

JÁRAY Márton¹ – SIBA Balázs²:

The Eagle's Nest Effect in the Pastoral Career

“Pay careful attention to yourselves and to all the flock, in which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to care for the church of God.” (Acts 20:28)

Abstract.

The research involved surveying active pastors of the Reformed Church in Hungary through an online tool between 2 May and 18 June 2023. In our current analysis, we included pastors with active status in Hungary (N = 681). In this study, we looked at the mental health of those in their first five years of ministry compared to those who have served longer. In terms of well-being, there is a higher proportion of pastors at risk among those who have served for 1–5 years. In this essay, we explore the possible causes of this phenomenon and formulate hypotheses for further research. We discuss the challenges and complexities faced by pastors in contemporary society, highlighting the changing roles and expectations within the church. The findings suggest that pastors often experience fatigue, emotional challenges, and conflicting expectations. The diversity of pastoral roles, evolving societal norms, and the pastor's evolving identity contribute to the complexity of their responsibilities. This paper identifies different phases in the pastor's journey,

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from initial exposure to pastoral life to assuming the role professionally. It emphasizes that becoming a pastor is not just learning a role but a transformation of one's identity and a continuous integration of faith into everyday life.

Keywords: pastor, early career, well-being, quantitative survey

1. Introduction

The primary purpose of analysing pastoral research is to see, through the accounts, how pastors themselves see their ministry, especially in their first few years of service. Our hypothesis is that pastors in the first period of their ministry are more likely to struggle with challenges and that professional support can reduce the impact of these on their mental health.

Most young people leave university in their mid-twenties. This is a time in life when young people have a lot of decisions to make. Choosing a first job, choosing a partner, choosing a place to live, separating from the family of origin, starting a family, raising children, possibly going on to further education are all issues that are challenging, and decisions have consequences. Whether in the workplace or in the private sphere, they face new life tasks and new life roles. Young people are starting to “live life with a capital L”, both in their personal lives and at work. With the overlapping of roles, they must cope with many different expectations at the same time, making this a stressful time for young people. The normative crisis of the family life cycle is compounded by the need to find a new job, and in this respect, it is normal for this to be a period of psychological labour for young people. As the saying goes, “all beginnings are difficult”, and it is indeed in the world of work that field skills have to be acquired in the new workplace. In a similar way as when one is immersed in another culture and after the initial honeymoon of enthusiasm comes the dull everyday routine. The change curve that is used to depict the arrival in another culture also applies to the “home field”, as learning and getting to grips with the culture of the workplace, even if there may be no language difficulties, can be difficult.³

³ NEULIEP, James W. (2012): *Intercultural Communication – A Contextual Approach*. Los Angeles, SAGE. 422.

Moreover, the personality of pastors is also very decisive in how resistant they are to challenges.⁴

It is likely that the pastoral profession is not the only one to have such initial difficulties, but in this paper we are specifically concerned with the beginning of a pastoral career.⁵ We examine the questionnaire responses of recent graduates and early-career pastors and formulate our hypotheses about the so-called “eagle’s nest effect”.

2. Description of the Research

2.1. Data Recording

Active, serving pastors of the Reformed Church in Hungary were surveyed. The data was collected anonymously using an online tool (LimeSurvey) between 2 May and 18 June 2023. Pastors were provided through several channels with a link to complete the survey. For statistical weighting, data on the base population was obtained from the Reformed Pastoral Pension Fund. Only minor weighting was required. The responses are approximately representative of the composition of the total population of Hungarian Reformed pastors. In our analysis, we have included respondents who completed at least 2/3 of the questionnaire and who fell within the target population of the survey. There were no compulsory questions, which increased confidence in completing the questionnaire. As the link was shared on several forums, Hungarian Reformed pastors serving in other countries also participated in the survey. In our current analysis, we only included pastors with active status in Hungary (N = 681). The set of questions was based on an earlier survey we conducted among Lutheran pastors in Hungary. Based on the experiences from that study, we have identified the main themes and question blocks for the current research. The draft was further elaborated by a professional group of pastors, psychologists, family therapists, supervisors, pastoral care workers, and spiritual leaders. Finally, it was finalized with the Church leadership and approved by the bishops.

⁴ MINER, M. H. (2007): Burnout in the First Year of Ministry: Personality and Belief Style as Important Predictors. In: *Mental Health, Religion & Culture*. 10, 1. 23.

⁵ A similar phenomenon can perhaps be found in the teaching profession. See: PRICE, Sally – MCWILLIAM, Sally (2019): *Essential Guides for Early Career Teachers: Mental Well-Being and Self-Care*. St Albans, Critical Publishing. 1.

The research will also serve as the basis for the development of a national programme and institute (Gyökössy Institute) to support pastors, and the questions were selected and developed with this focus.

2.2. Measuring Instruments

At the end of the process, we organized our questions into major blocks. The blocks were preceded by basic sociodemographic data: gender, age, marital status, etc.

2.2.1. Questions on Occupation

They start with general data such as: “How many years have you served as a pastor?” “What is your status in the Church?” “How many years of ministry have you held?” This was followed by asking about the circumstances of ministry. Staff, community situation, demographics. This was followed by more subjective questions as to perceptions of the profession, satisfaction, sense of usefulness, and perceived or real expectations. Then followed the regularity and extent of days off and holidays. This block concludes with a statement on the greatest joys and greatest challenges of the profession.

