

CHURCH STAFF HEALTH REPORT

⋮ A COMPREHENSIVE REPORT
⋮ ON TRENDS, CHALLENGES &
⋮ OPPORTUNITIES



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Welcome!

Whether you're a senior pastor wondering how your team is really doing, an executive pastor trying to navigate staffing challenges, a board member asking the right questions about organizational health, or a staff member striving to balance your ministry career, you're holding something that matters. This isn't just data. These are the voices of nearly 1,200 church staff members telling us what it's actually like to serve on a church team in 2025.

This is our third annual Church Staff Health Report, and what we've learned over these three years has both encouraged and sobered us. The good news? The majority of church staff (75%) are in healthy territory. They love their work, believe in their mission, and feel genuinely supported. Churches are getting some things remarkably right.

But the data also reveals a quieter story. One in four staff members is struggling. Half have seriously considered leaving in the past year. And the trend line over three years is moving in the wrong direction... slowly, but unmistakably.

We believe this matters because church staff health isn't just an HR issue... it's a ministry issue. When staff are burned out, undervalued, or uncertain about their future, it shows up in every sermon, every conversation, every initiative. And when staff are thriving? That energy radiates into everything the church does.

In the pages that follow, you'll discover which roles are flourishing and which are quietly struggling. You'll see the exact questions where churches score lowest (and highest). You'll understand why staff at the three-to-five-year mark are the most at risk. And you'll find practical insights you can apply this week, not someday.

The church needs healthy staff. And healthy staff need leaders who pay attention.

Thank you for paying attention.

For the health of your team,

Todd Rhoades

Co-Founder

Chemistry Staffing

About This Report

The Church Staff Health Assessment is Chemistry Staffing's annual research initiative to understand the state of church staff health across America. Now in its third year, this longitudinal study provides the most comprehensive look at what it's like to work on a church staff team in the United States.

The 2025 Study

This year, 1,196 paid church staff members from across the United States completed our comprehensive assessment. Combined with responses from 2023 and 2024, we now have data from over 3,400 church staff members spanning three consecutive years, giving us the ability to identify not just snapshots, but trends.

What We Measured

The assessment measures church staff health across seven categories using 50 Likert-scale questions. Respondents rate each statement on a scale of 1 to 5, from "Strongly Disagree" to "Strongly Agree." Scores are calculated to produce an overall health score out of 250 points, with sub-scores for each of the seven categories.

The seven categories assessed are:

- | | |
|--------------------|---------------------------|
| • Communication | • Compensation & Benefits |
| • Job Satisfaction | • Work Environment |
| • Leadership | • Future Stability |
| • Team Dynamics | |

Methodology Notes

The 2025 survey was fielded in Fall/Winter 2025. Participation was voluntary and self-selected; respondents were invited through Chemistry Staffing's network, partner organizations, and social media outreach. As with any self-selected survey, the sample may not perfectly represent all church staff nationally, but the size and

diversity of responses provides meaningful insights into the church staffing landscape.

All responses were anonymous and confidential. Quantitative responses were analyzed in aggregate; narrative responses are quoted verbatim but without identifying information.

How to Read This Report

This report uses two frameworks to help you interpret the data: Health Score Bands for overall staff health, and the Red/Yellow/Green Framework for individual question responses.

Health Score Bands

Each respondent's 50 question responses are calculated into an overall health score out of 250 points. These scores fall into six bands:

Score Range	Category	Interpretation
225-250	EXCEPTIONAL	Thriving - excellent staff health
190-224	STRONG	Healthy - positive with minor growth areas
155-189	GOOD	Stable - generally positive with some challenges
120-154	FAIR	Struggling - notable concerns affecting satisfaction
85-119	NEEDS IMPROVEMENT	At-risk - significant issues needing attention
0-84	CRITICAL	Crisis - severe dysfunction, high flight risk

The Red/Yellow/Green Framework

For individual questions, we use a color-coded framework to quickly identify areas of strength and concern:

● **GREEN (4s and 5s):** Agree and Strongly Agree responses. These staff members are healthy, engaged, and in a sustainable position. A vibrant church depends on having more Greens.

● **YELLOW (3s):** Neutral responses. These staff are on the fence—ambivalent, uncertain, or quietly disengaged. Yellows are an early warning sign; their concerns should be addressed before they drift toward Red.

● **RED (1s and 2s):** Disagree and Strongly Disagree responses. These staff members are at highest risk of burnout or turnover and need immediate support.

Key insight: When we report percentages throughout this report, we often combine Reds AND Yellows to show the full picture of staff needing attention. A staff member answering "neutral" isn't thriving—they're uncertain. That matters.

A NOTE ABOUT REVERSE-SCORED QUESTIONS

Two questions in the Future Stability category are reverse indicators: "I have thought seriously about leaving" and "I would consider an offer from another church." For these questions, HIGH scores are NEGATIVE signals (indicating flight risk). We clearly mark these when discussed.

2025 Demographics Snapshot

Our 2025 sample includes 1,196 paid church staff members from across the United States. Here's who participated:

Employment Type

Full-Time	808 (67.6%)
Part-Time	191 (16.0%)

Gender

Male	978 (81.8%)
Female	218 (18.2%)

Age Distribution

18-24: 23 (1.9%)	25-34: 184 (15.4%)	35-44: 253 (21.2%)
45-54: 336 (28.1%)	55-64: 265 (22.2%)	65+: 135 (11.3%)

Tenure at Current Church

Less than 1 year	126 (10.5%)
1-2 years	208 (17.4%)
3-5 years	370 (30.9%)
6-10 years	241 (20.2%)
11-15 years	103 (8.6%)
16+ years	148 (12.4%)

Top Roles Represented

Role	Count
Senior/Lead Pastor	295 (24.7%)
Student Ministries Pastor	152 (12.7%)
Executive/Administrative Pastor	121 (10.1%)
Associate Pastor	118 (9.9%)
Worship Pastor	87 (7.3%)
Other Roles	423 (35.4%)

Top Denominations

Denomination	Count
Non-Denominational	376 (31.4%)
Baptist (SBC)	209 (17.5%)
Christian Church	58 (4.8%)
Evangelical Free	56 (4.7%)
Assemblies of God	44 (3.7%)

Church Size (Current Weekend Attendance)

Size	Count
Under 100	235 (19.6%)
100-249	312 (26.1%)
250-499	199 (16.6%)
500-999	206 (17.2%)
1,000-1,999	139 (11.6%)
2,000+	105 (8.8%)

Executive Summary: The Top 10 Findings

Before diving into the full report, here are the ten discoveries that emerged from this year's assessment—the patterns that demand attention, the trends that should concern us, and the insights that can transform how you lead your team.

1. The Flight Risk Crisis

51% of church staff have thought seriously about leaving in the past year. That's not a typo. Half of all church staff members have actively considered walking away from their current roles in the last twelve months. And **44% would consider an offer from another church** if one came along. The implications for church stability, institutional knowledge, and ministry continuity are staggering.

2. The 3-5 Year Wall

Staff at the 3-5 year tenure mark have the lowest health scores (176.2) and highest flight risk (59%). New staff under one year score 193.3—a full 17-point drop by years 3-5. Something happens in those middle years: the honeymoon ends, growth opportunities stall, or disillusionment sets in. This is the critical window where churches lose the people they've invested in most.

3. The Second Chair Crisis

While Senior Pastors average 193.5, their direct reports are struggling. Associate Pastors average just 169.6 with 69% flight risk. Worship Pastors score 169.0 with 64% flight risk. Creative Arts staff score 153.4 with a stunning 75% flight risk. The people supporting the vision are far less healthy than the people casting it.

4. The Evaluation Disaster

"Clear process for evaluations and raises" scores 2.96/5 (the lowest of all 50 questions). A full 63% of staff are neutral or disagree that their church has a clear, fair evaluation process. Staff don't know where they stand, how they're being assessed,

or what it takes to get a raise. This ambiguity breeds anxiety, resentment, and turnover.

5. The Small Church Struggle

Staff at churches under 100 attendance average 176.9 with 61% flight risk.

Compare that to megachurch staff (2,000+), who score 185.7 with 40% flight risk. Small churches face resource constraints, limited growth paths, and often expect staff to wear more hats—and it shows in their health scores.

6. The Benefits Gap

Benefits satisfaction (health insurance, retirement) scores just 3.26/5, with 30%

dissatisfied. Compensation & Benefits is the weakest category overall at 68.5%—and benefits drag it down. Many churches haven't kept pace with what secular employers offer, creating a tangible cost to serving in ministry.

7. Communication Breakdown

36% of staff don't feel kept informed about important decisions affecting the

church. "Kept informed about decisions" (3.64) lags significantly behind "regular staff meetings" (4.06). Churches are meeting regularly but not communicating what matters. Information flows up, but not always down.

8. Leadership & Conflict

Only 54% believe leadership handles conflicts well (3.39/5). A full 24% are in the red zone on conflict handling. When conflict arises—and it always does—nearly half of church staff don't feel confident that leadership will address it constructively. Unresolved conflict festers and becomes a leading driver of departures.

9. The Three-Year Decline

Church staff health has declined three consecutive years. EXCEPTIONAL has dropped from 18.8% (2023) to 14.7% (2025)—a 22% decline in our healthiest category.

Meanwhile, FAIR has increased from 14.4% to 19.1%. The needle is moving in the wrong direction, slowly but consistently.

10. What Separates Thriving from Surviving

Twelve factors create a 2+ point gap between healthy and struggling staff. The biggest differentiators: clear direction from leadership (+2.32 gap), feeling valued by colleagues (+2.31), and church prioritizing well-being (+2.28). These aren't expensive programs—they're leadership choices that create dramatically different outcomes.

WHAT'S AHEAD

The pages that follow will unpack each of these findings in detail, with the data, context, and actionable recommendations you need to respond. You'll see category-by-category analysis, demographic breakdowns, year-over-year trends, and the voices of staff members themselves explaining what's working and what's broken. Our goal isn't just to inform—it's to equip you to build a healthier team.

The State of Church Staff Health

Where We Stand in 2025

Every year, we ask the same fundamental question: *How healthy is the American church staff?*

The answer in 2025 is complicated—and that complexity matters. The headline numbers reveal a workforce that is, for the most part, doing okay. But beneath that surface lies a troubling pattern that church leaders cannot afford to ignore. The slow erosion we've tracked since 2023 continues, and the cracks are becoming harder to dismiss as statistical noise.

This year, 1,196 paid church staff members from across the United States completed our assessment. Their responses paint a picture of a workforce at a crossroads: still majority-healthy, but trending in the wrong direction for the third consecutive year.

The 2025 Snapshot

The overall average score for church staff health in 2025 is 183.4 out of 250 points—a score that lands squarely in the GOOD category. The median score of 190 places the typical respondent at the threshold of STRONG. By these measures, church staff are, on the whole, in reasonable shape.

But averages and medians only tell part of the story. The distribution across our six health bands reveals where the workforce actually lives:

Health Band	Score Range	Respondents	Percentage
EXCEPTIONAL	225-250	176	14.7%
STRONG	190-224	423	35.4%
GOOD	155-189	295	24.7%
FAIR	120-154	228	19.1%
NEEDS IMPROVEMENT	85-119	61	5.1%
CRITICAL	0-84	13	1.1%

What do these categories mean in practical terms? Staff in the EXCEPTIONAL range are thriving—they love their work, feel deeply supported, and see a long future at their church. Those in STRONG territory are healthy, engaged, and generally satisfied, with only minor areas for growth. GOOD represents stability: these staff members are doing fine, but they have notable challenges that, left unaddressed, could push them downward.

The categories below GOOD tell a different story. FAIR indicates staff who are struggling—their concerns are real and affecting their daily experience. NEEDS IMPROVEMENT signals significant dysfunction, often involving multiple problem areas. And CRITICAL represents staff in crisis: burned out, considering resignation, or enduring toxic environments.

When we draw the line between healthy and concerning, the split looks like this:

- Healthy (GOOD or above): 894 respondents — 74.7%
- Concerning (FAIR or below): 302 respondents — 25.3%

Three-quarters of church staff are in healthy territory. That's genuinely good news—and it's easy to stop there. But one in four church staff members are struggling. In our sample from this year alone, that's 302 real people facing real challenges in their ministry roles. Extrapolate that to the hundreds of thousands of paid church staff across America, and you're looking at tens of thousands of ministry workers who are not okay.

The Three-Year Trend

This is Chemistry Staffing's third annual Church Staff Health Assessment, giving us a longitudinal view that single-year snapshots cannot provide. The trends are subtle—but consistent.

Metric	2023 (n=1,064)	2024 (n=1,202)	2025 (n=1,196)	Change (2023→2025)
Average Score	185.4	184.0	183.4	-2.0 points
Median Score	193	191	190	-3 points
EXCEPTIONAL	18.8%	18.4%	14.7%	-4.1%
STRONG	33.9%	32.8%	35.4%	+1.5%
GOOD	24.3%	25.0%	24.7%	+0.4%
FAIR	14.4%	15.8%	19.1%	+4.7%
NEEDS IMPROVEMENT	6.7%	6.0%	5.1%	-1.6%
CRITICAL	1.9%	2.0%	1.1%	-0.8%
Healthy Total	77.1%	76.2%	74.7%	-2.4%
Concerning Total	22.9%	23.8%	25.3%	+2.4%

A 2-point decline in average score over three years might seem insignificant. Is that really cause for concern?

On its own, perhaps not. But three things make this trend worth watching.

First, the decline is consistent. Scores have dropped every single year since we began measuring. This isn't fluctuation—it's a trajectory.

Second, the distribution shift matters more than the average. Look at where movement is actually happening: EXCEPTIONAL has shrunk by 4.1 percentage points

(from 18.8% to 14.7%), while FAIR has grown by 4.7 percentage points (from 14.4% to 19.1%). The middle categories—STRONG and GOOD—have remained relatively stable. What we're witnessing isn't a uniform decline. It's a hollowing out from the top.

Third, the median tells an important story. The median score (190) is notably higher than the average (183.4). This gap indicates that the distribution is being pulled down by a tail of struggling staff. Most church workers are doing reasonably well. But those who are struggling are struggling significantly—enough to drag the average down.

The Hollowing Out

The most important finding in this year's data isn't a single number. It's a pattern.

We are losing our healthiest staff. In 2023, nearly one in five church staff members (18.8%) were in EXCEPTIONAL health—thriving in every category, deeply engaged, and highly unlikely to leave. Today, that number is closer to one in seven (14.7%). That 4-point drop represents thousands of ministry workers nationwide who have moved from thriving to merely surviving.

Where did they go? Some moved to STRONG or GOOD—still healthy, but less vibrant. Others have slid further, landing in FAIR. The FAIR category has seen the most dramatic growth, expanding from 14.4% to 19.1% over three years. That's a 33% increase in the proportion of staff who are struggling.

Meanwhile, the bottom categories—NEEDS IMPROVEMENT and CRITICAL—have actually shrunk slightly. This seems counterintuitive until you consider the survivorship bias at play. Staff in crisis don't tend to stay. They resign, burn out, or are let go. The floor hasn't risen because we've gotten better at supporting struggling staff; it's contracted because struggling staff have already left.

The result is a workforce that looks stable from a distance but is slowly losing its most engaged members while accumulating more workers in the danger zone. The ceiling is lowering. And unless church leaders understand what's driving this shift, the trend will continue.

What This Means for Church Leaders

If you lead a church, here's what you need to understand: **the majority of your staff are probably fine—but "fine" is increasingly fragile.**

The 74.7% of staff in healthy categories are not immune to the pressures facing ministry workers. They're one bad leadership transition, one conflict mishandled, one unrealistic expectation away from joining the 25.3% who are struggling. And those who are already struggling are closer to the exit than you might think.

The discoveries that follow in this report will unpack *why* this erosion is happening. We'll examine the seven categories that comprise staff health—Communication, Job Satisfaction, Leadership, Team Dynamics, Compensation & Benefits, Work Environment, and Future Stability—and reveal where churches are succeeding and where they're falling short.

But before we dive into specific findings, we need to address the elephant in the room: the ongoing reality of church attendance decline and its profound impact on staff health. Because for many church workers, the trend lines in this report are not abstract statistics. They reflect daily realities of doing more with less, leading congregations through uncertainty, and wondering if the church they serve has a sustainable future.

THE BOTTOM LINE

Three-quarters of church staff are in healthy territory—but that number is shrinking, not growing. More concerning than the 2-point drop in average scores is the shift in distribution: we're losing our healthiest staff.

EXCEPTIONAL has fallen by 4 percentage points in three years, while FAIR has grown by nearly 5 points. The middle isn't collapsing—the top is eroding. Church leaders who assume their staff are "doing fine" may be watching their most engaged workers quietly slip toward the exit.

The Elephant in the Room: Church Decline and Staff Health

Let's talk about what everyone in church leadership is already thinking about.

If you're reading this report, chances are you know exactly where your church stands in relation to where it was before COVID. You know whether your attendance has recovered, stabilized, or continued to slide. You've looked at the numbers, wrestled with the budget implications, and probably lost sleep wondering what it all means for your church's future.

But here's what you may not have considered: what is your church's attendance trajectory doing to your staff?

The data from this year's assessment reveals something that demands our attention. There is a **nearly 20-point gap** in staff health scores between churches that have declined significantly since COVID and those that have stabilized or grown. This isn't just a budget problem. It's a people problem. And it's affecting the health, engagement, and retention of your team in ways that may be accelerating the very decline you're trying to reverse.

The COVID Recovery Landscape: Where Churches Stand Today

Three years after the initial COVID disruptions, we asked respondents to report both their church's pre-COVID attendance and their current attendance. Of the **1,176 respondents** who provided attendance data, the results paint a complicated picture.

Recovery Status	Respondents	Percentage
Still below pre-COVID attendance	570	48.5%
Roughly the same (within $\pm 5\%$ of pre-COVID)	138	11.7%
Grown beyond pre-COVID levels	468	39.8%

The **median attendance change** is exactly **0.0%**, meaning the typical church in our sample is right at the break-even point. Meanwhile, the **mean change of +13.1%** is skewed upward by high-growth outliers, particularly churches that have experienced explosive post-COVID growth.

What this tells us is that the American church landscape has essentially split into three camps: churches that are still struggling to recover, churches that have stabilized, and churches that are growing. And your staff's experience differs dramatically depending on which camp your church falls into.

The 20-Point Health Gap

When we segment staff health scores by church attendance trajectory, the pattern is unmistakable.

Church Trajectory	Sample Size	Avg. Staff Health Score	% Thought About Leaving
Declined >20% from pre-COVID	333	169.9	63%
Stable (-20% to +20%)	521	187.8	47%
Grew >20% from pre-COVID	322	189.7	47%

Staff in churches that have declined more than 20% since COVID score 169.9 on average, placing them solidly in the GOOD range but trending dangerously close to FAIR. Compare that to staff in stable churches (187.8) or growing churches (189.7), whose scores place them in the upper-GOOD range, approaching STRONG.

The difference is stark: 19.8 points separates declining churches from growing churches. That gap represents the difference between a healthy, engaged team and one that is struggling, discouraged, and considering their options.

And about those options: **63% of staff in significantly declining churches have thought seriously about leaving** within the past year. That's 16 percentage points higher than staff in stable or growing churches, where the number sits at 47%. Nearly

two-thirds of your team in a declining church context is already wondering if there's a better opportunity elsewhere.

Why Church Decline Hits Staff So Hard

It's tempting to assume that staff in declining churches are worried primarily about job security. After all, when attendance drops, giving usually follows, and budget cuts often mean staff cuts. That's certainly part of it.

But the health gap we're seeing touches every category of the assessment, from communication to leadership to team dynamics. The impact of church decline on staff isn't just financial. It's existential.

When a church is declining, staff often experience a cluster of compounding stressors. There's the uncertainty about the future: will the church survive, and will my position survive with it? There's the pressure of doing more with less as budgets tighten and positions are eliminated. There's the discouragement that comes from pouring yourself into ministry efforts that don't seem to move the needle. And there's the grief, often unacknowledged, of watching something you love and have invested in become diminished.

One staff member captured this feeling in their survey response:

"There is very little hope for church health and growth. You must move on as soon as possible because the church is so set in its ways and very adverse to change. You will go down with the sinking ship."

That's not just frustration talking. That's the voice of someone who has lost hope, and when staff lose hope, the vicious cycle accelerates. Attendance declines lead to staff morale drops, which lead to the best staff leaving, which stretches remaining staff thinner, which causes ministry quality to suffer, which leads to further attendance decline. Breaking this cycle requires intentional intervention, but it starts with recognizing that your staff are feeling the weight of decline even more than you may realize.

The Silver Lining: Stability Is Enough

Here's the encouraging news buried in this data: **you don't need to be a growing church to have healthy staff.**

Look again at the numbers. Staff in growing churches (189.7) score only marginally higher than staff in stable churches (187.8). That's less than two points of difference. The growth itself isn't what's protecting staff health. It's the stability, the sense that the church has found its footing and isn't in freefall.

This matters enormously for leaders of churches that may never return to their pre-COVID attendance numbers. The goal isn't explosive growth. It's stabilization. If you can stop the bleeding, if you can give your staff a sense that the future is secure even if it looks different than the past, you can protect their health and engagement.

The toxicity isn't in being a 200-person church instead of a 400-person church. The toxicity is in the decline itself, in the trajectory, in the uncertainty. A church that has honestly reckoned with its new reality and is building a sustainable future at a smaller size can have staff just as healthy as a church that's adding a second service.

A Word to Leaders of Declining Churches

If your church has experienced significant decline since COVID, and nearly half of churches in our sample have, this data isn't meant to pile on. You're already carrying enough weight.

But it is meant to open your eyes to something you may have missed. Your staff are struggling more than they may be letting on. They're carrying the emotional weight of the decline alongside you, often without the context and information that you have as a leader. And many of them, perhaps most of them, have already started wondering whether there's a different future for them somewhere else.

The instinct in a declining church is often to hunker down, cut costs, and focus outward on the attendance problem. Those instincts aren't wrong, but they're incomplete. If you neglect your staff's health while you're trying to turn things around, you may find yourself without the team you need to execute the turnaround.

Prioritizing staff health in a declining context isn't a luxury. It may be the intervention that breaks the cycle. A demoralized staff won't lead a revitalization. They'll quietly polish their resumes while going through the motions. But a staff that feels seen, supported, and hopeful, even in the midst of difficult circumstances, can be the catalyst for something new.

Talk openly with your team about where the church is and where it's going. Acknowledge the difficulty without pretending everything is fine. Celebrate small

wins. Invest in their development even when budgets are tight. And above all, don't let them feel alone in carrying the weight of the decline. You're in this together, and they need to know that.

THE BOTTOM LINE

Church attendance decline isn't just a budget problem; it's a staff health crisis. Staff in churches that have declined more than 20% since COVID score nearly 20 points lower on overall health and are 16 percentage points more likely to be considering departure. The good news? You don't need explosive growth to have healthy staff. Stability is enough. Staff in stable churches score nearly as high as those in growing churches. But unaddressed decline is toxic, not just to your attendance numbers, but to the people serving on your team. If your church is in decline, prioritizing staff health isn't optional. It may be the key to reversing the trajectory.

Discovery #1: The Flight Risk Crisis

More Than Half of Your Staff Have Thought About Leaving

Let that sink in for a moment.

51.1% of church staff have thought seriously about leaving their current position within the last year. Not "someday" or "eventually" — within the past twelve months. More than half of the people who showed up to your staff meeting this week have, at some point in the recent past, imagined a future that doesn't include your church.

This is the finding that should keep church leaders up at night. Not because it signals inevitable mass exodus, but because it reveals what your team members are thinking but will never tell you in a one-on-one. Staff don't typically announce they're weighing their options. They smile, they serve, they show up — until one day they hand you a resignation letter, and you're left wondering what you missed.

The 2025 Church Staff Health Assessment asked two questions designed to measure flight risk, and both paint a sobering picture of staff retention across the American church.

The Two Questions That Reveal What Staff Won't Say

Before examining the data, it's important to understand how these questions work. Unlike most items on the assessment where high scores indicate health, these two questions are **reverse indicators**. A staff member who "Strongly Agrees" that they've thought about leaving is at *higher* risk, not lower. High scores here are warning signs, not green lights.

Question 1: "I have thought seriously about leaving my current church position within the last year."

Response	Percentage
Agree + Strongly Agree (4-5)	51.1%
Neutral (3)	10.8%
Disagree + Strongly Disagree (1-2)	38.1%
Average Score	3.23/5

The 51.1% who agree have done more than daydream. "Thought seriously" implies the idea has weight — it's been considered, turned over, perhaps discussed with a spouse or close friend. These are staff members for whom the door to departure has already cracked open.

But don't overlook the 10.8% who answered "Neutral." These staff members didn't disagree. They didn't say, "No, I haven't thought about leaving." They said, essentially, "I'm not sure" or "It's complicated." When you combine those who have actively considered leaving with those who are ambivalent, you reach 61.9% — nearly two-thirds of church staff who are not firmly committed to staying.

Only 38.1% answered with the clarity of someone who is genuinely settled: "No, I have not thought seriously about leaving." That means for every three staff members on your team, statistically only one is fully anchored.

Question 2: "If offered a similar position at another church, I would consider the opportunity."

Response	Percentage
Agree + Strongly Agree (4-5)	44.0%
Neutral (3)	15.1%
Disagree + Strongly Disagree (1-2)	40.9%
Average Score	3.04/5

This question measures something slightly different: passive openness to opportunity. The staff member who agrees here isn't necessarily unhappy. They may love their church, enjoy their team, and feel fulfilled in their work. But if a recruiter called tomorrow, if a friend mentioned an opening, if they happened to see a job posting that caught their eye — they'd at least think about it.

44% would consider another offer. Another 15.1% are neutral — they're not saying no. Combined, that's **59.1%** of church staff who would not automatically dismiss an outside opportunity.

This matters because retention isn't just about preventing active job searches. It's about building the kind of loyalty and satisfaction that makes staff members say, "No thanks, I'm exactly where I'm supposed to be." When nearly 60% of your team would at least consider leaving if something came along, you're one well-timed LinkedIn message away from a resignation.

Flight Risk Varies Dramatically by Role

Not all positions face equal retention pressure. The data reveals striking disparities in flight risk across different ministry roles, with a **41 percentage point gap** between the most and least vulnerable positions.

Flight Risk by Role: "I have thought seriously about leaving my current church position within the last year"

Role	Sample Size	Avg Health Score	% Thought About Leaving
Creative Arts	16	153.4	75%
College/Young Adults Pastor	14	182.9	71%
Associate Pastor	118	169.6	69%
Teaching Pastor	27	189.9	67%
Family Pastor	31	168.8	65%
Worship Pastor	87	169.0	64%
Communications	10	173.3	60%
Campus Pastor	19	176.5	53%
Media/Technology	21	172.9	52%
Children's Pastor	45	179.9	49%
Senior/Lead Pastor	295	193.5	48%
Student Ministries Pastor	152	176.6	47%
Administrative Assistant	30	180.6	47%
Missions Pastor	13	174.7	46%
Discipleship/Small Groups	55	189.5	45%
Executive/Administrative Pastor	121	196.1	45%
Finance/HR	32	187.2	34%

The pattern is unmistakable: **roles with lower overall health scores consistently show higher flight risk.** Creative Arts staff, who report the lowest average health score (153.4), also report the highest flight risk (75%). Finance/HR staff, with a much healthier average score (187.2), show the lowest flight risk (34%).

Three out of four Creative Arts staff members have thought seriously about leaving. For every four people on your creative team, three have imagined life somewhere else. Meanwhile, only one in three Finance/HR staff have had the same thoughts.

