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**Seminary Training, Role Demands, Family Stressors and Strategies for Alleviation of  
Stressors in Pastors' Families**

Final Report to the North American Division Ministerial and Family Ministries Departments in  
conjunction with the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists

September 8, 2014

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# **Seminary Training, Role Demands, Family Stressors and Strategies for Alleviation of Stressors in Pastors' Families**

## **Executive Summary**

This is a report from a study of the stressors faced by Seventh-day Adventist pastors and their families in the North American Division. While the data are extensive and complex, we feel that the results are clear: the front-line leadership in the Seventh-day Adventist church, pastors and their families, experience levels of stress that are not sustainable for the future health of the Church. The results of this study comprise a call to action on the part of the higher levels of our Church organization to intervene and reduce the stressors associated with pastoral roles, expectations, and family life.

Researchers and Church administrators have had a long-term interest in the stresses experienced by clergy and how these stressors relate to the ability of the clergy to effectively conduct their ministry. Surveys suggest that clergy are one of the most trusted professions in the United States and that congregants turn to the clergy for assistance for a wide variety of traumatic life experiences. The Seventh-day Adventist Church has high theological and behavioral expectations of its clergy and their families. These expectations can place significant stress on the clergy who are not trained in areas in which congregants expect their help.

This study emerged within the context of a desire on the part of the General Conference and North American Division's Ministerial Department and Family Ministries Department to assess and attempt to develop strategies to alleviate Pastor Family Stressors. The study was conducted by researchers from the Seventh-day Adventist Theological Seminary, the Institute for the Prevention of Addictions, Behavioral Sciences Department and the Social Work Department at Andrews University.

This cooperative study had the following objectives:

1. Examine the training of pastors and how that training relates to their experiences of being a pastor.
2. Examine the stressors that are perceived/experienced by pastors, their spouses, and their adult children using a quantitative survey approach and a qualitative focus group approach.
3. Triangulate the responses from the survey and focus groups to determine the key stress issues that pastors and their families face.
4. Examine the consequences of pastoral family stress.
5. Suggest strategies for alleviating pastoral family stress from clerical training to continuing education approaches based on the study results.

## Methodology

Two types of methodology were used in this study. In cooperation with the General Conference and the North American Division, a survey was constructed to assess perceptions of training and stressors experienced by pastors, their spouses and their adult children. A total of 389 pastors, 313 spouses, and 171 pastors children were surveyed. In addition, focus groups were used to further understand the stressors experienced, the strategies used to address these stressors and obtaining information that might help developed educational and intervention programs to alleviate these stressors. Five focus groups were conducted with pastors, 6 with spouses, 4 with children and 5 with pastor family groups.

### **Quantitative Findings**

#### **Pastoral Education: Perceptions of Pastors in the Field**

In this study, 96% of the pastors surveyed had earned either a master's-level degree or a bachelor's degree. Four percent had less than a bachelor's degree. The results reported are an aggregate of all of these groups. It is also important to note that the respondents were heavily weighted in the older age range. That reality may impact the responses in this study.

When asked to indicate they classes they attended when receiving their pastoral education and to what extent this education increased their expertise, pastors were overwhelmingly positive about their education. Overall, the data suggest that pastors feel most comfortable with their expertise in the areas of theology, biblical languages, preaching, Old Testament, New Testament and so forth. They expressed least well prepared in areas such as counseling, leadership, marriage and family, youth and young adult ministry often because they were not exposed to these courses while in the seminary. A follow up open-ended question asked pastors to give suggestions about how to make educating future pastors more relevant? Of the 246 total responses, the majority of suggestions relate to practical ministry of some sort.

*Recommendations:* Pastoral education from bachelors through masters programs must find a way to integrate practice elements into all of the courses being taught. Much of a pastor's time is spent dealing with real life problems of people and pastors must be adequately prepared for this reality of pastoral ministry. Working toward a seamless model of pastoral ministry would be a valuable goal. We also recommend that the NAD move forward with plans for a continuing education requirement for the professions related to pastoral ministry.

#### **Pastoral Continuing Education**

The overwhelming majority of pastors (99.3%) report being favorable toward the development of a continuing education requirement for pastors. The majority report that they voluntarily do so now. The top ten areas of interest as indicated by the response that pastors would be "very

likely” to attend: Developing the Leaders in the Local Church, Conflict Resolution, Communication, Improving the Pastor’s Spiritual Life, Pastoral Care and Counseling, Methods to Resolve Pastoral Family Stress, Divorce Prevention and Post-Divorce Ministry, A Biblical Response to Sexuality, Depression, Anxiety and Mental Illness in the Church, and Family Ministries. It must be noted that these areas are those of practical concern rather than theoretical or theological in nature. It is important to note that many of these topics are similar to those that are of personal challenge to pastoral families.

Finally, pastors were asked to identify the factors that might incentivize them to attend continuing education programs. The most important factors were the importance of the topic itself to them and the speaker. The cost of the continuing education seminar (free tuition) and the distance to travel also arose as important factors to pastors.

## **Pastoral Family Stress**

### **Personal Challenge Checklist**

Spiritual Issues – Two-thirds of pastors reported that they had at least a mild level of concern about the difficulty of making time for personal devotions. Spouses at 75% and children at 92% were significantly higher. Personal prayer and maintaining a personal connection with God were also a challenge for all members of pastoral Families.

Addictions/Health Behavior Issues – The majority of all three groups reported at least a mild challenge with eating unhealthy foods with overeating reported by 40% or higher in each group. While very few pastors and even fewer spouses had a challenge with substance abuse, over 18% of children did. About one-third of pastors and over 45% of children had at least a mild challenge with pornography. Over one-third for pastors and spouses and over 71% for children of pastors struggle with media addiction.

Depression/Anxiety and Mental Health – About 61% of spouses reported struggles with anxiety or depression compared to 56% of children and 49% of pastors. This finding should be of significant concern to the Church. About 9% of spouses reported a concern about mental illness compared to 7% of children and 4% of pastors.

Family Life Issues – The data show very low rates of concern about domestic violence, physical abuse, and sexual abuse. Pastors and their spouses show relatively low rates of emotional/verbal abuse, but there is a significantly higher rate of concern among pastors’ children (25%), spiritual abuse (17%), extramarital sex (22%) and same sex attraction (10%).

Conflict – The majority of all three response groups expressed concern about church politics at higher organizational levels of the church and similar concern about politics at the local conference level. The majority of pastors and their children expressed at least a mild level of concern about conflict over worship styles, women’s ordination, jewelry, dietary choices and church doctrine.

*Recommendations:* Overall the data suggest that the Church should take a serious look at the mental health concerns of pastors and their families and consider policies to address these concerns; especially concerns around anxiety and depression. In addition to enhancing counseling opportunities for pastoral families, consideration should be given to developing a treatment facility dedicated to providing a safe place for pastoral families to heal from addiction, marriage, family, perceptions of verbal abuse, and mental health challenges. The data showing significantly higher rates of concern about these abuse issues by the children of pastors suggest the need for prevention programs for pastor’s families. The data suggest that it would be prudent to educate pastoral families about conflict resolution both in university settings and in continuing education.

### **Clergy Family Life Inventory**

Financial Stress – Financial stress received the highest percentage of responses than any other type of potential stress listed in this questionnaire. Over 70% of pastors and spouses indicated at least a mild level of stress with meeting monthly financial needs, saving money, and meeting any financial emergency. Approximately 60% of pastors and spouses perceived at least mild stress in their need for more monthly income, a better financial base, the lack of equity in their homes and the financial stress of frequent moves. About half of pastors and spouses expressed concern about paying for their children’s college costs.

Family Life Stress - The majority of pastors and pastor’s spouses indicated that they felt at least mild stress in response to the obligation to attend social activities not of their choice, disruption of their vacations by congregational member’s demands, the kind of daily interpretations of family time by congregations, the impact of congregational demands on marital relations. The majority of spouses reported at least mild stress from living in a “fish bowl” and being expected to be a model family.

Relationship Stressors Outside of the Family – The data suggest a considerable stress level from a feeling of isolation from others. A majority of pastors and spouses indicated at least mild stress because they felt that they could not confide in anyone and that that had difficulty in the balance between being a minister and a friend and because there were no other clergy families that they could be open with or be themselves with as well as no one with whom they could emotionally connect.

Time Demands – Over two-thirds of pastors and spouses felt that the time demands of their roles prevented sufficient leisure time with their families. The majority of both groups reported at least mild stress because they did not have enough time for friends to visit. Over two-thirds of spouses, and 46% of pastors felt at least mild stress because a spouse was expected to participate in almost all church events. Finally, 45% of pastors and 50% of spouses feel at least a mild stress level because they are in a time tug of war between the needs of their congregations and the families.

Moving Stressors – The majority of pastors and spouses reported at least mild stress when they families faced the possibility of moving and because the decision to move was made, not by the pastor and the family but rather by external others. Nearly half of pastors and spouses feel at least mild stress when they have to balance the needs of their families with accepting a call to move.

*Recommendations:* The data suggest the potential importance of financial counseling services for pastors and their families in pastoral training and through continuing education. Data from family life stress suggest the need for training in managing and prioritizing unexpected congregational demands. Setting healthy boundaries with congregants would be important training for the pastor, the family and the congregation. The data suggest that it is essential to address the sense of emotional disconnect and isolation that pastoral families feel. Building opportunities for pastoral family activities, mentoring and small groups could address this need. Consideration must be given to the policy of frequent moves for pastors. The needs of pastoral families as well as the conference should be considered.

### **Pastor's Children Concerns**

Overall the concerns of the adult children surveyed were similar to the concerns expressed by pastors and spouses. All three groups expressed concern about family finances, frequent moves and feeling alone with no one to talk to as well as mental health issues and the need for counseling. What is unique about the children is the behavioral expectations. There are three areas that the adult children expressed the highest level of concern: first, congregants and the whole community expected the children of pastors to be on their best behavior; second, the expectation that they be available to volunteer to do whatever the church needed; and finally, the congregation's expectations on such routine life decisions and events such as extra-curricular activities, grades and career decisions. Overall the data suggest that the children of pastors feel "watched" and likely criticized at almost every level of daily life.

*Recommendations:* The data suggest the need for family counseling for pastor families to find ways protect their children from intrusive congregants and of managing the stress of being so much in the public eye.

### **Pastoral Family Coping Strategies**

Pastors were more likely to address the person who caused the stress to find out more about the situation and grow from the experience than both spouses and children. On the other hand, pastors were less likely than spouses or children to accept sympathy and understanding from someone else and less likely to wish the situation would somehow just go away or to talk to someone about how they were feeling.

One of the spouses' main coping mechanism was anger at those who were causing the problem. Pastors and spouses reported asking a relative or friend for advice more often than adult children. Their adult children did not tend to talk to someone who could do something concrete about the problem and were also much more likely than pastors and pastors' spouses to fight for what they wanted, to change something about themselves because of the stress, to fantasize about how things might turn out or wish that things would just go away on their own more often than either of their parents.

Both pastors and children tried to get the person responsible to change his or her mind and were less likely to report rediscovering what is important than spouses.

*Recommendations:* Because pastoral families must cope with stress related to the pastoral role, mechanisms such as focus groups would give them a safe place to process their coping strategies and learn how others cope with similar stresses.

## **PASTOR FAMILY STRESS QUALITATIVE STUDY**

### **Pastor Family Spiritual Life Challenges and Enhancers**

Pastors, pastor spouses, and adult children in pastoral families all concur that they face challenges to their spiritual lives that are directly connected to their pastor or pastor-family roles. It appears that the occupational role of being a pastor or being a pastor spouse or a child of a pastor inherently provides a context in which the spiritual lives of these individuals face challenges. While the challenges vary from group to group (pastors or pastor spouses or pastor's children) the striking finding is that in the very homes and families where it is hoped that spirituality would be strongest, these family members report significant challenge and difficulty.

The most common thread of spiritual life challenge for pastors and for spouses of pastors centers on developing and maintaining personal and family boundaries. Bolstering these boundaries



would allow pastors and pastor spouses the ability to prioritize spiritual growth. When the press of “the work” becomes all-consuming, the spiritual lives of the pastors and spouses suffer.

For pastor’s children, the primary spiritual life challenge concerned the social role expectations associated with being a pastor’s child. Role expectation challenges will be addressed in another section of this report.

Participants in the adult children of pastor’s focus groups shared that church member’s high expectation of them often exacerbated their spiritual struggles. Some examples included expectations to have the pastor’s children behave well, be an example to others, be spiritual, and to have Biblical knowledge similar to a pastor.

When those high expectations weren’t fulfilled, participants reported feeling a certain amount of resentment towards the church. Pastoral children expressed that attending church was like ‘preparing for war.’ This implies a need for protective gear in the form of additional social support that was lacking for them.

The adult children of pastors reported that it seemed they were not allowed to struggle and make mistakes then be able to learn from those mistakes. Since their father was also their pastor, there were certain things they did not want their parents to know. This led to a sense that they didn’t really have a pastor they could confide in which resulted in stunted spiritual growth for some.

While the study participants revealed several challenges to experiencing the level of spiritual life that they desired, participants also shared factors that enhanced their spiritual lives. Pastors, pastor spouses and the adult children of pastors offered differing perspectives about the types of things that enhanced their spiritual lives.

A primary theme for the pastor groups focused on achieving work/life balance (accepting human limitations and engaging in self-care). This finding supports and reinforces the recommendations to address spiritual life challenges by implementing better-defined personal and professional boundaries. A second theme centered on being intentional about spiritual experiences—whether they occurred within the work context or on a personal level.

Pastor spouses echoed the theme of becoming intentional about building their spiritual lives. This happened by setting boundaries and prioritizing spiritual development or taking the time to enjoy the spiritual development of other people. Pastor spouses also focused on how social support positively impacts a sense of a growing spiritual life.

For the adult children of pastors, while some participants experienced challenge with church participation; other participants found that struggles with the church membership led to enhanced spiritual growth. It was also helpful to see God working in the lives of others, which in turn strengthened their spiritual life.

*Recommendations:*

Starting with the pastor, pastor families need to be explicitly encouraged to prioritize their family and spiritual lives as a part of their ministerial duties. Knowledge and skill development in setting personal and professional boundaries may be a helpful step in heading off the challenges of establishing and maintaining healthy spiritual lives for this group of people.

When participants (pastors and pastor spouses) became intentional about building their spiritual lives, they experienced and reported enhanced spiritual wellbeing. A simple intervention to encourage greater intentionality is for church leaders to regularly remind pastors and their spouses that their spiritual development is paramount.

Since the primary spiritual challenge for children of pastors centers on role expectations and church members, the recommendations for this group will come in the Role Expectations of this report.

### **Pastor Family Financial Stress Challenges and Stress Alleviators**

A major theme in this study concerning stress of pastoral life centered on financial challenges for two groups: pastors and pastor spouses. For adult children of pastors, this theme diminished in significance.

Pastors and pastoral spouses experience income challenges as well as expense challenges. The income challenges for pastors centers on their pay rates while the income challenges for pastor spouses focuses a variety of employment factors. These pastor spouse employment difficulties include interruptions due to mandatory moves, having unpaid duties associated with the pastor spouse role, and through perceived role conflicts with their ministry duties and their paid employment.

Study participants also shared a number of expense challenges unique to the pastoral family such as the obligation they sense for having their children attend Seventh-day Adventist schools. For pastor spouses, another expense challenge focused on the social expectations of the pastor family and the financial obligations associated with those expectations.

In terms of alleviating financial stress, pastors and spouses expressed a desire to have greater financial literacy. In addition, when a spouse is able to secure a strong supplemental income, financial stress decreases.

#### *Recommendations:*

One common theme for both pastor and pastor spouse groups centered on the stressor of mandatory moving and the attending costs associated with those moves. As a result, we recommend that church leadership carefully review policies and processes involved in moving pastors with an eye to reduce these moves over the course of the family's ministry.

In addition, providing either financial education or a financial advising for pastoral families may decrease financial stress. For example, church administrators might consider instituting a pilot program from Financial Peace University that has been shown to be effective in teaching money management from a Christian perspective.

### **Role Expectation Stressors and Stress Alleviators**

A second major theme of the study centered on the stress that comes from the role expectations associated with pastoral ministry. Participants in the pastor focus groups noted that the pastor's role is largely undefined. This role diffusion leads to role expansion and in turn to increased stress due to work overload.

A similar theme emerged among pastor spouses—that the pastor spouse role was ill defined and therefore subject to a myriad of social expectations. The number and variety of expectations proved overwhelming and stressful.

Among adult children from pastor families, role expectations emerged as one of the most painful and predominant themes. The participants' understanding of the role expectations came from interaction with church members. Participants perceived that church members expected pastors' children to: (1) exhibit high behavioral standards, (2) be either perfect or wild, (3) be a good example to others, (4) have high levels of spiritual knowledge, and (5) participate extensively in church groups and activities.

For pastors and pastor spouses the two primary methods of role expectation management included setting personal boundaries and training church members in regards to appropriate role expectations.

#### *Recommendations:*

Pastors would benefit by having clear role expectations outlined by church leadership. When the role expectations are diffuse, workload and stress increase. Similarly, church leaders spelling out any expectations that conferences hold for pastor spouses would be very helpful in stress reduction. Pastor spouses also expressed a desire to receive formal training and mentoring provided as the couple is entering pastoral ministry.

Church members should be informed/educated about the role of pastor and pastor spouse so as to reduce the number and types of expectations congregants currently hold.

Children of pastors are clearly the most vulnerable group in terms of role expectations and the stress that results from these expectations. As a result, we recommend that a more in-depth study be undertaken focusing on pastor children and role expectations.

The investigation should aim to uncover the extent of the problem, the negative effects of role expectations and gather data on strategies to intervene with the pressures that accompany role expectations. Following that investigation a pilot intervention should be initiated to address the negative effects of role expectations.

### **Social Support Needs, Barriers and Facilitators**

Study participants discussed at length their need for ongoing, intentional, and confidential social support in their roles as pastors, pastor spouses, and children of pastors. Yet, the analysis reveals multiple barriers to getting the support they needed. While the pastors, pastor spouses, and children of pastors differed in the types of barriers they experienced, the common theme remained--the participants felt there was insufficient support available to them.

For pastors, their family members, including spouses, provided one primary avenue of social support. Another source of social support for pastors and pastor spouses were peer group mentors. For pastors, other pastors served as mentors and for pastor spouses, other pastor spouses provided social support through mentorship. For pastors and pastor spouses who were able to navigate the initial boundary crossing, church members also provided appropriate social support.

Pastoral children did not always feel comfortable speaking to their parents about their struggles. The types of difficulties pastors' children faced in soliciting support included: (1) father often absent, (2) peers believing stereotypes, (3) having to find new friends due to frequent moves.

#### *Recommendations:*

Access to social support has been shown to be connected to general human wellbeing. Therefore, it is crucially important that people in church leadership positions begin to examine why pastors and their spouses and children sense such a lack of social support and experience the overwhelming barriers to receiving the support they need.

While preliminary, our sense of the data points to a pervasive set of beliefs about the pastor family role and the boundaries surrounding the pastor family and the congregation. When pastor families cannot be authentic with their parishioners, when they need to uphold a persona of "role model" rather than "fellow traveller" it leads to human disconnection. Examining the question of what healthy boundaries are for pastor families and their church members is a worthy goal for church leaders.

In preparing pastors and their families for the ministry, we recommend that they be made aware of the pressures they will experience and how it uniquely affects the children. Parents can protect their children from the high expectations of the congregation by defending them when necessary and educating the congregation on how that pressure unfairly harms their children. In addition, parents can provide emotional support of their children through encouraging open

communication and allowing mistakes and growing pains as their children navigate growing up in a fishbowl.

Because pastor's children feel like they have to present such a perfect front for their pastoral parent's sake, they often don't feel comfortable reaching out to others when they do have a problem. There should be encouragement for pastor's children to get confidential support through either peers or professional counselors.

Once source of social support for children of pastors proved to be other pastoral children. Participants related that they felt comfortable confiding in other pastors' children because this group understood them best. Therefore, we recommended church leadership provide regular opportunities, at least once per year, for pastoral families to interact with one another so they can provide understanding and support in ways that no one else can.

### **Stress Related to Conflict Resolution**

Stress related to conflict was an important theme for pastors, but not pastor spouse participants. The sources stressful conflict included conflicts with the local church and conflict with church leadership. Pastors also cited difficulties with lack of appropriate conflict resolution and relocating pastors in times of conflict rather than addressing the problem and resolving it. Both types of conflict contributed to pastors thinking about leaving pastoral ministry.

While conflict is a normal part of human interaction, the pastors noted that the stress often came from inappropriate methods of conflict resolution. Conversely, pastors reported that having the support of the higher levels of church organization helped to mitigate the stress associated with conflict.

#### *Recommendation:*

Because of the connection between conflict stress and pastor burnout, it is important for church leadership to examine ways in which conflict is currently addressed. Pastors may be lacking in confidence or abilities in dealing with conflict. In this case, church leadership can provide targeted training for pastors in conflict management and resolution. It is crucially important for church leaders to be especially skilled in conflict resolution themselves and to model these skills to the pastors they serve.

### **Stress Management**

Methods of stress management were not addressed to a great degree in the pastor or pastor spouse focus groups. Children of pastors spent quite a bit of time discussing the positive and negative coping strategies they used to manage their stress. In response to the pressure, participants identified escape and reaching out behaviors as a way they coped with stress. The escape behaviors included excessive reading, pornography addiction, and partying.

Conversely, participants identified positive coping behaviors such as: having a strong personal relationship with God, vacations, reaching out to others for support using open communication with their support system (parents, counselors, friends), externalizing the pressure, and developing hobbies (music and art).

There were some cultural influences on how these pressures were managed within the family. Some participants from Haitian and Latin cultures reported they felt like they could not reach out to others and that they had to handle their problems on their own.

#### *Recommendations:*

Researchers recommend that educational opportunities for children of pastors be made available by church leadership. The educational opportunities could focus on developing positive coping mechanisms such as cultivating peer support, encouraging healthy leisure activities, and communication skills. Open dialog and education about issues of addiction should be initiated with a primary prevention approach. It is crucially important that these educational messages and any accompanying resources come to pastor children without judgment or condemnation and that they are offered with complete confidentiality.

### **Overall Recommendations**

The focus group data point to a complex picture of individuals living their lives with incredible strength and coping abilities and at the same time facing tremendous amounts of stress simply due to being a member of a pastoral family.

It was clear from the data that if pastoral families are to succeed and thrive, corporate intervention is both desired and needed. Therefore we recommend that church leadership initiate an intervention strategy that begins with pilot programs for pastors, pastor spouses, and children in pastoral families. These pilot programs should have a research component that documents the impact of the intervention. As success in the pilot programs is noted, a widespread strategy should be implemented throughout the North American Division.

## **Integrated Executive Summary of Key Points from the Quantitative and Qualitative Data**

### Introduction

In this study of pastor concerns and family stressors we used two different methodologies; a quantitative survey methodology and a qualitative focus group methodology. We developed the survey drawing on standard questions that have been used in this type of research and also questions tailored for this project. In developing the questionnaire we worked closely with the General Conference and North American Division's Ministerial Department as well as the General Conference and North American Division Family Ministries Department. Each

methodology contributes to the findings and recommendations of the study. Quantitative methods provide a mathematical distribution of responses to questions that allow for a reasonably precise presentation of the extent of issues, stressors and concerns. One can tell if an issue/stressor was a concern to just a few or to many of the respondents. One can also see if there are significant differences between the subjects in the study; pastors, spouses and adult children.

Qualitative approaches make at least three distinct contributions to a study. First they provide the narrative context for interpreting the statistical data. Statistics can lack a clear perspective on how individuals actually perceive and think. Narrative qualitative data permit us to understand the statistical data. Secondly, qualitative data allow for issues to emerge that were not covered in a survey. By their very nature, surveys are limited in what they ask. A good survey covers the important issues, but there may be issues that are not covered. A good qualitative approach permits those issues to emerge. Finally, using two methods to examine research questions permits what is called triangulation. That is, we can see what concerns, stressors and coping mechanisms are emphasized in the survey and in the focus groups. When we see similar issues emphasized in both methodologies it suggests that these overlapping concerns/stressors may deserve special attention.

Role Demands/Expectations and Boundaries – One of the most persistent themes to emerge in both types of data collection was concern about maintaining personal and family boundaries in the face of role demands on the pastor, the pastor's spouse and the pastor's children. There were strong feelings expressed about the time demands the congregants place on a pastor's time. All family members tended to perceive that the pastor was taken away from the family with little regard to the pastor's personal time and family responsibilities. There was a tendency for the family to always feel they were being watched by the congregation to make sure they were a model family. Family members felt that they always had to go to services and meet whatever demands were made of them for roles in the church. Children seemed to especially feel that they could never live up to the behavioral expectations of the congregation and even the community.

Impact of Pastoral Role Demands/Expectations on Spiritual Life – Survey data and the focus groups noted that a major impact of the role demands and boundary issues was on the spiritual life of the pastor and the family. In the quantitative data, over 90% of the children, about 75% of the spouses and about two-thirds of the pastors indicated problems with time for personal devotions with the majority also indicating issues around personal prayer and a personal relationship with God. This theme also emerged strongly in the focus groups. It is of significant concern when respondents consistently indicate that their role of spiritual leadership reduces their own spirituality!

Lack of Support/Feeling Alone – Another major theme that emerged in both data sets was a strong sense from all family members of being isolated and without support and with no one to talk to about many issues including mental and physical health issues, behavioral problems and spiritual struggles. Often, Seventh-day Adventist Churches are isolated from each other by

considerable distance. This makes the possible support of other pastoral families not readily available. In addition, in the high expectation we hold for pastors and their families, it is difficult for them to admit vulnerabilities. Both of these factors appear to be a cause of considerable stress and concern.

Finances – Consistently, in both data sets, concerns and stressors around finances emerged. All family members felt that there were insufficient resources to meet the expectations that children would be educated in Adventist schools, live middle class life styles and have sufficient funds for retirement. Both data sets also suggest that salary issues also placed expectations that spouses would work and that pastoral moves made a spouse's career difficult. Finances are a complex issue that cannot simply be addressed by salary increases (and there are likely no funds to do that anyway). The data suggest that financial issues are a major source of stress and concern for all family members and the need for financial management to be a key part of pastoral training and continuing education.

Conflict – Another major source of concern and stress, particularly for the pastors in the qualitative data for all in the quantitative data, involved conflicts that occur within the local church as well as conflict issues within the larger church. Some of the major issues noted were gender equal ordination and jewelry. Pastors are in the front lines of any conflict as they attempt to resolve conflicts and explain larger church issues to their congregants. Pastors and their families also felt pressed by conflicts between various levels of the Church. If church members, Conferences, Unions, Divisions and the General Conference were moving in different directions, the pastor and their families felt considerable stress as they attempted to minister to their congregations, be a model family, and be loyal to the church. The issue of gender equal ordination was noted an example of these issues.

Stress Management – The negative impact on the spiritual life of pastors and their families has been noted, it is also important to note the concerns the pastors and their families raised about inappropriate stress coping mechanisms that they may use. Significant substance use, poor dietary habits, excessive media use, and pornography (pastors and their children) were reported. All members of the pastoral family unit also reported significant depression/anxiety. A number of more positive stress management responses were also noted and included a deepening relationship with God, reprioritizing the important things in life, and supportive others. But it must be remembered a high proportion of individuals felt too isolated from others to receive support from them.

Overall, both methodological approaches suggest that there are real concerns and stressors that impact the pastor and the family. These concerns and stressors must be addressed if the spiritual life of the pastor and their family is to be improved and burnout prevented. The reality of the impact of stressors is also indicated by the percent of pastors who had seriously considered leaving the ministry.



While it is important to note that the summary reports from each of the methodologies are important and stand on their own. In this brief section, we focused on key issues where both methods elicited similar concerns and stressors. These findings may suggest the high importance of addressing these issues.