2.2.2 Questions on Faith

Since there is not yet a validated questionnaire in Hungarian available and usable among pastors, which would examine spirituality, we formulated this block of questions ourselves. The focus of the survey is on Bible reading, prayer, fasting, silent retreat, participation in spiritual direction, and relationship with God.

2.2.3. Questions on Physical Health

In several parts of our research, we used questions that have been asked in a large sample of Hungarian society in the recent past. One such survey is Hungarostudy.⁶ In our physical health question block, in addition to the general sense of health, we included questions on Body Mass Index (BMI), symptoms of major physical diseases, the quality of sleep, tobacco and alcohol consumption habits.

⁶ SUSÁNSZKY, Éva – SZÉKELY, B. András – SZÉKELY, András (2022): A Hungarostudy 2021 felmérés célkitűzései és módszertana. In: Engler, Ágnes – Purebl, György – Susánszky, Éva – Székely, András (eds.): *Magyar lelkiállapot 2021. Család – egészség – közösség. Hungarostudy 2021 tanulmányok*. Budapest, Kopp Mária Intézet a Családokért. 16.

2.2.4. Questions on Social Support

In this block, we assessed the extent to which pastors perceived supportive relationships to be present in their lives. We started with feelings of loneliness and then asked about relationships with friends – about the quantity, quality, and intensity of those relationships, professional relationships that support their vocation. Within this, supervision, spiritual care, and pastoral peer groups were inquired into. Here, we were interested not only in their existence but also in whether pastors desire such support. In this block, we measured the supporting role of the family. We looked into work–family balance (WFB)⁷ and measured the general perceived social support with Multidimensional Scale of Perceived Social Support (MSPSS).⁸ A particular focus was on support from the Church: close colleagues, the congregation, church superiors.

2.2.5. Question on Family

The relationship with the spouse was a focus for pastors who were married (RAS-H).⁹ In addition, we asked about the work–family balance. Sociodemographic data on children were also discussed in more detail.

2.2.6. Questions on Mental Health

In this section, we also replaced several of the measuring instruments used in Hungarostudy. These include the 9-item Beck Depression Questionnaire (BDI-9)¹⁰ and

⁷ KISS, C. – CSILLAG, S. – SZILAS, R. – TAKÁCS, S. (2012): A szervezeti elkötelezettség és a munka–család viszonyrendszer összefüggései [The Relationship between Organizational Commitment and Work–Life Balance]. In: *Vezetéstudomány – Budapest Management Review*. 43, 9. 8.

⁸ PAPP-ZIPERNOVSZKY, O. – KÉKESI, M. Z. – JÁMBORI, S. (2017): A multidimenzionális észlelt társas támogatás kérdőív magyar nyelvű validálása. In: *Mentálhigiéné és Pszichoszomatika*. 18, 3. 260–261.

⁹ MARTOS, T. – SALLAY, V. – SZABÓ, T. – LAKATOS, C. – TÓTH-VAJNA, R. (2014): A Kapcsolati Elégedettség Skála magyar változatának (RAS-H) pszichometriai jellemzői [Psychometric Characteristics of the Hungarian Version of the Relationship Assessment Scale (RAS-H)]. In: *Mentálhigiéné és Pszichoszomatika*. 15, 3. 255–256.

¹⁰ RÓZSA, S. – SZÁDÓCZKY, E. – FÜREDI, J. (2001): A Beck depresszió kérdőív rövidített változatának jellemzői hazai mintán [Psychometric Properties of the Hungarian Version of the Shortened Beck Depression Inventory]. In: *Psychiatria Hungarica*. 16, 4. 384–402.

the 5-item WHO Well-Being Questionnaire.¹¹ Satisfaction with the general life situation and the service situation were also asked here. And we closed the whole questionnaire with the Mental Health Test (MET)¹² designed by Hungarian researchers. It is based on five pillars: well-being, savouring, creative and executing efficiency, self-regulation, and resilience dimensions of mental health.

3. Findings

The research has produced many remarkable results that need further reflection. When looking at mental health, there is a marked difference between these groups. There are some significant ($H(7) = 20,942$ $p = .004$) differences in the groups depending on how many years they have been pastors for.

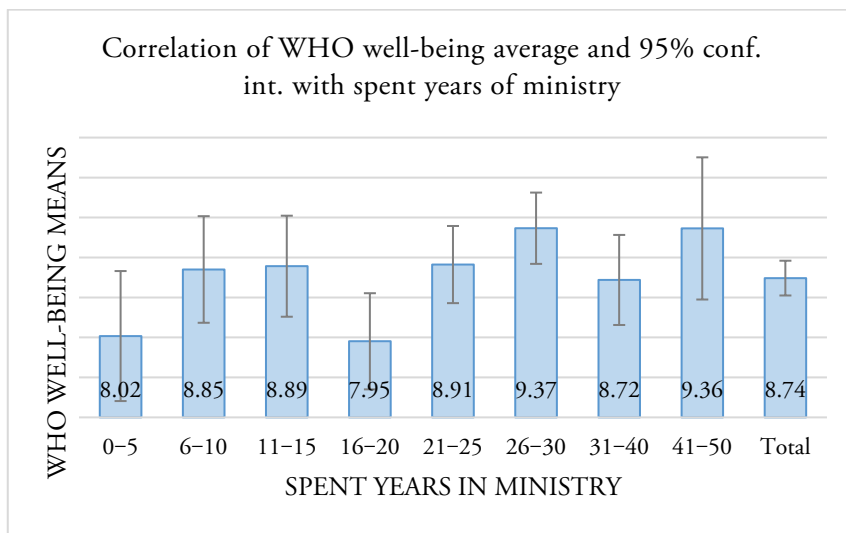


Figure 1. How well-being correlates with the spent years in ministry

¹¹ SUSÁNSZKY, É. – KONKOLY THEGE, B. – STAUDER, A. – KOPP, M. (2006): A WHO Jól-lét Kérdőív rövidített (WBI-5) magyar változatának validálása a Hungarostudy 2002 országos lakossági egészségfelmérés alapján. In: *Mentálhigiéné és Pszichoszomatika*. 7, 3. 252.

