burnout often tempt pastors to seek a way out of their calling:

Because of the persistent pressures upon the minister’s mental and emotional strength, and because his idealistic concepts of his calling fail to come to grips with the realistic pastoral situation today, his temptation often is to escape the bondage of his calling. (64)

Pastors struggling with burnout often face a growing sense of cynicism and disillusionment that threatens to undermine the very convictions that define their calling.

Christina Maslach and Michael P. Leiter define burnout as “the index of the dislocation between what people are and what they have to do. It represents an erosion in values, dignity, spirit, and will, an erosion of the human soul” (qtd. in Golden et al. 115). Another writer calls it “physical, emotional, mental, and spiritual exhaustion that results from a human being trying to be Superman in his or her vocation” (Greenfield 144). Oswald sums the various descriptions of burnout together by stating, “What do the definitions of burnout have in common? Decreased energy, decreased self-esteem, output exceeding input, sense of helplessness, hopelessness, being trapped, loss of idealism, cynicism and negativism, self-depletion” (59). I personally experienced burnout when a relatively minor crisis emerged within the church and I discovered that all of my inner resources were depleted. I simply had nothing left to give.

Some observers of attrition among clergy, however, are not happy with the use of the burnout metaphor:

“Burnout” implies that our problem, as pastors, is a lack of energy. One day we wake up and simply have no more fuel to give to the demands of ministry. From what I observe, our pastoral problem of constancy is more a matter of “blackout” or “brownout,” the gradual dissipation of meaning in ministry, a blurring of vision, the inability to keep the theological rationale for ministry that is necessary to enliven our imagination. We wake up one day and no longer have a reason or purpose for doing the things that the church expects us, as pastors, to do. (Willimon, *Pastor* 325-26)

By his claim, Willimon unfortunately discounts the very real feelings of burnout experienced by many pastors. Nevertheless, his use of the terms “blackout” and “brownout” actually do fit the definition of burnout offered from Maslach and Leiter.

William N. Grosch and David C. Olson note essentially two bodies of research in respect to the subject of burnout among clergy (620). One body concludes that the problem is essentially systemic. Ministers are overworked, lack support structures, have rigid work schedules, deal with difficult parishioners, are on call around the clock, deal with excessive bureaucracy, and struggle with unhelpful and often irrelevant denominational structures. The other body of literature suggests that the problem of burnout is latent within the person. Those most likely to burn out were idealists, perfectionists, and compulsives.

An example of the first type of burnout would be that highlighted in a study by Kelvin J. Randall among Anglican clergy. In a longitudinal study of 340 clergy who had been ordained in 1994, he examined their proneness to burnout in years one, two, three, and seven using the Maslach Burnout Inventory. He concludes that the proneness to burnout among Anglican clergy can be measured before they take the step of leaving; therefore, church officials should be able to direct specific help and support to them before they act (25). He believes that the systemic problems causing stress among the clergy can be addressed in a proactive fashion.

A study of Catholic clergy conducted by Joseph H. Fichter in 1984 is an example of the second kind of burnout. He studied 4,660 priests in order to examine the claims of religious superiors in the Roman Catholic Church that clergy were in danger of burnout. He concludes that only 6.2 percent of their subjects would be termed candidates for burnout, and that these would most likely be priests in their mid-fifties who exhibit a high incidence of tension, worry, and anxiety, have more physical ailments than other priests, and are overweight and do not get enough physical exercise or restful sleep (377-78).

Rather than approaching burnout and stress as a systemic issue, he approaches it from what is inherently a weakness within the person himself.

Whether external or internal, stress appears to be a strong contributor to burnout. Hans Selye's defines stress as "the rate of wear and tear in the body" (qtd. in Blanton and Morris 333). Nevertheless, Paul Qualben declares, "Stress is not the issue. The problem is rather distress. Distress is the product of frustration and repeated disappointment" (21). All pastors experience a measure of stress in their lives and ministries. Some, though, seem unable to cope with it. Distress, Qualben claims, can result from wrong chemistry between pastor and congregation, bad internal chemistry like unrealistic expectations and poor stewardship of resources. People who are prone to burnout, then, have strongly driven personalities and tend to base their personal worth on the results obtained in ministry.

Work-related stressors exact a heavy toll in several ways. They impair the ability of clergy to provide spiritual and organizational leadership for their congregations, they increase the risk of problem behaviors by clergy such as sexual infidelity, and they erode marital adjustment and quality of life with diminished emotional support available from spouses and children leading to further distress (Darling, Hill, and McWey 262-63).

Priscilla W. Blanton and M. Lane Morris concluded in their study that work-related stress among clergy often resulted in undesirable symptoms:

Hardships associated with the unique work/clergy family context are reflected in the increasing numbers of clergy seeking help at mental health facilities, leaving the ministry or having their employment terminated by their sponsoring denomination, entering drug/alcohol rehabilitation programs, being treated for sexual exploitation of adult and children parishioners, having extramarital affairs, and being granted divorces. (332)

The effects of marriage and family stress were noted in a discussion about why some pastors leave parish ministry.

Pastors experience similar stress to that of other mental health professionals but often do not have an adequate coping mechanism for processing it. One study made a number of recommendations to assist denominations in preventing burnout among clergy, including psychological assessment of ordination candidates to identify problems and judge suitability for vocation, professional consultation, supervision, and spiritual direction throughout their career, retreats, sabbaticals, and networking with fellow clergy, leadership training, clinical pastoral education, formal pastoral review procedures, conflict mediation and appeal mechanisms for pastors asked to resign, family support, and confidential pastor and family counseling (Pecter 20). A similar study agreed with these findings, adding the need for internships for beginning ministers, increased salaries, and time away from clerical duties to lessen the effects of compassion fatigue (Darling, Hill, and McWey 275).

Burnout and spirituality are also directly correlated with one another among pastors. In a study of 321 United Methodist ordained clergy using the Maslach Burnout Inventory, Satisfaction with Life scale, and Spiritual Transcendence scale, Jonathan Golden et al. found that one's spirituality actually showed incremental significance in predicting burnout. Additionally, others have stated the importance of spiritual well-being in contributing to the quality of life for both clergy and their spouses (Darling, Hill, and McWey 275). Rediger also cites the importance of body, mind, and spirit wholeness in their role on a pastor's sense of well-being. Unfitness in any one of these areas can be a primary cause of burnout (15).

### Ministerial Health

Fitness for ministry, in its various forms, appears to play a significant role in a minister's longevity. Rather than focusing on pathologies that have caused some to abandon their call, the focus of this study was to explore the influence of the call among healthy pastors as it relates to their longevity in ministry. This study, like the Meek et al. study, asks what emotionally healthy pastors attribute to their sense of well-being and endurance through years of emotional, spiritual, and physical challenges.

Rediger defines ministerial health this way: "In the clinical sense, fitness is disciplined self-management. In the spiritual sense, fitness is blending with God's purposes. In the everyday, physical meaning, fitness is the practice of wellness" (12). For Rediger, ministerial fitness involves the body, the mind, and the spirit. They are all interrelated to one another:

A physical body is only part of human personhood. Contemporary theology and the holistic movements assert that the unity of body-mind-spirit is a basic human reality. However, body, mind, and spirit are also dimensions, dynamics, or constituents of personhood that contribute identifiable characteristics to it. They are interactive and interdependent.... The body is the most visible and experiential aspect of our personhood.... The mind is the brain-heart combination in which the brain promotes individuality and the heart promotes relationships. The spirit is our *imago Dei* and our spiritual consciousness. (66)

One can be fit in body but seriously weak and vulnerable in mind and spirit, and vice versa. Health or wellness involves caring for each aspect of personhood.

Several studies clearly indicated the importance of spiritual well-being in contributing to the quality of life for both clergy and their spouses (Darling, Hill and McWey 268; Golden et al. 123; Meek et al. 343). One might naturally assume that because ministry is essentially a spiritual calling it should naturally result in spiritual

well-being. However, spiritual well-being does not naturally come about simply because one happens to be engaged in a spiritual calling. Rediger states, “In my ministry as pastor to pastors,... I did ecumenical surveys of the state of the clergy in those states.

Approximately 22 percent of questionnaires returned reported a deterioration of personal spiritual health” (118).

Mostly, spiritual well-being comes about because a pastor has diligently worked to achieve and maintain it. Jack Hayford believes that the passage of time sometimes causes pastors to forget the spiritual passion that propelled them into ministry:

Virtually every pastor begins answering his “call to promise” with a simple brokenness before God. Nearly every one of us also knows how time seems to harden the edges of that earlier softness of heart in the presence of the One who has commissioned us. (167)

A passionate love for God himself can all too easily be replaced with a love of the church, a love for the work of the church, or even a love of success. These false gods reveal the hollowness of one’s heart when the church and its people let the pastor down, when the work turns to drudgery, and when success becomes fleeting. McNeal warns of the consequences of neglecting one’s spiritual life:

Devoid of a growing, personal, dynamic relationship with God, spiritual leaders become casualties. Some are removed from battle, too wounded to go on. Some remain engaged but are missing in action. Others desert, going AWOL on God and his people. Perhaps the worst scenario is the tragic figure of a spiritual corpse going through ministry rituals like the zombies of science fiction horror movies. (139)

Pastors must intentionally work to maintain a vital spiritual life.

Looking at the life and ministry of Jesus from a human standpoint, one might wonder why he never burned out. Everywhere he went, people wanted something from him. He was constantly giving of himself, yet one common thread that emerges from the

Gospels is the practice of Jesus continually attending to his spirit. Prior to the beginning of his ministry, he retreated in order to be alone with his Father while engaging in a forty-day fast. Whenever the press of people's demands began to overwhelm him, he pulled himself away from the crowds in order to spend time communing with his Father (e.g., Luke 5:16; Matt. 14:22-23). If attending to his spirit was crucial for the Son of God, those who are called to be his servants should find it far more crucial.

One way pastors maintain spiritual well-being is through engaging in spiritual disciplines. Richard J. Foster states, "The desperate need today is not for a greater number of intelligent people, or gifted people, but for deep people" (1). Spiritual disciplines are the "things we do or don't do that bring us closer to God. They are repetitive actions, done habitually, that form us spiritually over time" (Drury, *With Unveiled Faces* 7). While experts in spiritual formation often disagree over which activities fit their criteria for a spiritual discipline, two-thirds of the pastors in the study by Meek et al. spontaneously mentioned participating in spiritual activities such as engaging in retreat/solitude, reading Scripture, journaling, fasting, and praying. Maxie Dunnam, former president of Asbury Theological Seminary, indicates he has discovered six things in his life that serve to keep him close to God: attending to the emotional, practicing spiritual disciplines, retreating, practicing the presence of God, keeping stretched, and nurturing relationships (39).

Nurturing relationships encourages pastors to become open and accountable to others in respect to their relationship with the Lord. Isolation is unfortunately a prominent theme for pastors as 70 percent report not having someone they consider to be a close friend (London and Wiseman, *Pastors at Greater Risk* 264). However, healthy emotional

and spiritual balance can be achieved through intentionally nurturing relationships both within the family and outside of it (Meek et al. 342-43). Wesley certainly understood the importance of relationships as he organized his converts into societies and bands in order that they would be able to examine one another's faith and exhort one another into greater holiness. The Meek study discovered this principle as well:

Ultimately, clergy want to be known. They are usually the counselors, the mentors, the teachers, and the encouragers. With their overwhelming responsibilities, clergy need to feel that they are not alone, that they are part of a bigger partnership with those who will stand by them. (343)

My own relationships, particularly those with my wife and a close friend, have been invaluable in helping me overcome feelings of depression and burnout.

A number of the studies that explored burnout and clergy attrition point to the need for denominations and churches to provide clergy support systems (Pecter 20; Hoge and Wenger 169; Darling, Hill, and McWey 275). Some denominations and churches do better than others. Many pastors, however, are on their own to find whatever help might be available.

Relationships are not adequate in themselves to strengthen the spirit. While they may be helpful to bring godly perspective, counsel, and encouragement to remain steadfast in ministry, the spirit is only truly nurtured by God himself. Sanders believes that spiritual leaders must attempt to find their sufficiency in God alone:

The leader must be a man who, while welcoming the friendship and support of all who can offer it, has sufficient inner resources to stand alone, even in the face of fierce opposition, in the discharge of his responsibilities. He must be prepared to have "no one but God." (108)

Os Guinness also states, "A life lived listening to the decisive call of God is a life lived before one audience that trumps all others—the audience of One" (73). McNeal believes

that when leaders are attuned to God they will be able to withstand various feelings that might cause them to abandon hope in their calling:

There is an audience of One that the Christian leader must cultivate. Only his approval assuages insignificance and loneliness and feelings of failure. Only he keeps perfect score.... His is the only vote that counts, no matter how many seem lined up either for or against you. (113)

Pastors who fail to nurture their own inner spiritual life eventually discover that they do not have adequate resources to minister effectively.

Rest, or Sabbath, is one of God's prescriptions for health. Beginning with creation, God set apart one day in seven as a day of rest. It is intended to be a time of refreshment for the body and the soul. Pastors often deprive themselves of this gift from God because they use their Sabbath to minister to others, thereby depleting their stores of adrenaline and increasing their stress. Daniel Spaite says that this reality is a ticking time bomb within the church:

Because of failure to obey God's plan for cyclical rest, the epidemic of ministers leaving their calling, burning out, and experiencing tragic moral failure continues. It is a time bomb in the church that ticks with ever-increasing fallout of ministerial discouragement and dropout. When the time bomb explodes, it exiles ministry leaders in ways God never intended. (69)

Clergy must find their Sabbath on days other than the weekend, when they are fully engaged in the work of the ministry.

The need for Sabbath is why spiritual retreats are often cited as a valuable resource for spiritual fitness (Darling, Hill, and McWey 275; Pector 20). The stress of ministry is relentless, and often only a retreat from its demands can bring about the needed opportunity to spend time alone with God and refocus. A good biblical example of retreat was that of Elijah. Burned out from his encounter with the prophets of Baal,

God refreshed his soul by giving him rest and good food, and by speaking to his heart (1 Kings 19). I personally benefited from just such a retreat while recovering from my own bout of burnout. Pastors Retreat Network, a ministry to full-time pastors and missionaries in the United States, offers “a self-directed and Christ-centered retreat experience, where God prompts Christian pastors to feel His presence, discern His will and follow His leading” (“General Information”). They believe that “spiritually strengthened pastors will be empowered by God to transform their ministries and build His kingdom.”