What's driving these disparities? While the data doesn't provide direct causation, the correlation between health score and flight risk suggests the obvious: **unhealthy situations produce thoughts of leaving.** The roles experiencing the most strain — often characterized by unclear expectations, limited resources, and high visibility with limited authority — are the same roles most actively contemplating departure.

Church leaders should pay particular attention to roles clustering above 60% flight risk: Creative Arts, College/Young Adults, Associate Pastor, Teaching Pastor, Family Pastor, Worship Pastor, and Communications. These team members need proactive attention, not reactive crisis management after they've already decided to go.

The Tenure Tipping Point

Perhaps no finding in this study has more immediate practical implications than the relationship between tenure and flight risk. The data reveals a pattern that should reshape how churches think about staff development and retention investment.

Flight Risk by Tenure: "I have thought seriously about leaving my current church position within the last year"

Tenure	Sample Size	Avg Health Score	% Thought About Leaving
Less than 1 year	126	193.3	32%
1-2 years	208	182.3	44%
3-5 years	370	176.2	59%
6-10 years	241	180.4	60%
11-15 years	103	185.0	57%
16-20 years	61	191.2	48%

Flight risk nearly doubles between year one (32%) and years three through five (59%). This is not a gradual increase — it's a dramatic escalation. Something happens in the first few years of ministry that transforms hopeful new hires into staff members actively weighing their options.

New staff members arrive with optimism. They're still learning, still acclimating, still giving the benefit of the doubt. Only 32% have thought about leaving in their first year. But by years three to five, that number has jumped to 59% — a 27 percentage point increase.

This pattern is so significant that we've dedicated an entire section to exploring it. Discovery #2 will examine what we call "The 3-5 Year Danger Zone" — the critical window when churches are most likely to lose the staff they've invested years in developing. For now, note this: the staff members most at risk aren't your newest hires. They're the ones who've been around long enough to see behind the curtain but not long enough to have fully committed to staying.

The good news embedded in this data? Staff who make it past the danger zone and reach 16-20 years show notably lower flight risk (48%) and higher health scores (191.2). Tenure does eventually produce stability — but only for those who survive the middle years.

Small Churches Face the Greatest Retention Challenge

Church size creates another significant disparity in flight risk, with smaller congregations facing substantially higher retention vulnerability than their larger counterparts.

Flight Risk by Church Size: "I have thought seriously about leaving my current church position within the last year"

Church Size (Current Attendance)	Sample Size	Avg Health Score	% Thought About Leaving
Under 100	235	176.9	61%
100-249	312	183.4	52%
250-499	199	185.5	49%
500-999	206	184.5	47%
1000-1999	139	187.8	51%
2000+	105	185.7	40%

Staff at churches under 100 in attendance show 61% flight risk — 21 percentage points higher than staff at churches over 2,000. This gap compounds the challenges small churches already face. They typically have smaller budgets, fewer staff, and less margin for error. Losing even one key staff member can be devastating. Yet they're the churches most likely to experience turnover.

Why the disparity? Several factors likely contribute. Smaller churches often struggle to provide competitive compensation. They may lack the resources for professional development. Staff in small churches frequently carry multiple roles, leading to unclear expectations and overwork. And with smaller teams, relational friction has nowhere to hide — there's no buffer between staff members who clash.

The irony is painful: the churches that can least afford to lose staff are the most likely to lose them. For pastors and boards at smaller congregations, this data should

prompt serious reflection about retention strategy. What are you doing to make your church a place where staff want to stay, even without the resources of a megachurch?

What This Costs

The human cost of staff turnover is immeasurable — broken relationships, disrupted ministries, congregational confusion, and the personal pain of transition. But even in purely financial terms, the cost is staggering.

Industry estimates suggest replacing a staff member costs between \$15,000 and \$50,000 or more when you factor in recruiting expenses, onboarding time, lost productivity during the transition, institutional knowledge that walks out the door, and the relational disruption that ripples through volunteers and congregants. For senior positions, the cost can exceed six figures.

If 51% of church staff are thinking about leaving and even 10-15% actually follow through, that represents an enormous organizational cost — one that most churches never quantify but always feel. The salary line item for a departing staff member is just the beginning. The true cost includes everything that goes with them: relationships cultivated over years, understanding of how things really work, trust built with volunteers and members, and momentum in ministries that now must start over.

This isn't meant to induce panic. Most staff who think about leaving don't actually leave — at least not immediately. But every departure that could have been prevented represents a failure of stewardship. These are people God brought to your church. They arrived with calling and hope. When they leave disillusioned, something has gone wrong — and it usually could have been addressed earlier if anyone had known to try.

What This Means for Your Church

The national statistics tell you what's typical. They reveal that flight risk is not unique to your church — it's endemic across American church staff. But the national data cannot tell you which of your staff members have thought about leaving, which would consider another offer, and what's driving those thoughts.

Here's the uncomfortable reality: this is happening on your team, whether you know it or not. Statistically, if you have ten staff members, five have thought seriously about leaving in the past year. Four would at least consider another opportunity if one came along. They haven't told you this — and they probably won't, at least not until they've already made their decision.

Staff members don't typically announce they're weighing their options. They don't walk into your office and say, "I'm not sure I want to be here anymore." They process privately. They talk to their spouse, not their supervisor. By the time you hear about it, they've often already reached a conclusion. The resignation letter isn't the beginning of their departure process — it's the end.

The churches that retain their best people are the ones who create space for honest conversation long before the exit interview. They ask difficult questions and actually listen to the answers. They address problems while they're still solvable. They make staff health a strategic priority, not an afterthought.

As you read these statistics, consider: What percentage of your staff have thought about leaving? The national data tells you what's typical — but only your own assessment can reveal what's true for your team. And only honest conversation can reveal what to do about it.

THE BOTTOM LINE

More than half of church staff (51.1%) have thought seriously about leaving their position in the past year. Another 44% would consider an offer from another church. This isn't a hypothetical risk — it's a present reality affecting teams across the country. The flight risk varies dramatically by role (34% to 75%), by tenure (32% to 60%), and by church size (40% to 61%). The question isn't whether some of your staff have considered leaving. The question is: which ones, why, and what are you doing about it?

Discovery #2: The 3-5 Year Wall

Your Newest Staff Are Your Healthiest—And That's a Problem

Here's a finding that should stop every church leader in their tracks: Your newest staff members are your healthiest. Staff in their first year score an average of 193.3 on the health assessment—solidly in the STRONG category—with only 32% having thought seriously about leaving.

That sounds like good news until you see what happens next.

By years 3-5, that score plummets to 176.2, a drop of 17 points. Flight risk nearly doubles to 59%. And here's the cruel irony: years 3-5 is precisely when your staff members become most valuable. They finally know your systems. They've built trust with the congregation. They've learned from their early mistakes. They're operating at full capacity. And statistically, nearly six in ten of them are thinking about walking out the door.

We call this "**The 3-5 Year Wall**"—and it may be the most actionable finding in this entire report.

The Tenure Data: A Clear Pattern Emerges

When we segment the 2025 data by tenure, a striking lifecycle pattern appears:

Tenure	Sample Size	Avg Health Score	% Thought About Leaving	% in Healthy Bands
Less than 1 year	126	193.3	32%	~82%
1-2 years	208	182.3	44%	~75%
3-5 years	370	176.2	59%	~68%
6-10 years	241	180.4	60%	~72%
11-15 years	103	185.0	57%	~76%
16-20 years	61	191.2	48%	~80%

The pattern is unmistakable. Staff enter with enthusiasm and optimism, then experience a steady decline that bottoms out at years 3-5. Those who survive that valley begin a slow climb back toward health, eventually reaching near-honeymoon levels by their second decade.

Two statistics deserve special attention. First, the 17.1-point drop from year one (193.3) to years 3-5 (176.2) represents a significant decline in overall wellbeing—the difference between a staff member who is thriving and one who is merely surviving. Second, flight risk doesn't just increase during this period; it nearly doubles from 32% to 59%. That's not a gradual shift. That's a crisis point.

Perhaps most concerning: the 3-5 year cohort is the largest in our sample, comprising 370 respondents—30.9% of all participants. If this is your most vulnerable group, and it's also your largest group, you're sitting on significant turnover risk.

The Staff Lifecycle: Understanding Each Stage

What we're seeing in this data is a predictable staff lifecycle—a journey that nearly every church staff member travels, whether churches recognize it or not.

Stage 1: The Honeymoon (Year 0-1) New staff arrive with excitement and possibility. Everything is fresh. The culture feels energizing. The vision feels inspiring. Even challenges feel like opportunities. At 193.3 average health and only 32% flight risk,

these staff members are operating with full emotional tanks. They haven't yet encountered the accumulated frustrations that will come.

Stage 2: The Adjustment (Years 1-2) Reality begins to set in. By years 1-2, the score drops 11 points to 182.3, and flight risk rises to 44%. These staff members have now experienced their first budget cycle where their ministry didn't get what it needed. They've encountered their first "we've always done it this way" roadblock. They've felt their first disappointment when an initiative fell flat. The gap between what was promised in the interview and what's delivered in reality has started to show.

Stage 3: The Wall (Years 3-5) This is the crisis point. At 176.2 average and 59% flight risk, staff members in this stage are genuinely struggling. Initial enthusiasm is depleted. They've seen enough of the organization's dysfunction to be disillusioned, but not yet enough to gain perspective. They're comparing their reality to opportunities elsewhere. They've invested enough to feel somewhat stuck but not enough to feel deeply committed. The internal question shifts from "How do I succeed here?" to "Should I even be here?"

Stage 4: Recovery (Years 6-10) Something interesting happens for those who break through the wall. Health scores begin climbing again, reaching 180.4 in years 6-10. Flight risk plateaus at 60%—high, but no longer increasing. Staff in this stage have either worked through their issues with the church, made peace with organizational imperfections, or developed coping mechanisms that allow them to thrive despite ongoing challenges.

Stage 5: Stabilization (Years 11-15) By years 11-15, health scores reach 185.0, and flight risk begins declining to 57%. These staff members have found their groove. They've developed deep relationships with congregants and colleagues. They've seen enough ministry fruit to sustain them through difficulties. They've likely also achieved enough seniority to have influence over the frustrations that once plagued them.

Stage 6: Veteran Resilience (Years 16-20) Long-tenured staff score 191.2—nearly identical to honeymoon-stage newcomers—with flight risk dropping to 48%. These veterans have achieved something remarkable: they've rediscovered joy and health on the other side of decades of ministry. They carry institutional wisdom, relational depth, and spiritual maturity that cannot be replicated by newer staff.

Why the Wall Exists

Understanding that the wall exists is valuable. Understanding *why* it exists is essential for addressing it.

Several dynamics converge at years 3-5 to create this perfect storm of declining health and rising flight risk. First, accumulated frustrations reach critical mass. Every organization has friction—inefficient processes, difficult personalities, budget constraints, unresolved conflicts. In year one, these are minor irritations. By year four, they've compounded into genuine grievances. The staff member has now encountered the same frustration dozens of times, and the pattern has shifted from "this is annoying" to "this is who they are."

Second, unmet expectations crystallize into resentment. During the hiring process, every church casts vision for what the role could become. Three to five years in, staff members have a clear picture of the gap between that vision and reality. If the resources never materialized, if the support was promised but not delivered, if the growth trajectory stalled—these disappointments have had time to harden into bitterness.

Third, peak marketability creates options. A staff member at year four has accumulated enough experience to be attractive to other churches while still being young enough in their career to make a move. They've built a network through denominational gatherings and conferences. They've likely received recruiting calls or seen job postings that made them wonder "what if?" The 3-5 year mark is precisely when external opportunities feel most accessible.

Fourth, and perhaps most significantly, the question fundamentally changes. Early in a role, staff members focus on how to succeed—how to learn the culture, build relationships, and prove themselves. By years 3-5, they've largely answered those questions. They know how to succeed here. The new question is whether they *want* to. This shift from "how" to "whether" is the defining characteristic of the wall.

The ROI Problem: Losing Staff at Maximum Value

Here's what makes the 3-5 year wall so costly: churches are losing staff members at precisely the moment they become most valuable.

Consider what a staff member at year four brings to the table. They understand your church's culture intuitively. They know which families are going through difficulties and which volunteers are burning out. They've built trust with congregation members who now come to them with sensitive issues. They've learned from their early missteps and refined their approach. They carry institutional knowledge about why certain decisions were made and which past initiatives failed. They can navigate your internal politics. They're finally operating at full capacity.

Now consider what it costs to lose that person. You're not just posting a job and conducting interviews. You're losing years of accumulated knowledge and relationships. The new hire will take 6-12 months just to get oriented. They'll repeat some of the same mistakes their predecessor already learned from. Key volunteers may disengage during the transition. Congregation members who had trusted the departing staff member will need to rebuild trust with someone new. The true cost of losing a four-year veteran dwarfs the cost of losing a one-year newcomer—yet the four-year veteran is nearly twice as likely to be thinking about leaving.

This is a terrible return on investment. Churches invest heavily in recruiting, onboarding, and developing staff members, then lose them at the precise moment that investment would start paying dividends.

The Recovery Phenomenon: Life on the Other Side

There is hope embedded in this data. Staff members who survive the wall don't just stabilize—they recover. By years 16-20, health scores reach 191.2, nearly matching the honeymoon stage. Flight risk drops to 48%, the lowest of any tenure band after year one.

What happens to create this recovery? Several factors are likely at play. Some of it is self-selection: the staff members who were most unhappy at years 3-5 have already left, leaving behind those with greater resilience or better fit. Some of it is perspective: veterans have seen enough ministry cycles to know that difficulties pass and fruit takes time. Some of it is influence: senior staff often have more ability to address the frustrations that plagued them earlier. And some of it is depth: after a decade or more, staff members have built relationships and seen life change that provides meaning transcending organizational annoyances.

The implication is clear: if you can help staff members break through the wall rather than leave during it, many will go on to become your healthiest, most committed, most valuable team members. The goal isn't just retention for retention's sake—it's getting staff to the other side where they can thrive.

Questions for Leaders

As you consider your own staff, several questions deserve reflection:

1. How many of your staff members are currently in the 3-5 year window? These individuals are statistically your most vulnerable. Do you know who they are?
2. When did you last have a substantive conversation with these staff members about their satisfaction, frustrations, and future? Not a performance review—a genuine check-in about how they're really doing?
3. What accumulated frustrations have they mentioned over the years that remain unaddressed? Are there patterns you've dismissed as "that's just how it is" that might be pushing them toward the door?
4. Are you waiting for these staff members to raise concerns, or are you proactively seeking to understand their experience? By the time a staff member in the wall stage brings up their frustrations, they may have already mentally checked out.

Think about your staff members in the 3-5 year window. Statistically, nearly 60% of them have thought seriously about leaving in the past year. Do you know which ones? Have you asked? What would it take to help them break through the wall instead of walking away? These individuals represent your highest potential loss—and your highest potential long-term gain if they stay.

THE BOTTOM LINE

The "3-5 Year Wall" is real. Staff health drops 17 points from year one to years 3-5, and flight risk nearly doubles from 32% to 59%. This is precisely when staff become most valuable—they know your culture, carry institutional knowledge, and have built relational equity with the congregation. Yet this is when they're most likely to leave. The staff who survive the wall go on to become your healthiest, most committed veterans, often rediscovering joy levels that match their honeymoon stage. The question every church leader must ask: How many staff members are you losing at the wall who never get the chance to become those thriving veterans?

Discovery #3: The Second Chair Crisis

Same Church, Different Worlds

What if the person sitting next to you in your staff meeting is experiencing your church in a fundamentally different way than you are?

Not different because they're less committed. Not different because they're weaker in faith. Different because of where they sit in the organizational chart.

This year's data reveals one of the most important findings in three years of this research: there is a 25-point gap between senior leaders and the staff who serve directly under them. Senior/Lead Pastors average 193.5 on the health assessment. Associate Pastors average 169.6. That's the difference between solidly STRONG and barely holding onto GOOD.

They share the same building. They attend the same meetings. They serve the same congregation. But they're living in different realities.

And for one role—Creative Arts—the situation has crossed from concerning into crisis territory.

The Complete Role Picture

Before we explore why this gap exists, let's look at the full landscape. The following table shows every role in our study, sorted from healthiest to most at-risk:

Role	Sample Size	Avg Health Score	% in Healthy Bands	% Thought About Leaving
Executive/Administrative Pastor	121	196.1	86%	45%
Senior/Lead Pastor	295	193.5	85%	48%
Teaching Pastor	27	189.9	78%	67%
Discipleship/Small Groups	55	189.5	82%	45%
Finance/HR	32	187.2	72%	34%
College/Young Adults Pastor	14	182.9	86%	71%
Administrative Assistant	30	180.6	73%	47%
Children's Pastor	45	179.9	80%	49%
Student Ministries Pastor	152	176.6	67%	47%
Campus Pastor	19	176.5	68%	53%
Missions Pastor	13	174.7	62%	46%
Communications	10	173.3	60%	60%
Media/Technology	21	172.9	71%	52%
Associate Pastor	118	169.6	58%	69%
Worship Pastor	87	169.0	63%	64%
Family Pastor	31	168.8	58%	65%
Creative Arts	16	153.4	38%	75%

The national average is 183.4. Seven roles score above that line. Ten roles score below it. The range spans nearly 43 points—from Executive Pastors at 196.1 to Creative Arts at 153.4. That's the difference between thriving and barely surviving.

The View from the Top Chair

Let's start with the good news.

Senior/Lead Pastors (193.5) and Executive/Administrative Pastors (196.1) are doing well. Their combined average of 194.3 places them firmly in STRONG territory, just 6 points shy of EXCEPTIONAL. Eighty-five percent of Senior Pastors and 86% of Executive Pastors fall into healthy bands (GOOD or above).

This isn't surprising. These roles come with significant autonomy. They set the direction. They control their calendars more than most staff. Their opinions carry weight in every conversation. When decisions are made, they're usually in the room—and often the ones making them.

Their flight risk, while not negligible at 45-48%, is below the national average. These are leaders who, by and large, feel good about where they are.

If you're a Senior Pastor or Executive Pastor reading this report, your experience of your church's staff culture is probably genuinely positive. You likely feel supported, valued, and clear on your mission. That's real. That's valid.

But it's not the whole story.

The View from the Second Chair

Now look at the roles directly beneath senior leadership—the people we might call "second-chair" leaders. These are staff members who carry significant responsibility but operate with less autonomy than those at the top. They implement vision more than they cast it. They manage outcomes they don't fully control.

Here's what we found:

Role	Avg Health Score	Gap from Senior Pastor	% in Healthy Bands	Flight Risk
Associate Pastor	169.6	-23.9 points	58%	69%
Worship Pastor	169.0	-24.5 points	63%	64%
Family Pastor	168.8	-24.7 points	58%	65%
Creative Arts	153.4	-40.1 points	38%	75%

The average of these four roles is 170.0—nearly 26 points below senior leadership's combined average of 194.8.

Consider what that gap represents. A Senior Pastor scoring 194 is experiencing their church as healthy, supportive, and sustainable. An Associate Pastor scoring 170 is on the edge—technically in GOOD territory, but just barely, and already showing warning signs that could tip toward FAIR.

They're attending the same staff meetings. They're praying together on Tuesday mornings. They're serving the same congregation on Sunday. But one is thriving while the other is quietly questioning whether they can sustain this.

The flight risk numbers tell the story even more starkly. Among Associate Pastors, 69% have thought seriously about leaving in the past year. Among Worship Pastors, it's 64%. Among Family Pastors, 65%. These aren't people on the margins of ministry—they're core leaders, often the most visible staff members after the Senior Pastor.

And nearly two-thirds of them have one foot out the door.

The Creative Arts Crisis

We need to pause on one role that has moved beyond struggling into genuine crisis.

Creative Arts staff—the designers, videographers, producers, and artists who shape what your congregation experiences every Sunday—scored 153.4 on average. That's

40 points below Senior Pastors. It's 30 points below the national average. It places them solidly in FAIR territory, teetering on the edge of NEEDS IMPROVEMENT.

The numbers are sobering:

- **Only 38%** of Creative Arts staff are in healthy bands
- **62%** are in concerning territory (FAIR or below)
- **75%** have thought seriously about leaving in the past year

Three out of four. In a typical church creative team, that means nearly everyone is actively considering walking away.

Why are Creative Arts staff struggling so severely? Several factors likely contribute:

Subjective evaluation. Creative work is inherently subjective. A Children's Pastor can point to attendance numbers or parent feedback. A Creative Arts director hears "I didn't like that video" or "Why did you choose that font?" from anyone with an opinion—which is everyone.

Invisible labor. The congregation sees the Sunday graphics package for fifteen seconds. They don't see the forty hours of work behind it. When creative work is excellent, it's invisible. When it misses, it's glaringly obvious.

Unclear expectations. Many Creative Arts staff report that expectations shift constantly—sometimes mid-project. "Make it pop" isn't a brief. "I'll know what I want when I see it" isn't direction.

Undervaluation. In many church cultures, creative work is seen as support rather than ministry. The person shaping what thousands of people experience every Sunday may be treated as a vendor rather than a pastor.

If your church has a creative team, they're probably not okay. And they may not feel safe telling you.

The Worship Pastor Problem

Worship Pastors deserve special attention. Scoring 169.0 with a 64% flight risk, they represent a critical vulnerability for most churches.

These are highly visible, highly skilled roles. They lead from the platform every single Sunday. They're the second face of your church after the Senior Pastor. They're often

the most musically gifted person in the room—which means they could find work elsewhere if they chose to.

And nearly two-thirds have seriously thought about it.

Worship Pastors navigate a uniquely challenging environment. They must balance artistic integrity with congregational preferences. They receive constant feedback on subjective matters—"That song was too loud." "I don't like that hymn." "Why don't we sing more contemporary music?" "Why don't we sing more hymns?" Every Sunday is an evaluation. Every week brings a new opportunity to disappoint someone.

They're also often caught between competing visions. The Senior Pastor wants one thing. The congregation wants another. The worship team has their own preferences. The sound engineer has constraints. The Worship Pastor stands in the middle, trying to create something meaningful while managing a web of expectations they can never fully satisfy.

Add to this the spiritual weight of the role. Worship Pastors don't just perform music—they're shepherding people into God's presence. The emotional and spiritual demands are immense. And when they're running on empty, they're still expected to lead with joy on Sunday morning.

The Associate Pastor Paradox

Associate Pastors (169.6, 69% flight risk) occupy one of the most complicated positions in church leadership.

They carry significant responsibility. They often oversee major ministry areas—discipleship, care, outreach, or operations. They're trusted with important work. They're frequently the person staff come to when they're not sure who to ask.

But they don't carry proportional authority. The decisions that affect their ministries are often made by someone else. The budget they work within was set by someone else. The direction they implement was cast by someone else.

This creates a structural tension that can erode health over time:

Responsibility without authority. Associate Pastors are often accountable for outcomes they can't fully control. They're expected to produce results with resources they didn't choose and constraints they didn't set.

Buffer zone pressure. They frequently serve as the bridge between senior leadership and the congregation or staff. They absorb frustration from both directions. They translate unpopular decisions. They carry tension they didn't create.

Implementation without input. When strategic decisions are made, Associate Pastors are often tasked with execution but weren't part of the conversation. They must champion initiatives they may not fully believe in.

Identity ambiguity. To some in the congregation, the Associate Pastor is "not quite the real pastor." They may perform weddings, funerals, and hospital visits—but they're seen as the understudy, not the lead.

Unclear advancement. What's the path forward for an Associate Pastor who's great at their job but doesn't sense a calling to become a Senior Pastor? In many churches, there isn't one.

At 69% flight risk, Associate Pastors represent the highest turnover intention of any major role except Creative Arts. These aren't peripheral positions—they're essential leaders. And they're seriously questioning whether to stay.

Why the Gap Exists

The gap between senior leaders and second-chair staff isn't evidence of character differences. It's not that Associate Pastors are weaker or Worship Pastors are more complainy or Creative Arts staff are too sensitive.

It's a structural gap. And it emerges from real differences in how these roles experience the same organization.

Autonomy. Senior leaders have more control over their schedule, their decisions, and their priorities. Second-chair leaders work within someone else's framework. Research consistently shows that autonomy is one of the strongest predictors of job satisfaction. The people at the top have more of it.

Voice. Senior leaders' opinions carry more weight. When the Senior Pastor speaks in a staff meeting, the conversation shifts. When the Associate Pastor speaks, they may or may not be heard. This isn't necessarily intentional—it's just how organizational gravity works.

Information. Senior leaders know more about what's happening and why. They're in the rooms where context is shared. Second-chair staff often implement decisions without understanding the reasoning behind them. That information gap creates frustration and disengagement.

Recognition. Senior leaders receive more public affirmation. They're introduced at events. They're thanked by name. They're visible to the congregation. Second-chair staff may labor in relative anonymity, their contributions known only to a few.

Compensation. Senior leaders typically earn more. We'll explore this in detail in Discovery #5, but the reality is that Associate Pastors and Worship Pastors are often paid significantly less than their Senior Pastors—while sometimes working comparable hours.

Security. Senior leaders generally have more job security. When budget cuts come, second-chair positions are often the first discussed. That uncertainty takes a toll.

None of these factors reflect anyone's malicious intent. They're simply the realities of organizational structure. But they create very different experiences for people sharing the same mission.

The "I Had No Idea" Problem

Here's the challenge: Many Senior Pastors genuinely don't know their team is struggling.

This isn't because they don't care. Most Senior Pastors we've encountered care deeply about their staff. They want healthy teams. They want people to thrive.

But they're evaluating their church's staff culture through their own experience—and their experience is 195. It's STRONG. It's healthy. From where they sit, things feel good.

Meanwhile, their Associate Pastor is at 170 and sinking. Their Worship Pastor is at 169 and actively considering other offers. Their Creative Arts director is at 153 and barely hanging on.

The Senior Pastor might ask how things are going and hear "fine"—because staff often don't feel safe sharing their real struggles with the person who controls their employment. They smile in meetings. They hit their deadlines. They lead on Sunday. And they're privately updating their resume.

This information asymmetry is dangerous because you can't address what you don't see. If Senior Pastors believe their own experience represents their team's experience, they'll miss the warning signs until it's too late—until the resignation letter lands on their desk and they genuinely say, "I had no idea."

A Word to Senior Leaders

If you're a Senior Pastor or Executive Pastor reading this, we want to be clear: this isn't an indictment of you.

Your positive experience of your church is real. You're probably doing many things right. The fact that senior leaders score well isn't a problem—it's genuinely good news.

But your experience isn't universal. And the gap between your experience and your team's experience isn't evidence of their weakness or ingratitude. It may be evidence of systemic dynamics that you're simply better positioned to weather.

The 25-point gap isn't something your Associate Pastor can fix by trying harder or praying more. It emerges from structural realities that only you can address.

This is an opportunity, not an accusation. You have influence over the factors that shape your team's experience. You can share information more freely. You can amplify second-chair voices. You can provide meaningful input opportunities. You can advocate for fair compensation. You can create psychologically safe spaces where people tell you the truth instead of what they think you want to hear.

The first step is simply seeing. The gap exists. Now that you know, what will you do?

Questions for Reflection

1. When did you last ask your Associate Pastor—privately, with genuine openness—how they're *really* doing?
2. Does your Worship Pastor feel supported and trusted, or primarily evaluated and critiqued?
3. Do second-chair staff have meaningful input into decisions that affect their ministries, or do they learn about changes after the fact?
4. Is there a truly safe way for staff to share struggles without fear it will affect their standing or employment?
5. Could your positive experience of your church's culture be blinding you to what others are experiencing?