¹² VARGHA, A. – ZÁBÓ, V. – TÖRÖK, R. – OLÁH, A. (2020): A jóllét és a mentális egészség mérése: a Mentális Egészség Teszt. In: *Mentálhigiéné és Pszichoszomatika*. 21, 3. 321–320.

In this study, we compare pastors in their first five years of ministry with other pastors. In particular, we highlight differences in the area of mental health. For the purposes of analysis, we also separately examined those who had served for the first two years (N = 24) from those who had served for 3–5 years (N = 48) and those who had served longer (N = 607). Among respondents, the sample of pastors serving in their first five years of ministry did not differ from the others in terms of gender. The proportion of women was 40.3% (N = 29) in the former category and 40.2% (N = 244) in the latter. We looked into the mental health of those in their first five years of ministry as compared to those who have served longer. The WHO-5, BDI-9, and MET well-being subscales were included in the study. For all three, there was a significant difference between those in their first five years of ministry and others, who were pastors for more than five years.

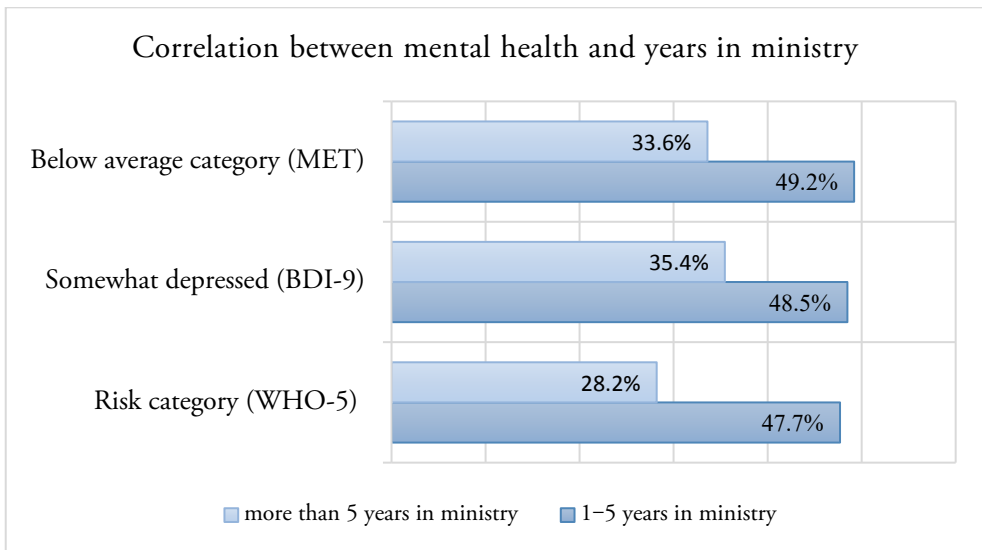


Figure 2. How the rate of poor mental health differs between early-career pastors and others (%)

In the WHO-5 test, we can distinguish two categories: the normal and the risk level. A chi-square test of independence was performed to examine the relation between spent years in ministry and the WHO well-being status. The relation between these

variables was significant, $\chi^2 (1, N = 636) = 10.525, p = .001$. In the first five years, pastors were more likely than later to be in the risk category. Only 28.2% of the others fell into this category, compared to 47.7% of those at the beginning of their careers. In Beck Depression Scale, there are four categories: non-depression, mild depression, moderate depression, and severe depression. The proportion of subjects with some level of depression was also significantly different between the two populations, although this correlation was not as strong as the previous one, $\chi^2 (1, N = 633) = 4.319, p = .038$. We can see that 35.4% of the early-career pastors fell into the depression levels compared to 48.5%. Finally, we can see that the MET questionnaire well-being subscale shows also a significant difference: $\chi^2 (2, N = 631) = 7.186, p = .028$. According to this indicator, well-being of 49.2% of the young pastors is below average. That is almost half of the respondents. In the other population, this is only 33.6%, i.e. one third of their sample.

–We asked the pastors if their ministries tend to build their faith. There were four answers: “It does not build at all.” “It rather does not build it.” “It rather builds it.” “I find inspiration mainly in my ministry.” We have simplified these into two groups: those for whom it builds faith and those for whom it does not.



Figure 3. The difference between early-career pastors and others – how they sense that ministry build their faith (%)

The chi-square test is strongly significant. $\chi^2 (1, N = 664) = 12.489, p < .001$. In the first years, more than double of the clergy feels that their tasks related to their ministry do not build their personal faith.