### **Integrated Recommendations**

#### Spiritual Life Challenges:

Starting with the pastor, pastor families need to be explicitly encouraged to prioritize their family and spiritual lives as a part of their ministerial duties. Knowledge and skill development in setting personal and professional boundaries may be a helpful step in heading off the challenges of establishing and maintaining healthy spiritual lives for this group of people.

When participants (pastors and pastor spouses) became intentional about building their spiritual lives, they experienced and reported enhanced spiritual wellbeing. A simple intervention to encourage greater intentionality is for church leaders to regularly remind pastors and their spouses that their spiritual development is paramount. Pastors should specifically be encouraged to make personal time with God more important than sermon preparation or any other pastoral responsibility.

Since the primary spiritual challenge for children of pastors centers on role expectations and church members, the recommendations for this group will come in the Role Expectations of this report.

#### Financial Stress:

One common theme for both pastor and pastor spouse groups centered on the stressor of mandatory moving and the attending costs associated with those moves. As a result, we recommend that church leadership carefully review policies and processes involved in moving pastors with an eye to reduce these moves over the course of the family's ministry.

In addition, providing either financial education or a financial advising for pastoral families may decrease financial stress. For example, church administrators might consider instituting a pilot program from Financial Peace University that has been shown to be effective in teaching money management from a Christian perspective.

#### Role Expectations Stressors:

Pastors would benefit by having clear role expectations outlined by church leadership. When the role expectations are diffuse, workload and stress increase. Similarly, church leaders spelling out any expectations that conferences hold for pastor spouses would be very helpful in stress reduction. Pastor spouses also expressed a desire to receive formal training and mentoring provided as the couple is entering pastoral ministry.

Church members should be informed/educated about the role of pastor and pastor spouse so as to reduce the number and types of expectations congregants currently hold.

Children of pastors are clearly the most vulnerable group in terms of role expectations and the stress that results from these expectations. As a result, we recommend that a more in-depth study be undertaken focusing on pastor children and role expectations.

The investigation should aim to uncover the extent of the problem, the negative effects of role expectations and gather data on strategies to intervene with the pressures that accompany role expectations. Following that investigation a pilot intervention should be initiated to address the negative effects of role expectations.

#### Social Support Needs, Barriers and Facilitators:

Access to social support has been shown to be connected to general human wellbeing. Therefore, it is crucially important that people in church leadership positions begin to examine why pastors and their spouses and children sense such a lack of social support and experience the overwhelming barriers to receiving the support they need.

While preliminary, our sense of the data points to a pervasive set of beliefs about the pastor family role and the boundaries surrounding the pastor family and the congregation. When pastor families cannot be authentic with their parishioners, when they need to uphold a persona of “role model” rather than “fellow traveler” it leads to human disconnection. Examining the question of what healthy boundaries are for pastor families and their church members is a worthy goal for church leaders.

In preparing pastors and their families for the ministry, we recommend that they be made aware of the pressures they will experience and how it uniquely affects the children. Parents can protect their children from the high expectations of the congregation by defending them when necessary and educating the congregation on how that pressure unfairly harms their children. In addition, parents can provide emotional support of their children through encouraging open communication and allowing mistakes and growing pains as their children navigate growing up in a fishbowl. Some conferences have begun to host regular pastoral family retreats or social events. Others have regular group mentorship calls that provide some social support. We would recommend that such efforts be further explored and recommended to all local conferences.

Because pastor’s children feel like they have to present such a perfect front for their pastoral parent’s sake, they often don’t feel comfortable reaching out to others when they do have a problem. There should be encouragement for pastor’s children to get confidential support through either peers or professional counselors.

Once source of social support for children of pastors proved to be other pastoral children. Participants related that they felt comfortable confiding in other pastors’ children because this

group understood them best. Therefore, we recommended church leadership provide regular opportunities, at least once per year, for pastoral families to interact with one another so they can provide understanding and support in ways that no one else can.

#### Conflict Resolution:

Because of the connection between conflict stress and pastor burnout, it is important for church leadership to examine ways in which conflict is currently addressed. Pastors may be lacking in confidence or abilities in dealing with conflict. In this case, church leadership can provide targeted training for pastors in conflict management and resolution. It is crucially important for church leaders to be especially skilled in conflict resolution themselves and to model these skills to the pastors they serve.

#### Stress Management:

Researchers recommend that educational opportunities for children of pastors be made available by church leadership. The educational opportunities could focus on developing positive coping mechanisms such as cultivating peer support, encouraging healthy leisure activities, and communication skills. Open dialog and education about issues of addiction should be initiated with a primary prevention approach. It is crucially important that these educational messages and any accompanying resources come to pastor children without judgment or condemnation and that they are offered with complete confidentiality. Since pastoral families expressed such a high degree of anxiety, depression, addictive behaviors, and overall stress, we would suggest that the NAD investigate how to improve counseling services for pastoral families. One option would be developing a pastoral family retreat center specifically dedicated for pastoral families.

### **Overall Recommendations**

The focus group data point to a complex picture of individuals living their lives with incredible strength and coping abilities and at the same time facing tremendous amounts of stress simply due to being a member of a pastoral family.

It was clear from the data that if pastoral families are to succeed and thrive, corporate intervention is both desired and needed. Therefore we recommend that church leadership initiate an intervention strategy that begins with pilot programs for pastors, pastor spouses, and children in pastoral families. These pilot programs should have a research component that documents the impact of the intervention. As success in the pilot programs is noted, a widespread strategy should be implemented throughout the North American Division.

### **NEXT STEPS: BUILDING ON THE STUDY EVIDENCE**

What are some clear next steps or pathways that will maximize and build on results of the study findings? The two basic pathways utilizing study findings are to deepen and broaden our understanding of the problem of pastor family stress and/or to initiate intervention and change in

the areas of concern uncovered by the analysis. There is not one more desirable path than another and both could and over time should be undertaken depending on available funding. The narrative that follows outlines possible projects following each of these pathways.

### **Broadening and Deepening Knowledge**

As a result of this study, we now know much more about pastor family stressors among pastors and their families in the North American Division. As is the case with every scientific study, much is still unknown. Some unanswered questions include:

1. How similar or different are pastor family stressors in other Divisions in the General Conference?
2. How much do these perceptions of stress add to pastor burnout or ineffectiveness? Do we need to utilize more objective measures of stress in order to understand their impacts?
3. How do the subjective levels of stress relate to object measures stress or other measures of health?
4. How similar or different are the challenges faced by pastoral families to church member families in general?

To address these lingering questions the Institute for the Prevention of Addictions proposes any the following:

1. The undertaking of a multi-year global study duplicating, with cultural adaptations, the NAD pastor family stress study. For efficiency and feasibility considerations, the study could be initiated in the English speaking areas of the world church. During the initial year of the global study, priority areas would be established with the target timeline of two to three years to complete the initiative.
2. To understand the connection between stress and effects on ministry satisfaction and work performance, a study would be designed that included objective measures of stress. We would examine how those objective measures correlate with subjective measures used in this study. This could produce a stress index that could offer an early intervention system for pastor burnout.
3. The research literature is unequivocal about the connection between stress and its effects on health. To understand how subjective and objective measures of stressors correlates with the physical and emotional health of pastors, we propose a pilot study centered in a few conferences in the NAD. We would measure objective and subjective stressors, as well as subjective and objective measures of wellbeing and

health. These measures could produce a stress and health index that could offer an early intervention system for pastor burnout.

### **Initiating Intervention and Change for Pastor Family Stress Management**

Taken together, the qualitative and quantitative findings offer some clear guidance about specific factors that stress pastors, pastor spouses, and children of pastors.

For pastors and pastor spouses, it appears that many of the primary stressors such as spiritual challenges, financial difficulties, and meeting role expectation related to a more core issue of lacking abilities to recognize, establish, and maintain appropriate and healthy personal and family boundaries.

For children of pastors, role expectations imposed by church members and lack of social support created their two primary stressors.

To address these known stressors, the Institute for the Prevention of Addictions proposes any the following:

1. To initiate an intervention study for pastors and their spouses focusing on recognizing, establishing, and maintaining appropriate and healthy personal and family boundaries. To establish a measure of intervention effectiveness, three groups would be designated for study: (1) an intervention group who receive self-guided online study course addressing the primary skills needed to strengthen boundaries, (2) an intervention group that receives a face-to-face training in a group format; and (3) a control group who receives no intervention.
2. To develop a pilot program for pastor children, ages 10 – 15 with the purpose of increased social support. Since no known program exists to implement, the program should develop with the guidance of adult children of pastors. The program would be delivered in two formats (online and face-to-face) with pre and posttest measures in place to note initial promising effectiveness of the intervention.
3. To create a pilot program for pastor children, ages 10 – 15 and their parents focusing on church member role expectations. The training would clarify social role expectations by identifying appropriate and inappropriate role expectations. In addition, the intervention would provide skills training to actively intervene with church members imposing inappropriate role expectations. The intervention would be delivered in a face-to-face format with pre and posttest measures to note the level of intervention effectiveness.

## **Full Final Report**

### **Introduction**

Researchers and Church administrators have had a long term interest in the stresses experienced by clergy and how these stressors relate to the ability of the clergy to effectively conduct their ministry. The work demands on clergy are extensive and extraordinarily varied with clergy often reporting that their training is not sufficiently related to their daily professional role demands (Werner, 2002). Surveys suggest that clergy are one of the most trusted professions in the United States and that congregants turn to the clergy for assistance for a wide variety of traumatic life experiences (Weaver et al., 2003). These expectations can place significant stress on the clergy who are not trained in areas that congregants expect them to help with. A wide variety of studies have also focused on the stresses experienced by the families of clergy. Clergy often have the great difficulty in time boundaries; that is they are expected to always be available to their congregants (Hill et al., 2003). This often results in significant interference with family time and expectations and in severe family stress and conflict (Blanton, 1992). There has often been a focus on the role of children in clerical families and the stress they feel as role models and the expectation that they will perfectly reflect the moral teachings of their clerical parent (see Darling et al., 2006). Strange and Sheppard (2001) reported that the children of clergy felt that their parent's congregation expected them to be rebellious and that they watched closely for

moral failures. These types of stresses have often been found to relate to a variety of acting out behaviors that causes additional stress in the personal and professional lives of the clergy. Clerical families are also often stressed by frequent moves. As Frame (1998) found, frequent moves relate to the stress of loss of familiar places and people as well as dealing with new schools, social networks and jobs. In a review of research literature, Weaver and his colleagues (2002) found that frequent moves were a source of increasing stress in clerical families.

A long tradition of research suggests that it is important to understand the current and changing stressors among clergy and their relationship with their families (Morris and Blanton, 1998; Minor, 2007) if professional burn out is to be avoided and clerical family functioning is to be improved (Warner and Carter, 1984) and the pastor's ability to fulfill their mission is to be enhanced.

### **Development of Study**

This study emerged from a conference was held in the Dominican Republic sponsored by the School of Social Work at Southern Adventist University focusing on Seventh-day Adventist pastor families. Conference attendees included the Family Ministries Departments of the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists and the North American Division and the Departments of Discipleship and Religious Education, Behavioral Sciences, Social Work and Institute for the Prevention of Addictions at Andrews University and the School of Social Work at Southern Adventist University. The conference focused on understanding and dealing with stressors in Clergy families and in understanding how contemporary role demands on SDA pastors relate to clerical training. Given the high moral standards of the Seventh-day Adventist Church, the very public lives of Adventist Clergy and their families and the limited differentiation between public and provide lives in Adventist culture, it was felt that Adventist pastors and their families may be particularly susceptible to role and family stress. There is a pervious study that has been published on family stressors among SDA clergy (Lee, 2007). This study does provide insight into how pastors and their spouses perceive stresses and the role of social support in alleviating stressors. However, the number in the sample was only 147 and it made use of instruments that were developed in 1949. We plan to survey all pastors and spouses in the North American Division which should provide us a sufficient N for complex multivariate analysis.

### **Study Objectives and Methodology**

This study had the following objectives:

1. Examine the training of pastors and how that training relates to their experiences of being a pastor.
2. Examine the stressors that are perceived/experienced by pastors, their spouses, and their adult children using a quantitative survey approach and a qualitative focus group approach.

3. Triangulate the responses from the survey and focus groups to determine the key stress issues that pastors and their families face.
4. Examine the consequences of pastoral family stress.
5. Suggest strategies for alleviating pastoral family stress from clerical training to continuing education approaches based on the study results.

The study was a cooperative effort involving researchers in Seventh-day Adventist Theological Seminary, the Institute for the Prevention of Addictions, Behavioral Sciences Department and the Social Work Department at Andrews University. The study was also done in partnership with members of the General Conference Department of Family Ministries and the North American Division Department of Family Ministries and the Ministerial Department.

### Methodology

A three part project was undertaken. Part I of the study addressed the issue of pastoral perception of the linkage between their theological education and the current professional demands/expectations they face. Part II addressed the issue of pastoral continuing education to address training gaps and to alleviate identified stressors. Part III focused on a quantitative and qualitative study of pastoral families examining role and family stressors, the consequences of those stressors and the coping mechanisms used. A more detailed outline of each of these parts:

#### Part I: Perceptions of Education:

1. Examined the extent to which the pastor's educational experience at the seminary relates to their current pastoral practice. In reaching this objective we would do the following, in consultation with the NAD/GC Family Ministries and Ministerial Departments:
  - a. Determined the courses the pastor took while enrolled at the seminary.
  - b. Identified their current role, major responsibilities, and size of church, most frequent daily, weekly, and monthly activities.
  - c. Used a Likert type scale, ask the pastor how well their pastoral education prepared them to perform their professional role.
  - d. Inquired about the pastor's perception of which courses and the description of those courses that best prepared them to meet their current pastoral responsibilities.
  - e. Obtained input on suggestions pastors have for making their training more relevant to professional roles and responsibilities.

#### Part II: Continuing Education:

1. This part of the study explored the felt needs of pastors for continuing education. To achieve this objective, the research team constructed the instruments to:



- a. Identify continuing education programs already attended by pastors and what they are directed toward.
- b. Determine the types of continuing education offerings that pastors perceive as of most benefit to their role demands and to dealing with family stressors.
- c. Examine pastoral interest and willingness to attend continuing education events and of what types.
- d. Explore pastoral perception of an NAD policy to require continuing education of all pastors and what would be needed to improve their willingness.

### Part III: Pastoral Family Stress:

1. Examined how pastoral families function exploring both areas of strength and challenge using a quantitative survey research methodology. To achieve this objective we:
  - a. Documented family structure (length of marriage, ages of children, whether children are in the home or not, etc.).
  - b. Surveyed NAD clergy and spouses and adult children of clergy attending Andrews University and Southern Adventist University on the stressors they have experienced and the consequences of those stressors as measured by the “Stress Coping Scale” developed by Folkman and Lazarus (1985), “Stressors of Clergy Children Inventory” developed by Ostrander, Henry, & Hendrix (1990) and the Clergy Family Life Inventory (see Morris and Blanton, 1998). The “Personal Challenge Checklist” was compiled by the researchers in close cooperation with the NAD/GC Family Ministries and Ministerial Departments.
  - c. Inquired about the strategies clergy and their spouses as well as adult children of clergy use to manage stressors and obtain ideas from pastoral families about how to relieve the stressors.
  - d. The survey (using Survey Monkey) was sent to NAD Pastors with the support of the NAD Ministerial Director. The request went from the NAD to the Unions and then to the local conferences. Spouses were contacted with the support of the NAD Spouses Association Leader. Pastors and spouses were emailed and two follow up reminders were sent. Three hundred and eighty-nine pastors and 313 spouses responded to the survey.
  - e. We surveyed adult children of pastors at Andrews University and Southern Adventist University and received 171 responses.

### 2. Qualitative Methodology

This study included a qualitative component to provide additional context for and understanding of the quantitative data. We used focus group methodology with pastors,

spouses, and their children to facilitate: (1) understanding the areas of challenge identified by the quantitative analysis; (2) identifying strategies used by clergy and spouses to manage stressors; (3) gathering information to develop programs to reduce stress among these groups, and; (4) eliciting data from which to improve clergy training in dealing with stress and role expectations.

Our research team conducted 20 focus groups consisting of five to ten participants with each participant group (pastors - 5, spouses - 6, adult children of pastors - 4). In addition, five pastoral families were interviewed to examine in more depth the stressors and dynamics of SDA pastoral families. Data gathering occurred for pastors and spouses at conference-level retreats. For adult children from pastor families, data was gathered through purposive sampling on the Andrews University or Southern Adventist University campuses. The research team developed a moderator guide to facilitate and center the discussion. The moderator guide included questions on the issues identified above, tailored to the particular participant group. The focus groups lasted from 45 to 90 minutes to facilitate an in-depth discussion of the topics.

To allow for verbatim transcription, the focus groups were audio and video taped. The analysis approach used the classic constant comparison tradition (Glaser & Strauss, 1967), using qualitative software, QDA Miner.

## **Seminary Training, Role Demands, Family Stressors and Strategies for Alleviation of Stressors in Pastors' Families**

What follows is a the final report of the results of the quantitative study of pastors, their spouses and their adult children regarding their perceptions of their seminary training, the need for and interest in continuing education for pastors and stressors on pastoral families and how the members of the pastoral family are coping with them. In this study, 389 pastors, 313 spouses and 171 adult children responded to the survey. Sixty-two percent were Caucasian pastors, 13% Black, and 15% Hispanic/Latino. Ninety-six percent were male and married, and 57% were 51 year of age or older. Forty-nine percent had spent 20 years or more in pastoral ministry with 85% reporting that they were now senior pastors. Seventy percent of our sample had earned an MDiv, an MA in Religion, Youth Ministry or related theological program, a DMin or a PhD. An additional 26% had earned a bachelor's degree as their highest education to date.

### **Part I -- Pastoral Education: Perceptions of Pastors in the Field**

Pastors were asked the following question related to their education for pastoral ministry: "If you have taken any of the following courses in preparation for ministry, to what extent have they increased your expertise in your current position?" Pastors' responses indicate that value the

education they received and have found it to be helpful in their pastoral ministry. Among subjects taken by most students, the following were found to be most helpful in descending order (Table One):

<b>Subject</b>	<b>% Increased Greatly/Somewhat</b>	<b>% Increased Very Little or not Increased</b>	<b>% Not Taken</b>
Biblical Interpretation, Hermeneutics, Exegesis	87.0	5.7	7.4
New Testament Theology	84.7	8.9	6.4
Old Testament Theology	83.3	8.5	8.2
Preaching Methods	83.0	9.5	7.4
Biblical Literature	82.9	9.3	7.9
Adventist Studies	80.4	10.1	9.4
Christian Ministry	76.5	13.0	10.5
Pastoral Ministry	73.8	17.1	9.1
Evangelism	70.3	21.9	7.8
Church Leadership	69.2	16.2	14.7
Reformation	66.2	20.0	13.8
Pastoral Care and Counseling	65.4	21.5	13.1
Early Christian History	64.0	25.5	10.5
Relationships, Conflict Resolution and Communication	63.7	17.6	18.7
Biblical Languages	61.5	27.6	11.0
Biblical Ethics	60.6	25.3	14.1
Biblical Spirituality	57.7	15.4	26.8
Systematic Theology	56.3	28.7	14.9
Christian Formation and Discipleship	51.6	20.8	27.5
Modern Christian History	48.4	27.7	24.0
Health Ministry	44.0	26.4	29.7
Youth and Young Adult Ministry	42.0	25.9	32.2
Christian Origins	42.0	30.1	27.9
Sacred Music and Worship	41.8	33.4	24.9
Family Ministries	40.4	21.7	37.9
Social Issues	35.7	31.2	33.1
Archaeology	33.1	28.3	38.6

It is instructive to note that courses that were seen as most increasing pastors' expertise were more theoretical in nature rather than practical in nature, but it must also be noted that higher

percentages of pastors did not take courses that were practical in nature. In fact, more than fifty percent did not take any class in the following subjects: Chaplaincy, Children’s Ministry, Urban Mission, Intercultural Mission, Jewish and Muslim Faiths, Hispanic Ministries, and African American Ministries. In interpreting this data, it is important to note that courses such as Marriage, Family and Interpersonal Relationship skills only became a part of the core for MDiv students in 2008. Many of the courses that were not taken by many were elective in nature rather than mandatory as a part of the core.

Overall, these data suggest that pastors feel most comfortable with their expertise being in the areas of theoretical education in theology, biblical languages, preaching, Old Testament, New Testament and so forth. They express less expertise in practical areas such as counseling, leadership, marriage and family, youth and young adult ministry often because they were not exposed to these courses while in the seminary.

Pastors were next asked two questions related to their work: “How often do you engage in the following activities?” and “How prepared do you feel to fulfill your role in each of these areas?”

On Table Two below the responses to both of these questions are compared.

<b>Activity/Pastoral Role</b>	<b>% Who Engage Weekly or More Often</b>	<b>% Feeling Well or Moderately Well Prepared</b>
Counseling	54.8	59.3
Visitation	76.0	86.1
Sermon Preparation	90.5	92.7
Preaching	88.5	93.4
Teaching (Bible studies, new believers classes)	80.2	91.4
Planning and Leading Worship	69.0	77.5
Evangelism and Outreach	34.8	76.0
Care for Church Members (financial help, etc.)	47.1	67.9
Community Care (food pantry, literacy training, etc.)	19.4	44.3
Church Administration	95.9 (monthly)	80.6
Conference Administration	70.8 (monthly)	67.7
Development of Church Leadership	29.3	61.3
Personal Development (attending seminars, continuing education)	10.1	NA
Conflict Resolution	25.8	60.7

It is interesting to note from the above data that pastors feeling least well prepared for practical ministry types of activities including community care, counseling, conflict resolution and the development of church leadership. These findings are reinforced by comments made by pastors about what they would like to have seen more of in their education. It would appear that pastoral ministry is largely defined as preaching, giving bible studies and visitation of church members. Pastors were then asked to respond to the following open-ended question:

What suggestions might you have to make educating future pastors more relevant? Of the 246 total responses, the majority of suggestions relate to practical ministry of some sort. The responses are listed by order of frequency. The number and percentages of responses are given below.

<b>Suggestions for Pastoral Education</b>	<b>N</b>	<b>Percent</b>
More practical application	50	20.3%
Internship/experience	34	13.8%
Leadership/Administration	33	13.4%
Pastoral Care & Counseling	28	11.4%
Personal	20	8.1%
Accessibility to education	19	7.7%
Conflict resolution	18	7.3%
Finance training	9	3.7%
Cultural studies/more cultural awareness	7	2.8%
Youth/Young Adult	4	1.6%
Education (other)	20	8.1%

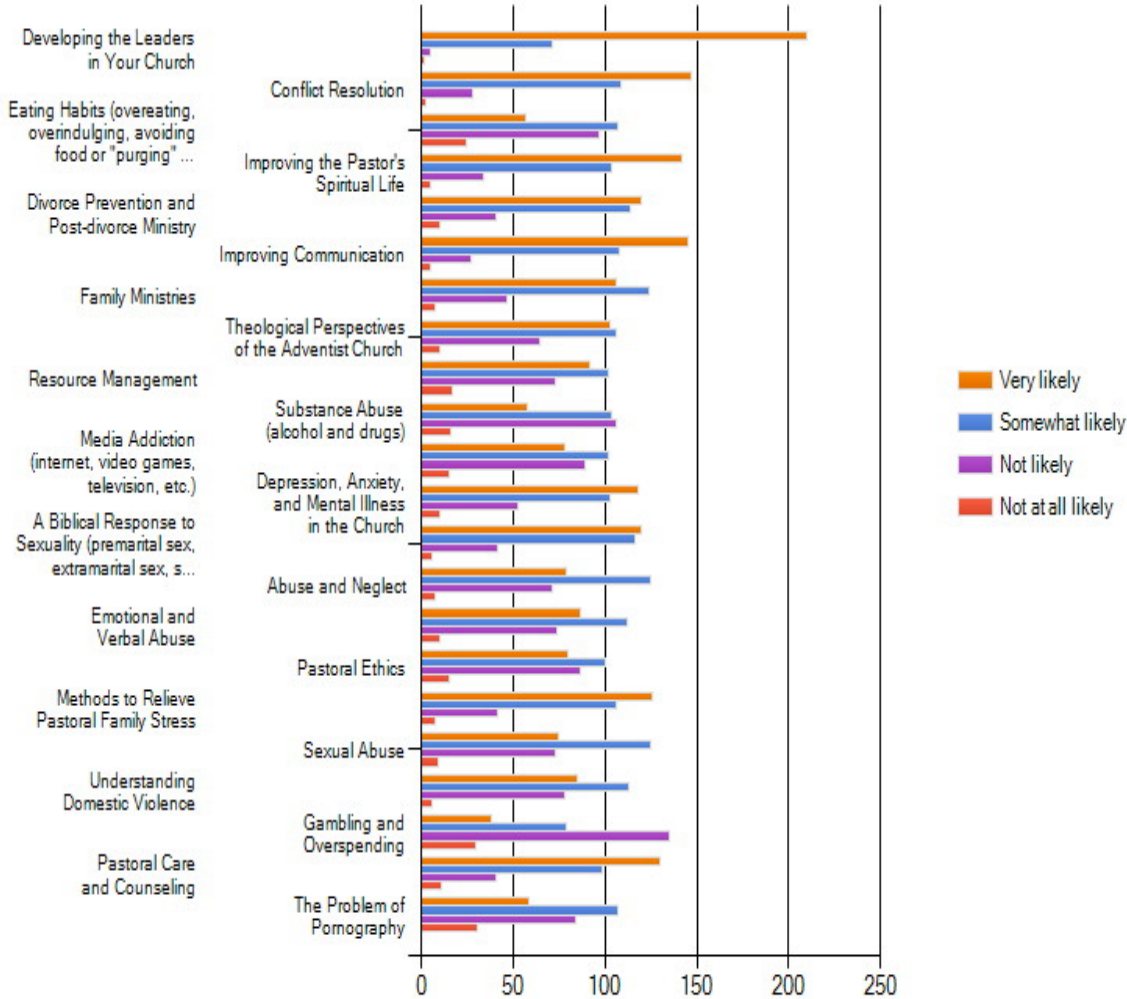
By far, the greatest need expressed by pastors was for education in the practical aspects of ministry.

**Part II -- Pastoral Continuing Education: Perceptions of Pastors in the Field**

The overwhelming majority of pastors report being very favorable toward the development of a continuing education requirement for pastors. 99.3% report that they would be very favorable or somewhat favorable toward attending continuing education seminars. In fact, 86.4% reported that they have already done so. Pastors were asked which areas (topics) of continuing education

they would be most likely to attend. Table Three summarizes the results.

**If you were to attend a continuing education seminar, how likely would you be to attend one offered in the following areas?**



The table above reveals the following as the top ten areas of interest as indicated by the response that pastors would be “very likely” to attend: Developing the Leaders in the Local Church, Conflict Resolution, Communication, Improving the Pastor’s Spiritual Life, Pastoral Care and Counseling, Methods to Resolve Pastoral Family Stress, Divorce Prevention and Post-Divorce Ministry, A Biblical Response to Sexuality, Depression, Anxiety and Mental Illness in the Church, and Family Ministries. It must be noted that these areas are those of practical concern rather than theoretical or theological in nature. Reinforcing these findings are the comments that pastors wrote in response to an open-ended question inviting them to respond further. Many of these responses echo further the responses on the table above.

