**[Title slide] Financial Issues Facing Clergy in the United States: Results from National and Denominational Surveys**Kirk Hadaway & Penny Long Marler

**[Clergy Income Title slide]**

Last year (in 2018), school teachers in several states went on strike to protest low pay and the increasing cost of health benefits. Although salaries differ by state, district, and type of school, the typical public school teacher made $57,000 in 2017. The typical *clergyperson*, however, made $10,000 less.

So why aren’t preachers out on the streets, protesting their low pay? A rhetorical question, of course, since there is really no one to protest to, or go on strike against, except for their congregations—and that probably would not be well received.

Clergy were not always near the bottom of the professional salary scale. In 18th Century New England, prior to the Revolutionary War, clergy were very well compensated, having salaries comparable to lawyers and living in what were often the largest houses in town. Of course, many colonies had Established churches during those days and town residents were required to pay for their support. After disestablishment, clergy still outpaced most other professions.

**[Clergy Average Salaries Graph]**

For instance, clergy were much better paid than school teachers in the 19th Century. As shown in the graph, clergy earned over 3 times as much as school teachers in 1890, an advantage which dropped to 1 and a half times as much in 1920, and to parity in 1970. By 1990, clergy salaries were only two-thirds of what the average school teacher made. *Since then, the disparity has moderated, but largely because of stagnation in teacher pay rather than through greater increases in clergy salary.*

So, a central element in the “financial crisis” facing clergy today is simply that they are not paid very well given their middle-class social status, the education demands of the profession, and the relative income of their constituents. As James Hudnut-Beumler explains, the change in clergy fortunes has been “a centuries-long slide of . . . incomes and economic standing from near the top of colonial-era communities to a diminished hold on middle-class status today.” (p. 95)

**[Clergy Salary & Education Chart]**

The average income of clergy was almost identical to the average income of the US population age 25 and over in 2017--a little less than $51,000. But there is a huge discrepancy between the average level of education among clergy and the adult population—particularly in terms of advanced degrees. 51% of clergy have masters or doctoral degrees, as compared to only 14% in the general population. In many denominations a master’s degree is required, yet higher education does not necessarily mean higher income. In the words of one Christian Reformed pastor, “though we are paid well compared to some pastors in other denominations, I am not paid well considering my 2 graduate degrees and 10 years in university.”

It is difficult to find professional occupations that are comparable to clergy in terms of their income and education profile. Still, it is instructive to compare clergy to a sampling of other occupations.

The professional occupations where salaries are similar (or lower) than clergy tend to be ‘helping’ occupations, such as counselors, social workers, and Licensed Practical Nurses. Elementary school teachers have about the same proportion of advanced degrees as clergy, but tend to make $10,000 more on average, yearly. Counselors and social workers make about the same as clergy, on average, with counselors having an even larger proportion with advanced degrees (53%). Nurses tend to make considerably more than clergy, with the notable exception of LPNs, who make $5,000 a year less than clergy on average but have much lower education (only 5% hold a bachelor’s degree or more).

Educational administrators are somewhat more likely to have master’s degrees than clergy, but also earn salaries that are almost twice as high ($95,000 vs. $51,000).

For clergy, and for counselors for that matter, the expectations for education are quite high, but the compensation is relatively low and more comparable to professions that require lower education. Clergy are likely to have more education than most members of their congregations, but incomes that are comparable--if not lower. And as we will see, with high expectations for education comes the likelihood of education debt and with lower income comes greater difficulty in paying off debt.

**[The NEI Research Initiative Title Chart]**

In the two previous charts, the information on clergy and other occupations comes from national level data collected largely by government agencies. While useful to capture the ‘big picture,’ the data do not deal with the financial situation of clergy in terms of need, the scope of financial concerns, or critical factors that affect clergy more than other occupations. The Endowment, however, required denominations and judicatories that applied for NEI funds in 2015 and 2016 to substantiate and describe clergy financial challenges. The following analysis is based largely on survey data from over 25,000 clergy across 31 denominational agencies. While survey samples and questions vary, the results provide a rare glimpse into the financial situation of clergy within and across denominations. Our analysis is restricted to comparable data and necessarily focuses on 15 denominations and judicatories in the US.

