

Looking into the Future:

Results and Analysis of Survey Conducted of
Credentialed Assemblies of God Ministers in the
U.S. Regarding Their Projections of What
Ministry Will Be like in Ten Years.

June 2019

Mario M. Duque
David W. Barnett

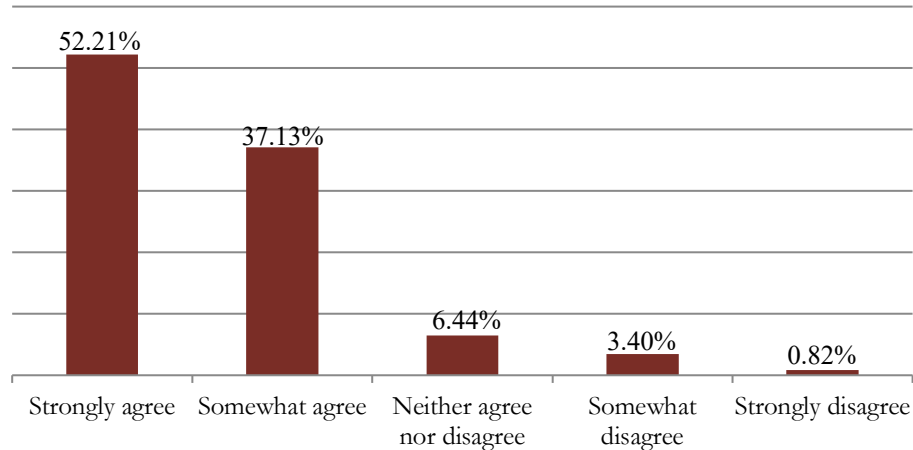
“If you were to project what ministry in the U.S.
will look like 10 years from now,
what would you predict?”

Survey responses:

Response #1

89%
predict greater
diversity

I expect significant ethnic and cultural diversity to be the new normal in ministry.



<u>Answer options</u>	Response percent	Response count
Strongly agree	52.21%	1337
Somewhat agree	37.13%	951
Neither agree nor disagree	6.44%	165
Somewhat disagree	3.40%	87
Strongly disagree	0.82%	21

Analysis

Consistently in every age category more than four out of five respondents agreed with this response. This statement had the highest level of agreement. This agreement rate was slightly higher than in the 2017 survey.

Comments

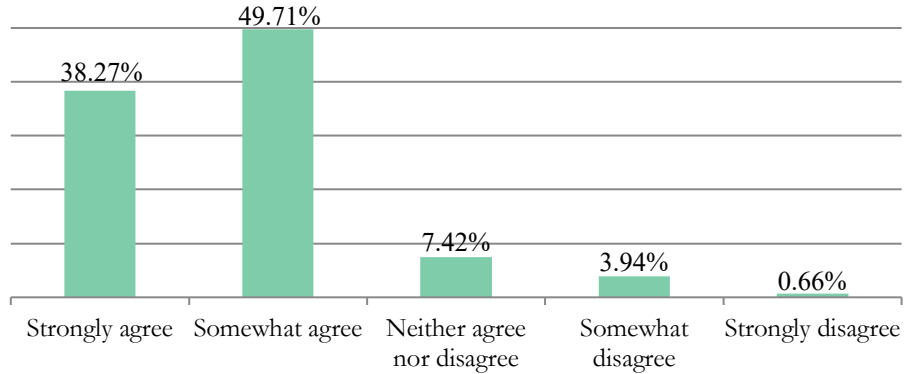
Diversity can be a difficult term to define and even more difficult to measure. The “All U.S. adults” diversity score on the Herfindahl-Hirschman index is 6.6. The AG U.S. is slightly lower, scoring a 6.2. However, the makeup of this diversity is important to recognize. The AG is equal with the general population at 66% white, more Hispanic (25% versus 15%), and lower in both black (3% compared to 12%) and Asian (<1% versus 4%).¹ As we move ahead towards what many of us believe will be a future of additional diversity, it will become more important to keep in mind where our unity lies.

¹ Lipka, Michael. “The Most and Least Racially Diverse U.S. Religious Groups.” Fact Tank News in the Numbers, July 2015. <https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2015/07/27/the-most-and-least-rationally-diverse-u-s-religious-groups/>.

Response #2

88%
expect more
specialized
and
innovated
ministry
opportunities

There will be many new and innovated ministry opportunities. Ministry will be more specialized and diverse, often tailored for specific groups or areas.



Answer options	Response percent	Response count
Strongly agree	38.27%	980
Somewhat agree	49.71%	1273
Neither agree nor disagree	7.42%	190
Somewhat disagree	3.94%	101
Strongly disagree	0.66%	17

Analysis

Responses were consistent across all demographic subgroups, but females were evenly split between “strongly agree” and “somewhat agree” (44.7% and 44.4%) while males were notably less strong in their agreement (36.3% and 51.4%).

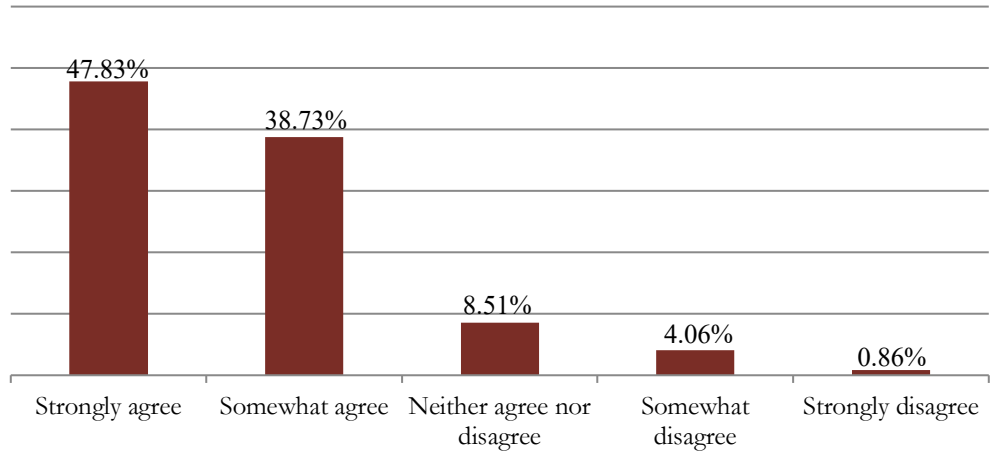
Comments

Responses reflect current cultural trends in the U.S., where target marketing based on very specific and narrow criteria is commonplace. Consider how digital advertising is delivered on websites and social media platforms, sometimes to the point of seeming completely personalized to the individual. Strength of agreement among females may represent an expectation that historical gender limitations in ministry will continue to evolve toward greater opportunities for women.

Response #3

86%
forecast more
relational,
organic,
ministry

Ministry will revolve more around
personal relations. It will be authentic,
organic, and incarnational.



<u>Answer options</u>	Response percent	Response count
Strongly agree	47.83%	1225
Somewhat agree	38.73%	992
Neither agree nor disagree	8.51%	218
Somewhat disagree	4.06%	104
Strongly disagree	0.86%	22

Analysis

There was significant difference in strength of agreement and overall agreement among age groups. Those 29 and under reported total agreement of 92.0% and favoring “strongly agree” by a 2-to-1 margin (61.5% and 30.5%), whereas ministers age 60 and over reported total agreement of 80.3% and more “somewhat agree” than “strongly agree” (38.2% and 42.1%). Male and female total agreement was almost the same, but females reported moderately higher in strength of agreement.

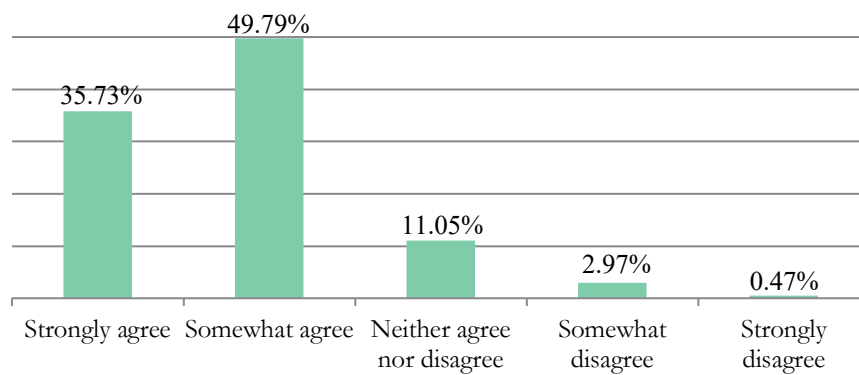
Comments

The difference of opinion by age groups regarding the importance of personal relations was somewhat expected, but the strength of opinion in the youngest age groups was remarkable; their response was the strongest of any response in the survey. The intense importance of personal relations in the younger age groups sounds a clear call to the church that the future will be increasingly relationship-driven, and the church must be prepared to minister in that context.

Response #4

85%
believe there
will be greater
opportunities
for lay
ministers and
indigenous
leaders.

Ministry will encompass more individual initiative and create greater opportunities for lay ministers and indigenous leaders.



