

Call for Presentations
Adventist Human-Subject Researchers Association Conference
May 15-17 (Wednesday – Friday), 2019

Proposal submitted by:

Petr Cincala

Institute of Church Ministry

cincala@andrews.edu

Rene' D. Drumm

University of Southern Mississippi

reneddrumm@gmail.com

Pastor's Age, Church Growth, and Vitality: What is the Relationship?

Abstract

This presentation highlights data from the Natural Church Development (NCD) survey, investigating the question, "How are selected measures of a church's wellbeing related to the pastor's age?" Utilizing data from over 8,000 congregations, the analysis indicates a consistent pattern of positive church leadership and growth associated with younger pastors.

Summary

For decades, researchers have tracked the average age of American protestant clergy and have found a trend towards an aging pastorate. For example, the Barna Group (2017) notes that a little over two decades ago, the median age of Protestant clergy was 44 years old while only six percent were 65 or older. In their most recent study (2017), the Barna Group found that the average age has increased to 54. In fact, the percentage of church leaders who are over 65 has nearly tripled and there are now more pastors in the oldest age bracket than there are leaders who are younger than 40. There is evidence, of this trend among SDA pastors as well, but to a lesser degree (Dudley, 2013).

Research also demonstrates that pastors vary by age in terms of how they view church growth in their congregations. In a study conducted by the Lifeway Research Group (2018), the study found that younger pastors, (age 18-44) were more likely to indicate that their church attendance was increasing compared to those age 55-64 and 65 and older. While this may be due to optimism bias or reporting error, might there be some data-driven trends that support that the age of the pastor relates to markers of church growth and vitality? If so, do these trends hold for the SDA Church pastorate?

This presentation highlights data from the Natural Church Development (NCD) survey, investigating the question, "How are selected measures of a church's wellbeing related to the pastor's age?" Utilizing data from over 8,000 congregations, including 760 SDA congregations, the analysis indicates a consistent pattern of positive church leadership and growth associated with churches that have younger pastors.

Using age 50 as the dividing line between "younger" and "older" pastors (43% and 57% respectively), the analysis shows that in churches where there are greater numbers of young adults and young families, pastors tend to be younger. However, in churches where there is a greater number of older adults, the pastors are more likely to be older. In addition, the analysis reveals a negative correlation between the pastor's age and (1) their scores on empowering leadership ($p = .01$); (2) inspiring worship services ($p = .01$); and (3) the annual average growth rate ($p = .01$). The evidence, while descriptive, points measurable differences between younger and older pastors in their leadership roles.

These findings hold important insights for church administrators in terms of leadership and planning for church growth in key congregations. In addition, these research findings offer important insights that should be a catalyst for future research endeavors.

References/Bibliography

- Barna Group (2017). *The Aging of America's Pastors*.
<https://www.barna.com/research/aging-americas-pastors/>
- Dudley, R. L. (2013). *The Adventist Pastor: A World Survey*. Berrien Springs, MI: Institute of Church Mission.
- Earls, Aaron (2017). *How Old Are America's Pastors? Facts & Trends*.
<https://factsandtrends.net/2017/03/09/how-old-are-americas-pastors/>
- Lifeway Research Group. (2018). *Survey of Protestant Pastors' Views on the Future of Their Church: Facts & Trends Future of The Church Study*.
<http://lifewayresearch.com/wp-content/uploads/2019/02/FutureOfTheChurchJuly2018.pdf>
- Shellnutt, Kate. (2017). *Only 1 in 7 Senior Pastors Is Under 40*. Christianity Today.
<https://www.christianitytoday.com/news/2017/january/only-1-in-7-senior-pastors-is-under-40-barna.html>