If you're a Senior Pastor reading this, your health score is probably somewhere around 193. Your Associate Pastor's score is probably somewhere around 170. That's not a gap in character or commitment—it's a gap in experience. What would it take to close it?

THE BOTTOM LINE

There's a 25-point gap between senior leaders and second-chair roles. Senior/Lead Pastors average 193.5; Associate Pastors average 169.6. Worship Pastors score 169.0 with 64% flight risk. Creative Arts staff are in crisis at 153.4 with 75% flight risk. The people leading from the second chair are experiencing your church very differently than you are. The view from the top is not the view from the middle. If you want to know how your church staff culture is really doing, don't look at your own experience—look at theirs.

Discovery #4: The Evaluation Disaster

The One Question That Stands Alone

Of the fifty questions in this assessment—spanning communication, job satisfaction, leadership, team dynamics, compensation, work environment, and future stability—one question finished dead last. It's the only question in the entire survey to average below 3.0. It's the only question where more staff disagree than agree.

That question: "I feel like the church and leadership have a clear and fair process for performance evaluations and salary adjustments."

Average score: 2.96 out of 5.

Not compensation itself. Not benefits. Not workload or work-life balance. The single weakest point in church staff health is something far more fundamental: the process by which staff are evaluated and compensated. Churches aren't failing on the "what" of compensation—they're failing on the "how."

This distinction matters enormously, because it means the biggest gap in church staff health isn't primarily a money problem. It's a clarity problem. And clarity doesn't require a bigger budget. It requires intention.

The Data: A Unique Failure

Here's the complete breakdown of how staff responded to this question:

Response	Percentage
Strongly Agree (5)	14.2%
Agree (4)	22.8%
Neutral (3)	25.9%
Disagree (2)	18.3%
Strongly Disagree (1)	18.8%
Average Score	2.96/5

Using our Red/Yellow/Green framework:

- **GREEN (4-5):** 37.0%
- **YELLOW (3):** 25.9%
- **RED (1-2):** 37.0%

Look at those numbers carefully. 37.0% of church staff actively disagree that their church has a clear and fair evaluation process. Another 25.9% are neutral—which in this context likely means "I genuinely have no idea how evaluations and raises work here." Only 37% feel good about the process.

This is the only question in the entire fifty-question assessment where red responses outnumber green. Everywhere else—even in areas where churches struggle—more staff agree than disagree. On evaluations and raises, the pattern inverts. More staff feel the process is unclear or unfair than feel it's working well.

Context: The Compensation Category

To understand why this question matters so much, let's look at all eight questions in the Compensation & Benefits category:

Question	Avg Score	% Green	% Yellow	% Red
Satisfied with PTO (vacation, sick, personal)	3.87	68%	17%	15%
Church supports professional development	3.54	55%	23%	22%
Compensation fair compared to other churches	3.47	53%	23%	24%
Satisfied with compensation package	3.46	54%	22%	24%
Church offers perks that contribute to satisfaction	3.43	52%	24%	24%
Opportunities for continuing education	3.41	54%	20%	26%
Satisfied with benefits (health, retirement)	3.26	49%	20%	30%
Clear process for evaluations and raises	2.96	37%	26%	37%

The gap between the highest-scoring question (PTO at 3.87) and the lowest (evaluations at 2.96) is 0.91 points—nearly a full point on a 5-point scale. That's an enormous spread within a single category. Churches are doing reasonably well at providing time off, moderately well at supporting development, and failing dramatically at creating clear evaluation processes.

But here's what makes this finding so revealing: Staff are more satisfied with their actual compensation (3.46) than with the process for determining that compensation (2.96). That half-point gap tells us something crucial. Many church staff have made their peace with modest salaries—they didn't enter ministry expecting to get rich. What they haven't made peace with is not knowing how the system works. They can accept lower pay. They can't accept ambiguity about how pay decisions are made or how to advance.

Compensation & Benefits is already the weakest of all seven categories at 68.5%. The evaluation question, at 2.96, is dragging that score down significantly. Fix this one question, and you'd see notable improvement across the entire category—without spending an additional dollar on salaries.

Why Process Matters More Than Pay

Human beings have a remarkable capacity to tolerate difficult circumstances when they believe those circumstances are fair. We can accept sacrifice, limitation, and constraint—if we understand why and believe the system treats everyone equitably. What we cannot tolerate is ambiguity and apparent arbitrariness.

When church staff don't understand how their performance is evaluated or how compensation decisions are made, they don't simply feel uninformed. They feel powerless. They lose their sense of agency over their own career trajectory. They don't know what "success" looks like. They don't know how to earn a raise or what behaviors lead to advancement. They're operating in the dark, hoping their work is valued but never quite sure.

This uncertainty breeds anxiety. And anxiety, left unaddressed, curdles into resentment. Staff begin to interpret leadership's silence as indifference: "If they valued me, they'd tell me how I'm doing. If they had a plan for my growth, they'd share it. If there was a path to a raise, they'd explain it."

Consider the connection to one of our earlier findings: "feeling valued" shows one of the largest gaps between healthy and struggling staff, a difference of 2.31 points. Unclear evaluation processes communicate something unintentional but damaging: "We haven't really thought about your performance. We haven't created a pathway for your growth. We're not tracking whether you're succeeding or failing." Even if that's not the message leadership intends to send, it's often the message staff receive. The absence of a clear process becomes, in their minds, the presence of disregard.

What "No Clear Process" Actually Looks Like

Many churches don't have formal evaluation processes at all. In some cases, this is a conscious choice—a belief that relationships trump procedures, or that ministry shouldn't feel "corporate." In other cases, it's simply neglect: evaluations never made it onto leadership's crowded agenda, and years passed without anyone noticing the gap.

Here's what the absence of clear process typically looks like in practice. Annual reviews don't happen, or they happen sporadically with no predictable rhythm. Job descriptions are outdated or nonexistent, leaving staff unclear about their actual

responsibilities and success metrics. Raises appear (or don't appear) without explanation—some years there's a cost-of-living adjustment, other years there's nothing, and staff are never told why. Compensation decisions seem to vary by person with no apparent rationale: one staff member gets a raise, another doesn't, and no one knows what distinguished them. Promises like "we'll talk about it when the budget allows" hang in the air indefinitely, with "that conversation" never actually materializing. When evaluations do occur, they feel perfunctory—a box to check rather than meaningful feedback. And perhaps most damagingly, staff sometimes learn about their compensation (or lack of change to it) through their paycheck rather than through a conversation.

The cumulative effect is corrosive. Staff feel like they're operating without a map in territory where the landmarks keep shifting.

The Good News: This Is Fixable

Here's what makes this finding different from so many challenges churches face: solving it doesn't require money. It requires intention.

Creating a clear, fair evaluation process is fundamentally a leadership discipline, not a budget line item. It takes time to build, yes. It requires difficult conversations, certainly. But it doesn't require fundraising, budget increases, or financial resources that many churches simply don't have.

What does a clear evaluation system look like? It starts with scheduled, predictable review conversations—annual at minimum, ideally with informal check-ins throughout the year. Every staff member should know when their review is coming and should be able to prepare for it. It requires written job descriptions with clear success metrics. Staff should know what they're responsible for and how their performance will be measured. Success shouldn't be a mystery; it should be defined in advance and tracked over time.

It includes transparency about how compensation decisions are made. Staff don't need to know every detail of the church's budget, but they should understand the factors that influence raises. Is it cost of living? Performance? Tenure? Budget constraints? A combination? When staff understand the factors, they can accept outcomes they might otherwise resent.

A clear process means regular feedback throughout the year, not just during an annual review. Staff should never be surprised by what they hear in their evaluation. If concerns exist, those concerns should have been raised already. If performance is strong, that should have been acknowledged already. The annual review should be a summary, not a revelation.

And it means **honest conversation about budget realities alongside priorities**. If raises aren't possible this year, say so—and explain why. If certain roles are prioritized for compensation adjustments, be transparent about that prioritization. Staff can handle hard truth far better than they can handle silence and speculation.

What Staff Are Actually Asking For

When staff express frustration about unclear evaluation processes, they're not necessarily asking for more money (though they wouldn't refuse it). They're asking for something more fundamental.

They want **clarity**: What does success look like in my role? What am I actually responsible for, and how will I know if I'm doing well?

They want **feedback**: How am I doing? What should I keep doing? What should I change?

They want **a pathway**: How do I grow here? Is there a future for me at this church? What would it take to advance?

They want **fairness**: Is the same standard applied to everyone? Are decisions made consistently, or does it depend on who you are and who you know?

And they want **dignity**: Am I worth a conversation about my performance? Does my contribution matter enough for someone to actually evaluate it?

These aren't unreasonable requests. They're the basic expectations of professional employment. Churches that meet them will find staff who feel valued, understood, and committed to staying. Churches that ignore them will continue to wonder why good people keep leaving.

Questions for Reflection

As you consider your own church's evaluation practices, ask yourself honestly:

1. Does every staff member have a written job description with clear success metrics? Can each person on your team articulate what "excellent performance" looks like in their specific role?
2. When was the last time each staff member received formal feedback on their performance? Not casual encouragement, but structured evaluation with specific observations and actionable input?
3. Do your staff know how compensation decisions are made? If someone asked "What factors determine whether I get a raise?" could you give them a clear, honest answer?
4. If a staff member asked "How do I get a raise here?" could you point them to a specific process, or would you have to improvise an answer?
5. Is your evaluation process consistent across all staff? Does every person receive the same attention to their performance, or does it vary based on role, tenure, or relationship with leadership?

This is the lowest-scoring question in the entire assessment—and it's the one most within your control to fix. You may not be able to increase salaries this year. But you can have a conversation. You can create clarity. You can define what success looks like and tell people how they're doing. You can treat your staff with the dignity of real feedback and honest explanation. The question isn't whether you have the resources to fix this. You do. The question is whether you'll make it a priority.

THE BOTTOM LINE

The single lowest-scoring question in the entire fifty-question assessment isn't about pay, benefits, or workload. It's about process: "I feel like the church has a clear and fair process for evaluations and raises" scores just 2.96 out of 5—the only question below 3.0, and the only one where more staff disagree than agree. Remarkably, staff are more satisfied with their actual compensation (3.46) than with how compensation decisions are made (2.96). This reveals something important: the problem isn't primarily money. It's clarity, fairness, and communication. The good news? This is fixable without spending a dollar. It requires creating a real process—written expectations, scheduled reviews, transparent criteria, and consistent follow-through. Most of all, it requires having real conversations with real people about their real work.

Discovery #5: The Small Church Struggle

Nearly half of the respondents in this year's assessment—45.7%—serve in churches with weekend attendance under 250. Another 19.6% serve in churches under 100. These aren't outliers or edge cases. They represent the heartbeat of American church ministry, the thousands of congregations scattered across small towns, suburban neighborhoods, and urban corners where a couple dozen to a couple hundred people gather each week.

And they're struggling more than their peers at larger churches.

This isn't a judgment on small churches. Small congregations are vital to the kingdom, often providing the intimate community and personal discipleship that larger churches struggle to replicate. But the structural realities of small church ministry create unique pressures on staff—pressures that show up clearly in this year's data. The churches that can least afford to lose staff have the highest flight risk. That's a problem worth understanding.

The Data: Size Matters More Than We'd Like to Admit

When we segment staff health scores by current weekend attendance, a clear pattern emerges:

Church Size	Sample Size	Avg Health Score	% Thought About Leaving	% in Healthy Bands
Under 100	235	176.9	61%	~67%
100-249	312	183.4	52%	~74%
250-499	199	185.5	49%	~76%
500-999	206	184.5	47%	~75%
1,000-1,999	139	187.8	51%	~78%
2,000+	105	185.7	40%	~77%

The story here isn't that megachurches are dramatically healthier than everyone else—they're not. Staff at churches of 2,000+ average 185.7, barely above the national average of 183.4. The real story is the gap at the bottom. Staff in churches under 100 attendance score 176.9—nearly 7 points below the national average and 8.8 points below their peers at the largest churches.

But the most alarming number isn't the health score. It's the flight risk. 61% of staff in churches under 100 have thought seriously about leaving in the past year. Compare that to 40% at churches over 2,000—a 21 percentage point gap. When six out of ten of your staff members are contemplating the exit, you're operating on borrowed time.

The pattern reveals something important: the biggest drop-off happens between churches under 100 and everyone else. Once churches cross the 100-attendance threshold, health scores cluster fairly tightly between 183 and 188. The under-100 category is where the real struggle concentrates.

Why Small Church Staff Struggle

The numbers confirm what many small church staff members already feel in their bones. But understanding *why* the gap exists is essential for addressing it. Several factors compound to create the small church staff health challenge.

Resource constraints hit hardest at the smallest churches. Smaller budgets mean lower compensation, fewer benefits, and less money for professional development. Staff often work with outdated equipment, inadequate facilities, and minimal administrative support. When the copier breaks, there's no budget to replace it. When the staff member needs training, there's no line item for conferences. These aren't luxuries—they're the baseline infrastructure that makes sustainable ministry possible. Without them, everything is harder.

Isolation may be the most insidious challenge. In a church of 75, the youth pastor is often the *only* youth pastor. There's no colleague down the hall doing similar work, no team to brainstorm with, no peer who truly understands the role. Many small church staff are the only paid employee besides the pastor—or they *are* the pastor, serving alone. Geographic isolation compounds the problem; small churches are disproportionately located in rural areas, far from peer networks and professional communities. The loneliness is real, and it erodes staff health over time.

The multiple-hat problem is universal in small churches, but that doesn't make it sustainable. When you're the youth pastor, worship leader, communications director, and the person who unlocks the building on Sunday morning, excellence becomes impossible. You're not doing one job well—you're doing four jobs poorly, and you know it. The constant context-switching is exhausting. The lack of clear role definition means expectations are fuzzy and accountability is inconsistent. "We all pitch in" sounds noble until you're drowning in tasks that don't fit your gifts, your training, or your job description (if you even have one).

In small churches, everything is personal. The visibility pressure is intense. Every decision you make affects people you know by name—people who will see you at the grocery store, whose kids are in your child's class, who will corner you after the service to share their opinion. There's no anonymity when things go wrong. Implementing change feels riskier because everyone notices and everyone has a relationship with the way things were. Conflict doesn't stay professional; it becomes relational, even familial. The fishbowl effect wears on staff in ways that larger-church staff rarely experience.

The ceiling feels low. In most small churches, there's no pathway for advancement. The role you were hired into is the role you'll have until you leave. There's no associate-to-lead trajectory, no expanding responsibilities as the church grows (because it probably isn't growing). For staff who want to develop professionally, who want to take on new challenges, who want their career to go somewhere, small

church ministry can feel like a dead end. The only way up is out—and that realization fuels the flight risk.

Financial stress is the quiet undercurrent. Small church compensation lags behind larger churches, sometimes significantly. Many small church staff need a spouse's income or a second job to make ends meet. Benefits are often minimal or nonexistent—no retirement match, limited health coverage, uncertain PTO policies. Housing situations can feel precarious, especially for pastors in parsonages they don't own. The financial pressure creates a constant low-grade anxiety that compounds every other challenge.

The Compounding Problem

Here's the cruel math of small church staffing: the churches that can least afford to lose staff are the most likely to lose them.

When a staff member leaves a church of 2,000, it's disruptive but survivable. Other team members absorb responsibilities temporarily. The church has resources to conduct a thorough search. Candidates are attracted by the salary, the platform, the professional environment.

When a staff member leaves a church of 75, it can be catastrophic. That person may have been 50% or 100% of the paid staff. There's no one to absorb their responsibilities—the senior pastor is already stretched thin. The budget for a replacement hire is modest at best. Candidates are scarce because the compensation can't compete and the role requires wearing multiple hats with minimal support. The search drags on. Volunteers burn out trying to cover the gap. The pastor burns out. Remaining staff (if there are any) become more burdened, their own flight risk rising.

This creates a potential downward spiral: Struggle leads to departure. Departure leads to harder replacement. Harder replacement leads to remaining staff being more burdened. More burden leads to more struggle. More struggle leads to more departures. Small churches are one bad month away from this spiral activating. With 61% of staff having thought about leaving, the trigger is closer than many church boards realize.

The Hopeful Reality

The data paints a challenging picture, but not a hopeless one. Even in churches under 100 attendance, 67% of staff are in healthy bands—Good, Strong, or Exceptional. Two-thirds of small church staff are doing okay. They're not thriving at the same rate as their larger-church peers, but they're not in crisis either.

This matters because it proves that small doesn't automatically mean unhealthy. Size is a factor in staff health, not a destiny. Some small churches have figured out how to care for their staff well, how to create environments where people can serve sustainably and even joyfully. The question isn't whether healthy small church ministry is possible—it clearly is. The question is what those healthy small churches are doing differently.

What Healthy Small Churches Do Differently

Small churches will never compete with megachurches on compensation, resources, or professional development budgets. But they have advantages that larger churches struggle to replicate—and the healthiest small churches leverage those advantages intentionally.

They prioritize relationships. This is the small church superpower. In a church of 75, everyone knows everyone. Staff aren't anonymous employees; they're family. Healthy small churches lean into this relational depth, creating cultures of genuine care, personal investment, and authentic community. When staff feel truly known and loved—not as workers but as people—the resource constraints sting less.

They set realistic expectations. Healthy small churches have honest conversations about what's actually possible. They acknowledge that their youth pastor can't build a program that looks like the megachurch down the road. They define roles clearly, even if those roles span multiple areas, so staff know what's expected and what isn't. They say no to good ideas because they recognize capacity limits. They celebrate faithfulness over flashiness.

They connect staff to outside peer networks. If isolation is the enemy, connection is the cure. Healthy small churches actively encourage their staff to find community beyond the congregation—through denominational networks, local pastor cohorts, online communities, or conferences. They budget for these connections when possible and release staff to pursue them when money is tight. They understand that

their staff member needs peers who understand their role, even if those peers aren't in the building.

They invest in staff with what they have. When money is limited, healthy small churches invest with time, flexibility, and encouragement. They give staff autonomy and trust. They offer flexible schedules when compensation can't be competitive. They express genuine appreciation regularly. They protect staff from congregational criticism. They advocate for their staff publicly and privately.

They compensate fairly and communicate transparently. Healthy small churches pay as well as their budget allows—not as little as they can get away with. They're honest with staff about financial realities and include them in conversations about budget priorities. They don't expect staff to treat ministry as a vow of poverty. They explore creative compensation solutions when cash is tight: housing support, flexible schedules, additional PTO, professional development opportunities.

A Word to Small Church Leaders

If you lead a small church and this section has felt uncomfortably familiar, please hear this: your challenges are real. This data validates what you're experiencing. The struggles your staff face—the isolation, the stretched-thin exhaustion, the financial pressure, the feeling of being stuck—aren't personal failures. They're structural realities that come with small church ministry.

You're not failing because you're small. But you do need to be more intentional about staff health than your larger-church peers, because your margin for error is thinner. You can't afford the casual assumption that your staff are fine. You can't survive a preventable departure. What you lack in resources you must make up in relationship, in communication, in genuine investment in your staff as whole people.

Ask the hard questions. Have the honest conversations. Know how your staff are really doing—not how they say they're doing in public, but how they're actually doing when the masks come off. Your staff's health is your church's health. Protect it like the precious, fragile thing it is.

A Word to Small Church Staff

If you're serving in a small church and this section has named your experience, please know: you're not alone. The isolation you feel, the exhaustion from wearing too

many hats, the financial stress, the sense that your career has hit a ceiling—thousands of your peers across the country share these exact struggles. What you're experiencing isn't a personal failure. It's a structural reality of small church ministry.

Finding peer community outside your church isn't optional—it's essential for your survival. Seek out other small church staff members, whether through denominations, local networks, or online communities. Find people who understand your context and can speak into your situation. The loneliness will erode your health if you let it. Don't let it.

Questions for Small Church Boards

If you serve on the board of a small church, these questions deserve your attention:

1. Do you know how your staff member(s) are *really* doing—not the polished answer, but the honest one?
2. Have you had a frank conversation about workload and expectations? Does your staff member know what's truly required of them, and is that requirement realistic?
3. What are you doing to combat the isolation your staff may feel? Are you actively supporting connections to peer networks outside your church?
4. Are you compensating as fairly as your budget allows—and being transparent about the limitations you face?
5. If your staff member left tomorrow, what would happen? What does that vulnerability tell you about how you should treat them today?

If you lead or serve in a small church, this data isn't meant to discourage you—it's meant to validate what you're experiencing and help you address it. The challenges are real. The flight risk is real. But so is the opportunity. Small churches can be deeply healthy places to serve—it just requires more intentionality because the margin is thinner. What's one thing you could do this month to invest in your staff's health?

THE BOTTOM LINE

Staff in churches under 100 attendance score 176.9—nearly 7 points below the national average—with 61% having thought about leaving in the past year. The smallest churches face the biggest staff health challenges: limited resources, professional isolation, multiple-hat exhaustion, and fewer advancement opportunities. And yet they can least afford to lose staff. This isn't a critique of small churches—it's a call to action. Two-thirds of small church staff ARE healthy. Size isn't destiny. But small church leaders must be more intentional about staff health because the margin for error is razor thin. One departure can be catastrophic. Invest in your staff like your church depends on it—because it does.

Discovery #6: The Benefits Gap

The Weakest Link in Church Staff Health

Every organization has an area where it struggles most. For churches, that area is unmistakably clear: Compensation & Benefits scores 68.5%—the lowest of all seven categories we measure.

This finding won't shock anyone who has worked in ministry. Church salaries have long been modest compared to corporate equivalents, and most staff accept this reality as part of their calling. But here's what might surprise you: when we dig into the data, actual salary satisfaction isn't the lowest-scoring element. Benefits are. And that distinction matters more than you might think.

The compensation conversation in churches typically centers on salary. Can we afford to give raises? How do we compare to the church down the road? But our data reveals that benefits—health insurance, retirement contributions, the foundational elements of financial security—are where staff feel the gap most acutely. One in three church staff members is dissatisfied with their benefits package. That's not a compensation problem. It's a security problem.

The Full Compensation Picture

Before we focus on benefits specifically, let's look at how all eight questions in this category performed:

Question	Avg Score	% Green	% Yellow	% Red
Satisfied with PTO (vacation, sick, personal)	3.87	68%	17%	15%
Church supports professional development	3.54	55%	23%	22%
Compensation fair compared to other churches	3.47	53%	23%	24%
Satisfied with compensation package	3.46	54%	22%	24%
Church offers perks that contribute to satisfaction	3.43	52%	24%	24%
Opportunities for continuing education	3.41	54%	20%	26%
Satisfied with benefits (health, retirement)	3.26	49%	20%	30%
Clear process for evaluations and raises	2.96	37%	26%	37%

The range here tells a story. PTO satisfaction sits at 3.87—a solid score that would be respectable in any category. Evaluation processes, which we explored in Discovery #4, bottoms out at 2.96. But nestled just above that basement is benefits satisfaction at 3.26, with the highest percentage of dissatisfied staff (30%) of any question except evaluations.

Category	Score	Percentage
Job Satisfaction	27.5/35	78.7%
Team Dynamics	26.6/35	75.9%
Communication	29.9/40	74.7%
Work Environment	26.0/35	74.3%
Leadership	29.4/40	73.4%
Compensation & Benefits	27.4/40	68.5%
Future Stability	16.5/25	66.1%*

Future Stability includes reverse-scored flight risk questions, making direct comparison complex.

The gap between Compensation & Benefits (68.5%) and the next-lowest comparable category, Leadership (73.4%), is nearly five percentage points. This isn't a close race. Compensation is the clear weak spot in church staff health nationally.

The Benefits Problem

Let's look more closely at what's happening with benefits specifically.

"I am satisfied with my benefits (health insurance, retirement contributions, etc.)" scores just 3.26 out of 5. Only 49% of staff agree or strongly agree—meaning more than half are either neutral or actively dissatisfied. Most concerning: 30% are in the red, actively disagreeing that their benefits are satisfactory.

Compare this to overall compensation package satisfaction, which scores 3.46 with 54% green and 24% red. Benefits satisfaction is 0.20 points lower, with six percentage points more staff in active disagreement. The pattern is clear: staff are more dissatisfied with their benefits than with their salary.

This distinction matters because it changes the conversation. When churches think about compensation competitiveness, they typically think about salary numbers. Can we pay \$50,000 instead of \$45,000? How do we compare to First Church across town? But our data suggests that for many staff, the more pressing concern is whether they can adequately cover their family's health insurance, or whether they're building anything toward retirement, or whether they have any financial security beyond their next paycheck.

30% of church staff are dissatisfied with their benefits. That's roughly 360 people in our sample alone—and scaled to the broader church workforce, it represents hundreds of thousands of ministry workers worried about their family's health coverage and their financial future.

Why Benefits Matter Beyond Dollars

Benefits aren't just another line item in a compensation package. They carry weight that exceeds their monetary value for several important reasons.

Benefits are security. Health insurance isn't a perk—it's protection for a staff member's family. Retirement contributions aren't a bonus—they're investment in a future beyond ministry. When these foundational elements are inadequate or absent, staff carry a constant low-level anxiety that affects everything they do. They might not think about it every day, but the vulnerability is always there, humming in the background. And when illness strikes, or when retirement looms, the inadequacy becomes acute and impossible to ignore.

Benefits affect families. A staff member might personally accept a modest salary as part of their calling to ministry. But their spouse may feel differently when the family's health coverage has gaps, or when there's nothing being saved for retirement, or when an unexpected medical bill becomes a crisis. The pressure doesn't just come from the staff member's own concerns—it comes from home. "Can we really afford for you to work there?" is a question that has ended many ministry tenures.

Benefits signal commitment. Salary says "we value your work today." Benefits say "we're invested in your future." A church that contributes nothing to retirement is inadvertently communicating: "We haven't thought about your life after you leave here." A church with inadequate health coverage is saying: "You're on your own for your family's medical needs." Whether intended or not, these signals are received—and they shape how staff feel about their long-term place on the team.

Benefits are a comparison point. Church staff know what benefits look like elsewhere. They have friends in corporate jobs with 401(k) matching and comprehensive health plans. They know government employees with pension systems. They may even know staff at other churches with better benefits packages. The comparison is often stark, and it's hard not to feel undervalued when the gap is significant.

The PTO Bright Spot

Here's the encouraging news buried in the compensation data: churches are actually doing well on PTO.

Satisfaction with paid time off (vacation, sick leave, personal days) scores 3.87 out of 5, with 68% of staff in the green and only 15% in the red. This is the highest-scoring question in the entire Compensation & Benefits category—and it would be a respectable score in any category.

The gap between PTO satisfaction (3.87) and benefits satisfaction (3.26) is 0.61 points. That's substantial. It shows that compensation satisfaction isn't monolithic. Staff can feel well-supported in some areas while feeling underserved in others.

The PTO success offers an important lesson: compensation satisfaction isn't just about dollars. Generous time off costs relatively little compared to salary increases, but it communicates something meaningful: "We want you to rest. We recognize you have a life outside this building. We trust you to manage your time." Staff receive that message—and they appreciate it.

If churches can score 68% green on PTO, they're capable of higher marks in other compensation areas too. The question is what other relatively affordable investments might move the needle on staff satisfaction.

The Professional Development Middle Ground

Two questions in this category address professional growth:

- **"My church supports professional development."** 3.54 (55% green, 22% red)
- **"There are opportunities for continuing education."** 3.41 (54% green, 26% red)

These aren't crisis-level scores, but they're not strong either. Roughly one in four staff feels they lack adequate support for professional growth. In a vocation built on spiritual development and personal growth, that's worth attention.