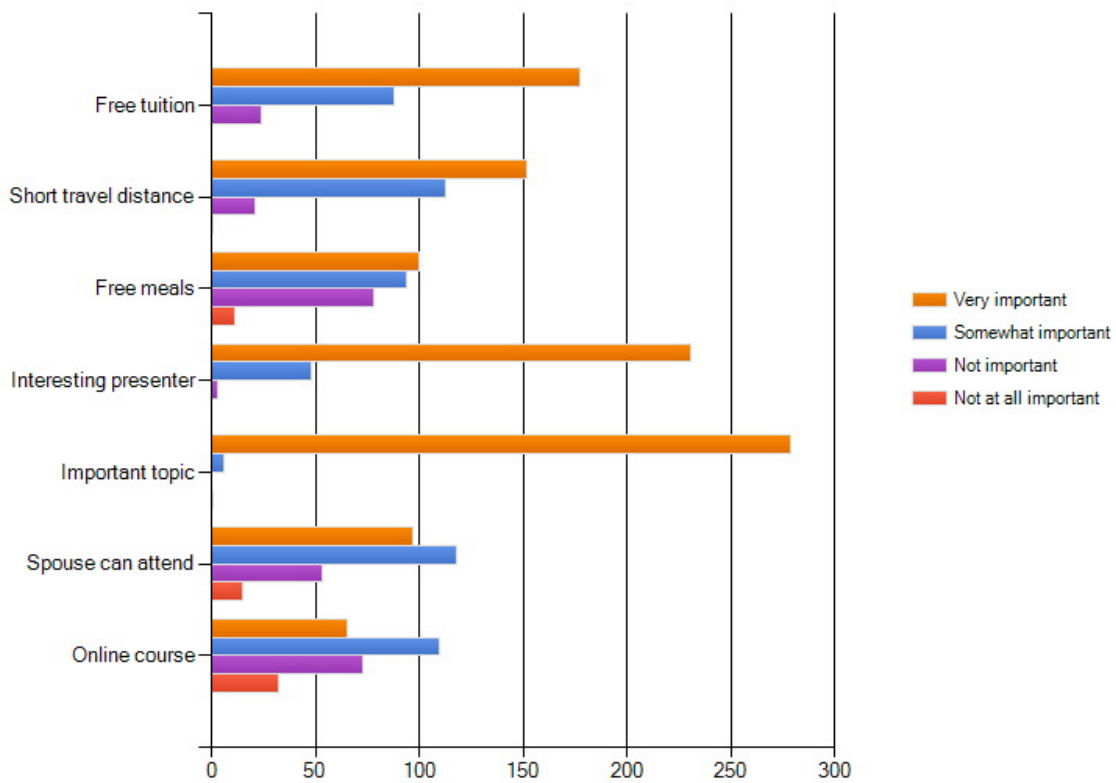
**Other areas for continuing education:**

<b>Other Areas for Continuing Education • (Total responses 55)</b>	<b>N</b>	<b>Percent</b>
Leadership	13	23.6%
Cultural Issues	10	18.2%
Evangelism	7	12.7%
Counseling	7	12.7%
Self-care	5	9.1%
Biblical Doctrines	4	7.3%
Conflict training	3	5.5%
Preaching	2	3.6%
Finances	2	3.6%
Other	2	3.6%

The data reveal that pastors are most interested in areas of practical ministry when it comes to programs designed for continuing education. These range from a desire to grow in their own spiritual life to how to help their congregants better by learning more about content and skill areas.

Finally, pastors were asked to identify the factors that might incentivize them to attend continuing education programs. The most important factors were the importance of the topic itself to them and the speaker. The cost of the continuing education seminar (free tuition) and the distance to travel also arose as important factors to pastors. See Table Four below for more detailed responses.

**How important are the following factors when considering attending continuing education seminars?**



**Part III -- Pastoral Family Stress and Coping**

Data are shown in Table Five below reporting responses to a series of 28 questions from the Personal Challenge Checklist from Pastors, Spouses and the adult children of pastors. It is important to note that these three groups are independent samples. That is, they are not matched to each other. The percentages reported are a combination of mild, moderate or severe concern for each of the questions asked.

**Table Five: Personal Challenge Checklist**

**To what extent are the following a personal struggle for you?** Percentage agreeing that item is of mild, moderate or severe concern:

Question	Pastors	Spouses	Children
1. Difficulty keeping the Sabbath day holy	40.3	43.7	67.5
2. Difficulty with personal prayer	55.9	55.0	74.4
3. Trouble maintaining personal connection with God	53.9	62.8	84.8
4. Making time for personal devotions	66.6	75.2	91.7
5. Substance abuse	3.3	.4	18.9



6. Gambling or overspending	8.9	12.4	18.3
7. Pornography	32.6	6.4	45.8
8. Media Addiction	44.8	35.5	71.1
9. Eating unhealthy foods	54.3	61.0	72.4
10. Overeating or overindulging	40.1	51.9	52.1
11. Avoiding food or “purging” to stay thin	5.6	4.0	15.8
12. Depression and/or Anxiety	49.1	60.9	55.8
13. Severe Mental Illness	3.7	8.8	6.6
14. Domestic violence	3.0	2.0	3.3
15. Physical abuse	2.7	1.6	1.6
16. Emotional or verbal abuse	12.7	18.0	25.0
17. Sexual abuse	2.3	2.4	4.2
18. Spiritual abuse	5.3	6.8	17.4
19. Extramarital sex	3.7	1.6	21.5
20. My own same sex attraction	1.1	.8	10.0
21. Church discipline	34.7	18.1	46.6
22. Conflict over differing worship styles	55.6	33.6	57.8
23. Conflict over dietary choices	23.0	29.2	44.6
24. Conflict over jewelry in the church	41.4	31.1	47.1
25. Conflict over women’s ordination	46.6	37.6	45.5
26. Church politics at the local conference level	48.5	50.7	59.5
27. Church politics at the Union, Division or General Conference level	56.5	58.8	51.3
28. My own conflict with church doctrine	15.2	18.0	38.1

Spiritual Issues (questions 1-4) – The first set of issues focused on personal spiritual aspects. Two-thirds of pastors reported that they had at least a mild level of concern about the difficulty of making time for personal devotions. Spouses at 75% and children at 92% were significantly higher. This was the only statistically significant difference between pastors, spouses and children. The area of personal devotions appears to be of the greatest challenge to all three groups. The majority of pastors, spouses and children also reported at least a mild personal challenge in personal prayer and maintaining a personal connection with God. Keeping the Sabbath was less of a challenge to pastors, spouses or children (though two-thirds of children reported it to be at least of mild challenge). Overall, these data suggest that the majority of pastors and spouses as well as over three-fourths of children of pastors experience at least a mild challenge in these important spiritual areas.

Addictions/Health Behavior Issues (Questions 5-11) – A series of items on addictions and unhealthy behaviors were listed. The majority of all three groups reported at least a mild challenge with eating unhealthy foods with overeating reported by 40% or higher in each group. This likely occurs because of the strong Adventist emphasis on eating healthy foods. While very

few pastors and even fewer spouses had a challenge with substance abuse, over 18% of children did; this was a statistically significant difference. About one-third of pastors and over 45% of children had at least a mild challenge with pornography compare to only 6% of spouses. The wide spread availability of pornography via the internet and the privacy that affords is a major issue that has often been studied among clergy. Similar data exists for media use with spouses joining pastors and children in the challenges they face with Media Addiction; over one-third for pastors and spouses and over 71% for children of pastors. Overall these data suggest that pastors and their families face at least mild challenges in dealing with health behaviors with the highest rates involving pornography (for the pastors and their children), food and media (for all three groups).

Depression/Anxiety and Mental Health (Questions 12 & 13) – There was a statistically significant difference between pastors and their other family members in terms of reporting concern about anxiety/depression. About 61% of spouses reported this concern compared to 56% of children and 49% of pastors. While exact comparable data are not available, these relatively high rates and particularly the high rates of spouses expressing at least mild concern about anxiety and depression should be of significant concern to the Church. It is also important to note that there was a significant difference between pastors, spouses and children relative to concern about severe mental illness. About 9% of spouses reported this concern compared to 7% of children and 4% of pastors. Overall the data suggest that the Church should take a serious look at the mental health concerns of pastors and their families and consider policies to address these concerns; especially concerns around anxiety/depression!

Family Life Issues – (Questions 14-20) – These questions cover a series of items about family life problems. The data show very low rates of concern about domestic violence, physical abuse, and sexual abuse. What any rate is of concern, the low rates of at least mild concern reported is of note. Relatively low rates of concern are also evident in the reports from pastors and their spouses, but there is a significantly higher rate of concern from the children about emotional/verbal abuse (25%), spiritual abuse (17%), extramarital sex (22%) and same sex attraction (10%). These data showing significantly higher rates of concern about these abuse issues by the children of pastors suggest the need for prevention programs for pastor's families.

Conflict – (Questions 21-28) – These questions examine concerns about a wide variety of possible conflicts with the Church. The majority of all three response groups expressed concern about Church politics at higher organizational levels of the Church with close to a majority expressing similar concern about politics at the local conference level. Interestingly, the majority of pastors and their children expressed at least a mild level of concern about conflict over worship styles. The next highest level of conflict concern focused on women's ordination with over 45% of pastors and their children expressing at least mild concern and 38% of spouses expressing this level of concern or higher. Interestingly, the data also show that conflict over jewelry remains a significant concern among pastors and their family members with over 40% of pastors and their children expressing at least mild concern and 31% of spouses expressing this

concern. About one-quarter of pastors and their spouses expressed at least mild concern about conflict over diet choices with 45% among the adult children expressing concern about this conflict. This difference was statistically significant. The other significant difference in this section was over conflict with church doctrine. About 15% of pastors expressed at least mild concern about conflict with church doctrines, 18% of spouses, but 38% of adult children! Overall these data show a relatively high percentage of the respondents are concerned about many types of conflict issues in the Church with church politics at every organizational level. This concern received the highest percentage of concern from all three respondent groups. It is also important to note that the adult children of pastors were more likely to express concern about more conflict issues than the pastor or spouse group.

### Summary of Pastoral Challenge Check List

1. A large majority of pastors and their families are concerned about the difficulties they have in maintaining a strong spiritual life.
2. Anxiety and depression are concerns for a majority of pastors, spouses and children.
3. Between 10% and 25% of the children of pastor’s express concern about various non-physical abuse issues.
4. For the majority of all three study groups there are concerns about conflict at all levels of church organization.

### Clergy Family Life Inventory

Table Six reports responses from the pastors and spouses indicating a mild, moderate or severe stress from 52 items. In order to avoid what is called response set questions of similar type are spread through this questionnaire. In this report, these questions will be organized together for purposes of discussion.

#### **Please indicate how stressful each situation listed is for you. (Clergy Family Life Inventory)**

Percentage reporting that item creates mild, moderate or severe stress

Question	Pastor	Spouse
1. It is difficult to make it through each month without worrying whether or not our financial resources will be adequate for our needs.	72	73.3
2. Our family is expected never to need outside professional intervention like therapy or counseling.	31.7	38.5
3. Our congregation’s expectations for our children are unrealistically high.	30.0	34.4
4. Most of our social activities are out of a sense of obligation rather than	53.3	61.2

choice.		
5. Our family has a public lifestyle that is different from our private lifestyle.	27.3	31.6
6. Our congregation expects the needs of our family to be secondary to their needs.	44.1	49.5
7. My spouse's expectations for how our family should function are too high.	32.4	29.0
8. Our family's financial situation requires more than the salary received from the church.	67.5	70.1
9. My spouse is expected to participate in most every church event even though our members are not always expected to participate.	45.9*	67.6
10. Our family is expected by our congregation to be a "model family".	42.7	55.9
11. My expectations for how our family functions are too high.	39.6	41.3
12. My compensation package does not provide adequate periods of paid vacation.	36.6	33.2
13. We do not have a network of other clergy families with whom we can really be open.	56.5	59.6
14. I feel we are caught in a tug-of-war between "church" and "family".	45.2	50.4
15. Our family does not have enough privacy.	33.5	36.2
16. It is difficult to maintain relationships that were made in former pastorates.	36.8	43.1
17. I am concerned about the level of retirement benefits we will have in the later years.	73.4	75.2
18. Our family's inability to save money on a regular basis is a worry for me.	70.7	75.0
19. Our family does not have affordable and comprehensive medical coverage.	31.5	30.2
20. Our congregation feels our marriage should be a role model for them to look to in shaping their own marital relationships.	27.8	32.0
21. Our congregation does not accept our family's expressions of frustration and dissatisfaction.	30.0	34.3
22. It is difficult for us to provide the same standard of living for our children as most of their peers have.	34.3	37.4
23. Clergy salaries in our organization simply do not provide a strong enough financial base for our family.	65.3	61.8
24. Our family resents having congregational input on how our house is decorated and/or maintained.	12.4	10.1
25. Congregation members believe that they have a right to know what goes on in our family.	22.6	26.3
26. Our family resents congregational influences on our decision-making.	22.1	22.8
27. We find it difficult to establish times for our marital relationship without having interruptions related to the needs of our children.	36.0	40.1
28. It is difficult to balance church and family considerations in making decisions about changing pastorates.	49.7	44.1
29. Our congregation disrupts days off and vacations for reasons other than emergencies.	50.5	52.8
30. Selflessness is an important aspect of ministering effectively to a congregation.	41.7	47.8

31. The leadership of my denomination does not respond in a positive manner to evidence of human failings or family problems in clergy families.	39.9	39.3
32. Planning times away from our congregation for vacations is problematic if congregational needs arise.	39.9	54.9
33. Our family does not feel close to our denomination's leadership.	38.0	37.7
34. There are not enough hours in the week to handle all our responsibilities and still have enough leisure time together as a family.	67.4	68.4
35. Our children have difficulty adjusting to new people and new situations when we move.	35.3	34.4
36. I have very few people I can confide in about the really important matters in my life.	64.7	71.0
37. When our family changes pastorates, we find it difficult to make new friends.	37.7	41.9
38. Our family is upset when faced with the possibility of moving.	58.9	54.3
39. The lack of equity acquired in owning a house is a concern for our family.	60.4	57.0
40. The moves our family has made have created financial concerns for us.	63.6	56.4
41. Moves are difficult to cope with because they are the result of decisions external to our family.	51.2	51.6
42. The free time most families have during the week are times when congregational demands interfere with our family's time together.	55.6	58.5
43. We have moved because at times we did not feel a sense of belonging to the community.	23.7	19.0
44. Our family is living in a "fish bowl".	39.3	50.3
45. Our family does not get to spend enough time with our relatives.	64.2	63.9
46. There are not enough relationships in our lives where we feel we can be ourselves.	53.5	56.9
47. Our family stays so busy that it is hard to find time for friends to visit with us.	58.3	58.9
48. We find it difficult to establish times for our marital relationship without having interruptions related to the needs of our congregation.	50.6	56.5
49. It is difficult to maintain friendships with congregation members because of the complications of being both friend and minister.	62.0	71.4
50. There are too few relationships in my life that make me feel "emotionally connected" with others.	57.2	65.8
51. Any unexpected financial demand plays havoc with our family's financial situation.	70.0	74.7
52. I am concerned about how well we will manage financially to provide college educations for our children.	52.6	51.6

Financial Stress (Questions 1,8,12,17,18,19,22,23,39,40,51,&52) – First of all it is important to note that there are not significant differences in perceived stress between pastors or spouses. Secondly, and perhaps most importantly, it should be noted that financial stress received the highest percentage of responses than any other type of potential stress listed in this questionnaire. Over 70% of pastors and spouses indicated at least a mild level of stress with meeting monthly

financial needs, saving money, and meeting any financial emergency. Over 60% of pastors (and about the same percent of spouses) perceived at least mild stress in their need for more monthly income, a better financial base, the lack of equity in their homes and the financial stress of frequent moves. About half of pastors and spouse expressed concern about paying for their children college costs with about one-third of pastors and spouses indicated at least a mild stress over the lack of money for vacations, adequate living standards, and medical coverage. Research shows that no one enters the Christian ministry expecting material wealth. However, these data suggest that the initial idealism of pastors and spouses may be confronting the reality of daily life, monthly bills and retirement. The data suggest the potential importance of financial counseling services for pastors and their families in pastoral training and through continuing education!

Family Life Stress (Questions 3,4,5,7,11,15,20,21,24,25,29,31,32,42,44,45,&48) - A number of questions focused on possible stressors concerning family life. The majority of pastors and pastor's spouses indicated that they felt at least mild stress in response to the obligation to attend social activities not of their choice, disruption of their vacations by congregational member's demands, the kind of daily interpretations of family time by congregations, the impact of congregational demands on marital relations. The majority of spouse reported at least mild stress from living in a "fish bowl" and being expected to be a model family. About one-quarter to one-third of pastors and spouses reported at least a mild level of stress regarding items that focused on congregational expectations of their children and their marriage. Overall the data suggest that pastors and their spouses perceive the most family life stress from unexpected congregation demands on planned family activities. This may suggest the need for training in managing and prioritizing unexpected congregational demands. This might be important training for the pastor, the family and the congregation.

Relationship Stressors Outside of the Family (Questions 2, 16, 27, 33, 35, 36, 37&46) – A number of questions focused on relationships outside of the family. The data suggest a considerable stress level from a feeling of isolation from others. Between 62% and 72% of pastors and spouses indicated at least mild stress because they felt that they could not confide in anyone and that that had difficulty in the balance between being a minister and a friend. A majority of both felt at least mild stress because there were no other clergy families that they could be open with or be themselves with as well as no one with whom they could emotionally connect. This feeling of isolation may be reflected in the fact that 32% of the pastors and 39% of the spouses reported at least mild stress because they were expected to not need the services of a professional counselor. Other relationship stresses are noted, but they do not appear to be a source of stress for a majority of the respondents. Overall the data indicate a profound sense of isolation on the part of pastors and spouses; a feeling that they cannot emotionally connect with anyone! The data suggest that it may be crucial to address this sense of emotional disconnect and isolation.

Time Demands (Questions 9, 14, 34, & 47) – Over two-thirds of pastors and spouses felt that the time demands of their roles prevented sufficient leisure time with their families. The majority of both groups reported at least mild stress because they did not have enough time for friends to visit. Both of these items are very consistent with previous data about stressors in family life and a sense of isolation. Over two-thirds of spouses, and 46% of pastors felt at least mild stress because a spouse was expected to participate in almost all church events. It is interesting to note that spouses felt significantly more stress than pastors which may suggest a bit of lack of sensitive on the part of pastors about how their spouse feel. Finally, 45% of pastors and 50% of spouses feel at least a mild stress level because they are in a time tug of war between the needs of their congregations and the families.

Moving Stressors (Questions 28, 37, 38, 41&43) – The majority of pastors and spouses reported at least mild stress when they families faced the possibility of moving and because the decision to move was made, not by the pastor and the family but rather by external others. Research suggests that the lack of control over these major life decisions is a major source of stress. Data are also reported in this section that indicate that nearly half of pastors and spouses feel at least mild stress when they have to balance the needs of their families with accepting a call to move. Over one-third of both groups reported at least a mild level of stress because of the difficulty of making new friends when they move and about one-quarter of pastors moved because they did not feel a part of the community they left. Generally the data in this section indicates that the lack of control over a move could be a major source of stress for pastors and their families. There appears to be a sense of alienation related to the process of moving.

### **Summary of Clergy Family Life Inventory Stressors**

1. Financial concerns are the major source of stress for pastors and spouses, from meeting today's needs to meeting educational expenses of children to being able to have a reasonably comfortable retirement.
2. The regular and unexpected time demands of congregations are a major source of stress for pastors and spouses as they try and have family time.
3. Pastors and spouses report a strong sense of emotional isolation from others and strong needs for connection to others.
4. Pastors and spouses reported that the lack of ability to control when and where they moved a significant source of stress.

### **Pastor's Children Concerns**

Data are presented in Table Seven below regarding concerns expressed by the adult children of pastors. Specifically, the percentages shown are the respondents' expression of somewhat concerned, quite concerned, or very, very concerned.

**Table Seven: Think back to when you lived with your parents. At that time, how concerned were you about the following?**

Percentage reporting that they were somewhat concerned, quite concerned, or very, very concerned as opposed to not concerned or a little concerned.

<b>Question</b>	<b>Adult Child Response</b>
1. How the people in my clergy parent's congregation thought I should behave	58.7
2. How our town/neighborhood people thought ministers' children should behave	50.4
3. Lack of privacy for our family-the feeling that people could see into our home	57.9
4. The amount of time I was expected to work at church-singing, cleaning, etc.,	46.3
5. The number of services I was expected to attend	52.9
6. Missing out on things because my parent was a minister	49.6
7. The number of times we moved	41.3
8. Missing out on things other kids do because of moving	46.6
9. My clergy parent was gone a lot on weekends and evenings when I was home	50.8
10. The house we lived in was not large enough for our needs	25.9
11. Whether my clergy parent practiced what he or she preached	34.0
12. Whether or not the church or the family was more important to my clergy parent	35.8
13. The way my clergy parent talked to me as compared to the way he or she talked to church people	35.1
14. Time our family spent praying and/or reading the Bible	38.3
15. My non-clergy parent worked because we needed the money	40.1
16. My non-clergy parent worked	32.8
17. The amount of time my non-clergy parent was home when I was home	30.7
18. My clergy parent's second job	13.4
19. Another family member's emotional/mental health	34.1
20. The death of a close relative	37.1
21. A family member's physical health	43.3
22. The church people's help, or lack of help when one of us was sick	25.6
23. My parent's divorce, or talk of divorce	8.4
24. My parent's fighting	32.6
25. Having to leave my pet when we moved	14.3
26. Feeling all alone or different from my friends	46.7
27. Not having close friends	39.0
28. Whether or not I could ask for help for my emotional/mental health	44.5
29. Having to be the new kid in school	38.4
30. The way I was allowed/not allowed to express my anger and other negative emotions	52.5



31. The things I did to get attention in school	26.6
32. Whether or not I could ask for help for my physical health	20.1
33. My health in general	27.7
34. My physical health	24.6
35. My emotional/mental health	45.0
36. Whether or not I had an adult I could talk to	43.3
37. Career decision-making	45.8
38. Extracurricular activities	45.8
39. School grades	48.2
40. Things I did to get attention	25.5
41. Dating	43.6

Behavioral Expectations Concerns (Questions 1,2,4,5,30,31,37,38,39&40) – This area received some of the highest level of expressed concern. The research literature often notes that the behavioral expectations of congregations toward pastor’s children are a major source of stress and concern. The majority of the children of pastors reported at least having somewhat of a concern about the congregation’s expectations of how they should behave (59%) and even how the town they lived in expected them to behave (50%). A majority (53%) expressed concern about the emotional control they were expected to maintain. Relatedly, about one-quarter expressed at least somewhat concern about behavior they engaged in to get attention in general or in school. Concerns were also expressed about a number of specific church related behavioral expectations. Almost 53% noted concern about the number of services they were expected to attend, with 46% expressing concern about the number of specific things they were expected to do at church. It is interesting to note that between 46% and 48% reported concern about even every day and routine life issues they dealt with from career decisions to grades and even extracurricular activities they engaged in at school. The data suggest that the adult children of parents often felt that they were a center of congregants behavioral focus at every level; from the extra-curricular activities they engaged in at school to church involved time demands that were placed on them by congregants as well as the feeling that they were always expected to be on their best behavior not only by congregants but by the whole town.

Relationship Concerns (Questions 26,27,36,41) – The data presented in Table Seven focused on the concerns that the adult child of pastor’s had about how being a pastor’s child impacted relationships. About 48% indicated being at least somewhat concerned about feeling all alone and different than their friends with 39% indicating that they were concerned about not having friends. This sense of being along was further noted when about 43% indicated that they were concerned that they had no adult they could talk to. About 44% indicated a concern about dating. Throughout this study the data on all three groups of respondents often indicates a profound sense of being alone; of not having anyone to really connect with or talk to. The data presented in this table clearly show pastor’s children were concerned about not having friends and feeling alone.

Family Concerns (Questions 3,6,9,11,12,13,14,23,24) – Data are presented in Table Seven showing concerns about family issues. The majority (58%) of the adult children of pastors reported being at least somewhat concerned that they had no family privacy; that people could always see what was happening in their homes. About half (51%) reported a concern about their pastor parent being absent in the evenings and on weekends; about half also reported being concerned that they missed out on doing things because of having a minister parent. Around one-third of the respondents indicated a concern about the public vs. the private parent; they seemed to feel that their pastor parent did not treat them in private as they did in public. About one-third also expressed concern that the family was not as important as the congregation. One-third also expressed concern about their parents fighting. About 38% expressed concern about family time spent on religious activities. Overall, these data suggest the children of pastors express concern about privacy and having a parent that is different in public than in private family interactions; with about one-third expressing concerns about parents fighting. These data suggest the need for family counseling being available for pastor’s families.

Family Finances (Questions 10,15,16,17,18,) – Data are presented in Table Seven showing concerns about family finances. Between one-third and 40% expressed a concern about their non-clergy parent having to work and how that impacted the time they could be with the child at home. A concern was also expressed by about one-quarter of the respondents about living in a small house. In many ways these data also fit general society in modern two income family issues. Children often report feeling a sense of being alone because of being a part of two-income professional families.

Moving Concerns – (Questions 7,8,29) – Data are shown in Table Seven expressing concerns about moving. Over 40% reported being at least somewhat concerned about the number of times they moved and missing out on things because they moved so much. Over 38% reported concerns about being the new kid in school with all of its incumbent stress. Overall, the data suggest that the frequent moves of clergy do impact the concerns of their children.

Physical and Mental Health Concerns (Questions 19,20,21,22,28,32,33,34,35) – The data in Table Seven show the level of concern about a wide variety of health issues. The highest proportion of health concerns expressed regarded mental/emotional health issues. About 45% indicated a concern about being able to seek help for mental health problems with 45% indicate a concern about their mental health. There was also concern expressed about physical health with 43% expressing concern about a family member’s physical health with about one-quarter expressing concern about the church not helping out when a family member was sick. About one-quarter also expressed concerns about their physical health. The data in this table suggest, particularly that the adult children of pastors expressed the most concern about how they could deal with mental health issues. There was a much higher level of concern about mental health issues than physical health. The data suggest that within the Adventist community, it may be much easier to express concerns about and seek help for physical health than emotional/mental health issues.

## Summary

Overall the data presented in these tables are similar to the concerns expressed by the parent of these children. All three groups expressed concern about family finances, frequent moves and feeling alone with no one to talk to as well as mental health issues and the need for counseling. What is unique about the responses from pastoral children are the behavioral expectations. There appear to be three areas regarding behavior that the adult children expressed the highest level of concern:

1. Outstanding Behavior Expectations – It was not surprising to learn that congregants expected the children of pastors to be on their best behavior, but it was interesting to note that the children felt a concern about the whole town expecting the best behavior.
2. “Volunteering” for Church Activities – The respondents expressed concern about being expected to do things that the church needed; to kind of always be available.
3. Life Choices Expectations – It was a bit surprising to note that the respondents felt concern about the congregation’s expectations on such routine life decisions and events such as extra-curricular activities, grades and career decisions.

Overall the data suggest that the children of pastors feel “watched” and likely criticized at almost every level of daily life. The data suggest the need for family counseling for pastor families from establishing and maintaining boundaries to ways of managing the stress of being so much in the public eye.

### Pastoral Family Coping Strategies

When pastors, pastors’ spouses, and adult children of pastors were asked to think about a stressful event that occurred recently and how they responded, they all responded in a similar way to prayer, personal growth, and hoping for a miracle. In every group (pastors, spouses, and children), prayer was the most frequently used coping mechanism. All three groups also reported similar levels of personal change or growth and level of hoping for a miracle.

<b>Numbers are in percentage of responses that indicated they used this technique</b>	<b>Pastors</b>	<b>Spouses</b>	<b>Children</b>
I prayed.	90.8	86.5	67.0
I changed or grew as a person in a good way.	56.5*	51.3*	53.0*
I hoped a miracle would happen.	41.6	47.8	40.0

\*Statistically significant correlation at  $\alpha=.05$

When looking at pastors, spouses, and children, there were several areas where spouses and children reported similar responses, but those responses were different than pastors. Pastors

were more likely to address the person who caused the stress to find out more about the situation than both spouses and children. Additionally, they were more likely than both spouses and adult children to come out of the experience better than when they came in. On the other hand, pastors were less likely than spouses or children to accept sympathy and understanding from someone else. They were also less likely to wish the situation would somehow just go away or to talk to someone about how they were feeling.