Great variation exists in clergy salaries. That goes almost without saying. I personally have known pastors who were extremely well compensated and whose salary package included perks such as country club memberships and new cars. On the other end of the continuum I have known clergy living in New York City who essentially earned fast-food wages. Unlike many professional occupations, it isn’t possible for clergy to make extremely large amounts of money, unless, perhaps, you are a televangelist. However, it **is** possible to make *little or nothing* as an employed clergyperson, working part-time or for housing alone.

**[Median (Full Time) Clergy Income Chart]**

Denominations differ in terms of the typical salary paid to clergy. A seen in the chart, clergy in the Episcopal Church and the Christian Reformed Church in North America both had median salaries of $75,000 or more in 2015. The Episcopal Church is the most highly educated and affluent Protestant denomination in the U.S., so the norms for salary tend to be high. Episcopal dioceses and congregations are informed about the typical salaries paid to clergy by position and region. Still, there are no true guidelines for salary—although dioceses usually have *minimum salaries*. Unlike the Episcopal Church, in the Christian Reformed Church in North America there **are** guidelines for clergy salaries which are fairly generous, but which also keep them a fairly narrow range. The ELCA also has guidelines for salary, and particularly for starting salary, so that clergy just out of seminary can earn enough to live.

Salaries in the Assemblies of God and Church of the Nazarene tend to be lower than the US average for all clergy. This is typical for evangelical denominations where each congregation decides clergy pay and churches are often quite small, with limited resources.

This chart deals with full-time clergy and their income, by denomination. But clearly, not all clergy are full-time and in most denominations the proportion of part-time or bi-vocational clergy is substantial. Increasingly, congregations are turning to part-time clergy in various incarnations (3/4 time, 1/2 time, etc.) as they find themselves with more limited resources.

**[Priest Status in Episcopal Congregations Chart]**

As shown in the chart, a little over half of Episcopal congregations have a full-time priest—which leaves 48% of congregations with part-time priests, supply priests or worship leader volunteers. We believe that the proportion of congregations with part-time priests increased in recent years, and we know there was a steady decline in the number of congregations with more than one full-time priest.

**[Part-Time and Bi-vocational Employment Status Chart]**

This chart focuses on the overall percentage of part-time and bi-vocational clergy among several denominations. Twenty-seven percent of active Episcopal priests are part-time. The percentage of part-time and bi-vocational clergy in the Assemblies of God is similar to the Episcopal Church, but higher in the Church of God, Anderson, Indiana. Nearly half of Mennonite clergy and well over half of Samuel DeWitt Proctor Conference pastors are part-time or bi-vocational.

Both mainline and evangelical denominations have a large and probably increasing proportion of clergy who are part-time, bi-vocational (even tri-vocational) or who essentially donate their services to congregations.

So, if the average full-time Episcopal priest earns over $75,000, how much does the average part-time priest make? Although there are not national records, a 2016 survey of part-time priests suggested that they make about $38,000, on average, or about half the salary of a full-time priest.

Although it varies according to denominational policy, part-time clergy are not eligible for benefits in most communions. Not only does paying clergy **part-time salaries** save congregations money, but the **lack of benefits** paid to part-time (or retired) clergy saves **even more**.

**[Satisfaction with Salary by Size of Church: CRCNA Chart]**

The economic difficulties of American clergy are worse in smaller churches, and there are a lot of small churches in the US. In the Christian Reformed Church, satisfaction with salary is highly correlated with church size. Over 80% of clergy in churches with 200 members or more are satisfied with the salary they make, but among small churches with 100 members or less, the proportion satisfied drops to below 50%.

Obviously, churches with more members have more funds available for salaries, and the typical church spends about half their income on staff salaries. In very small churches, that half may not cover a full-time clergyperson. So very small churches may spend 60% or more on staff, and even then, they may only be able to hire a part-time pastor or someone who is already on Medicare.