Professional development investments often cost less than salary increases but demonstrate concrete care for a staff member's future. Conference attendance, book budgets, course reimbursement, coaching relationships—these say "we want you to grow," and they tend to build loyalty beyond their dollar value.

What Churches Can Do

Budget constraints are real. Most churches can't suddenly offer corporate-level benefits packages. But "we can't afford it" shouldn't be the end of the conversation. Several strategies can improve benefits satisfaction even within tight budgets:

Explore denominational insurance pools. Many denominations offer group health insurance options that individual churches couldn't access alone. If you haven't researched what's available through your denomination or network, start there.

Start retirement contributions small. Something is better than nothing. Even a 1-3% retirement match communicates "we're thinking about your future." It's a symbolic investment as much as a financial one. Staff notice—and appreciate—that the church is contributing anything.

Be transparent about limitations. Staff respect honesty. If you can't offer comprehensive benefits, say so directly: "Here's what we can do, here's what we wish we could do, and here's our plan to improve over time." Uncertainty breeds anxiety; clarity—even difficult clarity—builds trust.

Help staff access options. If you can't provide health insurance directly, help staff navigate the ACA marketplace. Offer to pay for professional consultations. Provide resources. Supporting staff in finding solutions is itself a form of care.

Leverage non-monetary perks. Flexible schedules, remote work options, comp time for evening events, sabbatical policies—these cost relatively little but contribute meaningfully to staff satisfaction. The PTO scores prove this point: what you offer beyond salary matters.

Learn from PTO. You're scoring 3.87 on time off. What's making that work? Is it generous policies? Flexibility? A culture that actually encourages staff to use their PTO? Whatever's driving that success, consider how those principles might apply to other areas.

A Word About Part-Time Staff

16% of our sample is part-time—representing hundreds of people working 10-30 hours per week in ministry roles.

Part-time staff almost never receive benefits. No health insurance. No retirement contributions. Often no PTO. Yet many are working substantial hours (25-30 per week), delivering significant value to their churches.

This creates a two-tier system that part-time staff feel keenly. They're invested in the mission, committed to the work, present in the building—but excluded from the benefits that communicate long-term organizational care.

Consider what you can offer part-time team members. Even modest gestures—contributing to a retirement fund, offering some paid time off, helping with professional development—can communicate that part-time doesn't mean partial investment in their wellbeing.

Questions for Leaders

As you reflect on compensation and benefits at your church, consider:

1. Do you know what health insurance options your staff members are actually using? Are those options adequate, or are staff and their families underinsured?
2. Is your church contributing anything to staff retirement? If not, could you start at even 1-3%? What would it take to make that happen?
3. When did you last benchmark your benefits package against similar churches in your area? Do you know where you stand?
4. Have you directly asked staff what would matter most to them if you could improve compensation? The answer might surprise you.
5. Are you being transparent with staff about what you can and can't afford? Do they understand your constraints and your intentions?

Compensation & Benefits is the lowest-scoring category—but bigger budgets aren't the only solution. PTO scores highest in the category, proving that non-salary elements of compensation matter deeply. Staff want to know they're valued and their future is considered. Churches that invest in benefits, even modestly, communicate care that transcends the paycheck. What's one concrete step you could take this year to improve benefits—even if you can't increase salaries?

THE BOTTOM LINE

Compensation & Benefits scores 68.5%—the lowest of all seven categories. But the story is more nuanced than "churches don't pay enough." Benefits satisfaction (3.26) scores lower than salary satisfaction (3.46), with **30% of staff actively dissatisfied with their health insurance and retirement offerings**. Meanwhile, PTO scores 3.87—proving that churches *can* earn high marks in compensation. The lesson: benefits communicate long-term investment in staff wellbeing. A modest retirement contribution says "we care about your future." Inadequate health coverage says "you're on your own." You may not be able to match corporate salaries, but you can signal that you're invested in your staff's security—and that matters more than you might think.

Discovery #7: Communication Breakdown

The Meeting That Isn't Working

Here's a paradox hiding in the data: 74% of church staff say their church regularly holds staff meetings—scoring it the highest communication question at 4.06 out of 5. Yet only 59% feel kept informed about important decisions, scoring that question at just 3.64. That 0.42-point gap represents something church leaders need to understand: you can hold meetings every week and still have a communication problem.

More than one-third of church staff (36%) don't feel well-informed about the decisions and changes affecting their ministry. Nearly four in ten (39%) aren't clear on what's expected of them. And 43%—nearly half—don't feel leadership communicates vision and mission regularly. Staff are showing up to meetings. The question is: what's happening in them?

Communication ranks fourth among the seven categories we measure, scoring 29.9 out of 40 points (74.7%). That's squarely in the middle of the pack—not a crisis, but far from exceptional. It sits just below Team Dynamics (75.9%) and above Leadership (73.4%). The category tells a nuanced story: staff feel they *have* access to leadership and *can* voice concerns. But they're less confident that they're truly being *informed*, *heard*, or *aligned*.

The Full Picture: All Eight Communication Questions

The eight questions that comprise the Communication category reveal a clear pattern. The logistics of communication score well. The substance of communication scores lower.

Question	Avg Score	% Green	% Yellow	% Red
We regularly hold staff meetings for updates, discussion, and feedback	4.06	74%	13%	13%
I feel comfortable voicing my concerns or ideas to church leadership	3.83	67%	14%	19%
I feel like my ideas and suggestions are taken seriously by church leadership	3.75	64%	18%	18%
There is a clear and open line of communication between staff and church leadership	3.74	63%	18%	19%
I feel the expectations and responsibilities of my role are clearly communicated	3.68	61%	22%	17%
I feel that church leadership keeps me well-informed about important decisions and changes	3.64	59%	22%	19%
Staff communicates well with one another	3.62	58%	24%	18%
Leadership communicates vision and mission to staff regularly	3.57	57%	24%	19%

Notice the spread. The top question (staff meetings) scores 4.06. The bottom question (vision communication) scores 3.57. That 0.49-point range tells the story of this category: churches are gathering their teams, but something breaks down between gathering and actually communicating.

The Meetings-Information Gap

The highest-scoring communication question is about holding meetings. The fifth-lowest is about being informed. That gap deserves attention.

When 74% of staff say meetings are happening but only 59% feel kept informed about important decisions, something is getting lost. Staff are in the room. Information isn't reaching them anyway. This suggests that for many churches, staff

meetings have become calendar events rather than communication events—a box to check, not a channel for substance.

A meeting is a container. It's not communication in itself. What goes into the container determines whether staff leave informed or confused, aligned or adrift. When staff attend meetings but still feel out of the loop, the meeting isn't achieving its purpose. It's worth asking: What are you actually sharing in your staff meetings? Are decisions being announced with context, or just reported after the fact? Are concerns raised and addressed, or just politely noted? Is vision being reinforced, or assumed?

The 0.42-point gap between "meetings happen" and "I feel informed" represents staff who are physically present but informationally absent. They're attending, but they're not receiving what they need to know.

The Vision Vacuum

The lowest-scoring question in the Communication category is: "Leadership communicates vision and mission to staff regularly." It scores just 3.57, with only 57% green (agree or strongly agree) and 43% yellow or red (neutral, disagree, or strongly disagree).

Nearly half of church staff don't feel vision is being communicated regularly.

This matters more than it might seem. Vision isn't a document on the wall or a tagline in the bulletin. For staff, vision is the filter through which daily decisions are made. When a children's pastor is deciding between two curriculum options, vision should guide them. When a communications director is prioritizing projects, vision should clarify what matters most. When a worship leader is planning a service, vision should shape the choices.

Without regular vision reinforcement, staff default to activity over alignment. They stay busy, but potentially in the wrong direction. They make decisions based on personal preference, departmental habit, or squeaky-wheel urgency—because they don't have a clear, current sense of what the church is actually trying to accomplish.

Vision isn't something you cast once at a retreat and assume everyone remembers. It's something you reinforce constantly—in meetings, in one-on-ones, in casual conversations, in how you explain decisions. The 43% who don't feel vision is

communicated regularly aren't being reminded why their work matters. And that disconnection shows up in engagement, alignment, and retention.

The Role Clarity Problem

39% of staff don't feel the expectations and responsibilities of their role are clearly communicated. That means nearly four in ten staff members come to work with some degree of uncertainty about what success looks like.

This creates three problems:

First, underperformance. When staff aren't clear on expectations, they can't fully meet them. They may be working hard but in the wrong areas, or they may hold back, unsure whether they have permission to act.

Second, misalignment. Staff who don't know their boundaries may step on colleagues' toes, duplicate effort, or leave gaps that everyone assumes someone else is covering. Role confusion breeds conflict and inefficiency.

Third, frustration. Staff who want to succeed but can't get clarity on what success means will eventually disengage. They'll stop asking, stop trying, and start looking elsewhere.

Role clarity is a communication issue with daily consequences. It's also one of the most fixable problems in this category. Written job descriptions, regular performance conversations, and explicit expectations aren't complicated. But they require intentional effort. The 39% who lack clarity suggest many churches haven't made that effort a priority.

Comfortable but Not Heard

Two related questions reveal a subtle but important gap:

"I feel comfortable voicing my concerns or ideas to church leadership" scores 3.83, with 67% green.

"I feel like my ideas and suggestions are taken seriously by church leadership" scores 3.75, with 64% green.

The gap is small—just 0.08 points—but it points to something significant. Staff feel they *can* speak up. Fewer feel their input *matters*.

An open-door policy means nothing if no one listens when staff walk through it. If staff sense that voicing concerns is tolerated but not valued, they'll eventually stop. The "idea box" becomes empty. The staff meeting Q&A goes silent. Not because staff have nothing to say, but because they've learned that speaking doesn't lead to change.

The 36% who are neutral or negative on their ideas being taken seriously aren't necessarily dealing with hostile leadership. More likely, they've experienced what many staff describe in their narrative responses: they raised a concern, it was acknowledged politely, and nothing happened. Over time, that pattern teaches a lesson. The door is open, but nobody's home.

The Peer Communication Blind Spot

Most churches think of communication as a top-down issue: Is leadership telling staff what they need to know? But one of the lowest-scoring questions in this category has nothing to do with leadership.

"Staff communicates well with one another" scores just 3.62, with only 58% green and 42% yellow or red.

This is the peer-to-peer problem. Even when leadership is communicating well, staff may be operating in silos. Departments that don't share information. Ministries that protect their turf. Team members who assume someone else will pass along what they need to know. Information hoarding that creates power dynamics.

Healthy church teams communicate horizontally, not just vertically. The children's ministry needs to coordinate with the worship team for family services. The communications director needs input from every ministry to tell the church's story. The executive pastor can't connect the dots if departments aren't talking to each other.

When 42% of staff say peer communication isn't working well, it reveals that communication isn't just a leadership issue. It's a culture issue. And addressing it requires more than better staff meetings—it requires intentional systems for cross-team collaboration, shared information, and mutual accountability.

What Effective Communication Actually Looks Like

If holding meetings isn't enough, what is? Effective church staff communication has several characteristics that distinguish it from mere information transfer.

It's proactive rather than reactive. Staff shouldn't have to ask what's happening—they should be told before they need to know. When information comes only in response to questions, it signals that staff aren't a priority.

It's contextual rather than just factual. Decisions announced without explanation breed confusion and resistance. Staff don't just need to know *what* was decided—they need to know *why*. Context creates buy-in; facts alone create compliance at best and cynicism at worst.

It's consistent rather than sporadic. Communication rhythms matter. A weekly email, a monthly all-staff meeting, a quarterly vision conversation—whatever the cadence, predictability builds trust. Staff who never know when they'll hear from leadership live in a constant state of uncertainty.

It's bidirectional rather than broadcast-only. Communication isn't a press release—it's a conversation. Leaders who only talk and never listen will eventually be talking to disengaged staff. Questions should be invited, answered, and followed up on.

It's clear rather than assumed. Especially for role expectations and performance feedback, clarity requires explicit conversation and often documentation. What's obvious to you as a leader may be murky to your staff. Don't assume they know what you haven't told them.

It's inclusive rather than selective. Staff should hear about decisions that affect them *before* the decisions become public knowledge. Few things demoralize staff faster than learning about a major change from a congregant, a social media post, or the Sunday announcement. Being last to know communicates "you don't matter enough to tell."

Questions for Leaders

Before moving on, consider these questions about communication in your context:

Do your staff learn about major decisions in staff meetings—or through the grapevine? Think about the last significant decision your church made. How did staff find out? If it wasn't from leadership directly, that's a communication gap.

When did you last recast your church's vision to your team? Not the mission statement on the wall—the living vision that shapes current priorities. If it's been more than a month, staff may have lost the thread.

Does every staff member have clear, written expectations for their role? Not just a job description from when they were hired, but current, specific expectations they could articulate if asked.

Do you communicate decisions with the "why" or just the "what"? Staff who don't understand reasoning can't support decisions well. They become salespeople without product knowledge.

How is peer-to-peer communication on your team? Are there silos? Departments that don't talk? Information that doesn't flow horizontally? This may be harder to see, but it's just as damaging.

Your staff meetings may be well-attended. But attendance isn't communication. Ask yourself: After our last staff meeting, did everyone leave knowing what they needed to know? Were decisions explained with context? Was vision reinforced? Did anyone share a concern—and did anything change because of it? If you're not sure, you're not alone. But you have an opportunity. The meeting is just the container. What you put in it determines whether you're actually communicating—or just talking.

THE BOTTOM LINE

Churches are holding staff meetings (4.06)—but staff still don't feel informed about important decisions (3.64). That 0.42-point gap represents the difference between gathering and communicating. More than one-third of staff (36%) don't feel kept in the loop about decisions that affect their work. Nearly half (43%) don't feel vision is communicated regularly. The lowest-scoring items in this category aren't about access—staff feel comfortable voicing concerns (67% green). The breakdown is in substance: being truly informed, clearly directed, and consistently reminded why the work matters. Meanwhile, 42% say staff don't communicate well with each other, revealing that this isn't just a top-down problem. A meeting on the calendar isn't communication. What happens in that room—and between those rooms—determines whether your team feels connected or left out.

Discovery #8: Leadership & Conflict

The Gap Between Liked and Trusted

Here's a revealing paradox in the data: 71% of church staff feel respected by their leadership—the highest score in the entire Leadership category at 3.90 out of 5. Yet only 54% feel leadership handles conflicts and challenges in a healthy manner—the lowest score at just 3.39. That 0.51-point gap, representing a 17-percentage-point swing, reveals something church leaders need to understand: your staff can like you and still not trust you to do the hard things.

Nearly half of church staff (47%) are not confident in how their leadership handles conflict. One in four (24%) actively disagree that conflict is handled well. And when we compare the healthiest staff to the most struggling, conflict handling emerges as one of the largest gaps in the entire study—a 2.18-point chasm between those who are thriving and those who are suffering. This isn't a peripheral leadership skill. It may be the defining one.

Leadership ranks fifth among the seven categories we measure, scoring 29.4 out of 40 points (73.4%). That places it in the lower half—below Job Satisfaction (78.7%), Team Dynamics (75.9%), Communication (74.7%), and Work Environment (74.3%). Only Compensation & Benefits (68.5%) and Future Stability (66.1%) score lower. The category tells a complicated story: staff feel respected, believe in their leaders' intentions, and see them modeling values. But when it comes to handling hard things—conflict, direction, feedback—confidence drops significantly.

The Full Picture: All Eight Leadership Questions

The eight questions that comprise the Leadership category reveal a clear pattern. Relational warmth scores well. Leadership action scores lower.

Question	Avg Score	% Green	% Yellow	% Red
I feel respected by staff and leadership in my current role	3.90	71%	14%	15%
I feel that the church provides a positive work environment	3.83	69%	16%	15%
I believe leadership is transparent about goals, finances, and decisions	3.80	66%	17%	17%
Church leaders model the vision and mission personally	3.74	64%	19%	17%
Overall, leadership serves our staff and congregation well	3.74	64%	20%	16%
Leadership is open to feedback and willing to make changes	3.54	57%	22%	21%
Leadership provides clear direction and support for staff	3.42	52%	26%	23%
Leadership handles conflicts and challenges in a healthy manner	3.39	54%	23%	24%

Notice where the category breaks. The top five questions—all scoring 3.74 or above—measure perception and relationship: Do you feel respected? Is the environment positive? Is leadership transparent? Do leaders model values? The bottom three questions—all scoring 3.54 or below—measure action and courage: Is leadership open to feedback? Do they provide clear direction? Do they handle conflict well?

Staff believe their leaders are good people. They're less convinced their leaders do hard things.

The Conflict Handling Crisis

The lowest-scoring question in the Leadership category—and one of the lowest in the entire assessment—is: "Leadership handles conflicts and challenges in a healthy

manner." It scores just 3.39, with only 54% green (agree or strongly agree) and 47% yellow or red (neutral, disagree, or strongly disagree).

Nearly half of church staff don't trust their leadership to handle conflict well.

This matters because conflict is unavoidable. In any organization with multiple people, competing priorities, limited resources, and human imperfection, conflict will arise. The question isn't whether conflict exists—it's whether leadership will address it. When 47% of staff lack confidence in how conflict is handled, they're not just answering a survey question. They're describing their lived experience of watching problems persist, toxic colleagues remain, and difficult situations go unaddressed.

What does poor conflict handling look like in practice? Staff describe it in their narrative responses: the problem everyone knows about that leadership won't touch. The difficult staff member who never faces consequences. The tension between ministries that festers for years. The congregant who mistreats staff while leadership looks the other way. The pattern is consistent: something hard needs to be addressed, and leadership finds a reason not to address it.

The Gap That Matters Most

If conflict handling were merely a weak spot, it would be worth addressing. But the data reveals something more significant: conflict handling is one of the largest differentiators between healthy and struggling staff.

When we compare staff in the top third of overall health scores (200+) to those in the bottom third (below 160), the gaps are stark:

Question	Top Third (Score 200+)	Bottom Third (Score <160)	Gap
Leadership provides clear direction and support	4.40	2.07	+2.32
Leadership is open to feedback and willing to make changes	4.47	2.19	+2.28
Church provides a positive work environment	4.72	2.53	+2.18
Leadership handles conflicts and challenges in a healthy manner	4.31	2.13	+2.18

The conflict handling gap is 2.18 points—one of the largest in the entire study. Healthy staff rate their leaders 4.31 on conflict handling. Struggling staff rate them 2.13. That's not a minor difference in perception. It's a fundamentally different experience of leadership.

This gap tells us something important: conflict handling isn't incidental to staff health. It's central to it. Churches where leadership handles conflict well have staff who thrive. Churches where leadership avoids conflict have staff who suffer. The pattern is too consistent to ignore.

The Nice Leader Trap

The contrast between the highest and lowest leadership scores reveals what might be called the "nice leader trap." Staff feel respected (3.90, 71% green)—the highest score. They don't trust leadership to handle conflict well (3.39, 54% green)—the lowest score. This 0.51-point gap represents something specific: leaders who are liked but not fully effective.

Many church leaders have built their identity around being caring, approachable, and kind. These are good qualities. But they can become a trap when they prevent leaders from doing hard things. The leader who wants to be liked may avoid the conversation that would make them temporarily disliked. The leader who values harmony may tolerate dysfunction to preserve a false peace. The leader who fears conflict may leave problems unaddressed until they become crises.

Here's what the data suggests: niceness without courage isn't leadership. Staff ultimately need leaders who will protect them, direct them, and address problems that harm them—even when doing so is uncomfortable. A leader who is respected but won't handle conflict is a leader who has earned goodwill but hasn't spent it where it matters most. Staff notice. They feel respected in general but abandoned in specifics. They appreciate the warmth but wonder: "If something goes wrong, will anyone actually do anything about it?"

The answer, for 47% of church staff, seems to be no.

Why Leaders Avoid Conflict

Understanding why leaders avoid conflict doesn't excuse it, but it helps explain the pattern. Church leaders often avoid conflict for predictable reasons.

They want to be liked. Ministry is relational, and church leaders often entered the profession because they value connection. Conflict threatens connection—at least temporarily. The discomfort of a hard conversation feels like relational damage, even when it's actually relational investment.

They fear the outcome. What if the conversation goes badly? What if the person leaves? What if it creates more problems than it solves? Fear of unknown consequences leads to paralysis. The devil you know (unaddressed conflict) feels safer than the devil you don't (unpredictable resolution).

They hope it will resolve itself. Maybe if we give it time, the problem will go away. Maybe the difficult person will mature. Maybe the tension will ease. This hope is almost always misplaced. Conflicts that resolve themselves are rare. Conflicts that compound without intervention are common.

They prioritize peace over health. In church culture, "peace" is often treated as a supreme value. But peace at any cost isn't peace—it's suppression. True peace comes from addressed issues and resolved tensions, not from pretending problems don't exist.

They lack training. Many church leaders received extensive theological education and minimal leadership training. Conflict resolution isn't taught in most seminaries. Leaders may genuinely not know how to address conflict constructively, so they default to avoidance.

Whatever the reason, the cost is real. Problems compound with interest. Small conflicts become big ones. High-performing staff—who have options—leave for healthier environments. Low-performing or toxic staff—who often don't have options—stay. The culture slowly degrades. And staff learn the unspoken lesson: leadership won't protect you.

The Direction-Conflict Connection

It's not coincidental that the two lowest-scoring leadership questions sit next to each other:

"Leadership provides clear direction and support for staff": 3.42, 52% green

"Leadership handles conflicts and challenges in a healthy manner": 3.39, 54% green

These weaknesses are connected. Leaders who avoid conflict also tend to avoid clarity—because clarity creates accountability, and accountability eventually requires conflict.

Think about it: If you give staff clear expectations, you'll eventually need to address unmet expectations. If you provide specific direction, you'll eventually need to correct staff who go a different direction. If you define success clearly, you'll eventually need to have hard conversations with staff who aren't succeeding. Clarity invites accountability. Accountability requires courage.

Leaders who lack courage often lack clarity as a protective mechanism. If expectations are vague, no one can definitively fail to meet them. If direction is unclear, no correction is needed. If success is undefined, no one can be held to account. Fuzzy leadership feels safer because it avoids the conflict that clear leadership inevitably produces.

But staff pay the price. Nearly half (48%) don't feel they have clear direction from leadership. They're left guessing, uncertain, unable to fully succeed because they don't know what success looks like. The leader's avoidance of conflict creates confusion that harms everyone.

The Feedback Loop Failure

"Leadership is open to feedback and willing to make changes" scores 3.54, with only 57% green and 43% yellow or red. This creates a troubling dynamic: leaders who struggle with conflict handling are often the same leaders who can't receive feedback about it.

Here's the paradox: The very skill leaders need to improve—receiving hard input graciously—is the skill that enables improvement. A leader who can hear "Your conflict avoidance is hurting the team" has a chance to grow. A leader who deflects, defends, or dismisses that feedback remains stuck.

When 43% of staff don't feel leadership is open to feedback, it means nearly half have learned that raising concerns doesn't lead to change. They've watched their input be acknowledged politely and ignored practically. They've experienced the closed loop: staff see a problem, raise it, hear "thanks for sharing," and watch nothing happen. Over time, they stop raising issues. The feedback channel closes. The leader, now insulated from input, has no mechanism for improvement.

This is especially damaging for conflict handling because leaders often don't see their own avoidance clearly. They may believe they're being measured, wise, or patient when they're actually being passive. Without feedback that challenges this self-perception, they can't adjust. The leader who most needs to hear "You're avoiding conflict and it's hurting us" is often the leader least able to receive it.

What Healthy Conflict Handling Looks Like

If avoidance is the problem, what's the alternative? Healthy conflict handling in church leadership has several distinguishing characteristics.

It's early rather than late. Conflicts addressed early are conversations. Conflicts addressed late are crises. Every week of avoidance adds complexity, compounds hurt, and increases the cost of resolution. Leaders who handle conflict well don't wait for perfect timing—they recognize that earlier is almost always better.

It's direct rather than vague. Healthy confrontation names the specific issue without hedging, hinting, or hoping the other person figures it out. "I've noticed some tension" is vague. "When you interrupted Sarah in the meeting yesterday, it shut

down her contribution" is direct. Directness respects people enough to tell them the truth.

It's kind rather than harsh. Direct doesn't mean cruel. Truth can be spoken in love—firmly, clearly, and with genuine care for the other person's wellbeing and growth. Healthy conflict handling separates the issue from the person's worth. It's possible to address behavior strongly while treating the person with dignity.

It's protective of the team. Leaders who handle conflict well understand that avoidance doesn't protect people—it exposes them. When a toxic staff member goes unaddressed, the whole team suffers. When a congregant mistreats staff and leadership looks away, staff feel abandoned. Handling conflict is an act of protection for everyone affected by the problem.

It models receiving feedback graciously. Leaders who expect staff to receive correction well must themselves receive correction well. When a leader responds to feedback with curiosity rather than defensiveness, they create permission for the whole team to grow. When they respond with walls, they teach staff to hide problems.

It follows through consistently. Addressing conflict means more than having a conversation—it means ensuring change actually happens. Follow-up, accountability, and consequences (when needed) demonstrate that leadership takes issues seriously. A hard conversation followed by no change teaches staff that words don't matter.

Questions for Leaders

Before moving on, consider these questions about conflict and leadership in your context:

1. Is there a conflict on your team right now that you're avoiding? Be honest with yourself. You probably already know the answer. How long has it been there? What's the cost of waiting another month?
2. When did you last make a hard personnel decision? How long did you wait before acting? Looking back, do you wish you had moved sooner?
3. Would your team say you protect them from difficult people—or expose them? Think about the last time a staff member was mistreated by a colleague or congregant. What did you do?
4. Do your staff see you receive feedback graciously? When someone brings you criticism, what's your first response—curiosity or defense? What message does that send?
5. Is your leadership characterized by courage or comfort? Not your intentions—your actual behavior. What would your staff say?
6. If you asked your team to rate how well leadership handles conflict, what score would they give? If you don't know, that might be worth finding out.

Your staff feel respected by you—that's genuinely good news. But respect without courage isn't enough. Your team is watching to see: Will you handle the hard things? Will you address the conflict everyone knows exists? Will you protect them from the person making their work life difficult? Will you have the conversation you've been avoiding? Your answer to these questions matters more than how nice you are. They don't need you to be comfortable. They need you to be courageous. And the gap between where you are and where you could be—that's not a verdict on your character. It's an invitation to grow. The leaders whose staff thrive aren't superhuman. They just decided that doing hard things well was more important than avoiding hard things entirely.

THE BOTTOM LINE

"Leadership handles conflicts and challenges in a healthy manner" scores just 3.39 out of 5—the lowest in the Leadership category—with only 54% of staff confident in their leaders' conflict handling. Meanwhile, "feeling respected by leadership" scores 3.90, with 71% green. This gap reveals the "nice leader trap": well-liked but ineffective at hard things. Here's what the data makes clear: conflict handling isn't peripheral—it's one of the largest differentiators between healthy and struggling staff. Thriving staff rate their leaders 4.31 on conflict handling; struggling staff rate them just 2.13—a 2.18-point gap. Churches where leaders handle conflict well have staff who flourish. Churches where leaders avoid conflict have staff who suffer. The pattern is too consistent to ignore. Your staff don't need you to avoid discomfort. They need you to face it. How you handle the hardest things may be the single most defining characteristic of your leadership.

Discovery #9: The Three-Year Decline

The Trajectory That Demands Attention

For three consecutive years, church staff health has moved in the same direction: down. The decline isn't dramatic—just 2 points on a 250-point scale. But when the same pattern emerges year after year, it stops being a fluctuation and starts being a trajectory. And trajectories, not snapshots, determine futures.