Professional support also had a strong correlation with mental health indicators. We asked them if they had a spiritual leader: “A person with whom you can talk about your personal relationship to God?” We also asked if they had a supervisor: “Is there someone who provides regular advice to support your ministry?” Third, we measured the extent to which they feel supported by their pastoral colleagues.

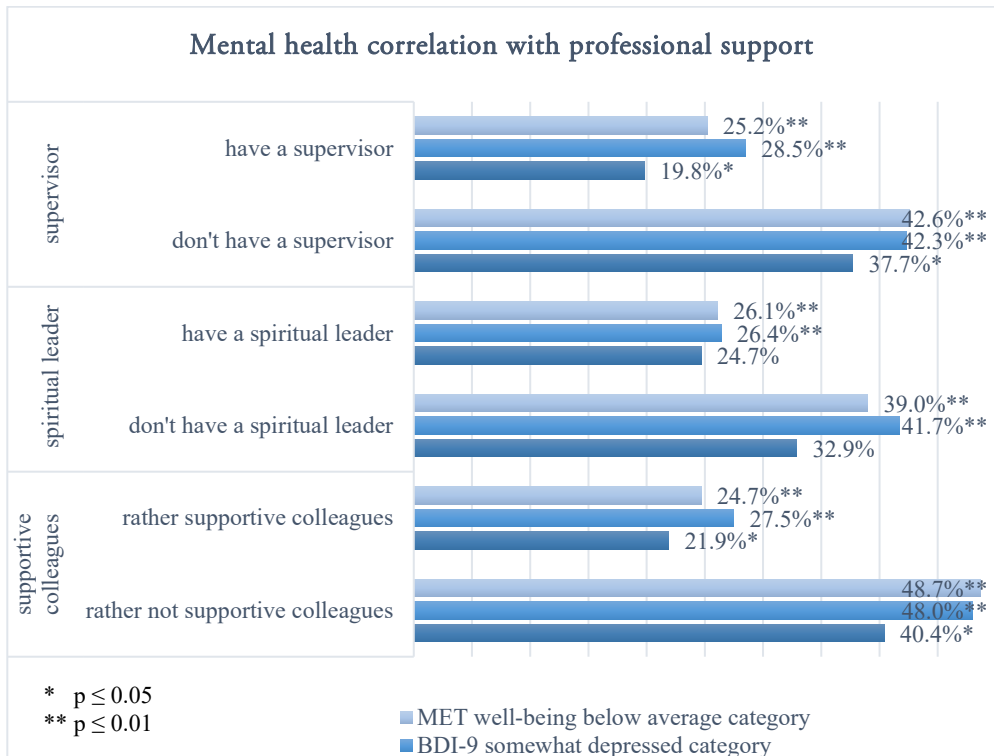
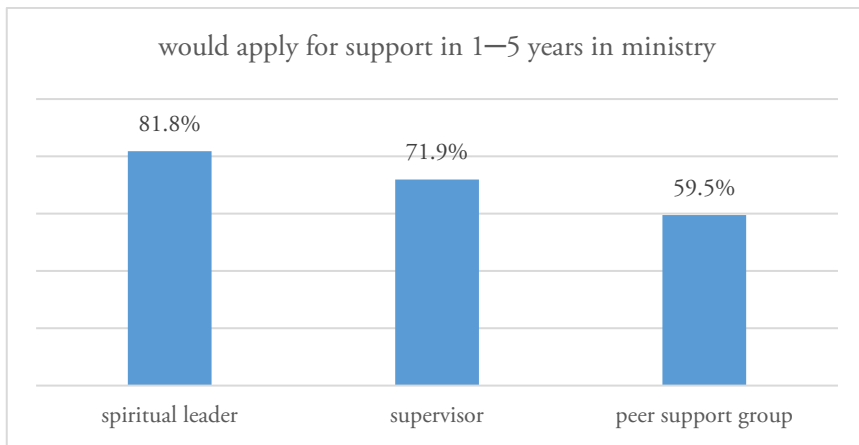


Figure 4. How the different received professional support changes the rate of pastors in poor mental health (%)

We can see that these three kinds of professional support have an effect on mental health status. Only the correlation between WHO-5 and the spiritual leader did not show a significant difference between the two groups. $\chi^2(1, N = 606) = 3.744, p = .053$. All other correlations between the professional support and mental health status were significant.

We asked all pastors if they would have applied for these kinds of professional support. A high percentage of early-career pastors reported that they would have been happy to apply for them.



Note: N = 44.

Figure 5. How many percent of the early-career pastors would apply for the different kinds of professional support (%)

Most of them (81.8%) are open to starting a supportive process with a spiritual leader. Speaking about their own personal relationship to God, a little less – but still the majority – would require a supervisor (71.9%). Almost two-thirds of them (59.5%) would join a peer support group with other pastors.

In the sociological survey, we found some data to support the idea that there was a degree of fatigue within the sample population in the early years.

4. Specific challenges in the life of early-career pastors

A few further points are listed to explain the reasons behind this results. This list is not exhaustive, but it can be used as a basis for further hypotheses for possible future qualitative research.