Attending to the spirit has been the primary focus of this discussion because the call to ministry is essentially a spiritual issue. As Rediger notes, the spirit is integrally linked to both the mind and body; consequently, weaknesses in those areas can often mask themselves as spiritual issues (64). Ministerial health depends on a healthy mind and body as well as a healthy spirit. Consequently, some experts in the field of clergy care note the importance of physical fitness to the overall fitness of a pastor (Rediger, 64; Oswald 141). Jud, Mills and Burch note that 8.5 percent of their subjects who had left the ministry did so because of personal illness or breakdown (50). Eating right and exercising regularly help the body ward off sickness and disease that can shorten a pastor’s life or significantly limit a pastor’s ability to care for people. In addition, they demonstrate a proper stewardship of the body, which is the temple of the Holy Spirit (1 Cor. 6:19-20).

Clergy care experts also point to the importance of attending to the mind and the emotions. Depression has already been cited as a major cause of burnout. Oswald notes the importance of self-care strategies such as letting go, having a psychotherapy tune-up, and experiencing the power of laughter (115, 159, 181). Rassieur notes the importance of recovering oneself, discovering and using one’s major interests, ministering within limits,

and understanding the seasons of life (36, 73, 82, 126). Both note the importance of getting control of one's time (Oswald 165; Rassieur 104). All of these self-care strategies speak to the importance of developing balance.

### **Qualitative Research**

The field of academic research revolves around two different approaches to collecting and analyzing data. The one that has dominated the various arenas of scientific inquiry is quantitative research. It is based on observations that are subsequently converted into units that can be compared with other units by the use of statistical analysis. The other, used more by the social sciences, is qualitative research. It examines people's words or actions in descriptive ways that closely represent the situation as it is experienced by the participants. At the risk of oversimplifying the differences in the two approaches, quantitative research focuses on numbers, whereas qualitative research focuses on words. The method used in a research project should be determined by what will be most useful in analyzing the reality under consideration. Indeed, oftentimes a study demands the use of both approaches (Strauss and Corbin 27).

Because this study explored the influence of ministers' divine call on their long-term endurance in pastoral ministry, I believed that the words of the participants would be more useful for understanding than statistics. Indeed, as Pamela Maykut and Richard Morehouse assert, "From the qualitative perspective, to present this situation mathematically by using statistics would be to strip the experience of its meaning, that is, the meaning as the participants experienced it" (18). They go on to say the following:

The goal of qualitative research is to discover patterns which emerge after close observation, careful documentation, and thoughtful analysis of the research topic. What can be discovered by qualitative research are not sweeping generalizations but contextual findings. (21)

In other words, the goal of qualitative research is discovery, not proof.

### **Sample**

The means of determining the sample of a study is an important consideration. Randomness has often been regarded as being critical to assure that a sample will accurately represent the population that is being studied. However, in qualitative studies, researchers generally have a different goal in mind. Their goal is to gain deep understanding of something that is being experienced by a carefully selected group of people. This kind of sampling is sometimes called discriminate sampling (Strauss and Corbin 211). Participants in a particular study may be selected because they are all extreme cases, or perhaps typical cases. More common, however, is what researchers call maximum variation sampling:

Maximum variation sampling provides the qualitative researcher with a method by which the variability characteristic of random selection can be addressed, while recognizing that the goal of a qualitative study is not generalizability. It is not our goal to build a random sample, but rather to select persons or settings that we think represent the range of experience on the phenomenon in which we are interested. (Maykut and Morehouse 57)

When generalizability is not the goal, the size of the sample can be smaller.

The sample size for qualitative studies is relatively small based on traditional scientific standards. The size, however, should not be dictated by what makes for a good random sample, but by how many people are required to reach the saturation point with necessary data (Strauss and Corbin 212). Maykut and Morehouse state, “When we reach a point of diminishing returns from our data collection efforts, we can be reasonably assured that we have conducted a thorough study” (62). This saturation point could

possibly be reached with as few as twelve people but could take up to twenty or more depending on the particular phenomenon under study:

Practically speaking, the sampling concepts of saturation of information and diminishing returns may have to be balanced with limitations of time, money, and other factors that impinge upon the research enterprise. (63)

One of these practical considerations is the large volume of data that must be processed.

### **Data Collection**

Qualitative researchers use several primary methods to collect data for their studies. One of those is direct observation. Observation is “the systematic noting and recording of events, behaviors, and artifacts (objects) in the social setting chosen for study” (Marshall and Rossman 79). Cultural anthropology frequently utilizes this means of data collection, referred to as ethnography. The researcher is seen as a “participant observer” who “attempts to enter the lives of others, . . . suspending as much as possible his or her own ways of viewing the world” (Maykut and Morehouse 69). This means of data collection is even used in in-depth interview studies as the researcher takes note of a participant’s body language and emotions. Catherine Marshall and Gretchen B. Rossman note, however, that this method presents some difficulties:

Discomfort, uncomfortable ethical dilemmas and even danger, the difficulty of managing a relatively unobtrusive role, and the challenge to identify the “big picture” while finely observing huge amounts of fast-moving and complex behavior are just a few of the challenges. (80)

The challenge to the researcher using this method is to participate or fit into the setting with the participants while maintaining an unobtrusive presence.

Data can also be collected through in-depth interviewing. An interview is particularly useful in getting large amounts of data quickly. Interviews allow the researcher to enter into a dialogue with the participants and thereby gain deeper

understanding through the process of “indwelling.” Michael Quinn Patton gives the following instructions to researchers:

Go forth now. Go forth and question. Ask and listen. The world is just beginning to open up to you. Each person you question can take you into a new part of the world. For the person who is willing to ask and listen, the world will always be new. The skilled questioner and the attentive listener knows how to enter into another’s experience. (278)

In-depth interviewing provides an opportunity for a researcher to enter into another’s experience.

Interviews can range from a relatively unstructured format to one that is highly structured. One type would be an informal conversational interview. Maykut and Morehouse state, “With one’s focus of inquiry clearly in mind, the researcher tactfully asks and actively listens in order to understand what is important to know about the setting and the experiences of people in that setting” (81). No established questions are asked in this format. A conversational interview requires a skilled interviewer who can interact with the subject and adapt his or her questions and flow with the course of conversation. This format is particularly helpful when the information being sought is unclear. Another interview format is the general interview guide approach. This more structured approach allows the researcher to formulate specific topics or questions to be probed from the participant. The questions asked are open-ended but structured into a guide or schedule.

Some researchers believe that tape recording of interviews is essential to good data collection and analysis. Patton, for one, believes that a tape recorder is part of the indispensable equipment of the qualitative interviewer (279). Yvonna S. Lincoln and Egon G. Guba, however, believe that it should never be used “unless there are legal or

training reasons for doing so” (qtd. in Maykut and Morehouse 98). All agree, however, that interviews should only be taped with the full consent of the participants and that care should be taken to file or destroy them properly when the research is concluded.

Maykut and Morehouse hold that “preparing a complete transcript from an audio-taped interview is especially important when interviews are a main source of data for a qualitative study” (100). Making a transcript is very time consuming and tedious, but it enables the researcher to “relive the interview and become substantially more familiar with the data” (101). Researchers are divided, however, on whether these transcripts should be fed into a computer program for coding purposes or manually analyzed. Computer software programs can be helpful in identifying various codes, but they are not capable of the harder work of interpretation, synthesis, and hypothesis testing (Wiersma and Jurs 217).

Interviewing does have some limitations and weaknesses. Marshall and Rossman point out that interviews involve personal interaction, so the researcher must have the cooperation of the subjects (81). Additionally, the questions that are asked may not evoke long narratives from the participants and thus fail to provide much data. Also, interviewees may be reluctant to be truthful. Finally, interviewers themselves may not properly understand the responses of the participants.

Another means of data collection in qualitative studies is a review of documents. Oftentimes this method is used in conjunction with other methods, but in some studies it can stand alone. Reviewing documents is unobtrusive and it is “rich in portraying the values and beliefs of participants in the setting” (Marshall and Rossman 85). Words are the tools of qualitative research; therefore, items such as meeting minutes, logs,

announcements, policy statements, and letters can be very useful in gaining a broader understanding of a particular setting or group.

### **Data Analysis**

The biggest task involved in qualitative research is data analysis. One of its main characteristics is that it is inductive; meaning should flow directly out of the data itself. Data analysis is “the process of bringing order, structure, and meaning to the mass of collected data” (Marshall and Rossman 111). Anselm Strauss and Juliet Corbin call it “the interplay between researchers and data” (13).

Researchers are subject to reading their own biases into the data. One assumption of qualitative research is that a participant’s own perspective of the phenomenon under study should prevail over that of the researcher (Marshall and Rossman 80). In order for objectivity to happen, researchers must become aware of their own prejudices, viewpoints, or assumptions related to what they are studying. This process is often referred to as “epoche” (Maykut and Morehouse 123). This subjective element in qualitative research leads some critics to dismiss its validity altogether. However, “the objective-subjective dichotomy used to differentiate research approaches is more aptly viewed as perspectival” (124).

Analysis of the data involves several different procedures. One is organizing the data, which in most cases is extremely large. Here the various bits of data must all be put in some kind of manageable form where it can be compared and analyzed. Taped interviews should be transcribed and coded to their sources. Field notes and handwritten documents should be typed and copied. Some also suggest the transfer of data into

software programs or onto predeveloped data recording charts to aid in the management and analysis of the data (Marshall and Rossman 113-14; Wiersma and Jurs 216-18).

A second procedure is generating categories, themes, and patterns in the data. This procedure is referred to as coding. It is the process of “organizing data and obtaining data reduction. In essence, it is the process by which qualitative researchers ‘see what they have in the data’” (Wiersma and Jurs 206). Strauss and Corbin call it “the analytic processes through which data are fractured, conceptualized, and integrated to form theory” (3). The researcher searches for the “salient, grounded categories of meaning held by the participants in the setting” (Marshall and Rossman 114). If the study is truly inductive, these must flow out of the data itself rather than being imposed by the researcher on the data. The researcher searches for things that have internal convergence and external divergence. Some of those codes might be the perceptions of the subjects about the phenomenon under study, setting or context codes, or process codes that focus on the sequence of events and how changes occur.

A third procedure of data analysis is testing the emergent hypotheses against the data. As codes become more and more apparent from the data, the researcher begins to formulate hypotheses. Strauss and Corbin refer to this process as the development of grounded theory. Theorizing is “work that entails not only conceiving or intuiting ideas (concepts) but also formulating them into a logical, systematic, and explanatory scheme” (21). As the researcher theorizes he or she must also search for possible alternative explanations from the data (Marshall and Rossman 116-17).

The final step in data analysis is writing the report. Report writing is integral to the process of data analysis because “in the choice of particular words to summarize and

reflect the complexity of the data, the researcher is engaging in the interpretive act, lending shape and form—meaning—to massive amounts of raw data” (Marshall and Rossman 117). The report can be presented as descriptive life history, as a presentation of data gathered through in-depth interviews and participant observation, as a relating of practice to theory, or as an attempt to build theory.

## CHAPTER 3

### METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this study was to investigate how a sense of divine calling contributes to longevity among ordained ministers of the Wesleyan Church. A significant number of ministers eventually leave parish ministry after starting out with high hopes and dreams. H. B. London, Jr. and Neil B. Wiseman ask, “Why do so many contemporary pastors sigh for something that might allow them to respectably leave pastoral service?” (*Heart of a Great Pastor* 112). They believe that the answer lies somewhere in their understanding of their call:

Apparently, some pastors lost this inner spring of motivation years ago and never missed it. Some have forgotten how insistent the call was when they heard it the first time. Still other pastors question if a call they heard in their childhood or adolescence has relevance now. (112-13)

The stresses of ministry cause many to burn out or simply give up, yet, at the same time, a great many other pastors persevere through these same stresses and finish strong. The concern of this research is to discover how their understanding of God’s call has enabled long-term Wesleyan pastors to remain steadfast in their ministry.

#### Research Questions

Three primary research questions formed the basis of this study.

##### **Research Question #1**

What is the cognitive understanding of divine calling that ordained ministers of the Wesleyan Church possess?

All ministers within the Wesleyan Church testify to having been called by God prior to their ordination. Their call defines who they are. Christopherson even says that ministers’ identity and personal worth are defined by their call (222). However, studies

have shown that pastors' understanding of their call often changes significantly over time. The stresses and challenges of ministry are instrumental in causing ministers to often reevaluate what their call from God looks like and how it is linked to their present role. Interview questions 1, 8, and 9 address this particular research question.

### **Research Question #2**

How have ordained ministers of the Wesleyan Church personally experienced a divine call to ministry?

Ministers experience the summons of God to ministry in a variety of ways. Some, like Moses, experience an instantaneous call where they hear the voice of God clearly speaking to their souls. Others, in perhaps less dramatic fashion, experience a call from birth: "As their consciousness dawns children are also aware that they are called to God's special service" (General Department 13). Some experience a progressive call where, over time through a series of incidences or experiences, God makes his will clear to them. Still others experience God's call as an open door through which they followed the Spirit's leading until they eventually developed a conviction that they were called by God to that ministry. Interview questions 2, 3, and 4 probe this particular research question.

### **Research Question #3**

How has their understanding and experience of their call influenced ordained ministers in the Wesleyan Church regarding their longevity in pastoral ministry?

The literature shows that a high percentage of all pastors point to their call as being a strong influence upon their longevity in ministry. Because the Wesleyan Church places a strong emphasis upon the divine call in the selection and ordination process, this

claim is undoubtedly true of Wesleyan pastors. Interview questions 5, 6, and 7 get to the heart of this research question.