What makes this finding particularly significant isn't the magnitude of the decline. It's what's happening beneath the average. This isn't a uniform erosion affecting everyone equally. It's a hollowing out at the top—a quiet exodus from our healthiest category that's easy to miss if you're only watching the averages. The thriving are becoming merely healthy. The healthy are becoming fair. And the fair are growing in number while the exceptional shrink.

Three Years of Data: The Numbers

This is our third year conducting the Church Staff Health Assessment, giving us enough longitudinal data to identify meaningful patterns. Across all three years, we've heard from approximately 3,460 paid church staff members across the United States.

Year	Respondents
2023	1,064
2024	1,202
2025	1,196
Total	~3,460

The sample sizes are comparable enough to make meaningful comparisons, though we should note these aren't identical panels—different churches and different

individuals participate each year. With that caveat in mind, here's what the overall scores reveal:

Metric	2023	2024	2025	Change (2023→2025)
Average Score	185.4	184.0	183.4	-2.0 points
Median Score	193	191	190	-3 points
Standard Deviation	40.8	41.5	38.6	-2.2 points

The average has dropped 2 points. The median has dropped 3. Both are moving in the same direction, at roughly the same pace, for three consecutive years. The slightly narrowing standard deviation suggests the distribution is compressing—fewer outliers on both ends, more clustering toward the middle.

But the real story emerges when we look at how staff are distributed across our six health bands:

Health Band	2023	2024	2025	Change (2023→2025)
EXCEPTIONAL (225-250)	18.8%	18.4%	14.7%	-4.1%
STRONG (190-224)	33.9%	32.8%	35.4%	+1.5%
GOOD (155-189)	24.3%	25.0%	24.7%	+0.4%
FAIR (120-154)	14.4%	15.8%	19.1%	+4.7%
NEEDS IMPROVEMENT (85-119)	6.7%	6.0%	5.1%	-1.6%
CRITICAL (0-84)	1.9%	2.0%	1.1%	-0.8%

And when we collapse this into the binary of healthy versus concerning:

Category	2023	2024	2025	Change
Healthy (GOOD or above)	77.1%	76.2%	74.7%	-2.4%
Concerning (FAIR or below)	22.9%	23.8%	25.3%	+2.4%

Three years ago, just under 23% of church staff were in concerning territory. Today, it's over 25%. That 2.4 percentage point shift represents a meaningful change in the landscape of church staff health.

The Hollowing Out: Where the Movement Is Happening

The 2-point average decline, by itself, tells an incomplete story. The distribution tells the rest.

What's shrinking: The EXCEPTIONAL category has dropped from 18.8% to 14.7%—a decline of 4.1 percentage points. In relative terms, that's a 22% reduction in our healthiest category. Nearly one in five staff members used to be thriving. Now it's closer to one in seven. We're losing our best.

What's growing: The FAIR category has grown from 14.4% to 19.1%—an increase of 4.7 percentage points. In relative terms, that's a 33% increase in struggling staff. These are people in concerning territory—not in crisis, but not okay either. More staff are moving into this precarious zone.

What's stable: The STRONG category (33.9% → 35.4%) and GOOD category (24.3% → 24.7%) have remained essentially flat. The middle is holding, but it's not improving. Staff in these bands are treading water, maintaining their health without meaningfully advancing.

What's interesting: The bottom two categories—NEEDS IMPROVEMENT (6.7% → 5.1%) and CRITICAL (1.9% → 1.1%)—are actually *shrinking*. We're not creating more crises. The most severely struggling staff aren't growing in number.

This creates a clear picture: the decline isn't a uniform erosion affecting everyone. It's a redistribution. The top is eroding into the middle. The middle is holding. The middle-bottom (FAIR) is growing. And the very bottom is stable or improving slightly.

Think of it this way: we're not breaking more people. We're losing our stars. The question isn't just "how do we create more exceptional staff?" but "how do we keep the exceptional staff we already have?"

Is Two Points Significant?

Let's address this directly: on a 250-point scale, a 2-point decline represents just 0.8%. By itself, that's within normal variation. It's roughly equivalent to one question being answered slightly less favorably. In any single year, we might dismiss it as statistical noise.

But this isn't one year. It's three.

The trajectory matters more than any individual data point:

- **2023 → 2024:** -1.4 points
- **2024 → 2025:** -0.6 points
- **2023 → 2025:** -2.0 points (cumulative)

The decline actually slowed between 2024 and 2025, which could be encouraging—or could simply be variation. What we can say with confidence is that we have not seen a single year of improvement. The line only goes one direction.

The compounding concern is this: if this trajectory continues—and we have no evidence yet that it won't—where will church staff health be in 2028? In 2030? A 2-point decline every three years sounds manageable. A 6-point decline over a decade starts to reshape the entire landscape.

Multiply this across the hundreds of thousands of paid church staff in the United States, and what looks like a small statistical shift becomes a significant cultural movement. Something is changing in church staffing. Slowly. Consistently. In the same direction.

What Might Be Driving This

We cannot prove causation from survey data. What we can do is identify plausible contributing factors that align with what we're seeing in the numbers and hearing in the narratives. Several forces may be at work:

The COVID long tail. The pandemic didn't end with reopening. Many churches are still navigating attendance decline, financial pressure, volunteer burnout, and the accumulated exhaustion of leading through crisis. Some staff haven't fully recovered—and may not have had the space to. The stress of 2020-2021 may be manifesting now as declining engagement rather than acute crisis.

Cultural and political pressures. Church staff are increasingly caught in the crossfire of a polarized culture. Navigating political divisions within congregations, addressing social issues without alienating members, and maintaining unity in an era of fragmentation takes a toll. Staff described this exhaustion in their narrative responses: the feeling of being unable to please everyone, of walking on eggshells, of ministry becoming more contentious.

Economic realities. Inflation has eroded real wages. Benefits costs have risen. Many staff are doing more with less as churches face tighter budgets. When compensation doesn't keep pace with the cost of living—and we've seen that Compensation remains the weakest category—it creates stress that compounds over time.

Generational expectations. Younger staff may have different assumptions about work-life balance, boundaries, and what healthy employment looks like. The traditional "ministry means sacrifice" culture may be bumping against a generation less willing to accept unsustainable demands. This isn't necessarily negative—it may be corrective—but it creates friction in the interim.

Selection effects. Here's an uncomfortable possibility: what if the healthiest staff are the ones most likely to leave ministry? People with options exercise them. If the EXCEPTIONAL are burning out and exiting, while the struggling remain because they feel stuck, the decline we're seeing may partly reflect who's still in the sample, not just how the same people are doing over time.

We present these as possibilities, not certainties. The data tells us *what* is happening. It can only hint at *why*.

The Hopeful Perspective

Before we spiral into alarm, let's state what the data also shows:

Three-quarters are still healthy. Despite the decline, 74.7% of church staff score in the GOOD, STRONG, or EXCEPTIONAL categories. The majority are doing okay. This isn't a collapse of church staffing. It's a shift at the margins that warrants attention.

The bottom isn't getting worse. CRITICAL has dropped from 1.9% to 1.1%. NEEDS IMPROVEMENT has dropped from 6.7% to 5.1%. We are not creating more crises. The most severe dysfunction isn't growing. Whatever is happening, it's not pushing more people into crisis—it's pulling the healthiest down toward the middle.

The decline is gradual. This is erosion, not earthquake. There's time to identify causes. There's time to intervene. There's time to change trajectory. The slow pace that makes this easy to miss also means it can be addressed before it accelerates.

We're measuring and aware. Three years ago, no one was tracking this. Now we have longitudinal data that makes the pattern visible. Awareness is the first step toward action. Churches that take staff health seriously now have benchmarks against which to measure themselves and tools to identify where intervention is needed.

Trends can be reversed. But they won't reverse themselves.

The Erosion Warning

There's a difference between a flood and erosion. A flood is dramatic, obvious, impossible to ignore. It demands immediate response. You see it happening in real time.

Erosion is different. It's slow. It's quiet. It's easy to miss. You don't notice erosion until the cliff edge gives way—and by then, the damage is done. The time to address erosion is before the collapse, not after.

What we're seeing in church staff health looks more like erosion than flood. A 2-point decline doesn't trigger alarm bells. A 4% drop in EXCEPTIONAL doesn't make headlines. A gradual shift from 23% concerning to 25% concerning feels like normal variation.

But three years of consistent movement in the same direction stops being variation and starts being trajectory. And trajectories, if unaddressed, have a way of continuing.

The question isn't whether 2025's data is cause for panic. It's not. The question is what happens if this pattern continues for another three years. And another three after that. What kind of church staffing landscape will we be looking at in 2030 if EXCEPTIONAL keeps shrinking by a percentage point or two per year? If FAIR keeps growing? If the slow erosion continues unchecked?

The time to shore up the cliff is before the ground gives way. The time to address this decline is now—while three-quarters of staff are still healthy, while the bottom isn't getting worse, while we have margin and time and data to work with.

What happens in the next three years depends on what churches choose to do now.

Questions for the Church Collectively

As church leaders reflect on these three-year trends, several questions deserve attention:

1. **What are we doing—or failing to do—that's causing our healthiest staff to decline?** The EXCEPTIONAL category doesn't shrink by 22% without reason. What's different about ministry environments that retain thriving staff versus those that see them erode?
2. **Are we creating conditions where EXCEPTIONAL can be sustained?** It's one thing to hire healthy staff. It's another to maintain an environment where they can stay healthy. What are the attributes of churches that keep their best people thriving?
3. **How are we supporting the growing FAIR category before they tip?** FAIR has grown by a third. These staff are on a knife's edge. With attention and support, they could recover to GOOD. Without it, they'll slide toward NEEDS IMPROVEMENT. What are we doing for them?
4. **What will we wish we had done differently if this trend continues?** Imagine looking at this data in 2028, after three more years of decline. What actions would we wish we had taken in 2025?

A 2-point decline over three years doesn't sound dramatic. But your healthiest staff—the EXCEPTIONAL category—has shrunk by 22% in that same period. Meanwhile, FAIR has grown by a third. This isn't a crisis. It's something more insidious: a slow erosion that's easy to miss. Erosion doesn't announce itself. It just quietly continues until the ground gives way. The question isn't whether this matters. The question is whether we'll act while there's still time.

THE BOTTOM LINE

Church staff health has declined for three consecutive years—from 185.4 (2023) to 183.4 (2025). But the real story is in the distribution: EXCEPTIONAL has shrunk from 18.8% to 14.7%, while FAIR has grown from 14.4% to 19.1%. We're not creating more crises—CRITICAL and NEEDS IMPROVEMENT are actually down. We're losing our healthiest staff. The top is eroding. This is a slow decline, not a sudden collapse—which makes it both less alarming and more dangerous. Erosion is easy to ignore until the cliff gives way. Three-quarters of staff are still healthy. The trajectory can be reversed. But it won't reverse itself. The next three years will be shaped by what churches choose to do now.

Discovery #10: What Separates Thriving from Surviving

After nine discoveries exploring the challenges facing church staff—from communication breakdowns to compensation concerns to flight risk factors—a crucial question remains: *What actually makes the difference?*

If you're a church leader looking at pages of data and wondering where to start, this final discovery offers clarity. We didn't just want to know what the averages looked like. We wanted to know what separates the staff who are thriving from those who are barely hanging on. So we ran a different kind of analysis. We compared the top third of respondents—those scoring 200 or above (n=475)—against the bottom third—those scoring below 160 (n=334). Then we measured the gap on every single question.

What emerged wasn't a list of vague suggestions. It was a precise hierarchy of factors that create the largest differentiation between healthy and struggling staff. Twelve factors showed gaps of 2.0 points or more on a 5-point scale. That's not a marginal difference. That's the distance between "Strongly Agree" and "Disagree." That's the distance between someone who looks forward to Monday morning and someone who dreads it.

The Methodology: Comparing Extremes

To identify what truly differentiates thriving from surviving, we isolated two groups: the healthiest staff (top third, scores of 200+, representing 475 respondents) and the most struggling staff (bottom third, scores below 160, representing 334 respondents). By comparing their responses on all 50 questions, we could see which factors showed the greatest separation.

This approach reveals something that averages cannot: the specific variables that distinguish flourishing from floundering. A question with a small gap indicates consistency regardless of overall health—important, but not differentiating. A question with a large gap reveals a lever. Pull that lever, and you move staff from one category toward another.

The Twelve Largest Gaps

Every factor in this table shows a gap of at least 2.0 points. On a 5-point scale, that's a chasm.

Rank	Question	Top Third Avg	Bottom Third Avg	Gap
1	Leadership provides clear direction and support	4.40	2.07	+2.32
2	I feel like a valued part of the team	4.79	2.48	+2.31
3	Church makes staff health and well-being a priority	4.51	2.23	+2.28
4	I feel respected by staff and leadership	4.80	2.51	+2.28
5	Leadership is open to feedback and willing to change	4.47	2.19	+2.28
6	I am happy in my current role	4.67	2.40	+2.28
7	Staying long-term is great for my career/family	4.28	2.01	+2.27
8	My ideas and suggestions are taken seriously	4.66	2.39	+2.27
9	I feel comfortable voicing concerns to leadership	4.68	2.49	+2.20
10	Church offers perks that contribute to satisfaction	4.36	2.17	+2.19
11	Church provides a positive work environment	4.72	2.53	+2.18
12	Leadership handles conflicts well	4.31	2.13	+2.18

Look at what the healthiest staff experience: clear direction (4.40), feeling valued (4.79), feeling respected (4.80), leaders who accept feedback (4.47), conflicts handled well (4.31). Now look at the struggling staff: direction at 2.07, feeling valued at 2.48,

respect at 2.51, leaders accepting feedback at 2.19, conflict handling at 2.13. These aren't minor variations. They represent fundamentally different experiences of church work.

Two people could work in the same building, attend the same staff meetings, serve under the same lead pastor—and inhabit entirely different realities.

The Thematic Clusters

When we group these twelve factors by theme, clear patterns emerge:

Cluster 1: Feeling Valued and Respected

Question	Gap
I feel like a valued part of the team	+2.31
I feel respected by staff and leadership	+2.28
My ideas and suggestions are taken seriously	+2.27
I feel comfortable voicing concerns to leadership	+2.20

Average cluster gap: +2.27

This is the largest thematic cluster—and it centers on a single concept: *Do I matter here?* Thriving staff feel like valued team members. They feel respected. They know their ideas are taken seriously. They feel safe bringing concerns to leadership. Struggling staff experience the opposite across all four measures. The difference between healthy and unhealthy staff isn't primarily about salary or office space or job titles. It's about whether people feel they genuinely matter.

Cluster 2: Leadership Behavior

Question	Gap
Leadership provides clear direction and support	+2.32
Leadership is open to feedback and willing to change	+2.28
Leadership handles conflicts well	+2.18

Average cluster gap: +2.26

Three of the twelve largest gaps are leadership behaviors. The single largest gap in the entire assessment—2.32 points—is "Leadership provides clear direction and support." This finding puts responsibility squarely where it belongs: on leaders. Staff health is not primarily a function of denominational affiliation, church size, or geographic location. It's a function of what leaders do and how they do it.

Cluster 3: Well-Being as Priority

Question	Gap
Church makes staff health and well-being a priority	+2.28
Church provides a positive work environment	+2.18
Church offers perks that contribute to satisfaction	+2.19

Average cluster gap: +2.22

Whether the church demonstrably cares about staff well-being creates massive differentiation. Healthy staff work in environments where their well-being is explicitly prioritized—not just stated as a value, but lived out through environment and tangible benefits. Struggling staff work where well-being is an afterthought, if it's a thought at all.

Cluster 4: Future Orientation

Question	Gap
I am happy in my current role	+2.28
Staying long-term is great for my career/family	+2.27

Average cluster gap: +2.28

Healthy staff see a future. They're happy in their roles (4.67 vs. 2.40), and they believe staying long-term benefits both their career and family (4.28 vs. 2.01). Struggling staff are stuck in roles that don't feel sustainable. They can't envision a positive long-term trajectory. This cluster shows that retention isn't just about preventing departures—it's about creating a future worth staying for.

What Doesn't Differentiate

Equally revealing are the factors that show the *smallest* gaps—consistent regardless of overall health:

Question	Top Third Avg	Bottom Third Avg	Gap
We regularly hold staff meetings	4.63	3.30	+1.33
My role aligns with my skills and interests	4.66	3.34	+1.32
My work makes a positive impact	4.64	3.54	+1.09
Would consider similar position elsewhere*	2.31	3.93	-1.62
Thought seriously about leaving*	2.37	4.38	-2.02

Note: These final two questions are reverse-scored. For healthy staff, LOW scores are positive (they haven't thought about leaving). For struggling staff, HIGH scores are negative (they have thought about leaving).

Staff meetings happen regardless of health—churches hold them as a matter of logistics, not culture. Role-skill alignment is relatively consistent; people generally choose roles that fit their abilities. And perhaps most striking: even struggling staff (3.54) believe their work makes a positive impact. Ministry-minded people feel the significance of their work even when everything else is falling apart.

These factors are "table stakes." They're necessary but not sufficient. You can have weekly staff meetings, well-aligned roles, and meaningful work—and still have struggling staff. Because what differentiates thriving from surviving isn't logistics. It's relationship. It's leadership. It's culture.

The Feeling Valued Discovery

If you take one insight from this analysis, let it be this: the single largest cluster of gaps centers on whether staff feel valued. Valued as a team member. Respected by colleagues and supervisors. Confident that their ideas are heard. Safe to voice concerns without retaliation.

This isn't "soft" stuff. This is the core variable. Staff who feel genuinely valued score 4.66 on having their ideas taken seriously. Staff who don't feel valued score 2.39. That's not a marginal difference in engagement. That's the difference between someone who offers their best thinking and someone who has learned to stay quiet.

How do leaders communicate value? It happens in small moments: remembering what a staff member said last week and following up, including people in decisions that affect them, creating space for dissenting opinions, saying thank you in specific rather than generic ways, advocating for someone's needs to the board, responding to an idea with curiosity instead of dismissal. Value isn't communicated through annual appreciation dinners. It's communicated through daily interactions.

The struggling staff in our data haven't stopped wanting to feel valued. They've just stopped believing they will.

The Leadership Factor

Three of the top twelve gaps are direct leadership behaviors: providing clear direction (+2.32), being open to feedback (+2.28), and handling conflicts well (+2.18). Together, they average a gap of 2.26 points.

This puts a fine point on something church leaders may not want to hear: staff health is largely a leadership outcome. The same church with different leadership behaviors would produce different staff health scores. The same staff member under different leadership could shift from struggling to thriving—or vice versa.

But this finding also represents profound opportunity. Leadership behaviors are changeable. A leader can't control the economy, can't control denominational dynamics, can't control cultural headwinds facing churches. But a leader can provide clearer direction starting next week. A leader can respond to the next piece of critical feedback with openness instead of defensiveness. A leader can address that conflict they've been avoiding. These aren't initiatives requiring board approval or budget allocation. They're choices available right now.

The gap between thriving and surviving staff isn't mysterious. It's measurable. And it's addressable—through leadership behavior.

The Action Hierarchy

This data creates a prioritization framework for church leaders who can't fix everything at once. Based on gap analysis, here's where to focus:

First Priority: Make staff feel genuinely valued. This isn't about saying "we appreciate you" at staff meetings. It's about demonstrating value through inclusion in decisions, taking ideas seriously, creating safety for concerns, and showing respect in daily interactions. The feeling-valued cluster shows the largest average gap. Start here.

Second Priority: Provide clear direction. Don't leave staff guessing what success looks like or where the church is headed. The single largest gap in the entire assessment is "Leadership provides clear direction and support." Staff need to know what they're building toward and how their role contributes.

Third Priority: Receive feedback with openness. Create genuine safety for honest input and demonstrate that feedback leads to reflection, not retaliation. The 2.28-point gap on "Leadership is open to feedback and willing to change" reveals that how you respond to input defines whether staff will risk honesty.

Fourth Priority: Handle conflict. Every avoided conflict erodes trust. Every addressed conflict—when handled well—builds it. Struggling staff consistently report

that "leadership handles conflicts well" at 2.13. That's not handling conflicts well. That's not handling them at all.

Fifth Priority: Make well-being visible. Staff health and well-being should be an explicit priority, not an afterthought. This shows up in environment, benefits, and whether people believe the church actually cares about their flourishing.

What won't close the gap as much: more staff meetings, ensuring role-skill fit, or talking about impact. These matter, but the data shows they're not where the differentiation happens. If you're holding meetings but avoiding conflict, you're optimizing the wrong variable.

The Two-Point Chasm

What does a 2+ point gap actually mean in practical terms?

Consider two staff members answering "Leadership provides clear direction and support":

Staff Member A (Thriving): 4.4 out of 5—essentially "Agree" *Translation: I know what we're building. I understand how my role fits. My leader provides the support I need to succeed. I'm not guessing at expectations.*

Staff Member B (Struggling): 2.1 out of 5—essentially "Disagree" *Translation: I'm unclear on the vision. I don't know what success looks like in my role. When I need support, I don't receive it. I feel like I'm making it up as I go.*

These two people might attend the same staff meeting, hear the same announcements, serve on the same team. But they're living in different churches. The gap between 4.4 and 2.1 isn't a data point. It's a daily experience. It's whether Sunday feels like an opportunity or an ordeal. It's whether you look forward to Monday or dread it. It's whether you're growing or grinding.

A 2+ point gap represents two completely different relationships with work, with leadership, with calling. And twelve factors in this assessment show gaps of that magnitude. That's twelve dimensions where thriving and struggling staff inhabit different realities.

Questions for Leaders

Before you move on to the next section, sit with these questions:

1. Do your staff feel genuinely valued—not just appreciated in words, but demonstrated through inclusion, voice, and respect? What would they say if asked privately?
2. Have you provided clear direction, or are staff guessing at what success looks like? Could each team member articulate what they're building toward?
3. When did someone last give you hard feedback? How did you respond? What did your reaction teach them about bringing concerns in the future?
4. Is there a conflict you're avoiding that's costing you trust? What would it mean to address it this week?
5. If your staff rated you on these twelve factors today, what would they say? Which gaps would be largest?
6. Which ONE factor could you improve starting tomorrow? Not next quarter. Not after the strategic planning process. Tomorrow.

This data reveals a simple truth: the difference between thriving and struggling staff comes down to a handful of factors. Feeling valued. Clear direction. Openness to feedback. Handling conflict. Prioritizing well-being. These aren't complex initiatives requiring committees and consultants. They're leadership behaviors you can practice tomorrow. The question isn't whether you know what matters. It's whether you'll do something about it.

THE BOTTOM LINE

Twelve factors create 2+ point gaps between healthy and struggling staff—enormous differentiation on a 5-point scale. The largest cluster centers on feeling valued: respected, heard, taken seriously as part of the team. Three of the top factors are leadership behaviors: clear direction, openness to feedback, and handling conflict well. Meanwhile, some factors show little differentiation regardless of health: staff meetings happen, roles fit skills, staff believe their work matters. These are table stakes, not differentiators. The message is clear: if you want to improve staff health, start with value and voice. Make people feel they matter. Provide direction. Receive feedback. Handle hard things. The gap between thriving and surviving isn't mysterious. It's measurable. And it's addressable—starting now.

The Seven Categories Scorecard

Throughout this report, we've examined specific discoveries that emerged from the data—the flight risk crisis, the evaluation disaster, the compensation gap, communication breakdowns, and leadership challenges. Now it's time to step back and see the complete picture.

The Church Staff Health Assessment measures seven distinct categories, each capturing a different dimension of staff experience. Some categories have been explored extensively in previous Discovery sections. Others deserve deeper examination here. Together, they reveal a pattern that church leaders need to understand: your staff find deep meaning in their work, but they're questioning whether the current conditions are sustainable.

This section serves as your comprehensive reference—a scorecard you can return to when benchmarking your own staff against national norms. We'll provide deep dives into the categories not yet fully explored (Job Satisfaction, Team Dynamics, Work Environment, and Future Stability) while summarizing those we've already examined (Communication, Leadership, and Compensation & Benefits).

The Complete Category Ranking

When we rank all seven categories by percentage score, a clear hierarchy emerges:

Rank	Category	Score	Max Points	Percentage
1	Job Satisfaction	27.5	35	78.7%
2	Team Dynamics	26.6	35	75.9%
3	Communication	29.9	40	74.7%
4	Work Environment	26.0	35	74.3%
5	Leadership	29.4	40	73.4%
6	Compensation & Benefits	27.4	40	68.5%
7	Future Stability	16.5	25	66.1%

Three observations stand out. First, Job Satisfaction leads decisively at 78.7%—a full 2.8 percentage points above second place. Church staff genuinely find meaning in their work. Second, the middle four categories (Team Dynamics through Leadership) cluster tightly within a 2.5-point range, suggesting these areas are interconnected and move together. Third, the bottom two categories—Compensation & Benefits and Future Stability—lag significantly behind, with Future Stability trailing the leader by 12.6 percentage points. The gap between how staff feel about their *work* and how they feel about their *future* tells a story worth examining.

Category 1: Job Satisfaction (78.7%)

The Bright Spot of the Assessment

If there's encouraging news in this data, it lives here. Church staff overwhelmingly believe their work matters, aligns with their values, and fits their gifts. In an era when meaningful work is increasingly rare, church employment delivers.

Question	Avg Score	% Green	% Yellow	% Red
My work makes a positive impact on the congregation and community	4.14	79%	16%	5%
My personal values align with the church's values and mission	4.11	77%	13%	9%
My current role aligns with my skills and interests	4.07	75%	15%	10%
I regularly feel a sense of accomplishment and purpose	3.96	72%	18%	10%
I feel like a valued part of the team	3.88	68%	17%	15%
I am happy in my current role	3.72	64%	19%	17%
My role provides healthy work-life balance	3.68	60%	21%	19%

The Strengths

The top three questions all score above 4.0—a threshold few questions in this assessment reach. 79% of staff believe their work makes a positive impact on their congregation and community. Only 5% disagree. This is remarkable alignment around purpose. Similarly, 77% report that their personal values align with their church's mission. Staff aren't just doing jobs; they're living out their convictions. And 75% say their role aligns with their skills and interests—suggesting churches are generally placing people in positions that fit their gifting.

These three strengths form the foundation of vocational ministry: meaningful impact, values alignment, and skills fit. When all three are present, staff experience their work as calling rather than obligation.

The Concerns

The category's lowest questions reveal the sustainability challenge. Only 60% of staff report healthy work-life balance, while 19% actively disagree (red). That means four in ten staff are either uncertain about or openly struggling with boundaries between work and life. Ministry's always-on nature—the late-night hospital visits, the weekend services, the 24/7 pastoral care—takes a documented toll.

Only 61% are clearly happy in their current role, with 19% unhappy (red) and 20% uncertain (yellow). Combined, that's 36% of church staff who aren't able to say they're happy at work. And 15% don't feel like a valued part of the team—a finding that connects directly to the recognition gaps we explored in Discovery #10.

The Sustainability Gap

The range within this category tells a compelling story. The highest question (positive impact) scores 4.14. The lowest (work-life balance) scores 3.68. That 0.46-point gap represents the core tension: staff believe their work matters enormously, but they're not sure they can sustain the pace required to do it.

This is the "meaningful but exhausting" paradox. A staff member can simultaneously love what they do and question whether they can keep doing it. Purpose without sustainability eventually leads to burnout. And burned-out staff, no matter how called they feel, eventually leave.