<b>Numbers are in percentage of responses that indicated they used this technique</b>	<b>Pastors</b>	<b>Spouses</b>	<b>Children</b>
I talked to someone to find out more about the situation.	69.2	48.9	55.2
I came out of the experience better than when I went in.	52.3	43.9*	41.0*
I accepted sympathy and understanding from someone.	28.5	40.4*	42.2*
I let my feelings out somehow.	28.5	47.3*	48.3*
I wished that the situation would go away or somehow be over with.	34.3	52.0	63.8
I talked to someone about how I was feeling.	42.3	58.4*	61.5*

\*Statistically significant correlation at  $\alpha=.05$

Additionally, spouses were more than three times more likely to become angry than pastors and children were more than four times more likely than pastors to become angry.

<b>Numbers are in percentage of responses that indicated they used this technique</b>	<b>Pastors</b>	<b>Spouses</b>	<b>Children</b>
I expressed anger to the person(s) who caused the problem.	5.0	15.9	20.7

Pastors and spouses also had some responses that were in common, yet different than that of adult children. Pastors and spouses reported asking a relative or friend for advice more often than adult children. When asked if they talked to someone who could do something concrete about the problem, children expressed that this was their response about half as often as pastors and spouses. Pastors and spouses were also more likely than children to ask a relative or friend

for advice about the situation. On the other hand, children were also much more likely than pastors and pastors' spouses to fight for what they wanted. Children were also more likely than both pastors and spouses to change something about themselves because of the stress. Additionally, children reported fantasizing about how things might turn out or wish that things would just go away on their own more often than either of their parents.

<b>Numbers are in percentage of responses that indicated they used this technique</b>	<b>Pastors</b>	<b>Spouses</b>	<b>Children</b>
I talked to someone who could do something concrete about the problem.	50.0	43.9	27.6
I asked a relative or friend I respected for advice.	46.7*	47.9*	59.1
I stood my ground and fought for what I wanted.	33.1	28.5	46.9
I changed something about myself.	33.4	37.9	45.3
I had fantasies or wishes about how things might turn out.	30.8	35.1	54.3

\*Statistically significant correlation at  $\alpha=.05$

Additionally, there were two coping responses for adult children mirrored that of pastors, but not that of pastors' spouses. Pastors and children tried to get the person responsible to change his or her mind more often than spouses. In addition, pastors and children were less likely to report rediscovering what is important than spouses.

<b>Question</b>	<b>Pastors</b>	<b>Spouses</b>	<b>Children</b>
I tried to get the person responsible to change his or her mind.	29.7	19.4	33.7
I rediscovered what is important in life.	41.1*	56.5	43.9*

\*Statistically significant correlation at  $\alpha=.05$

The instruments that were used in the data represented above were the following:

Pastors, spouses and adult children of pastors were each given the "Stress Coping Scale" developed by Folkman and Lazarus (1985).

All groups were also given the "Personal Challenge Checklist" compiled by the researchers.

Pastors and spouses were given the “Clergy Family Life Inventory” developed by Morris and Blanton (1998). This instrument did not, however, relate to pastors’ children.

Adult Children were instead given the 41 item “Stressors of Clergy Children Inventory” developed by Ostrander, Henry, & Hendrix (1990).

Except for the “Personal Challenge Checklist” compiled by the researchers, the other instruments were located in the literature and judged by the researchers to be valid and reliable instruments. Further analysis of this data can be done as requested by our research partners.

## **ADVENTIST PASTOR STRESS CHALLENGES AND PROTECTIVE FACTORS**

This report reviews the findings from the analysis of data of five pastor focus groups. The primary areas of stress and challenge researchers addressed included spiritual and financial challenges, dealing with conflict, stressors related to pastoral role expectations, and challenges related to accessing social support. Researchers also investigated the pastors’ perceptions about conditions and factors associated with alleviating stress and facilitating relief in these areas.

### **Pastors’ Spiritual Challenges and Enhancers**

In this section we report on the research questions: “What are some factors that challenge a pastor’s spiritual life?” and “What are some of the factors enhance a pastor’s spiritual life?”

#### **Spiritual Challenges**

Focus group participants reported several types of challenges to maintaining a healthy spiritual life. These challenges and barriers to achieving a desired level of spirituality included: (1) knowing how to define spirituality; (2) meeting the demands of their job; (3) struggling to keep Sabbath while fulfilling their pastoral duties; and (4) viewing typical ministry “success” indicators as a measure of their own spirituality.

#### **Challenges in Defining Spirituality**

Prior to discussing the barriers to achieving a desired spiritual life, the focus group participants discussed the lack of a universally accepted definition for spirituality. Pastors expressed concern that what is considered acceptable spiritual behavior for some, is not for others. Thus it is difficult at times for pastors to make a determination about spiritual health for themselves. The following quotes from participants illustrate this concern.

“The definition of spirituality is a problem, very different to members of the congregation, probably different to all of us here. So, that is a word that when you ask the question, ends up being defined by each of us. And then, I think often what happens is people will put a guilt trip on us or will put a guilt trip on ourselves because we are not spiritual like some other definition

or someone else is. So, probably that is a very difficult thing to try and determine...what is spirituality?" (PFG 4)

"I've had this question many times in my life. How spiritual should be a pastor? That question always haunts me because to what level of spiritual degree that you can go to as a pastor?" (PFG 4)

### **Meeting the Demands of the Job**

In addition to understanding spirituality in a broad sense, the focus group participants identified discrepancies between the outward demonstration of spirituality (which is what they are evaluated on), and the time needed to build spirituality vitality that is used in pastoral work. For example, pastors reported feeling pressured by the daily demands of the job such as conducting Bible studies and visiting church members, while recognizing that this conflicted with and took away from the time needed for personal spiritual growth.

"As a young pastor you quickly learn you're rewarded for doing, not being. And so, the minute you wake up, the pressure to accomplish, to do some measurable tasks that the conference would acknowledge that you were actually doing your job, is tremendous. It takes a lot of self-discipline to say 'Forget that. I'm going to walk with God and I'm going to spend the morning with Him or several hours with Him.' because the pressure is intense. You got to be out to visit them, you got to in Bible studies, and you got funds to raise. The list is obnoxiously long. And so there is a lot of pressure." (PFG 1)

"It is so easy to get wrapped up in the work that you don't take that time (for devotion). I mean, it's my personality that I know I got to do this, I got to do this, I got to do this, so I'm task directed. But as we go through this day, each day, [it is difficult] to take that time for [your] spiritual journey. Even though we're in the work, it's can be strain if you don't take that time. So that's a struggle for me sometimes." (PFG 1)

"The demand of ministry, the time that it takes people to see, and for me personally, when I end up going to bed late, and I have an early appointment in the morning, I find myself being pressed for time and although I know I need to get up and spend time with the Lord, depending on a number of things...you know...just trying to spend time with the family, trying to prepare the sermon, trying to prepare the Bible studies, just a host of things that I have to do. "(PFG 3)

### **The Struggle of Sabbath-keeping**

For participants in these focus groups, the demands of the job are experienced most prevalently on Sabbath, a day that for other Seventh-Day Adventists is intended to be set aside for spiritual renewal. Sabbath keeping is central to SDA beliefs. However, by the very nature of their job, keeping the Sabbath is impossible for any SDA Pastor. Faced with this reality, the Pastors in the

focus groups discussed how an absence of Sabbath has impacted their spiritual lives and how they have coped with that reality.

“It was a question I asked when I first started pastoral ministry, when I came from education into pastoral ministry. And the question was, ‘How does a pastor [keep] Sabbath?’ Every pastor’s got to figure that out for themselves. But it is a challenge. We’re all Sunday keepers.” (PFG 1)

“Being a church administrator, it makes it even doubly hard then just a regular pastor, triply hard at times. I mean I reflect back, and I’ll be honest, when you take 52 Sabbaths out of the year and I can look back and ask myself, ‘Okay, how many of those Sabbaths, did you actually worship?’ Especially for an administrative pastor it’s impossible. I mean, I can go in a sanctuary and say okay ‘I’m going to worship for service and I’m gonna listen to the sermon, and I’m gonna worship.’ And, you know, your pager is going off, somebody’s coming out tapping me on my shoulder saying ‘we got an issue this or that’, you know.” (PFG 1)

“There is a sense about that, that you know it took me a couple of decades what it was missing? And I didn’t, it goes back to what I would want to do differently if I was back in Seminary. I would want a class that would have at its heart strategies to negotiate all of that in healthy ways. How do I get that Sabbath time? I think we are so focused on the end is near the end is near that we’re not focused on every day is every day and this is the day that the Lord has made.” (PFG 2)

### **Perceived Progress in Ministry**

Another barrier to experiencing a healthy rewarding spiritual life for these participants was how they mistakenly connected their internal spiritual life with the outward success (or lack of success) they experienced as pastors. During times of little progress or a lack of visible results, pastors recalled feeling less spiritual or somehow discontented from God.

“If you feel as if you are making progress you can cope with time pressure, you can cope with criticism. But, if you are not making progress, there is no meaning in what you are doing, moving from A to B. That can affect your spirituality in a sense that you can see something in scripture that this is how it is supposed to be, but compare it with what you are doing, and you wonder to yourself... ‘What am I doing? What am I not doing? What should I be doing?’ So, if you are stagnant, it can affect your spirituality because you don’t feel as if you are moving in the direction spiritually you should be in as a person and as a pastor.” (PFG 4)

“I think the question I sometimes ask is ‘if you are not making progress in concerns of the church or whatever, am I spiritually right with God? Is there something about what I’m not doing spiritually, should I be spending more time in God’s word... is there some aspect of my spiritual life...’.” (PFG 4)



“But, having gone around the block a few times and earned my gray hair, that doesn’t play much of a part at all for me, but what does is when you get in a church that is dead or dying and you are preaching your heart out, you’re visiting, you’re trying to do these things to wake it up and you go a year or year and a half or more without seeing some growth, that is the most vulnerable time for me because the devil sits on your shoulder and says, ‘You must not be working hard enough’ or ‘Maybe it is your ministry, not them.’ That is probably what I find the most challenging.” (PFG 3)

### **Spiritual Life Enhancers**

In spite of the barriers pastors face in achieving a healthy spiritual life, the study participants were also able to identify several factors that enhanced their spiritual lives. These included: (1) accepting human limitations; (2) focusing on the enjoyable aspects of ministry, (3) utilizing self-care; and (4) engaging in meaningful personal worship experiences.

### **Accepting Human Limitations**

Throughout the focus groups, pastors identified the constant struggle of the many demands on their schedule as barriers to their desired level of spiritual health. Pastors reported overwhelming expectations placed on them to be able to do all and be all for their church members, family members, members of the community and the greater Adventist church leadership. To help alleviate some of this pressure, pastors reported that being able to accept human limitations was key.

“I think we need to accept that God has called us and we should be a normal human beings. Because, when we accept this call, we form, we create our own expectation of us. Connect to God all day. But you need to be connected with people as normal people.” (PFG 4)

“I have seasons where I don’t feel like doing this and I should be ok to feel that way and not feel guilty that I need to put on this façade all the time that you know 100% of the time you are that perfect spiritual leader. We’re not, and I have over the years struggled as a pastor’s wife and as a pastor today, and I feel that I have reached a point now, frankly, you know this is who I am and I don’t care what you think. Once I reached that point, I reached a level of comfort that I can just be me. Human.” (PFG 2)

“And I’m very in touch with my brokenness, I’m in touch with my familial brokenness, and because I’m so in touch with it, when I minister to people on personal levels is when I feel most alive, because I’m touch with my own brokenness and my familial brokenness.” (PFG 5)

### **Engaging in Enjoyable Aspects of Ministry**

Pastors reported that they experience enhanced spiritual wellness when they are engaging in personally enjoyable aspects of the ministry. The enjoyable aspects included a variety of activities such as baptizing, providing Bible studies, evangelism and chaplaincy.

“When I’m baptizing, when I’m wet, when I’m preaching, when that canvas is snapping in the wind, that is when I’m alive! That’s when things are happening, when I’m standing up there preaching, that’s when I’m alive.” (PFG5)

“I would say time with Bible study. For me is right up there and equal with when you are able to engage in Bible studies with others, sharing that one on one or a small group and say that other people begin to wake up to spiritual things, there is no greater high than leading a person to the Lord. So those two things for me are just real powerful motivators.” (PFG3)

“But I find when I’m in people’s homes, when I’m doing chaplaincy is when I’m at my best. I love chaplaincy, I love standing with somebody, sitting with somebody. When I can see somebody, (because I left the church here seven years ago), seven years later [say]: ‘I took your challenge, and it works!’ that is when I’m at my best. It is not when I’m preaching to the masses, but when I’m sitting in somebody’s house.” (PFG5)

“I would also add that I agree 100% with what he said about the soul winning component. I’d also add all night prayer meetings.... We leave just kind of revived, refreshed, rejuvenated and with a greater desire to want to spend alone time with God and share what we received from that time that we spent together. So group prayer, praying together with a group of people is something that sort of catapults me towards spiritual vitality.” (PFG3)

“But I have acknowledged that when I’m going and visiting members and spending time with them and I see that as a result of spending some time with them that that has brought about some improvement for them, I thrive off of that as well, particularly when I go by the hospital and visit a member and have spent time with them and they say: ‘Pastor it is so good that you have come and spent this time with me.’ I do, I thrive off of that as well, so those are the two things that really help me with my spiritual wellness.” (PFG5)

### **Engaging in Meaningful Personal Worship Experiences**

Engaging in worship experiences that were personally meaningful to the participants enhanced their spiritual lives. The following quotes from participants illustrate the varying types of personal worship experiences that were meaningful and enriching.

“The other thing that helps me is that I have the Bible CD so pastors do a lot of driving and so I like to listen to the Bible also. There is one thing about reading it and still another thing about hearing it.” (PFG 3)

“I do God talk. I got it from my grandmother where she would always say ‘Lord, let’s go do so and so’; ‘Jesus, let’s do this and this’ so I find I do God talk. And that is how I do my spiritual life. A structured 5 to 6 don’t work for me. But, I can go through my whole day in a relationship with God if I’m doing God talk.” (PFG5)

“One of the things that you do there is you just go into the nature or wherever and just spend time communing with God and I think that is just crucial. To have that time on a regular basis is key to spiritual health.” (PFG 2)

“Let me say, for me, there were two things that really helped contribute to my spiritual wellness. One is when I know I have heard the voice of God, when his Spirit speaks to my spirit, and I found that interesting enough for me, that doesn’t always even happen when I’m in front of the Lord. Sometimes I’m going through the day and God’s spirit speaks to me and gives me a fresh revelation about His love, His grace or the person of Christ, and that really gets me thriving. “(PFG5)

### **Utilizing Self Care**

Participants reported that engaging in self-care facilitated a sense of spiritual health. Some self-care activities included engaging in exercise, individual therapy, associating with other pastors, or experiencing “Sabbath” on different days.

“If I don’t do my physical exercise and health is not there, then spiritual health will not be there either. At the age of 50 I was breaking down health-wise from stress in one of my hardest districts in the conference. But then the Lord showed me that you need exercise, you can’t neglect that.” (PFG3)

“One of the best things that I ever did for myself was see a therapist for three years.... I have been in this for almost 40 years. At some point, I just had a lot of stuff. I would often have my biggest breakthroughs driving home from my therapist’s office.” (PFG 2)

“My observation of what creates the spiritual difficulty is where there is isolation and not good interaction. But what encourages greater spirituality is when there is a free mingling of the pastors together on a regular basis where they are able to share, giving them time to share and interact in a way that is productive.” (PFG2)

“I know I have found it very helpful. So that is just my observation of what creates the spiritual difficulty, is where there is isolation and not good interaction. But what encourages greater

spirituality is when there is a free mingling of the pastors together on a regular basis where they are able to share, giving them time to share and interact in a way that is productive. “(PFG2)

“I needed my own Sabbath. I ‘Sabbathize’ on Sunday. You can’t say that too loudly but. But I did a lot of my own spiritual renewal outside of my own congregations. “ (PFG2)

“For me, it is having more balance in my life.... Since I have started exercising, taking time out to get good sleep, scheduling my vacations, that helps me spiritually because I was less stressed. So actually for me, scaling back is a good way of becoming more balanced spiritually. Once I was more reasonable about how to manage my time in terms of family, church, and time off, I felt I was a better pastor and more spiritual.” (PFG4)

### **Financial Stressors and Stress Alleviators**

This section reviews the research questions, “Where does financial stress come from? What could the higher levels of the Seventh-day Adventist organization (conferences, unions, divisions) do to assist ministerial families in helping themselves with financial stressors?”

#### **Sources of Financial Stress and Challenge**

Financial stress among study participants emerged as a principle theme in this analysis. There were several sources of financial stress reported including: (1) educational debt, (2) insufficient stand-alone income, (3) pressure to spend on Adventist education, (4) unclear benefits, and (5) changing key benefit policies.

#### **Stress Related to Educational Loan Debt**

One source for financial stress for these participants focused on owing money for educational loans, particularly for undergraduate education. For many participants, while graduate school costs were absorbed by the sponsoring conference, that was not true for all and undergraduate debt was still substantial and troublesome.

“So when I go to Oakwood and I learn about Dave Ramsey and I get on this Financial Peace kind of thing, you know what I’m saying. That was real to me. It was enlightening to me but it didn’t take away the fact that I got to take out student loans just to go to school. It doesn’t take away....and I did work, I did bust my behind trying to get scholarships, but I still start off \$80,000 in the hole because of these student loans.”(PFG3)

“The younger pastors have to pay their loans off too. That is true, that is why we need financial direction.” (PFG4)

“May I say one more thing about the stress thing? I think student loans were brought out. I’m fresh out of the seminary. This is my first pastoral assignment in the Potomac, but I’ve accrued

some serious debt with the seminary, given the discount that NAD gives and simply because it is just hard to maintain the curriculum at the seminary, it is really tough, you know the classes, the expectation and be able to hold a full time job and go to school. So when you get out of the seminary you come here and that follows you. Although I didn't have a lot with undergrad, but I had to take out some money for three years at the seminary as a non-sponsored student, and I would like to see NAD do something about it.” (PFG4)

### **Insufficient Income without Spousal Support**

Focus group participants shared their perceptions about the lack of sufficient pastoral income as a stand-alone breadwinner. A good deal of consensus emerged around the theme of needing a second income in order for the family to be financially solvent.

“I know many of my colleagues have working spouses. For various reasons that just hasn't worked out for us. So that is a big financial challenge.” (PFG4)

“My wife and I both have worked, so we've got two incomes coming in, where some of these guys that have small children, it is hard to have two incomes coming in because you've got the little ones. So, it is more difficult when you are dealing with one salary for sure.” (PFG3)

“Probably another thing that produces financial stress and that is every time one's spouse loses a job you must begin again. Every single time. They are the big loser. It would be good if there was some (my wife would like some compensation) basically, because reality is I am no longer pastoring a local church but when I was pastoring a local church my wife put in time too. It was an expectation. But there was no compensation.” (PFG4)

“And then I have to pay my tithe, my offerings, my taxes and my mortgage. There is no way with my pastoral income. So my wife has to work. That is just a reality. There is just no way to survive, given the expectations of the church, of what a pastor, how we should raise our kids and giving some of the money back to the church. It is just too much, we can't do it.” (PFG 2)

### **The Pressure to Spend on Adventist Education**

One clear financial stressor that participants reported was pressure they experience in the cost of Adventist education. While in principle, pastors agree with the importance of Adventist education, financially they experienced it as stressful.

“My kids are now in high school and so tuition, we are encouraged through pressure to send our kids to church school. Even with the pastoral discount, I am having to pay nearly \$1500 a month just for tuition. Nearly half my income.” (PFG 2)

“I think like me you looked at your child’s needs and said this is where he needs to be right now, and for this reason. People don’t always understand that. Whether it is a financial need or special education concern, or family dynamics, or any number of reasons. If a pastor decides this is how we have to do our education, we often are criticized for “not supporting the Adventist school.” Especially if we are pastors of a church with an Adventist school.” (PFG4)

“My wife and I planned way ahead of time for affording Christian education, so if you have your kids at least 4 years apart, when one goes into college, the older one is done. Then, when my son graduated from the academy he decided to take some time off. He went to Colorado. To make a long story short we have two seniors at Southern, so things don’t always work out the way they were planned. So it is a struggle many times.” (PFG4)

“We have to be a leader and in being a leader you can’t talk about Christian education if your children are not getting one. And that can also bring about financial stress as well, to the point where I taught Academy Bible for two years in exchange for my children’s tuition. It was important to me. And then, when I left that I moonlighted with the okay of the president.” (PFG 5)

### **Unclear Financial Benefits**

Study participants reported experiencing a lack of knowledge and confusion in regards to which benefits they might be eligible for. As a result, some of the pastors recounted being able to take advantage of certain benefits while others did not.

“You know one of the things that I discovered that sometimes different pastors are treated differently. So one pastor may get this deal and another pastor is not even offered the same thing. That creates a kind of uncomfortable feeling that you would expect that what is available is available to all under the same circumstances. We didn’t know some of the benefits that were available to us because nobody at the conference office when you moved into the area says, ‘By the way did you know that paternity leave is an option for you?’ My wife is struggling with post-partum depression. She could have really used me at home for several weeks, and I didn’t find out until another person, an education superintendent from the conference, had a child and took paternity leave. I said, “What, that is an option?!” (PFG4)

“It used to be when you moved, there was a thing called the curtain allowance. And I knew about the curtain allowance, I knew the policies, I knew what it was and I said I want the curtain allowance and I got it, no big deal. I am talking to fellow pastor who moved and I said something about the curtain allowance, this that and the other, and he says this is expensive. I am thinking it’s not that hard and he goes, ‘What curtain allowance?’ So I went to the treasurer and I said how come I got mine and he didn’t get his? And he said, ‘Because you asked for yours.’”(PFG2)

“Why are we fooling people who are trying to decide financially? It is stressful for me and it has always been stressful because the church has never been transparent and how they have dealt with finances what their principles were how they do with it. We therefore, are stuck with a bias, for me is a moral issue, where we do not treat people equally. And that is seen not only in gender or nation issues which is a big public thing now, but that is across the board in almost every single area of administration where we do not treat people equally and respectfully. And that’s my observation.” (PFG2)

### **Inconsistency--Changing Benefit Policies**

In addition to the financial stress caused by unclear benefits, pastors also reported experiencing stress due to changing benefit policies. For example, pastors reported feeling stress when there was a change in pastor’s retirement plans, insurance reimbursements, and insurance criteria.

“I remember sitting soon after I got to this conference...hearing a person from the denomination say about our new retirement plan, where it is invested, that we were...he didn’t use the word stupid, but we were naïve if we had never thought if we didn’t need to be investing in the stock market all the way through our lives because we thought that the church would just take care of us that everyone has to invest in the future and we were very naïve if we hadn’t been doing that all along.... When I started in ministry, a church leader stood in front of us and told us the church takes care of your retirement, you should not be investing. To invest money in the stock market, mutual funds, and all of that is simply like going to Las Vegas and gambling. It is wrong and you should not be putting money there. So the same church told me those two things, 40 years apart. I have had a wish that they had been consistent in one way or the other, from start to finish.” (PFG2)

“Retirement is another one that has, since 2000, been a serious issue. Those who were in mid-career at the year 2000, are the ones who got hit the worst. The ones who were in mid-career, because they end up with only half of the old retirement plan and they don’t have long enough to do the new one, plus then the stock market tanked. So that is the group that will work until we die.” (PFG4)

“Then you come up halfway through and the church changed its policies. First of all, which became stressed for us financially that they said had to do with insurance. And it was because the church wanted to save their money to do what they wanted to do with the money. And so they wanted to know how they could limit the expenses and their liabilities. So they came up with a policy that said as “if you have a working spouse, your spouse will only be covered under your insurance policy if she earns less than this amount of money.”” (PFG2)

“ (In reference to car insurance reimbursement) I’ve called the Union, and they have cleared their throats, ‘Well, we’ll talk to your treasury department and go back’. They would not commit,

even though they said what I had in my hand was true. That causes stressors and financial difficulty in the house. If I'm supposed to get 180% and you have given me less than 1/3 for my insurance, make sure that you give me what I deserve! ... In fact I had it and brought it with me two days ago and said, 'cause it is not fair if it is in the policy book for you to give me some voodoo economics about "now we are going to work this like this, now watch me while I work this percentage". It is voodoo economics. Either it is 180% or it isn't. Don't leave it in there if it isn't." (PFG5)

"The denomination has, and this is where I come back to blaming administration, I see them as having taken a shift from "we are all here working together for the Lord's work and we are going to support each other and make sure we are all taken care of" to a game of "how little can I pay them and can I siphon them up here so I can create this program that I want over here in this part of the world." (PFG2)

### **Financial Stress Alleviators**

Pastors had several suggestions for alleviating financial stress. Of these suggestions, two main themes emerged in regards to assistance with alleviating financial stress: (1) financial education or a financial advisor should be provided and (2) increased assistance with moving expenses.

#### **Provide Financial Education and/or Financial Advising**

Focus group participants shared their desires for administration to provide more financial education and/or financial advising to help deal with financial stressors. Pastors who had received some financial education expressed how it lowered their stress.

'My wife and I recently, probably in the last two years, went to Financial Peace University. Dave Ramsey lays out exactly what you should do. We were on the same page with understanding. Before that I didn't really have a clear understanding, you know. My father just always said, 'Save, you have to save, you have to save.' But I didn't understand anything. But after understanding, now even when things are tight, because I know exactly what should be done, and what to prioritize, etc., that takes the stress way down." (PFG5)

"Well, it would be nice to have financial education more than what we have been receiving you know, here and there. I studied 7 years and during that 7 years I didn't get much financial instruction and so that would be wise for our church to do. Because, you know we all have to learn this." (PFG 3)

"I highly recommend getting a financial advisor and I think that it would be beneficial for the conferences to encourage that and/or even help pay for pastors to get financial advisors." (PFG 2)



### **Increased Assistance with Moving**

Pastors discussed the issue of frequent moves as a financial stressor. To help alleviate this stress, Pastors suggested that additional assistance from the conference would be beneficial. Specific suggestions for help included providing a housing allowance, covering all of the moving expenses and buying a pastor's old home.

“Don't move us so much and then pay for the move 100%.” (PGF5)

“That is probably one of the most devastating things...you do not have the option of choosing where and when you will move. Sometimes you make out like a bandit, sometimes you make out like a bandit just came to your house. It does not play out fair to people. I think that is one of the most severe areas that we do not address, is helping people with that.” (PFG4)

“There is the case, though, that if I buy a house and they move me and I can't sell that house, there are housing allowance, so there may be something they could do with that.” (PFG3)

“They want somebody to move and they say well, ok, we'd like to take that job but we cannot afford to take this hit on our house. And they say, 'We'll buy you out.' Well, maybe the conference says we want you to move, maybe we need to look at the fact that instead of helping banks we need to help pastors.” (PFG4)

## **Stressor and Stress Alleviators Related to Conflict Resolution**

### **Sources of Stress Related to Conflict**

When discussing sources stressful conflict, pastors identified conflict with both their local church and conflict with church leadership. Both sources of conflict tend to negatively affect a pastor's ability to fully engage in effective pastoral ministry.

#### **Local Church Conflict**

At the local church level, pastors experience conflict with their church members. Focus group participants reported the impact of this conflict as stressful. The consequences of these conflicts included creating a lack of trust between the pastor and their church members, and contributing to thoughts of leaving the ministry. These consequences are illustrated by the following quotes from participants.

