Summary and Transcript

The Single Greatest Threat Facing the Church: Clergy Well-Being

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Summary

The Episcopal Parish Network hosted Thad Austin of the Common Table Collaborative for a conversation on the health and well-being of pastoral leaders. Drawing on nationally representative research, including the National Study of Religious Leaders and his own book Caring for Clergy: Understanding a Disconnected Network of Providers, Thad traced how clergy demographics and health have shifted over the past two decades, why mainline Protestant clergy report nearly double the elevated depressive symptoms of the matched US population, and how a disconnected network of care providers contributes to the problem. He closed with practical ways congregations can support their pastors -- identifying an Aaron and Hur, budgeting for support, and using The Corinthian Plan's free 27-item well-being checklist -- and introduced the Common Table Collaborative's online community platform.

Key Takeaways

1. **Clergy well-being is the single greatest threat facing the church.** Thad framed the stakes with his own story: of the 13 people ordained alongside him 16 years ago, only three remain in ministry, and he reminded us that it is not possible to have a healthy and effective church without a healthy and effective pastor.

2. **Clergy health has declined even as support has grown.** Obesity among clergy rose from 30% to 45% between 2001 and 2019, those reporting excellent health fell from 32% to 19%, and clergy now work about the same median hours (50 a week) as they did in 2000 -- with the median age of US clergy now 59.

3. **The support network around pastors is deeply disconnected.** Research for Caring for Clergy mapped about 740 care providers and found deep silos between denominational officials, counselors and coaches, retreat centers, pension and insurance providers, and continuing educators -- and of roughly 350 peer-reviewed sources and 325 resources providers said they rely on, only three overlapped.

4. **Political misalignment is an occupational hazard for mainline clergy.** Mainline congregations are the most politically diverse, leaving pastors caught in the middle of warring factions -- which researchers link to nearly double the elevated depressive symptoms found in more politically homogeneous traditions.

5. **Congregations can act locally to support their pastors.** Identify and mobilize an "Aaron and Hur" team with a mandate and even a budget, budget for support and sabbatical time, set up an on-call rotation, and use The Corinthian Plan's free 27-item checklist -- remembering that outside support is "like a field hospital" if a pastor returns to a toxic system.

Transcript

Bowie Snodgrass: Well, hello, and welcome, everyone. My name is Bowie Snodgrass, and I'm the rector of Christ Church in Short Hills, New Jersey, and I'm the Episcopal Parish Network Planning Committee co-chair where the church gathers. We're happy to welcome you to this webinar today, examining clergy well-being, an important and timely subject. We're so thankful that you're here and hope you'll take advantage of the many learning opportunities through EPN. I'm happy to introduce Thad Austin, Executive Director of the Common Table Collaborative in Charlotte, North Carolina, who will be presenting with us today. Thad?

Thad Austin: Wonderful. Thank you so much. It's a pleasure to be with you all today, and I'm so excited to have the chance to share a little bit about some of the research that is out there, as well as this very important topic of clergy well-being. I'm going to share my screen and we will get started. I'd like for you to take your phone, or you'll notice in the chat there is a link that you can click, and I'd just be curious what it is that best describes you: are you laity, or are you clergy? And as you are going through that quick little survey, just to find out who's in the room, I'm curious also about the size of your parish, and also just why you feel like this particular topic matters. So feel free to fill that out.

While you're doing that and getting into the survey, I'll just tell you a little bit about who I am. My name's Thad Austin. This is my wife Courtney and our daughter Chloe on a trip that we just wrapped up here a few weeks back, and they are the loves of my life. In addition to that, I spent more than a decade in the local church serving in pastoral ministry, and just enjoyed every moment of it. But I went back to school and did some additional education, did a PhD in philanthropic studies with a focus on the concept of leadership, and then began teaching in theological institutions after that, particularly Duke Divinity School, which is where my last place of employment was. When I was there, I discovered something called the Duke Clergy Health Initiative, which is now the Duke Clergy Health Collaborative, and that's what got me interested in this particular topic. Beyond that, I've got some personal interest as well.