### **Population and Sample**

The subjects of this study were ordained ministers within the Wesleyan Church. The study was limited to pastors who are currently serving in ministry, not those who have dropped out. Even though some pastors within the Wesleyan Church have not been ordained, I also chose to limit the study to those who had completed this process and had affirmed their call to ministry during the rite of ordination. In particular, I chose to study senior or solo pastors who had served in ministry for more than ten years. The literature indicates that the majority of pastors who left the ministry did so within their first several years; consequently, I assumed that feedback from this cohort of pastors would not be especially helpful to the study. Additionally, I assumed that pastors would have to have been in ministry for several years in order to incur enough stress to have caused them at some point to consider leaving.

I selected pastors for the study out of three districts of the Wesleyan Church in North America. These districts represent three different geographical areas because of the possibility that geography might have some slight bearing on the data. The districts chosen were Central New York, Western Michigan, and Pacific Southwest. I first contacted the superintendents of these districts by telephone in order to solicit their support for the project. They, in turn, submitted a list of pastors within their districts whom they believed fit the profile. From the total sample of pastors, I randomly selected seven to nine from each district. I then contacted these pastors by telephone asking for their willingness to participate in the study. I asked if they would be willing to participate

in a thirty-minute telephone interview regarding factors related to their longevity in ministry. I then scheduled an appointment to conduct the interview with those who were willing to participate. I selected additional pastors from the original sample to replace those who chose not to participate.

### **Instrumentation**

The instrument used for the survey was a researcher-designed semi-structured interview. It consisted of a short questionnaire followed by several open-ended questions. Seven of the nine interview questions were also included in the Gonlag study. The questionnaire sought to establish some demographic criteria that would give a better understanding of who the subjects were. Among these factors were age, gender, number of years in the ministry, number of years as a senior or solo pastor, number of years at the present church, education, income range, and geographical location. These variables would be compared with the responses of the participants to the open-ended questions to evaluate any possible correlation.

I designed the questions in the survey to encourage pastors to talk openly about several key factors. One factor related to their understanding of the nature of their call to ministry. Another related to their particular experience of their call. A third factor related to the stresses that may have brought that call into question at some point and the reasons they chose to remain in ministry. The questions were

1. How did you make the decision to become a pastor?
2. How did you experience God's call to ministry?
3. Were there any particular things or experiences that helped to confirm the call?

4. Has God reassured you of your call? If so, how?
5. Are there some things you run into in ministry that sometimes make you wonder about your call?
6. While in ministry have you ever given consideration to leaving pastoral ministry for another line of work? Describe the situation.
7. Why have you chosen to remain in pastoral ministry?
8. Do you believe God's call on your life is seasonal or lifelong? Why?
9. Since you first entered pastoral ministry, has your understanding of your call changed significantly? If so, how?

### **Data Collection**

I conducted interviews with each of the subjects in the study during the months of June, July, and August 2008. I interviewed each of them by telephone for approximately one-half hour. In one case, I interviewed the subject in person. I took extensive field notes during the interviews, and also tape recorded them for later comparison. I then transcribed the interviews to assist in the process of data analysis.

### **Reliability and Validity**

Reliability asks the question as to whether the research is consistent or, in the case of qualitative research, that the data collected is an accurate representation of the facts being studied (Wiersma and Jurs 215). In the case of this study, I hoped that the subjects have accurately conveyed their understanding of their underlying influences and motivations regarding pastoral constancy. This problem poses several limitations. One of them involves the researcher. Interviewers can inadvertently inject personal biases or desired responses into the inflection and tone of the questions being asked. Another

involves the phone interview process itself, where the researcher is unable to read body language and where the interviewee may not be honest with his or her responses because the interview is being recorded. A third limit is perhaps the most significant. People can readily deceive themselves, so the responses of some subjects may reflect an idealized view instead of an accurate one. Self-reflection has certain limits.

The question of validity is whether or not the study can be interpreted accurately as well as whether it can be generalized. In qualitative research validity is determined largely by logical analysis of the results (Wiersma and Jurs 215). In the question of why certain pastors have endured in ministry, causal relationships between various stressors (push-pull factors), certain behaviors leading to spiritual and emotional health, and a pastor's decision to persevere must be established. The study's generalizability is seen in that it is a follow-up to the Gonlag study that examined the understanding of the call among younger, less seasoned ministers. This study grew out of a need to understand how a pastor's call to ministry influences his or her ability to endure stresses to leave. The study can be easily replicated in any number of denominational settings and judicatory units.

### **Variables**

Among the variables in the study were the kinds of stressors that caused the subjects to consider leaving their pastoral calling. Another variable was the nature of the call experienced by each of the participants.

A number of confounding variables were presumed to have possible influence on the outcomes of the study and were considered alongside the responses of the participants. Among these were age, gender, number of years in the ministry, number of

years as a senior or solo pastor, number of years at the present church, education, and geographical location. An attempt to control these variables by choosing subjects from three distinct geographical regions and a cross section of ages sought to minimize their impact on the results.

### **Data Analysis**

After I collected the data, I transcribed the interviews and organized the data around the nine interview questions. I reviewed the interviews along with my field notes in order to detect common themes and correlations. This process helped me to establish codes that would be useful for interpreting the data. Rather than being predetermined, the coding categories emerged from the interviews themselves. The codes revealed a number of useful categories that opened the door to building theory in respect to the data.

As I had personally experienced a time of burnout that led to a season of reflection on my own call to ministry, I made a conscious effort not to read my own biases into the conclusions. I attempted to let the stories of the participants speak for themselves.

### **Ethics**

Every study has its share of ethical concerns, and this study was no exception. Because the interviews were being tape recorded, permission had to be obtained from the subjects. Permission was sought and granted verbally. Additionally, I assured the participants that they would remain anonymous, hopefully contributing to the honesty of their responses. I also assured them that I would be the only one involved in analyzing their responses and that when the project was complete I would destroy all the written

notes, tapes, and transcripts. Finally, in the reporting of the study's findings, I verbally assured the participants that I would conceal their identities.

## CHAPTER 4

### FINDINGS

The profession of pastoral ministry is often very difficult, and many who begin the journey eventually drop out along the way. London and Wiseman, who have studied this phenomenon for years, even refer to pastors as “an endangered species” (*Your Pastor* 11). However, those pastors who manage to weather the storms of ministry tend to display an outlook of hope and optimism toward their profession and could not even imagine doing anything else. Even though many of them have experienced the same stresses and pressures to quit as those who have given up, something inside them stiffens their resolve to remain by the calling that drew them to the profession in the first place. The purpose of this study was to investigate how a sense of divine calling contributes to longevity among ordained ministers of the Wesleyan Church.

#### **Profile of Participants**

The subjects of the study were all ordained ministers within the Wesleyan Church serving churches in the United States. I randomly selected twenty-five pastors from among three districts representing three distinct regions of the United States—the Northeast, the Midwest, and the West. I also asked the participants a number of demographic questions in order to determine if certain factors might have some influence in the outcomes.

The district superintendents selected the pastors for the study from their districts based on their tenure in ministry (more than ten years). From that original pool of pastors, I randomly selected eight from two districts and nine from a third. I then contacted these pastors in order to verify their willingness to participate and arrange a convenient time for

a half-hour phone interview. Prior to the interview, they were only aware that they were participating in a study of “seasoned veterans” of pastoral ministry.

All of the participants were male. The percentage of female pastors in the Wesleyan Church is quite low; consequently, many districts do not have any female pastors with more than ten years experience. Additionally all of the subjects were married. The ages of the participants ranged from a low of thirty-seven to a high of sixty-eight. The average age was 53.1 years. They all had at least ten years experience as pastors, ranging from a low of twelve to a high of forty-three years. The average tenure in ministry was 27.9 years. They had served in a role as senior or solo pastors for an average of 24.6 years. They had also served as pastors in their present churches from a low of three years to a high of twenty-nine years, for an average of 15.6 years. All of them were working full-time in ministry. Nine of the pastors had obtained bachelor’s degrees, twelve had obtained master’s degrees, and four had earned doctorates. Nine of the pastors served in churches located in rural or small town settings. Seven of them served in churches located in small cities (under 100,000). The remaining nine ministered in large city or suburban settings.

I tape recorded all of the interviews and later transcribed them. Each interview was assigned a number according to the sequence in which the subjects were interviewed. I organized the findings around the three basic research questions with a number of operational questions as subcategories.

### **Research Question 1**

What is the cognitive understanding of divine calling that ordained ministers of the Wesleyan Church possess?

In order to answer this research question, responses of the participants were organized around a series of operational questions. Who does the calling? For how long is the calling? How is calling confirmed? How does God reassure pastors of their calling to ministry? How has their understanding of their calling changed since entering the ministry?

### **The Origin of the Call**

The answer to the question of who does the calling may seem somewhat obvious. One would assume that a calling, particularly one to Christian ministry, would of necessity come from God; however, many of the pastors in the study expressed concern on this point. They clearly understood that many different voices may be calling out to them. Some, particularly those who had grown up in pastoral families, heard voices or sensed pressure to go into ministry from within their family:

I came from a long line of pastors. My dad is a pastor. My grandfather was a pastor. I have a couple uncles who are pastors. So when I was in high school and getting ready to make a decision about what I was going to do with my life, everybody thought I was going to take after my father and grandfather and go into the ministry. But while people were pushing me I never really felt the calling of God to ministry.

Those from pastors' homes had no difficulty separating God's voice from the voices of their family. One remarked, "My father who was an ordained pastor had been urging me to be ordained, but I kept telling him that I was not called. I would not seek ordination until I was called."

Others in the study remarked that they heard well-meaning saints within their churches urging them to go into ministry:

I had always wanted to be a scientist. I was getting ready to go in that direction, but everyone was telling me I'd make a great pastor. So I didn't know what I was going to do when I got out of high school.

There were several old ladies when I was growing up that said, “You’d make a great pastor.” But it was never a desire on my part or a leaning at all.

At the same time, these subjects also recognized that God himself actually spoke to them through people. One pastor mentioned a speaker at a conference telling the audience that someone present had a call placed upon their lives. “That hit me right between the eyes,” he said.

Still others heard voices from within themselves. One pastor remarked, “I wanted to be sure that it was a calling and not just an idea or something in my mind.” Another said, “I was struggling with whether this calling was from God or something I thought up.” Still others recognized that the thoughts that come into one’s mind are often the vehicle that God uses to speak to people. One pastor indicated, “It was an impression. It was just a clear thought that came across my mind.” Another said, “It was just something I heard in my heart that I knew it was from him.”

### **The Length of the Call**

The pastors in the study were asked if they believed their calling was seasonal or lifelong. Most of the pastors (80 percent) indicated they believed their calling was lifelong. Nevertheless, many of them also went on to define what they meant by their call. One pastor said, “If we define call as a relationship with Him, then it is lifelong.” Another said, “The role may be seasonal, but the call is lifelong because it is about who I am, not what I do.” Still another said, “As far as my relationship with Christ, obviously it is lifelong. As far as pastoring, I’ll go until I sense the Lord saying, ‘It’s time for you to step aside and let someone else do what you’ve been doing.’” Most understood their call as a call to ministry in general but not specifically to pastoral ministry; consequently,

they believed that God might change their role of ministry at various points throughout their lifetime.

Some, however, believed that their call was to a lifetime of pastoral ministry. Two pastors even quoted Romans 11:29: “For the gifts and calling of God are without repentance” (KJV). They understood that verse to mean that their calling to pastoral service was a lifetime call. A few others shared that same conviction:

I tend to think God calls most pastors in a lifelong journey. Once God has put a call on a person’s heart to be a shepherd of people or to lead a church, you can’t escape it because God’s not going to let you escape it.

For me I believe it is lifelong. First his call was so definite to me. Secondly, he’s never seemingly allowed me to entertain thoughts of not being in there. And I still find the same joy. I can’t imagine doing anything else.

Nine other pastors in the study also indicated that they could not imagine doing anything other than what they were doing.

Several of the pastors did refer to retirement in some way while speaking of whether their call was lifelong. The majority of the pastors in the study group (thirteen) were 55 years old or older, so this question had special relevance for them. One remarked, “I can’t find anyone in the Bible who retired. That theology, though, does not always fit with my desire to one day retire from active pastoral ministry.” Several of the pastors even described their future retirement:

I know when I retire that there is a greater work that he would have me do. Retirement is not buying a motor home and traveling around the country. Retirement is still working for the kingdom in some way, but I still don’t have a specific vision of what that is yet.

At 52 I’m not looking to retire, but I’m thinking more about retirement. For me the picture of retirement is not a cottage at Brooksville (Wesleyan retirement village). It’s coming alongside a church planter who is starting a church and saying, “I’ll tell you what, you give me housing and I’ll live

off social security and we'll come alongside of you and we'll do whatever we can to help you succeed.”

One of the subjects who was of post-retirement age (67) stated the sentiments of most of this group. He said, “Even if I would retire I would be involved in ministry.” These pastors saw their calling as lasting for their entire lifetime.

### **Sources of Confirmation**

The ministers in the study were all asked directly how their call to ministry was confirmed. Many common themes emerged as they shared their stories.

Twelve of the subjects indicated that the affirmation of others to their calling was an important confirmation. One said, “Early on I had people confirming for me that they believed I was doing what I was supposed to be doing.” Pastors especially played a large role in the recognition and affirmation of the gifts of many of the subjects. One subject shared a remarkable story of confirmation by his pastor:

We were finishing up the retreat, and we were in a circle holding hands and praying, and during that prayer time I sensed that God was telling me that he was calling me into full-time Christian ministry to be a pastor. And when we finished praying, my pastor walked up to me and looked at me for a moment and he said, “God called you, didn't he?”

For others the affirmation came from people in their congregation. One said, “A number of people confirmed that in the local church body and the district as I went through the process. I've always had people who would say, ‘You are going to be a minister.’” For still others the affirmation came from people outside of the church:

When I was in high school I had a couple of great Christian teachers. It was a public high school that I went to. I had one English teacher and one speech teacher that both recognized the exceptional skills that I had in verbal skills that translated into preaching and writing. Those were a couple of things that I look back on in a very keen time in my life—people that recognized some of the spiritual gifts that God had endowed me with.”