“This was a situation where a church member called CPS to have my daughter taken away, you know. All kinds of stuff. That was not an easy situation to go through and it is going to take years to rebuild any trust.” (PFG3)

“There is some frustration and some stress when you have a church that has some deep rooted issues and you are supposed to go in there and help it grow, but you are not supposed to step on any toes. And you know, there are church boards – just recently gone through that, and this has been a very difficult, the most difficult two years of ministry out of 27 that I have ever experienced. I wanted to quit but the Lord wouldn’t let me.” (PFG3)

“In my last church there were like 2 or 3 people like that. But they can create enough of a hell to make life somewhat difficult from time to time. Numbers are small but their volume is huge.” (PFG4)

### **Conflict with Church Leadership**

In addition to conflict within their congregation, pastors also reported experiencing conflict with church leadership. One participant shared, “What is interesting is that most conflict or pressures of conflict come from the highest level of our church.” (PFG2)

The types of conflict with church leadership included: (1) a general lack of support or trust shown by conference administration; (2) lack of appropriate conflict resolution approaches; and (3) resorting to moving pastors without resolving the conflict.

#### *Lack of Support by Church Administration*

Participants identified the lack of support by church administrators when they were feeling pressure to increase baptisms or engaging in proactive attempts to undermine the pastor.

“I think sometimes it is frustrating as a pastor when you do work hard and you are trying to get Bible studies and you are trying to get new interests and then they don’t come, and maybe someone else in another area are getting baptisms, sometimes that is a little frustrating because man you’ve put in effort too, you know, and you’ve been praying and you’ve been working and eventually it comes, but you do feel a little level of competition and you wonder what the brethren are thinking if you are not as big a soul winner as your colleague... So, the stress is there because we are under the gun, there is a little heat, they put a little pressure on you... ‘What are you doing? Are you being lazy, are you working?’” (PFG3)

“Sometimes when leaders double speak and they see issues that they dodge them or pretend they do not exist, that is a serious discouragement for the pastor. What might happen at another time is that a pastor may soon learn to close his eyes to issues in some churches just to patch things over and pass it on to the next pastor. And that may not help us.” (PFG5)

“I had a conference president where he would send spies, and would sneak around and then had a meeting with my elders without me so that they could tell everything bad about me, and try to

get accusations. He got run out, but you have that kind of administration periodically sometimes.”(PFG2)

### *Lack of Appropriate Conflict Resolution*

When conflict occurs, whether at the local church level, or with church leadership, pastors identified the need for conflict resolution to be approached from a Biblical perspective and conducted appropriately. When appropriate conflict resolution did not occur, pastors’ stress increased.

“There needs to be some time maybe the church and the pastor need to be in group therapy or something. Or some form of it. Where we learn how to get along when we disagree.” (PFG2)

“When the conference finally got around to intervening after that [conflictual] Board meeting, we were not invited to go meet with the Board. They met for two hours and heard everything they wanted to hear without us being there. To me that is un-Biblical.” (PFG3)

“ I think what they could do is realize that we have some rebellious churches, we have some dying churches—not all of them, and there are good members in all of them, but when it comes down to it, they need to sit down with pastor, church together, and say Biblically, where he is off base. Or is this just different from the way you’ve always done it, which is driving you in the grave anyway.” (PFG3)

“I think the Conference needs to have some kind of a conflict management team and at a local church when something is elevated to the point of where this has become a major distraction and ministry is not happening, then the conflict resolution team comes in and the purpose is not to find an excuse to remove the pastor or fight a pastor. The purpose is to resolve the issue that everybody could state and still treat each other with dignity and respect. “(PFG5)

### *Moving Pastors Due to Conflict*

Pastors reported that in lieu of conflict resolution, or when conflict resolution was not successful, they or someone they knew were transferred to new districts. For pastors, this threat of being moved caused significant stress and made it difficult to address conflict appropriately.

“I think there has been too many times where I had seen let’s just send him out or let’s give them a new pastor, and I don’t think that works very well.” (PFG2)

“And you know, if I have to lose my job because I clapped, I mean that is ridiculous, isn’t it? Or if I read some non-Adventist author? That is crazy. That is why I thought, ‘Am I gonna be in trouble, because I have a whole library full of non-Adventist authors?’ That is just not helpful to us. That is added stress.” (PFG4)

“And the members have known then that if they talk to the conference enough, we can get rid of this pastor. And it has happened and I’ve even heard that in the new district where I’m at where they say, ‘Well, you know we didn’t like the pastor we just have to make a few calls and the conference will move them.’ Some of us have tougher skin and we would be glad to stick through it so that the church could grow, but it seems like they are a little quick to move and that’s all I’m going to say.” (PFG3)

“Over the years as I have observed it in my life and in other pastors and churches, church’s that are able to win conference support were not moving a pastor as quite as often. And pastors who get moved too often never really learn how to get along with the church.” (PFG2)

“I got a call from the conference: ‘What’s going on? Your Board just met (which I didn’t know about) and said they don’t want you in the pulpit again’ and they [the conference] upheld that. To me, that just undercut everything and I was moved to another district because of that.” (PFG3)

### **Alleviating or Minimizing The Negative Impact Of Conflict**

In spite of the many sources of conflict and stress, pastors also shared information about how to alleviate the stress related to conflict. Pastors reported that having the support of the higher levels of church organization was the primary way to mitigate the stress associated with conflict.

### **Church Administrative Support**

Participants identified several specific type of church administrative support that included the conference administration being accessible for problem solving, defending the pastors in times of conflict, and using a Biblical approach to conflict resolution. The following quotes from participants illustrate these varying types of church administrative support.

“But that was so helpful to know that the local conference administration trusted us and they said that we are not going to hear all of these complaints and move you immediately and sort of play into what everybody is saying. We trust you, we are going to work with you and we are not going to allow all of this kind of stuff to happen. I found that incredibly helpful to know that I had their support, which gave me more confidence and ability to take on the tough issues and that I didn’t need to be afraid if I upset the highest paying tithe member person, that the conference would still have my back and they wouldn’t move me if I did something wrong. So I found that to be a really helpful thing, where it gave me confidence.” (PFG2)

“I’ve got a conference director, ministerial director that if you have an issue, call him and within a few hours or 24 hours I’m already getting a response in the field. So, I have no stress just because of availability.” (PFG3)

“I think it has been helpful for me to know that the conference backs me. I have felt in every conference I have worked in, I’ve felt supported by conference administration, and never criticized. I think they have always encouraged Matt. 18 principle to be followed and I know that the president here does that if somebody goes to him with a complaint about a pastor, he says, “Well, have you talked to the pastor?” I don’t know that you can avoid the stress, I just want to affirm that situations where administration is supporting the pastors, that is really important.” (PFG4)

“But a few people got together and called the conference president and he came down and he met with them and he called me in and we met with me and he said, ‘Now look, you have some people in this congregation that are pretty upset with you.’ and he laid it out. He said here’s why. And he said, “I defended you to the hilt. You are one of mine, I picked you. I am going to defend you.”... It was a turning point in my life. But I was eternally grateful that he never gave any of my members anything more than he was on my side. And then he got with me privately, behind closed doors and I was able to take a wrap on the knuckles.” (PFG2)

### **Stress and Challenges Related to Pastor Role Expectations**

This section addresses the following questions: (1) What elements comprise the pastoral professional role? (2) Where do pastoral expectations come from? (3) How are these expectations communicated and internalized by pastors?

#### **Pastoral Role Expectation Stressors**

Defining a pastor’s role can be difficult due to the number of expectations placed on them by their congregation, by church administrators and the expectations that they place on themselves. Participants reported that the quantity of expectations they experienced was stressful. In addition, pastors also reported that these expectations at times conflicted with each other, leaving pastors feeling confused about how to proceed and increasing subsequent stress.

#### **Quantity and Types of Expectations**

Pastors described a number of expectations of various types placed on them. As the participants assessed the volume of expectations, they experienced is as unrealistic and overwhelming. Thus, there is a sense of inadequacy that arises from the inability to measure up to these unrealistic expectations.

“[Members expect you to be] almost like you are Jesus. When you come in and your shadow hits them they are supposed to get well. I’m serious. It is the same ol’, same ole’. You are supposed to be all in all. You are supposed to be the best, have the best and work for less.” (PFG5)

“Because there is always going to be more to do than you can do and you have to decide is this is how much I can do and I will do that and be satisfied that and live with the fact that there is a whole lot more than I cannot do, that I would like to do and feel like I ought to do. But I am only one person and this is what I can do. And to live comfortably with that fact just to say yep but I cannot do it.” (PFG2)

“There is an expectation that the laity have of the pastor, and I think sometimes leadership perpetuates in a way that says, the pastor is supposed to run the programs. As a result of that laity says, ‘that is what we pay you for, that is why we pay tithe. It is your job to do evangelism. It is your job to do the visits. It is your job to make the phone calls, it is your job to be the chairman of this, that and the other, because that what we pay you for.’ And I hope the new generation of pastors pay attention to that. Some of us older generation of pastors did not. And we ended up losing our families. We ended up having children who are bitter towards the church and we ended up having wives who don’t want to be married to pastors anymore because they don’t know that guy. That is not the person they married. That person was never home and when they are home they are too tired, they couldn’t interact because the pastor became everything to everybody.” (PFG5)

### **Conflicting Expectations**

Participants discussed a number of ways in which expectations come in conflict with one another. For example, the needs of the church members are sometimes in opposition to the needs of the church administrators. Each entity has its own expectation in regards to how the pastor should prioritize time, focus and resources. Additionally, the pastor also has expectations of his or her own that might conflict with either the congregation or the church administrators. These conflicting expectations increased stress for these pastors.

“There are expectations from each church of what you have to be as a pastor, and it is different for every church. But I felt that the members and the conference and other pastors that you work with even, they have preconceived ideas of what you should do as a pastor. To some degree that is great, you learn and it is a learning opportunity and it is a school of hard knocks sometimes.” (PFG2)

“This is your primary responsibility, to maintain your spiritual life by reading the Bible and praying.” And many times I’ve thought of those words because if I take time from other things that people might expect me to be doing, and say I just really need to read and pray right now, I feel guilty for doing that. I feel like there is all this other stuff that is screaming for my attention and I’m not doing that and here I am and sometimes I think members think I don’t do anything because they don’t see me actively involved when I am in the study spending time in prayer.” (PFG4)

“So I put together a little survey on my own. Let’s say that I worked 50 hours per week. How many hours a week do you think that I should spend in each of these areas? And I put down a

number of things; sermon preparation, pastoral visiting, evangelism, with the kids/ youth in the church doing stuff with them. Went through the whole list. Whole week for 50 hours in each of these things and I gave it to my congregation and I gave it to all the people in the conference office. And they were kind enough to do it for me. I tallied the results and I found that the conference expectations and the congregational expectations were absolutely totally opposite of each other. They were totally inverse mirrors of each other. The congregation wanted me to spend the most time with was kids, the youth and the church. The conference didn't care if I did that at all. The conference wanted me to spend most of my time in evangelism. The congregation didn't care if I spent any time in evangelism at all. The whole thing was just reversed. So I decided after that since I will not be able to please everybody, I would just do my own thing.” (PFG2)

### **Alleviating Stress by Managing Pastoral Role Expectations**

The pastors offered two primary ways in which they reduced the stress associated with the amount, types and sometimes-conflicting expectations of the pastor role. The two main methods of role expectation management included (1) setting personal boundaries and (2) investing time in training church members in regards to what pastoral expectations should be.

#### **Setting Boundaries**

Whether the boundaries focused on work duties, accepting responsibility, or setting aside time for family, pastors reported that setting limits as crucial in stress reduction.

“I was trained by CD Brooks who brought up Adventist Home at evangelism field school while we were doing a meeting, and said the pastor's first duty is to his home. And then he said, ‘Brethren, when church is over I take my wife home first, then I'll come back. I want to be sure she is taken care of, that the meal is prepared and then I do what I have to do. But my first duty is in my home.’ So with that and with me coming into the ministry with a family, that is what it was. We didn't answer the phone. We put on an answering machine when it was suppertime. And I drove the children to school and picked them up and brought them home, and when I couldn't she did, but it is from a different working models.” (PFG5)

“But somewhere we have to draw the line and say, you know, someone does need to do that. It may kill us to let the grass grow three feet high instead of us doing it because they expect it, but sooner or later they'll get the point and I think we draw the line on that.” (PFG3)

#### **Training about Expectations**

Some participants offered ideas and suggestions for to engage in educating and training congregations in what the pastor role does and what it does not include. While some pastors did their own congregational education, others voiced the desire for church administrators to be proactive in educating church members.

“There are a lot of expectations from the members to the pastor. But those will only go as far as I choose to let them and we need to know what we are really called for and I remind my churches often that the last I knew, I’ve never seen a shepherd who produces sheep. Sheep produce sheep.” (PFG3)

“I think with the Division especially, and maybe Unions, but probably more Divisions can do is train and providing reasonable expectations of what a pastor’s role should be and what it is not. You know, ‘he is not your babysitter, he is not your maintenance man, he is not your janitor nor is he your yard’s man.’” (PFG4)

“Now one of the things that I found very helpful is I have had church administrators go over what pastoral expectations were. And they have been helpful in being able to give direction to even work with the congregation. “This is what we are expecting your pastor to do.” Just to lay it out and to make it, it’s helpful. Because then there is a little idea.” (PFG2)

### **Social Support Stressors and Stress Alleviators**

Researchers investigated the questions, “How do pastors experience stress from lack of social support? And “What strategies do pastors engage to gain and benefit from social support? This section reviews the findings from the analysis surrounding the issue of loneliness and lack of social support for pastors and ways that pastors find to address these issues in their lives.

#### **Barriers to Pastor Social Support**

Focus group participants shared various types of barriers that contributed to social isolation, loneliness, and the experience of lack of social support. These barriers appeared to be a complex mix of internalized rules and beliefs about the pastoral role and how those beliefs impinge on personal and professional boundaries and as well as a lack of opportunities for social support initiated by conference administration.

#### **Internalized Belief Barriers about Vulnerability**

When pastors hold beliefs that they should not be vulnerable or allow anyone to see their personal struggles, then they are more susceptible to social isolation. The following quotes from participants illustrate this internal struggle with reluctance to share their challenges and burdens with others.

“Some of us are more open. Some of us are more lone-rangers or closed or whatever term you want to use. There is, and this is just self, as you mentioned, ‘pride’. If I am reluctant to share with my brother, nobody can fix that problem, not even God himself. I have to choose. And so, if I am closed with accountability, with that social structure, that network of support because I am embarrassed for him to know, then sure it is going to create stress.” (PFG3)



“I like what he said about accountability partner. That is healthy, not everybody is that vulnerable, seriously. Pastors have pride; we don’t want that be vulnerable to have an accountability partner so I commend him.” (PFG3)

### **Barriers Related to Beliefs about Spouse and Family Boundaries**

Some barriers to receiving social support, particularly from family members centered on the pastor beliefs that their spouses and children either could or should not be sounding boards for them and offer them the support they needed. The following quotes from focus group participants offer insights into these belief barriers preventing family members from providing social support to the pastors.

“I think that this is the crux of pastors failing in ministry, where ministry at times can be so lonely. Because, believe it or not, I do not believe that your spouse always understands what you do. If you tell her the experience, ‘How was Board Meeting?’ I just say, ‘Fine’. If I tell her this person cursed me out, how is that going to affect her next Sabbath when she sees this person? ‘How was Business Meeting?’ ‘Oh, you know it was fine. It was just long and I’m tired. I just need a shower and go to bed.’ If I tell her that somebody says they want to kill my child, which is her child, which I had a threat before, how would that help her in her spiritual growth?” (PFG5)

“The challenge for me has been, when you move to a new church, you are going to be meeting the people as a pastor and you’ll start building relationships. For us the challenge has been my wife often feels isolated. She has just had to uproot, leave everything she knows including close friends, and start over. And she is not going to all the appointments I’m going to, she is not meeting everybody, she is not sitting on the committees and the boards and so it is a longer more difficult process for the spouse.” (PFG4)

“I dare say that spouses maybe are more isolated than pastors. My wife just told me recently, I don’t have a friend that I can call. No one ever calls me and says “Hey, let’s hang out”. We have been in Maryland 11 years now and she doesn’t have one person, a female friend who would say let’s go shopping.” (PFG4)

“I just realized that I can’t talk to my wife. I can’t talk to my daughter who is my secretary of the same church, who do I talk to? My kid Daniel who has worked here sometimes? Talk to the dogs. “(PFG2)

### **Barriers Related to Lack of Social Support Opportunities Offered by Administration**

In addition to the internalized beliefs and rules about sharing personal struggles and challenges to achieve needed social support, the pastors noted that church administration sometimes cautioned about maintaining boundaries with congregants. This belief surrounding professional boundaries

added to the pastors' sense of isolation. In addition, pastors identified a lack of opportunities provided by some conferences to interact with other pastors.

“As a young pastor coming up through the ranks, I often heard this expressed one way or another. Don't get too close to your members, you have to keep yourself...you can't be really vulnerable with them because you have to lead them. That is one of those methods of determining that sort of isolation that ministers often feel especially early in the day when we are out in the middle of nowhere sometimes. So I think that one of the things that often happens is that our pastoral social orientation is not to the congregation, but is to the conference. And in most cases that isn't very helpful.” (PFG2)

“So as a pastor I will say that in my previous conference it seemed like collegiality camaraderie was much more engendered by the conferences intentional effort at pastors meetings and other events including families, building relationships between more than just the pastor but the pastoral families as well. I can't quite put my finger on why it hasn't happened as much here. I've been here 11 years now and I'm starting to feel like I'm making connections with other pastors, but not even after 11 years to the degree that I had in other places I have been.” (PFG4)

“So I think there should be more events from the Family Ministries Department which is very intentional. A time for pastors to have their spouses together, not in the setting of a lecture, but rather in a setting where they can talk together. If you are put in a district of 8 or 9 pastors, you get together and go as a family, get to know each other. You know if we go to a conference room and get to know each other nobody is going to talk. So I think more of that is needed.” (PFG4)

“I'd like to share what the previous conference I was in was doing. We had twice a year a retreat which included families. We started Sunday night to Wednesday morning. All meetings were in the morning. Afternoon is more family time. That is when you will see the camaraderie develop.” (PFG4)

### **Social Support Facilitators and Isolation Alleviators**

To help alleviate this isolation, pastors expressed the importance of actively building a social network. Pastors' social support sources included: (1) friends and mentors, (2) spouses and family; (3) peer pastors; and (4) current and former church members.

### **Supportive Friends or Mentors**

Participants shared the importance of having close and trusting relationships with individuals who offer both accountability and support. When the friends or mentors were proactive in initiating contact, pastors reported an increased consistency in the level of support they experienced.

“He came from outside of my district to visit me, he said, ‘So tell me Andy, how's it going? How are you feeling about this? Tell me what you are excited about, what is bothering you.’ And he

would rejoice with me on days and he would, out of his wisdom, because he had been at it for a while, he would give me some simple things to try. He wanted me to try this and see what would happen. It was never like, ‘if you would do this Andy and report to me on Monday!’ It was a lot more personal, he would pray for my wife and just visit with us and eat at our table and probably he saved my life and my ministry.” (PFG2)

“I have a couple of very close friends that I can tell anything. And they can tell me anything that are my peers and I have a couple of older people who are mentors that I can call and get support and encouragement, sometimes correction and rebuke from. That has really been very strong for me.” (PFG5)

“But find a friend, and pray for a friend that God will give you someone that you can just be real with and you know, just let it out. And then, also someone, an older minister who is experienced who knows the Lord that you can trust, especially if it is an older couple that the wife can give support to your wife, then I have found that to be tremendous. (PFG5)

“I have a friend , Bob in Canada, and if I don’t call him he calls me, he’ll say ‘Richard, I haven’t heard from you for a while. How is life? What is going on? How are you feeling? How is your relationship? How is your sex life? How are your finances?’ He really takes me through everything. From CPE I learned to do that, I learned that I needed somebody that could hold me accountable. And Bob holds me accountable and he calls me if I don’t call him. He just asks honest, straight up, frank questions. ‘How’s the members treating you? The last time I heard you were really struggling in E\_\_\_\_\_, how has things improved? How are things going?’ We have that relationship and that is great for me. “(PFG5)

“Ideally, I think if it is possible you need all of those forms of support. I think being able to have it at home is good, but it is not enough. You need a friend, but that is not enough because it becomes very subjective between you and them. Having someone that has some age and experience that can correct you is also very important. (PFG5)

### **Family and Spousal Support**

For many pastors, family and especially spouses were a built-in, foundational level of support. Several pastors reported that home was a safe place to unwind, to build camaraderie and to experience peace.

“Home is not always peaches and cream—but my wife is a great support to me and that is great. As the Lord sanctifies and grows us, it gets better and better.” (PFG5)

“But the best thing to unwind is my family; my children, my wife, my grandchildren so on and so forth.” (PFG2)

“I will come home and ask my wife if she wants to sit out for a while and she says, “yeah” so we will be out there and just converse. I find that at this stage in my life that is cathartic. And being

around other people who at least acknowledge us and just want to be our neighbors and friends on a casual basis. That is a real peace for me.” (PFG2)

“But see my wife would be my accountability partner. I can tell her everything and she tells me everything so I have one too, it is just my wife.” (PFG3)

“But the salvation to me was my family. I had a family, a wife and kids when I came in. She knew enough (she went through those classes) to rub the knots on my head when I came in. And we could do things as a family and have peace.” (PFG5)

### **Pastoral Peer Support**

Another source of social support comes from other pastors. Spending time with peers whom they perceive as having an understanding about their reality was reported to be particularly helpful. Activities such as playing, praying and talking together were all identified as useful tools for building social support amongst these participants.

“But, particularly what I would recommend in terms of other pastors is that you find at least a peer that you can trust that is in ministry that knows what being in ministry is like, someone you can talk to...”(PFG5)

“But there is that support among a multi-staff church. You have the ability to be supportive of each other. And I think that we talk most of our stuff out here. And we are done with it so when we go home we are with our family. No but you know it is therapeutic. Sometimes you don’t want to share too much with your kids but sometimes we have had some of the best laughs with what happens with our kids in church. But I need to say this, this multi-staff group here is unique. Because what happens here doesn’t happen in every multi-staff group.” (PFG2)

“I have a handful of pastor friends that I call and say, ‘How’s things going?’ I got a pastor friend that we are prayer partners. I have an accountability partner, so that is how I stay connected. It is not Facebook, it is personal or it is on the phone.” (PFG3)

“There are about three guys I could call who have been in the ministry for a long time. You know, these guys I could call and talk to, say, ‘Please pray with me, I’m struggling, totally frustrated.’” (PFG5)

“We [other pastors] played ball together and then we set up where we went out and fellowshiped with our wives together. We went out together and so we developed not only that friendship, but even closer membership where we could call one another and say, ‘How you doin’ man? Whatcha doin’?’ ‘. Or ‘Hey, hey, I got a problem, I need to deal with something, we need to talk. Can we go out to lunch together?’ Or ‘Let’s go out to the park and play ball together.’ We could do that because we developed those kind of relationships and, like you say....get senior people....I have conference presidents I call.” (PFG5)

## **Support from Current or Former Church Members**

“When I would leave a congregation, I was very deliberate in saying that we have to acknowledge as a pastor and as a congregation, now I am no longer your pastor, I am your friend. I would signal that in terms of relationship so that they would have a better understanding as a result. And now as a friend I can meet, greet, socialize with them as a friend and now they can go be over there with that person whoever that is.”(PFG2)

“Although it historically has been frowned upon, certainly in my last two congregations, I had a couple of church members in each church who were just really good friends. And that was very helpful. But historically, that has been... discouraged.” (PFG4)

## **Conclusions and Recommendations**

This analysis offers insights into the social reality of Adventist pastors regarding the challenges and stresses of pastoral ministry. The analysis also addressed the factors that alleviate or mitigate these stressors and challenges. While this analysis cannot offer quantifiable and generalizable insights into pastor stresses and challenges, these findings provide information about the context for the stresses, the conditions under which the stresses occur and the strategies used to meet and overcome stresses and challenges. The analysis of the pastor perspective shapes our recommendations to church administrators, pastoral families, and congregants interested in strengthening pastoral families.

### **Spiritual Challenges and Spiritual Life Enhancers**

This report revealed a number of spiritual challenges and barriers to achieving a desired level of spirituality for these participants. These included: (1) knowing how to define spirituality; (2) meeting the demands of their job; (3) struggling to keep Sabbath while fulfilling their pastoral duties; and (4) viewing typical ministry “success” indicators as a measure of their own spirituality.

Focus group participants also shared factors that enhanced their spiritual lives. The primary themes for spiritual enhancement included: (1) accepting their human limitations; (2) focusing on the enjoyable aspects of ministry, (3) utilizing self-care; and (4) engaging in meaningful personal worship experiences.

### ***Recommendations Regarding Spiritual Challenges***

From these findings, it appears that many of the challenges associated with achieving a healthy level of spirituality relate to internal processes, both cognitive and emotional, as well as individual action steps.

When pastors are confused about what spirituality is and how it manifests itself in their lives, they feel challenged and stressed. Conversely, when pastors are intentional about identifying what constitutes healthy spirituality they enjoy enhanced spiritual welfare.

Establishing personal and professional boundaries also appears as a central issue for the pastor's level of spiritual health. Becoming overwhelmed by the demands of the job, struggling to keep the Sabbath because of pastoral duties, and confusing job success with spiritual health are all indicators of a lack of clarity about personal identity and values (Who am I and what do I stand for?) as well as a lack in establishing a professional boundaries (What are the job demands that I will accept and what imposed demands will I reject?).

Finally, beyond cognitive and emotional clarification, and boundary setting, some pastors engaged in active strategies that proved valuable such as using self-care techniques and/or seeking out meaningful worship experiences. These practices enhanced the pastors' spiritual lives.

Therefore, we recommend that conference administrators provide pastors opportunities to clarify their thinking and beliefs (values) about healthy spirituality, to be proactive in setting personal and professional boundaries, and to actively engage in self-care activities. For many pastors, formal instruction and training/education in these approaches will likely be needed. Venues such as pastor retreats would provide an ideal setting for such growth.

### **Financial Stress and Challenge and Financial Stress Alleviators**

Financial stress among study participants emerged as a principle theme in this analysis. The sources of financial stress included: (1) educational debt, (2) insufficient stand-alone income, (3) pressure to spend on Adventist education, (3) unclear benefits, and (4) changing key benefit policies.

The two main themes that emerged in regards to alleviating financial stress included: (1) financial education or providing pastors with financial advisors and (2) increased assistance with moving expenses.

### ***Recommendations Regarding Financial Challenges***

While it is unlikely there will be any change to the pay scale for pastors, SDA church administrators could adapt several proactive strategies to alleviate financial stress for pastor families. First, undergraduate students and non-sponsored graduate students seeking theology degrees should be advised about student loan debt and its future impact on their finances. Students are often uneducated about how \$80,000 in student loan debt translates to large monthly payments following graduation.

Second, pastoral families must be free to decide, without pressure from church administration, whether or not Adventist education is financially feasible for their children. Each pastoral family has its own unique financial situation that must be honored and supported by administration and congregants.

Third, conferences can and should be as clear and consistent as possible in helping pastors to understand their benefits packages, including the reimbursement available for geographic moves. When conferences are proactive in assisting pastors to take advantage of the benefits provided, the pastors feel more loyalty to and trust in church administration.

Finally, pastors could benefit from ongoing financial planning and financial literacy education. If conferences could be more intentional about financial education, it may go far in reducing the financial pressures and stresses experienced by pastors.

### **Conflict Stress and Minimizing the Negative Impact of Conflict**

Pastors experienced increased stress when conflicts arose at the local church level and with church administration. The consequences of conflicts at the local church level included: (1) creating a lack of trust between the pastor and their church members, and (2) contributing to thoughts of leaving the ministry. Conflicts with church administration primarily centered on difficulties associated with the perceived administrative mishandling of conflict, including relocating pastors in times of conflict. Two typical types of conflict with church leadership included pressure to meet expectations and lack of support or trust shown by conference leaders.

Conversely, pastors reported reduced stress when they experienced having the support of the higher levels of church organization. The specific type of support included the conference administration being accessible, defending them in times of conflict, and using a Biblical approach to conflict resolution.