**[Proportion of Very Small Congregations Increasing Text Chart]**

In the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, the proportion of churches with average attendance of 50 or less increased 15 percentage points from 2000 to 2015, to 37% of all congregations. The Episcopal Church had more very small congregations to begin with in 2000 (33%), but also saw a large increase in the proportion of such congregations. In 2015, 45% of Episcopal churches had attendance of 50 or less, and in 2017 the proportion increased again to 47%--rapidly approaching half of all Episcopal congregations in the US.

In many denominations—and possibly most—the proportion of small churches is increasing. As a result, more congregations are becoming economically marginal and cannot afford a full-time pastor.

**[Text Chart on Salary by Gender]**

Part-time clergy earn less, as do clergy in small congregations. Not surprisingly, female clergy also tend to earn less than male clergy. In the Episcopal Church, full-time male clergy earn $12,000 on average more than female clergy. In the ELCA, full-time male clergy earn $8,000 more than full-time female clergy. Comparable data are not available for the Christian Church, Disciples of Christ, but a much larger proportion of female clergy earn less than $40,000.

**[Chart on Percent Female by Church Size: The Episcopal Church]**

One of the reasons female clergy earn less than male clergy in the Episcopal Church is that women priests are much more likely to be employed in small congregations and in associate-level positions. Women are more likely to be offered and take lower-paid positions. It may be difficult to live on the salaries offered, but frequently “you take what you can get” if you are a woman called to the ministry in the Episcopal Church. It is rare for a woman to serve as the senior or solo priest in a large congregation.

**[Chart on Base Salary by Race: CRCNA]**

All but one of the denominations that conducted a survey as part of their application process is majority white and the one denominational body that is not, has black clergy. Nevertheless, in looking at non-white clergy in majority white denominations, there is a tendency for clergy of color to earn less and be less satisfied with their salary than their white counterparts.

In the Christian Reformed Church in North America, 71% of white clergy are satisfied with their base salary, as compared to only 34% of clergy of color. In the CRCNA, non-white clergy also are much more likely to have a secondary ordination status and tend to pastor smaller churches. As was the case for gender, race is a barrier to better positions and higher salaries, which makes it much more difficult to maintain a reasonable standard of living without outside income.

**[Clergy Benefits Title Slide]**

Retirement is a serious financial concern for most Americans. Defined benefit plans in the form of pensions are increasingly rare and have been largely replaced by 401K and 403B accounts. But not all clergy are under a retirement plan towards which their church or judicatory contributes. So, what do they do? They must save and invest on their own initiative, reducing their current income by salary reductions or a regular savings strategy—something that many Americans put off until retirement is looming.

Social Security is the only active retirement plan for large numbers of Americans, and in the case of all clergy and many government workers, participation in Social Security is optional.

In most surveys conducted by projects in the National Economic Initiative, retirement saving is the most serious financial concern expressed by clergy, including younger clergy for whom retirement is (still) somewhat abstract. Even clergy in denominations that offer retirement plans—such as Greek Orthodox priests who have a defined benefit plan—report that retirement is their greatest concern.

**[Text Chart on Retirement Savings]**

Clergy are very concerned about retirement for a variety of reasons, and these reasons vary according to what their denomination provides or considers normative. The denominational plan may be underfunded or provides inadequate benefits; or the plan presumes outside savings and Social Security income (and clergy may have neglected to save and/or opted out of Social Security); or the plan is optional and not all churches and/or clergy participate; or finally, the denomination may have no retirement plan at all.

91% of Assemblies of God pastors say retirement savings is a significant stressor. Why so high? Well, although the Assemblies of God offer a retirement plan, it is optional for churches and clergy. Only 29% of clergy participate in the plan and for many of those, the contribution is in the form of a salary reduction. In addition, 18% of Assemblies of God clergy have opted out of Social Security, a decision that would require additional personal savings of at least $400,000 to replace monthly Social Security benefits at retirement, not to mention the funds needed to replace Medicare benefits that they also would not receive. So, their concern is understandable.