75% of you are religious leaders; you're clergy. 25% are laity. That's fantastic to know. In terms of the size of worship attendance for your particular parish, we've got 36% in that 51 to 99, and then 100 to 149, and then a pretty equal distribution of 8% for those remaining: the 150 to 199, 200 to 299, and then 300 and up. That is very helpful to just begin orienting to who you are as we're getting acquainted. And then I asked this question in the chat, which is: why do healthy and effective clergy matter to God, the church, and society? This is the topic that we're going to be engaging with, and I'm going to give you some -- what I hope are important -- insights, both from empirical data as well as some historical sources. You've put in some things like: so we can do the work, faithfulness, burnout, pastoral formation, availability, impact, whole health, balance, peace. Everyone matters. Wholeness. It's really, really great. So thank you so much for doing that and putting in those comments.

We're gonna continue on, and I'm gonna tell you just a little bit about some points of continuity as well as points of change when it comes to religious leadership. Throughout the presentation, I'm going to be pulling on some of the latest nationally representative, highest quality data that we have from sociological sources. A lot of that comes from the National Study of Religious Leaders that Mark Chaves has done at Duke, as well as some work from

Hartford International University, specifically coming out of Scott Thumma and his work. So let's just dive right in. Here are some points of continuity when it comes to religious leaders. The first is education: clergy are equally likely to have a graduate degree now as in 2001. In terms of marriage, clergy are equally likely to be married now as at the time of the turn of the millennium. In terms of gender, the representation among women, among solo and senior pastor leaders, has only increased from 11 to 17 percent. The pastorate still is predominantly male; we've not seen as much change in terms of women in ministry. I do need to say that these are national trends, and the specific trends for the Episcopal Church are obviously much different, but I'm just trying to paint a picture of the large scale: within the Roman Catholic tradition, as well as some other traditions, they have a male-only pastorate, and as a result of that, we haven't seen as much of a change as maybe we might expect. In terms of the overall career, clergy are equally as likely to be second career now as they were in the year 2000, but they are more likely to be bivocational. There's a likelihood that that's related to some of the wider demographic shifts and trends, not only within pastors but also some of the changes that are happening within congregations as well. And then clergy also work about the same number of median hours -- the average work week is about the same. In the year 2000, they worked about 51 hours a week, and in 2019, which was the last time this particular question was asked, the answer was 50 hours. So there has not been as much change with regards to career.

Thad Austin: But there have been some other points of change. The first is in terms of age. You can see that the number of religious leaders that are under 40 has been declining, and the number over 60 has been dramatically increasing, from 23% up to 48%. The average median age of a clergy person in the United States right now is 59 years old, and we anticipate that that above-60 number is going to continue to climb. This is going to be something that we have to pay attention to within the larger ecosystem of our work. One of the other big changes is that there is an increase in the number of religious leaders, Christian pastors, that were born abroad -- we're becoming more ethnically diverse. Most of this has been driven specifically by the Roman Catholic Church, in particular as they have pulled clergy from non-US settings to serve parishes within the United States. So there have been some changes in terms of age, in terms of overall race and origin. Health: the percent of clergy who are obese has increased. In 2001, 30% of clergy experienced obesity; in 2019, 45%, so a 15% differential there -- but that's also about the same as the increase in the general population, and we're gonna come back to this particular piece about clergy health a little bit later. The percent of clergy who say they are in excellent health has actually decreased, from 32% to 19%. And even though there's some elements of the career of pastors that have stayed the same, there's some things that have really changed. Clergy are as satisfied with their jobs -- there's been a shift in the amount of satisfaction that pastors as a whole have with relation to their particular place of ministry. I think this is captured here better than anywhere else: one of my mentors and former bosses, Greg Jones, who's now president of Belmont University, former dean of Duke Divinity School, once said that an honest advertisement for pastoral ministry, especially within a mainline context, might read something like this: "Clergy wanted: manage conflict and slow decline for long hours and little pay." I think that is certainly true in terms of some of the changes that have happened by means of the career path that's available to pastors.