<u>Answer options</u>	Response percent	Response count
Strongly agree	35.73%	915
Somewhat agree	49.79%	1275
Neither agree nor disagree	11.05%	283
Somewhat disagree	2.97%	76
Strongly disagree	0.47%	12

Analysis

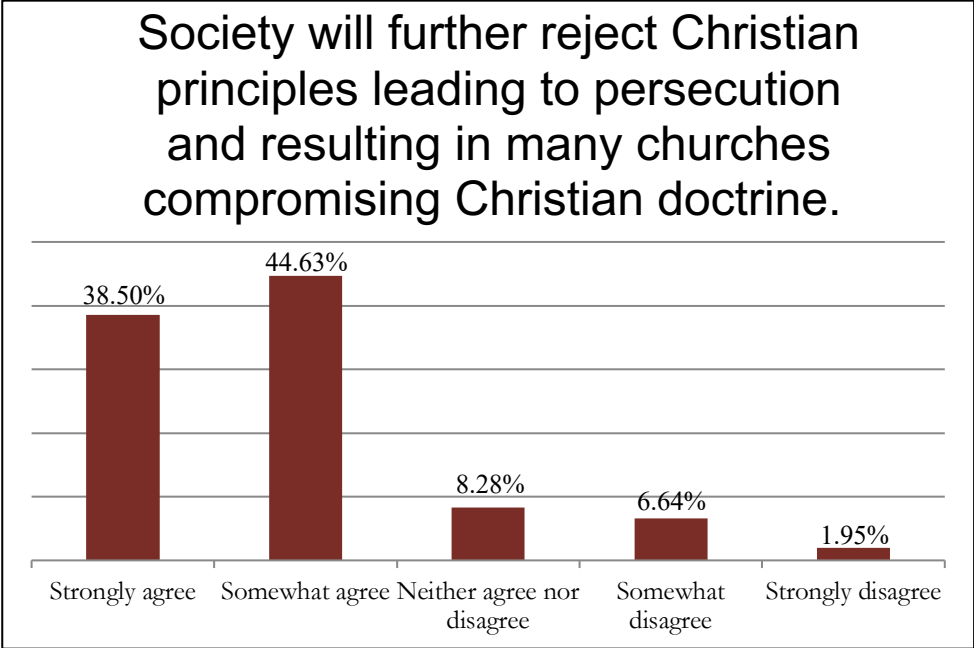
These results were consistent throughout all age groups. Female ministers were slightly stronger in their agreement. It is encouraging to note that although language specific ethnic groups are under-represented in the survey (see page 26), there was more strong agreement for this response among Asian/Pacific Islanders, Blacks, and Hispanics than among Whites.

Comments

This response combines three related issues: the individual believer, the lay minister, and indigenous leaders. A deeper study would be necessary to identify differences in each of these areas. However, the level of agreement does seem to indicate that AG ministers anticipate more diversity in both who does ministry and what kind of ministry will take place. This finding suggests two things. First, ministry training needs to be made available to more people at more levels. Ephesians 4:11-12 supports this conclusion. Second, we need to allow for additional and innovative ministry prospects. These opportunities should include the encouragement for people to be involved in ministry both within and outside of their specific group.

Response #5

83%
foresee
persecution
and
apostasy



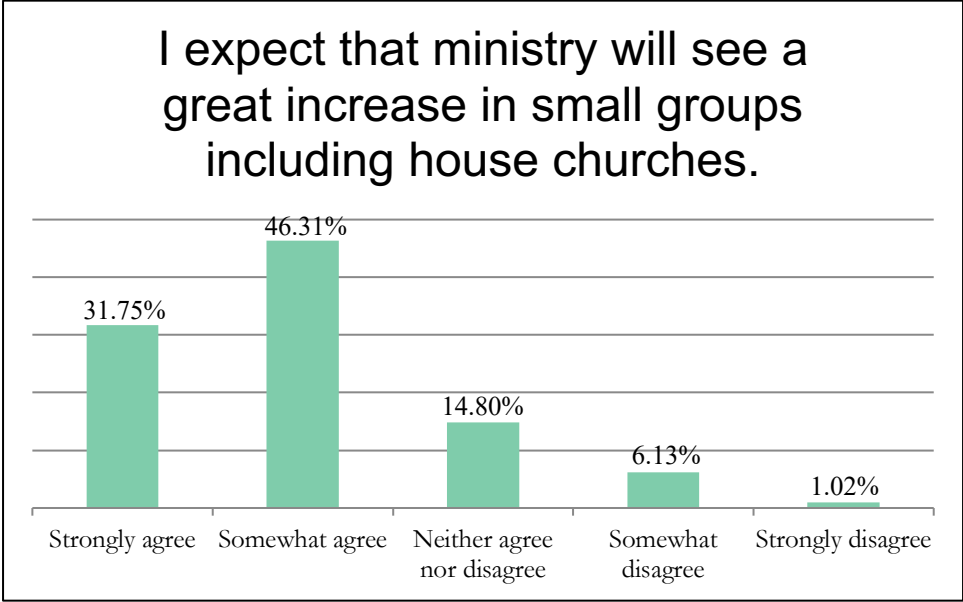
<u>Answer options</u>	Response percent	Response count
Strongly agree	38.50%	986
Somewhat agree	44.63%	1143
Neither agree nor disagree	8.28%	212
Somewhat disagree	6.64%	170
Strongly disagree	1.95%	50

Analysis
 Those who agreed with this response outnumbered those who disagreed by a ratio of more than 4 to 1. The level of agreement increased slightly by age. Compared to our previous survey’s statement on persecution agreement level was slightly lower, but this can be attributed to different wording in the response.

Comments
 Two issues that often arise from persecution are apostasy and financial hardships. The main way in which individuals or groups are punished or rewarded in a capitalistic society is economically. Future ministry will need to function with less income and greater expenses. Greater biblical literacy will be needed to combat false doctrines. The Church needs to prepare for ministry in a country in which Christians no longer enjoy a “home field advantage.”

Response #6

78%
predict
more small
groups and
house
churches



Answer options	Response percent	Response count
Strongly agree	31.75%	813
Somewhat agree	46.31%	1186
Neither agree nor disagree	14.80%	379
Somewhat disagree	6.13%	157
Strongly disagree	1.02%	26

Analysis

This response encountered a 78% agreement level. Younger groups agreed at a slightly higher rate and expressed more strong agreement. This was a significant increase from a similarly worded statement two years ago which found that only 35% of respondents agreed that “ministry will move to a small group format almost exclusively.”

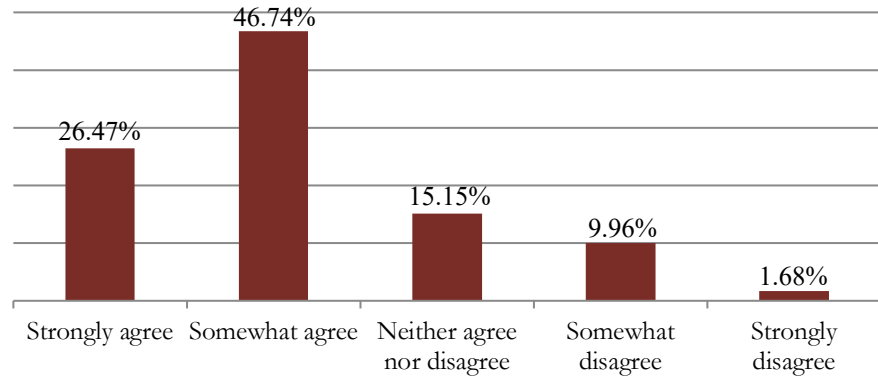
Comments

The belief that small groups will be a key ingredient to successful future ministry incurred the largest boost of any response. Possible reasons may be the wording change to include the term “house churches” and also the inclusion of licensed ministers, which provided more respondents from a younger demographic. However, no other single theme saw such a dramatic change in agreement rate. It could be a combination of the aforementioned as well as an increase in social isolation due to technology combined with a greater yearning for meaningful relationships. Small groups have been popular outside the U.S. but resisted within our nation. Although it is too soon to tell if there is a change of attitude in this area, Americans’ responsiveness to small groups and house churches could be changing. Furthermore, economic challenges and the secularization of society might be making these alternatives more attractive.

Response #7

73%
expect more
localized
direction

Hierarchical church organizational influence will decrease, and localized direction will increase.



Answer options

	Response percent	Response count
Strongly agree	26.47%	678
Somewhat agree	46.74%	1197
Neither agree nor disagree	15.15%	388
Somewhat disagree	9.96%	255
Strongly disagree	1.68%	43

Analysis

Over 73% of respondents agree with this prediction while less than 12% disagree. There was no previous survey theme that corresponds with this statement. Agreement level generally increases with age. While only 67% of ministers under 30 agree, more than 75% of ministers over 60 agree with this prediction.

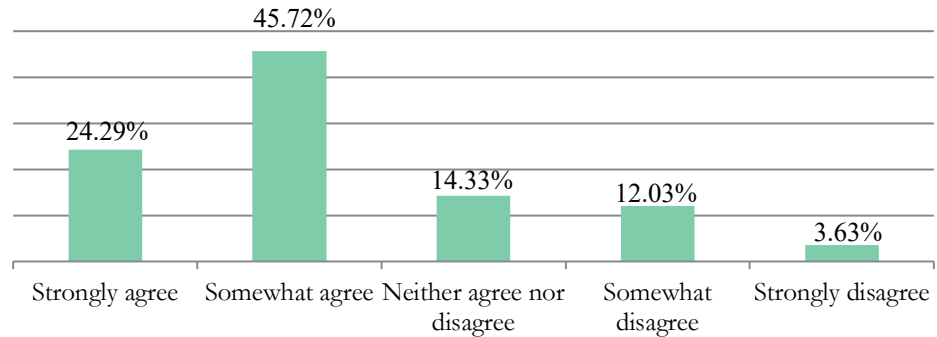
Comments

This issue was the most difficult theme for the researchers to formulate. Some of the comments on the initial open-ended survey were very strong in expressing their belief that denominations and national entities will have diminished influence. Some believe that in their place affinity networks will arise. (The researchers use the designation “network” in its generic meaning and are not necessarily relating our comments to former districts who now use the network label.) Generally speaking networks are united by practice and style while denominations are joined by doctrine.