**[Text Chart on Participation in Denomination’s Retirement Plan]**

Even among denominations that have a non-optional pension or defined contribution plan, participation is not universal. In the Christian Church, Disciples of Christ, 85% of clergy participate, and in the Reformed Church in America, participation drops to 73%.

Major reasons for non-participation in denomination retirement plans include clergy status and position. Churches with part-time clergy or clergy without full ordination status are not normally required, or even allowed, to contribute to their clergyperson’s retirement. In other cases, denominational rules regarding retirement contributions may be treated as “suggestions” by congregations, as there may be no mechanism for enforcing the rules or canons. Churches are not simply billed for the cost.

Adequacy of retirement is a separate cause for concern, even for denominations with a mandatory retirement plan. Defined benefit plans and annuity plans are usually based on the cleric’s income over a number of years. So lower-paid clergy with fewer years of service necessarily receive less benefits in retirement. A priest friend of mine who retired in the Diocese of Long Island had about 12 years of service as a priest-in-charge at diocesan minimum. His pension under the Episcopal defined benefit plan? Only $14,000.

Given the relatively modest pension, annuity or monthly retirement distributions that many clergy can expect from their denomination plans, some outside retirement savings is usually essential. The Christian Reformed Church in North America presumes such savings for an adequate retirement income.

Saving for retirement is highly correlated with education, certainly because of higher average income but also because persons with more education realize that retirement saving is essential and tend to set higher goals for their retirement savings.

**[Figure on Household Retirement Savings by Education]**

In this figure, it is apparent that a bare majority of persons with college education have $100,000 or more in retirement savings. The proportion drops to 33% for those with some college and 24% among those with a high school diploma or less. *And among those with a high school diploma or less, almost one third (31%) have retirement savings of less than $10,000.*

These national figures on retirement savings do not seem very encouraging, but is it possible that a highly educated clergy might do better? Apparently not.

For clergy in the Assemblies of God, only 20% have of $100,000 or more in retirement savings and 44% have $10,000 or less. AG pastors are saving at a lower rate than Americans with only a high school education, even though half of AG pastors have at least a master’s degree. These low levels of savings will not be enough and most clergy know it. But they also believe that they cannot save more because of their relatively low incomes and the financial pressures they feel.

Low income in their first clergy position, along with debt issues, causes many clergy (and government workers) to opt out of Social Security. Some well-known clergy financial consultants even recommend doing so. Here is what Dave Ramsey says: “**I’d opt out in a nanosecond.**That’s because sending money to the Social Security office is a bad way to manage your money for God..”

Now in fairness, Ramsey also tells you what you must do in order to make up for the lack of eventual Social Security benefits and Medicare. But the question is, do people have the means and discipline to do it? Someone in my family opted out of Social Security at the beginning of his career because it was difficult to house and feed his family on such a low income. Fortunately, he had worked in a drug store before attending college and had just enough quarters to qualify for Social Security and Medicare. Still, he only received $135 a month from Social Security.

**[Chart on Opting Out of Social Security]**

Many clergy in all denominations opt out of Social Security, and even though it is supposed to be on the ground of conscience, the real reason is almost always financial. Starting clergy tend have low incomes and many are in debt. Clergy are like most Americans; typically, they are poor savers and investors. The only difference is that most Americans cannot opt out of Social Security and end up with a couple of thousand a month from Social Security and full Medicare benefits. Clergy who opt out will get neither.

**[Health Care Benefits Title Chart]**

*American’s are increasingly concerned about their* health insurance *or lack thereof. It was the number one issue in the 2018 election.* I don’t recall anyone addressing the issue among clergy, however.

Large organizations typically provide health coverage for their full-time employees. I worked for 6 different denominational agencies, in the Southern Baptist Convention, the United Church of Christ and the Episcopal Church. I received excellent health insurance benefits from all. But congregations are different, with some treating their clergy as “employees” and others as “independent contractors.”