### ***Recommendations Related to Conflict Resolution***

While conflict is an expected part of any organization or human interaction, when conflict resolution is handled poorly, the attending stress increases. Best practices and Bible-based conflict resolution protocols should be instituted and practiced from the individual conflicts between pastor and parishioner to group and/or organizational conflicts between churches and conferences. This protocol should be taught in undergraduate pastoral education through graduate-level training. In addition, the conflict resolution protocols should be reinforced in pastor training retreats as a way to keep the protocols up-to-date and as a way to institutionalize healthy and productive conflict resolution across systems.

### **Stress and Stress Alleviators Related to Pastor Role Expectations**

Because there is a lack of clear definitions to the pastor role, pastors in this study noted that role expectations proliferate. This role expansion occurs by congregations, by church administrators and through the expectations pastors place on themselves. Participants reported that the sheer quantity of expectations from these sources tended to increase stress. In addition, pastors reported that these expectations conflicted with each other, leaving pastors feeling confused about how to proceed.

The pastors offered two primary ways in which they reduced the stress associated with the amount, types and sometimes-conflicting expectations of the pastor role. The two main methods of role expectation management included (1) setting personal boundaries and (2) investing time in training church members in regards to what pastoral expectations should be.

### ***Recommendations Regarding to Pastor Role Expectations***

Helping pastors to understand the bounds of their role as pastor is key to reducing stress among Adventist pastors. Because of the lack of clear guidelines about what a pastor's job entails and clear markers for success, pastors continue to struggle with confidently setting realistic goals for their ministry. An important insight from one participant who conducted his own inquiry about role expectations was that church members and church administrators often have conflicting and competing interests in the use of the pastor's time and energy. These competing expectations should be defined by church administration with church member input so that pastors have a clearer picture about their ministerial mandates.

### **Barriers to and Facilitators of Pastor Social Support**

Lack of social support among pastors in this study was associated with social isolation and loneliness often resulting in discouragement in pastoral ministry. Internalized beliefs about the pastoral role and appropriate sources of support proved to be barriers to getting the needed social support. For example, when pastors held beliefs that they should not be vulnerable or allow anyone to see their personal struggles, they were more susceptible to social isolation. Other barriers to receiving social support, particularly from family members centered on the pastor beliefs that their spouses and children either could or should not be sounding boards for them and offer them the support they needed.

Beyond internal barriers, participants reported a lack of conference-initiated opportunities for accessing social support. In addition, pastors noted that church administration sometimes cautioned about maintaining boundaries with congregants. This belief surrounding professional boundaries added to the pastors' sense of isolation.



To help alleviate this isolation, pastors expressed the importance of actively building a social network. Pastors' successful social support sources included: (1) friends and mentors, (2) spouses and family; (3) peer pastors; and (4) current and former church members.

### ***Recommendations Regarding Pastor Social Support***

The findings related to appropriate sources of social support for pastors raise important questions about how pastors, parishioners, and church administrators view the pastor role. If a pastor is expected to be a perfect example to parishioners in their personal and professional lives, if the relationship is "top-down" or one directional (the pastor is always the helper, the church member is always the recipient of help), then pastors cannot and should not receive social support from their families or church members. On the other hand, if pastors approach their ministry from a position of "learning and growing together," then a vulnerable, authentic, and mutually supportive relationships with church members are appropriate. It would seem that the healthier option would contain elements in the second model that is more focused on mutuality beneficial relationship building.

## **PASTOR SPOUSE STRESS**

### **CHALLENGES AND PROTECTIVE FACTORS**

This report reviews the findings from the analysis of data from five pastor spouses' focus groups. The primary areas of stress and challenge researchers addressed included spiritual and financial challenges, dealing with conflict, stressors related to pastoral expectations, and stressors related to lack of social support. Researchers also investigated the pastor spouses' perceptions about conditions and factors associated with alleviating stress and facilitating relief in these areas.

### **Spiritual Challenges and Enhancers**

This section identifies the predominant themes that emerged from the pastor spouse focus groups regarding areas of spiritual challenge. Researchers inquired about the factors that increase stress through spiritual challenges as well as factors that strengthen spiritual lives.

### **Spiritual Life Challenges**

Pastor spouses shared a number of challenges to achieving the spiritual life that they desired. These challenges included: (1) the cycle of ministerial life and the ability to achieve work/life balance; (2) the unpredictability of the pastor-spouse's schedule; (3) and the social isolation that sometimes accompanies the pastor-spouse role.

### **Cycle of Ministerial Life and Work/Life Balance**

One of the primary challenges to maintaining a strong spiritual life among pastor spouses is getting caught in the cycle of ministerial life and finding appropriate work/life balance. Pastoral

spouses recounted experiencing spiritual challenges when, as an active partner in ministry, they focus on meeting congregants' needs and then struggle to maintain personal and family boundaries. This pull on the pastor spouse's time results in reducing the time available for personal spiritual development.

“A lot of times I've found a challenge for my spirituality is not feeling guilty about setting up those boundaries so that I can come apart and rest awhile and spend my personal time with Jesus, because in ministry, we understand that we reach out to people, but what happens is there is this creep into the time that is supposed to be for you and the Lord.” (PSFG3)

“I would say just from personal experience, getting so wrapped up in 'doing' that you forget the motivation behind the “doing” is the Spirit of God... You know, you get so busy that you get exhausted and you just lose every motivation and you come to find out that wait a minute, you know what? All this time I've been operating by myself and that is not right, so you can get weary of well doing.” (PSFG2)

“I've come to the place where I just can't do it on my own strength. I recognize that without the Holy Spirit filling me, I don't have anything to give. Or at least, anything that is long lasting, because I too am a 'doer,' and if I'm not careful I could be doing and doing and not sitting at the feet of Jesus. So I think I've had to run out of gas, like you have talked about, to learn how much I depend on Him.” (PSFG2)

### **Unpredictable Work Schedule and Work Load**

Another factor that adds to the spiritual challenges of pastoral spouses is the oftentimes-unpredictable work hours, schedule, and workload of the pastor. This unpredictability adds to the challenges of developing and maintaining spiritual growth for some pastor spouses.

“I think it [husband's work load] interferes [with spouse's spiritual life]. I think probably other jobs do too. Life interferes, you know, but I think for us it interferes, because there is no set schedule. You can't, even if I was a morning person, get up at 4 o'clock every morning because there are nights when he comes in at 11 or 12. You know, but then there are other days he has to leave first thing or before first thing and so there is really not a predictable schedule of, 'OK, every morning we do it [worship] at this time.’” (PSFG4)

“I have found that is the biggest challenge I have [is] actually dealing with a real need. You know, this member really does need to talk it out to midnight, but I still have to get up, and I still need to spend time with the Lord and I still need to drive two hours to work.” (PSFG3)

“I thought that being a part of a pastoral family that everything would flow perfectly when it came to worship, that we would get up at the same time, that we would have worship in the morning, and other people seem to have that, and then us...it is like, OK, you grab the devotional book, we'll do it in the car...put the cereal in the bag for on the way to school, and

there are times when we stop and look at each other and we are just like,.....is this the way it is supposed to be? There were times when I felt a little ashamed that somehow I didn't find the time to sit down at 6:15 and have devotional every single day at 6:15 with my family, and yet at other times there was someone who called on the phone at that time and said "so and so has passed" "so and so has issues" whereas if it is someone else, if the phone rings, they have more of an option not to answer it." (PSFG4)

### **Social Isolation and Lack of Social Support**

A third factor pastor spouses noted that adds to their spiritual challenges is the social isolation that often accompanies the pastor-spouse role. Social isolation will be discussed at length in another part of this report; however, it is important to note this lack of social support as a challenge to developing a strong spiritual life.

"And you know we need to be ministered to too, and Christ is available for us and we know it, but sometimes he has to use people. And so people need to learn to be sensitive and they need to understand that ministers and their families are sometimes isolated from support systems." (PSFG3)

"Sabbath used to be fun and I'd have kids and it would be a family time, but now I go to church and I sit and watch everybody else with their families and mine are gone. None of them are here. And I sit in the pew and watch all these wives with their husbands and mine's up there and everybody else gets a piece of him and I get the leftovers. Yeah, and I just miss not having family, so enjoy it while you can because there will come a day in church when you'll sit there all by yourself." (PSFG5)

### **Spiritual Life Enhancers**

Pastor spouses shared a number of circumstances and practices that enhanced their spiritual lives and reduced spiritual challenges. Some of the spiritual life enhancers included: (1) receiving social support and (2) making an intentional decision to prioritize spiritual development. The following quotes from participants illustrate these spiritual enhancers.

#### **Receiving Social Support**

Just as pastor spouses faced spiritual challenge due to social isolation, pastor spouses noted spiritual life enhancement when they were provided social support. Pastor spouses reported receiving social support from their husbands, friends, conference-related activities, and from other pastors.

"My husband. He knows me, he can tell when I'm going down that path and we just have that type of relationship and he'll come and say, listen, you need to stop and sometimes I don't want to stop. But, I have to remember he is my pastor too..... And I know he sees it, so I say OK you

what? Let me stop for a minute here and re-evaluate what I'm doing and get myself back connected with Christ.” (PSFG2)

“Having a friend, ... a friend that is a confidant, the one you can go to and say, ‘I don't want to have devotional today.’ And they are there to have prayer with you and build you up and be there for you and ... our web page, our Facebook for the pastor's wives is there to help build us back up.” (PSFG2)

[Speaking of Shepherdess ministry in conference] “I believe that they are very balanced, you know...nothing ever ends with negativity, it always ends with you, let's pray about it and the Lord will take care. You know, God has called you. But they are very transparent. They don't behave as though they don't ever go through anything. They don't behave as though they don't experience struggle...and it makes me feel like I can do this. You know, with God's help, I can do it.” (Baltazar-2) (PSFG2)

“Because I just had that stress taken off of me by another human and allowed me to feel better toward God, because God began to be like a slave driver to me, you know I thought he was expecting things and I wasn't able to live up to His expectations. But that man of God was able to relieve my own guilt and stress so that I was able to take a deep breath and connect.” (PSFG2)

### **Prioritizing Spiritual Life**

Pastor spouses noted that when they intentionally prioritized engaging in spiritual practices such as setting aside uninterrupted time for Bible reading, devotionals, and contemplation, their spiritual lives became stronger and more meaningful.

“I don't allow anything to interfere with my spiritual life because, to me, that's what makes me who I am, um, outside of a pastor's wife's role, so I don't let that affect anything that I do. (PSGF1)

“Just doing the devotions every morning, religiously, knowing that will take you through the day and you'll actually get more done on your 'to do' list if you start with that hour in the morning, because sometimes I feel that I could save that one hour of time if I start doing dishes now. But knowing that... without the Lord's strength you'll be crabby and—you know.” (PSFG2)

“From birth my parents always have taught me that I need to know the Lord for myself and read the Bible for yourself and seek the Lord for yourself, so I guess it's just been growing, growing, growing. So when I married to a pastor I guess I got stronger 'cause I know that I really got to know the Lord in a lot of situations for myself.” (PSGF1)

“For me it is unhurried time. I have to make sure I get to bed at a reasonable hour so that I can get up at a reasonable hour so that I don't have to rush. If I feel hurried in my devotions my mind is too much on my day, but if I can just take time, read a little bit about prayer before I pray, not hurry through my prayer and not hurry through my devotions, that is essential. (PSFG5)

“If there is that type of an atmosphere then I just find another place. Like if my husband is in the office and I’m kneeling and praying and he comes in the office and he is going to get on his computer and do whatever he is going to do, I just pick up my notepad and whatever I’m doing and I go to my upper room. Just find a new place. You’ve got to get away from the hurry. You have to get away from the hurry, even if you have to go outside and hide behind the shed. You got to get away from the hurry.” (PSFG5)

## **Financial Stressors and Stress Alleviators**

### **Financial Life Challenges**

Pastoral spouses shared their financial challenges in the context of income challenges and expense challenges. The income challenges focused on the pastor’s employment situation as well as the pastor-spouse’s employment challenges. In addition, pastor spouses discussed their fears about future income stability regarding retirement compensation.

### **Income Challenges for the Pastor**

Pastor spouses recounted two primary income challenges arising from their spouse being employed as a pastor: (1) Low pay rates for pastors in general; and (2) restrictions by the conference on their spouses’ ability to engage in outside employment (moonlighting).

#### *Low Pay Scale for Pastors*

Many pastor spouses acknowledged that some financial stress centers on the pay scale for pastors in the Adventist Church. The following quotes from focus group members illustrate this perception.

Interviewer: “Where does the financial stress come from?”

Participant: “Not getting paid as much as other people! Especially if you know that you have friends that are pastors but they are not Seventh-day Adventist pastors, and you know what they get paid and you are hoping that you never have to say what you get paid. It is an issue because others (non-Adventist pastors) get paid so much more than we do, and they get paid differently than we do.” (PSFG3)

“We are the only Adventists in our family... ‘The church is really big, why doesn’t your husband make enough money?’ I said, we don’t do it that way, we have a salary base and they are just dumfounded as to why we are not wealthy!” (PSFG4)

“Well, we also came from a secular job that we were accustomed to a six-figure income and when we went back into the ministry, well you know, we don’t get paid that much...” (PSFG5)

“We have a commitment trying to be debt free but it just seems like no matter how much we conserve there is just not enough with one income... (PSFG5)

### *Moonlighting Restrictions*

Pastor spouses reported in one focus group that the conference had a policy against obtaining any type of employment outside of pastoral work. This policy restriction increased the stress experienced by the pastor spouses in this group. In one case, the focus group participant took on extra work instead of the pastor-spouse in order to stay in compliance with the policy.

“I believe that whoever is in charge of that [employment policies] at the Conference should look at and sit down with each individual who wants to “moonlight” and see okay, when do you plan to work with us, when do you plan on working for yourself, etc., to make sure there is no conflict. But just to say “no” there shouldn’t be any conflicts, that puts us in a position where, unlike other people can change their financial success rate, we are put in a box, where it is like...do this, you have to do this job.” (PSFG4)

“Please don’t put limitations on our ability to make money profitably.” (PSFG4)

“My husband was a previous car salesman and he is a good one. Recently, he had a dealership say any time you want to come in and sell a car, you are good. So he said, ‘What if I could go in and sell a couple extra cars a month, one day a week?’ He’d only have to sell a couple of cars to tremendously help us out. On his day off.” (PSFG4)

“I got three jobs this last year, three part-time jobs so that we could get back up where we need to be [financially]. I did the moonlighting, because I can as the spouse. I worked like everything I can work.” (PSFG4)

### **Income Challenges for the Pastor-Spouse**

Pastor spouses recounted several ways in which financial challenge centered around their own employment: (1) through the expectation that they serve as an uncompensated partner in ministry; (2) by being taken advantage of when working for the church at a very low wage; (3) by job changes related to moving; and (4) through their perceived role conflicts with their ministry duties and their paid employment.

#### *Uncompensated ministry partner*

The perception that pastor spouses are seen as an unpaid extension of the pastor’s ministry was pervasive. Pastor spouses shared their views of being expected to “do” ministry alongside their spouses without compensation.

“You know you always seem available to do something in the church and most wives I know we are the unpaid help in this partnership, whereas if someone else comes in and they do Bible studies they are paid for being a Bible worker.” (PSGF1)

“Well, my job I can easily work 50+ hours a week because it is a sales oriented job and the problem that I find is you know you feel like you are working 7 days a week really, because you work those 50+ hours at the job and on the week-ends you are working all week-end with church stuff, so you just never feel like you get a break. It is really heavy sometimes. Everything is just intense. (PSFG5)

[VBS is passion of wife. But has to spend a lot of time and makes many trips using a lot of gas  
“So you know, the gas expense I think is a bigger deal than having someone clean. My husband is like, this should not be our job, to have to clean all of this at the end everybody leaves, you know, so then you are driving back for two more days to get everything put back up just like it goes... You know, because we don’t have money in the church to cover all this. We have to do it.” (PSFG5)

#### *Spouse working for church at low wage/spouse being taken advantage of*

A closely related theme to that of being an unpaid partner in ministry was the idea that at times, the pastor spouse will accept a job working for the church, but the expectations for the job are at a low wage or have unrealistic expectations attached to the job. The following quotes from focus group participants illustrate these experiences.

[Husband sick so quit nursing job to take care of and worked for church] Well in that focus I found myself becoming the secretary of our church and I thought, oh, well, I love doing this too, so this is great and they pay me \$75 a week which is, okay, a far cry from what I was making as a nurse absolutely, but okay because I know the church can’t afford much and I’m okay with that...I am working more hours and longer and doing more stuff there than I ever did working as a nurse and I’m sitting back going, what in the world did I get myself into? (PSFG5)

Well, I came in as an interim janitor for our church and they were supposed to be finding a new janitor and I was supposed to just be very temporary. Five months later I am still the janitor and I have not been paid for the last 3 months, and I was just talking with the treasurer last week about it. You know every time I talk to the treasurer it’s a new set of things that he wants in order to pay me...It is not that they didn’t even have the money, they had the money in the account. (PSFG5)

#### *Job changes related to moving*

While the majority of the information from focus group participants related to moving is handled in another section of this report, one concern in particular connects to the pastor spouse’s ability to generate income. This pattern of job changes increases financial challenge.

“When administration is deciding to move an individual, a pastor, they don’t take into account his family or his wife or the fact that the wife may be working and she may not be able to find a job which adds financial stress to the family along with the stress there is anyway, because a lot of women would prefer to stay at home and raise their children, but they can’t because of the economy that we live in. Maybe it is an excuse, but I really think there needs to be more sensitivity in that area because it doesn’t happen. Men are moved and it creates bitterness in the wife.” (PSFG3)

“Wives that can’t find jobs and they have good careers but they can’t find jobs” (PSGF1)

### *Perceived role conflicts*

Pastor spouses sometimes experiences conflict between their role as the pastor spouse and partner in ministry and having full-time employment. While they experience one as a calling or duty, the pastor spouse recognizes the income from the outside employment is essential for financial stability.

“I believe the stress comes from intellectually saying I need to work but... and then working, but because I’m working here doing this, I can’t do that.” (PSFG3.)

### **Retirement Concerns**

In addition to the present income challenges, pastor spouses also expressed considerable stress and fears about the financial challenges they may face in retirement. Some of the fears resulted from variation in the stock market while others came from the reality of experiencing frequent moves to new locations.

“The thing that scares me the most is our retirement. You know we don’t have any control over that and I have fears of waking up some morning and finding out something happened and our retirement is gone.” (PSFG5)

“Six years ago when the bottom dropped out of everything, we literally lost half of our retirement. More than half of our retirement.” (PSFG5)

[Anticipating retirement without being able to pay off their mortgage frightens more than one participant]“... the normal every day person that stays in the same job for 30 years when they retire, they bought their house 30 years ago and now they have a house that has no mortgage. I’ve looked at my retirement savings. I don’t know how I’m going to retire, ever... whatever district we end up with before we retire, and we’ll only be there 3-5 years on average, maybe 10 if we are really lucky. That is not enough time to get rid of a mortgage, so how do we retire?” (PSFG4)

[Will my husband have to work part-time after he retires?] It [living in a parsonage] doesn’t solve the retirement issue, because if you add Social Security plus the measly amount coming out



of that investment thing, it is not enough to make a mortgage payment and have food on the table and whatever medicines you have to buy because the retirement plan medically is not the same as the ‘when you are still working plan’. I know many pastors in my family included, who have gone back to work part-time in a little district, not particularly because they were wanting to continue pastoring, they were already in retirement—they needed the money to patch the gap so that they could pay the rent. And that is a terrible situation when you are 70 or 75 years old.” (PSFG4)

## **Expense Challenges**

Pastor spouse participants shared a number of expense challenges unique to the pastoral family. The primary challenge in terms of expense appears to center on mandatory geographical moves for pastors. A second expense challenge for pastor families is the obligation they sense for having their children attending Seventh-day Adventist schools. Under normal conditions, the pastor spouses would choose SDA education for their children, but when there is financial strain, they feel that they lack the freedom to reduce expenses in this way. The third major expense challenge focuses on the social expectations of the pastor family and the financial obligations associated with those expectations.

### *Mandatory Moves*

Several factors add to the financial stress connected with moving from one church district to another. The stressors include: (1) the unpredictability of when a move occurs and (2) the experience of not selling the home they currently owned. The following quotes from participants illustrate the various expense challenges connected to moving and not selling a home the family owned.

#### Unpredictability of When a Move Will Happen

[Moving was an issue for this participant who noted that] “the move is at such unpredictable times...many people can move when the market is up...We move when the call comes... Plus, you have to be in your home 5-10 years before they say you can even benefit from them.” (PSFG4)

“Should we buy a house? But we might be moved. There is so much involved in that, you are kind of scared to make certain decisions.” (PSFG2)

“My husband called the conference and said we are moving here and I’d like to buy a house. Can you give me some assurance that it would be okay for me to go ahead and buy a house that you are not planning to pull us up in two years or something?” (PSFG2)

#### Stress Related to Not Selling the House

“We were never able to sell the house. We have had several renters; it has been a nightmare because now it is considered an investment loan because we don’t live in it. Even with our rent we are not getting enough to pay the mortgage or what we owe on the house. (PSFG4)

“We still have our house, another house that we have in Birmingham and we have left Birmingham nine years ago or something like that and we still have that house. (PSGF1)

[Temporary double housing allowance on an upside down loan can be problematic] “This latest downturn has been horrible ...while it is very helpful that the conference that you go to offers to cover the payment on your previous house... on some occasions... may have to actually request that the conference not send the payment to the bank because as long as the conference sent the payment to the bank, couldn’t get any help with getting out from under a loan that was up side down. (258-266 PSFG4)

### *High costs associated with Adventist education*

While the pastor spouses reported their strong support of Adventist education, the participants shared their financial challenges in being able to afford the tuition rates, even with the Conference discounts. Participants from different conferences varied in how strong the expectation was that pastor’s children should be enrolled in the local school.

On the topic of financial/educational stress, pastor spouses shared their experiences with homeschooling their children. The stress associated with homeschooling focused on the perceived lack of support from the conferences to make homeschooling a viable option.

The quotes from participants illustrate the expectations and the concerns about the impacts financially to participate in Adventist Education, followed by the pastor spouses’ stress regarding homeschooling.

“Some conferences are a little more stiff with that... when my children were younger in other conferences, it was really a big deal if you did not send your child to church school. It could affect your future.” (PSFG4)

“New pastors coming in [to a conference] have to sign something that says they will put their kids in church school.” (PSFG4)

“I think about Christian education. I'm a strong person. I believe in Christian education and my husband's a pastor and sometimes there are places where you're moved you don't have a church school and so you have to make sacrifices to send your children to a boarding academy which is expensive even though they will give you 70% but you still have to come up with a certain amount.” (PSGF1)

“When your kids are in the academy or college. That is where I see, needing tuition [help], or people mortgage their homes.” (PSFG2)

“We couldn’t put them [their children] all in [Adventist school] at once, we could only do a little bit at a time... (PSFG5)

### Stress Associated with Homeschooling

“Now, with our children a stressor was Christian education and I homeschooled them. That's how they were able to transition and come here, but the cost of that was basically on us, the materials, especially if I didn't use something Adventist where they were gonna' reimburse 35 percent on whatever course. “(PSGF1)

[Respondents noted stressors related to choosing to homeschool and the conflict it caused because they were the pastor’s kids.] “... it is like they know what is better for your kids than you know what is better for your kids... It just seems to me that preserving the institution of Adventist Education is more important to the church than what a husband and wife feel is best for their children.” (PSFG4)

“...depends on the church that you are in. If your church has a school connected to it and the pastor does not send his kids to the school, it really damages the school, so I know that there is a lot of pressure from the conference educational department, not the pastoral ministry, to put your kid in school if there is a school attached to it. If there is not a school attached to it, you will have more lenience. And also if you have been here for a long time, you have more lenience. It probably varies from area to area.” (PSFG4)

[A mother of a child with special needs had this to add] “People don’t seem to understand that sometimes people homeschool because our schools haven’t done a very good job of special needs or gifted children. I have a child with dyslexia and ADHD and so in the regular school setting my son would drown. He needs one on one attention and we cannot afford to send him to the places that are specialized for children with that. So our option is to home school. “ (PSFG4)

### *Social Expectations Contributing to Financial Stress*

Pastor spouses recounted several types of social expectations that they equated with financial stress. These included the expectation that the pastor family leads out in contributing financially for (1) church outreach initiatives; (2) church social activities; and (3) general social expectations of the pastor family.

#### To Contribute Financially for Church Outreach Initiatives

Pastor spouses shared when the church in which they were serving engaged in outreach and there was little or no budget to support the effort. In these cases, the pastor family made personal contributions to these initiatives.

“Trying to get baptismal numbers up in small district...having to use own funds] especially when you have small churches, there is never money at the church so we would supplement for this or that and you hope that in your faithfulness something will come out of it, the Lord will bless. So my husband and I prayed and prayed and my husband says, okay well we are going to have a full evangelistic crusade...And the Lord blessed in that situation and we fasted and prayed for 40 days and the Lord provided \$3,000, but there have been other times when we covered everything, everything! (PSFG5)

“I mean even when money is short in a church most pastors and wives that I know end up going into our pockets. When there's evangelism, if my husband makes a plea for it he's going to lead out. It's like we have to raise this money and this is a sacrificial offer. My wife and I are going to come up with \$1,000.” (PSGF1)

### **Church Social Activities**

Participants in the pastor spouse focus groups shared their financial challenges as they engaged in the many social activities that the church hosted. The pastor spouses believe that the social expectation of the congregants is to have the pastor family represented at all church family events such as wedding and baby showers. The pastor spouses shared that while congregants were free to attend these events or not, they felt obligated to attend and to actively participate in and contribute financially to the event. The following quotes from participants illustrate the ways in which the participants experience this financial obligation.

“ ... you know, and also we're having the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary part for them and this person's getting married and I'm helping them with that and you got all of the social things that are going on and everyone thinks well, 'I want the pastor's wife to help me do that because she helped them do that and look how nice it was.'” (PSFG5)

“I think that is the harder part for us. We seem like we could manage the money pretty good, but all the expectations for all the stuff that your husband is doing the wedding, you've got to bring a present to this wedding, you know, and I can't sit there, I don't have time to sit and crochet or cross stitch something really nice or make the baby blankets that you see all these ladies do, but I'd be thinking, well maybe if I were staying home, but you know, I can't do that. (PSFG5)

“I have drawers in my craft room that I keep crafts for kids programs. Whenever I have leftovers I just save them because I know I'll use them again and I have drawers where I've kept things I've found on clearance or things like that when we can afford it and I just put it in there so that when birthdays or anniversaries or something special where the pastor is expected to have a gift. (PSFG5)

## **Social Expectations of Congregants Creates Financial Pressure**

Pastor spouses also shared that congregants held general expectations that created financial pressures. Participants recounted expectations regarding clothing, appearance,

“Then there is the expectations of what the family should wear. (PSFG5)

“We live in the highest income area in the nation, and so on one salary you can imagine we are drowning financially. Especially sending our sons to school. I cut my hair like twice a year because I can’t afford it. So when I do get a new dress or get my hair cut the comments are like, ‘oh my goodness, you got your hair done, it is beautiful!’ which you would think felt good, but it doesn’t feel good....it could be very demeaning.” (PSFG4)

“One participant shares her frustration about being judged for having a nice car] “But you can’t really win because my husband has always driven a car that the air conditioning doesn’t work or something was wrong and all of those problems and the last two cars that we have purchased, I said you know what, he is getting up in his 40’s, let’s purchase you one car that you can enjoy... ‘Oh, the pastor has a nice car, where is that money coming from?’ Well, I had to say, I purchased the car. If you don’t like it, you buy him a different one and he’ll drive it to church.” (PSFG4)

## **Financial Challenge Alleviation Factors**

Pastor spouses also recounted ways in which their financial challenges were sometimes alleviated. These included (1) the pastor spouse working to provide a second income; (2) careful financial planning; and (3) through answers to prayer or divine intervention. The following quotes from focus group participants demonstrate these ways of alleviating financial stress.