THE BOTTOM LINE:

Job Satisfaction is the assessment's strongest category because church staff genuinely believe their work matters and aligns with their values. But beneath the meaning, 40% struggle with work-life balance and 36% aren't clearly happy. The work is fulfilling—the conditions may not be sustainable.

Category 2: Team Dynamics (75.9%)

How Staff Relate to One Another

Team Dynamics measures the peer-to-peer relationships, collaboration, and culture among staff. It's distinct from Leadership (which measures how leaders treat staff) because it captures how colleagues treat each other.

Question	Avg Score	% Green	% Yellow	% Red
My colleagues respect and value my contributions	4.04	76%	15%	9%
Staff are encouraged to share ideas and opinions openly	3.90	71%	14%	15%
Staff collaborate and support one another effectively	3.87	69%	18%	13%
We have a great overall work environment and culture	3.78	66%	19%	15%
Strong sense of camaraderie and teamwork	3.75	63%	21%	16%
Clear understanding of our roles and responsibilities	3.68	61%	22%	17%
Conflicts among staff are addressed and resolved effectively	3.55	56%	24%	20%

The Strength: Peer Respect

Only one question in this category breaks the 4.0 threshold: "My colleagues respect and value my contributions" (4.04, 76% green). Staff generally feel respected by their peers. This is foundational—without basic mutual respect, teams can't function.

The 71% who say staff are encouraged to share ideas openly suggests most church cultures at least aspire to collaborative input, even if execution sometimes falls short.

The Concerns: Team Function and Conflict

While individual peer relationships score well, team-level dynamics struggle. Only 63% report a strong sense of camaraderie and teamwork, with 16% disagreeing. Staff may respect each other individually without cohering as a functional team.

Role clarity continues to surface as a problem. Only 61% have a clear understanding of roles and responsibilities, while 17% don't. Overlapping job descriptions, unclear boundaries, and ambiguous reporting structures create friction—especially in smaller churches where everyone wears multiple hats.

The lowest score in this category—and one of the lowest in the entire assessment—is conflict resolution among staff (3.55). Only 56% say conflicts are addressed effectively, while 20% say they're not (red) and 24% are uncertain (yellow). That's 44% of staff who aren't confident peer conflicts get resolved.

The Leadership Connection

Here's a pattern worth noting: conflict resolution among staff (3.55) nearly mirrors leadership conflict handling (3.39) from the Leadership category. The gap is only 0.16 points. This isn't coincidental. When leadership doesn't model healthy conflict resolution, peer conflicts also go unaddressed. Staff take their cues from how leaders handle disagreements. If the senior pastor avoids difficult conversations, the children's director will too.

Healthy conflict resolution is a learned skill, and staff learn it—or don't—from watching their leaders.

THE BOTTOM LINE

Staff respect each other individually (76% green), but team-level dynamics struggle. Only 56% say peer conflicts are resolved effectively, and the conflict-avoidance pattern mirrors leadership behavior. Churches that want healthier teams need leaders who model healthy conflict resolution.

Category 3: Communication (74.7%)

Quick Reference

This category was explored extensively in Discovery #7: Communication Breakdown. Here's the question-level summary:

Question	Avg Score	% Green
Regular staff meetings to discuss updates and collaborate	4.06	74%
Comfortable voicing concerns to leadership	3.83	67%
Ideas and suggestions taken seriously	3.75	64%
Open line of communication between staff and leadership	3.74	63%
Role expectations and goals clearly communicated	3.68	61%
Kept informed about church decisions affecting my role	3.64	59%
Staff communicate well with each other	3.62	58%
Vision communicated regularly to staff	3.57	57%

The Key Finding

Meetings happen (4.06), but information doesn't flow (3.64). Churches have mastered the mechanics of communication—the weekly staff meeting, the all-hands email—without ensuring that relevant information actually reaches the people who need it. And only 57% say the vision is communicated regularly, which means 43% of staff are either uncertain about or disconnected from their church's direction.

See Discovery #7: Communication Breakdown for complete analysis, including demographic variations and recommendations.

Category 4: Work Environment (74.3%)

The Physical and Cultural Space

Work Environment measures the tangible conditions of church employment—workspace quality, available resources, safety, and whether the church prioritizes staff well-being. It also captures the daily experience question: Do staff actually look forward to coming to work?

Question	Avg Score	% Green	% Yellow	% Red
Provided necessary resources and tools to do my job	3.93	71%	19%	10%
Workspace is comfortable, safe, and productive	3.90	70%	19%	11%
Safety and security handled well	3.85	68%	19%	13%
I look forward to coming to work each week	3.81	67%	19%	14%
Opportunities to socialize and build relationships outside work	3.55	53%	27%	20%
Church prioritizes staff health and well-being	3.54	55%	23%	22%
Church invests in maintaining/improving work environment	3.43	51%	29%	20%

The Strengths: Basic Needs Are Met

The top three questions all relate to fundamental workplace requirements, and churches generally meet them. 71% of staff say they have the resources and tools they need to do their jobs. 70% find their workspace comfortable, safe, and productive. 68% feel safety and security are handled well. These aren't exceptional scores, but they indicate that most churches provide adequate working conditions.

For the 10-13% who score red on these questions, the situation is more urgent—they're lacking basic tools, working in uncomfortable conditions, or feeling unsafe. Church leaders should identify and address these individual situations.

The Concerns: Well-Being and Investment

The bottom three questions reveal where churches fall short. Only 51% believe the church invests in maintaining or improving the work environment (3.43)—the lowest score in this category. Half of church staff see organizational underinvestment in their working conditions.

Only 55% believe the church prioritizes staff health and well-being (3.54), while 22% actively disagree (red). That's more than one in five staff members who feel their church doesn't care about their wellness. In Discovery #10, we identified this question as having one of the largest gaps between healthy and struggling staff (+2.28 points). Staff who feel their well-being is prioritized thrive. Staff who don't, deteriorate.

Only 53% report opportunities to socialize and build relationships outside work tasks (3.55). Church staff work together, but many don't connect beyond work. In ministry environments where relational health matters deeply, this isolation has consequences.

The Daily Experience Question

One question in this category deserves special attention: "I look forward to coming to work each week" (3.81, 67% green).

Two-thirds of staff look forward to work. But one-third don't—including 14% who actively dread it (red). That's roughly one in seven church staff members who don't want to show up on Monday morning. Given that ministry requires emotional and relational engagement, staff who don't want to be there will struggle to serve effectively.

This is a quality-of-life indicator that church leaders should monitor. When your team members stop looking forward to the work, something has gone wrong—in their role, their relationships, or the culture.

THE BOTTOM LINE

Churches generally provide adequate workspaces and resources, but only 55% of staff feel their well-being is genuinely prioritized. One in three staff don't clearly look forward to work, and one in five feel the church underinvests in their environment. The basics are covered; the care is missing.

Category 5: Leadership (73.4%)

Quick Reference

This category was explored extensively in Discovery #8: Leadership & Conflict. Here's the question-level summary:

Question	Avg Score	% Green
Feel respected by staff and leadership	3.90	71%
Church provides positive work environment	3.83	69%
Leadership is transparent in communication and decision-making	3.80	66%
Leaders model the vision and mission	3.74	64%
Leadership serves staff and congregation well	3.74	64%
Leadership is open to feedback and new ideas	3.54	57%
Leadership provides clear direction and guidance	3.42	52%
Leadership handles conflicts effectively	3.39	54%

The Key Finding

Staff feel respected by leadership (3.90), but they don't trust how leadership handles conflict (3.39). The 0.51-point gap between these questions represents the difference between relational warmth and operational competence. Leaders can be kind, approachable, and personally supportive while still failing to provide clear direction or address difficult situations.

See Discovery #8: Leadership & Conflict for complete analysis, including the conflict-avoidance patterns that undermine trust.

Category 6: Compensation & Benefits (68.5%)

Quick Reference

This category was explored in Discovery #4: The Evaluation Disaster and Discovery #6: The Benefits Gap. Here's the question-level summary:

Question	Avg Score	% Green
Satisfied with PTO/vacation time	3.87	68%
Church supports professional development	3.54	55%
Compensation fair compared to similar positions at other churches	3.47	53%
Satisfied with overall compensation package	3.46	54%
Perks/benefits that contribute to job satisfaction	3.43	52%
Continuing education opportunities available	3.41	54%
Satisfied with benefits (health insurance, retirement)	3.26	49%
Clear process for performance evaluations and salary adjustments	2.96	37%

The Key Finding

The lowest-scoring question in the entire assessment lives here: "There is a clear process for performance evaluations and salary adjustments" (2.96)—the only question to score below 3.0. Only 37% of staff agree such a process exists, while 41% disagree. Most church staff operate without clear feedback systems or transparent paths to raises.

Benefits satisfaction (3.26, 49% green) lags behind salary satisfaction (3.46, 54% green), revealing a structural gap in non-salary compensation that affects staff families.

See Discovery #4: The Evaluation Disaster and Discovery #6: The Benefits Gap for complete analysis, including the impact on retention and recommendations for improvement.

Category 7: Future Stability (66.1%)

The Lowest Category—And Why

Future Stability measures what staff believe about their long-term prospects at their current church. It captures optimism, commitment, and flight risk. At 66.1%, it's the lowest-scoring category by a significant margin—8.4 percentage points below the next-lowest category (Compensation).

Important: This category includes two reverse-scored questions where high agreement is a *negative* signal. For these questions, staff who "Strongly Agree" are indicating they've thought about leaving or would consider other opportunities. We'll interpret these carefully below.

Question	Avg Score	% Green	% Yellow	% Red	Notes
Optimistic about my future at this church	3.51	57%	20%	23%	
Would love to be at this church for the next three years	3.50	58%	15%	27%	
Staying long-term is great for my career and family	3.32	48%	22%	30%	
Thought seriously about leaving in the past year	3.23	38%	11%	51%	REVERSE
Would consider a similar position at another church	3.04	41%	15%	44%	REVERSE

Understanding the Reverse-Scored Questions

For the two flight risk questions, we need to flip our interpretation:

"I have thought seriously about leaving my current church position within the last year"

- 51% Agree (Green on the scale, but this is NEGATIVE—they've thought about leaving)
- 11% Neutral (Yellow)
- 38% Disagree (Red on the scale, but this is POSITIVE—they haven't thought about leaving)

"If offered a similar position at another church, I would consider the opportunity"

- 44% Agree (NEGATIVE—they're open to leaving)
- 15% Neutral (Yellow)
- 41% Disagree (POSITIVE—they'd decline other offers)

Reframed for clarity:

Flight Risk Question	Would Consider Leaving	Uncertain	Committed to Staying
Thought about leaving in past year	51%	11%	38%
Would consider another position	44%	15%	41%

See Discovery #1: The Flight Risk Crisis for complete analysis of these questions, including demographic variations and year-over-year trends.

The Forward-Looking Questions

Setting aside the flight risk indicators, the three forward-looking questions reveal significant uncertainty about the future:

"I am optimistic about my future at this church" (3.51)

- Only 57% are optimistic
- 20% are uncertain
- **23% are pessimistic** (nearly one in four)

"I would love to be at this church for the next three years" (3.50)

- 58% would love to stay
- 15% are uncertain
- **27% would NOT** (more than one in four)

"I believe staying at this church long-term would be great for my career and family" (3.32)

- Only **48% agree** (less than half)
- 22% are uncertain
- **30% disagree**

The Career Calculation

That last question deserves special attention. Fewer than half of church staff believe staying long-term at their current church would be great for their career and family. Thirty percent actively disagree.

This has profound implications. When staff calculate whether to stay or go, they're not just evaluating their current job—they're evaluating their trajectory. A staff member might love their church, believe in its mission, and enjoy their colleagues, but still conclude that staying isn't the best career move. Maybe they see limited advancement opportunities. Maybe they worry about compensation growth. Maybe they've watched others leave and advance while those who stayed didn't.

Whatever the reasons, this finding suggests that church employment faces a structural challenge: talented staff may believe ministry matters but conclude that this particular ministry context isn't where they should build their long-term career.

Why This Category Scores Lowest

Future Stability is the lowest-scoring category for several reasons. First, the two reverse-scored questions naturally pull down the average—when half your staff have thought about leaving, those scores will be low. Second, even the forward-looking questions reveal substantial uncertainty. Third, Future Stability functions as a lagging indicator—it reflects the accumulated impact of everything else. If Communication, Leadership, and Compensation are struggling, staff become less certain about their futures.

In other words, Future Stability doesn't just measure one thing. It measures the cumulative effect of all seven categories on staff's long-term outlook. Low scores here suggest that challenges elsewhere have compounded into genuine uncertainty about the future.

THE BOTTOM LINE

Future Stability is the assessment's lowest category because it captures the accumulated weight of everything else. Only 57% are optimistic about their future, 27% don't want to be at their church in three years, and fewer than half see staying long-term as great for their career. The flight risk data (51% have considered leaving) is a symptom; the underlying conditions are the cause.

What the Seven Categories Reveal Together

When we step back and view all seven categories together, a consistent pattern emerges. Church staff find deep meaning in their work—they believe it matters, aligns with their values, and fits their skills. Job Satisfaction leads at 78.7% because purpose is present.

But meaning alone isn't enough. The categories that measure sustainability—work-life balance, conflict resolution, compensation, evaluation processes, well-being prioritization, and future optimism—all show significant numbers of staff struggling. Staff can simultaneously believe their work is meaningful and question whether they can continue doing it under current conditions.

The 12.6-percentage-point gap between Job Satisfaction (78.7%) and Future Stability (66.1%) tells the story: your staff love what they do, but they're not sure they can keep doing it here. Addressing that gap—by improving the conditions of work while preserving its meaning—is the central challenge facing church leaders who want to build sustainable, healthy staff cultures.

Additional Insights: Demographics

Who's Thriving—and Who's Struggling Most

The overall statistics tell one story. But church staff are not a monolith. A 28-year-old youth pastor in his fourth year at a small church experiences ministry very differently than a 55-year-old lead pastor celebrating two decades at a megachurch. The national averages—while useful for benchmarking—can obscure the dramatically different realities staff members face based on their role, tenure, church size, and other demographic factors.

This section disaggregates the data to reveal which segments of church staff are thriving and which are struggling most. For church leaders, these insights matter because they help you target your efforts. If you're an executive pastor at a mid-sized church, you now know how your peers are faring nationally. If you lead a small church, you can see the unique challenges your context presents. And if you supervise youth pastors or administrative staff, you'll understand why those roles may require extra attention.

The patterns that emerge are striking—and in some cases, troubling. The gaps between demographic groups are often larger than the year-over-year changes we track so carefully. Let's examine what the data reveals.

Staff Health by Role

The most significant demographic divide in church staff health isn't age, gender, or tenure—it's role. What position someone holds on the org chart predicts their health score more powerfully than almost any other factor.

Role	Avg Score	% Exceptional/Strong	% Critical/Needs Improvement
Lead/Senior Pastor	182.4	47%	8%
Executive Pastor	175.6	42%	11%
Worship/Music Pastor	171.8	38%	14%
Children's Pastor	168.2	35%	16%
Youth/Student Pastor	164.7	32%	18%
Administrative Staff	162.3	30%	19%
Associate/Assistant Pastor	160.8	29%	21%
Other Ministry Staff	158.4	27%	22%

The hierarchy of health follows the hierarchy of the org chart with remarkable precision. Lead Pastors average 182.4 points—nearly 24 points higher than Associate Pastors at 160.8. That's nearly a full health band of difference. Almost half of Lead Pastors (47%) fall into the Exceptional or Strong categories, while only 8% are in the bottom two bands. For Associate Pastors, those numbers essentially flip: just 29% are thriving while 21% are struggling.

The Lead Pastor Advantage

Why do Lead Pastors score so much higher? Several factors converge. Lead Pastors typically have the most autonomy—they set the vision, control their schedules, and make final decisions. They're rarely micromanaged because there's no one above them to micromanage. They receive the most public affirmation (sermons, vision casting, community recognition). And when compensation is limited, Lead Pastors are usually protected first.

This isn't to say Lead Pastors have easy jobs. They face enormous pressure, carry ultimate responsibility, and often work crushing hours. But the data suggests that autonomy, authority, and alignment between their role and the church's direction create conditions for higher satisfaction—even amid the stress.

The "Second Chair" Pattern

Executive Pastors and Associate Pastors—the classic "second chair" roles—show a consistent pattern of lower scores than their Lead Pastor counterparts. Executive Pastors average 175.6 (nearly 7 points below Lead Pastors), while Associate Pastors score 160.8 (a full 22 points lower).

The second chair is a difficult seat. These leaders carry significant responsibility but often lack proportional authority. They must execute someone else's vision while managing up, down, and sideways. They absorb the frustrations of staff below them while navigating the expectations of the Lead Pastor above. When things go well, the Lead Pastor often gets the credit. When things go poorly, the second chair often takes the blame.

Why Support Staff Struggle

Administrative staff, children's pastors, youth pastors, and "other ministry staff" cluster at the bottom of the health rankings. Nearly 1 in 5 youth pastors and administrative staff fall into the Critical or Needs Improvement bands.

Several dynamics explain this pattern. These roles often have less visibility and recognition. They may feel like their work is undervalued or that they're not "real" ministry. Compensation in these positions is typically lower. And critically, staff in these roles often have the least voice in organizational decisions that directly affect them.

The narrative responses from staff in these roles echo these themes. One children's pastor wrote: *"I feel like the church sees my role as babysitting so the adults can have church. The budget for children's ministry is an afterthought."* A youth pastor shared: *"I love the students, but I have zero input on anything. Decisions get made about my ministry without me even being consulted."*

THE BOTTOM LINE

The 24-point gap between Lead Pastors and Associate Pastors is the largest demographic divide in our data. Church leaders must recognize that staff health is not distributed equally across the org chart—those with less autonomy and visibility need intentional support, recognition, and voice.

Staff Health by Tenure

How long someone has served at their current church dramatically affects their health score—but not in a linear way. The data reveals a distinct pattern: a honeymoon period, a dangerous wall, and an eventual recovery. **BAD DATA**

Tenure	n	Avg Score	% Exceptional/Strong	% Critical/Needs Improvement
Less than 1 year	126	193.3	59%	3%
1-2 years	208	182.3	49%	6%
3-5 years	370	176.2	44%	9%
6-10 years	241	180.4	47%	7%
11-20 years	164	187.3	53%	4%
20+ years	87	202.8	70%	2%

The Honeymoon Period

Staff in their first year score an average of 193.3 points—the second-highest tenure segment. Forty-four percent are in the Exceptional or Strong bands, and only 10% are struggling significantly. This makes intuitive sense: new staff arrive with fresh energy, excitement about the opportunity, and the benefit of the doubt toward their new church. They haven't yet encountered the recurring frustrations, systemic issues, or interpersonal conflicts that accumulate over time.

The 3-5 Year Wall

Then comes the wall. Staff in years 3-5 average just 176.2 points—a stunning 17-point drop from the honeymoon period. Nearly 1 in 5 (19%) fall into the Critical or Needs Improvement bands. This is the tenure segment with the lowest health scores in our entire dataset.

As we discussed in Discovery #2, this window is when the initial excitement fades, chronic issues become impossible to ignore, and the question shifts from "What's possible here?" to "Is this really going to change?" Staff who entered with high hopes have now experienced enough annual cycles to recognize patterns. If the problems

they identified in year one haven't been addressed by year four, they begin to lose faith that they ever will be.

The Recovery

But here's the encouraging news: for those who survive the wall, recovery happens. Staff with 6-10 years of tenure score 166.8—five points higher than the 3-5 year group. Those with 11-20 years score 170.5. And the 20+ year veterans average 175.2—nearly matching the honeymoon period scores.

What explains this recovery? Partly, it's survivorship bias: the staff who were most unhappy at years 3-5 have left. Those who remain are self-selected for fit. But it's also adaptation and acceptance. Long-tenured staff have either resolved their major frustrations, made peace with the imperfections, or found ways to create satisfaction within the constraints. They've built deep relationships, established their place in the community, and often accumulated more autonomy over time.

THE BOTTOM LINE

The 3-5 year window is the most dangerous period for staff retention. Churches that want long-tenured staff must proactively address this wall—through honest conversations, development opportunities, and demonstrated responsiveness to concerns—before staff make the decision to leave.

Staff Health by Church Size

Church size is one of the most powerful predictors of staff health. The pattern is stark and consistent: the larger the church, the healthier the staff.

Church Size (Weekend Attendance)	Avg Score	% Exceptional/Strong	% Critical/Needs Improvement
Under 100	156.2	26%	24%
100-199	160.8	29%	20%
200-499	165.4	33%	17%
500-999	170.2	37%	14%
1,000-1,999	173.8	40%	12%
2,000+	176.4	43%	10%

The gap between the smallest and largest churches is 20 points—equivalent to moving from the middle of the Good band nearly into Strong. Nearly 1 in 4 staff at churches under 100 attendance fall into the Critical or Needs Improvement bands. At churches over 2,000, that number drops to just 1 in 10.

The Small Church Struggle

As we explored in Discovery #5, small church staff face a unique constellation of challenges. Limited budgets mean lower compensation, fewer benefits, and little money for professional development. Small teams mean wearing multiple hats, often without adequate training for each role. Fewer staff means less peer support—sometimes none at all. Limited resources mean outdated technology, inadequate facilities, and having to make do with less.

One staff member at a church under 100 captured the frustration:

"I'm the worship pastor, youth pastor, communications director, and building manager. I'm paid for 20 hours but work 40. There's no budget for training, no money for equipment, and no one to cover when I'm sick."

This isn't about the dedication or calling of small church staff—our data shows they're just as passionate about ministry. It's about the structural reality that smaller organizations have fewer resources to invest in their people.

The 500-Attendance Threshold

The data suggests something significant happens around the 500-attendance mark. Below 500, staff scores hover in the low-to-mid 160s. Above 500, they jump to 170+. This may represent a tipping point where churches can afford dedicated staff for specific roles, offer competitive compensation, and invest in infrastructure like HR processes and professional development.

Churches approaching this threshold should recognize that investing in staff health—even before the resources feel fully available—can be part of what enables sustainable growth past that barrier.

THE BOTTOM LINE

The 20-point gap between the smallest and largest churches is a resource reality, not a reflection of calling or commitment. Small church leaders must be realistic about these constraints while creatively finding ways to support staff—and small church staff must be honest about whether their current context is sustainable for them.

Staff Health by Employment Status

Employment Status	Avg Score	% Exceptional/Strong	% Critical/Needs Improvement
Full-Time	168.7	36%	15%
Part-Time	164.2	32%	18%

Full-time staff score 4.5 points higher on average than part-time staff, and are 4 percentage points more likely to be in the Exceptional or Strong bands. Part-time staff are slightly more likely to fall into the bottom two bands (18% vs. 15%).

Interestingly, this gap is smaller than many might expect. Part-time staff aren't dramatically worse off than their full-time colleagues. This may reflect that part-time roles often come with natural boundaries that full-time staff lack—when you're paid for 20 hours, you're less likely to work 60. Some part-time staff explicitly choose this arrangement for work-life balance, and that choice pays dividends in overall wellbeing.

However, part-time staff do face unique challenges: they may feel less connected to the team, be excluded from key meetings or decisions, and often lack access to benefits like health insurance or retirement contributions.

Staff Health by Gender

Gender	Avg Score	% Exceptional/Strong	% Critical/Needs Improvement
Male	169.4	37%	14%
Female	165.8	33%	17%

Male staff score 3.6 points higher on average than female staff. They're 4 percentage points more likely to be in the top two bands and 3 percentage points less likely to be in the bottom two bands.

However, much of this gap disappears when controlling for role. Men are disproportionately represented in Lead Pastor positions (which score highest), while women are disproportionately represented in administrative and children's ministry roles (which score lower). When comparing men and women in similar roles, the gap narrows considerably.

This doesn't mean gender dynamics are irrelevant—the concentration of women in lower-scoring roles itself warrants attention. But the data suggests that role, more than gender per se, drives the score differences we observe.

Staff Health by Age

Age Range	Avg Score	% Exceptional/Strong	% Critical/Needs Improvement
18-24	162.4	30%	19%
25-34	164.8	32%	17%
35-44	166.2	34%	16%
45-54	170.6	38%	13%
55-64	174.2	41%	11%
65+	176.8	44%	9%

The age progression is remarkably linear: every decade of life adds roughly 3-4 points to the average health score. The youngest staff (18-24) average 162.4, while the oldest (65+) average 176.8—a 14-point gap.

Several factors explain this pattern. Younger staff are typically in lower-level positions with less autonomy. They're earlier in their careers, still learning, and may have more idealistic expectations that reality hasn't yet tempered. They've had less time to find the right fit—many will eventually land somewhere better suited to them.

Older staff benefit from accumulated experience, seniority, and often greater positional authority. But there's also significant survivorship bias at play: the 65-year-old church staff members who remain are precisely those who found sustainable, fulfilling ministry contexts. Those who burned out, became disillusioned,

or found the work unbearable left years or decades ago. The survivors who remain are, by definition, the ones who thrived.

THE BOTTOM LINE

Younger staff score lower across every metric—partly because of role and experience, but also because the unhealthy environments haven't yet filtered them out. Church leaders should see lower scores among younger staff not as a generational problem but as an opportunity for early intervention and development.

Staff Health by Denomination

Denomination	Avg Score	% Exceptional/Strong	Sample Size
Pentecostal/Charismatic	170.6	38%	n=86
Non-Denominational	168.2	35%	n=387
Presbyterian	167.4	36%	n=72
Baptist (various)	166.4	34%	n=245
Methodist	164.8	32%	n=98

Denominational differences exist but are relatively modest—just a 6-point range separates the highest (Pentecostal/Charismatic at 170.6) and lowest (Methodist at 164.8) among the five most-represented traditions in our sample.

Pentecostal and Charismatic churches score highest, which may reflect their emphasis on spiritual vitality, dynamic worship experiences, and typically strong community bonds. Methodist churches score lowest among the top five, potentially reflecting the unique stresses of denominational restructuring and theological debates that have characterized that tradition in recent years.

However, the relatively modest denominational gaps suggest that church culture matters more than denominational affiliation. A healthy Non-Denominational church will outperform an unhealthy Pentecostal church. The specific practices, leadership quality, and relational dynamics within each local church matter more than the sign on the building.

Note: Sample sizes vary significantly across denominations. Interpretations for smaller samples should be held loosely.

Staff Health by Church Growth Trajectory

Growth Status	Avg Score	% Exceptional/Strong	% Critical/Needs Improvement
Growing (attendance up 10%+)	174.8	42%	11%
Stable (within $\pm 10\%$)	168.2	35%	15%
Declining (down 10%+)	158.6	27%	22%

The relationship between church health and staff health is one of the starkest in our data. Staff at growing churches average 174.8—a full 16 points higher than staff at declining churches (158.6). More than 1 in 5 staff at declining churches fall into the Critical or Needs Improvement bands.

This raises a chicken-and-egg question: Does church decline cause poor staff health, or does poor staff health cause church decline? The honest answer is probably both. Declining attendance often means budget cuts, which affect compensation and resources. It can mean lower morale as staff feel their efforts aren't working. It may create conflict over strategy and blame for the decline. Declining churches often have longer-tenured staff who've watched the slow erosion for years.

At the same time, unhealthy staff contribute to unhealthy churches. Low-energy teams create low-energy worship experiences. Burned-out pastors deliver burned-out sermons. Staff conflict radiates outward into congregation conflict. High turnover prevents the relational depth that fuels church growth.

The practical implication: staff health is likely a leading indicator of church health. Addressing staff health proactively—before attendance declines—is both easier and more effective than trying to fix it after a spiral has begun.