Thad Austin: There are some challenges that I want to specifically note. When senior religious leaders are surveyed, as they were with the National Study of Religious Leaders, and they're asked what are the biggest concerns that you have about the church, 50% have been concerned about secularization. There's concerns about finances, generational challenges, building issues, and then also personal well-being. Just quickly in terms of secularization -- this is some of the work that comes out of the University of Chicago that specifically noted -- and I think this is self-evident -- that there has been an increase in the number of people who never attend a religious service, especially coming out of the pandemic. As a nation we are becoming more secularized, and this is a major concern that pastors have. There's also a concern about finances; that was the second highest number there. Just quickly on that, the trends in charitable religious giving -- giving to congregations, from the Giving USA report that was released just a few months ago -- people are giving more in terms of raw dollars towards congregations now than they ever have in prior recorded history. The difference is that when controlled for inflation -- the golden line on the graph -- the increase is less significant, and also more money is being given by fewer people. That's obviously a big concern. In terms of the overall congregational finances, about 24% of congregations are in the red, and the others are either having a balanced budget or are in the black. We do see a big difference here specifically related to the size of the congregation -- those that increased their budget coming out of the pandemic: basically, if you're in a larger church, there's a substantial likelihood that you were increasing your budget, and if you're in a smaller church, there is an increased likelihood that you decreased your budget. I just wanted to touch on those two because those are the two highest in terms of the issues that oftentimes pastors are saying we're really concerned about. But what I want you to notice is that on the bottom is this personal well-being, that lines up with building issues. Oftentimes we don't turn our attention back towards the self to say, how is it with my own soul? The way that the Reverend Lori Tapia from the Disciples of Christ puts it is this: "We often think the problem is out there instead of within us."

So let me tell you just a little bit more about me, and that'll set the stage for the larger conversation we're going to have about clergy well-being. When I was ordained, I was ordained with 12 other people that same night. That was about 16 years ago. And after 16 years in ordained ministry, there are only three of us who are left. My friends and colleagues have, in some cases, left the ministry altogether; some have left the faith. This has been one of the primary reasons why I have been so interested in this particular topic, because I've been asking, what happened? What happened to my friends, my colleagues in ministry? I'm sure that if you think about those that have been in your sphere of influence, you might be able to think of a person that's either burned out, flamed out -- maybe there's been some type of moral failure that's been part of their experience, and now they're no longer in ministry.

So what is it that we actually know about clergy well-being, and in particular, why does it matter? You put into the chat some of the reasons why healthy, effective clergy matter to God, the church, and the world. But I just want to note that we have an entire book of the Bible, the book of Leviticus, that is specifically dedicated to the rules and regulations of what it means to be a pastor and how they are to be supported. Think back in the biblical tradition: of the 12 tribes of Israel, the only tribe that did not have any land was the priests and Levites --

the tribe of Levi. They did not have land, and so they were dependent upon the rest of society to support their overall well-being. In the Protestant Reformation, Esther Chung-Kim from Claremont McKenna College has produced a book about the economics of faith. She's a historian and an expert in the Reformation, and one of the things that she notes is that the reformers actually judged the effectiveness and scope of the Reformation based upon two primary criteria. The first was: are the poor being cared for? If so, we know that the Protestant Reformation has taken place. The second, however, was: are the pastors being supported? Because with the Protestant Reformation, the pastors who were previously wards of the state -- because the church and state were one -- now all of a sudden had to be supported by these local churches. The way that they judged the effectiveness of the movement was to say, okay, are the poor being cared for, and -- now, because pastors are able to marry -- are the pastors being cared for as well? So what would it be like if those were the primary metrics by which we judged our effectiveness today? Are the poor being cared for? Are our pastors being cared for?