Response #8

70%
foresee more
adherents
watching
online

Churches will greatly expand their online ministries including a virtual church. This will lead to a much greater percentage of adherents choosing to attend virtual services rather than in person.



<u>Answer options</u>	Response percent	Response count
Strongly agree	24.29%	622
Somewhat agree	45.72%	1171
Neither agree nor disagree	14.33%	367
Somewhat disagree	12.03%	308
Strongly disagree	3.63%	93

Analysis

Although total agreement was fairly robust at 70%, strength of agreement was modest.

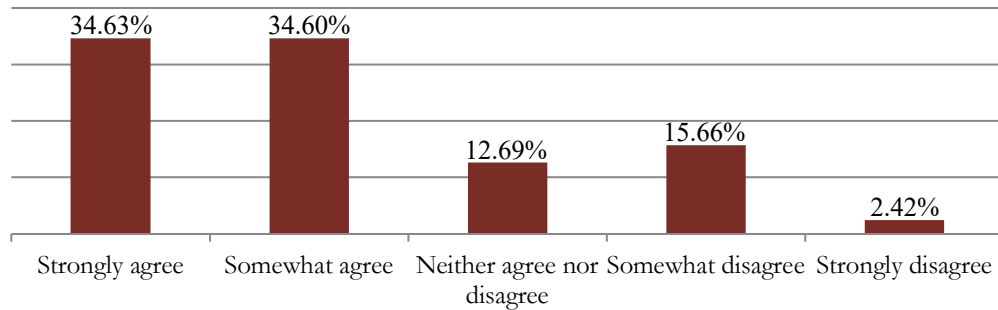
Comments

This question has interesting implications when considered together with Response #15 regarding church attendance. There appears to be a concern that traditional church participation will give way to virtual participation. Conventional wisdom would suggest that younger age groups would have higher agreement toward technology-driven ministry, but the responses were mostly even across age bands. Perhaps the strength of agreement reflects an underlying sense that virtual church will support rather than supplant traditional services.

Response #9

69% believe that there will be a greater move of the Spirit

Ministry will have a strong emphasis on being Spirit-led and Spirit-empowered, which will result in supernatural manifestations, a spiritual awakening, and transcendent worship.



<u>Answer options</u>	Response percent	Response count
Strongly agree	34.63%	887
Somewhat agree	34.60%	886
Neither agree nor disagree	12.69%	325
Somewhat disagree	15.66%	401
Strongly disagree	2.42%	62

Analysis

Two years ago over 75% of respondents agreed with the statement “I suspect that supernatural manifestations of the Spirit will be a significant characteristic of ministry.” The belief that there is a move of the Holy Spirit coming continues to hold much support. This belief is stronger among the youngest and oldest demographic.

Comments

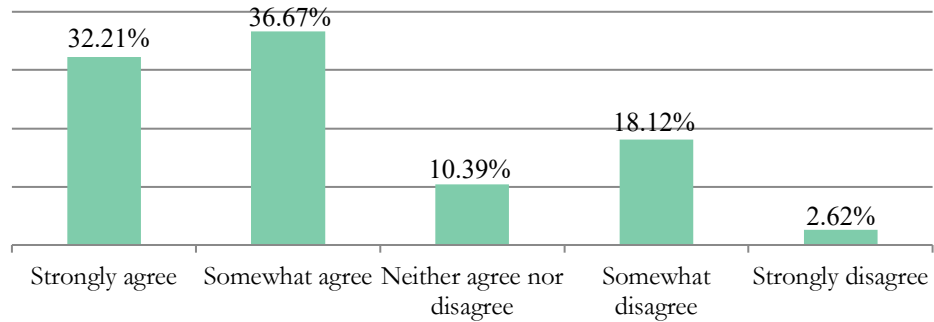
There is obviously a belief that the future will bring more supernatural manifestations. It is not surprising that the younger generation especially foresees the miraculous happening more frequently. Today’s media is replete with super humans, the walking dead, zombies, vampires, and other previously normal people who evolved or were somehow affected and took on supernatural qualities. The real issue is from what source will the paranormal emanate? If the Pentecostal Church initiates and prepares ministers for the supernatural manifestations of the Holy Spirit, and God grants such manifestations, then there will be a generation of ministers who are truly endowed with signs and wonders following their ministry. If the churches fail to provide this teaching the expectation will endure, creating a vacuum that the secular worldly society will attempt to fill absent of the third person of the Trinity.²

² These comments were included in the initial survey report of 2017.

Response #10

69%
expect the
next
generation to
carry on

The generation that follows will be willing and able to properly continue the mission and ministry of the church.



Answer options	Response percent	Response count
Strongly agree	32.21%	825
Somewhat agree	36.67%	939
Neither agree nor disagree	10.39%	266
Somewhat disagree	18.12%	464
Strongly disagree	2.62%	67

Analysis

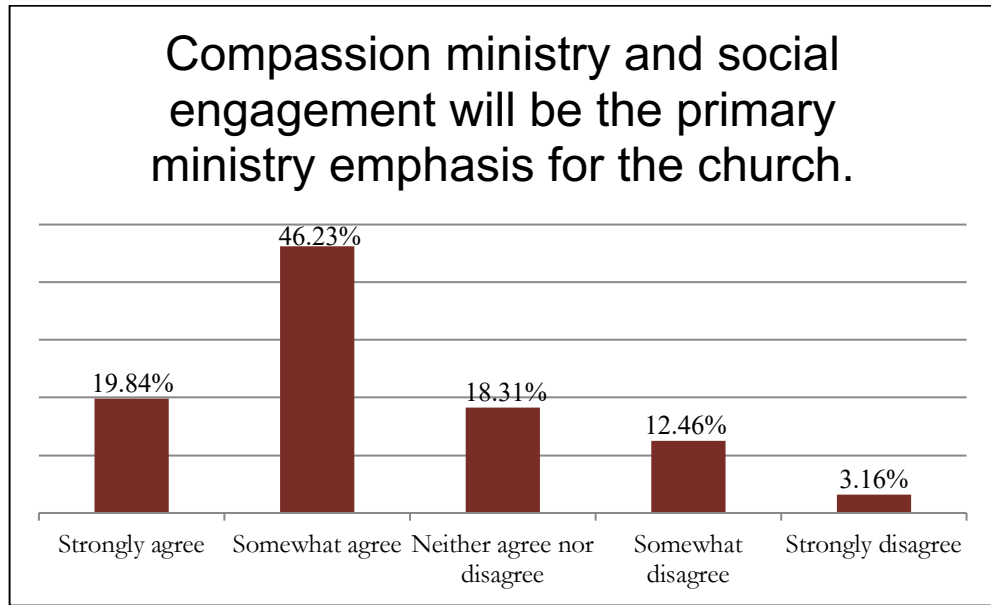
This question showed a very wide difference in response between age groups. The 29 and under age group had total agreement of 78.1% with strong agreement of 45.5%, whereas the 60 to 69 age group had total agreement of only 63.1% and strong agreement of just 26.3%.

Comments

This question reflects a wide and vitally important gap in opinion that desperately needs to be addressed for the future vitality of ministry. The generation just entering ministry demonstrates confidence in their ability to lead in the future, while the generation nearing or at retirement shows relatively weak agreement. Is the gap simply one of perception? Or are there legitimate concerns and obstacles that are obvious to those with greater ministry experience but oblivious to those with less?

Response #11

66%
forecast more
compassion
ministries



Answer options	Response percent	Response count
Strongly agree	19.84%	508
Somewhat agree	46.23%	1184
Neither agree nor disagree	18.31%	469
Somewhat disagree	12.46%	319
Strongly disagree	3.16%	81

Analysis

This response had great overall agreement level (66%). This consensus held true for every demographic group categorized. The two youngest age groups indicated greater strong agreement.

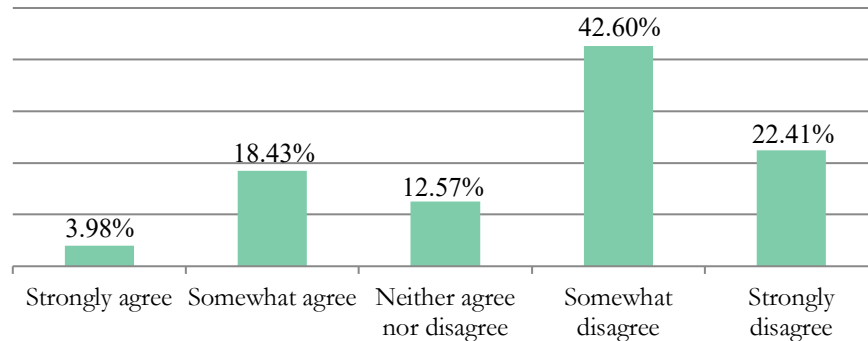
Comments

There is no question that compassion ministry, community involvement, and social justice issues have taken a greater role in church ministry and in society at large. Much good has resulted from this. A question to consider is whether the church is leading this cause or simply following a new societal norm. The commandment for the believer is not just to help the poor and marginalized, but to actually care about their standing, especially spiritually. In the public arena compassionate causes have become a marketing ploy. Tugging on the heartstrings of well-meaning people, especially the younger folk, companies and organizations will take on a social justice issue to increase their bottom line or add followers. It is crucial that Christian ministries care about the people more than the cause, and that biblical principles of love and concern be taught along with calls to action.

