



Pastors' Emotional Resilience Rises as Job Satisfaction Declines, New Research Finds

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While pastors' confidence in calling rebounds, fewer feel fulfilled in their day-to-day ministry

BOULDER, Colo.--(BUSINESS WIRE)--May 5, 2026-- New [research](#) from [Barna Group](#), in partnership with [Gloo](#), reveals a growing disconnect among U.S. pastors: while their emotional health and confidence in their calling are improving, overall satisfaction with pastoral vocation has fallen to a decade low. Part of the [2026 State of the Church](#) series, the findings highlight a widening gap between pastors' renewed sense of calling and their day-to-day ministry experience.

Indicators of emotional strain among pastors have declined significantly over the past decade. Feelings of inadequacy among pastors have dropped from 64% in 2023 to 44% in 2026, the lowest level Barna has recorded. Similarly, rates of emotional and mental exhaustion have decreased, with just over 60% of pastors saying they frequently or sometimes feel emotionally or mentally exhausted, compared to nearly 75% a decade ago. Energy for ministry work has also rebounded.

Additionally, pastors' confidence in their calling has recovered substantially following a sharp decline during the COVID-19 pandemic. In 2015, 66% of pastors reported feeling more confident in their calling than when they first entered ministry. That share dropped to 35% in 2020. That number has since risen to 58% in 2026.

Despite these improvements, satisfaction with pastoral vocation has steadily declined. In 2015, 72% of pastors described themselves as "very satisfied" in their role. Today, that figure stands at 52%. Meanwhile, the share who report being "somewhat satisfied" has increased to 40%, indicating a shift from strong satisfaction to more moderate levels.

A similar trend appears in pastors' views of their current church ministry. The share of pastors who say they are "very satisfied" with their role in their present church has dropped from 53% in 2015 to 43% in 2026. The share of pastors who say they are "somewhat satisfied" has risen to 43% and now represent the largest group, meaning that more pastors are now moderately rather than deeply satisfied with their work.

Separate Barna findings suggest that dissatisfaction may be tied less to exhaustion or doubt and more to the structure of the pastoral role. Pastors experiencing burnout are more likely to point to misalignment between their responsibilities and their strengths and gifts, along with limited ability to delegate responsibilities to others, rather than questioning their calling.

"Pastors are in the most emotionally healthy place they've been in a while regarding vocation," said Daniel Copeland, Barna's Vice President of Research. "But the satisfaction data suggest they may be settling into a more sustainable — but less deeply fulfilling — experience of the work itself. If they feel confident in the calling and less burdened by doubt than they've been in years, that should be encouraging. It's a moment to ask how we empower them to show us what the job of pastoring should be rather than continuing to tell them how to lead a church."

"Two things can be true at the same time. Pastors are feeling more fit to lead than at any time in recent memory, yet they seem to be telling us that the role is less of a fit for them," said Brad Hill, Chief Partner Success Officer at Gloo. "The role of pastoring today and tomorrow will likely look different than in the past. This research is a wake-up call for leaders to examine how we resource, equip, train and support pastors so they can fully live out their calling."

The detailed findings of this month's release are available [here](#). Learn more about the 2026 State of the Church initiative at gloo.com/stateofthechurch.

About the Research

Research for this article was conducted by Barna in partnership with Gloo as part of the State of the Church 2026 series. The data are drawn from surveys of U.S. senior Protestant pastors: n=900 (2015), n=408 (2020), n=584 (2022), n=523 (2023), n=551 (2024), n=507 (2026).

Each survey was conducted utilizing Barna's PastorPanel, a research community of senior Protestant pastors that is representative of churches by denomination, church size and region of the country. Each survey utilizes quotas and statistical weighting to maximize statistical representation.

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donor solutions expand reach, awareness, and long-term giving for mission-based organizations. Based in Boulder, Colorado, Gloop serves over 140,000 faith, ministry, and nonprofit leaders.

Barna Group is a leading research organization focused on the intersection of faith and culture. Since 1984, Barna has conducted more than two million interviews over the course of thousands of studies and has become a go-to source for insights about religion, leadership, vocation and generations. Barna is an independent, privately-held, nonpartisan organization based in Dallas–Fort Worth, Texas.

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