Some, mostly mainline Protestant, denominations have national medical plans that are mandated for all full-time clergy. Other denominations provide a national plan for all clergy, but participation is optional. Some denominations provide a national plan, but it may be in competition with plans provided by dioceses, synods, and other judicatories. And finally, there are denominations with no centralized health care plans at all. Their ranks were increased by one in 2017 when the Christian Church, Disciples of Christ ended their denomination’s health care plan.

**[Health Care Benefits Text Chart]**

The Episcopal Church is one of those denominations that has a national, mandated plan which is rated a “platinum plan” using Affordable Health Care guidelines. The Evangelical Lutheran Church in America plan is similar, but offers bronze, silver, gold, and platinum plans. Other denominations have a contracted plan but participation is optional, and the clergyperson or church can opt out for privately offered health insurance. So, participation is less than universal. Among Greek Orthodox clergy, for instance, only 59% use the Archdiocesan plan; 19% use a private plan paid by the church; 12% use their spouse’s plan; 7% have private insurance which they pay themselves; and 3% have no plan. A fifth of Orthodox priests say their plan does not adequately cover their medical needs; and others complain about the costs and high deductibles of the Archdiocesan plan.

In the Reformed Church in America, 58% of clergy have health care through a denominational plan. In the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) 55% of clergy had health care through their denomination’s coverage plan before it ended.

In other Protestant (especially evangelical) denominations there is no denomination-wide provider and it is relatively rare for the congregation to provide health insurance. In the Church of the Nazarene, 23% of clergy have health insurance paid by their church; 28% have health insurance through another job or through their spouse; and 17% buy the insurance on their own. In the Church of God, Cleveland, Tennessee, 58% of clergy pay for coverage without reimbursement, 23% obtain insurance on their own but are reimbursed in part or completely for the cost. Another 19% obtain coverage through their spouse.

It is ironic in denominations where salaries tend to be lower that many clergy must pay for health care out of their own salaries. And even when costs for health insurance are reimbursed, the cost is still considered income and subject to income tax.

**[Introductory Chart on Clergy Debt and Savings]**

Americans have a long history of consumer debt, and today, the average household carries a credit card debt of $5,700, according to the US Federal Reserve. More recently, education debt has expanded exponentially, so that the average student in the class of 2016 had over $37,000 in student loan debt.

Education debt is usually seen as an investment that will pay off in higher income. That was certainly my daughter’s logic when after a brief career in print journalism she began applying to top-tier law schools. But for clergy, for whom an advanced degree is usually required, higher income is not necessarily forthcoming. Starting salaries are also quite low, making it even more difficult to pay off student loans.

**[Chart on Education Debt]**

Data from various NEI surveys indicate a quite high level of education debt. For younger United Methodists pursuing ordination, 72% had student loans, with a median amount of $40,000. For younger ordained United Methodist clergy, 67% currently had education loans, with a median of $30,000. And many (30%) of clergy spouses also had outstanding student loans. Among clergy in ELCA, 80% had incurred education debt at some point before graduating from seminary. For those with current student loans, 55% still owe more than $25,000. Among Mennonite pastors, 70% had education loans at some point, with 18% still owing education debt*. And for those Mennonite pastors with debt, only around half thought that they had enough income to repay the loans.*

Not surprisingly, survey results show that clergy who were ordained more recently are most concerned about education debt. Among clergy in the Christian Reformed Church in North America, 34% of those ordained in the last 5 years were “concerned” or “very concerned” about student loan debt, as compared to only 15% of those ordained 6 to 11 years ago.

**[Graph on Tuition at Seminaries]**

Americans are increasingly likely to finance higher education through student loans. This is a nationwide trend with several causes. One is the increasing expense of going to college and graduate school. When I was in college, small scholarships, meager contributions by parents and summer jobs were usually enough. But not anymore.

As shown in the graph, tuition at seminaries increased much faster than inflation from 2000 to 2016, and during this period, the likelihood of seminary students taking on student loans increased, as did the amount of such loans.