One pastor summed up the importance of this aspect of confirmation. He said, “I can remember early on my prayer was that, ‘Lord, if nothing else, others would sense that call on my life.’” This group of pastors was strengthened by the recognition of their gifts and abilities by others.

Another strong source of confirmation for the calling of the subjects was the providence of God. Twelve pastors testified to the importance of providence in their calling. Two pastors spoke of having put a fleece before the Lord, whereupon they sensed God dramatically confirming their calling through opening one door or closing another. Another spoke of how God had led him to a particular passage of Scripture. I believe one pastor summed up this aspect of confirmation well by saying, “I think the confirmation of the call was the providence of God. God was opening doors and answering prayers, and he was showing me opportunities.” An open door for ministry was a sign to this group that God had called them.

A third important source of confirmation for the subjects was the fruit or growth that they experienced as they began to live out their calling. One pastor said, “It was kind of exciting to teach and see people responding to sharing the word of God with people.... I just started in and people were very responsive.” Another said, “Probably the greatest confirmation is when you see someone come to faith in Christ and grow.” A third pastor even indicated that this confirmation of fruitfulness was due to the supernatural power of God working through him:

My call has been confirmed over and over again, basically through the areas that God has placed me in where I have seen some wonderfully supernatural spiritual results—things that I would never have been able to do on my own where God just kind of confirmed that this was where he wanted me and here was the proof of that.

In all, ten pastors indicated that fruit or growth was an important sign for them that they were doing what God had called them to do.

Nine of the subjects indicated that an important confirmation of their calling was the belief that ministry was a good fit for their personality and giftedness. “It was a good fit for who I was,” one of the pastors said. Another subject told about how his first ministry experiences helped to convince him of his giftedness:

When I was twenty-one, I committed my life to Christ and actually became involved in the church. I served on the board and started teaching an adult Sunday school class and became Sunday school superintendent. I liked every aspect of that. One particular night we had a young adult gathering. Two young adult couples got in a spat about something. I went and talked with them and calmed everything down, settled the issues, and that particular night it seemed that God was saying, “This is something you ought to be doing on a regular basis. You like to teach. You like every aspect of ministry.”

Several pastors actually wrestled with the idea of the ministry being a good fit because they had believed that they were not gifted in the same way as other pastors:

I sensed stirrings toward local church ministry but was not really wired like the wonderful pastors I knew. I thought I was more wired to be in business. So it was in conversation with [a mentor] when I was in my freshman year of college that he helped me to process that I didn’t need to become something that I was not in order to be in ministry, and that God could use someone wired like me.

The idea of giftedness for ministry is related to the aspect of the confirmation of people. Often God uses people to help believers understand and appreciate their gifts for ministry.

Still another prominent confirmation that some of the subjects noted was assurance from God regarding their calling or inner peace about their decision to go into ministry. When he was asked how God had confirmed his call, one pastor said, “The first would be the peace I felt in my heart when I said, ‘yes.’” Another said, “In my experience

in discerning and trying to follow the Lord's will, there was just an overwhelming sense of peace." One pastor actually described his experience as being similar to Wesley's heartwarming experience at Aldersgate. He said, "An anointing fell upon me that I knew I was called into ministry and I just didn't know where, so I began to pursue that." This group of pastors seemed to be bolstered by their feelings and experiences.

The pastors in the study cited several other sources of confirmation of their calling, although they were far less prominent. Three of them spoke of the personal fulfillment or growth that they had experienced since entering the ministry. One of them, who had recently recovered from an experience of burnout, spoke about the areas of confirmation that had led him back into ministry. He said, "I have a sense of this is what I am supposed to be doing. It fits me well and provides fulfillment." Two others spoke of the dramatic changes that took place within their own hearts as an evidence of God's calling. One of them, who had been very negative toward the idea of being a minister said, "The confirmation has been that as God has instructed me, my view of ministry has changed 180 degrees." The pastors all received confirmation of their call in different ways.

### **Continuing Affirmation of the Call**

The pastors in the study were all seasoned veterans of pastoral ministry, having served as senior or solo pastors for an average of 24.6 years. Because considerable time had passed since the initial confirmation of their calling, they were asked if God had reassured them over the years of their call and, if so, how. Fourteen of the pastors offered the idea that they had needed reassurance at some point in the exercise of their ministry because of conflicts, problems, or discouragement they had faced. Ten of them even

indicated that they had actually considered leaving pastoral ministry at some point. Four of the subjects indicated that they had never at any point doubted their calling. Each of the pastors, though, believed that God had reassured them of their calling; however, the sources of that assurance were more diverse than in their initial confirmation.

The primary source of continuing affirmation cited was the evidence of fruit in their ministry. Ten of the subjects indicated that things such as “people coming to know the Lord,” church growth, changed lives, “wonderfully supernatural spiritual results,” “the anointing of the Holy Spirit when I preach,” and “seeing the Lord at work in the ministry,” all gave them reassurance that God was still calling them to ministry. Conversely, some of them cited the absence of fruit in their ministry as an occasional source of doubt or discouragement.

Four of the subjects cited their enjoyment of the ministry as a source of reassurance, and two others added the evidence of their continued passion for ministry.

That joy and passion is evident in their responses:

I think he has given me a joy and a passion for what I am doing. And it isn't that I get up each morning and say, “Whoo-hoo. I'm excited about doing this.” I've had those bad times, bad days. But I feel love for the ministry, particularly pastoral ministry. I can't think of anything I'd rather be doing in life!

I guess number one I have never looked back at the large sum of money I was making with [a secular company]. I've never looked back at that and said, “O my, I wish I was still there. I wish I still had that money.” And I just love coming into the office every day. Every day I enjoy it. It's just a joy to be here and pastor this church.

All along just the driving heart of I love what I do. I consider myself one of the lucky ones in life that I get to do what I love to do. I am passionate about what God has raised within me, and that is just revealed over and over in the experiences of joy.

None of the subjects in the study indicated that they did not enjoy what they were doing, although many of them did indicate that they had gone through discouraging seasons. The recovery of that joy and passion, however, was important to the reassurance of their calling.

Four of the pastors in the study believed that they received assurance from God regarding their calling because the work of ministry corresponded with their gifts and passions. The correspondence of the responsibility of ministry with one's giftedness is what some pastors referred to as ministry being a "good fit." One pastor said his assurance came "through opportunities to serve and feeling like that is what God wired me to do,... the sense that I am in sync with how God created me to make a difference in the world." One of the pastors indicated that his sense of fit only came through a period of self-discovery:

I think a lot of times for me in my ministry I was very miserable even though I felt called because I got stuck doing things I just hated to do and wasn't able to use my gifts the way that God has put me together. So for me my calling is reassured because I have identified where my gifting is and I am using my gifts in those places where I am called.

That self-discovery of one's unique gifting was also mentioned by several other pastors in relation to how their understanding of their calling had changed over the years.

Four pastors also indicated that prayer was a source of reassurance for them in respect to their calling. It is what one pastor called a "personal confirmation in those private times with the Lord." Each of the pastors who claimed that they received reassurance through prayer also indicated that they had experienced a time of adversity that caused them to question their calling. One pastor said, "I think there have certainly been those times where I have gone to him in prayer and said, 'OK, is this right? Is this

where I belong?’ And I get that confirmation.” The Bible gives assurance that anxiety is often relieved during private times alone with God (e.g., Phil. 4:6-7).

Several other sources of continuing affirmation of the call were cited by the subjects. Three of them indicated that they were reassured because God had realigned their perspectives or attitudes in respect to the ministry. Three pastors were reassured by the encouragement of people in their ministry. Two of the pastors said they received reassurance because the ministry gave them a sense of personal fulfillment. Two others said they were given inner peace regarding their decision to enter the ministry. Two of them also indicated that they were reassured by their remembrance of the way God had spoken to them when he called them. One pastor indicated that he had been reassured because God had brought him through a difficult period.

### **Changed Understanding of Calling**

I asked the pastors in the study if their understanding of their calling had changed since they entered the ministry, and how. Three of them indicated that their understanding had not changed at all. One said, “When I first entered the ministry my job was to shepherd the flock and to help others come to know Christ. That’s been the burning passion of my whole life.” Another, who had served as an active layperson in leadership within the church before his call, indicated that he went into the ministry, having “a pretty good handle on what pastoral ministry was all about.”

Five other pastors indicated that although they believed their calling had not changed significantly, they had over time developed a much deeper understanding of what it meant. One said, “I wouldn’t say that the call has changed significantly. I would

say that wisdom and depth of understanding has definitely changed—wow, powerfully.”

This increased depth of understanding is what another pastor called focus:

I can't say that it has changed significantly. I think probably more than anything else it's probably changed so that it's become more focused because at one time, and when you are younger, your calling tends to be a bit nebulous. But then as you get older, especially when you take on the position of senior pastor, the calling becomes more focused.

The understanding and focus of which these pastors spoke concerned the shape of the ministry to which they were called.

Many of the pastors in the study indicated that they believed that the role of ministry in which they were engaged had changed or would change over time. One had migrated through the various roles of youth pastor and missionary before becoming a senior pastor. Several of them expressed their growing awareness of the importance of the role of leadership, which eventually caused them to change from focusing solely on pastoral care or preaching or teaching. For one, he made a shift from being a solo pastor to a leading a multiple staff ministry. For another he made a shift from ministry as an individual effort to ministry as a team effort. One said that he had changed from being a teacher/pastor to being a pastor/teacher. Still another spoke about his growing awareness of the importance of a minister's priestly role.

When speaking about how their calling had changed, two of the pastors referred to the “style” of their ministry. One said, “Church, by and large, even though you have a general church service, has to have a ministry that is very diverse and very specialized for the generations you are trying to reach.” The other spoke about how the church needed to adapt its methods to fulfill its mission:

It has changed drastically because society has changed. Twenty-five years ago people were still seeking the church. The church has become less

relevant, and now rather than us opening up our doors and inviting people in, we are opening up our doors and pushing people out into the community. We are going to go out to the community to take Christ to the community rather than making them come in to find Christ.

Both of these pastors, nevertheless, had remained unchanged in their missional focus.

Two pastors in the study indicated that their initial understanding of their calling was linked to the image of a pastor or pastors they had known. One said he had only known and observed small town solo pastors while growing up but that he had grown in his ministry to serving a large, multiple staff church. The other said, “When I started out I think there was a sense of the call to become kind of a stereotypical pastor, whereas now the call is kind of consistent or is a reflection of the uniqueness God created me.” As these pastors gained more experience, their understanding of their calling matured.

Finally, one pastor indicated that he had entered pastoral ministry with unrealistic expectations of what it would be like, but eventually his vision of ministry clashed sharply with the harsh realities of working with uncooperative people. He said, “I think the reality of it eventually overshadows the romantic notion of it and I think you become more realistic.” The literature showed that this disconnect is one reason why some pastors eventually leave the ministry.

### **Summary of Cognitive Understanding of the Call**

The pastors in the study overwhelmingly believed that God himself had called them to the work of ministry, although in most cases he used people like pastors or laypeople as his mouthpiece. They also believed very strongly that their calling was not temporary, but for life. They believed that God had confirmed their calling by a number of means, most notably the recognition of their giftedness for ministry by others, the providence of God in opening a door of service, the fruit or growth they experienced in

the exercise of their ministry, and the belief that ministry was a good fit with the person they believed they were. They believed that God had reassured them of their calling over the years by continued fruitfulness, enjoyment of the role and tasks of ministry, a sense of ministry being a good fit for who they were, and through the “still small voice” (1 Kings 19:12) of God in prayer. Over the years, since entering pastoral ministry, their understanding of their calling had deepened, and most of the subjects believed that while their calling itself remained unchanged, their role within ministry was always subject to change.

### **Research Question 2**

How have ordained ministers of the Wesleyan Church personally experienced a divine call to ministry?

In order to answer this particular research question, responses of the participants were organized around a different series of operational questions. How did the participants make the decision to become pastors? What kinds of things did they experience that were perceived as a divine call? What did they do in response to the call?

#### **The Decision to Be a Pastor**

The first question I asked the subjects was how they had made their decision to become pastors. Wesleyan pastors are questioned at length regarding their experience of their call to ministry during the ordination process; therefore, I presumed that most of the subjects would mention its influence in their decision. All but one of them indicated that the call of God was the primary thing that caused them to consider pursuing a career in ministry.

Three of the subjects indicated that they had sensed their call to ministry very early in life. Eight of the pastors first sensed a call to ministry when they were in their teens. Five of them sensed God's call while they were students in college, and six of them sensed it shortly after they finished college and were seeking God's direction in their lives. Two of the subjects converted to Christ in their thirties and sensed God's call shortly afterward.

The one exception to those who entered the ministry in response to God's call said that he did feel a very generalized call to serve God, but not a call to pastoring:

I'll just be honest with you. When I started it was because I needed a job and I knew I could do it, and I became a pastor. And I was not ordained. I had not taken enough ministry courses in my bachelor's program, but they licensed me anyway. So I became a pastor in [area]. So at that time I did not feel a call at all.

Nevertheless, after several difficult years in and out of ministry, this subject did eventually experience a very dramatic call to pastoral ministry.

In speaking of events that led up to their call, the pastors in the study did mention a number of things that had an influence on their decision to pursue ministry. Nine of the pastors indicated that they sensed God calling them into ministry after they had dedicated themselves to the Lord. Following are a few examples:

I went out into the class meeting room and I dedicated myself to the Lord. I just told the Lord, "Lord, you haven't called me tonight, but if you would ever want me to be a pastor or a missionary, I would gladly forsake all the things I might be doing or planning in order to prepare myself for this calling." It was about two years later I began to feel God calling me into the ministry.

I can still remember. I was sitting in the balcony, and he gave the invitation one night, and I just went down and I said, "God, you know where I'm headed and what I want to do, but I'll do what you want me to do." And so from that time on, my life took a hard right turn in a different direction.

I basically was trying to sort out what God wanted me to do. I came to the point where I said, “God, I’ll do anything you want me to do.” And when ministry came up I said, “I can’t do that.” I got to a point where I said, “OK God, if that’s what you want me to do, then that’s what I want to do.”