4.1. *The Diversity of Contemporary Pastoral Roles*

In our changing times, the image and role of the pastor, already variously defined, or even undefined, within the Protestant churches, is undergoing new changes.¹³ There is a move away from traditional role expectations. For example, within the Church, there is a variety of ministry areas (school, hospital, prison, military, social mission, university, etc.) both within and outside the parish system (village, city). One can be a pastor in a congregation as a leader, a subordinate, an institutional administrator, or even a part-time minister. There are also different ways of interpreting the role of pastor depending on the denomination: some congregations are sceptical about women pastors, while others have a female pastor as the lead pastor of the congregation. The life situation also offers different interpretations of the role, depending on whether we are talking about a single woman pastor in an independent congregation, a woman pastor with a husband in a secular occupation, or a pastor couple.¹⁴ In addition to this, there are a number of professional specializations for pastors such as: pastoral care, religious education, supervision, organizational development, mental health, other degrees, or scholarships abroad. This is compounded by the fact that while generations ago the role of the pastor was a respected status in the society, the focus has now shifted to the question of the personality of the pastor (how kind, loving, and attractive he or she is). For today's man, the focus has shifted to the personality, and the relevance of the Church is experienced as relevant or irrelevant to him or her through the connection to the person.¹⁵ It is increasingly the case that the newer generation is either connected to the Church through personal relationships or not at all.¹⁶ The impact of a changing society and changing expectations on the lives of the pastors, according to Klessmann, is that:

¹³ SCHNEIDER, N. – LEHNERT, V. A. (2011): *Berufen – wozu? – Zur gegenwärtigen Diskussion um das Pfarrbild in der Evangelischen Kirche*. Neukirchen-Vluyn, Neukirchener Verlag. 66.

¹⁴ TÖRÖK, Emőke – BIRÓ, Emese (2023b): Hungarian Clergywomen's Careers in the Church. In: *Religions*. 14, 10. 1311; TÖRÖK, Emőke – BIRÓ, Emese (2023a): Gendered Division of Work within Clergy Couples in Hungary. In: *Religions*. 14, 1. 105.

¹⁵ KLESSMANN, M. (2001): *Pfarrbilder im Wandel – Ein Beruf im Umbruch*. Neukirchener-Vluyn, Neukirchener 72.

¹⁶ JONES, T. (2008): *The New Christians – Dispatches from the Emergent Frontier*. San Francisco, Jossey-Bass. 56.

They find themselves confronted with a wide variety of expectations and demands, to which they respond according to their own changing emotional states: illusions of personal grandeur and omnipotence on the one hand and insecurity, diminished worth, and inferiority on the other. The pastor feels that in order to be a role model and a symbolic embodiment of authenticity in an increasingly fragmented society, one must lead a successful life. He feels that he must be seen as great in particular, and therefore – more likely than not – he feels constantly overwhelmed and underwhelmed by expectations. It is a common experience that he can only live up to this ideal in a very approximate way and can easily become overwhelmed by insecurity and discouragement.¹⁷

Without awareness, the pastor can take upon himself the expectations and responsibilities that the community should fulfil together. He finds himself in a role of implementation, whereas as a practical leader he should be rather coordinating the community's turning to God. Leadership in the life of the community, and the public presence and responsibility, can bring a lot of stress.¹⁸ There are conflicting expectations of the pastor's role in everyday life. Between the tasks and expectations, intellectual and spiritual energy is fragmented, while at the same time being present with people in the marginal situations of life and preparing to preach the *Word of God* requires a deep attention from the pastor.¹⁹ In the pastor, too, there can be a mixture of desired, lived, and confirmed role expectations.²⁰ Job role and personality overlap well, but personality is not only the sum of roles but also a role that differs from what the person in it consciously sees of their own role. As Rössler puts it, "The pastor must be aware that he

¹⁷ KLESSMANN 2001, 15. The translations of all, originally non-English quotations belong to the authors of this article.

¹⁸ KLESSMANN, M. (2012): *Das Pfarramt – Einführung in Grundfragen der Pastoraltheologie*. Göttingen, Neukirchener. 34.

¹⁹ WAGNER-RAU, U. (2012): *Auf der Schwelle – Das Pfarramt im Prozess kirchlichen Wandels*. Stuttgart, Kohlhammer. 22–32.

²⁰ GULYÁS, Péter – KONCZ, András – LÁZÁR, László – SIBA, Balázs (2016): *A vezetett vezető – a szakmai kompetenciák, a menedzsment módszerek és a spiritualitás összefüggései egy nemzetközi vezetői kutatás tükrében*. In: *Igazság és Élet*. X, 1. 188.

or she represents much more than his or her personal religious convictions and beliefs.”²¹ There is a part of the role that the bearer does not see (blind spots, impulse transference), but the other projects onto it (projections), and there is also a part of identity that does not fully cover the totality of roles (personal secrets etc.). The pastor’s role is a kind of projection surface for himself (ideal-self) as well as for other people.²² Josuttis formulates the unspoken claim, whether in external role assignments or in the pastor’s internal role formation, in this way: “human weakness, which in some form characterizes all human beings, is forbidden to the pastor”.²³ Since the pastoral vocation is a secular vocation, we can agree with the words of Josuttis when he writes, “the pastor who tells the sacred story, presents the sacred rites, and lives the sacred life to others”.²⁴

4.2. *The Starting Level of Role Learning*

We become skilled in different areas of our lives to different degrees, and learning to live the ministry is a process in stages.²⁵ The first phase is when one sees what it means to be a pastor. Some people grow up in their parents’ house with pastors in their family and have seen first-hand how a person lives their ministry from an early age, while others only encounter a congregation at a later stage in their lives.