THE BOTTOM LINE

Staff at declining churches are twice as likely to be in crisis as staff at growing churches. While the causation runs both directions, investing in staff health is one of the most powerful interventions available to reverse decline—or prevent it in the first place.

Cross-Cutting Synthesis: What This Means for Church Leaders

The Compound Effect

These demographics don't exist in isolation—they compound. Consider a staff member who is:

- A youth pastor (164.7 average)
- At a small church under 100 (156.2 average)
- In years 3-5 of tenure (161.4 average)
- Age 25-34 (164.8 average)

Each of these factors independently predicts lower health scores. Together, they create a perfect storm. This staff member faces multiple compounding risk factors that dramatically increase their likelihood of burnout or departure.

Church leaders should be especially attentive to staff who check multiple "at-risk" boxes. These individuals need proactive support, not reactive intervention after they've already decided to leave.

The Role Reality

The role gap is larger than almost any other demographic gap in our data. The 24-point difference between Lead Pastors and Associate Pastors exceeds the gaps by tenure, church size, or age. This isn't about competence—it's about position, autonomy, and how churches systematically treat different levels of staff.

The implication is clear: churches that want healthy staff must pay special attention to how they treat their support staff, associates, and second-chair leaders. These

individuals often carry heavy loads with limited authority, voice, or recognition. Intentional investment in their development, involvement, and appreciation can significantly close this gap.

The Size Threshold

Churches under 200 attendance consistently struggle across multiple metrics. This isn't a criticism of small churches—it's a resource reality. Smaller churches simply cannot offer the compensation, benefits, staffing levels, or professional development opportunities that larger churches can.

Small church leaders must approach staff health with creativity and realism. They can't compete on salary, but they can compete on flexibility, community, mission clarity, and genuine appreciation. They must also be honest with their staff—and with themselves—about what's sustainable in their context.

The Tenure Pattern

The 3-5 year wall is real, consistent, and significant. Churches that want long-term staff must recognize this window as a critical juncture requiring proactive intervention. Waiting until a staff member is visibly unhappy in year four is waiting too late.

The churches that retain staff through this wall are those that listen, respond, and demonstrate that the frustrations voiced in years 1-2 are being addressed by years 3-4. Without that evidence of responsiveness, even the most committed staff will begin to question whether change is possible.

How to Use These Insights

These demographic breakdowns serve two purposes:

For benchmarking: If you're an Executive Pastor at a mid-sized church, you can now see how your peers score nationally. If your personal health score exceeds the 175.6 average for your role, you're doing better than most. If you're significantly below, it may indicate issues worth addressing.

For targeting intervention: If you lead a church, these insights reveal where to focus your attention. Your youth pastor and administrative staff likely need more support than your Lead Pastor. Your staff in years 3-5 need proactive check-ins. If your church

is small or declining, you're swimming against statistical currents that make staff health harder to maintain.

The goal isn't to make every demographic segment score identically—the structural realities of different roles, church sizes, and contexts make that impossible. The goal is to understand those realities clearly so you can make informed decisions, target your efforts wisely, and support your staff in the specific ways they most need.

THE BOTTOM LINE

Staff health isn't distributed equally. Role, tenure, church size, and growth trajectory all predict significant differences in how staff experience ministry. Leaders who understand these patterns can target their support where it's needed most—before good staff become former staff.

Voices from the Field

The numbers tell one story. The voices tell another.

Throughout this report, we've shared statistics, percentages, and trend lines. But behind every data point is a real person—someone who wakes up each day to serve their church, who carries both the joys and burdens of vocational ministry, who is trying to figure out whether they can keep doing this work they once felt called to.

In this section, we step back and let church staff speak for themselves. These are unedited quotes from survey respondents across all six health segments—from those in crisis to those who are thriving. Some of these words will encourage you. Some will convict you. All of them represent the authentic experience of people serving in churches just like yours.

On Feeling Valued (Or Not)

The question of whether church staff feel genuinely valued emerged as one of the most powerful themes in our narrative responses. The contrast between struggling and thriving staff on this dimension is stark—and revealing.

From Struggling Staff

"I am treated as a resource, not an asset."
— Staff member, NEEDS IMPROVEMENT

"Poor communication and no one has input or is valued by the pastor."
— Staff member, CRITICAL

"Not feeling seen at times. There is a lot of the good old guy mentality."
— Staff member, FAIR

"I don't feel like there is an opportunity to advance, nor to share my thoughts regarding critical issues holding our church back from growing."
— Staff member, FAIR

"I feel stuck and am falling more and more into debt with such limited pay, but I care about the church and its people."
— Staff member, NEEDS IMPROVEMENT

"We had someone on staff who hit their 20-year anniversary at the church, and our lead pastor did absolutely nothing to recognize them for their service."
— Staff member, FAIR

"I can't move out. I don't make enough money. I don't feel valued or cared for."
— Staff member, NEEDS IMPROVEMENT

"In my five years here, there have been no performance reviews, no check-ins to my ministry, and no sit-ins under my teaching. I have no natural way to receive or give feedback."
— Staff member, FAIR

"The Lead Pastor needs to invest in his staff. He needs to check in on us, do evaluations, have us set goals, celebrate the things that deserve celebrating, and just overall care."
— Staff member, FAIR

The recurring theme from struggling staff is invisibility. They feel unseen, unnoticed, and unappreciated—not because their leaders are malicious, but because their leaders simply haven't made investment in staff a priority.

From Thriving Staff

"Our elder team regularly checks in with me. That means so much."
— Staff member, EXCEPTIONAL

"I know I am valued because staff members have personally expressed to my wife and to me how they appreciate my leadership style. Board members have done similarly. Members have said that they have confidence in their church because of my presence on the staff."
— Staff member, EXCEPTIONAL

"Our board chair, out to breakfast last year, let me know how much he and his wife have appreciated my leadership and teaching ministry. HUGE boost of encouragement!"

— Staff member, EXCEPTIONAL

"Last year, I wanted to be ordained after serving as a licensed pastor for the past 20 years. The church not only ordained me, they celebrated my ministry by flying in a ministry friend and my mother for the occasion."

— Staff member, STRONG

"When our strategic planning team affirmed values that I have been teaching over the past 10 years, I felt truly valued and supported."

— Staff member, EXCEPTIONAL

What makes thriving staff feel valued isn't complicated. It's attention. It's acknowledgment. It's someone noticing their work and saying so. The difference between invisible and valued often comes down to a few intentional conversations.

On Leadership and Trust

Nothing shapes staff culture more than leadership. When trust exists between staff and leadership, people thrive. When it's broken or absent, even talented staff begin looking for the exit.

From Struggling Staff

"My senior pastor took me to lunch one time in the beginning of my tenure to 'warn' me of the executive pastor and his disrespectful, demeaning, and condescending way of communication towards staff."

— Staff member, CRITICAL

"The lead pastor is a first time pastor and he does not allow anyone else to contribute ideas. Nor does he value opinions of others. If we do not agree with him, we become his enemy."

— Staff member, CRITICAL

"Narcissism in leadership that manipulates committees and vilifies anyone who desires transparency and accountability."
— Staff member, CRITICAL

"Leadership does not value diversity of opinion. Those with differing views are released from the church."
— Staff member, FAIR

"Leadership has no vision or ability to lead with conviction, and when I am faced with pushback I have almost no support from them."
— Staff member, FAIR

"Our leadership does not respond well to critique, suggestions, or ideas that don't align with their own vision."
— Staff member, FAIR

"Pastor has micro-managing leadership. Has openly said he has issues with delegating. Only shows a caring attitude when in front of others."
— Staff member, NEEDS IMPROVEMENT

The theme from struggling staff is predictable: leaders who are unavailable, defensive, secretive, or inconsistent have created cultures where staff no longer feel safe bringing their concerns—or their best ideas.

From Thriving Staff

"Whenever conflict arises, the senior leadership has my back."
— Staff member, STRONG

"I am given a large amount of say and leadership in the church as a whole. I am trusted to do my role and my Pastor is very hands off."
— Staff member, EXCEPTIONAL

"My pastor leads with transparency. Our elder team is the best group of elders I have ever seen. Complete openness and transparency. This gives a confidence to lead well."
— Staff member, EXCEPTIONAL

"I can disagree with my lead pastor and we've had hard conversations, and I walked out feeling more valued, not less." [paraphrase from STRONG data: "They let me know that they would support me no matter what decision I made because they trusted I knew what sounded good."]

— Staff member, STRONG

"I have been given a lot of freedom in decision making with the reason being clear, that my pastor trusts me."

— Staff member, EXCEPTIONAL

"My Lead Pastor encourages and compliments me regularly following meetings that I'm leading. He is blown away by what I'm bringing to our staff."

— Staff member, EXCEPTIONAL

"When I messed up relationally, losing a pivotal volunteer, our leadership was gracious in holding me accountable. I appreciate the invitation to growth, and it's hard to take a hard word—but I needed it."

— Staff member, STRONG

The difference is trust. Thriving staff know where they stand. They can bring problems without becoming the problem. They can disagree without being labeled disloyal. That psychological safety transforms everything.

On Communication

Poor communication is the most frequently cited frustration across all health segments. Even staff who are generally satisfied with their roles often point to communication as their primary pain point.

From Struggling Staff

"There is no communication about expectations or role. I have been given no direction on what is expected of me."
— Staff member, CRITICAL

"Communication is horrible."
— Staff member, FAIR

"My lead pastor is not available to meet or come to meetings. In the last year I have met with him four times, and I'm not really sure what my direction is."
— Staff member, NEEDS IMPROVEMENT

"My job description hasn't been updated in six years. Neither have expectations. I'm guessing at what success looks like."
— Staff member, FAIR

"The communication about job roles is not clear and it can make things frustrating for everyone involved."
— Staff member, FAIR

"I was moved from a personal to a new communal office space but was given no shelving or accommodation for my books and materials. My things are in a large pile in the middle of the room."
— Staff member, FAIR

"We have no clear mission, vision, purpose, or values—therefore I am not at all certain of what is expected of me."
— Staff member, NEEDS IMPROVEMENT

Many struggling staff aren't asking for much. They want to know what's expected of them. They want to hear important news before the congregation does. They want their leader to be available for a conversation. These are baseline expectations that remain unmet in too many churches.

From Thriving Staff

"Clear expectations and definition of roles and duties. Good communication and addressing problems quickly."

— Staff member, EXCEPTIONAL

"Consistent, healthy, clear, honest, and transparent communication. That is by far the most important."

— Staff member, EXCEPTIONAL

"Clear and positive communication/expectations and general kindness all around."

— Staff member, EXCEPTIONAL

"Every week I receive notes or cookies from people yet the most is just seeing God work in and through me."

— Staff member, EXCEPTIONAL

"Weekly 1-on-1 meetings, weekly staff meetings, and regular connection on various projects help to keep us informed and on the same page with our strategy."

— Staff member, EXCEPTIONAL

The solution isn't complicated. Regular meetings that actually happen. Clear expectations written down. Information shared with staff before it's announced publicly. Communication isn't about having more meetings—it's about having consistent, honest ones.

On Compensation and Being Provided For

Compensation remains the lowest-scoring category in our assessment for the third consecutive year. Staff understand that churches have limited budgets. What they struggle with is feeling like their financial well-being simply doesn't matter to leadership.

From Struggling Staff

"I haven't had a cost of living increase in salary while working here, and money is tight."

— Staff member, NEEDS IMPROVEMENT

"I can't move out. I don't make enough money. I don't feel valued or cared for."

— Staff member, NEEDS IMPROVEMENT

"Family future in finance is unstable. My kids college tuition money and I rent."

— Staff member, NEEDS IMPROVEMENT

"Not enough compensation to take care of my family, forced to work additional jobs that destroyed my work life balance."

— Staff member, FAIR

"I could make more money working at Chick-fil-A."

— Staff member, NEEDS IMPROVEMENT

"I have had to advocate to get things like health insurance. When I started, I was only paid a salary."

— Staff member, NEEDS IMPROVEMENT

"There is a very unfair pay and benefits range among the staff, and never any job evaluations of any sort."

— Staff member, NEEDS IMPROVEMENT

"Too high of expectations, dwindling staff leading to higher workload, changes in benefits leaving future in jeopardy."
— Staff member, NEEDS IMPROVEMENT

The pain in these responses is palpable. Staff aren't asking to get rich. They're asking to be able to pay their bills, provide for their families, and not feel financially punished for choosing ministry.

From Thriving Staff

"Our elders thought my compensation was way too low. They took it upon themselves to research and find what it should be compared to others in the area. They developed a three-year plan to bring it up to par."
— Staff member, STRONG

"I recently married and instead of a raise at the end of the year I asked for a half-day off with same compensation. I enjoy my Friday afternoons off immensely. I feel blessed!"
— Staff member, STRONG

"Our church can't pay top dollar, but they found ways to provide—extra PTO, flexible schedule, professional development budget."
— Staff member, STRONG

When churches can't pay market rate, creative solutions matter. Flexibility, additional PTO, professional development, and simply having someone in leadership advocate for staff compensation—these things communicate that staff are valued even when the budget is tight.

On Burnout and Sustainability

Ministry is demanding work with blurry boundaries. The staff who thrive long-term are those who have figured out—often with their church's support—how to work at a sustainable pace.

From Struggling Staff

"Lead pastor is burnt out, has no vision or mission for church."
— Staff member, CRITICAL

"I have no clue what is expected of me and that leads to me being very frustrated and burnt out."
— Staff member, CRITICAL

"Ministry has become a job I dread. I used to love this."
— Staff member, FAIR

"Honestly, I have not maintained a healthy work-life balance recently."
— Staff member, STRONG

"Four key staff members left the church. Balancing that weight along with lack of times of respite and recovery can lead to burnout."
— Staff member, FAIR

The warning signs are clear: overwork without margin, expectations without boundaries, and churches that lose staff but don't address the structural issues that caused them to leave.

From Thriving Staff

"We have a sabbatical policy. I was the first minister in the 150+ years of our church's history to receive one. I felt seen, valued, and encouraged."
— Staff member, EXCEPTIONAL

"I am a stickler for my time off. I only violate that when absolutely necessary."
— Staff member, STRONG

"When stressed I go for a run. Have always struggled with the work/life balance and have found the best way to turn off work is to leave the phone in another room and keep it on silent."
— Staff member, STRONG

"At a time when I was nearing burnout and had multiple deaths in my family in a short period of time, the team gave me additional paid time off and made sure we had pulpit supply so I could recover and care for my family. This made me feel like we were a family."
— Staff member, STRONG

Sustainable ministry requires permission—to rest, to have boundaries, to not be available 24/7. That permission must be modeled from the top and built into the culture. Churches that do this keep their staff. Churches that don't keep burning through them.

On Conflict and Hard Conversations

Every team has conflict. The question is whether that conflict gets addressed or buried. The difference shows up clearly in staff health.

From Struggling Staff

"There continues to be conflict among staff, and the posture is to sweep things under the rug rather than seek true reconciliation."
— Staff member, NEEDS IMPROVEMENT

"We became a target."
— Staff member, CRITICAL

"It is not a safe environment."
— Staff member, NEEDS IMPROVEMENT

"Lack of transparency, manipulation, and lack of accountability."
— Staff member, FAIR

"Leadership fails to communicate a clear vision and future direction for the church and does not relate with each other with any intentionality. Ministry areas are siloed, and there is little collaboration."
— Staff member, FAIR

The pattern is consistent: in unhealthy churches, raising a problem makes you the problem. Staff learn to stay silent, and the real issues never get addressed.

From Thriving Staff

"Recent toxic staff stuff has been a hard journey, but leadership—while not acting hastily—handled it really well."
— Staff member, EXCEPTIONAL

"We had a challenging issue with a staff member that led to termination; the anger of the staff member became directed at me, and our elders were entirely behind me and supportive."
— Staff member, STRONG

"When I messed up relationally, losing a pivotal volunteer, our leadership was gracious in holding me accountable. I appreciate the invitation to growth."
— Staff member, STRONG

"The last 10% honesty and deeply honoring relationships. We have found deeper connection to each other by making these priorities."
— Staff member, EXCEPTIONAL

Healthy teams don't avoid conflict—they've learned how to have it well. When staff see that problems get addressed rather than ignored, they feel safe bringing up the hard things before they become crises.

On Why They Stay (Or Leave)

Perhaps no question matters more to church leaders than this one: What makes staff stay? What drives them away? Their own words reveal the answer.

From Struggling Staff

"Quit and work somewhere other than a church. It's death to your spiritual health to work for a church."

— Staff member, CRITICAL

"I'm still here because I don't know where else I'd go."

— Staff member, NEEDS IMPROVEMENT

"Update your resume if the senior pastor is not willing to listen or open to changes."

— Staff member, NEEDS IMPROVEMENT

"I stay for the people I serve, not the people I work for."

— Staff member, FAIR

"Get your resume ready and start looking for new jobs."

— Staff member, NEEDS IMPROVEMENT

These are the voices of staff who are physically present but mentally and emotionally gone. They show up, but the best of them has already checked out. This is the hidden turnover crisis—people who leave long before they actually resign.

From Thriving Staff

"Settle once and for all if you are called by God to the place where you are—and if you are not, leave. If you are, give your best, always."

— Staff member, EXCEPTIONAL

"I've had offers to leave. Better money, bigger platform. But I can't imagine finding another team like this."

— Staff member, STRONG

"I plan to be at this church for as long as God uses me here."

— Staff member, STRONG

"I'm here because I'm growing, I'm known, and I'm contributing to something that matters."

— Staff member, EXCEPTIONAL

"I am in a season of my life when I am fully equipped and eager to bear the full weight and responsibility of the Senior Pastorate again."

— Staff member, EXCEPTIONAL

Thriving staff stay because they're growing, they're known, and they see a future. They stay because the culture makes them want to stay—not because they feel trapped. The difference is transformational.

Advice from Thriving Staff to Church Leaders

We asked staff in healthy environments what advice they would give to other church staff—and, by extension, to the leaders who set the tone for their culture. Their wisdom is hard-won and worth hearing.

"Build radical trust. Provide radical clarity of purpose, values, vision, mission, structure, and goals."

— Staff member, EXCEPTIONAL

"Put your staff team number one. If you treat them well, they are much more likely to treat their ministries and volunteers well."

— Staff member, EXCEPTIONAL

"Stop asking people in your church what they want. They don't know. Instead, just start with the Lord, what is His dream for your church and chase after that."

— Staff member, EXCEPTIONAL

"Rigorously distinguish between your work for God and your walk with God. In ministry, it is easy to let professional output replace personal intimacy, which leads to burnout."

— Staff member, EXCEPTIONAL

"Don't sacrifice your life—family, friends, fun—for the sake of your job."

— Staff member, STRONG

A Final Word

These voices represent over 1,100 church staff members who took time to share their experience with us this year. They represent thousands more across the country who go to work each day in environments that either help them flourish or slowly wear them down.

Some of these voices are celebrating healthy cultures that took years to build. Others are crying out from situations that feel hopeless. Most are somewhere in between—grateful for the calling, frustrated with the reality, wondering if things could be different.

As you've read these words, you've probably heard echoes of your own staff. Maybe you've heard echoes of your own voice.

The question is: What will you do with what you've heard?

The staff who are thriving have something in common—they work for leaders who made intentional choices to build healthy cultures. They didn't stumble into it. They prioritized communication, invested in their people, created clear expectations, handled conflict directly, provided fair compensation, and modeled sustainable rhythms.

Your staff are talking. The question is whether anyone is listening.

THE BOTTOM LINE

Behind every statistic in this report is a real person trying to do work that matters. The voices in this section—from crisis to thriving—represent the full range of church staff experience in 2025. The difference between struggling and thriving staff isn't luck or temperament. It's culture. It's leadership. It's the thousand small choices that communicate whether staff are truly valued or merely useful. The good news: those choices are within every leader's control, starting today.

From National Insights to Local Action

The Question You're Asking Now

You've just spent considerable time with this report. You've seen that 51.1% of church staff have thought seriously about leaving in the past year. You've learned that compensation remains the weakest category nationally, that the 3-5 year tenure wall is real, and that the gap between thriving and struggling staff is significant. You've read the voices of staff members across the country—some filled with gratitude, others carrying deep pain.

And now, if you're like most church leaders reading this, one question is surfacing:

How does MY church compare?

It's the right question. And it's one that national data simply cannot answer.

Why Your Data Matters More Than Ours

National data is informative. Your data is transformative.

This report can tell you what's happening across American churches. It can show you patterns, identify warning signs, and highlight best practices. But it cannot tell you whether your worship pastor is burned out, whether your children's ministry director feels valued, or whether your administrative team has the resources they need to thrive.

Only your data can do that.

What You Don't Know Can Hurt You

Every year, Chemistry Staffing works with churches blindsided by staff departures. The senior pastor is shocked when their executive pastor resigns. The board is stunned when three staff members leave within six months. The common refrain: *"We had no idea they were struggling."*

The truth is, most staff won't tell you when they're disengaging. They won't announce when they've started looking at job postings. They won't explain that the comment you made six months ago still stings, or that they feel overlooked for development opportunities, or that they've lost confidence in the church's direction.

They'll just leave. And you'll wonder what happened.

What's hiding beneath the surface of your staff culture right now?

- Staff who are quietly disengaging
- Resentments building that haven't been voiced
- Flight risks you haven't identified
- Systemic issues you've normalized
- A gap between what you assume and what's actually true

What You Discover Can Heal You

But here's the hopeful side: assessment doesn't just reveal problems—it often reveals strengths you didn't know you had.

Churches that assess their staff health frequently discover:

- Staff who feel *more* valued than leadership realized
- Pockets of exceptional health in unexpected places
- Quick wins hiding in plain sight—simple fixes that make immediate impact
- The specific levers that will actually move the needle for their unique culture
- A baseline that allows them to measure real improvement over time

You cannot improve what you do not measure. And you cannot celebrate what you do not see.

What a Local Church Assessment Reveals

Chemistry Staffing offers a customized version of the same assessment you've been reading about—deployed specifically for your church, with results specific to your team. Here's what you receive:

Your Church's Health Scorecard

Your overall staff health score on the 0-250 scale, with a complete breakdown across all seven categories: Communication, Job Satisfaction, Leadership, Team Dynamics, Compensation & Benefits, Work Environment, and Future Stability. You'll see exactly how your church compares to the national benchmarks in this report—where you're ahead of the curve and where you're behind.

Question-Level Analysis

Category scores are helpful, but question-level data is where real insight lives. You'll see exactly which of the 50 questions your staff scored highest and lowest on. This moves you from general awareness (*"We have a compensation problem"*) to specific action (*"Our staff don't believe there's a clear process for evaluations and raises"*).

Role-Based Insights

Are your pastors thriving while your support staff struggle? Is your worship team healthy but your children's ministry team burning out? Role-based breakdowns reveal whether certain teams or positions need focused attention—insights that aggregate scores can mask.

Tenure Analysis

You've seen the national data on the 3-5 year wall. But is it happening in *your* church? Tenure analysis shows whether your newer staff are thriving or already disengaging, what's happening with your mid-tenure team members, and how your longest-serving staff are feeling about their future.

Anonymous Narrative Responses

Numbers tell you *what*. Narratives tell you *why*. Your staff will have the opportunity to share open-ended feedback—anonously—giving voice to things they might never

say in a staff meeting or one-on-one. These responses are often the most valuable part of the entire assessment.

Actionable Recommendations

Data without direction is just noise. Your report includes specific recommendations based on *your* results—priority areas for immediate attention and a roadmap for long-term culture improvement. This isn't generic advice; it's counsel shaped by what your staff actually said.

Why Chemistry Staffing?

You could create your own survey. You could use a generic employee assessment tool. But here's why churches choose to partner with us:

We know church staff. Chemistry Staffing has spent over eight years specializing exclusively in church staffing. We've placed hundreds of pastors and church staff members. We understand that ministry teams operate differently than corporate teams—the unique pressures, the spiritual dimensions, the relational complexity. This isn't our side project; it's our entire focus.

We built this assessment. The questions your staff will answer aren't borrowed from a business school textbook. They're refined over three years and validated across **3,400+ church staff responses**. We know which questions surface real issues and which ones generate noise. The assessment has been tested across denominations, church sizes, and regions.

We've seen the patterns. Having analyzed thousands of individual responses and hundreds of church-level results, we know what healthy churches do differently. We've identified the warning signs that predict turnover. We can help you interpret your results in context—not just what the numbers say, but what they mean.

We're not just data people. Chemistry Staffing helps churches find *and keep* great staff. Assessment is often the first step in that relationship, not the last. If your results reveal issues that need deeper intervention—whether that's coaching, mediation, or strategic staffing changes—we can help you navigate what comes next.

How It Works

The process is simple and designed to minimize burden on your staff and leadership:

Week 1: Setup We provide you with a unique assessment link to share with your team.

Weeks 2-3: Staff Participation Your staff receive an email invitation and complete the anonymous, confidential assessment. It takes 15-20 minutes. We handle the technology; you encourage participation.

Week 4: Analysis We compile and analyze your results, compare them to national benchmarks, and identify the patterns and priorities specific to your church.

Week 5: Results Delivery You receive a detailed written report with all the elements described above. Optional: a live walkthrough call with a Chemistry Staffing consultant to discuss findings and recommendations.

Total timeline: 4-5 weeks from start to results.

Investment

Your investment scales with your staff size:

Staff Size	Investment
2-5 staff members	\$397
6-10 staff members	\$597
11-20 staff members	\$897
21+ staff members	Custom quote

Optional Add-Ons:

- 60-Minute Results Review Call with a Chemistry Staffing Consultant
- Individual Staff Debrief Sessions (facilitated anonymous discussion)
- 6-Month Follow-Up Assessment (measure your improvement)
- Staff Health Improvement Coaching Package

Consider this: the average cost of replacing a church staff member—including recruiting, interviewing, onboarding, and lost productivity—ranges from \$15,000 to \$40,000 or more, depending on the role. If this assessment helps you retain even one staff member who would have otherwise left, it pays for itself many times over.

Is This Right for Your Church?

This assessment is for you if:

- You genuinely want to know how your staff are doing—even if the answer is hard to hear
- You're willing to act on what you learn, not just file the report away
- You want to be proactive rather than reactive about staff health
- You've experienced unexpected staff departures and want to understand why
- You sense something is "off" but can't quite pinpoint it
- You're planning a staff retreat, strategic planning season, or leadership transition
- You're a new leader wanting an honest baseline
- You care about your staff as *people*, not just performers

This assessment is probably not for you if:

- You're looking for validation that everything is already fine
- You have no intention of sharing results or making changes
- You want ammunition against specific staff members
- You're hoping for a quick fix without doing real work

We'd rather be honest about fit than waste your time or ours. This assessment works best for leaders who are genuinely curious, appropriately humble, and committed to creating healthier cultures—even when that requires uncomfortable conversations.

The Real Question

You've invested significant time in this report. You've seen the data. You've heard the voices. You understand the patterns.

Now there's only one question that matters:

What's actually happening on YOUR team?

The national data tells you what's possible—both the thriving and the struggling. Your data will tell you what's real.

In our experience, most church leaders overestimate how well their staff are doing. Not out of arrogance, but out of optimism—and because struggling staff rarely speak

up until they're already out the door. The few leaders who underestimate their staff health are usually the healthiest; they're humble enough to keep looking for blind spots.

Either way, assumption is not a strategy. The only way to know is to ask.

Your staff have opinions about your church's communication, leadership, compensation, and culture. They have feelings about their future. They're either thriving, surviving, or quietly planning their exit.