These pastors would never have made a decision to enter pastoral ministry without that moment of surrender.

Eight of the pastors also spoke of experiencing a time of wrestling with God or wrestling with the decision to become a pastor. For some of them this wrestling was due to resistance they felt toward the profession of ministry. One pastor said, “I never wanted to be one. My father was a pastor, and I saw all of the churches and their relationship to their spiritual leaders that I wanted to see.” Another, also the son of a preacher, described his inner battle:

I had just left Brooksville, Florida, and we were driving up to Maryland where we lived at the time. I hated Brooksville. I hated seeing a bunch of former pastors there who hadn’t had enough pension to live anywhere but a very small and ingrown village down there. I was mad at God and mad at the church. I had just been through a very bad experience as an assistant that made me not want to do this again, ever, in my life.

Nevertheless, each of the pastors who mentioned a time of wrestling with God also spoke of a moment of surrender when they finally submitted to God’s summons to ministry.

Eight of the pastors also indicated that one of the things leading to their decision to become a pastor was their dissatisfaction with what they were currently doing or where their lives were heading. One pastor said that his decision “came out of a time of general dissatisfaction with my job when I was out of college and began to sort that out.” One of the subjects, headed toward a career in law enforcement, said, “I realized that the passion I had for law enforcement was not the same.” Another became dissatisfied with his decision to become a teacher:

I began to realize that I did not want to just impart my teaching credentials in social sciences. My desire was to have some kind of impact on lives and I realized that I could not do that in the public school system.

Still another was headed toward becoming a psychologist:

To give it to you very simply, I was bored in dealing with yesterday's problems and wanted to deal with taking people to a future and being more about future thinking than all of the time dealing with yesterday's garbage.

All of these testified that their dissatisfaction led to a time of openness where God was able to call them into pastoral ministry.

Positive ministry experiences were also mentioned by seven of the subjects as being influential in their decisions to become pastors. One pastor, who had been called upon to lead his youth group while in junior high school, said, "Those early leadership experiences were what God was using to draw me into ministry." Another testified that, while in college, a district superintendent had asked him to teach a Sunday school class in a small church, and that led to more and more opportunities to preach and teach until he finally became open to God's call. Still another pastor was drawn into ministry through a mission experience. All of them believed that God helped them to see their calling through using their gifts in ministry.

Seven of the subjects also testified to the influence of their pastors in being role models, in encouraging them to consider careers in ministry, or in helping them process their feelings about God's call. Several of them said they were helped by some counsel from the pastors of the church they were attending. Another said ministry was a value that his local church pastor regularly discussed during his teen years. Others said they admired their pastors or were good friends with them.

The subjects also cited several other factors as being influential on their decision to enter ministry. Four of them cited God's providential leading of the events in their lives. Five of them indicated that they had not considered pastoral ministry before being challenged to do so while in college or Bible school. Three of them indicated that they had positive feelings about coming from a pastoral family. Another subject who was not from a pastoral family indicated that his parents had encouraged and influenced him toward ministry. Two of them cited the affirmation of their gifts by friends or laypeople in their church. All of the subjects were influenced by more than one factor, and some were influenced by a combination of many of them.

### **The Experience of the Call**

I asked all of the subjects in the study to describe their experience of being called into ministry. All but one had volunteered the notion that they had made the decision to enter ministry because they had been called by God. However, even the one pastor who began ministry before he sensed a call to it testified to a dramatic experience of being called several years later. The experiences of the subjects were vastly different from one another, reflecting their varied backgrounds and personalities.

While several of the subjects reported having first sensed God calling them to ministry at a very young age, most of them had rebelled against that notion and also pointed to a more dramatic experience later in life. Two, however, had had an abiding sense of God's calling throughout their lives. One remarked, "When I was a very young boy I felt the call of God on my life. I guess that is always what I have known I was going to do." The other was quite similar:

I had a call on my life at a very early age. It was always something that I admired, my pastors, but still there was that sense of this is what my life

was supposed to be.... I've never doubted that this is what I was supposed to be doing.

Perhaps because his calling was something experienced early in life, this subject had difficulty in describing the nature of it. He added, "It's really kind of hard to define. It's kind of a mystical bit that you sense that this is just the right thing." Nevertheless, he still had an abiding sense that it was real.

Five of the subjects indicated that God had spoken to them as a personal voice to their heart. One of them said, "It was just a clear thought that came across my mind." Another said, "It was an inner sense, or an inner tugging of my heart." Two of them described this inner voice in rather dramatic terms:

We were finishing up the retreat, and we were in a circle holding hands and praying, and during that prayer time I sensed that God was telling me that he was calling me into full-time Christian ministry to be a pastor.... I didn't hear any loud voices or anything like that. It was just something I heard in my heart that I knew it was him and was confirmed a few minutes later by my pastor.

As we were driving and came to southern Maryland near our town—the town was actually called Damascus, and the road was actually called the Damascus Road—I was fighting God the whole time. God said in no uncertain terms, "I have called you to be a pastor. Don't think about it." And what that meant was I had thought at times I should be a pastor, but had reasoned my way out of it.... And so this time it was like he just whacked me. There was no audible voice, but it definitely was someone speaking inside of me.

These five subjects had all learned to recognize the voice of God when he speaks, just as the prophet Samuel once did (1 Sam. 3:1-10).

Five other subjects heard God speaking to them through a preacher. God most often uses people as his mouthpiece when attempting to convey a message:

It was in my sophomore year at [college] and I believe it was [speaker] who came and spoke one night. I don't remember what he spoke about, but I remember in the middle of that feeling like the Lord was calling me into ministry.

[Speaker] who was an evangelist for the Wesleyan Church out of Pittsburgh was at our church, and I don't remember specifically what he was preaching on. All I know was that I went to the altar and really committed my life to the Lord and just sensed his calling on my life at that point.

An interesting note about these five subjects is that, even though the experience happened many years previously, they still could clearly remember the events surrounding it, including the speaker himself. One noted, "I know exactly when and where, and the pastor who was preaching that day." The message God spoke through these speakers left an indelible impression on their hearts.

Three of the subjects noted that God spoke to them from the Bible concerning their call to ministry:

The Lord laid it on my heart that I was more and more interested in being a pastor. I asked the Lord if I could serve in that capacity, and he gave me a verse in Acts. We were talking about the prophets and how they spoke for God, and there is a verse in Acts that talks about you too being an heir of the prophets. I sort of took that verse a little bit out of context, but it was in context for what I was studying, and I became one of those who speak for God.

One day I was struggling with whether this calling was from God or something I thought up and I found an old Gideon Bible that I had been given in fifth grade in a box. I was sitting down waiting for the school bus, and just kind of breathed a prayer that if this is what God wanted me to do he would confirm it, and of course I had in mind right then, and so I fumbled through the pages and landed on the verse in Romans where it talks about, "How shall they hear unless someone goes and preaches to them," and I took that as a strong confirmation that that is what God had in mind for me.

Wesleyan pastors have a strong conviction that the Bible is the inspired and authoritative word of God, so I was not surprised that some would believe that God spoke to them directly from the scriptures.

Four of the subjects believed that God spoke to them regarding their calling through a need that he placed on their heart. One heard a missionary speak of a need overseas, and his heart responded in a willingness to go. Another sensed the need to make the gospel less complex and understandable to the common person, laced with joy and humor. A third pastor saw a big gap between his godly teachers and “us regular folks, the students in the chairs.” He felt a burden to be somebody in the middle who can speak both ways. The existential settings of these pastors tended to define the need they felt:

The calling was that I came from a broken home, one that was culturally based Christian, but then my family walked away from the church because of life changes and I saw Christ in my family and out of my family, and I saw the distinct difference was black and white. And I didn't like the black. I wanted the white, and I knew that was the calling that God was calling me to, to bring Christ into the lives of people because I saw the difference.

The burden these pastors felt was what Bill Hybels calls “holy discontent,” a burning desire that God places on one's heart that drives one to action (*Holy Discontent* 54).

While none of the pastors in the study saw any burning bushes, some did sense a more dramatic kind of call. Two of the pastors actually testified to having received visions from the Lord:

I went to the altar at the old mourner's bench down a sawdust trail and knelt at the altar, and I knew I was saved and going to heaven. I just asked the Lord what he wanted, and I saw a vision. Actually, I didn't see it. It just came to my mind, of people dropping off a cliff and into flames, and the Lord said, “I want you to stand in the gap and I want you to preach the gospel.”

Another pastor heard someone speak a word of prophecy:

It is something I will forever remember. He said, “I know I have never met you, but there is someone who is here right now, you have a two-year call placed on your life by God. Tonight you are going to surrender.” That hit me right between the eyes.

Most of the pastors, however, testified that their calling from God was far less dramatic than the burning bush type.

For many of the pastors, their calling from God was less a point in time, but more gradual and progressive. Two of them spoke of simply making themselves available to the Lord. Three of them said that their calling came out of awareness that they were fit for the work of ministry. Three of them spoke of their calling as a gradual conviction upon their soul. One summed up his experience in this manner:

God began to change my heart at about age fourteen and I just sensed a call that started as something small and just grew into a final—it wasn't a lightning bolt or anything like that—but it finally grew to the place where I knew that if I didn't follow God's call into ministry I was going to be displeasing him. So it was a gradual kind of conviction that he seemed to confirm after I said I would do it.

Three of the pastors said their calling was progressive in nature. One of them described it this way:

I know a lot of guys, and I respect them, who have a sense of call when they were seven years old, or they grow up in church or home environments where young men are encouraged to go into ministry. That was not my experience, so it just never occurred to me. So as I began to think about it, and because I had not been a Christian all that long when we first started to have discussion along those lines, I really expected that the pastor would say that's not really for you. I was almost hoping he would. But he said that is a possibility, and here are some next steps for you to take. Then as I began to take those steps, I felt more and more comfortable that that might be what God would have for me.

Finally, four of the pastors described their call as a result of God's providential leading in their lives. As he opened doors and brought certain people into their lives, these subjects could sense that God was nudging them toward pastoral ministry.

## The Response to the Call

In describing their varied experiences of God's calling into pastoral ministry, the pastors in the study also shared their varied responses to that calling. More than half of them (thirteen) mentioned that they engaged in a kind of struggle with God over the idea of being a pastor. For three of them, this struggle was perhaps associated with teenage rebellion against their early upbringing. Each of these particular pastors had first sensed God's calling when they were young children. Several other pastors indicated that their struggle came with sorting out whether they were actually being called by God. Most of the pastors, however, spoke of their struggle more in terms of resisting the idea of being a pastor altogether. One of them said, "There was a two-year period of me wrestling with, 'Do I really want to do this?' I really wrestled with God."

Ten of the subjects indicated that, after sensing God's calling or wrestling with it for a period of time, they eventually surrendered themselves to God's will:

That was my moment. That was my deciding factor. And I was just resisting it, but finally I said, "OK, Lord, I'll go." That was it.

So I remember going back to my dorm room and wrestling with that for a little while, and finally saying, "If that's what you want me to do, I'll do it."

I was in a small Wesleyan Church in [location] serving as a layman when I got a call from God at a board retreat. I kind of fought that call for a few years, and finally gave in to it at the age of 35.

The surrender described by these pastors actually resembled that of Jesus who, while agonizing over the decision to go to the cross, said to his Father, "Not as I will, but as you will" (Matt. 26:39, NIV). Because the idea of ministry is actually servanthood, the call to ministry should begin with the submission of the servant to his master.

Five of the pastors, however, actually spoke of their moment of surrender occurring prior to being called. Like Isaiah, they seemed to cry out, “Here am I, Lord. Send me” (Isa. 6:8). These pastors were generally open to the idea of being pastors before they dedicated themselves to the Lord and his will. However, none of them wanted to choose that career path unless they sensed that it was the one God had chosen for them.

Ten of the pastors in the study did not mention a time of surrender in terms of their calling. Instead, they described their response to God’s calling more in terms of it being a simple awareness, or an awakening:

It was while I was leading singing one Wednesday evening that I just had this overwhelming sense that swept over me that this is where I was meant to be.

It was more of a growing awareness that that is where I sensed I could make a difference for his kingdom and really be used of God.

It was in my junior year of college that I came to that awakening.

For these pastors, God’s calling did not come to them at a particular point in time but was perceived gradually over a period of weeks, months, or even years. One of them even commented, “It was just kind of a progressive thing. If God had just come out one night and said, ‘[Name], you’re going to be a pastor,’ I would have resisted that, to be quite honest with you.” Progressively, though, over time he recognized and responded to God’s voice calling to him.

### **Summary of Calling Experiences**

Overwhelmingly, the pastors in this study indicated that they made the decision to enter pastoral ministry because God had called them to it. Other factors that contributed to that decision were dissatisfaction with their current jobs or vocational pursuits, positive ministry experiences, and the influence of their pastors. Their experiences of their call to

ministry differed greatly, from an abiding sense of call from an early age, to the personal voice of God to their heart or speaking to them through a preacher or the Bible, to a response they saw to a need, to dramatic burning bush types of experiences, to a very slow and gradual awareness. Many responded to God's call only after a time of struggle. Most responded to God's call by an act of surrender, but some surrendered to God's will even before they were called. Still others responded through a growing awareness and acceptance over time to the reality of their call.

### **Research Question 3**

How has their understanding and experience of their call influenced ordained ministers in the Wesleyan Church regarding their longevity in pastoral ministry?

In order to answer this particular research question, responses of the participants were organized around another series of operational questions. Have the subjects in the study ever questioned their calling? Have they ever considered leaving pastoral ministry? Why have they chosen to remain in pastoral ministry?

### **Doubts in Relation to Their Calling**

The pastors in the study were all asked if some things they ran into in ministry occasionally made them wonder about their call. In order to know if their calling from God had any influence on their longevity in ministry, I needed to be ascertain whether they had also experienced any push or pull factors away from their calling. Many studies had revealed that pastors who left ministry usually did so because of some strong external or internal pressure to do so. In such cases one is either forced to question whether they were truly called to the work of ministry or whether that calling was, in fact, being

changed. I assumed that seasoned pastors would have experienced a variety of push and pull factors during their tenures in ministry.