Thad Austin: When we think about this, I want you to understand that there is a profound implication, not just to the church, but also to the world. A few years back, there was a series of major suicides among non-denominational pastors at really high profile congregations. I have a friend who's a sociologist out in the greater Los Angeles area where one of these particular suicides took place, and a person that is associated with one of the major health insurance firms out there actually called and said, can you help me understand what's going on? Because they saw this spike in insurance claims over this really small period of time. They tied it back, and there was a correlation that the spike in health insurance claims happened as a result of, and in coordination with, one of these high profile clergy suicides. What does it say when your religious leader says life is not worth living? But let me tell you the real piece for me why I think this issue is so critically important. It's what my mentor from seminary, the late Ellsworth Callis, once told me. He said, "Thad, beware of serving the bread of life with emaciated hands." Beware of serving the bread of life with emaciated hands. Let me just put it like this: I don't think it's possible to have a healthy and effective church without a healthy and effective pastor. It's that important. As I look at the folks that are serving, oftentimes I'm wondering, are we in fact serving the bread of life with emaciated hands?

So let's dive in then to this particular topic of clergy well-being. I'm going to take you on a bit of a journey here. Back in the year 2001, which corresponds with the timing of some of those statistics I was telling you about before, Jack Carroll wrote a book called God's Potters, and in it he said that clergy health fares not well, though not much worse, than the US population as a whole. In fact, at about the same time, there were a couple sociologists, Stuart and Stickling, who found that Episcopal priests had actually much more positive affect than the general population, and they were well satisfied. But since that time, there has been a good bit of change. If you look at the academic literature: Reynolds in 2015 -- significant levels of psychological suffering among clergy; there's a true crisis in clergy physical health. In 2019, clergy health has reached crisis levels. Matt Bloom in 2019: pastoral work is not only tough, it may also be dangerous. One of my favorite memes during the pandemic was this one: baby Yoda -- this is your pastor in January of the first year of the pandemic, this is your pastor in May, and then your pastor in August. In terms of the overall distribution of what we're seeing

within large-scale studies: those who were okay before the pandemic are still doing okay; those who were not okay are worse; and those who were on the border are having trouble holding things together.

Thad Austin: Let me talk just briefly about physical health, and we're going to talk about mental health as well. This particular slide tracks obesity rates by religious tradition -- the predicted obesity prevalence within each of these. Mainline Protestants are somewhere in the middle; the folks that have significant concern in terms of obesity, which oftentimes is a predictor of other types of struggle with regards to stress, are Black Protestants, United Methodists, conservative Protestants. However, when it comes to elevated depressive symptoms, it's a different story. The National Study of Religious Leaders did a few items to try to unpack this. What they found by looking at head clergy people across the nation is that there was not a big difference between all clergy and the matched US population -- it was about 4%. But when you start to look at these trends across religious tradition, big changes. You'll see where Catholics fall in terms of elevated depressive symptoms; Black Protestants and conservative Protestants right on line -- and then mainline: almost double, almost double elevated depressive symptoms within mainline Protestant clergy.

As a result of that, they've been trying to figure out what is going on, and I'd like to offer a couple of suggestions that I think are particularly important. The first comes from Joseph Roso and Mark Chaves, who published a study looking at clergy-laity political misalignment. Politics actually does play a significant factor in terms of clergy well-being. What you'll see over here on the left hand side of the screen is the political makeup of Roman Catholic parishes, where 52% of the congregation would be considered more liberal, 28% about the same, 14% more conservative, and then 6% much more conservative. Within evangelical congregations there's oftentimes much more homogeneity; Black Protestants, again, much more homogeneity. But when it comes to mainline congregations, there actually is a bit of political differentiation. What we're finding is that oftentimes clergy are caught in the middle with regard to the political infighting. Sociologists have been saying this could actually be one of the occupational hazards of mainline Protestant clergy, and one of the reasons that, as the nation has become more polarized, clergy within mainline Protestant congregations have actually been experiencing increased depressive symptoms.

