



First
Presbyterian
Church
of Waynesboro, Virginia

The Columns *Online*

April 6, 2022 | Waynesboro, Virginia | *a newsletter supplement*

Opinion: Is a Great Resignation brewing for pastors?

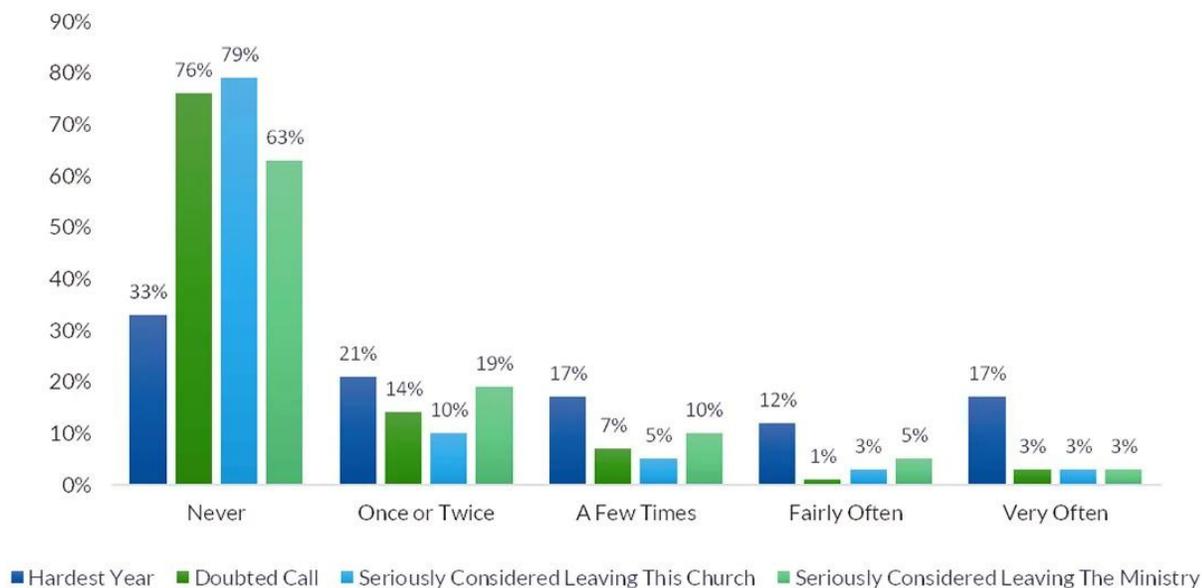
by Scott Thumma, Religion News Service

(RNS) — Are nearly 40% of clergy really about to leave the ministry? It's a question that has come up regularly in conversations among sociologists of religion since The Barna Group, a research firm that focuses on religion, found last year that 2 in 5 Christian pastors had considered quitting full-time ministry in the past year. Nearly every conversation I have gets around to just how exhausted clergy are and how many of their colleagues are thinking about quitting the ministry. The theme of clergy burnout and the "Great Resignation" — the failure of thousands to return to work after the worst of the pandemic was over — are likewise echoed in innumerable newspaper and blog articles across the web. But is it true?

The past two years have certainly been beyond trying. Religious leaders have not only had to learn new ways of doing their jobs — delivering their sermons virtually, conducting online committee meetings, and substituting texting, Facebook and Zoom for what used to be in-person, face-to-face encounters — they also had to decide, repeatedly, whether to encourage vaccinations, to close or reopen the church building, to enforce mask mandates and navigate issues of race and politics. It is exhausting just thinking about the trials most clergy have had to face since COVID-19 hit. In the summer of 2021, we asked nearly 2,000 clergy if they considered the previous year the hardest year in their ministry experience.

continued

The Hardest Ministry Year Ever



Source: *Exploring the Pandemic Impact on Congregations* study, Hartford Institute for Religion Research.

Two-thirds (67%) claimed to have thought this at least once or twice, and nearly a third (29%) had this thought fairly or very often. A third of them actually had a year harder than 2020. This same survey further documented that roughly 40% of congregations saw a rise in requests for food and monetary assistance, increased demands for psychological and spiritual counseling and a steep decline in volunteering by members. Plus 15% of them had to reduce staff hours or lay off personnel. To top it all off, 75% reported some level of conflict arising from how they handled COVID-19 (though only a quarter called the moderate or severe). As a result, many of us who look at religious life in America wholeheartedly accept the “mass clergy exodus” storyline. But what does survey data actually show?

In our most recent survey, we asked clergy: “In the past year how often had you seriously considered leaving pastoral ministry?” A majority — 63% — responded “never,” which meant, however, that 37% of pastors had this

thought cross their minds. This result parallels Barna’s finding. But thinking something in the middle of a trying year of ministry does not automatically equate to actually leaving the profession. When you look more deeply at our data on how often pastors had this thought, only 5% did so fairly often and just 3% said very often. Interestingly, 3% of clergy just as often pondered leaving their current congregation or had doubts about their call to ministry. There is also a strong correlation between those who often considered leaving their churches and the ministry and those who doubted their call.