Seminary debt tends to be particularly high among Black clergy. According to the Association of Theological Schools data on recent seminary graduates, 55% of graduates who identify as Black, Non-Hispanic owe $40,000 or more as compared to less than 20% of White, Non-Hispanic graduates.

Survey data from various NEI projects also show that Black, Latino, Native American, and other clergy of color tend to have larger education debt and express greater concern over that debt. With fewer resources to draw upon going into seminary, clergy of color tend to rely more heavily on loans.

**[Text Chart on Emergency Savings]**

Since high consumer and education debt are so widespread among clergy—and particularly younger clergy—saving for emergencies is especially difficult.

Quite a few surveys conducted for the NEI asked about emergency savings. Some of these questions were phrased as levels of concern. 42% of Assemblies of God clergy indicated that having sufficient savings for emergencies caused them major financial stress. 67% of AG clergy also said they could not come up with $10,000 for unexpected emergencies out of savings. When asked about money for emergencies, 46% of clergy in the Missouri Conference of the United Methodist Church were dissatisfied or very dissatisfied with available savings. Among Church of God, Cleveland, Tennessee clergy, 24% have no savings and 53% have savings of less than $1,000.

**[Graph on Estimated Emergency Savings by Education]**

One of the strongest correlates of the amount of emergency savings is education. Nationally, among those with a high school diploma or less, the median saved was only $1,000. For those with trade school or some college, the median rises to $4,000. For college graduates and those with post-graduate education, the median levels of savings are $10,000 and $25,000, respectively. Since 75% of clergy have a college degree and 51% have post-graduate degrees, most clergy should have savings of at least $10,000. But among Greek Orthodox priests, for example—a denomination that requires a Master of Divinity degree--only 30% of priests say they have emergency savings of $10,000 or more. Greek Orthodox priests fall somewhere between persons with a high school diploma and those with some college or a trade school degree with respect to emergency savings.

In terms of savings, clergy have lower levels of savings than would be expected given their level of education. This situation puts clergy families at risk when financial emergencies do occur.

**[Introductory Chart on Standard of Living]**

Clergy do not go into the ministry for the money. The financial rewards just are not there. But most clergy do expect to live “well enough” or to have “a reasonable standard of living” in the words of two pastors. But some find that they must “struggle to keep a roof over our heads and gas in the tank.”

We think clergy can be roughly divided between those who have “an adequate standard of living” and those that are “just getting by.” The difference between the two in terms of household finances is not simply a matter of salary, although that is important. *Rather, the difference is conditioned by salary and situation: the combination of which makes it that much harder or that much easier to live without serious financial stress.*

Clergy in the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America are much more likely to say they are *satisfied with their standard of living* (74%) than to say their *“compensation meets their financial needs”* (54%). A nearly identical finding was seen for Christian Reformed clergy who, like the ELCA, tend to be compensated above the ministerial norm.

**Household Income Vs. Church Income Text Chart**

One reason that satisfaction with standard of living is higher than satisfaction with salary is that standard of living is based on *household income*. Most clergypersons are married and most of their spouses are in the workforce, so the median household income for all clergy of $55,775 is considerably higher than the median salary of $45,000. In the ELCA, the median household income for clergy with full-time calls was $86,000 as compared to the median defined compensation of $63,000 (primarily salary and a housing allowance).

Other clergy may be in a second career or have investment income that allows a higher standard of living than would be possible with a ministerial salary alone. But most clergy also realize that their pay is not commensurate with their education, responsibilities, hours spent, and/or the average standard of living of their congregants. Although underpaid, they achieve a reasonable standard of living one way or another if they are not burdened by serious debt or by serving in a location with a very high cost of living.

But many clergy are struggling with their finances and their standard of living is under serious threat. Like many other Americans, their greatest financial priority is “just getting by.” They live paycheck to paycheck--a situation where financial emergencies can create a crisis.