There are some other items that are important here. This comes from a list of items that Alexander Lang, who's a Presbyterian mainline pastor -- he was the pastor of a very thriving, large membership Presbyterian church -- [he] stepped down from his position. In the open letter that he wrote, he cited stress; he cited loneliness; the impact that ministry had had, not just on him but his family; overall pessimism about the future; having a thousand bosses, each who felt that they could speak into his particular job, how he was doing; and then unrealistic expectations. These are just some of the reasons why clergy may be in a position where they're not doing well.

One of the things that I have often found with regard to these particular studies is that the finger gets pointed back at the clergy person. Most of the studies I've seen, and the recommendations that come out of them, point the finger right back at the pastor and say, well, pastor, you need to do a better job of taking your Sabbath; you need to do a better job of

caring for yourself; you need to do a better job of saying no. I believe in individual responsibility -- I think that we all need to be responsible for our own actions -- but there was a wondering that I had: could there actually be something wrong with the system? So Laura, I'm gonna ask that you pop that next link in the chat. We did a formal sociological study, a national study, to better understand the support network that's available to pastors. What's crazy here is that I believe that there is more support available to pastors than any other profession that exists. I know of no other profession that has dedicated retreat centers, dedicated mental health professionals, entire denominational structures and educational systems, and there's actually a lot of research, as I've presented today, on the profession of clergy. So we see this situation where there's more support available, and yet clergy oftentimes have worse health outcomes than the general population. The question became, well, why? What's going on? So we did a survey by developing the most comprehensive database of care providers to Protestant pastors in North America, and we identified about 740 of those. The findings are there in the book called Caring for Clergy: Understanding a Disconnected Network of Providers. Within it, what we identified were deep silos by particular sector. Denominational officials oftentimes weren't always in conversation with those on the front line, like spiritual directors, counselors, coaches, and the retreat center providers; those folks weren't always in conversation with the folks doing the pension, benefit, and insurance work; those folks weren't always in conversation with our continuing education providers. What we're finding is that there is just this messy network.

Thad Austin: We did a formal network analysis of these different providers, and this is what the network looks like -- kind of a messy spider web of all of these different organizations. We asked them just one simple question: who is it that you are in conversation with, or who do you partner with, if anyone? This is like what pastors have to navigate on their own -- this messy network. What was most astounding to me is that when we zoomed out, there were all of these other providers on the outside that had no meaningful connection to anything that was happening at the center. While, as an example, Lilly Endowment, the Duke Endowment, the Murdock Charitable Trust, and others are doing really incredible work, there are a whole lot that are not even part of those conversations. As a result, they're under-resourced, they are under-networked; sometimes they aren't actually receiving the latest information, and so you see these fractured efforts. We actually did a formal academic literature review of everything that had been written about clergy well-being, and we came up with about 350 or so unique sources that had been published in peer-reviewed journals and replicable books about clergy well-being. Then we surveyed this particular group of 740 clergy care providers and we asked them: what are you relying on in your ministry? What's the latest stuff? Tell us -- where are you finding your information? They produced about 325 or so unique resources that they were relying on. Then we compared them, and guess what? There were only three that overlapped. This is the type of situation that I'm talking about: it's as if you go to your oncologist, and your oncologist isn't reading the latest cancer research.

What would it be like to actually bring all of these people together, to break down the silos, to create the formational opportunities and training experiences, and also to heal some of the wounds? One of the things that we found -- and you'll see here on the screen the woodcut of Moses, Aaron, and Hur, thinking about Moses leading the children of Israel in battle with arms