Four of the pastors indicated that they had never experienced any doubts in respect to their calling. Additionally, these pastors were emphatic on this point, as evidenced by the pastor who responded, “Never! Never, not one time!” One of them remarked, “Even though things have happened that might make me wonder, I didn’t question, but I just realized that it’s just life” Like the others, these pastors had experienced difficult situations, but the difficulties did not lead to a time of questioning their call.

In contrast to these four subjects, the other twenty-one indicated that they had experienced a season of doubting. Ironically, they were equally emphatic, as if to say that doubts were a normal experience for any pastor. As one of them remarked, “Probably everyone who is in the ministry runs into those discouragements that make you wonder what you are doing here. I’m human.” The acknowledgment of doubts by these pastors corresponds with the fact that, when previously asked how God had reassured them of their call, fourteen of the subjects volunteered the fact that they had at some point experienced a time of struggle where they had needed God’s assurance.

The doubts of these pastors were triggered by several different things. Ten of them indicated that for them conflict within the church was a prominent factor. For some the conflict was between parishioners:

The thing that makes me question my call is turmoil that can happen with Christian people—family against family.

We have in my church right now at least four three-generational families. You know that is good, but it’s also bad. It’s good in that we know our people are close. It’s bad because we know all the details of everybody’s

life, and sometimes people are less forgiving of what has happened in the past because we're reminded of it through our relationships.

Most of the conflict in question, however, directly involved the pastors themselves. That conflict often challenged a pastors' ability to minister effectively or their vision for the church, thus going to the core of their understanding of their calling:

When there is division in the church or opposition to your ministry or what you feel is your vision for the church, or people leave the church and say nasty things about you. Oh, there have been many times and many days that, even though I've known that this is what God called me to, I haven't particularly wanted to keep doing it.

I don't like conflict, and obviously if you are in ministry there is going to be conflict and you can either deal with it in a healthy fashion or reap the consequences of failing to deal with it in a healthy fashion. So, to me those are the types of things that are most likely to cause me to question my call.

And the criticism was so strong, and people were so, in my opinion, un-Christlike in their actions that I became rather confused, and I said, "Lord, maybe you're telling me you don't want me to do this anymore."

The Klaas and Klaas study cited in Chapter 2 notes that church conflict was one of the most significant reasons why some ministers in the Lutheran Church, Missouri Synod left pastoral ministry.

Another source of doubt in respect to one's calling was insecurity and self-doubt.

Ten of the subjects indicated that they encountered stresses in ministry that made them question their giftedness. Pastoral ministry involves many things for which no amount of training or experience can adequately prepare one:

I guess one thing is when insecurities pop up and I think to myself, "Lord, I'm not really wired that way. I'm not charismatic in terms of my personality and whatever." I see people who are more, at least from an outsider's perspective. I see them and think that God could really use them a lot more than he could use me. It's those times of doubt.

I live outside of my comfort zone. I've thought about this many times over the years. I live outside of my comfort zone at least 80 percent of my time.

So there have been several serious times of question, not that God called me, but why would he call me when this is so foreign to me.

As this last pastor indicated, the doubts expressed by most of these people were not doubts about the reality of God's calling on their lives, but doubts about their ability to fulfill their calling.

Four of the pastors indicated that they occasionally wondered about their call when the outward signs of success in their churches were absent. Additionally, two others mentioned that they struggled when people left their churches. The church growth movement and the proliferation of megachurches in society has resulted in a bar of success that many pastors and churches find unattainable:

Pastors get discouraged because they don't have the kind of success that they think they should have, or could have, or wish they did, so they think "I'd better do something else." I've wrestled with that over the last few years.

There have been times when things got a little rough, or the success hasn't been there. I'm in a time like that right now. I've got a crisis here at [church name] where we just seem to be losing people rather than gaining people. And we're financially hard pressed. I just had to let staff go. All those make me wonder if God wants me to do this.

With the majority of churches in America either plateaued or declining, I believe that many more pastors are facing doubts over their lack of fruit or success. The pressure to succeed is not confined to those pastoring smaller churches. One of the six respondents on this issue was the pastor of a very large congregation.

A few other sources of doubt were also cited by the pastors in the study. Two of them indicated that family pressure was a factor. One had a spouse who was not wholly supportive of his call to ministry, and the other struggled when his family was criticized by members of the congregation. Another pastor indicated that he wondered about his

call when he experienced a series of events that resulted in a season of burnout. Still another expressed frustration with his calling because of the consumer orientation of society toward the church. He said, “The church in the United States is narcissistic, consumer driven, and individualistic. You know, all those things just make you want to pull your hair out and say, ‘Why? Why am I spending my life here?’” I’ve often asked that same question.

### **Leaving Pastoral Ministry**

The pastors in the study were also asked if they had ever considered leaving pastoral ministry for another line of work. This question took the idea of frustrations and doubts about their calling to another level. I believed that because many of the subjects had related a time in their ministry where they needed assurance, some of them might have even contemplated at some point the notion of leaving pastoral ministry and doing something else. When asked previously about how God had reassured them of their calling, ten of the subjects actually offered the idea that they had considered leaving ministry at some point. They mentioned entertaining this idea before I ever asked them the question on whether they had ever considered leaving ministry, suggesting that the struggles they experienced had left a deep impression upon them.

Nine of the pastors stated, some very emphatically, that they had never entertained the idea of leaving pastoral ministry for another line of work. Some had entertained the thought of changing their focus within full-time ministry (teaching, chaplaincy) but never actually leaving ministry itself for another line of work. One pastor summed up the sentiments of this group by saying, “No. Just plain no. There’s nothing I would rather do than be a pastor right now. And I’m struggling with retirement because

of that, because I love being a pastor.” Most of the subjects expressed a high degree of satisfaction with the ministry.

Six other pastors also indicated that they had briefly considered leaving the ministry, but not seriously. One said, “During the difficult days I’ve looked at options, but never seriously.” The options that most of them had considered, however, were not outside the scope of ministry. As one of them stated, “I don’t know that I have questioned leaving the ministry. But I have questioned pastoral ministry.” These pastors had all expressed doubts at some point in respect to their calling but had not given in to them.

Ten of the subjects (40 percent) indicated that they had actually considered leaving pastoral ministry at some point for another line of work. One of them expressed that he believed that was a normal feeling. He said, “I don’t think that is necessarily unusual. I think everybody wants to quit their job now and then and do something either more interesting or less stressful.” Another pastor also thought secular work would be less stressful:

I think most of the time when I have felt that way it’s just the responsibility of everything that sometimes you just want to say, “I think I’d like to go do something mindless and something that I don’t have to feel like I’m carrying the burden for. Being on the production line in a factory wouldn’t be all that bad. You go to work, work your shift, come home, and you don’t think about your work until the next day when you go and pick up from where the last guy left off. In ministry, nobody picks up from where the last guy left off. The buck stops here. That’s the most time when I feel, “Boy, I’d like to do something different.”

Still another said, “Obviously you have a bad day and you think, ‘OK, if I did something else I wouldn’t have bad days.’ It really is a choice. People are unhappy regardless of what they do.” These subjects understood the myth of the greener grass.

The primary trigger for these thoughts of leaving pastoral ministry was conflict. Conflict as a trigger for leaving was consistent with the findings in regards to what caused these ministers to wonder about their call. Five of the ten pastors who seriously considered leaving pastoral ministry mentioned conflict as a key reason:

I think for me a lot of it comes back to not liking to deal with conflict. So when those situations arise, the thought of leaving ministry, I probably wouldn't articulate it this way if I were in the midst of it, but the reality is that the thought of leaving ministry to me is a means of avoiding that conflict or dealing with the consequences of conflict.

Any time there is movement and friction, and when you are in a church that is growing, there will be conflict. I don't like conflict. I don't like to be around it. I don't like disharmony. So when I come up with leading and we face resistance, and there are problems, when people are upset and leave the church, that is so discouraging.

While these pastors did choose to remain in pastoral ministry, conflict was often behind their occasional decisions to seek a different church in which to exercise their ministry.

### **Remaining in Ministry**

The pastors in the study had all chosen to remain in pastoral ministry in spite of the fact that they had encountered various stresses that made them wonder about their call and even consider leaving it for another line of work. When they were asked why they had chosen to remain in pastoral ministry, overwhelmingly they indicated that God's call on their lives was the overriding factor. Twenty-one of the twenty-five subjects (84 percent) cited the role of the Lord's call in their decision. One even remarked, "If it were not for a very strong assurance of call I probably would have bailed out." Following is a sampling of how strongly they felt about it:

I would link it to the call of God because there are certainly times that are difficult and you think there has to be an easier way to make a living. But with that in mind, the call motivates me and inspires me but also haunts

me in that if I tried to do anything else I would be stepping out of God's will.

I believe God has called me to ministry, and I don't believe that once a person is called to ministry that call is ever rescinded. I don't see any plan in the Bible for retirement for ministers.

I felt so strongly about that call from the beginning that I just don't feel that I could walk away from it without that same strong sense of release. That has never come.

The same call that they initially sensed from God that had a profound effect on leading them into ministry also had a deeply profound effect on keeping them in it. In relating the story of his call to ministry, one pastor spoke about a warning his pastor father had given him:

Never, ever forget where you were and the calling that you sensed that first time, because down the road there's going to be some times when Satan says, "You weren't supposed to be doing this," or you wonder, "Was I really supposed to be doing this?" You can look back on that time and place, and know for sure in the midst of those dark times and rough times that this is what you are supposed to be doing.

These pastors overwhelmingly believed, because God had called them, that pastoring a church was what they were still supposed to be doing.

In stating why they had chosen to remain in pastoral ministry, a number of the subjects spoke of God's call negatively as an obligation they were bound to fulfill. They could not walk away and do something else because they were under orders from God. One of them said, "In the midst of despair I'd like to go do something else, but God hasn't released me from the call, so you just stay with it." Another one of the pastors indicated that he had remained in it because he had made a vow to the Lord:

I promised the Lord in the jungles of Viet Nam that if he could get me out of here back to the world and back to my wife I would serve him my entire life. Still today I am compelled. That is my call. That is my vow.

In all, eight of the subjects spoke of God's call as something from which they would have to be released.

Additionally, seven of the subjects indicated that they could not see themselves doing anything else. While for most of them the sentiment of not doing anything else was stated in a positive light, for a few it actually meant that they really did not have many other options.:

When you get into your fifties you get to the point where you have very few choices as to what you can do. You can either stick it out and hope, or you can go do something else. You really can't change churches. You don't have that choice very easily by the time you get past fifty-five. Nobody will hire you in the Wesleyan system.

Another pastor indicated that he did not feel he was entrepreneurial and that pastoring was comfortable, what he knew. Still another acknowledged that he might have stayed in ministry partially because of "cowardice or just not wanting to venture out and try something else." Although they felt called to ministry, they also felt somewhat trapped.

Still, most of the subjects spoke of remaining in pastoral ministry in a positive light. Six of them spoke of how they found a great deal of joy and fulfillment in what they were doing. Here are two examples:

I have remained in pastoral ministry because of the Lord's call, and the joy and fulfillment that I find in working with people. I'm a people person. I love people. I love to talk with them. I love counseling. I love to lead them to Christ and share with them and help them with their problems. The thought never entered my mind about leaving the ministry or anything like that.

I forget who said it, but if you can find something other than full-time ministry and be happy doing it, you should probably do it. And that is it for me. I certainly struggle to see anything else that would bring me the degree of joy that I have in doing what I do.

Even the pastors who indicated that they had not been released from their calling or had not seen themselves doing anything else spoke with a positive sense of satisfaction in what they were doing.

Three of the subjects indicated that their greatest joy came in helping other people begin a relationship with Christ and grow in their faith. They saw leading people to Christ as their primary calling. One said, “I want to see people not only get to heaven but to have a relationship with Jesus Christ because this world is so crazy.” Another, who had formerly worked as a salesman, indicated that he had so much joy and confidence in what he was doing because he now believed he had the greatest product in the world to offer:

I just can't imagine as a salesman having a better product than what I now have. And that is I guess how I would explain why I love it so much. I can go into any family, any situation, and, through the Holy Spirit, bring change to the better.

In other contexts several more of the subjects gave evidence of the same evangelistic passion.

Three of the pastors also indicated that they had remained in pastoral ministry because they believed in the value and potential of the local church. Several of them expressed an indebtedness to Hybels who says, “There is nothing like the local church when the local church is working right” (*Courageous Leadership* 23). One of the pastors expressed this idea with a great deal of vision for the future:

A positive motivation would be the real driving hope that comes that if the church ever got it right and got it together, what a difference it would make for the kingdom of God. What would a community look like of the church were really known for being Christ in the community? If we would ever get a glimpse of that and put it together, what a powerful impact that would make.... That would be the legacy of a life worth lived. (19)

Each of the pastors who expressed this sentiment also indicated elsewhere that they saw themselves as leaders and visionaries. That hope and vision of the church eventually becoming all it can be and making a powerful impact on its community is a powerful motivator to leaders who feel God's call on their lives.

### **Summary of the Influence of the Call**

Most of the pastors in the study had experienced seasons where they wondered about their call. Their doubts were usually a result of dealing with conflict among the members of the congregation, insecurity and self-doubt over their abilities to solve some of the problems they encountered, or seasons when their churches did not experience any growth. In all, 40 percent of them had at one time or another considered leaving pastoral ministry, while another 24 percent had entertained the notion, but not seriously. They believed that other occupations might be less stressful and less prone to conflict. Overwhelmingly, the pastors of the study indicated that their call had had a strong influence on their decision to remain in pastoral ministry. Some spoke of it in terms of not being released from their call or not seeing themselves doing anything else. Many spoke of staying in ministry because of its accompanying joy and fulfillment, as well as the changed lives they had the privilege of witnessing.

### **Summary of the Major Findings**

The study had a number of major findings:

- Almost all of the pastors believed that they had been called to the work of ministry and entered pastoral ministry because they sensed a call to it.
- Most of the pastors believed that their calling to ministry was lifelong.