The next phase of becoming a pastor is when the future pastor tries out roles in the congregation that are related to his or her future role as a pastor. This may be before, during, or after the theological years: for example, leading a youth group, pastoral care, participating in camps, etc. The next stage is when one enters the pastoral role with the approval of the congregation and is comfortable in this role, first at the beginner level and then at an advanced level. By becoming a pastor, he is no longer just watching how others do it, no longer just doing what he understands to be part of the pastor’s work, but “as a professional believer” he is himself teaches what it means to live as a follower of Christ in the world.

²¹ RÖSSLER, D. (1994): *Grundriss der praktischen Theologie*. Berlin – New York, de Gruyter. 293.

²² KLESSMANN 2001, 13.

²³ JOSUTTIS, M. (1982): *Der Pfarrer ist anders – Aspekte einer zeitgenössischen Pastoraltheologie*. Munich, Chr. Kaiser. 176.

²⁴ JOSUTTIS, M. (1988): *Der Traum des Theologen – Aspekte einer zeitgenössischen Pastoraltheologie 2*. Munich, Chr. Kaiser, 62.

²⁵ BRUNER, J. (2004): *Az oktatás kultúrája*. Budapest, Gondolat Kiadó.

Becoming a pastor is not only a process of learning a role but also a way of living the life of a believer at the level of identity. In our view, the pastoral vocation is most different from other vocations in that the pastor not only encounters and works with the issues of living the Christian faith like any other believer, but he also “lives it out” and teaches it to others.²⁶ His lived relationship with God is his reflection on the things of the world and on himself, which he makes “public” from time to time, whether in the pulpit, in the Sunday school, or in personal conversation. It is a way of life that constantly seeks to find the links between the witness of the Bible and the world today.²⁷

4.3. Facing up to the Expectations of a Pastor

How does the pastor decide which of the expectations he or she considers his or her own and which he or she cannot or will not identify with? Should the pastor be more of a generalist with some knowledge of many things or a specialist in one area? Isolde Karle calls the competence that a pastor needs a “special generalist”.²⁸ However, the sum total of charisms or competences is not enough since competence is not enough for pastoral ministry, although it is a necessary condition.²⁹ The Spirit that permeates the presence of the pastor is also important.³⁰ As Barth writes about the importance of God’s guidance: “It is not experience, being in it, and discovery that are most important but the simple and factual knowledge of what the eye has not seen and the ear has not heard (1Cor 2:9). Not only sharing what has come to our knowledge but also what we have participated in. It is not just passing on but understanding, not just compassion but working together

²⁶ SCHAREN, C. (2008): *Faith as a Way of Life – A Vision for Pastoral Leadership*. Grand Rapids, Eerdmans. 1.

²⁷ CARROLL, J. W. (2006): *God’s Potters – Pastoral Leadership and the Shaping of Congregations*. Pulpit & Pew. 32.

²⁸ KARLE, I. (2008): *Der Pfarrberuf als Profession – Eine Berufstheorie im Kontext der modernen Gesellschaft*. Stuttgart, Kreuz. 242.

²⁹ KELLER, D. (2011): *Charisma als Grundbegriff der Praktischen Theologie – Die Bedeutung der Charismenlehre für die Pastoraltheologie und für die Lehre von Gemeindeaufbau*. Zürich, TVZ. 447.

³⁰ MACIEL, M. (2005): *Priester für das Dritte Jahrtausend – und ihre ganzheitliche Ausbildung*. Rome, ART. 43.

that counts. The passing on of faith must precede the faith that God has worked in us.”³¹

Contrary to human expectations, God's presence is not about expectations; the experience of grace also liberates us to serve. Of course, there may be parts of the role that must be carried out of responsibility, but in this we must please God rather than men (Acts 5:29).³² The “extra me” aspect of ministry is unmissable. God is the one who makes one fit for ministry, and it is to Him that we give an account of our lives in the first place.

In the ecclesiastical sense, it is possible to resign from church service, but in the psychological sense it is not an easy task since it also means leaving a role and a community, with all its pain and grief.³³ Theologically, it is also not easy to “resign” since there is also an eschatological dimension to vocation.³⁴ Once a pastor has taken an oath of ordination and committed himself to serving the Church, he has become a “co-worker of Christ”, and his work is therefore not to be understood in terms of earthly life alone, since his service has an impact on his own salvation and the salvation and eternal life of others and of his fellow human beings.³⁵ In Puritan thought, it was accepted for one to choose a vocation, since a man could have many talents in life, but once he had accepted a task, a vocation, his calling had come into effect, and he therefore had to persevere in it as far as he was able to.³⁶ However, asking God to lead and leading ourselves cannot be played off against each other, but these should be done simultaneously, depending on the first one of them. On the one hand, this calls for humility, and, on the other, it can give hope to the person in the pastoral role. Although the community may look upon the pastor not only with its expectations set for his role but also with a specific role delegation – the pastor may easily find himself in a consultative role, as if he were a knower of secrets and an

³¹ BARTH, K. (2010 [1922]): *Der Römerbrief*. Zürich, TVZ. (zweite Fassung). 47–48.

³² KARLE, I. (2010): *Kirche in Reformstress*. Gütersloh, Gütersloher. 217.

³³ LÁSZLÓ, JÁNOS (2012): *A történetek tudománya, Bevezetés a narratív pszichológiába*. Budapest, Akadémia Kiadó. 67.