raised -- Aaron and Hur come alongside to lift up and support Moses' arms. We were basically asking, who are Aaron and Hur today? As we surveyed those Aarons and Hurs, what we found was, in many cases, folks that had been serving in the local church in pastoral ministry. In fact, 70% of this population had formal former pastoral duties and responsibilities. Yet when we started to ask them, so how did you get involved in this work? One after another, these gut-wrenching stories: I got kicked out, or I got burnt out by the local church. In all honesty, I think that can be a great story, a great redemptive story -- a lot of folks will enter mental health professions because they've struggled with mental health; they might enter marriage and family therapy because they came from a broken home. That's not the issue. The issue is that in the church, oftentimes we use those broken issues -- those become like the badges that qualify us to then begin offering care. If you just want to call yourself a coach, you can do that; obviously there are formal things like the National Coaching Federation and others. But in the church, sometimes we don't think you have to undergo counseling before you offer counseling. As a result of that, these are some of the reasons why we have found that, beyond just individual responsibility, clergy well-being is suffering. And as a result of that, we set up an organization called the Common Table Collaborative to try to help make a dent.

Thad Austin: The idea here is that the church is hurting. Sadly, there are many people that believe the church won't ever be healthy again. I said that there's more support that's available to the church than any other nonprofit sector that exists, and yet the church often has worse outcomes than the wider population. But we at the Common Table haven't given up; we still believe in the church, and we gather others who also believe. We gather people together around four key areas of opportunity. The first is pastoral well-being -- we don't think it's possible to have a healthy and effective church without a healthy and effective pastor. The second is thriving congregations -- we believe that healthy leaders lead thriving congregations. The third is missional presence -- thriving congregations make a difference in the world. And the fourth is organizational life -- what we've found oftentimes is that the root cause of unhealthy churches is because of unhealthy systems. What I mean by that is if your pastor is burning out, it might be that it's not just about your pastor; it could be about the level of expectations that the vestry has of that pastor, or it could be about the communication of those expectations. There might be underlying core issues that need to be addressed. So I'd just be curious: what would it be like if we created the conditions for the church to thrive? What do you think is possible if our pastors were more healthy and effective? What would that look like? How might the church be different? How might the world be different? How might pastoral families be different if we created the conditions for the church and our pastors to thrive?

I'm going to give you just a couple of ideas -- things that you can consider as you think about your local setting. The first thing I'll say is that the most helpful and effective support that a pastor will ever receive is the support that pastor receives at the local parish level. The different sectors that I popped onto the screen earlier, whether it be denominational officials or funders or continuing educators, certainly have a role. But at the end of the day, the people that are going to make the difference day in and day out are in the local church. So I want to give you just a couple of practical ideas and resources that might be helpful in your particular setting. The first is: don't assume that your pastor is in dire straits. It could be that your pastor

is doing just fine, thank you very much. But you can provide appropriate support and encouragement, and I really want to encourage you to give agency to the pastor, to be able to help them diagnose what perhaps they need, as well as the means by which to obtain it. Here are just a couple of practical ideas that might be helpful for you and your church. The first is: I want you to identify your Aaron and Hur. Whether you're a pastor or perhaps a lay leader, identify who Aaron and Hur are in your church -- again, those that were supporting the arms of Moses. Who are they? Is there a way for them to be mobilized, and then given a mandate, an authority, and maybe even a budget to make a difference? That can be in small ways. For instance, they could just simply check in with the pastor from time to time: "Pastor, you pray for so many people -- how can I pray for you?" It could be that you just send the pastor's family a gift box; make sure that they're remembered on their birthday. It could be that you mobilize within the church to collect all kinds of cards, words of appreciation, and deliver those to the pastor, so that the pastor can understand the value and the impact that they make -- simply complimenting the pastor, noticing what goes well. Oftentimes pastors hear what doesn't go well. You might be able to help your pastor know, "Here's what's going well," or "Here's what I noticed," or "Here's what I really liked."