- The pastors believed that God had both confirmed and reassured them of their calling to ministry.
- Many pastors believed that while their calling remained unchanged, their role within ministry was continually subject to change.
- The pastors in the study experienced their call to ministry in a wide variety of ways.
- Most of the pastors had experienced seasons of doubt in respect to their calling.
- Nearly half (40 percent) of the pastors had considered leaving pastoral ministry at some point, while another 24 percent had entertained the notion, but not seriously.
- Overwhelmingly the pastors of the study indicated that the call of God had had a strong influence on their decision to remain in pastoral ministry.

## **CHAPTER 5**

### **DISCUSSION**

The Wesleyan Church has always valued the role of the call of God in leading men and women into pastoral ministry. Nevertheless, like many other denominations, the ranks of their ordained ministers are impacted every year by those who decide that they can no longer continue to pastor a church. This research sought to study seasoned ordained ministers within the Wesleyan Church in order to find any correlation between their understanding and experience of their call and their continuing decision to remain in ministry.

#### **Major Findings**

The findings of the study reveal a strong correlation between pastors' sense of divine calling and their perseverance in ministry.

#### **A Divine Summons to Ministry**

Every one of the pastors in the study believed that they had received a call by God to the work of ministry. Additionally, all but one of them had made the decision to enter pastoral ministry because they felt called to it. This finding was not surprising, given the high value that the Wesleyan Church places on the call of God into ministry. This correlates with the earlier findings of Gonlag. Young people are routinely challenged to respond to God's call to full-time Christian service in conferences, camp meetings, and revivals. Pastoral candidates are generally questioned extensively regarding their experience of their call prior to ordination.

As seen from the literature (Guiness) and from Scripture (1 Pet. 3:9; Eph. 4:12), God's call is often viewed in the general sense in which all Christians are called to follow

Christ. God's call is also understood in relation to the specific calling he places upon individuals to serve in specialized roles within the Church as "prophets, evangelists, pastors and teachers" (Eph. 4:11). In the same way that Jesus had been sent by his Father into this world to accomplish his will, Jesus calls individuals to himself and sends them into the world to fulfill his divine plan. Like Wesley, Calvin and Luther, pastors within the Wesleyan Church see themselves as being under divine summons and divine orders.

Whenever one understands their occupation as a divine calling, they believe that they can not run away from it without also turning their backs on God himself. The biblical story of Jonah demonstrates how a refusal to follow the divine summons can ultimately lead to dire consequences. The notion of resisting God was reflected in the research by the number of pastors who indicated that they initially struggled or wrestled with the call when they first heard it. It was also reflected in the number that did not question the fact that they had been called to pastoral ministry, but had serious doubts about their ability to carry it out.

The Mason study had revealed that one's natural gifting for ministry was a more prominent predictor of longevity than inward calling. While some of the pastors spoke of believing that they possessed natural gifts for ministry and that ministry was a good fit for them, pastors within the Wesleyan Church appear to be more likely to describe their calling experience as being inward and personal. The culture in which calling is stressed may be one reason why inward calling is so prominent.

The Wilson study among Episcopal and Church of God (Anderson) pastors revealed that ministers who perceived their ministry as a calling rather than a profession had greater satisfaction and were more likely to remain with their calling during difficult

seasons. This study correlated with that finding in that these long term pastors all described their ministerial journey in terms of having been called to it.

### **A Variety of Experiences**

The pastors in the study experienced their call to ministry in a wide variety of ways. Their experiences differed greatly, from an abiding sense of call from an early age, to the personal voice of God speaking to their heart or speaking to them through a preacher or the Bible, to a response to a need they perceived, to dramatic burning bush types of experiences, to a very slow and gradual awareness. These experiences were also confirmed in a wide variety of means, sometimes by the recognition of their giftedness for ministry by others, sometimes by the providence of God in opening a door of service, sometimes by the fruit or growth they experienced in the exercise of their ministry, and sometimes by the belief that ministry was a good fit for who they believed they were.

Every person is wired differently, with different personalities, different family backgrounds, different life experiences. No two people are alike. Consequently, God uses a wide variety of means to capture the attention and heart of people. He called Abraham by speaking to his heart, but he called Moses through speaking to him out of a burning bush. The most important thing is not how God calls an individual but the reality that he has. The fact that God uses such a wide variety of means is indicative of how personal the experiences of God's call were perceived. Every pastor in the study testified to the personal nature of his or her calling to ministry.

Because calling is so personal, it is difficult to evaluate in respect to its genuineness. Ministerial oversight boards are charged with the responsibility of judging whether candidates' experiences were true or possibly a mistaken case of indigestion?

Some pastors have unfortunately found their way into ministry primarily because they believed God had called them to it, when others around them believed that either they or God was mistaken. One's calling should be both inward and outward. Wesley's three test questions for his preachers regarding whether they had experienced his saving and sanctifying grace, possessed gifts and grace for ministry, and had exhibited fruit from their labors is still a good formula for ministry oversight boards. These questions should not be overlooked today.

### **A Lifelong Calling**

Contrary to the belief of Ernst that calling to ministry should be viewed in terms of one's temporary role instead of one's longevity, the subjects believed very strongly that their calling to ministry was not temporary but lasted for their entire lifetimes. In line with Romans 11:29 they believed that "God's gifts and his call are irrevocable," although unlike the Roman Catholics they did not see their calling in sacramental terms. For some the belief in a lifetime calling meant that they perceived that they were always called to be pastors. Most believed that their call to ministry could be fulfilled in more ways than simply pastoral ministry.

In the free market calling system of the Wesleyan Church, pastors are expected to discern the will of God constantly in respect to their assignments. Congregations even share in that responsibility by periodically voting on the tenure of the pastor.

Unfortunately, within this system opportunity for vocational ministry assignments diminish with age, so even though one might sense an inward call from God to preach as well as possess an outward call of confirmation from the Church, they might not perceivably have a call of opportunity. The politics of church life occasionally prevent a

pastor from being able to follow through with his lifetime calling. Chang's views on the diminishing labor market are certainly true for older pastors within the Wesleyan structure.

Most of the subjects described their calling in terms of what they believed God had called them to do. However, some of them described their calling in terms of being as opposed to doing. Being a minister of the gospel, a servant of God, defined who they were in spite of the specific role they might fill in living out that calling. Wherever calling is viewed in respect to being, it is generally perceived as lasting for a lifetime.

Highly significant in this understanding of a lifelong call were the views of these pastors toward retirement. For a significant number of them, the ministry did not have a finish line. They saw themselves as being fully engaged in some aspect of ministry long into their senior years. This attitude was undoubtedly due in some measure to the degree of satisfaction that they gained from the work of ministry. In many cases it was also due to the fact that they saw themselves as being under divine orders that did not cease when a person happens to reach a certain arbitrary age.

### **A Fluid Understanding of Their Role**

Many of the pastors in the study believed that while their calling to ministry remained unchanged, their specific role within ministry was always subject to change. They understood that they were under divine orders, but also that God had the right to change their assignments if and whenever he willed. A change in assignment might mean a change in the church they were called to serve. It might also mean a change in their ministry role altogether. The understanding of a fluid role in calling correlates with the observation in both the Jud, Mills, and Burch and the Hogue and Wenger studies that the

former pastors resented not being regarded as real ministers. The majority of the pastors in this study had already served in multiple settings. Some had grown their churches from small, single-celled churches to large, multilayered organizations. Before serving as pastors some of them had served previously as missionaries, specialized staff pastors, or as active laymen.

Some of this fluidity in respect to one's role in ministry is undoubtedly due to the maturity of the subjects. When they first heard the divine summons, most of them had a more static understanding of what pastoral ministry meant, linking it to particular churches or pastors that they knew. However, as they grew in their understanding of their gifts and their particular ministry settings, they also began to realize that they were more effective in some roles than in others. Ministry fit was a big issue for many of the subjects, which correlates with the findings of Mason that natural leadings were a stronger motivator than spiritual calling in retention to ministry. Some roles gave them more joy and fulfillment than others. Some roles brought greater degrees of success to the church. Some roles needed to be laid aside for a season in order to make way for the ministry of others in the church. Some roles required the energy of youth, whereas others required the wisdom and maturity of age.

### **Seasons of Doubt**

Most of the pastors in the study (84 percent) had experienced some season of doubt in respect to their calling. This experience of a season of doubt contrasts with 60 percent in Gonlag study. The doubt they experienced was not so much about whether or not God had called them into ministry but generally in respect to whether they could or should continue to follow their calling. This doubt was often triggered by things such as

conflict within the church, feelings of inadequacy regarding their ability to lead the congregation, or a lack of outward signs of success. The triggers of doubt cited by the pastors in the study correlates with the observations of Willimon, Pector, and Randall. Anyone who has been in the ministry for any length of time has experienced one or all of those triggers. Even some of the great leaders in the Bible experienced seasons of doubt or questioning.

A significant number of the pastors who were interviewed (40 percent) had actually considered leaving pastoral ministry at some point, while another 24 percent had entertained the notion, but not seriously. This figure was identical to that cited by London and Wiseman in their survey of pastors (*Pastors at Greater Risk* 26). It is also alarmingly high and points in some measure to the high degree of stress that pastors often feel to succeed, especially when success is measured by factors such as size, growth, and buildings. Pastors who go into pastoral ministry believing that their calling is to build a community of authentic Christ followers often find that vision being hijacked over time by a lesser vision of corporate success.

Some pastors do eventually resign from pastoral ministry as a result of these doubts. The stress for them eventually takes its toll, and they seek greener pastures in some other ministry or even leave the ministry altogether. In the Wesleyan Church those numbers are relatively small (6 percent every year according to the Heer study). Much could still be done, however, to support and encourage those who happen to be treading these treacherous waters, including peer support networks and measurement of church health factors other than size and budgets. The correlates with the Pector and Darling,

Hill, and McWey studies which highlighted a number of ways that supervising agencies can support pastors during their seasons of doubt.

### **Staying Power**

Overwhelmingly, the pastors in the study indicated that the call of God had had a strong influence on their decision to persevere in pastoral ministry. This finding mirrors that of Lane, Hoskins, Loomis, and Gonlag. Whenever pastoral ministry is regarded as a profession apart from the conviction of calling, the pressures to abandon it for another profession can often supersede the need to persevere (Hoge and Wenger 157). However, the notion of humble service (*diakoniva*) that underlies the meaning of ministry can fortify pastors to endure innumerable hardships on the way to completing the task to which they have been called. Jesus modeled humility when he humbled himself to death on a cross in order to fulfill the mission his Father had sent him to accomplish (Phil. 2:5-8). As a servant of Christ, the apostle Paul persevered through beatings, imprisonment, shipwreck, and countless false accusations in an attempt to fight the good fight, finish the race, and keep the faith (2 Tim. 4:7). The unmistakable and unshakable call of God kept him steady.

Some of the pastors in the study spoke of their decision to remain in ministry in terms of not being released from their call. Viewed in this light, the call of God could feel like a kind of bondage, holding one to a task that they would rather abandon.

Unquestionably, some pastors do stay by their calling long after the joy of the hearts has disappeared, and some of the subjects in the study inferred that they had remained at their present church because at their age they had no other options. However, rather than viewing their ministry as a kind of bondage, these pastors tended to see it as a

responsibility that naturally had its accompanying ups and downs. Instead of fleeing from their responsibility during the down times, they made a conscious decision to persevere and remain obedient to the directions of God. For them the divine summons had not been rescinded. Until God released them to minister elsewhere, they would remain faithful.

Many of the subjects could not imagine themselves as doing anything other than pastoring. They generally spoke of staying in ministry because of its accompanying joy and fulfillment, as well as the changed lives they had the privilege of witnessing. Fruitfulness in their ministry was also one of the signs many of them pointed to as a confirmation of their calling. Most of the pastors spoke of having a high degree of satisfaction in respect to their calling. Jesus had indeed told his disciples that if they remained faithful to him and his calling upon their lives that their ministry would bear fruit and their joy would be full, or complete (John 15:11).

### **Implications**

The research of this study complements Gonlag's research among ministers within the Wesleyan Church with less than five years experience that examined their understanding of their call to ministry and how it was experienced. It adds a further dimension to that research because it looks at seasoned veterans of pastoral ministry and asks how the battle scars of ministry might have altered that understanding. It also complements Lane's research among seasoned Free Methodist pastors that studied the controllable factors leading to their longevity in ministry. The subject pool of that study and their responses were very similar to that found in this research.

The research of this study opened the door to a number of new questions that might form the basis for further research. One is in relation to the understanding of the

call among ministers who have left pastoral ministry for other occupations. Did they misperceive God's call when they first entered ministry and arrive at the conclusion that they were not really called to it? Did they leave ministry believing that they were once called to it but that call had been rescinded? Did they leave because they believed that they were unwilling or unable to live out their call?

Another question that the research raised was in relation to the calling of ministers' spouses. Curiously, none of the subjects spoke about their call in relation to God's call on their spouse, in spite of the fact that the Wesleyan liturgy of ordination also includes a covenant with the minister's spouse. How many pastors are serving without the support of their spouses? How many pastors have spouses who also perceive that they had been called to the work of ministry by God? How many pastors link their own call to that of their spouses? How does the ministerial satisfaction of those with supportive spouses compare with that of those whose spouses do not sense a call to ministry?

### **Limitations**

One of the limitations of the study was that no women were included in the sample. The Wesleyan Church has always affirmed the role of women as pastors, but ironically the number of women serving in that role today is relatively small. Most of the women who are currently in the ministry within the Wesleyan are serving in staff positions rather than as lead pastors. The insights from the women in ministry might possibly be quite different from that of the men.

Another limitation is that the interview questions may have possibly led the respondents to the conclusion. The subjects were asked if they had ever given consideration to leaving pastoral ministry for another line of work and then asked why

they had chosen to remain in it. However, since most of the earlier questions in the interview centered on the subjects' understanding and experience of their call to ministry, they may have been preconditioned to respond later that their call was the main thing that influenced their endurance in it.