³⁴ MOLTSMANN, J. (1984): The Right to Work. In: *On Human Dignity: Political Theology and Ethics*. Philadelphia, Fortress.

³⁵ PACHMANN, H. (2011): *Pfarrer sein – Ein Beruf und eine Berufung im Wandel*. Göttingen, Vanderhoeck & Ruprecht. 43.

³⁶ GUZMAN, J. P. (2004): *Eschatological Significance of Human Vocation*. Master's thesis. Orlando, Reformed Theological Seminary. 40.

official mediator of God's will.³⁷ However, this potent sense can easily be deceptive, as Klessmann warns, "He who is aware of the limitations of his own boundaries need not live and act as a religious virtuoso (D. F. Schleiermacher) but rather needs a sense of belonging to those with whom he is on the journey."³⁸ Whether the image of the pastor is taken from others or whether the pastor himself forms the image of the pastor, it will always be an ideal image and cannot be realized in reality, at the level of action, even with the best of intentions.³⁹

The high expectations of the pastor are closer to the positivist and success-oriented view of man of our time than to the Christian view, namely that life is fragmented.⁴⁰ The pastor himself is a recipient of the Word and a man justified from sin.⁴¹ It is not a "cutting off" of the personality but the testimony of a man with his darkness and sins before God and produced with Him, living and real for other men.⁴² "The goal should not be a mature pastoral-theological identity, not a full role (*Totalrolle*) fulfilled to the best of one's ability but a serious acceptance and assumption of one's own limits, both in ministry and in private life. Without denying the pain and sadness that this causes, the aim is to bring opportunities and creative possibilities to the fore", writes Klessmann.⁴³ A congruent personality requires not only facing one's own sins but also distancing oneself from role expectations.⁴⁴ Krappmann identifies the ability to maintain the distance necessary for reflexive insight into roles and norms as important for a mature identity – finding personal meaning in role taking, the ability to live with

³⁷ RÖSSLER 1994, 499.

³⁸ KLESSMANN 2001, 24.

³⁹ KELLER 2011, 457.

⁴⁰ LUTHER, H. (1992): *Religion und Alltag – Bausteine zu einer Praktischen Theologie des Subjekts*. Stuttgart, Radius. 168.

⁴¹ LUTHER, H. (2014): Paradoxe Institution – Zum Funktionswandel des Pfarramts im Individualisierungsprozess. In: FECHTNER, K. – MULTIA, C. (eds.): *Henning Luther – Impluse für eine Praktische. Theologie der Spätmoderne*. Stuttgart, Kohlhammer. 58.

⁴² KASSEL, M. (1980): *Biblische Urbilder – Tiefenpsychologische Auslegung nach C. G. Jung*. Munich, Pfeiffer. 136.

⁴³ KLESSMANN 2001, 24.

⁴⁴ REIHMANN, A. – NEUBERT-STEGEMANN, R. (2012): Verlehrnen im Pfarramt. In: Sommar, R. – Koll, J. (eds.): *Schwellenkunde – einsichten und Aussichten für den Pfarrberuf im 21. Jahrhundert*. Ulrike Wagner-Rau zum 60. Geburtstag. Stuttgart, Kohlhammer. 172.

and cope with role expectations from others, to bear the ambivalences of the role, to see the boundaries of the role, and to see the role as congruent with one's own identity.⁴⁵

4.4. *Exchange of the Support Community*

Our network of relationships needs connections with family, friends, home, and work.⁴⁶ The most stable support networks are those that can rely on both family and friends.⁴⁷ Naturally, there are qualitative differences between family relationships and friendships. An illustrative example is, “Distant family relationships require only a reminder to become active, but friendships die out quickly if they are not tied up with a sufficient number of meetings for a certain period of time.”⁴⁸ From time to time, our network of friends may also experience a high turnover of people, for example when moving to a new place or changing jobs.⁴⁹ Some research suggests that when young people start university, around 40 per cent of their friends are replaced in a relatively short space of time.⁵⁰ The degree of closeness may vary constantly in our human relationships, but the distance is usually accompanied by pain and a sense of loss.⁵¹ Relationships with many of our good friends are fading, and hopefully a new network of friends is forming. The metaphor of “a caravan of friends” describes the dynamics of change in our network of contacts.⁵² As on a pilgrimage, so on a caravan journey, the travelling companionship becomes a loose alliance for a while, to support, help or just accompany each other on a section of the journey. With leaving theology and entering

⁴⁵ KRAPPMANN, L. (1973): *Soziologische Dimensionen der Identität*. Stuttgart. 97. See also: THOMA, László (2023): Mít kezdünk a lekipásztori szerep narcisztikus alaphelyzetével? – Az önértékelés jelentősége a lekipásztori hivatásban. In: *Sárospataki Füzetek*. 2023, 1. 57–72.

⁴⁶ ALBERT, Fruzsina (2022): *Emberi kapcsolatok – A személyes kapcsolathálózatok szociológiai szempontú elemzése*. Debrecen, Debreceni Egyetemi Kiadó. 20.

⁴⁷ ALBERT, Fruzsina – DÁVID, Beáta (2007): *Embert barátjáról – A barátság szociológiája*. Budapest, Századvég. 119.

⁴⁸ DUNBAR, Robin (2022): *Barátok – Hogyan értelmezzük legfontosabb kapcsolataink erejét?* Budapest, Typotex. 41.

⁴⁹ ALBERT – DÁVID 2007, 108.