Overall, our data just doesn’t provide much evidence of a pending mass exodus of clergy. It does show that a small percentage of religious leaders are rethinking their choice of vocation.

Barna’s data suggests they are more likely to be mainline, female, younger and in poorer physical and mental health, which our data affirms. But further analysis suggests other dynamics at work.

Is a Great Resignation brewing for pastors? continued

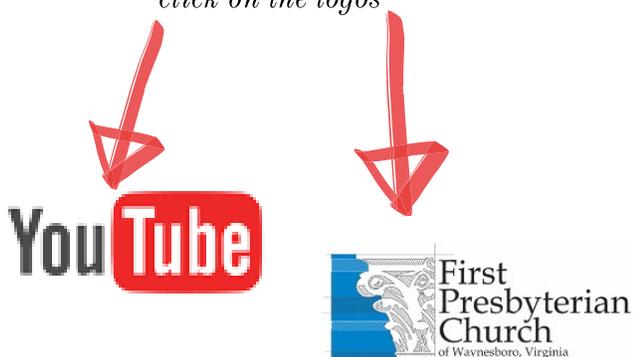
Those pastors who thought most about leaving the ministry led declining churches of 100-250 Sunday attendees even before the pandemic. They tend to have little staff support while facing significant conflict over the pandemic. They were struggling financially and, by several of our measures, were less vital.

It's interesting that, according to Pew Research, most secular job resignations in COVID-19's aftermath stemmed from a poor working environment. Likewise, disaffected clergy were likely contemplating an exodus from the ministry because they faced difficult congregational situations before the pandemic.

It is impossible to tell if lack of education, experience or skill created the poor working conditions these pastors were enduring. But it is

Our Worship Channels

click on the logos



certain that a strong desire to leave the ministry was in part shaped by a challenging contextual situation, not any deficiency in any individual pastor's theology, gender, age, or physical and

mental situation, as is often assumed. (We should note, too, that women, younger pastors, and those in the mainline are more likely to be assigned to struggling churches and therefore suffer mental or physical disease.) The good news is that certain aspects of our survey showed that clergy are in fact highly resilient. We used several of the questions from the Harvard Flourishing Measure, an indicator of life satisfaction, to ask clergy about their well-being. In every case, the clergy in our research scored significantly higher than national averages of random respondents in pre-pandemic (January 2020) and mid-pandemic (June 2020) flourishing surveys.

Likewise, 52% of pastors agreed that their congregation's ministries continued through the heart of the pandemic without significant disruption. More than half added new social outreach efforts or augmented what they were already doing, and more than two-thirds (69%) embraced new opportunities for ministry as a result of the pandemic. Through the significant challenges the pandemic wrought, a majority never thought once about leaving their church or doubted their calling.

Clergy continue to express to us their exhaustion and uncertainty about the directions forward as the pandemic wanes. Time will tell the full implications of these pastoral struggles. But it's a good bet that the hardest ministry year ever won't turn into the greatest resignation.



Music Notes.

This week, we celebrate Jesus' entrance into Jerusalem, his pathway strewn with palms. On Palm Sunday, the opening and closing hymns will be some of the most familiar for this holy day:

Hosanna, Loud Hosanna (Ellacombe) and *Ride On! Ride On in Majesty!* (St. Drostan). Both the introit and anthem also reflect that joyous day.

The Hosanna introit is part of the *Missa Brevis* by William Mathias (1934-1994), composed in 1973 for the 80th Patronal Festival of St. Matthew's Northampton, England. The Hosanna anthem was written by Christian Gregor (1723-1801). It is one of over 300 hymns penned by the Moravian composer and bishop, known as the "Father of Moravian Music."



St. Matthew's, Northampton

Holy Week Celebrations



Palm Sunday Procession

April 10 10:15 a.m.

Gather at Grace ELCA Church for a brief outdoor service, then process to FPC.

Palm Sunday Service

April 10 11:00 a.m.

Liturgist: Danny Leech

Psalm 118:19-29

Luke 19: 39:48

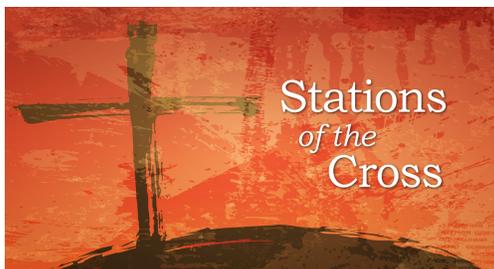
Sermon: The world turns.