Thad Austin: The second would be to actually budget for support. In many cases, congregations and denominational bodies are oftentimes cutting continuing education budgets. But I wonder what it would be like to actually carve out some funds that the pastor is able to use in ways that the pastor might find to be most helpful and effective, not only to advance ministry but also to care for their family. What would it be like to say, you know, Pastor, we've got this particular fund that's available for you to be able to take a weekend away, just as an example? These can be in terms of large-scale sabbaticals -- Lilly Endowment certainly has a wonderful program through Christian Theological Seminary in Indianapolis for long-term sabbaticals -- but even short-term sabbaticals are helpful. The only thing I would say is that if you are sending your pastor away, or having them find support, that's great, but that support is like a field hospital if you are sending them out to get care and they're coming back into a toxic situation. So beyond just identifying Aaron and Hur or budgeting support, fixing some of the underlying problems that might be creating the toxic environment is going to be critically important. One other idea is to create an on-call rotation. If you are in a parish that has multiple staff or pastors, perhaps the load can be shared. But if not, even in a small church, perhaps you can set up a small group of trusted lay leadership that can provide help and support. So there's just a few -- just three -- practical ideas that you might be able to take back with you.

I want to provide you with one additional piece of information that is very practical, and it's one that I ran across just here a few weeks back. It comes actually out of the Mennonite church, so let me pop this over. I'm showing you the inside of the Common Table's online platform. Laura, if you've not already, just make sure to pop that link in where folks can find out more. You'll notice that in this platform we've got all kinds of things related to pastoral well-being, thriving congregations, missional presence, and organizational life -- the latest research that's coming out about clergy well-being, and strategies and ideas. We are cultivating, we're curating these together so that you don't have to look more than one place. In particular, I want to just note here The Corinthian Plan. This was a post -- this was a free

27-item checklist that congregations can use to identify gaps in their support for pastors. Again, this comes out of the Mennonite Church, but it's available on the Common Table website, and I'd highly advise you to check this out. It notes a number of key areas, and then you'll notice here there is a checklist. In terms of physical well-being: the congregation is taking steps to encourage or eliminate barriers to walking, running, biking, et cetera. Financial well-being: the congregation encourages and pays for half of financial planning consultation services -- man, isn't that a novel concept? Anyway, you just go through all of these. In terms of time, rest, and flexibility: the congregation regularly revisits and reaffirms boundaries and availability. Wouldn't that just be amazing? In terms of spiritual and emotional support, or professional and peer support -- this is just a survey of saying, how are we doing in these different areas, in terms of family support, and then, are there other ways that we can support our pastor and their well-being? You total them up -- "our congregation's well-being score is" -- and then you can track it from year to year. And then there's an interpretation guide. Basic support, 10 to 14 points: you're likely aware, and here's some next steps. If you have 15 to 20 points, you're likely offering structured feedback and support systems, but your next steps: maybe you want to meet with your pastor to prioritize additional support. You get the idea. I think that this is one particular resource that can be incredibly helpful to you, and I hope that you'll find benefit in it.

Thad Austin: So with that, I want to just say thank you so much for your attention, and I'm more than happy to take a look here in the chat and just to see if there are any questions that you have. Feel free to post those there. I did see that Jim said: "What I saw in the political graph for mainline Protestants is that the percentage of red congregants was around 14%. The number of bluish congregations increased, so there is conflict between red money people and political makeup." That's exactly right. There's much more political diversity within the congregations of mainline Protestant churches when compared to the more homogeneous political makeup of congregations that are evangelical, as an example, or Black Protestant, as another. As a result of that, there's tension that can emerge. Just as an example, let's go back to the pandemic, and do you remember all the controversy related to masking and not masking, or hosting in-person worship or not? Within more politically homogeneous congregations there might have been an assumed idea -- it's not to say that there wouldn't have been naysayers, but it might have been that the church just felt like this was the way to go and they did it. Whereas within a more heterogeneous congregation of political makeup, those warring factions begin to go at each other, and the pastor oftentimes is in the middle. So thanks so much for that, Jim.