Response #12

65%
do not think
that our
current
training
structures
are adequate
for the future

Our current methods and structures for ministry training and development will be adequate to prepare people for ministry ten years from now.



<u>Answer options</u>	Response percent	Response count
Strongly agree	3.98%	102
Somewhat agree	18.43%	472
Neither agree nor disagree	12.57%	322
Somewhat disagree	42.60%	1091
Strongly disagree	22.41%	574

Analysis

This response is one of only two in the entire survey with majority disagreement. Two-thirds of ministers believe that our current approaches to ministry training and development will not be adequate to meet the need in the future. Suburban ministers disagreed at 68.5%, compared to 59.4% of rural ministers. Ministers in the 30 to 39 age group had the highest total disagreement at 71.5%, with 30.0% strong disagreement, by far the highest levels of disagreement in the entire survey and for any demographic subset.

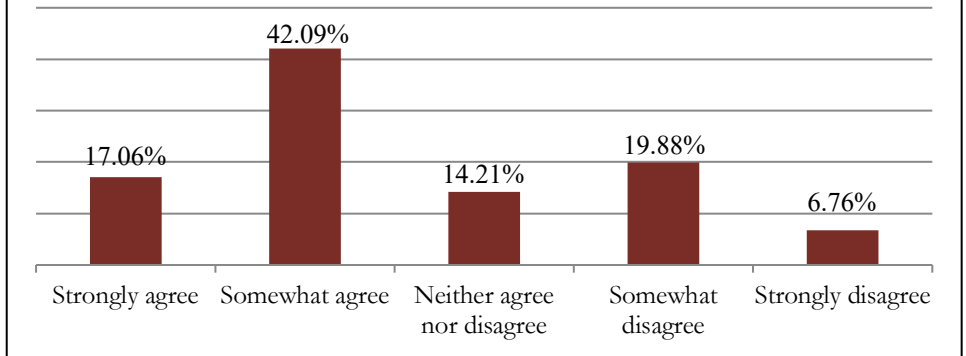
Comments

When taken into consideration with Response #10 regarding the next generation’s ability to lead, there is an enormous disconnect between AG ministers’ expectations for the future and their confidence in the means and methods of preparation for it. It is remarkable that the 30 to 39 age group shows the strongest disagreement, since this is the age band that most represents ministers trained and launched into ministry in the last 10 to 20 years. We believe that this response reflects an urgent need for the fellowship to give acute attention to our systems and processes for ministry training and development.

Response #13

59%
foresee more
bi-vocational
ministry

Financial challenges will require most pastors to be bi-vocational rather than supported solely by the congregation.



<u>Answer options</u>	Response percent	Response count
Strongly agree	17.06%	437
Somewhat agree	42.09%	1078
Neither agree nor disagree	14.21%	364
Somewhat disagree	19.88%	509
Strongly disagree	6.76%	173

Analysis

Just under 60% agree with this response. Although every group identified had a majority of respondents agree with this statement, there were some noticeable differences. Agreement levels were lowest among male, white, suburban respondents. Every identified ethnic minority group had higher strong agreement levels as well as higher overall agreement. Female respondents also had higher levels of both strong and overall agreement. Urban ministers agreed more than rural ministers. Rural ministers agreed at higher rates than suburban ministers.

Comments

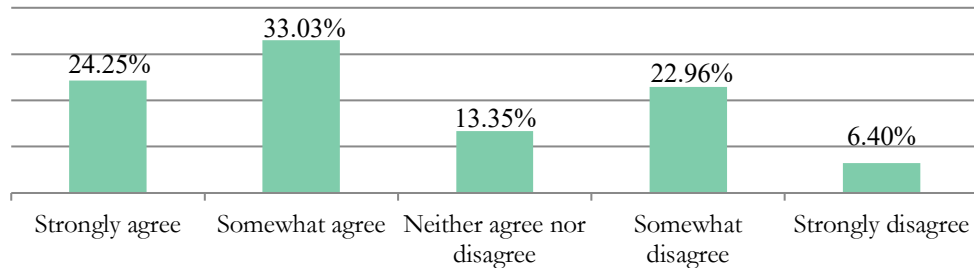
Currently more than a third of senior AG pastors and almost half of church staff works an additional job.³ Many ministers who would not label themselves “bi-vocational” have multiple revenue streams. This factuality is expected to increase and is even preferred by an increasing number of ministers. There are two factors that can be addressed in order to serve this increasing number of ministers. First, we can provide proper training and encouragement for fruitful and fulfilling dual income ministry. Second, we need to remove the stigma often associated with being bi-vocational.

³ Based on self-reported data (AG Ministers and Finances Report 2016, Office of the General Treasurer).

Response #14

57%
expect more
division

I suspect that there will be a significantly increasing disconnect between believers and non-believers in the community.



<u>Answer options</u>	Response percent	Response count
Strongly agree	24.25%	621
Somewhat agree	33.03%	846
Neither agree nor disagree	13.35%	342
Somewhat disagree	22.96%	588
Strongly disagree	6.40%	164

Analysis

There was mostly agreement with this response, but the levels did show differences between some groups. Overall white respondents agreed at a lower level than those of other ethnic groupings. The biggest difference was in the age breakdowns where there was a continual increase in agreement levels as the age increased. Ministers under 30 had more disagreement than agreement with this response. Those in their 30s were nearly split (44% agreed while 41% disagreed). Older age groups agreed by 20 to 40 percentage points.

Comments

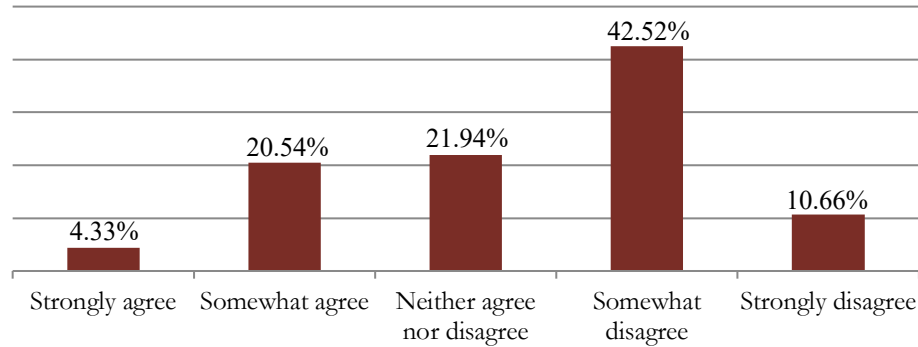
Most respondents agree that there will be a continual disconnect between believers and non-believers in American society. It may be that older generations have seen this bifurcation intensify over time and are therefore more inclined to predict that this split will continue. It is likewise possible that minorities see the disharmony in their communities more than the majority group. As the Church in America moves forward its relations with the general culture needs to be examined. Where there is a disconnect ministers must find new ways to present an incarnate gospel that does not compromise its essentials. Where there is coherence ministers will need to do some self-examination to determine if there is spiritual victory or religious capitulation.

Response #15

53%

do not expect adherents to attend more frequently

Adherent's attendance and involvement in church activities will greatly increase.



Answer options

	Response percent	Response count
Strongly agree	4.33%	111
Somewhat agree	20.54%	526
Neither agree nor disagree	21.94%	562
Somewhat disagree	42.52%	1089
Strongly disagree	10.66%	273

Analysis

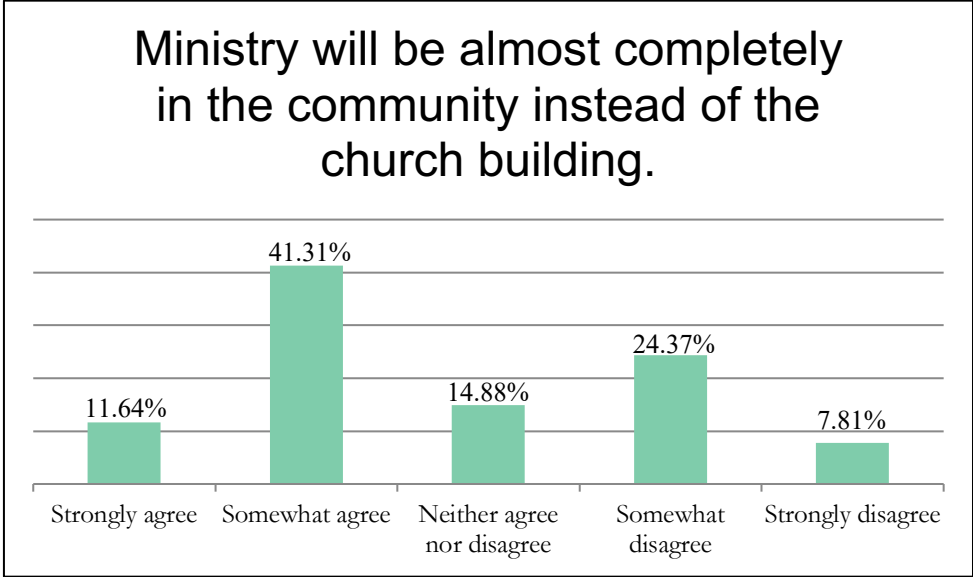
This response shows the least strong opinions (15.0% strongly positive or negative) and most neutral opinion (21.9%) of the entire survey. The 20 to 29 (54.0%) and 70 and older (60.2%) age groups were over half in agreement or neutral, while the middle age groups were over half in disagreement or neutral.