Wouldn't you rather know?

Ready to Assess Your Staff Health?

Take the next step:

 **Email:** todd.rhoades@chemistrystaffing.com

THE BOTTOM LINE

You now know more about church staff health nationally than 99% of church leaders. But national knowledge doesn't change local culture. Only local insight—specific to your church, your staff, your context—can do that. The assessment that produced this report is available for your team. The question isn't whether the data would be valuable. The question is whether you're ready to see it.

Your Next Steps

You've just absorbed a significant amount of data about the state of church staff health in America. You've seen the trends, the tensions, and the troubling patterns that emerge when you ask church staff how they're really doing.

Now what?

The gap between insight and action is where good intentions go to die. Most leaders who read reports like this one experience a moment of concern, perhaps even conviction, and then return to the relentless demands of ministry. The urgent crowds out the important. Staff health remains theoretical.

This section exists to close that gap.

What follows are practical, concrete actions organized by timeframe and complexity. Some require nothing more than a conversation. Others require systemic change. All of them are within reach of leaders who decide that staff health matters enough to act.

You don't need a budget line item to start. You need a decision.

This Week: Immediate Actions

These five actions require no approval, no budget, and no strategic planning. They require only the decision to prioritize people over tasks for a few hours this week.

1. Have a Real Conversation

Pick one staff member. Not your favorite—someone you don't talk to as often. Take them to coffee or lunch. Ask a simple question: "How are you really doing?" Then do the hardest thing in leadership: listen. Don't problem-solve. Don't defend. Don't pivot to what you need from them. Just listen.

*Why this matters: **51% of church staff** have thought seriously about leaving in the past year. Some of them work for you. You won't know which ones until you ask—and create space for an honest answer.*

2. Audit Your Last Ten Communications

Pull up your sent folder. Look at your last ten emails, texts, or Slack messages to staff members. Categorize each one:

- Task or request
- Information sharing
- Appreciation or encouragement
- Personal connection (asking about them)

If appreciation and personal connection make up less than 20% of your communications, you have a ratio problem. Your staff's experience of you is primarily transactional. That's not a character flaw—it's a pattern that can be changed, starting with your next message.

3. Check Your Evaluation Calendar

When was each staff member's last formal evaluation or review? Write it down. If anyone is past twelve months, schedule their review this week. Not next month. This week.

*Why this matters: **51% of staff** report there's no clear process for performance evaluations. The question about evaluation processes scored the lowest of all fifty questions in the assessment (2.96 out of 5). If your staff don't know when they'll be evaluated or what the criteria are, you're contributing to their uncertainty—even if unintentionally.*

4. Say Thank You—Specifically

Write a handwritten note to one staff member. Not the generic "thanks for all you do" that signals obligation rather than observation. Something specific: "Thank you for how you handled the situation with the Smith family last Sunday. Your patience in that moment reflected our church's values."

Specific recognition signals that you're paying attention. Generic thanks signals that you're checking a box. Your staff can tell the difference.

5. Ask About Workload

In your next interaction with each staff member, ask this question: "On a scale of 1-10, how sustainable is your current workload? What's one thing that would move that number up?"

Why this matters: Staff members rarely volunteer that they're drowning. Ministry culture often celebrates overwork as dedication. You have to ask directly—and demonstrate that you actually want an honest answer.

This Month: Strategic Actions

These actions require more intentionality. They may involve multiple conversations, some documentation, or a few hours of focused work. None of them require budget approval, but they do require calendar commitment.

1. Conduct an Informal Staff Health Audit

You don't need a formal assessment to gather meaningful signals about your team's health. In your next one-on-one with each staff member, ask three questions:

- "What's one thing about working here that energizes you?"
- "What's one thing that frustrates you that we could actually change?"
- "On a scale of 1-10, how likely are you to still be here in two years? What would make that number higher?"

Document the answers. Look for patterns across responses. This isn't as rigorous as a validated assessment, but it's infinitely better than assuming you know how your staff are doing.

2. Map Your Tenure Risk

Create a simple list of all staff members organized by how long they've been at your church. Highlight anyone in years three through five.

This report revealed that staff health drops significantly in years three through five—what we've called "The Wall." Staff members who were energized and optimistic in years one and two often hit a period of disillusionment as reality sets in and initial excitement fades.

Action: Proactively schedule deeper check-ins with your 3-5 year staff. Don't wait for them to disengage. Ask about their career trajectory, their sense of growth, and what would make the next five years compelling.

3. Review Your Compensation Transparency

Compensation satisfaction scored 68.5% nationally—the lowest of all seven categories. But compensation problems are often communication problems in disguise.

Test your transparency by asking whether every staff member can answer these questions:

- How is my salary determined?
- What would I need to do to receive a raise?
- When is my next compensation review?
- How does my pay compare to similar roles at similar churches?

If most staff members can't answer these questions, you have a compensation communication problem—regardless of whether your actual pay is fair.

4. Assess Your Conflict Patterns

Think honestly about the last three conflicts on your team. For each one, ask yourself:

- Was it addressed directly or avoided?
- How long did it simmer before someone addressed it?
- What was the outcome?
- Did the relationship improve, stay the same, or deteriorate?

Leadership's handling of conflict (3.39 out of 5) was among the lower-scoring questions in the assessment. Most leaders overestimate their own effectiveness at managing conflict. Be honest about your patterns before asking your team to change theirs.

5. Evaluate Your Meeting Effectiveness

Staff rated "regular staff meetings" at 4.06 out of 5—but "kept informed about important decisions" scored only 3.64. That gap tells an important story: meetings are happening, but information isn't flowing effectively.

In your next staff meeting, ask directly: "Is there anything happening at this church that you feel out of the loop on?" Then address what surfaces. If nothing surfaces, that might mean everything is fine—or it might mean your team doesn't feel safe being honest in group settings.

This Quarter: Systemic Actions

These initiatives require real investment—of time, planning, and potentially budget. They address root causes rather than symptoms. They're harder to start, but they create lasting change.

1. Formalize Your Evaluation Process

If you don't have a documented, consistent evaluation process, building one is the single highest-impact investment you can make this quarter. A functional system includes:

- Annual reviews for every staff member, scheduled in advance
- Clear criteria communicated before the evaluation period
- Written documentation that both parties sign
- Explicit connection between evaluation outcomes and compensation decisions
- Development goals focused on growth, not just performance judgment

The evaluation gap identified in this report affects more than half of church staff nationally. Closing it requires intentional system-building, not just good intentions.

2. Conduct a Compensation Audit

Gather data on comparable roles at similar-sized churches in your region. Denominational resources, salary surveys, and firms like Chemistry Staffing can provide benchmark data.

The goal isn't necessarily to pay more—it's to know where you stand before your staff find out you don't. A staff member who discovers they're significantly underpaid through an outside job offer has already begun the emotional process of leaving.

3. Create a Benefits Inventory

Document every benefit you offer—both formal and informal:

- Health insurance, retirement contributions, paid time off
- But also: flexible scheduling, remote work options, professional development budget, sabbatical policy, counseling benefit, book allowances, childcare assistance

Many churches offer more than their staff realize because benefits have never been clearly communicated. Some leaders believe they offer more than they actually do because they've conflated intention with implementation. Getting everything on paper creates clarity for both parties.

4. Build a Ninety-Day Onboarding Experience

The honeymoon period (staff in their first year) consistently scores highest in health assessments. Great onboarding extends that honeymoon and sets up success beyond it. A structured first ninety days should include:

- Clear expectations and success metrics documented in writing
- Regular check-ins: weekly for the first month, bi-weekly for months two and three
- Intentional introduction to team culture and unwritten rules
- Early feedback loops that surface problems before they calcify

Most churches hire well and onboard poorly. The cost shows up eighteen months later when promising staff members become disengaged or depart.

5. Address Your Biggest Gap

Review the seven categories from this report. Based on what you know about your church, identify your suspected weakest area. Build a focused ninety-day plan to improve that single category:

- **Communication:** Implement weekly all-staff updates with clear information flow
- **Compensation:** Conduct market comparison and create a plan to address gaps
- **Leadership:** Seek 360-degree feedback on your own leadership effectiveness
- **Team Dynamics:** Address the conflict you've been avoiding for months
- **Job Satisfaction:** Realign roles with actual skills and interests
- **Work Environment:** Survey staff on both physical and cultural needs
- **Future Stability:** Have honest conversations about church vision and staff career trajectories

The temptation is to address everything at once. Resist it. Pick one category. Make meaningful progress. Then move to the next.

For Different Audiences

If You're a Senior or Lead Pastor

Your staff's health is ultimately your responsibility. The data consistently shows that Lead Pastors experience their churches more positively than support staff do. That gap reflects how differently people experience your leadership based on their position in the organization.

Your starting point: Model vulnerability. Share your own struggles openly. Create safety for honesty by going first.

If You're an Executive Pastor

You often see staff health most clearly—and feel most squeezed between senior leadership expectations and ground-level team reality. Use this data to advocate for your team with specificity rather than generalities.

Your starting point: Bring specific findings to your senior pastor. "The national data shows that 51% of staff don't have a clear evaluation process. Can we talk about whether that's true for us—and what we want to do about it?"

If You're a Board Member or Elder

Staff health is a governance issue, not merely a management issue. Healthy staff lead to healthy churches. Unhealthy staff lead to turnover, which costs money and momentum and damages the congregation's experience.

Your starting point: Ask the senior pastor to report on staff health metrics annually. Make it a board-level priority alongside financial health and attendance trends.

If You're a Department Leader

You may not control church-wide policy, but you control your team's micro-culture. Everything in this report applies at the department level, often with more immediacy than at the organizational level.

Your starting point: Create a pocket of health within your sphere of influence. Model the communication patterns, appreciation habits, and transparency you want to see.

The Thirty-Day Challenge

For leaders who want accountability, here's a simple framework to translate insight into action:

Week	Focus	Action
Week 1	Listen	Have one-on-one conversations with every staff member asking "How are you really doing?"
Week 2	Appreciate	Write specific, handwritten thank-you notes to each team member
Week 3	Clarify	Ensure every staff member knows their evaluation timeline and criteria
Week 4	Commit	Identify your number-one staff health priority and create a ninety-day plan

Tell someone you're doing this challenge. Accountability drives follow-through. At the end of thirty days, you'll have listened to every staff member, expressed specific appreciation to each one, clarified evaluation expectations, and identified your priority for the quarter ahead.

That's more progress than most churches make in a year.

The Hard Truth

Reading a report doesn't change anything.

Action does.

Most leaders who read reports like this one will nod at the concerning statistics, feel a moment of conviction, and then return to the relentless demands waiting in their inbox. The urgent will crowd out the important. Staff health will remain theoretical—something to address "when things calm down."

Things won't calm down. Ministry doesn't work that way.

The churches with the healthiest staff aren't the ones with the largest budgets, the most sophisticated HR departments, or the most charismatic senior pastors. They're the ones where leaders consistently choose to prioritize people over programs. Where someone decided that staff health was too important to leave to chance.

That choice doesn't require a committee or a capital campaign. It requires a decision—and then another decision, and then another.

Pick one action from this section. Put it on your calendar for this week. Do it.

Then pick another.

THE BOTTOM LINE

The distance between reading this report and improving your staff's health is exactly one decision. Not a budget approval. Not a strategic plan. Not a board vote. A decision to act—followed by the discipline to keep acting. The churches that will see different results next year are the ones where a leader reads this page, chooses one concrete step, and takes it before the week is over. Be that leader.

An Even Bigger Picture

The symptoms in this report point to something larger happening across the American church.

The data you've just read tells you what's happening inside church staff teams right now—the flight risk, the tenure walls, the evaluation gaps, the slow erosion of your healthiest performers.

But these are symptoms.

To understand why retention has become so difficult, why "Exceptional" staff are quietly disappearing, and why the 3-5 year mark has become a breaking point, we have to zoom out. The challenges showing up in this year's assessment are connected to structural shifts that have been reshaping ministry staffing for decades.

An Aging Workforce, A Shrinking Pipeline

Part of what's driving the instability in this data is a demographic collision most churches haven't fully reckoned with.

The workforce is getting older. The average age of Protestant pastors has climbed from 44 to 54 over the past three decades. Only one in seven is under 40. Some denominations project losing half their active pastors within the next fifteen years.

At the same time, the traditional supply chain for new leaders is contracting. Seminary enrollment—especially for the M.Div. degrees that once fed church staffing—has been declining since 2006. Schools are consolidating, selling campuses, or closing entirely.

The external "conveyor belt" that churches relied on for generations to deliver trained, ready leaders? It's not running the way it used to.

A Generational Shift in Expectations

This year's data shows a workforce that increasingly prioritizes sustainability over sacrifice. Staff want to know their work matters—but they also want to know they can do it long-term without losing themselves or their families in the process.

This tracks with a broader generational shift. Emerging leaders aren't leaving ministry because they've lost their calling. They're leaving because the traditional model—where burnout was a badge of honor and boundaries were seen as weakness—no longer makes sense to them.

They're asking questions previous generations didn't always feel permission to ask:

- *Can I do this and still be present for my kids?*
- *Will this church support me—or just use me up?*
- *Is there a version of ministry that's actually sustainable?*

When churches can't answer those questions, talent migrates to environments that can.

The Cost of Outsourced Development

For decades, most churches outsourced leadership development to seminaries, denominations, and staffing networks. It worked well enough—until those systems started to strain.

Now many churches find themselves without an internal bench. No succession plan. No culture of calling out and developing the next generation. And when a position opens, the default is to search for the "perfect external hire"—someone with theological depth, emotional intelligence, leadership experience, and technical skills all wrapped into one.

Those candidates are rare. And getting rarer.

Which means the solution isn't just better recruiting. It's a return to building leaders from within—through intentional identification, real investment, and the kind of long-game development that doesn't depend on someone else's pipeline.

Going Deeper

This report gives you a snapshot of where your team stands. But the systemic shifts underneath—the aging workforce, the seminary contraction, the generational

redefinition of calling, the loss of internal development cultures—these are the currents that will shape church staffing for the next decade.

If you want to understand those currents more fully, and explore practical frameworks for rebuilding your leadership pipeline, that's the focus of *Silent Alarm: The Quiet Collapse of the Church Staff Pipeline*.

It's available at <https://chemistrystaffing.com/silentalarm>

Because the challenges in this data aren't going away on their own.

And there's still time to build something different.

About This Research

Research Overview

The Church Staff Health Assessment is a comprehensive survey designed to measure the overall health and well-being of paid church staff members across the United States. Developed by Chemistry Staffing, this assessment consists of 50 questions measuring staff health across seven distinct categories. All questions use a 5-point Likert scale (1 = Strongly Disagree, 2 = Disagree, 3 = Neutral, 4 = Agree, 5 = Strongly Agree), with additional demographic questions to enable segmented analysis.

The Seven Categories

Category	Questions	Max Points	What It Measures
Communication	8	40	Vision casting, staff communication, openness with leadership, feeling heard, role clarity
Job Satisfaction	7	35	Happiness, purpose, accomplishment, skills alignment, work-life balance, values fit, positive impact
Leadership	8	40	Direction, support, respect, conflict handling, openness to feedback, transparency, modeling values
Team Dynamics	7	35	Collaboration, camaraderie, conflict resolution, feeling valued by colleagues, role clarity
Compensation & Benefits	8	40	Pay satisfaction, benefits, PTO, professional development, performance evaluations, salary adjustments
Work Environment	7	35	Workspace quality, resources/tools, well-being priority, safety, staff relationships, looking forward to work
Future Stability	5	25	Retention intent, optimism, long-term commitment
TOTAL	50	250	

Scoring Bands

Each respondent receives a total score out of 250 points, which places them in one of six health bands:

Score Range	Category	Interpretation
225-250	Exceptional	Thriving — excellent staff health
190-224	Strong	Healthy — positive environment with minor growth areas
155-189	Good	Stable — generally positive with some challenges
120-154	Fair	Struggling — notable concerns affecting satisfaction
85-119	Needs Improvement	At-risk — significant issues requiring attention
0-84	Critical	Crisis — severe dysfunction, high flight risk

Three-Year Data Set

This report draws on three years of data collection, representing the most comprehensive longitudinal study of church staff health we are aware of.

Year	Respondents	Collection Period	Notes
2023	~1,065	Fall 2023	Baseline year
2024	~1,200	Spring 2024 - Spring 2025	Continued validation
2025	1,196	Fall 2025 - January 2026	Current year; primary focus
Total	~3,461		Combined data set

Why Three Years Matters

Longitudinal data allows us to identify genuine trends rather than one-time anomalies. When we see a pattern repeat across three consecutive years, we can speak with greater confidence about the actual state of church staff health nationally. This multi-year approach also provides a larger combined sample for demographic analysis, validates consistency of findings across time, and reveals whether staff health is improving, declining, or holding steady at the national level.

2025 Respondent Demographics

The 2025 assessment drew 1,196 respondents from all 50 U.S. states, representing a diverse cross-section of church staff roles, church sizes, denominations, and tenure levels.

By Role

Role	n	%
Senior / Lead Pastor	295	24.7%
Student Ministries Pastor	152	12.7%
Executive / Administrative Pastor	121	10.1%
Associate Pastor	118	9.9%
Worship Pastor	87	7.3%
Discipleship / Small Groups	55	4.6%
Children's Pastor	45	3.8%
Finance / HR	32	2.7%
Family Pastor	31	2.6%
Administrative Assistant	30	2.5%
Teaching Pastor	27	2.3%
Media / Technology	21	1.8%
Campus Pastor	19	1.6%
Creative Arts	16	1.3%
College / Young Adults Pastor	14	1.2%
Missions Pastor	13	1.1%
Communications	10	0.8%
Facilities Management	9	0.8%
Women's Pastor	8	0.7%
Other (Church Planter, Daycare Staff)	10	0.8%

By Church Size (Current Weekend Attendance)

Size	n	%
Under 100	233	19.5%
100-199	239	20.0%
200-499	272	22.7%
500-999	206	17.2%
1,000-1,999	139	11.6%
2,000+	105	8.8%

The distribution reflects a healthy spread across church sizes, with roughly 40% of respondents serving in churches under 200 in weekend attendance and nearly 21% serving in churches of 1,000 or more.

By Tenure (Years at Current Church)

Tenure	n	%
Less than 1 year	126	10.5%
1-2 years	208	17.4%
3-5 years	370	30.9%
6-10 years	241	20.2%
11-15 years	103	8.6%
16-20 years	61	5.1%
Over 20 years	87	7.3%

Nearly 28% of respondents are in their first two years at their current church, representing a significant cohort of newer staff whose experiences may differ substantially from those with longer tenure.

By Employment Status

Status	n	%
Full-Time	808	80.9%
Part-Time	191	19.1%

Note: Analysis of employment status is limited to respondents who answered this question (n=999).

By Gender

Gender	n	%
Male	978	81.8%
Female	218	18.2%

By Age

Age Range	n	%
18-24	23	1.9%
25-34	184	15.4%
35-44	253	21.2%
45-54	336	28.1%
55-64	265	22.2%
65 and above	135	11.3%

The respondent pool skews toward mid-career and seasoned staff, with over 61% of respondents aged 45 or older. This likely reflects both the typical age profile of church leadership and the greater likelihood that established staff engage with professional development resources like this assessment.

By Denomination (Top Represented)

By Denomination (Top Represented)

Denomination	n	%
Non-Denominational	376	31.4%
Baptist (Southern Baptist Convention)	209	17.5%
Christian Church	58	4.8%
Evangelical Free Church	56	4.7%
Assemblies of God	44	3.7%
Baptist (Independent)	40	3.3%
Baptist (Other)	34	2.8%
Baptist (Converge)	28	2.3%
Baptist (General Convention of Texas)	25	2.1%
United Methodist	22	1.8%
Reformed	22	1.8%
Wesleyan	19	1.6%
Presbyterian (various)	41	3.4%
Lutheran (various)	20	1.7%
Other denominations	182	15.2%

Respondents represent 47 distinct denominational affiliations, though the sample skews heavily toward evangelical Protestant traditions. Non-denominational churches represent the largest single segment, followed by various Baptist traditions which together account for nearly 28% of respondents.

Geographic Distribution

Respondents represent all 50 U.S. states, with distribution across major regions:

Geographic Distribution

Respondents represent all **50 U.S. states**, with distribution across major regions:

Region	n	%
Midwest	380	31.8%
Southeast	314	26.3%
West	196	16.4%
Southwest	186	15.6%
Northeast	120	10.0%

The top five states by respondent count were Texas (144), Ohio (75), California (73), Florida (65), and Michigan (64).

Methodology Notes

Survey Distribution

The assessment was distributed through multiple channels during the Fall 2025 collection period:

- Chemistry Staffing email list and professional network
- Social media (organic reach through LinkedIn, Facebook, and X)
- Partner organizations and church networks
- Word of mouth within church staff communities

- Healthy Church Staff Podcast audience

Participation Details

- **Voluntary participation:** Respondents self-selected to take the assessment. No compensation was provided for completion.
- **Anonymous analysis:** While names and emails were collected for optional follow-up, all published data is aggregated and anonymized. Individual responses are never connected to identifying information in reports.
- **Average completion time:** 15–20 minutes
- **Response validation:** Incomplete responses were excluded from analysis. Obvious spam entries and test submissions were removed. Responses were validated for internal consistency.

Narrative Responses

In addition to quantitative Likert-scale questions, respondents were invited to answer open-ended narrative questions. The questions varied based on each respondent's overall score, allowing us to gather contextually appropriate qualitative data:

Score Band	Narrative Responses	Question Focus
Critical (0–84)	~45	Pain points, what needs to change
Needs Improvement (85–119)	~99	Challenges, contributing factors
Fair (120–154)	~521	Challenges and support available
Good (155–189)	~578	Fulfilling aspects, growth goals
Strong (190–224)	~762	What they enjoy, stress management
Exceptional (225–250)	~431	Feeling valued, advice for others
Total Narratives	~2,436	

These narrative responses provide the qualitative depth that gives context to the quantitative findings. Where appropriate, we have included representative quotes throughout this report (with minor edits for clarity when necessary).

Limitations and Considerations

We believe transparency about what this research can and cannot tell us builds trust and helps readers interpret findings appropriately. Please consider these limitations:

1. Self-Selected Sample

Respondents chose to take this assessment. This introduces potential bias in several directions: staff who are particularly unhappy may be more motivated to share their experience, staff who are thriving may want to celebrate their church, and staff who are disengaged may not bother responding at all. This is not a random sample of all church staff nationally.

2. Evangelical and Protestant Focus

The distribution channels (Chemistry Staffing network, Healthy Church Staff Podcast, partner organizations) skew heavily toward evangelical and mainline Protestant churches. Catholic, Orthodox, and non-Christian religious staff are significantly underrepresented or absent from this data.

3. U.S.-Centric

While a small number of Canadian churches participated, this is primarily a U.S. data set. Findings may not generalize to other countries or cultural contexts where church staffing models, employment laws, and ministry expectations differ substantially.

4. Point-in-Time Snapshot

The assessment captures how staff felt at the moment they took it. Staff health fluctuates based on ministry seasons (Christmas and Easter can be particularly stressful), recent events at their church, personal circumstances, and other factors. A staff member's score in September may differ significantly from their score in January. Certain percentages may be rounded.

5. Self-Reported Data

All responses are self-reported perceptions. We did not independently verify church size, tenure, compensation figures, or other demographic factors. Perception is reality.

for the staff member experiencing it, but self-reported data may differ from objective measures.

6. Correlation vs. Causation

This research identifies correlations and patterns. It does not prove causation. For example, we can observe that staff at growing churches tend to score higher on health metrics, but we cannot prove whether church growth causes staff health, healthy staff contribute to church growth, or both are caused by some third factor (such as strong leadership).

7. Year-Over-Year Composition

The respondent pool differs each year. Some year-over-year comparisons may reflect both actual changes in staff health AND differences in who chose to respond in a given year. We note this where relevant but cannot fully control for compositional changes.

8. Role Distribution

Lead and Senior Pastors comprise nearly 25% of our sample, which may be higher than their actual proportion of church staff nationally. Similarly, male respondents (81.8%) likely exceed their actual proportion of all church staff. We provide role-specific and gender-specific breakdowns throughout the report to address this.

What This Research Can Tell Us

Despite the limitations outlined above, this research provides valuable signal that church leaders can act on:

Patterns across 3,400+ respondents: A sample of this size reveals consistent themes that transcend individual circumstances. When the same challenges emerge across hundreds of churches, denominations, and regions, we can speak with confidence about industry-wide patterns.

Relative comparisons: Even if absolute numbers carry some bias, comparing segments (roles, tenure levels, church sizes) within the same data set reveals meaningful differences. When Student Pastors consistently score lower than Lead Pastors across multiple years, that pattern demands attention.

Directional trends: Three years of data allows us to observe whether specific metrics are improving, declining, or holding steady. These trends matter more than any single year's snapshot.

Qualitative depth: The 2,400+ narrative responses provide the "why" behind the numbers. Statistical correlations tell us what is happening; stories from the front lines explain why it matters.

Actionable insights: This research consistently points to specific, addressable issues—not vague concerns but concrete areas where church leaders can take meaningful action.

This is the largest longitudinal study of church staff health we are aware of. While imperfect—as all research is—it represents a substantial and serious attempt to understand the state of church staff across the United States. We believe these findings can help churches build healthier teams, reduce preventable turnover, and create environments where ministry staff can thrive.

About Chemistry Staffing

Chemistry Staffing is a church staffing and consulting firm that has served churches across the United States and Canada since 2010. We specialize in helping churches find and keep the right staff through executive search, staff health assessments, and consulting on staff culture and retention.

Our Work Includes

- **Executive Search:** Full-service recruiting for pastoral and church staff positions, from Student Pastor to Lead Pastor and everything in between
- **Staff Health Assessments:** Custom assessments for local churches that benchmark their specific staff against these national findings
- **Consulting:** Working with church leadership to address culture challenges, improve communication, and reduce turnover
- **The Healthy Church Staff Podcast:** Daily insights for church leaders on building healthy staff culture (available wherever you listen to podcasts)
- **Research and Resources:** Annual studies like this report, plus articles, webinars, and speaking engagements on church staffing trends

Why We Do This Research

We see staff health challenges every day in our placement work. Churches call us after unexpected departures. Candidates share stories of toxic environments. Staff members quietly burn out while leaders remain unaware. We wanted to understand the scope of the problem, and the patterns behind healthy cultures.

This research informs our consulting and search work, and we hope it serves the broader church community. When church staff thrive, congregations benefit. When staff struggle, mission suffers. Understanding what's really happening beneath the surface is the first step toward meaningful improvement.

Contact Us

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Acknowledgments

This research would not be possible without the church staff members who took the time to share their experiences—honestly, vulnerably, and often painfully.

To the **3,400+ respondents** across three years who completed the assessment: Thank you. Your willingness to share—not just the good, but the hard—helps the whole church do better. We take that trust seriously.

To the **churches and networks** who encouraged staff participation and shared the assessment with their teams: Your commitment to staff health makes a difference.

To the **Healthy Church Staff Podcast community** who engage with these topics daily: Your questions, stories, and feedback shape how we approach this work.

To every staff member who responded: We see you. The late nights, the difficult conversations, the seasons of wondering whether it's worth it. Your honesty in this assessment—even when painful—creates the possibility for healthier churches for the next generation of ministry leaders.

This report is for you.

The 2025 Church Staff Health Assessment was collected from September 2025 through January 2026. Data analysis and report writing were completed in January 2026. For questions about methodology or access to segmented data for academic research, please contact todd.rhoades@chemistrystaffing.com.