Tim says there'd be a lot more joy, for sure, if our pastors in the church were supported. Jim mentioned one benefit of bivocational ministry is that your identity is not wrapped up in the challenges of ministry and in the increased secularization of mainline support. This is an incredibly important topic, and I'm thankful, Jim, that you've noticed this. When we look at it, actually, part-time clergy oftentimes have better health outcomes and they're more satisfied in ministry. Why is that? In some cases their financial position is better, and they have plausible deniability, so they can actually say, hey, sorry, I'm off right now. There's a lot to be learned from the folks that are in bivocational ministry. I think there's a stigma around bivocational ministry in some settings; however, bivocational pastors oftentimes are doing

better than others. The Common Table actually just hosted a webinar on this particular topic, and I have not posted it on the platform quite yet, but you're welcome to use the community platform link there, and if you sign up there we will be happy to get you more information on it. It's actually fascinating -- there's work not only out of the UCC and Hartford International, but also Briercrest Seminary in Canada. Canada has a really interesting case about bivocational ministry. One of the things I'll just mention quickly is that part of the reason they're finding that these bivocational ministers are doing better is not just because of their bivocational nature; they're finding they call it "co-vocational" -- in other words, it's not just the pastor that's bivocational, but that the congregation takes on a bivocational kind of understanding, and so people start to step up: "I'll take care of that. Pastor, I know you gotta go to work, I'll take care of that." So what would it be like, as the priesthood of all believers, if we actually relied on the body of Christ? That might create a much more happy place to be as well.

Thad Austin: All right. So Ned: most of the data seem to be from before 2020 -- is there more recent research? Certainly there is; there are studies that are coming out each and every year. You'll find a number of those actually on the Common Table website. The data that I've presented to you today are the latest nationally representative random sample survey, so it's the highest quality. If we want to think about, as an example, United Methodists in North Carolina, the Duke Clergy Health Initiative has some deep research on that. But how aligned are United Methodists in North Carolina with Episcopal priests across the nation? That's a question, and I think it's always really important to be aware. Most of the data that I've presented, however, actually is beyond 2020 -- 2024, 2025, kind of in there -- as with any sociological research that's done; obviously there's some time lag that it takes for things to get out. But I would encourage you to take a look at the Common Table website, community.commontable.network, that's in the chat. Within that, anytime there's a new study that comes out, we're posting it right there, and there's a lot certainly to be learned.

Jim mentioned one of the challenges is laity health -- the boundaries are less clear. Certainly, and this is one of the areas in terms of lay leader health where there's been some great work at the University of South Carolina. Sarah Wilcox in particular has done amazing work to look at faith activity and nutrition, particularly within congregations. Most of the studies that have been done on lay health actually are within marginalized communities, Black Protestant in particular, and one of the things that they have found is that if you want to move the needle in terms of the physical health and well-being of African American people, just as an example, the best way to do that is through their church. That's part of the reason why the National Institutes of Health and others have invested very deeply within that particular area.

So anyway, I think that comes to the conclusion of the items that I've seen related to the questions in the chat. If there are ways that I can be helpful to you, I hope that you would feel very happy to reach out. I'll just pop my contact information here on the screen so that if you would like to connect, you've got a way to do so -- there's a QR code that you can scan. I'm just so incredibly grateful for the Episcopal Parish Network and the good work that they are doing. It's really making a difference, and I'm so excited to be in partnership, and also would love to be a resource -- as well as the Common Table -- to each and every one of you. I want you to know that you do not have to work alone. Instead, I think that if we took an asset-based kind

of approach towards the issues that the church faces, whether it be finances, property, or anything else, what we would find is that the church has more money than any other nonprofit sector that exists. We have more land, more buildings, more resources, and there is actually more support available to pastors than any other profession that exists. If we are able to integrate that all together, we can do incredible things. I've thought often about what would be the implications if Aaron and Hur had not come alongside Moses as the children of Israel were leading in battle. I don't know what it would have meant, but I've wondered, could it have delayed the entry to the promised land? What would have been the implications for the Davidic kingdom, or even the coming reign of Christ? There is support that is available, and we want to make sure to provide it to our pastors. I think that one of the single greatest threats that's facing the church is not finances, it's not secularization, it's not buildings. The question is: do we have healthy and effective leaders that can lead the church forward into the next era that God is calling us? So thank you all so much for being with us today, and I hope that you have a wonderful day.