Comments

While clearly there is concern among ministers that adherent attendance and involvement may decline, the weakness of opinion would indicate that the concerns are modest. The fact that the youngest age group responded relatively more positively is consistent with current cultural trends among Millennials to value personal relationship and face-to-face interaction, which can be realized through personal church attendance and participation.

Response #16

53%
 Predict more
 community
 involvement



<u>Answer options</u>	Response percent	Response count
Strongly agree	11.64%	298
Somewhat agree	41.31%	1058
Neither agree nor disagree	14.88%	381
Somewhat disagree	24.37%	624
Strongly disagree	7.81%	200

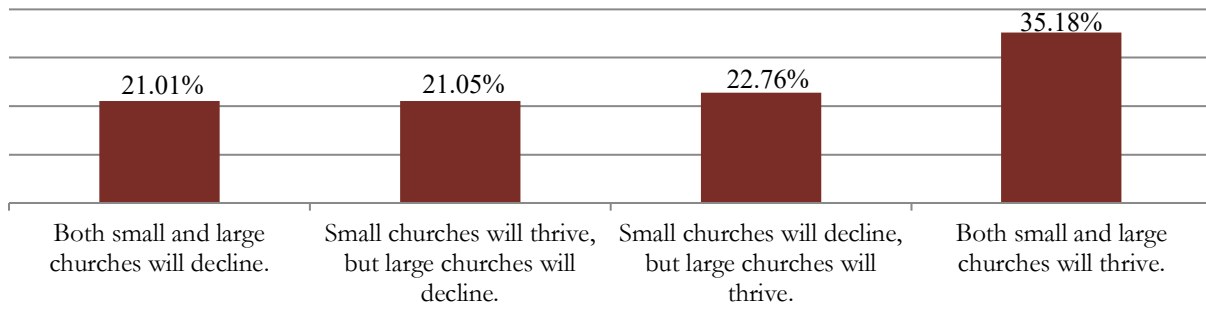
Analysis

While less than 12% strongly agreed with this response a majority of the total respondents did agree (nearly 53%) and only 32% disagreed. These numbers were fairly consistent across the different age groupings. The belief that future ministry will be out in the community more was stronger among minorities, females, and those in urban areas.

Comments

It seems clear that a majority of the ministers believe more ministry will take place in the “marketplace” outside of traditional church times and places. It is imperative that ministers be prepared to operate in these arenas and to train others to do likewise. Differences among ethnic groups and environments should be adequately studied before advocating for “best practices” across the spectrum.

Which of the following best describes your expectation for churches ten years from now:



Answer choices

Responses

Both small and large churches will decline.	21.01%	538
Small churches will thrive, but large churches will decline.	21.05%	539
Small churches will decline, but large churches will thrive.	22.76%	583
Both small and large churches will thrive.	35.18%	901

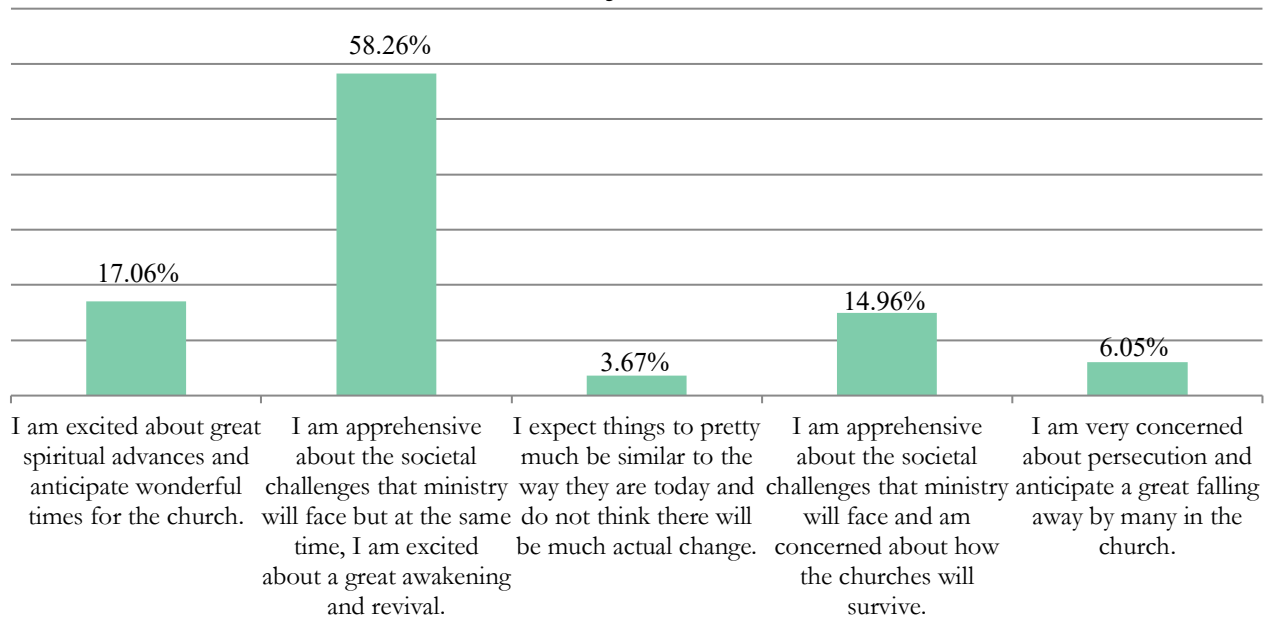
Analysis

Overall there is an optimism in the ability for at least some churches to thrive. More than a third of respondents expect both small and large churches to thrive. When answers are combined 56% expect small churches to thrive and 58% predict that large churches will prosper. Minorities seemed to be a bit more optimistic than whites. Hispanics and blacks have a more positive outlook particularly in the opportunity for small churches to thrive (68% and 67% respectively). Female ministers were a little more optimistic overall than males were. Optimism in all categories diminished slightly with age. There was no significant difference based on environs.

Comments

The emergence of the megachurch has changed what constitutes a “large” church perhaps for all times. Overall 56% see no difference based on size while almost 44% think that size will make the difference in whether or not a church will thrive. In order to draw deeper conclusions on what ministers’ expectations are, there would need to be further research that specifically looks at what those in small and large churches see as their future. These results could have been presented in a negative tone by stating that 64% expect at least one category to decline, however, it is more accurate to note that more than three quarters expect at least one church size to experience increase.

Overall, as I think about what ministry will be like in 10 years,



Answer choices

I am excited about great spiritual advances and anticipate wonderful times for the church.

Responses

17.06% 437

I am apprehensive about the societal challenges that ministry will face but at the same time, I am excited about a great awakening and revival.

58.26% 1492

I expect things to pretty much be similar to the way they are today and do not think there will be much actual change.

3.67% 94

I am apprehensive about the societal challenges that ministry will face and am concerned about how the churches will survive.

14.96% 383

I am very concerned about persecution and anticipate a great falling away by many in the church.

6.05% 155

Analysis

Overall outlook on the future of ministry is positive. More than 75% of respondents replied that they are excited about ministry ten years from now even if they are apprehensive about some of the conditions. Only slight statistical differences were found when comparing the different demographic groups.

Comments

While reading the responses to the open-ended question on the initial survey, the researchers noticed a number of ministers who mentioned their concerns about what the next ten years will bring while at the same time expressing their passion for being a part of an expected national revival and awakening. The larger study upheld this outlook. This enthusiasm should be cultivated to help produce a burgeoning harvest of ministers eager to experience a great move of God in our nation.

Ten years from now Christian love will best be expressed by:

- Top ten responses:**
1. Compassion
 2. Relationship
 3. Action
 4. Service
 5. Community
 6. Caring
 7. Love
 8. Compassion ministry
 9. Serving
 10. Personal relationships



Analysis

Responses to this question were open-ended, with a 25-word limit. The graph above is a word cloud for which the relative size of the word represents the frequency of the word’s appearance in the responses—the larger the word, the more frequently it appears.

Comments

Christian Love and related love words did not widely appear in the open-ended responses of the first survey. The researchers added this question as a “wild card” on the consideration that love has great scriptural support as the basis for ministry. The top ten responses (delineated in the box above) definitely are consistent with the opinions expressed elsewhere in the survey responses.

