

Hope After Division:

3 Key Findings on Pastoring Beyond Disaffiliation from the Duke Clergy Health Initiative

It's been a hard but hopeful couple of years. Clergy in the two Annual Conferences of the North Carolina United Methodist Church (UMC) have had to navigate a vast sea of cultural changes. Although some waters have calmed, we can't help but be affected by the tumult.

Our Clergy Health Statewide Survey in 2023* captured clergy's positive and negative experiences related to disaffiliation, as well as a rising wave of clergy and congregational morale. Through it all, an overwhelming majority reported a feeling of hope on the horizon.

Here are three key findings:

1 POSITIVE EXPERIENCES RELATED TO DISAFFILIATION WERE COMMON.

Many clergy reported positive experiences related to disaffiliation, including **88% feeling a sense of hope that there is a future for the UMC** and 70% feeling a sense of fruitfulness and vibrancy in their congregation. Some (48%) even reported gaining church members as a result of the choice to remain UMC.



2 NEGATIVE EXPERIENCES RELATED TO DISAFFILIATION WERE COMMON.

Clergy endured a number of negative experiences related to disaffiliation, including **55% losing one or more friendships with congregants or clergy** and 39% having their integrity, faith, or theological commitment challenged by a clergy colleague. These negative experiences were significantly related to burnout and mental distress.



3 CLERGY AND CONGREGATIONAL MORALE HAVE IMPROVED.

Pastors' agreement with 'My current morale as a pastor is high' increased from 69% in 2021 to 80% in 2023, and pastors' agreement with 'The current morale of my primary congregation is high' increased from 66% in 2021 to **78% in 2023**. These are very positive signs.



*To learn more about our Clergy Health Statewide Survey, as well as the resources that have come out of it, visit our website: clergyreligionresearch.duke.edu