### **Pastor Spouse Providing a Second Income**

“Go to work. See the challenge though, again, I’m also transitioning, is that because of our husbands are compensated and we do ministry in the church and we don’t get a paycheck from the conference if you would, but I have found my attitude is that I want to fulfill what I believe the Lord is calling me to do in ministry, but I feel I need to earn an income because I understand what our bills are and it affects even what I can consider.” (PSFG3.)

“working- that alleviates a whole lot of stress. (Laughter) So that's all I can say because when you have two people that can maintain” (PSGF1)

### **Careful Financial Management**

“We live off of one income and that's my husband's income so anytime I have a job or whatever that's not even factored into the finances of having a home, having a car, having food, it doesn't factor into that. So all of the finances that it takes to manage our family is done off of his income and so to us it's so much easier that way. (PSGF1)

“For me it was a matter of just gaining more financial literacy. I'm 54, so you know back then when I came through school it wasn't like you know you learned about finances.... And when people would say live within your means, we made a choice to live beneath our means...but that's just something that I've done for years and have taught my children that. So they know how to live within a budget. (PSGF1)

“You know you find ways that my family's gonna eat healthy, it's gonna taste good, it's gonna look good. And you find a way to make that work. (PSGF1)

“We’ve been on Dave Ramsey’s Financial program. Love it. We don’t have stress over money. It has been really good, as far as being on the same team. You know, we are like ‘Dave Ramsey Evangelists’ we’ll pass out his books. (PSFG4)

### **Prayer and Divine Intervention**

“God has been always blessing that He will send someone to rent the home or whatever. So the world we live in both of us work and the Lord blesses us. He has really blessed us. Sometimes you will have members that just bless you, I mean just bless you and good parents that will bless you, and other family members. And sometimes you don't even ask but they just say “you wanna go this place? You wanna go here for a trip?” So you know the Lord still is in the blessing business for the pastors and wives. So that's what I believe. I truly believe that. (PSGF1)

“The Lord opens up doors.” There are times when I have prayed. I needed an outfit for something and I've gone into a consignment shop, in a thrift store, on a clearance rack, and my size. That's not easy to do. I know it's something the Lord put there for me in the right color. So it's just, there are some things you know it's a miracle. My kids say, “Mom, God had to do that for you because I know it wasn't just there.” (PSGF1)

### **Pastor Spouse Role Expectation Stressors and Stress Alleviators**

Research participants discussed at length the stress that comes from the role expectations associated with being a pastor’s spouse. In addition, the pastor spouses shared how they learned what the role expectations were, ways in which they were prepared (or not) for the role, and offered ideas on how they have endeavored to alleviate the stress related to the pastor spouse role.

### **Pastor Spouse Role Expectations Stressors**

The stressors associated with the pastor spouse role included: (1) providing support for the pastor (their spouse); (2) conforming to particular standards of appearance; (3) being capable in specific ways such as music, hospitality, career; (4) attending church events; (5) being an example to

others; (6) keeping quiet; and (7) doing things like or being like the former pastor's spouse. The following quotes from participants illustrate the various expectations and the stress associated with these expectations.

### **Providing Support for the Pastor (their spouse)**

Interviewer: How would you define the pastors' spouse role?

“Support. Support of your husband, support of his ministry, support of the church family.” (PSFG2)

“I've even heard conference officers say this....your wife needs to get a job so that she can help support you. We found that that is really the only way pastors can make ends meet.” (PSFG5)

“I look at the pastor's wife's role as being supportive. Now sometimes you may be the only cheerer in that whole group that smiling face that your husband can see and you are the eyes and the ears of a lot of the things that are going on in the church... So I look at it as being supportive and being the ears and the eyes and giving advice to our husbands... you can give that female touch. And it helps them alleviate a lot of problems that you see coming that way.” (PSFG1)

“I think that a pastor's wife, for me I feel like my responsibility is to be a soft place to land for my husband, you know. When he comes home, I try to make it... I know that he's had a stressful day and you know, my job is to be a listening board, a comfort, and just a helpmate for him.” (PSFG1)

### **Conforming to Particular Standards of Appearance**

“I sat down at my first conference by a female conference officer and informed that I needed to have my teeth fixed and whitened, and if that meant that we had to go into debt for it, then that is what we needed to do; that I needed to cut my hair and to re-vamp my wardrobe or my husband was not going to be able to go further in the ministry.” (PSFG5)

“Whether you are on the platform or not, people [in the congregation] are looking at you because you are the pastor's wife” (PSFG4)

“One of my member's did my hair because sometimes it is just like “poof”, and some people don't like it, some people do, and I'm very much so like, well can you help? (PSFG4 )

### **Being Capable in Specific Ways such as Music, Hospitality, Career**

“We are all supposed to play the piano, sing like a lark, make great potluck dishes, be ready to feed anybody at any time, as much as they want. Host anybody in our homes at any give time, if they just decide to show up, teach Sabbath School. (PSFG5)

“Growing up in the Korean culture, the pastor’s wife has to play piano. She has to cook and invite people over. It is so huge that when my husband got the call to ministry my parents said, ‘You need to get a new wardrobe. You got to take piano lessons.’ You feel like, oh, because I don’t play piano, immediately I’m down a notch, so I’ll have to make it up in cooking. I’ll have to help in Sabbath School because I can’t help [in another area].” (PSFG2)

“We did have one place a new family moved in and we got to be pretty good friends with them. And then one day the husband says to me, ‘I never see you playing the piano.’ I said, ‘That is right, you don’t, I don’t play the piano.’ ‘Oh, well, are you a nurse?’ I said, ‘No.’ ‘Well, are you a teacher?’ And I said ‘No, I’m not a teacher.’ ‘Well, you are a defective preacher’s wife.’ Well, he was teasing me, but he says, ‘We’ll keep you because we like you the way you are.’ (PSFG2).

“One of the expectations of congregations is that the wife not only have a college degree or be degreed in some field where they can utilize her at some point in time but that she also, like the sister said, has a talent – a vocal and instrumental talent.” (PSFG3)

### **Attending Church Events**

“We were in another church district where my mother was dying. We lived in a split-level home but the church members expected me to bring my dad...and my mother who was becoming bed-ridden to that split-level home and live there and take care of them there. And I’m just like, I couldn’t change their mindset but I knew that I was going to keep the 5<sup>th</sup> commandment. I was going to honor my father and mother because my dad would kill himself trying to take care of mom and so it wasn’t an easy situation for my husband at all. They thought that I was being a bad wife and I had to deal with it. I was away from it [the district] for eight months, but I never regret the stand I made. I don’t regret one day I spent away from the district. Not because I hated them, but because God called me for something else at that time.” (PSFG2)

“I think that the husband has a totally different perspective of what your job is. And that can be stressful. I mean he does expect you to be there, you know, even you know we say the members put a lot of pressure on you, but, you know, my husband wants me at prayer meeting too. He wants me there when he's speaking. He likes to see my face, you know, and I want to sleep (laughter) and be watching a television show on Wednesday nights sometimes, you know?” (PSFG1)

“They want you to come out there every night to the evangelism meeting.” (PSFG2)

### **Being an Example to Others**

“There are things that I, like Paul said, that perhaps are permissible for me to wear or to do, but I choose not to because, whether it is fair or not, I have a position that requires me to be an example and ... I am looked at and observed and emulated to some extent.” (PSFG2)

We are to set an example for other people to look at. (PSFG4)



“I wasn’t raised Adventist and so when I came into the church prior to marrying the pastor, I had previous pastor’s wives as my examples and not that I was so much studying them, but I noticed a trend that when the pastor’s wife would come in with a certain hair style, certain sisters of the church would come in with the same hair style. It perplexed me, but it showed the respect and the admiration that the other women and for who she was and how she conducted herself.” (PSFG3)

### **Keeping Quiet**

“You know Lord, you are going to have to learn to shut this [mouth] because I’m a very outspoken person and if somebody is going to jump in my face, then I was really just quick to jump right back into theirs, and I knew being a pastor’s wife I could not do that. I could not speak my mind; at least that is what I thought.”(PSFG5)

“Love everybody, keep your mouth shut, don’t have an opinion.” (PSFG5)

“I think I am contributing to the church, you know, and I have just as much say. I’m a member, but I don’t get to take a vote or to say, you know, come to a business meeting and voice my opinion on a particular hot item in a church. I don’t think that’s fair to us as pastors’ wives, that we are expected *not to say anything* or not to even participate in, um, board meetings or business meetings or things like that. I think that is unfair to us as spouses.” (PSFG1)

### **Doing Things Like or be Like the Former Pastor’s Spouse**

“There are the pastors’ wives who have told her what she has to do. She’s come up with some crazy stories, you know? ‘You have to start on this side of the church and work your way around and greet everybody.’ I mean, someone told her that.” (PSFG1)

“There are some things that people kind of assume—the expectations that I have found has sometimes been because the former pastor’s wife did this, so then you’ll probably do this. I always try to tell people when we leave, don’t expect the next wife to do what I do. Let her put on her own clothing, her own armor.” (PSFG2)

“You have to be bold enough on your own to say, ‘No, that’s not what I do.’ ‘Well, Sister before you did it.’ ‘Oh, well bless her heart. I don’t do that.’ And you have to be okay with that, you know.” (PSFG1)

“Every district we have been in, there are a little bit different expectation and lot of time it was based on who was there before you... There was a pastor’s wife before us and I just really admire the lady myself, but they were coming towards their retirement time and here I was coming, pregnant with our 5th child and I was like, ‘I can’t do all the things that she did before’, so I think a lot of times the expectations can be based on the past.... That would make me feel kind of like, ‘Oh, I probably should be able to do that too’, but I just can’t, so expectations vary and they change.” (PSFG5)

## **Expectations about what Spouses Should NOT do or be**

Besides having expectations about what the pastor spouse should do, the participants shared information about what they were expected to not do because of their pastor spouse role. These expectations included: (1) not being vulnerable or needy/hurting; (2) not taking a board position; and (3) not having close friends at church. These quotes illustrate these three concepts.

### *Not Being Vulnerable or Needy/Hurting*

The pastorate is different than other people [‘s jobs] because whenever they have an illness, a mental breakdown or whatever, their church surrounds them and supports them or at least as much as they can. Often in ministry those are the loneliest times [for pastors’ families],,, there is nowhere to go. The expectations are that we will always be bubbly, happy and move on.” (PSFG4)

### *Not Taking a Board Position*

“We are highly advised “Don’t take a board position.” And then the members hear that and they don’t even want to... Or the husband says ‘My wife ain’t taking no board position.’ That’s crazy.” (PSFG1)

“I mean you hear it coming from the conference level: “Oh wow, don’t get on a board.” You know?” (PSFG1)

### *Not Having Close Friends at Church*

“When I first got in the ministry I was told that you could not have friends with members and although I don’t agree with that there is a perception by the members, a jealousy perception, when I do have friends.” (PSFG1)

## **“Training” for Role Expectations**

Focus group participants were asked how they learned what the role of pastor spouse entailed. It was clear from participants’ answers to the question that there was no one uniform way that they had learned what was expected of them as a pastor spouse. Because there are few formal mechanisms for learning this role, many pastor spouses learned about the expectations through interacting with other pastors’ spouses. Other ways of learning role expectations included on the job training and/or from seminary or conference sponsored events. The following quotes from participants illustrate the ways in which they received training for the role of pastor spouse.

### *Learning from Other Pastors’ Spouses*

“A pastor’s wife... just took me under her wing and mentored me. Not so much to be a pastor’s wife, but because of her example, I think it helped to prepare me. And my husband is a pastor’s

kid and so when we got married, you know, I had a mother-in-law who is a pastor's wife. Sometimes I lived up to her expectations and many times I did not!" (PSFG2)

"You have to take bits and pieces from wherever you go. It's like gleaning and you know it's like "that's interesting" you know, "Praise you Lord"... You have to learn to just pray and you ask God to give you guidance and when I have a question I ask. I mean, I ask my sisters in Christ." (PSFG1)

"One of the things that's helped me is just looking at other people who have been in ministry longer and that's why I share with some of my sisters, 'You don't even know how big you bless me.' You know? Because you look and you see the things that, you know, these wives and you say 'wow.'" (PSFG1)

### *On-the-job Training*

Interviewer: "How did you learn what the job of a pastor's spouse is?"

P: On-the-job training. On-the-job training!" (PSFG1)

"Unlike some of the other ladies, when I was a young minister's wife I had no idea of what a minister's wife was supposed to be, because the few moments they spent with us at Andrews wasn't enough to give you a background or experience. So, my first taste of it was a blind, feel your way through.... I didn't know what mold or guidelines there were available for me, so it was a struggle." (PSFG3)

"At least for me I would say that in some instances there really is not necessarily a preparation of a book you can read. I think that a lot of it is just going to be the Lord calls you and you go. And it is as you go that you learn." (PSFG2)

### *Seminary or Conference Efforts*

The participants recalled some attempts by the seminary or their conferences to help the pastor spouses with understanding and coping with their roles. These quotes illustrate the various types of help offered through these entities.

"Sharon Kress was at the seminary when I was there. She did a seminar and the best thing she told me was she talked about the story of the... Is it Peter and John at the gate with the silver and gold I have not, but what I have I give? And she said, 'you need to really know what you don't have. And give what you do have.' And that was the best thing I could've set off knowing- that I can only give what I do have. But that's the only thing, the only bit of training I had." (PSFG1)

"Back in the day, they had the Shepherdess Guild when my husband was in the seminary, and I think it is important to take advantage of that because it was a way to bounce things off and learn things and kind of get an idea of what to expect, and I found that to be helpful." (PSFG2)

Our conference is so good we have like a closed Facebook group. People can raise discussion questions. We have a newsletter quarterly that comes, so we have questions and answers. They are all issues we are all dealing with.... But what I think has been a great blessing, just reading and knowing you are not alone.... Sometimes when you are feeling bitter or resentment or discouragement, you know there is a sisterhood, there is a group of people in this conference that you can say, "I don't like being a pastor's wife today."

"When I was at Oakwood College we did have some type of preparatory sessions there which I still remember. They would bring in senior ministers wives to talk to us and they did not play. I still remember, it wasn't like formal classes, but when we left there, we were certified to survive because they would tell us exactly, especially the negative things, but they would tell us to be prepared to be disliked, be prepared to be lied about [and] somebody else thinks that they can be a better wife to your husband or something, be prepared for that sister." (PSFG3)

### **Stress Alleviators Connected with Role Expectations**

Participants shared their own strategies in alleviating stress that is associated with pastor spouse role expectations and their desires for others to do something to help reduce role expectation stress.

#### **Self-initiated Strategies**

The primary strategy pastor spouses personally used centered on setting personal boundaries achieve a work/life balance. Other strategies included (1) praying for guidance and (2) educating the congregation about spouse role expectations.

#### *Setting Boundaries to Achieve a Healthy Work/Life Balance*

"We don't take a day off.... What we take is time off. Does that make sense? So for us, a lot of times we will do things in the mornings. We will go hiking or we'll go to a sports club or work out or we take blocks of time off in a day where you can grab it. But not necessarily a specific day, and I don't think that is better or worse, I'm just saying how we've kind of made it work for us.... I know that there are congregations who really recognize and want that. When we were interviewed here, they said, "What do you do to protect your family time?" We were just not sure how to answer. And then we just explained it, well we just sort of grab time when we can and we are OK with that. But I do admire when people do have boundaries and this is really what works well. They have date nights, etc. I think that is great because it can be however we make it, but I think it is really important to do it.

"I don't think we have ever said we take this day off and the church family knows that you are going to take Sunday and you don't bother us. We have never been that way and we've always

been open to the church family whenever they need us, but when we have an afternoon we take off, we shut off the cell phone and we go play. (PSFG2)

“I would say as far as my observation in over 30 years of pastoring, it is helpful if both are called. It is a great burden if the wife is not called and feels thrust into the ministry, because I think that can cause a lot of resentment, because in a sense you are not your own. But I totally agree about the support.” (PSFG2)

### *Praying for Guidance*

“If you ask the Lord if you go to prayer and ask the Lord He will always send someone. You don't even have to ask a question. But He will send someone who will come up and speak to you or, like she said earlier, have a book or something you can read to give you ideas of how you should be. But I think that when we go to the Lord, or I know when we go to the Lord, He will impress upon us how He wants us to be.” (PSFG1)

### *Educating the Congregation about Spouse Role*

“And they say “Well, we don't know. Who's going to replace you?” And I say “I hope the next pastor's wife does nothing.” And the church looked at me. I said “I hope she does nothing except take care of her husband and take care of her children because that's all she has to do. That's full-time. She doesn't have to serve; she doesn't have to get up here and be on the piano and do the solos and just everything.” I said “she doesn't have to do that.” (PSFG1)

### **Desires for Administrative Intervention**

The focus group participants also shared their desires for conference administrators to (1) provide more training and (2) develop a mentoring system for pastor spouses.

### *Provide Formal Training*

“Our husbands went to class. We didn't go to classes and maybe that's something that the administration might think about, you know, we need to go to classes or sessions where we can just, you know, get little tidbits, real brief, find out how do you do this thing as a first lady better? I think that we need to have that.” (PSFG1)

“One of the things I would suggest [would be for] Andrews or other places to help minister's wives and I think it is excellent if they have a course or at least a realistic approach to let them know that your children will have a difficult time because people have these high expectations for them and that they can do no wrong. (PSFG3)

“I would like to see a course where the ministers and their wives together attend a course on family balance, how to balance your family and your ministry so that one doesn't get lost in the process, because I've seen where it does get lost and it's unfair to the children of that family, it is

unfair to the relationship as husband and wife and then all of that bleeds over to the relationship you have with your fellow pastoral families.” (PSFG3)

### *Provide Mentoring*

“I wish that I had had a senior pastor's wife to start off with.... I remember that first and second year and I wish that we were teamed up with people who understood that you don't all have to be the same, that you all have different gifts, that she doesn't have to be just like me. But she needs encouragement and knows that she's going to make it. I wish we were teamed up with those kind of people.” (PSFG1)

“A mentorship, because I remember someone assigned new people to certain people and sometimes it's not a match at all. So I think sometimes you have to seek out someone to be your mentor. (PSFG1)

“Finding someone or people that you can talk to – sometimes they're not even in the same conference. They're far away. Sometimes you will meet up at registration, you're registering your kids for school and other times it's here at camp meeting or evangelism council where you have to kind of find someone that you gel with. So you have to find someone that you click with.” (PSFG1)

“I felt blessed because I have had relationships with other pastor’s wives who may be a little older than myself and so I have been able to turn to them.” (PSFG3)

### **Social Support Needs, Barriers and Facilitators**

Focus group participants discussed their (1) need of social support, (2) the barriers encountered in obtaining social support and (3) factors have facilitated receiving the support the participants needed.

#### **Need for Social Support**

Study participants discussed at length their need for ongoing, intentional, and confidential support in their roles as pastor spouses. The following quotes from focus group participants illustrates the need for social support.

“Here you come with some family issue. It is like, ‘Can’t you find a book or something to handle that for you?’ You know, ‘Just go to God in prayer, He’ll help you with that.’ Yes, I know that, but right now I need some support here, some human support, I need some eye-to-eye contact with somebody who may have an idea of what I’m going through and a little sympathy or whatever would go a long way to getting me over this hump until I get my answer.” (PSFG2)

“But it's not easy. It's not easy and it's an everyday thing that you have to deal with. That is a serious loneliness that's out of this world. (PSGF1)

“I think with what we experience, the kind of loneliness is almost like a mourning. I think we mourn that there is a place that we seem to understand that we will really never be able to go again, with other people. We’ve always had that with the Lord, but with other people we won’t have that anymore.” (PSFG3)

“We are fairly new to pastoral ministry, but I’ve experienced that [loneliness] already. There are times when I just want to talk to someone. I mean you can’t talk to your members about your life. You just cannot do that and it is difficult and we know we have the Shepherdess Club, but I wasn’t on the email list. You know, I’m kind of just out there.” (PSFG3)

### **Barriers to Social Support**

While the need for social support is clear, the focus group participants pointed out that barriers to getting the needed support are prevalent. Some of these barriers include: (1) getting direct advice from conference leaders; (2) having negative personal experiences; (3) sensing jealousy from church members; and (4) barriers related to life stage. The following quotes from participants illustrate these different types of barriers to gaining pastor spouse social support.

“So 31 years ago when I became a pastor’s wife, the conference president’s wife was the Shepherdess leader and she got us all together and said, “Do not form friendships within your church. Do not confide in your church members. Do not have friends.” How can you live without friends? ...I don’t think her wisdom was completely false, but... in order to be effective we have to connect. How can I make a difference? How can you make a difference for me if we don’t connect? And that connection has to do with the human connection.” (PSFG2)

“They would say don’t get involved with the members, so I have a few friends, but you know, you don’t get involved with the members and making all these friends, and I think I’ve been lonely.” (PSFG3)

“I have personally seen ministers and especially minister’s wives, because I think they deal with the loneliness issues more than the men do, who allow themselves to become too engrossed in relationships in the church and sometimes they are not aware of why people are befriending them. You cannot give all of your personal information to people, even though someone may say, “Oh this is my best friend.” And then I saw later that the best friend has done them great damage.” (PSFG3)

“When I first got in the ministry I was told that you could not have friends with members and although I don’t agree with that there is a perception by the members, a jealousy perception, when I do have friends [who are church members]. But members are jealous when you sit with the same women every week. And I even tried to sit with someone who was 80 every week, and do you know it doesn’t matter? If I’m friends with senior citizens, then the senior citizens will be jealous.” (PSGF1)

“When we were younger and our children were small it was a lot easier to make social connections with other people in the church plus other pastoral families. When you have children you have something in common with them if they have children. When your children are all grown up and married and you are just an old lady, you just don’t have as many ways to connect with people that are young. Because you don’t have a little child anymore.” (PSFG4)

### **Facilitators and Sources of Social Support for Pastor Spouses**

Focus group participants also shared the strategies they used to facilitate getting social support as well as the sources of their social support. These strategies and sources included: (1) pastor spouse mentors; (2) formal mechanism from the conference including social media, ministerial director outreach, and pastor family gatherings; (3) former parishioners; and (4) district families as a group.

“The older pastors’ wives actually do talk to us and they actually like us and they treat us like we are their children, like their daughters. You know, “how are you doing?” “I’m good.” “No you’re not!” You know. Or they tell you you are doing a great job, and it is priceless.” (PSFG2)

“That [the Facebook group for pastors’ wives] I think has been a great blessing, just reading and knowing you are not alone. So even knowing that, before going into it, “hey there are other pastors’ wives who will be able to identify.” Like you are not alone, sometimes when you are feeling bitter or resentment or discouragement, you know there is a sisterhood, there is a group of people in this conference that you can say “I don’t like being a pastor’s wife today.” (PSFG2)

“When Royce and PSFG2 [the Ministerial Director and his wife] come and take you out to dinner once a year, that is just so cool! You know you are feeling like you are having lunch with your best friends and if you want to talk about something you can, if not you just have a good time, good connection.” (PSFG2)

“We were in the Northern California Conference and I felt that that Conference fosters camaraderie. It felt like family there and I would love to have that again!

*I: How did they do that?*

“They did that---all the families came to all the meetings, to the pastor’s meetings.... Well, those who could come would come. Those who didn’t want to come didn’t come, but I would say, just like what you had said having the families come to all the pastor’s meetings—it makes a difference. It makes you feel like you’ve got that family connection. (PSFG4)

*I: So that kind of leads us to the social support question. Who is your support network? Who do you turn to now?*

“People out of state. People that I have known from other places. You can’t turn to.... You know I’m mentoring some people personally in the church like some other young moms so I



hang out with them and yes, I talk to them and I talk to them about their life, but I can't go to them and be like, you know, I had a fight with my husband last night and I don't know what to do! You know....., or stuff like that. You really have to leave far to find support. (PSFG4)

"I've been in three conferences. I have a friend in our first conference that I've had throughout all these years that I've kept in contact with. She isn't in ministry—she is a farmer's wife—but what a blessing she was in my life. (PSFG2)

"We have districts and they encourage us to create a family within a family. So even though we are family as a conference, our districts are small families within the conference. So one of the things we try to do as a district is we try to get together as district families and laugh and talk and get away from the everyday stresses of life." (PSFG2)

### **Conclusions and Recommendations**

Qualitative analysis at its best provides an in-depth look at the social reality from the perspective of the study participants. While this analysis cannot offer quantifiable and generalizable insights into pastor spouse stresses and challenges, this analysis offers the context for the stresses, the conditions under which the stresses occur and the strategies used to meet and overcome stresses and challenges. The analysis of the pastor spouse perspective shapes our recommendations to church administrators, pastoral families, and congregants interested in strengthening pastoral families.

#### **Spiritual Challenge and Stressors**

The major stresses and challenges researchers investigated included: (1) spiritual challenges; (2) financial stressors, (3) challenges related to social role expectations; and (4) social support needs, barriers and facilitators.

Pastor spouses across focus groups shared common experiences of spiritual challenge associated with their role as a pastoral spouse. The three primary challenges included: (1) the cycle of ministerial life and the ability to achieve work/life balance; (2) the unpredictability of the pastor-spouse's schedule; (3) and the social isolation that sometimes accompanies the pastor-spouse role.

The elements that pastor spouses described in terms of spiritual life enhancers included: (1) receiving social support; (2) making an intentional decision to prioritize spiritual development; and (3) seeing God at work in their lives and the lives of others.

#### **Recommendations Regarding Spiritual Challenges**

Based on these challenges and enhancers as described by the focus group participants, we recommend that: (1) pastor families receive specialized training in setting healthy boundaries that allows for both privacy and social support when needed; (2) SDA entities tasked with

pastoral health develop formal mechanisms for increasing social support of pastor spouses; and (3) SDA church administration provide increased opportunities for training and mentoring of pastor spouses particularly as the couple enters pastoral ministry.

### **Financial Challenges and Stressors**

Pastoral spouses shared their financial challenges in the context of income challenges and expense challenges. The income challenges focused on the pastor's employment situation as well as the pastor-spouse's employment challenges. Associated with these employment challenges pastor spouses also shared fears about future income stability focused on retirement compensation.

Pastor spouses described two primary income challenges arising from their spouse being employed as a pastor: (1) the perceived low pay rates for pastors; and (2) restrictions by the conference on their spouses' ability to engage in outside employment (moonlighting).

In addition to the pastor's income challenges, there were several ways in which financial challenge centered around their own employment: (1) through the expectation that they serve as an uncompensated partner in ministry; (2) by working for the church at a very low wage; (3) by job changes related to moving; and (4) through their perceived role conflicts with their ministry duties and their paid employment.

Finally, pastor spouses also expressed considerable stress and fears about the financial challenges they may face in retirement. Some of the fears resulted from variation in the stock market while others came from the reality of experiencing frequent moves to new locations.

On the other side of the financial picture, pastor spouse participants shared a number of expense challenges unique to the pastoral family. The primary challenges in terms of expense includes: (1) mandatory geographical moves for pastors; (2) the obligation of having their children attending Seventh-day Adventist schools; and (3) the social expectations of the pastor family and the financial obligations associated with those expectations.

### ***Recommendations for Reducing Financial Challenge and Related Stress***

While pastor spouses perceived a low pay scale for pastors and wished for increased income, they did not hold the income level as something they advocated changing. However, some resentment was noted concerning the moonlighting policy of some conferences. As a result, we recommend that conferences with policies against moonlighting review the policies and outline the benefits of the policy to the pastor's family, the conference, and/or congregants.

Participants were much more vocal about their own employment challenges as related to being a pastor spouse. These data reveal a pattern of uncompensated work by the pastor spouse either by being an unpaid ministerial partner or by being underpaid for tasks done for the church. We

recommend that church administrators review policies undergirding the compensation of pastor spouses as it relates to their involvement in achieving ministry outcomes.

Perhaps one of the most pervasive themes in the data concerning financial challenge and stress related to mandatory moves. This theme occurred in relation to income challenge through the interruption of the spouse's employment and in terms of expense challenge due to the unpredictability of the move and the frequent difficulty in selling a home.