Ten years from now ministry will best be described as:

- Top ten responses:**
1. Relational
 2. Community
 3. Personal
 4. Love
 5. Discipleship
 6. Authentic
 7. Service
 8. Relationships
 9. Challenging
 10. Compassion

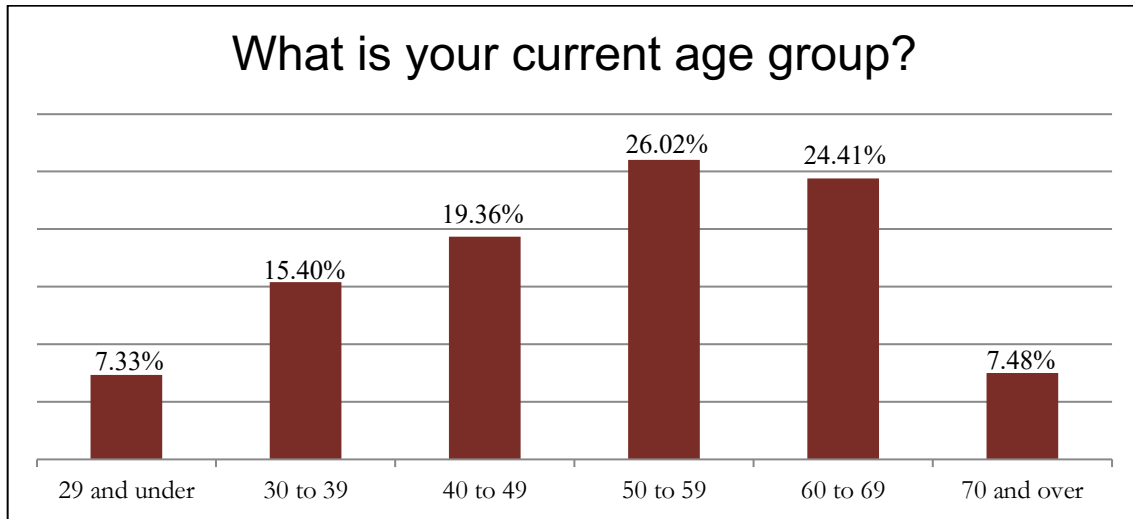


Analysis

This question used the same open-ended format as the previous question regarding Christian love, and data is represented graphically using a word cloud.

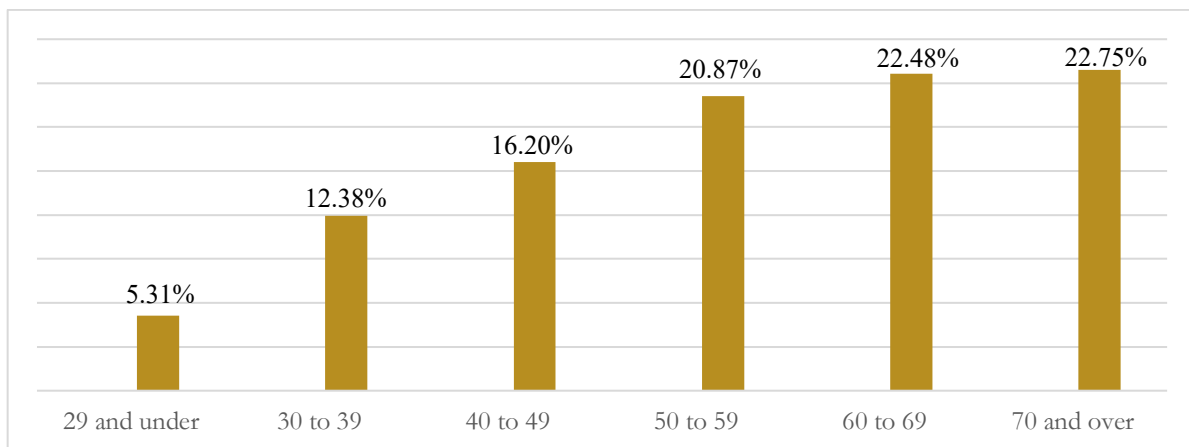
Comments

The researchers included this question to get an idea of the respondent's overall outlook for the future and to identify the concepts that were most prevalent in people's thinking. Consistent with the other survey responses, concepts of relationship, community, authenticity, and service have a significant presence in this response.

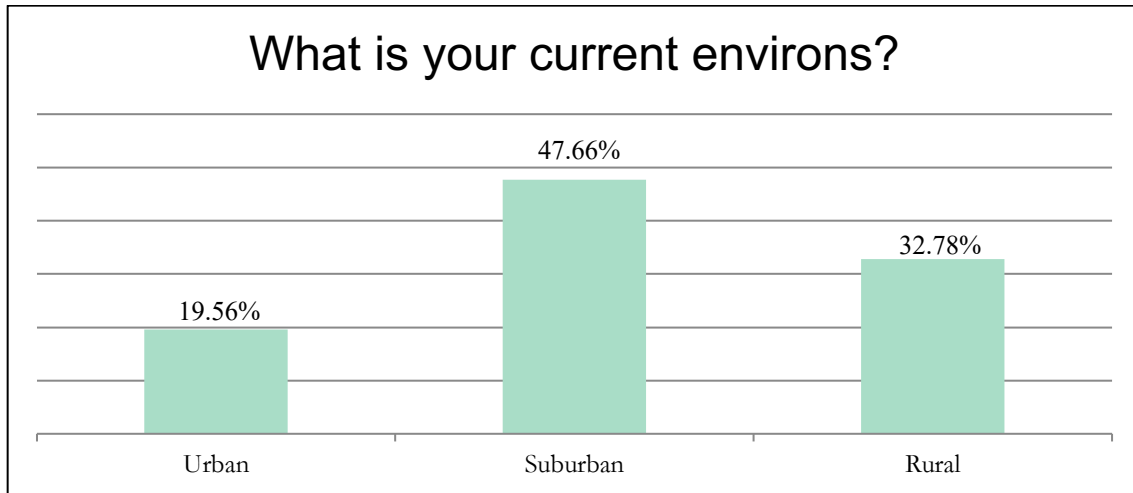


<u>Answer options</u>	Response percent	Response count
29 and under	7.33%	187
30 to 39	15.40%	393
40 to 49	19.36%	494
50 to 59	26.02%	664
60 to 69	24.41%	623
70 and over	7.48%	191

AG credentialed ministers by age group 2018



All age groups were fairly represented with the exception of the 70 and over category.



<u>Answer options</u>	Response percent	Response count
Urban	19.56%	497
Suburban	47.66%	1211
Rural	32.78%	833

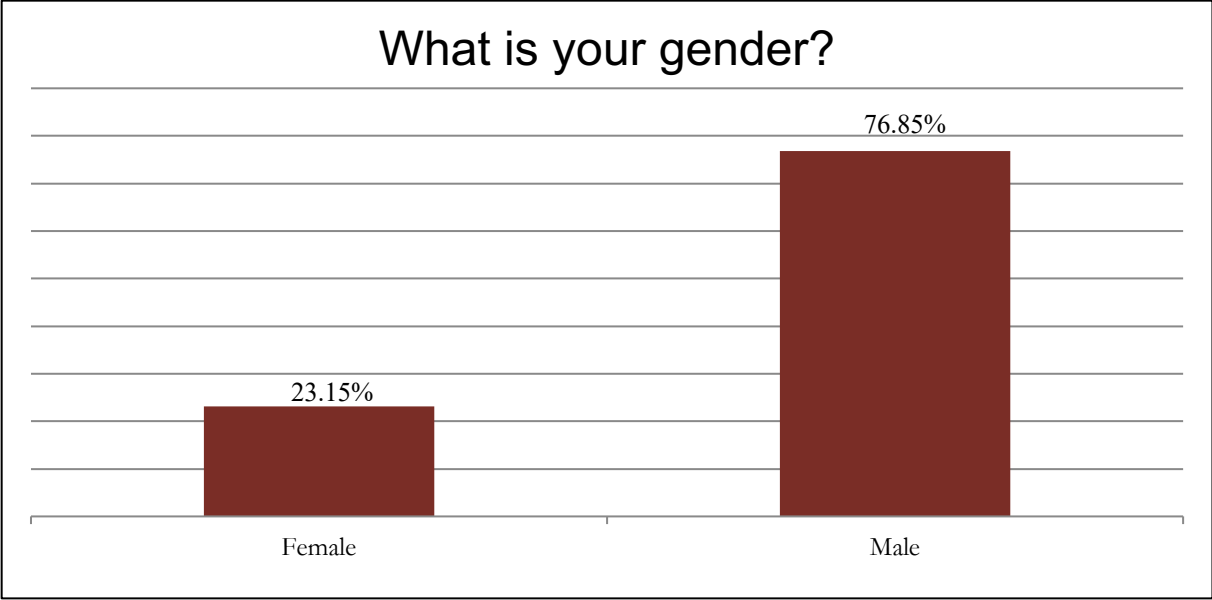
2016 U.S. population by environs⁴

	Millions	%
Urban	98	30.72
Sub	175	54.86
Rural	46	14.42
Total	319	100

Comments

The three different environs were not defined in our survey. The results are based on the self-identification of the respondents. Furthermore, environs data is not available for AG ministers. If our respondent rate is representative of AG ministers as a whole, the percentage of ministers in urban areas is significantly lower than the overall U.S. population and the rural ministers are more than twice that of the general population. These preliminary findings are insufficient for any action, however, these findings may be cause for further research into the environs placements of AG ministers throughout the U.S. Furthermore, geographic proximity allows for a single minister to have greater contacts in a concentrated higher population environment than in an area where the residents are more spread out.