**[Chart on “Just Getting By” by Education as a Financial Priority for American Workers]**

“Just getting by” is a financial reality for many American households and families. Based on a nation-wide survey conducted by the Transamerica Institute, 60% of persons with high school education or less, indicated that just getting by was a serious financial priority. For those with some college or trade school, 50% listed “just getting by” as a priority. For college graduates and those with some graduate school or a graduate degree, the percentages listing “just getting by” were 31% and 19%, respectively.

**[“Just Getting By” by Denomination]**

Among Greek Orthodox priests, 50% say living paycheck to paycheck is something they experience frequently or sometimes. In answer to a similar question, 53% of Assemblies of God clergy and pastors in denominations affiliated with the National Association of Evangelicals say that making ends meet each month is an issue that causes financial stress, worry or concern.

In other denominations around one third of clergy say they have “high levels of financial stress” or even that their calling is at risk due to finances.

It is possible to earn enough as a household for a reasonable standard of living, but to have such a standard of living, many clergy must live paycheck to paycheck, and some apparently finance their living standard with loans and credit card debt. It is also possible to be both satisfied in terms of the way one’s family is living and still under financial stress because of the difficulties in maintaining that standard of living. Among clergy in the Christian Reformed Church in North America, 77% are satisfied with their standard of living but only 53% say that they have money available after bills and expenses for savings. In the CRCNA, as in many denominations, saving for retirement over and above the retirement plan, as well as for emergencies, is critical. Not being able to do so in order to keep up with immediate financial needs necessarily causes stress.

Financial stress is not just about relative lack of income, it also is about the ability to live a reasonable lifestyle with one’s expenses and debts.

Financial stress is greater among Disciples of Christ clergy with lower household income, and for unmarried clergy, part-time clergy, clergy in smaller, less affluent churches, and clergywomen. The relationship was particularly strong for gender. The vast majority (81%) of female clergy experience some level of financial stress, as compared to 67% of men, and almost 30% of women experience major financial stress compared to only 16% of men. A much larger percentage of women have even considered leaving the ministry among Disciples clergy.

Among American Baptist clergy, financial stress is strongly related to race as well as gender. 40% of ABC Black clergy reported that their financial situation caused an “extreme’ or “large” problem for them, as compared to only 27% of White clergy.

**[Chart on Student Debt and Financial Crisis: Disciples]**

The level of overall financial stress was also strongly related to student loan debt among Christian Church, Disciples of Christ clergy. Those without student loan debt were most likely to say they currently had no financial stress in their lives (38%) and least likely to say they had major financial stress. Just having any student loan debt greatly increases the likelihood of having financial stress. However, the likelihood of major financial stress is much greater among those with $40,000 or more in outstanding student loan debt. So, regardless of whatever else is going on in their lives, student loan debt looms large over those who have it and particularly over those who have a lot of it.

**Blank Chart**

As we have shown, the possibilities for financial stress and financial emergencies are greater for clergy with lower salaries from their churches. And life situations make a difference, either positively or negatively. There are ways clergy insulate themselves from the problems of low pay such as a becoming a pastor after a successful prior career, having a two-income family or another job, or belonging to a denomination that provides more generous benefits. But a high cost of living, small church position, part-time status, large student debt, lack of benefits, race and gender, and even informal denominational expectations regarding education in private Christian schools make it much more difficult for clergy to avoid living paycheck to paycheck.

That the financial challenges for clergy have increased overtime is clear. In an analysis of the national labor market, Schleifer and Miller found that clergy had a distinct income disadvantage compared to others with similar education during the entire period of study from 1976 to 2016. Among male clergy the disparity became steadily worse. Male clergy made 30% less than their educational peers in 1976 and 44% less in 2016. For female clergy, the income disparity remained substantial at 29% over the last 30 years.

**[Charlie Brown Cartoon on Teachers (and Clergy) Making a Difference]**

Like clergy, most teachers don’t enter the profession for the money. Despite education and pay gaps, they do it—in the sage words of Charlie Brown—to make a difference. The majority of clergy in the NEI research, when asked, said that such sacrifice is worth it. Admittedly, for some the strain is becoming too great. Which is why the Endowment has targeted this critical issue with its considerable resources, and why this effort is both important and timely.