The study may have also been somewhat biased by my own recent encounter with burnout and time away from the ministry, coupled with the recent experiences of several friends who have had to lay their calling aside for a period of time, which made the study fresh and personal for me. At the same time, I recognize that the meaning I was seeking may have been unconsciously interjected into the interviews as well as the conclusions. Nevertheless, I believe that my own experience sensitized me to the issues and made me more aware of the meaning behind the words of the participants. In this way, I believe that my experiences actually contributed to a stronger and more meaningful study.

### **Unexpected Observations**

While attempting to discover the influence of the call among long-term pastors in the Wesleyan Church, I made a number of surprising discoveries. One was the observation of several pastors regarding diminishing options for Wesleyan pastors after age fifty-five. Personal experience confirms this observation. If a pastor in his or her fifties or sixties feels a need to make a change in church assignment, or a church forces a change as a result of a poor vote for renewal of call, churches are reluctant to consider giving a call because of age. One pastor commented that he reluctantly had to stay where he was because no other church was interested in his services, in spite of having good health, an advanced degree, as well as a good track record of ministry. His age was unfortunately regarded as a liability instead of an asset.

Another surprise was the observation of one pastor that the ordination process for him minimized the role of the call. District officials, he thought, had treated ordination as a kind of academic honor or attainment simply because a person had finished coursework and met all the requirements. He believed he had been pushed into the role of pastoring without sensing a call from God, and it took several years before he did eventually experience it. Over time the Wesleyan Church has been gradually evolving from being a church that ministered to the lower classes to one that is predominately middle class, so the emphasis on education has been much stronger than the past. It must be careful in the process that it does not lose the heart and passion of the call.

Still another surprise was the fact that very few of the pastors spoke about their call in relation to their spouses. They were not specifically asked about whether or not their spouses had also experienced some kind of calling from God; however, in most churches within the Wesleyan Church spouses have been regarded as critical members of the pastoral team. A spouse who does not share the minister's calling will be a reluctant participant at best and a strong reason to abandon one's calling at worst. In contrast, a spouse who shares a partner's calling will help to reinforce it whenever questions and doubts arise. My own call to pastoral ministry was delayed for several years because I knew my wife did not want to be a pastor's wife; however, when God eventually changed her heart and called her, then my own calling was confirmed.

### **Recommendations**

This research should be helpful for district boards of ministerial development as they attempt to guide prospective candidates for ordination through the process of understanding their call. Prospective ministers must realize that they will inevitably

experience times when their call will be tested and questioned. Understanding the certainty and clarity of it at the beginning stages of the process could help to prevent a great deal of heartbreak later on.

The research could also be helpful for district superintendents and others as they counsel with pastors who are wrestling with seasons of doubt in respect to their calling. Many pastors believe that they should never have any doubts, viewing them as a sign of spiritual weakness, but doubts were a common experience of most of the pastors in the study. They were held steady, though, through an understanding that they had been called to ministry by God, a call that was confirmed and reaffirmed periodically through moments of grace when they needed it.

### **Postscript**

This research has greatly enriched my own life. I was delighted to speak with the various pastors in the sample regarding their experience of God's call. The conversations brought my own call fresh to the surface once again and reminded me of why I entered the ministry in the first place. I relived with them both the joys as well as the heartaches that I have experienced through the years in attempting to lead God's Church into greater devotion to the lordship of Christ and greater service to the world for which he died. My own understanding of the servant nature of ministry has increased, as well as the resolve to persevere through whatever hardships may come my way. I hope I have become one of those faithful pastors who possesses real staying power.

## WORKS CITED

- Blanton, Priscilla W., and M. Lane Morris. "Work-Related Predictors of Physical Symptomatology and Emotional Well-Being among Clergy and Spouses." *Review of Religious Research* 40.4 (June 1999): 331-48.
- Brister, C. W. "The Ministry in an Age of Stress." *Southwestern Journal of Theology* 2 (Oct. 1959): 63-71.
- Brown, Colin, ed. *New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1976. 3 vols.
- Calvin, John. *Institutes of the Christian Religion*. Vol. 2. Ed. John T. McNeill. Philadelphia: Westminster, 1960.
- Cardwell, Sue Webb, and Richard A. Hunt. "Persistence in Seminary and Ministry." *Pastoral Psychology* 28.2 (Winter 1979): 119-31.
- Chang, Patricia M. Y. "Factors Shaping Clergy Careers: A Wake-Up Call for Protestant Denominations and Pastors." *Pulpit & Pew* 2005. 36pp. 5 May 2007  
<<http://www.pulpitandpew.duke.edu/clergycareers.pdf>>.
- Christopherson, Richard W. "Calling and Career in Christian Ministry." *Review of Religious Research* 35.3 (Mar. 1994): 219-37.
- Darling, Carol Anderson, Wayne E. Hill, and Lenore M. McWey. "Understanding Stress and Quality of Life for Clergy and Clergy Spouses." *Stress and Health* 20 (2004): 261-77.
- Dobson, Ed, Wayne Gordon, and Louis McBurney. *Standing Fast: Ministry in an Unfriendly World*. Sisters, OR: Multnomah-Questar, 1994.
- Drury, Keith W. *The Call of a Lifetime*. Indianapolis: Wesleyan Publishing, 2003.

---. *With Unveiled Faces: Experience Intimacy with God through Spiritual Disciplines.*

Indianapolis: Wesleyan Publishing, 2005.

Dunnam, Maxie. "A Heart Close to God." *Deepening Your Ministry through Prayer and*

*Personal Growth.* Library of Christian Leadership Series. Nashville: Moorings,

1996. 39-48.

Ernst, David J. "The Call." *Clergy Journal* 0382.5 (2006): 33-34.

Fichter, Joseph H. "The Myth of Clergy Burnout." *Sociological Analysis* 45.4 (1985):

373-82.

Foster, Richard J. *Celebration of Discipline: The Path to Spiritual Growth.* San

Francisco: Harper, 1988.

Gaebelein, Frank W., ed. *The Expositors Bible Commentary.* Grand Rapids: Zondervan,

1981. 12 vols.

Garlow, James L. "Partners in Ministry." Beeson Institute for Advanced Church

Leadership, Module 5. Montgomery, AL. 1 Mar. 2007.

General Department of Education and the Ministry. *Manual of Ministerial Preparation.*

Indianapolis: Wesleyan Publishing, 2004.

"General Information." *Pastors Retreat Network.* 5 Apr. 2007

<<http://www.pastorsretreatnetwork.org/content/GeneralInformation.asp>>.

Golden, Jonathan, et al. "Spirituality and Burnout: An Incremental Validity Study."

*Journal of Psychology and Theology* 32.2 (2004): 115-25.

Gonlag, Marianne. "Perceived Evidences of the Call to Ministry and its Experiential

Affirmations." Diss. Trinity Evangelical Divinity School, 1992.

Greenfield, Guy. *The Wounded Minister: Healing from and Preventing Personal Attacks*.  
Grand Rapids: Baker, 2001.

Grosch, William N., and David C. Olsen. "Clergy Burnout: An Integrative Study."  
*JCLP/In Session: Psychotherapy in Practice* 56.5 (2000): 619-32.

Guinness, Os. *The Call: Finding and Fulfilling the Central Purpose of Your Life*.  
Nashville: Word, 1998.

Haines, Lee M. *Background Studies on Wesleyan Higher Education*. Indianapolis:  
Department of Education and the Ministry, The Wesleyan Church, 1987.

Haden, Ben. "Secrets of Staying Power." *Leadership* 7.3 (1986): 12-18.

Hayford, Jack. *Pastors of Promise: Pointing to Character and Hope as the Keys to  
Fruitful Shepherding*. Ventura, CA: Regal, 1997.

Heer, Kenneth R. *Report on Ministerial Recruitment/Conservation among Wesleyan  
Pastors*, ms. Kenneth R. Heer. The Wesleyan Church, Department of Education  
and the Ministry, Indianapolis.

Hoge, Dean R., and Jacqueline E. Wenger. *Pastors in Transition: Why Clergy Leave  
Local Church Ministry*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2005.

Hoskins, John H. "Obeying God's Call for the Long Haul: A Study of Pastoral Longevity  
and Tenure among Independent Baptist and Bible Pastors in West Virginia." Diss.  
Temple Baptist Seminary, 2000.

Hybels, Bill. *Courageous Leadership*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2002.

---. *Holy Discontent: Fueling the Fire That Ignites Personal Vision*. Grand Rapids:  
Zondervan, 2007.

- Jud, Gerald, Edgar Mills, and Genevieve Burch. *Ex-Pastors: Why Men Leave the Ministry*. Philadelphia: United Church, 1970.
- Kelly, Ronald D., et al., ed. *The Discipline of the Wesleyan Church 2004*. Indianapolis: Wesleyan Publishing, 2005.
- Lane, John R. "Controllable Factors for Longevity in Ministry." Diss. Gordon Conwell, 2005.
- Larson, Craig Brian. *Staying Power: Encouragement for Pastors to Persevere*. Grand Rapids: Baker, 2005.
- London, H. B., Jr., and Neil B. Wiseman. *The Heart of a Great Pastor: How to Grow Strong and Thrive Where God Has Planted You*. Ventura, CA: Regal, 1994.
- . *Pastors at Greater Risk: Real Help for Pastors from Pastors Who've Been There*. Ventura, CA: Regal, 2003.
- . *Your Pastor Is an Endangered Species*. Wheaton, IL: Victor, 1996.
- Loomis, Gregory Mark. "Key Factors of Pastoral Longevity in the Evangelical Free Church of America." Diss. Trinity Evangelical Divinity School, 2006.
- MacDonald, Gordon. "Dear Church—I Quit." *Christianity Today* 24.12 (1980): 16-19.
- Marshall, Catherine, and Gretchen B. Rossman. *Designing Qualitative Research*. 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 1995.
- Mason, Donald Lee. "A Study of Motivating Factors Which Resulted in the Selection of Ministry as a Vocation for First Year Seminarians as Related to Persistence in Ministry." Diss. U of Kentucky, 1992.
- Maykut, Pamela, and Richard Morehouse. *Beginning Qualitative Research: A Philosophical and Practical Guide*. London: Falmer, 1994.

- McDuff, Elaine M., and Charles W. Mueller. "The Ministry as an Occupational Labor Market: Intentions to Leave an Employer (Church) versus Intentions to Leave a Profession (Ministry)." *Work and Occupations* 27.1 (2000): 89-116.
- McNeal, Reggie. *A Work of Heart: Understanding How God Shapes Spiritual Leaders*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2000.
- Meek, Katherine Rhoads, et al. "Maintaining Personal Resiliency: Lessons Learned from Evangelical Protestant Clergy." *Journal of Psychology and Theology* 12-0131.4 (2003): 339-47.
- Mohler, Albert. "Has God Called You? Discerning the Call to Preach." *AlbertMohler.com*. 11 Feb. 2008. 5 March, 2008.  
<[http://www.albertmohler.com/blog\\_read.php?id=1095](http://www.albertmohler.com/blog_read.php?id=1095)>.
- National Council of Catholic Bishops. "The Ministerial Priesthood." *Christusrex*. 30 Nov. 1971. 23 pp. 4 Mar. 2008 <<http://www.christusrex.org/www1/CDHN/ministpr.html>>.
- Nouwen, Henry. *In the Name of Jesus: Reflections on Christian Leadership*. New York: Crossroads, 1991.
- Oswald, Roy M. *Clergy Self-Care: Finding a Balance for Effective Ministry*. Washington, DC: Alban Institute, 1991.
- Patton, Michael Quinn. *Qualitative Evaluation and Research Methods*. 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. Beverly Hills, CA: Sage, 1990.
- Pector, Elizabeth A. "Professional Burnout: Detection, Prevention, and Coping." *Clergy Journal* Sept. 2005: 19-20.
- Qualben, Paul. "A Cool Look at Burning Out." *Leadership* 7.3 (1986): 19-21.

- Randall, Kelvin J. "Burnout as a Predictor of Leaving Anglican Parish Ministry." *Review of Religious Research* 46.1 (2004): 20-26.
- Rassieur, Charles L. *Stress Management for Ministers: Practical Help for Clergy Who Deny Themselves the Care They Give to Others*. Philadelphia: Westminster, 1982.
- Rediger, G. Lloyd. *Fit to Be a Pastor: A Call to Physical, Mental, and Spiritual Fitness*. Louisville: Westminster-John Knox, 2000.
- Sanders, J. Oswald. *Spiritual Leadership*. Chicago: Moody, 1980.
- Schaefer, Frank. "Self Care Tips for the Clergy Family." *Desperate Preacher*. 2003. 12 Apr. 2007 <[http://www.desperatepreacher.com/pastorcare/intro\\_clergyfamily.htm](http://www.desperatepreacher.com/pastorcare/intro_clergyfamily.htm)>.
- Spaite, Daniel. *Time Bomb in the Church: Defusing Pastoral Burnout*. Kansas City: Beacon Hill, 1999.
- "The State of Ministry Marriage and Morals." *Save America Ministries*. 2003. 2 pp. 5 May 2007 <<http://www.saveus.org/docs/factsheets/stateofministry2003.pdf>>.
- Steckel, Clyde J. "The Ministry as Profession and Calling." *Word and World* 1.4 (Fall 1981): 373-81.
- Strauss, Anselm, and Juliet Corbin. *Basic Qualitative Research: Techniques and Procedures for Developing Grounded Theory*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 1998.
- Wesley, John. *The Works of the Rev. John Wesley, A.M.* 5th ed. London: Wesleyan Conference Office, 1878. 14 vols.
- Wiersma, William, and Stephen G. Jurs. *Research Methods in Education: An Introduction*. Boston: Pearson Education, 2005.

Willimon, William H. *Calling and Character: Virtues of the Ordained Life*. Nashville: Abingdon, 2000.

---. *Pastor: The Theology and Practice of Ordained Ministry*. Nashville: Abingdon, 2002.

Willis, David A. "God's Call and Practical Methodology for Establishing Longevity in Ministry." Diss. Fuller Theological Seminary, 2003.

Zikmund, Barbara Brown, Adair T. Lummis, and Patricia M. Y. Chang. *Clergy Women: An Uphill Calling*. Louisville: John Knox, 1968.