⁴ Parker, Kim, Juliana Menasce Horowitz, Anna Brown, Richard Fry, D'vera Cohn, and Ruth Igielnik. "What Unites and Divides Urban, Suburban, and Rural Communities." *Pew Research Center*. Accessed May 22, 2018. <https://www.pewsocialtrends.org/2018/05/22/what-unites-and-divides-urban-suburban-and-rural-communities/>.

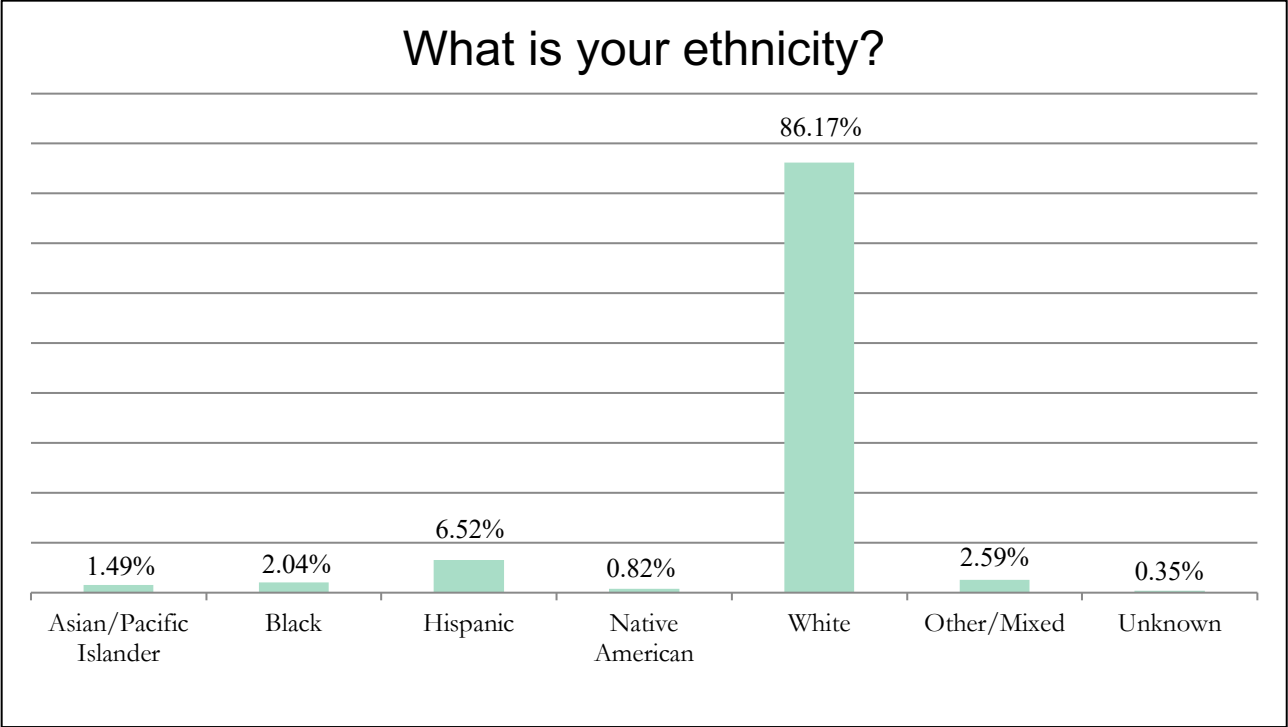


<u>Answer choices</u>	Responses	
Female	23.15%	588
Male	76.85%	1952

Comments

Female ministers’ response rate was very representative at 23.15% of respondents compared to 23.72% of the licensed and ordained ministers total. When certified ministers are included female ministers make up 25% of our total credentialed ministers (2018). The total number of female ministers in the AG is increasing with a net gain of 347 (2018 compared to 2017). Male ministers saw a slight net loss of -150 during this same time period.⁵

⁵ Assemblies of God General Secretary’s Office, Statistics. “AG USA Ministers Report, 2018: Credentials, Marital, and Ministry Status by Gender.” May, 2019.



<u>Answer choices</u>	Responses	
Asian/Pacific Islander	1.49%	38
Black	2.04%	52
Hispanic	6.52%	166
Native American	0.82%	21
White	86.17%	2194
Other/Mixed	2.59%	66
Unknown	0.35%	9

Comments

Language specific ethnic groups were underrepresented in our study. Asian/Pacific Islanders are 3.1% of AG credentialed ministers and had a response rate of 1.49% in our study. Hispanics make up 13.8% of the ministerial roll but responded to this survey at a rate of only 6.52%.⁶ The General Secretary’s numbers include Certified Ministers whereas our survey was sent only to ordained and licensed ministers. This might account for the lower rate in this current study. Where applicable the researchers have noted differences between ethnic groups.

⁶ Assemblies of God General Secretary’s Office, Statistics. “AG USA Ministers by Race: 2001 to 2017.” April, 2018.

The Purpose of this study

Every decade or two brings monumental changes to society. As such, the way people respond to ministry changes. Ministry then responds in kind in order to continue its effectiveness. Sometimes the cultural changes catch churches unaware and ministry opportunities are missed. When this happens the church occasionally follows the lead of the secular society and at best is limited in its effectiveness. At worst heresy arises. The purpose of this study is to look ahead with the intention to understand these times, the times coming, and to know what the Church ought to do.

The book of Ecclesiastes states that there really is not anything truly new (1:9). Yet, the more things remain the same the more they change. Human-created culture will continue to be corrupted due to the Fall. How this corruption is revealed will change. People will still sin and fall short of God's glory. How these sins are manifested may be different. Souls will continue to be reached with the Gospel message and believers will still need to be disciplined in the ways of Christ. How to best communicate the unchanging Message and how to demonstrate the eternal love of God will need adjustments.

Most ministers are fairly good at learning their environment. Pastors especially look at their communities and recognize the needs (real and felt), have a vision for what God wants to see happen, and can institute a process to minister to those God gives them. To identify broader national movements, however, requires categorizing as many of these local developments as possible, connecting the dots, and then recognizing the trends. What the Holy Spirit is doing in a church or in a community may be an individualized case. When the Holy Spirit is showing something repeatedly to many ministers across the nation it is proper to say that a trend is emerging.

The purpose of this report is to begin an examination into what Assemblies of God ministers across the United States believe the Holy Spirit is showing them regarding this society and how to effectively minister in and to it in the next ten years. This information will be valuable as training, preparation, and planning takes place. The Church will find safety in making plans based on the foresight of a multitude of counselors.

Conclusions

The purpose of this report has been to get a glimpse of what ministry is expected to be like in the year 2029. The analyses and comments presented here are initial and limited in scope to the authors' collective context and experience. The data represent a consensus of ministers, each of which has his or her own ministry perspective. In keeping with the principles of the AG this report has sought to present the assessment of many and not just a few. There are six areas in which respondents agree on the future forecast at a rate of 7- to 8- for each one who disagrees. These six responses can be matched into three pairs.

An overwhelming 87% of the respondents believe there will be greater persecution and government interference, and 73% expect greater polarization between believers and non-believers. Some sociologists are indicating there is a growing intolerance to opposing viewpoints in American society.⁷ They blame this at least in part on social media and point to the latest presidential election result and its aftermath as signifiers. Technology is making it possible for people to engage in self-selection, effectively filtering out any contrary opinion. Without exposure to different beliefs, any voice that conflicts with the held opinion is deemed erroneous and needs to be eradicated. David Kinnaman⁸ (president of Barna Group) states in his latest book *Good Faith* that Christians are increasingly viewed as irrelevant and as extremist. Intolerance and polarization will thereby provide the base for persecution of Christians and Christian expression. Ministers must be prepared to operate in an increasingly hostile environment.

By very similar margins most of the respondents believe ministry will include more diversity (89%) and be more relational (86%). These two aspects have the potential for overcoming the concerns mentioned above. Ministry based on personal relations, and that crosses cultural divides, can overcome polarizing inclinations. People tend to be anxious about the unknown. Ministry that becomes personal will dispel this fear and create a more agreeable environment for producing what the Bible terms "good soil." Ministers need to recognize how they can remain true to the Gospel while connecting with those who oppose it.

The third pair of statements which received very high agreement levels were that ministry will be more technological (70%) and that there will be more supernatural manifestations (69%). At first, technology and the supernatural may seem to be on opposite ends of the spectrum. However, it is technology that is feeding this desire for the transcendent, especially as it is portrayed in movies and television. Society is beginning to appreciate the limitations of science and technology to provide sufficient answers for human experience. Acceptance of, if not outright belief in, the supernatural is growing. This does not necessarily mean that people are becoming more open to the Holy Spirit, but rather they are believing more in that which is otherworldly. Absent of a true Pentecostal move of God, this desire for supernatural manifestations will find satisfaction in the occult, paganism, and science fiction. The Church needs to prepare itself by looking at past Pentecostal movements and seeking God for new wonders.

⁷ Prado, C. G., ed. *Social Media and Your Brain: Web-Based Communication Is Changing How We Think and Express Ourselves*. Santa Barbara, California: Praeger, An Imprint of ABC-CLIO, LLC, 2017.

⁸ Kinnaman, D. (2016). *Good faith: Being a Christian when society thinks you're irrelevant and extreme*. Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Books.

Methodology

The research presented in this paper is a two-part mixed methods study comprising two surveys, with the first survey establishing range and the second survey establishing frequency.