As a result of these themes, we recommend that church administrators engage in a careful study of the policies surrounding mandatory moves of pastoral families that weigh the costs and benefits to the families and congregations with an eye to reducing the number of moves imposed on pastoral families.

### **Pastor Spouse Role Expectation Stressors**

The primary roles that pastor spouses identified included: (1) providing support for the pastor (their spouse); (2) conforming to particular standards of appearance; (3) being capable in specific ways such as music, hospitality, career; (4) attending church events; (5) being an example to others; (6) keeping quiet; and (7) doing things like or being like the former pastor's spouse.

Besides having expectations about what the pastor spouse should do, the participants shared information about what they were expected to not do because of their pastor spouse role. These expectations included: (1) not being vulnerable or needy/hurting; (2) not taking a board position; and (3) not having close friends at church.

The primary stress arising from these expectations to do or be or to not do something because of their pastor spouse role created a great deal of internal stress for these participants. Many of these expectations are internal in nature, but externally reinforced by congregants and in some cases church administration.

### **Recommendations Regarding Role Expectations**

Therefore we recommend that church administrators examine the role of the pastor spouse and clarify the formal expectations, if any, of the pastor spouse. Then, following the recommendation of the study participants, church administrators should institute an intentional orientation and training for any organizationally sanctioned expectations of pastor spouses.

Pastor families and conference administrators can work together to reduce stress in this area by educating congregations about the pastor spouse role and by setting clear boundaries with congregants around the issues of pastor spouse responsibilities.

### **Social Support Challenges and Stressors**

Study participants discussed at length their need for ongoing, intentional, and confidential support in their roles as pastor spouses. While needing social support, participants also reported several barriers to getting the needed support such as: (1) getting direct advice from conference leaders; (2) having negative personal experiences; (3) sensing jealousy from church members; and (4) barriers related to life stage.

One benefits of church affiliation and attendance is the availability of social support for congregants, yet for pastoral spouses this important source of support appears limited. The primary barrier to receiving social support from fellow church members centers on the nature of the pastoral family/congregational relationship and achieving appropriate and healthy boundaries with congregants.

### ***Recommendations Concerning Social Support***

It is not clear from these data the elements of healthy and appropriate pastor family-congregational relationships include. More study is needed in this area to give good guidance to pastoral families and church administrators to maximize social support while maintaining healthy boundaries. However, focus group participants expressed several ways that social support for pastor spouses could be enhanced and our recommendations center on these suggestions.

First, as mentioned above, formal mechanism of mentoring is needed to increase pastor spouse social support. In addition, conferences should be proactive in using social media to connect pastor spouses and provide a venue for receiving social support. Third, we would encourage conferences to continue to build on ministerial directors' individual outreach to pastors and their spouses. And, finally, we encourage conference to provide opportunities for pastor families to connect for mutual support.

### **“I’m an Inferior Specimen of a PK”**

### **Pressures Experienced by Pastors’ Children and Identified Stress Management Techniques**

#### **Qualitative Report**

**Alina Baltazar**

This report summarizes the findings of interviews with four focus groups attended by young adult children of pastors. Researchers identified areas of stress and challenges for pastor’s children. The areas of stress and challenges reported were the (1) pressures and expectations associated with the role of pastor child, (2) spiritual struggles, and (3) lack of social support. In addition, participants identified multiple ways they try to cope with those stressors (both positive and negative) and elicited support from others. Finally, there were some recommendations made by participants and summarized by researchers for the church organization and pastoral parents.

## **Pressure and Expectations**

The participants reported many areas that led them to feel pressured and had high expectations in their role as the child of a pastor. The types of pressures and role expectations pastors' children faced were: (1) high behavioral expectations, (2) feeling stereotyped as either being perfect or wild, (3) to be a good example to others, (4) expected to have high levels of spiritual knowledge, (5) pressure to participate in church groups and activities. These are listed in order of the frequency these themes were coded by the researchers.

### High Behavioral Expectations

The most common theme identified is the pressure children of pastors experience regarding their behavior. The participants reported there were high expectations to always be well behaved at school and church. Being expected to behave a certain way as a pastor's child was the code identified the most often, at 27%. An example of this sentiment is:

“He should be better than this. He's a pastor's kid.”

“I think it has a lot to do with church members, like the people you're surrounded by from when you're young at the church. They just- they hold you to such a high standard that it's just like it's almost impossible the standards they hold you to...”

“So I can't even live a life, I can't scratch my nose without scratching it in the wrong way. Like you know, I couldn't live, and I just hate being a pastor's kid. Like to the point where I was just like dad, I don't even want to be with a pastor. It even got to that point.”

“It makes it very confusing for you as a pastor's kid because it's like; we're not doing like anything wrong but it makes us feel like we're doing something wrong even though like everyone out there, they're all doing the same thing. They all dress just like I do, they all do the same things I do; but it's like I have to like pretend all the time that I'm like some like perfect kid because what will people say? Like, it's just...it's just how it's always been; it still is to this day, like me and my dad argue about this all the time because I just...I don't feel like it's fair because, like, I'm not employed by the Adventist church; like, I'm not; like, I didn't ask to be a pastor's kid, that was his choice, his thing and like, at this point I think, like, I'm adult-enough to make my own decisions, do my own thing but yet I still have to monitor everything on every social networking thing just in case someone sees it and like, it's very stressful to have to grow up like that and still have to do that even when you feel like you should be allowed to make your own choices, like you're still nice, so you always have to, in the back of your head, like, protect your parents from like...it's—it's annoying and stressful!”

### Being Stereotyped

In addition, the participants felt there was a stereotype of pastors' children that had polar behavioral expectations. Pastors' children are expected to either be perfect or rebellious. They felt those labels were unfair when comparing themselves to other children, since they did not see themselves as either extreme.

“I mean everyone that you'll meet is gonna either think that you're either crazy and wild or you're going to church every week, reading your Bible, doing your Bible studies, and helping the sick, and going on mission trips.”

“Oh... so that's why you're terrible.” And it's like “WHAT?” (Laughter.) How am I terrible? That doesn't make any sense.”

### Be an Example

Many felt pressure to be an example to others in the church. If they weren't able to set that good example, they were afraid of the consequences.

“We need you to be an example for these people because you are the pastor's kid and these people are acting out and they were a little younger than me, so they are like, oh we need you to be an example to them, become close to them and help them to become more like you.

“Sometimes, I don't know if it is as extreme for everybody, but sometimes there is a sense of if I don't meet these expectations of people, like they are all going to go to hell because of me.”

### Spiritual Maturity

Behavior was not the only high expectation, but many participants identified feeling pressure to have a high level of spiritual maturity and knowledge of the Bible. They felt this was an automatic expectation of being a pastor's kid and they weren't allowed to develop spiritually on their own.

“I feel like in other families it's something you kind of have to work towards, but in a pastor's family it's something that's already expected to just kind of be there and it's not something you are like trying to get to.”

“You don't know the answer to this? But you're the pastor's kid.”

### Church Participation

Not only were they expected to behave a certain way, but also have a high level of participation in church activities. The participants felt they should have a choice. Some participants participated only because they were stuck at church and they had nothing else to do.

“You go in the children's choir, you participate in Vacation Bible School, you open the church, you grow a little bit and you get in Pathfinders you are a Junior usher, then you are a Deacon, you are doing everything. You are in the AY Society, about to be A Y Leader, since the pastor is the leader of the church, you are expected to be involved in activities so you can be the next leader of the church.”

### **Spiritual Struggles**

Pastors' kids shared that their spiritual struggles were exacerbated by the church member's high expectation of them to behave well, be an example to others, be spiritual, and to have Biblical knowledge similar to a pastor. When those high expectations weren't fulfilled, participants reported feeling a certain amount of resentment towards the church. Pastoral children expressed that their spiritual struggles with attending church was like preparing for war in terms of needing protective gear. In addition, the participants felt they didn't have enough support to deal with those difficulties.

The participants reported that it seemed they were not allowed to struggle and make mistakes then be able to learn from those mistakes. Since their parent was also their pastor and there are certain things they may not want their parent to know, they felt they didn't really have a pastor they could confide in. This situation led to stunted spiritual growth for some. The following narrative quotes from young adult pastors' children participants illustrate their spiritual struggles.

“They just hold you to such a high standard that like it makes you feel inferior to everyone else.”

“Like you have to go to war against the church, so every week, you put on your suit, step up, we're goin' to church!”

“...your kids never have pastors. And they can go through stuff and they won't ever get to call a pastor because your daddy and maybe it is something you don't want to tell daddy.”

### **Spiritual Growth**

While some pastoral children experienced challenge with church participation, other participants found that struggles with the church membership led to spiritual growth. It was also helpful to see God working in the lives of others which helped strengthen their spiritual life.

“I realized that I needed God to help me with these problems and to lead me.”

“My dad told us, ‘God has chosen the three of you to be missionaries in this country. And now it is your privilege to find out what that mission is.’ And those words just stuck in my mind until today, it just makes me even want to cry, because I felt like God had chosen me for a purpose.”

### **Lack of Social and Family Support**

Pastoral children shared examples of the people they confide in for social support through their difficult times. Participants did not always feel comfortable speaking to their parents about their struggles. The types of difficulties pastors’ children faced in soliciting support included: (1) father often absent, (2) peers believing stereotypes, (3) having to find new friends due to frequent moves.

#### Father Often Absent

In addition, their father was often gone doing church business, so they felt their dad was absent when they really needed him.

“Well, it is not a 9-5 job, you know. And so you never know when dad is going to need to go. And so the phone rings and maybe you were supposed to do something, maybe the family had something planned at that time, maybe it was quality time with just you or it was family quality time and all of a sudden everything has just changed up and it's a Holy thing because this is God's work and its got to be done so to what degree do we let pastors say “no” to a funeral or “no” to a hospital visit?”

#### Peers Believing Stereotypes

Sometimes peers would believe the stereotypes of pastor’s kids and would not be supportive. Since pastoral children were expected to behave in a certain way, then it was assumed they wouldn’t see certain movies or go to parties. This made some feel left out of their peer group as a result. They were even told they couldn’t post certain things on Facebook or Instagram for fear that it would lead to their father losing his job. So, they felt left out of commonly used social media.

“They would have parties and tell me about it and say to me, but you can't come because you are the pastor's daughter.”

“Facebooks and Instagrams and everything and what we allow the outside world to see of our lives because of my...because my dad being afraid of what other people would think. My whole life it's always been that like don't say this to anyone don't do this. Because like what will people think of our family ...”

#### Making New Friends Due to Frequent Moves



In addition, they found it challenging to adjust to a new environment and meet new friends when the family moved to a city and a new church. So they sometimes had to be creative with who they found and who could provide the most emotional and spiritual support for them. Some expressed that they found confiding with other pastor's children was very helpful since they understood what they were going through in a way no one else could. In addition, participants identified reaching out to mentors and counselors to also be helpful.

“I still struggle to maintain friendships and it doesn't have to do with expectations, it has to do with how often we moved, because whenever we moved my friendships would stop, and I didn't maintain friendships.”

“I would ask God to give me good friends because I knew I had to start all over you know, being the new girl at school, the new girl at church, how to get to know the people around my house, you know my neighbors and sometimes it was good and sometimes you miss your friends, sometimes you didn't know you were going to make any friends.”

“And like what we said, having other PKs that are your friends, it helps a lot, but I mean if you don't have that, its....there is no one to turn to.”

## **Stress Management**

Pastoral kids shared the positive and negative coping strategies they used to manage their stress. In response to the pressure, participants identified escape and reaching out behaviors as a way they coped with stress. These stress management techniques were separated into negative and positive coping. Negative coping was identified as potentially harmful and positive coping less likely to lead to problematic outcomes. There were some cultural differences noted on how stress was managed among participants.

### Negative Coping

The harmful behaviors identified were excessive reading, pornography addiction, and partying, along with identifying other pastors' kids as getting into drug use as a way to escape.

“And so it was more internalized, it was too much pressure, way too much pressure. And that is what makes people do very crazy things! I know PKs who turned to Methamphetamines, I know PKs who became hard drug addicts, I know PKs that used sex as a way to escape. I have personal friends of mine who even began to become transgendered where they would put wigs on and counsel themselves in the mirror so that they would feel like they were speaking to somebody else. You want to talk about psychologically, I mean, completely distorting themselves because they felt like they had nowhere else to go so they had to go to themselves, to play roles with themselves.”

“And I personally struggled with pornography for years until lately, very recently, very recently was I able to get out of its grips as an adult. I had no one to talk to and coming from a Latin background we don't talk to psychologists because there is nothing wrong with you.”

### Positive Coping

Some positive coping behaviors included: having a strong personal relationship with God, vacations, reaching out to others for support using open communication with their support system (parents, counselors, friends), externalizing the pressure, and developing hobbies (music and art).

“I knew I was willing to come before God's presence and presentable before God, so I was okay. So I felt like I didn't really care about what people thought that much”

“My parents helping me develop my own personal relationship with God really helped me because they helped me understand how I could relate to God and how I could talk to God, they didn't just tell me to read the Bible, they told me how to read the Bible in order to gain the word of God in my life, you know, how to apply the Word of God to my life instead of just saying, Oh, and Timothy said to this man....and I'd say well, what does that mean to me? My parents helped me understand what the Bible had to say in my life and how the Bible was relevant, so when I would read the Bible I understood how God was speaking to me, not just the Word said but how it applied to my life.”

“Always getting away, seeing something, new friends.”

“Well first of all I would always go to talk to counselors from the school from the Adventist school, or sometimes I'll go talk to the principal because a lot of times the principal has a psychology major too, and they just seem approachable. Also the religion teachers and in college the school psychologist. He became one of my best mentors until today.”

### Cultural Differences

There were some cultural influences on how these pressures were managed within the family. Some participants from Haitian and Latin cultures reported they felt like they could not reach out to others and that they had to handle their problems on their own.

“Yeah, but the Haitian culture is a very specific culture that is not—it is very hard to communicate with. They don't show emotions, you don't have a say, even to this day now, it is just like you say what you say, but it is what my word is at the end of the day.”

“I had no one to talk to and coming from a Latin background we don't talk to psychologists because there is nothing wrong with you. I mean, why are you going to..... There is a stigma...”

## **Recommendations**

There are four main areas of recommendations that researchers identified that should be addressed by the church: (1) scheduled family time, (2) opportunities for peer support, (3) more understanding (allow for some mistakes), (4) parents protect their children, (5) teach positive coping, and (6) show appreciation for their sacrifices. Pastoral children report that they want more acknowledgement from the church regarding the pressure that they are under and work to provide the support these children need.

### Scheduled Family Time

The first place to start is by encouraging and supporting family time in response to the perceived frequent absence and lack of support of their pastoral parent.

“I've heard of conferences that are more innovative and open that will say to the pastor's family, hey, every six months or once a month or a 5th Sabbath of a month, that is your week-end to go to church wherever you want.”

“My father would save time, he would try to take a day so he could go with just me, because I have a younger sister, and so he would say, okay today I'm going just with my son and then tomorrow I'll go with my daughter and I'm only going to spend this time just to talk with you, quality time. It was good because that way I was able to talk about the frustrations that I had you know, talk about the expectations that were putting stress on me if I was dealing with something I could say, Dad, how do I get over what I'm going through, and we talk about all these things, and just having that time.”

### Opportunities for Peer Support

Many participants referred to the benefit of contact with other pastoral children since they felt comfortable confiding in them and this group understood them best. It is recommended there be regular opportunities, at least once per year, for pastoral families to interact with one another so they can provide understanding and support in ways that no one else can.

“And I think that is another thing that should happen within our conferences, is more reaching out to other pastor's kids in our area. I met another one we met later in life, but you know, we share the same experiences.”

### More Understanding from the Conference

Since the greatest source of stress identified by the participants is behavioral expectations of pastoral children by church members and peers, the church can work to change the culture

surrounding those stereotypes. Pastoral children make mistakes, like all of us. We need to give them space in order to do that without the fear it could lead to their parents' losing their job. They want room to grow and understanding while they navigate the moral conundrums we all face.

“Maybe somehow like explaining to like officials in the church and teachers of the classes like that that it's like we need to like be treated the same as everyone else and given like the same opportunity to make mistakes like everyone else and not get reprimanded when we don't know the answer.”

### Parents Need to Protect Their Children

In preparing pastors and their families for the ministry, it is recommended that they be aware of the pressures they will experience and how it uniquely affects the children. Parents can protect their children from the high expectations of the congregation by defending them when necessary and educating the congregation on how that pressure unfairly harms their children. In addition, parents can provide emotional support of their children through encouraging open communication and allowing mistakes and growing pains as their children navigate growing up in a fishbowl.

“I would have wished that he (my dad) would have said to me, ‘You know, I know I'm the pastor and I know the church is going to say certain things about you, but no matter what you do, I love you and I care about you and you are still my child regardless of what deacon so and so and sister so and so said, you know, I am still your parent and I'm your parent first before I am somebody's pastor.’ I think that for me would have allowed me to be a little bit more, not receptive, but tolerant of church people and their sayings and their perceptions of what I should or should not be and them telling me this, that and the third, but having not heard that, I had to figure it out for myself.”

### Teach Positive Coping

The church can teach positive coping techniques for all members of the pastoral family as part of seminary training. Though being a pastor can be all encompassing, pastoral families need to protect a certain amount of family time by having family meals as often as possible, vacations, having regular days off, and just generally being a present parent to provide support as needed. Learning how to find balance and set boundaries can also be part of pastoral training.

Because pastor's children feel like they have to present such a perfect front for their pastoral parent's sake, they often don't feel comfortable reaching out to others when they do have a problem. There should be encouragement for pastor's children to get confidential support through either peers or professional counselors. This will help the emotional health of all members of the pastoral family.

“I definitely think counseling could have personally helped me so much. There were so many things that I felt I couldn’t talk to my dad about, he was the pastor. Couldn’t talk to friends because they knew my dad was a pastor. I couldn’t go to church members...I just..it would have been nice to have somebody to kind of just get things out.”

### Show Appreciation

Everyone is aware of the sacrifices being involved in ministry (lower income, frequent moves, high expectations, and busy parents). The participants said it is helpful if they were showed the positive results and appreciation for the sacrifices they have made.

“And then maybe allowing the kids into the stories, allowing them into the successes, allowing them to hear and participate in the positive results of the work. You know, because this happened, so and so was anointed at the hospital and so and so was healed.”

“The pastors have this brotherhood connection type thing, the pastors wives have the Shepheress clubs, I think us PKs are kind of left out. (lots of agreement!) The pastor's birthday comes, here's a gift, the first lady's birthday is here, here is what we do for our 1st ladies. Our birthday comes..... It was your birthday? Yeah, yeah. Oh cool.”

“We go through stuff too, or because we actually have to sit there, because we have to be in the church all day because of the Board Meetings or Business meetings and stuff like that, we want some appreciation to.”

## **Integrated Recommendations**

### Spiritual Life Challenges:

Starting with the pastor, pastor families need to be explicitly encouraged to prioritize their family and spiritual lives as a part of their ministerial duties. Knowledge and skill development in setting personal and professional boundaries may be a helpful step in heading off the challenges of establishing and maintaining healthy spiritual lives for this group of people.

When participants (pastors and pastor spouses) became intentional about building their spiritual lives, they experienced and reported enhanced spiritual wellbeing. A simple intervention to encourage greater intentionality is for church leaders to regularly remind pastors and their spouses that their spiritual development is paramount. Pastors should specifically be encouraged to make personal time with God more important than sermon preparation or any other pastoral responsibility.

Since the primary spiritual challenge for children of pastors centers on role expectations and church members, the recommendations for this group will come in the Role Expectations of this report.

### Financial Stress:

One common theme for both pastor and pastor spouse groups centered on the stressor of mandatory moving and the attending costs associated with those moves. As a result, we recommend that church leadership carefully review policies and processes involved in moving pastors with an eye to reduce these moves over the course of the family's ministry.

In addition, providing either financial education or a financial advising for pastoral families may decrease financial stress. For example, church administrators might consider instituting a pilot program from Financial Peace University that has been shown to be effective in teaching money management from a Christian perspective.

### Role Expectations Stressors:

Pastors would benefit by having clear role expectations outlined by church leadership. When the role expectations are diffuse, workload and stress increase. Similarly, church leaders spelling out any expectations that conferences hold for pastor spouses would be very helpful in stress reduction. Pastor spouses also expressed a desire to receive formal training and mentoring provided as the couple is entering pastoral ministry.

Church members should be informed/educated about the role of pastor and pastor spouse so as to reduce the number and types of expectations congregants currently hold.

Children of pastors are clearly the most vulnerable group in terms of role expectations and the stress that results from these expectations. As a result, we recommend that a more in-depth study be undertaken focusing on pastor children and role expectations.

The investigation should aim to uncover the extent of the problem, the negative effects of role expectations and gather data on strategies to intervene with the pressures that accompany role expectations. Following that investigation a pilot intervention should be initiated to address the negative effects of role expectations.

### Social Support Needs, Barriers and Facilitators:

Access to social support has been shown to be connected to general human wellbeing. Therefore, it is crucially important that people in church leadership positions begin to examine why pastors and their spouses and children sense such a lack of social support and experience the overwhelming barriers to receiving the support they need.

While preliminary, our sense of the data points to a pervasive set of beliefs about the pastor family role and the boundaries surrounding the pastor family and the congregation. When pastor families cannot be authentic with their parishioners, when they need to uphold a persona of "role model" rather than "fellow traveler" it leads to human disconnection. Examining the question of

what healthy boundaries are for pastor families and their church members is a worthy goal for church leaders.

In preparing pastors and their families for the ministry, we recommend that they be made aware of the pressures they will experience and how it uniquely affects the children. Parents can protect their children from the high expectations of the congregation by defending them when necessary and educating the congregation on how that pressure unfairly harms their children. In addition, parents can provide emotional support of their children through encouraging open communication and allowing mistakes and growing pains as their children navigate growing up in a fishbowl. Some conferences have begun to host regular pastoral family retreats or social events. Others have regular group mentorship calls that provide some social support. We would recommend that such efforts be further explored and recommended to all local conferences.

Because pastor's children feel like they have to present such a perfect front for their pastoral parent's sake, they often don't feel comfortable reaching out to others when they do have a problem. There should be encouragement for pastor's children to get confidential support through either peers or professional counselors.

Once source of social support for children of pastors proved to be other pastoral children. Participants related that they felt comfortable confiding in other pastors' children because this group understood them best. Therefore, we recommended church leadership provide regular opportunities, at least once per year, for pastoral families to interact with one another so they can provide understanding and support in ways that no one else can.

#### Conflict Resolution:

Because of the connection between conflict stress and pastor burnout, it is important for church leadership to examine ways in which conflict is currently addressed. Pastors may be lacking in confidence or abilities in dealing with conflict. In this case, church leadership can provide targeted training for pastors in conflict management and resolution. It is crucially important for church leaders to be especially skilled in conflict resolution themselves and to model these skills to the pastors they serve.

#### Stress Management:

Researchers recommend that educational opportunities for children of pastors be made available by church leadership. The educational opportunities could focus on developing positive coping mechanisms such as cultivating peer support, encouraging healthy leisure activities, and communication skills. Open dialog and education about issues of addiction should be initiated with a primary prevention approach. It is crucially important that these educational messages and any accompanying resources come to pastor children without judgment or condemnation and that they are offered with complete confidentiality. Since pastoral families expressed such a high degree of anxiety, depression, addictive behaviors, and overall stress, we would suggest that the

NAD investigate how to improve counseling services for pastoral families. One option would be developing a pastoral family retreat center specifically dedicated for pastoral families.

### **Overall Recommendations**

The focus group data point to a complex picture of individuals living their lives with incredible strength and coping abilities and at the same time facing tremendous amounts of stress simply due to being a member of a pastoral family.

It was clear from the data that if pastoral families are to succeed and thrive, corporate intervention is both desired and needed. Therefore we recommend that church leadership initiate an intervention strategy that begins with pilot programs for pastors, pastor spouses, and children in pastoral families. These pilot programs should have a research component that documents the impact of the intervention. As success in the pilot programs is noted, a widespread strategy should be implemented throughout the North American Division.

### **NEXT STEPS: BUILDING ON THE STUDY EVIDENCE**

What are some clear next steps or pathways that will maximize and build on results of the study findings? The two basic pathways utilizing study findings are to deepen and broaden our understanding of the problem of pastor family stress or to initiate intervention and change in the areas of concern uncovered by the analysis. The narrative that follows outlines possible projects following each of these pathways.

#### **Broadening and Deepening Knowledge**

As a result of this study, we now know much more about pastor family stressors among pastors and their families in the North American Division. As is the case with every scientific study, much is still unknown. Some unanswered questions include:

1. How similar or different are pastor family stressors in other Divisions in the General Conference?
2. How much do these perceptions of stress add to pastor burnout or ineffectiveness? Do we need to utilize more objective measures of stress in order to understand their impacts?
3. How do the subjective levels of stress relate to object measures stress or other measures of health?
4. How similar or different are the challenges faced by pastoral families to church member families in general?



To address these lingering questions the Institute for the Prevention of Addictions proposes any the following:

1. The undertaking of a multi-year global study duplicating, with cultural adaptations, the NAD pastor family stress study. For efficiency and feasibility considerations, the study could be initiated in the English speaking areas of the world church. During the initial year of the global study, priority areas would be established with the target timeline of two to three years to complete the initiative.
2. To understand the connection between stress and effects on ministry satisfaction and work performance, a study would be designed that included objective measures of stress. We would examine how those objective measures correlate with subjective measures used in this study. This could produce a stress index that could offer an early intervention system for pastor burnout.
3. The research literature is unequivocal about the connection between stress and its effects on health. To understand how subjective and objective measures of stressors correlates with the physical and emotional health of pastors, we propose a pilot study centered in a few conferences in the NAD. We would measure objective and subjective stressors, as well as subjective and objective measures of wellbeing and health. These measures could produce a stress and health index that could offer an early intervention system for pastor burnout.

### **Initiating Intervention and Change for Pastor Family Stress Management**

Taken together, the qualitative and quantitative findings offer some clear guidance about specific factors that stress pastors, pastor spouses, and children of pastors.

For pastors and pastor spouses, it appears that many of the primary stressors such as spiritual challenges, financial difficulties, and meeting role expectation related to a more core issue of lacking abilities to recognize, establish, and maintain appropriate and healthy personal and family boundaries.

For children of pastors, role expectations imposed by church members and lack of social support created their two primary stressors.

To address these known stressors, the Institute for the Prevention of Addictions proposes any the following:

1. To initiate an intervention study for pastors and their spouses focusing on recognizing, establishing, and maintaining appropriate and healthy personal and family boundaries. To establish a measure of intervention effectiveness, three groups

would be designated for study: (1) an intervention group who receive self-guided online study course addressing the primary skills needed to strengthen boundaries, (2) an intervention group that receives a face-to-face training in a group format; and (3) a control group who receives no intervention.

2. To develop a pilot program for pastor children, ages 10 – 15 with the purpose of increased social support. Since no known program exists to implement, the program should develop with the guidance of adult children of pastors. The program would be delivered in two formats (online and face-to-face) with pre and posttest measures in place to note initial promising effectiveness of the intervention.
3. To create a pilot program for pastor children, ages 10 – 15 and their parents focusing on church member role expectations. The training would clarify social role expectations by identifying appropriate and inappropriate role expectations. In addition, the intervention would provide skills training to actively intervene with church members imposing inappropriate role expectations. The intervention would be delivered in a face-to-face format with pre and posttest measures to note the level of intervention effectiveness.

**In conclusion,** while the data is extensive and complex, we feel that it is important to The results of this study, while complex, are clear: the front-line leadership in the Seventh-day Adventist church, pastors and their families, experience levels of stress that are not sustainable for the future health of the Church. The results of this study comprise a call to action on the part of the higher levels of our Church organization to intervene and reduce the stressors associated with pastoral roles, expectations, and family life.