⁵⁰ DUNBAR 2022, 84.

⁵¹ FELDMÁR, András (2007): *Közelség, távolság – Az intimitás határai*. Lecture. Soteria Alapítvány, Gödör Klub, 9 October 2007. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=g74qiDmk-Qw>.

⁵² ALBERT 2022, 24.

the workplace, the existing support network around the young minister is also transformed. If the place of ministry is far away from the family, the challenge is how the young minister can cultivate genuine, mutually supportive relationships with family members. If friendships have been formed with fellow students during the university years, it is natural that most of these relationships will be weakened after the university years are over. After all, each former classmate's life enters a new phase of life with a new job, a new network of people to which old friends are connected, and the start of a family means even less time and energy for other external relationships.

New relationships begin to form when you arrive at a new church, but they also take time to deepen. As in any other workplace, a pastor can experience a supportive atmosphere in the congregation, but there are also issues and problems that the young pastor cannot and does not want to burden church members with, as there may be personal issues that one shares primarily with family or friends.

4.5. Living in the Church Family

When a young pastor has a spouse and possibly children, it is not only the different life roles that are a challenge but also the pastoral family and a particular set of expectations to live with and deal with within the church.

Oddly enough, the church pastor's family is part of his work system. In the congregation, it is not only the pastor who is doing ministry, but his family is also a part of the serving community, wittingly or unwittingly. The pastor's family, as part of the extended family of the congregation, as a central subsystem, is projected by the community with esteem, love, and trust: "The psychic role of pastors is that they are the value carriers of the community."⁵³ As a value carrier on the level of external and internal expectations, the pastor is also a paternal role model, the pastor's wife a model of sacrifice, and their children the models of church attendance and volunteerism for peer groups. Oddly enough, some church members tend to expect more from the pastor's family than from their own family in terms of the level of expectations. Friedman sees the disadvantages and advantages of the pastor's family position as follows, "Not only do

⁵³ SZARKA, Miklós (2013): *Lelkipásztor házaspárok kapcsolati konfliktusainak kezelése – Pasztorálpszichoterápia a gyakorlatban*. Budapest, Kálvin Kiadó. 83.

congregation members have higher expectations of their pastor's family than of their own, but even the pastor's holiness accrues to those who are in a family relationship with him."⁵⁴ Viewed in this way, pastoral ministry takes more than just energy. The love of the community, their appreciation, trust as basic human needs can be experienced by the pastor in a loving community. The congregational system has an impact on the pastor's individual system: positive changes in the community can give the pastor self-confidence, a sense of achievement, and a work ethic, in addition to a sense of gratitude to God. On the other hand, a negative change in the community can be experienced as a personal failure and become a "symptom carrier" for the problems of the whole community.⁵⁵ The life of the congregation also affects the pastor's family, and family events can spill over into the wider system. It is important for the long-term spiritual and physical health of the pastor that he or she have the opportunity for growth within the family system and within the church community.⁵⁶ Physiological, psychological, and social needs are present in life simultaneously, and one dimension of the quality of life has impact on another one and vice versa. It is along these dimensions that pastors seek to find and live balance, both at the level of the pastoral family and the wider "church family".

5. Implications for Further Research

Our research has its limitations. Although the sociodemographic indicators of the respondents are a good representation of the base population, it is assumed that a larger number of early-career respondents can provide more accurate correlations. Their indicators had a higher average standard deviation. This suggests that this initial period is experienced very differently by pastors, influenced by many background factors. In our database, this subsample is not large enough for more complex statistical analyses and clustering.

⁵⁴ FRIEDMAN, E. H. (2008): *Nemzedékről nemzedékre – Családi folyamatok egyházi és zsinagógái közösségben*. Cluj-Napoca, Exit Kiadó. 304.

⁵⁵ Op. cit. 241.

⁵⁶ EGRI, László (2006): Spiritualitás, vallásosság és testi egészség. In: Tózsér, Endre (ed.): *Az istenhit mint erőforrás*. Budapest, Új Ember. 162.

Nonetheless, our hypothesis is confirmed by the results of the research. The necessity of leaving the “eagle’s nest” – in many ways, a safe and secure environment – causes a serious mental strain for early-career pastors. In terms of well-being, there is a higher proportion of pastors at risk among those who have served for 1–5 years. It is also clear that this is a very complex phenomenon.

Given the complexity and diversity of the life of early-career pastors, further qualitative research could explore the following areas:

1. The impact of internal and external expectations: What expectations determine the lives of pastors at the beginning of their careers? How do these affect well-being and the development of role stability?
2. The relationship between role identity and personal well-being: What helps to develop the pastoral role and manage role conflicts? What kind of interplays are between desired, lived, and confirmed role expectations, and how this affects the pastor’s emotional well-being?
3. Support networks and pastoral resilience: How changes support networks in pastors’ lives, focusing on the dynamics of family, friendships, and church communities? How these changes impact the pastor’s resilience and overall satisfaction in ministry.
4. Integration of faith and the “new” identity: How pastors integrate their faith into their identity and daily lives? What is the correlation between personal faith, ministry, and mental health in the early years?
5. Professional support and well-being: What kind of professional support can strengthen early-career pastors in their ministry?

These hypotheses could provide for possible future qualitative research valuable insights into the lived experiences of pastors, contributing to a deeper understanding of the challenges they face and informing strategies to support their well-being and fulfilment in ministry.

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