The first survey included one open-ended question: *Based on your current ministry and observations, what will ministry in the U.S. be like 10 years from now?* An email invitation to take the survey was sent to 1,000 ordained and 500 licensed Assemblies of God ministers.⁹ There were 194 respondents. The survey format allowed the respondent to enter a narrative response. Response lengths ranged from one or two words to over 600 words, with an average response length of 77 words. Using the qualitative research coding method proposed by Gioia et al,¹⁰ we coded the narrative data, looking for key words, phrases, and concepts. From the coding, we identified 79 unique themes with saturation taking place at 178 responses. Further saturation measurements are as follows:

- 35 themes >2, saturation at 125
- 29 themes >3, saturation at 107
- 18 themes >5, saturation at 53

After we identified the themes, we then considered their relative materiality, and eliminated themes for which there were not two or more unique occurrences in the responses. As a result, we narrowed our consideration to 50 themes. We then looked for conceptual relationships among the 50 themes and refined them into 17 meta-themes that served as the basis for the questions in the second survey. We also noted the absence of several themes that were not mentioned in the responses but are commonly discussed ministry concepts.

The second survey consisted of 20 questions plus demographic data. Demographic data collected includes Age Group, Gender, Environs, Ethnicity, and AG District. This survey was sent to approximately 21,000 credentialed AG ministers. There were 2,561 completed surveys. This response gives the second survey a margin of error of 2% at a 95% confidence level. When available data for demographics are considered the survey is very representative of the Assemblies of God in the U.S. with two exceptions: ministers over 70 and language-specific ethnic groups are both under-represented.

Seventeen questions were factual statements that offered an answer, predicated on one of the meta-themes, to the open-ended question from the first survey. For 16 of the questions, responses were limited to a 5-point Likert scale range, from Strongly Agree to Strongly Disagree. One question relating to the meta-theme of church growth potential by size (small or large) offered four choices: +/+, +/-, -/+, and -/-. We included one question to measure overall outlook with four answers representing emotional statements about the future. We also included two open-ended short-answer questions: one based on Christian love (a theme that was absent or under-represented in the first survey), and one asking for a description of ministry in the future. The average response for these two questions was 2.34 and 2.14 words respectively.

In the analysis of the data, we condensed the responses into three groupings: “strongly agree” and “somewhat agree” were combined as “total agreement”, “strongly disagree” and “somewhat disagree” as “disagreement”, and “neither agree nor disagree” as “neutral”.

⁹ Assemblies of God World Missionaries were not included in either survey

¹⁰ Gioia, D. A., Corley, K. G., & Hamilton, A. L. (2012). Seeking qualitative rigor in inductive research: Notes on the Gioia methodology. *Organizational Research Methods*, 16, 1, 15-31.

In the preceding pages the reader finds graphs showing raw data, an analysis of the data, and some brief commentary from the authors. The sum of percentages may not always total 100.0% due to rounding. It is hoped that this information from many ministers will assist in the preparation of future individual ministry.

Observations, limitations, and areas for further research

We offer observations in connection with the data presented for each response in the report. However, there were some general observations that should be noted. In the first survey, we intentionally did not define the term “ministry” with the expectation that the responses would be more wide-ranging. Ministry seemed to be interpreted and/or defined by the respondents as a function of three distinct agents: the vocational minister, broad-scope ministers including laity, and/or churches. Also, many of the responses viewed ministry in relation to the environment or location in which ministry takes place and what impact the environment will have on ministry. We believe that the qualitative data obtained in the first survey could be explored in other ways to reveal additional insights.

It is our hope to repeat this study every two years on an ongoing basis and build a longitudinal data set that will help identify trends over time. Therefore, we wanted to maintain as much continuity as we could with the 2017 study. As we formulated the questions for the second survey, we attempted to use questions from the 2017 survey to the extent they fairly represented one of the meta-themes. However, certain questions from 2017 either had to be substantially reworded or omitted because they did not correlate to the 2019 themes.

As we noted in the methodology, we reduced the five-level Likert scale responses to three by combining “strong” and “somewhat” answers. While we believe that this method is useful for the kind of analysis we have done, we should note that by combining the data we have mitigated the significance of strength of opinion. There are some instances where the strength of opinion is quite pronounced, such as in Response #1 regarding diversity and Response #3 regarding relationship.

We gathered several levels of demographic data, but this report does not break down the responses by subgroup beyond a few comments in our response-specific analysis. As we looked at the data trends overall, there were some interesting observations. Many of the responses tracked very closely with the expectations of conventional wisdom. However, there were a few surprises. First, we had expected to see a fair range of deviation in subgroups, particularly in the age bands and gender data subsets. By and large the responses tracked very closely together, with a few notable exceptions. We believe there are some important conclusions that could be drawn with a deeper analysis of the data by subgroups, and we would like to encourage further research to be done in this vein using the dataset.

Every study or survey has limitations. For this present study, the main limitation is that it is limited to credentialed AG ministers who received the email and chose to respond to the survey. The predictions presented here are merely the opinions—educated guesses—of imperfect people. However, these results are a proper representation of the views of credentialed ministers within the Assemblies of God across the U.S.

Author's comments: Mario M. Duque

For me the overarching theme of this year's study is *diversity*. The respondents expect diversity in ethnicities, ministry style and structure, locations, revenue streams, and individualism. Even the expectations of more technology and greater moves of the Spirit invokes diversity of both styles and substance.

The overall strength of agreement in the responses demonstrates reliability. This is not to say that all the predictions included herein are correct. Even the response with the highest agreement level had over 100 ministers that disagreed. What can be said is that this report offers a reliable perspective on what AG ministers believe ministry will be like in ten years' time.

The top four responses all dealt with individualism. Having more cultural and ethnic diversity stems from a consideration of the individual. Two of the top four responses were specifically about individual initiative and allowing for new and innovative ministry. Rounding off the top four is the issue of personal relationships, which is always about the individual.

The second group of four responses and responses 15-16 deal with change in structure. Most respondents foresee further division between saints and sinners, leading to persecution from society, and a possible disconnecting of believers from traditional churches. This can lead to more house churches, virtual churches, or less church attendance overall.

Responses 10-13 and 16 address issues that the next generation will deal with. Most believe that the ministers of 2029 will be both willing and able to face the needs of their society but will need to discover additional methods for ministerial training, depend on multiple revenue streams, and be outside the church walls involved in the community.

Perhaps the most encouraging responses that arose from this study was the generally held belief that God is going to move by the Spirit, in demonstrations of the supernatural, encouraging ministers and churches to press on (responses 9, 17, 18).

Author's comments: David W. Barnett

There are a few personal thoughts I would like to share regarding this study. When I joined this project in early 2019, I was impressed with the work that lead researcher Mario Duque had already done to expand the scope and methodology of this iteration in comparison to his 2017 study. The fact that we started with an open-ended inquiry that generated such rich narrative responses greatly enhanced the identification of important areas of interest/concern.

The qualitative work we did in coding the responses from the first survey was extensive and difficult. Multiple themes often intersected and connected within a single response, and our coding likely identified the various themes without effectively articulating their relationships to each other. Also, the narrative responses revealed an interesting human element, in that the responses were almost evenly divided between those that expressed an overall negative outlook and those expressing an overall positive outlook. Additionally, the negative/positive range trended towards polarization on the ends rather than consensus in the middle.

Above all, I must observe that both the first and second surveys were designed to elicit from our ministers their *opinions* about the future, with the first survey helping establish the issues they believe to be important, and the second survey measuring how strongly the overall population feels about them. It is likely that some of the issues believed to be most prominent are, *in fact*, of marginal importance in the future, and conversely, that some of the most important future issues are absent or deeply discounted in the ministers' minds. For this study to have the strongest practical application, it needs to be held up to the light of research that looks objectively at future issues to see if these present concerns and opinions are of true import.

About the authors

Mario M. Duque is an ordained Assemblies of God minister and an appointed U.S. missionary. He has served in various ministerial capacities in Florida, Arkansas, and Missouri. Currently he is the field liaison for missionary church planters in the Missionary Church Planters and Developers department within AGUSM. He holds a master's degree in Christian education and is working on a Ph.D. in intercultural studies, both at AGTS.

David W. Barnett is an ordained Assemblies of God minister and serves in a variety of leadership roles within the AG, including as a board member for several missions entities, universities, and benevolence organizations. He has been in bi-vocational ministry since 1984, with a career in insurance and financial services that included an 11-year tenure as Vice President and Director with Christian Fidelity Life Insurance Company. He holds a master's degree in theological studies from Southwestern Assemblies of God University and is currently a Ph.D. candidate (ABD) in the Values-Driven Leadership Program at Benedictine University.

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Mario would additionally like to thank his wife Michella for her encouragement as he walks down seldom travelled paths, and all the friends, pastors, and professors who have recognized his distinct calling even as they nudge him to not stray too far off course.

David would like to thank Mario, the creator of and lead researcher on this study, for the invitation to work with him on this project. Your heart and your visionary leadership are apparent in this work. Thanks to my precious wife, Juliana, who faithfully supported me through the many hours of work that went into this project. And finally, thanks to our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, who rules and reigns over our past, present, and future.

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For a free electronic copy of this report, questions regarding the report, or access to the raw data for further study, please contact Mario Duque at revmmd@gmail.com.

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But when he, the Spirit of truth, comes, he will guide you into all the truth. He will not speak on his own; he will speak only what he hears, and *he will tell you what is yet to come.*

John 16:13 NIV