Maundy Thursday Simple Meal

April 14 12:00 p.m.

Barkesdale Room

Communion will be served around the tables.



Good Friday Stations of the Cross

April 15 3:00 p.m.

Gather at St. John's Episcopal Church, and walk the Way of the Cross along Wayne Avenue.

This Week in History.

PONY EXPRESS!

CHANGE OF TIME!  REDUCED RATES!

10 Days to San Francisco!

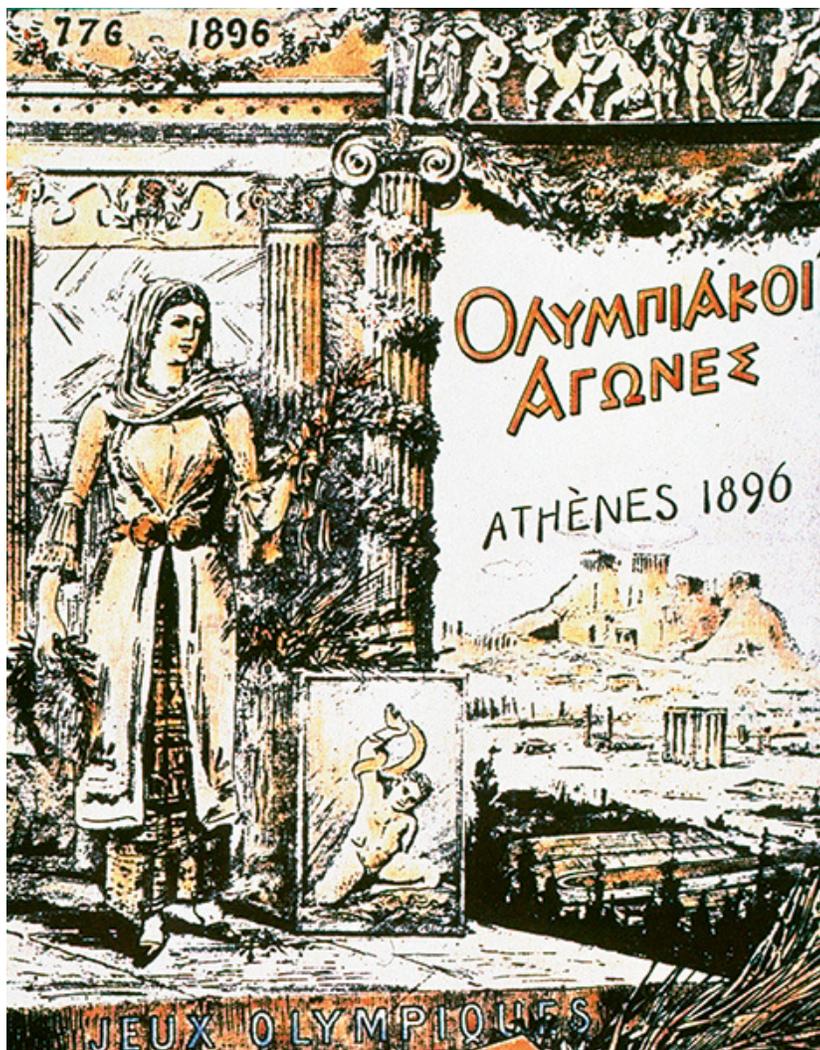
LETTERS
WILL BE RECEIVED AT THE
OFFICE, 84 BROADWAY,
NEW YORK,
Up to 4 P. M. every TUESDAY,
AND
Up to 2½ P. M. every SATURDAY,
Which will be forwarded to connect with the PONY EXPRESS leaving
ST. JOSEPH, Missouri,
Every WEDNESDAY and SATURDAY at 11 P. M.

TELEGRAMS
Sent to Fort Kearney on the mornings of MONDAY and FRIDAY, will connect
with PONY leaving St. Joseph, WEDNESDAYS and SATURDAYS.

EXPRESS CHARGES.
LETTERS weighing half ounce or under.....\$1 00
For every additional half ounce or fraction of an ounce 1 00
In all cases to be enclosed in 10 cent Government Stamped Envelopes,
And all Express CHARGES Pre-paid.
PONY EXPRESS ENVELOPES For Sale at our Office.
WELLS, FARGO & CO., Ag'ts.
New York, July 1, 1861.

SLOTE & JAMES, STATIONERS AND PRINTERS, 6 FULTON STREET, NEW YORK

The Pony Express begins
two year service.
April 3, 1860



First Olympiad of the modern era opens in Athens, Greece.
April 6, 1896



First woman mayor in the U.S
elected: Susannah M. Salter of
Argonia, KS
April 4, 1887



Booker T. Washington
born in Franklin County, VA
April 5, 1856



The Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.
assassinated in Memphis TN
April 4, 1968