

**Resilience and wellbeing in ministry:**  
**An empirical enquiry within the Church of Scotland**

**Executive summary**

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**Context**

The Resilience in Ministry Survey was designed and implemented within the Church of Scotland to give an up-to-date profile of those currently engaged in ministry within the Church and to provide a well-informed basis on which future strategies could be planned for ministerial development and for enhancing the wellbeing of ministers. The survey was designed in consultation with a working group convened by the Ministries Council. This survey was mailed to all ministers, deacons, and locums serving within the Church of Scotland. Over half of those to whom the survey was sent invested time and care in completing the detailed range of questions.

**Theoretical roots**

The study was rooted in a theology of individual differences, in psychological type theory, and in a balanced affect model of work-related wellbeing. A theology of individual differences recognises that God calls a variety of people into discipleship and into ministry. As a consequence, not all ministers look alike, not all ministers exercise ministry in the same way, not all ministers have the same giftings, and not all ministers find the same aspects of ministry fulfilling or stressful.

Psychological type theory recognises that there are some key (and healthy) patterns in psychological differences among ministers. For example, introverts and extraverts are equally likely to be called by God into ministry, but there will be systematic patterns in their different approaches to ministry. As a consequence, the Church needs to recognise that the different giftings of introverts and extraverts need to be respected and valued. The same point is valid for the differences between sensing types and intuitive types, between feeling types and thinking types, and between perceiving types and judging types.

The balanced affect approach to work-related wellbeing distinguishes between negative affect (emotional exhaustion) and positive affect (satisfaction in ministry). It is not unusual for ministers to feel drained from an emotionally exhausting vocation, and yet at the same time to feel sustained by the sense that they are making a real difference to the lives of others through their response to God's call. The balanced affect approach recognises that positive affect can reduce the detrimental impact of negative affect on the lives of ministers.

**Listening to ministers**

While the theology of individual differences suggests that God may call all types into ministry, the evidence suggests that some types are more likely to be ordained into ministry in the Church of Scotland. The weighting is toward ordaining introverts, feeling types, and

judging types. The consequence is that the Church may be less equipped to minister among extraverts, thinking types, and perceiving types. This finding is supported by congregation surveys conducted in other denominations that show a similar type bias among ministers. One of these differences, the difference between thinking and feeling is also markedly different among men and women in the wider population. In the wider population 65% of men prefer thinking, compared with 30% of women. With just 41% of male ministers preferring thinking they occupy a position closer to the population norms for women than to the population norms for men. Thinking type men may experience particular difficulty fitting into churches led by feeling type ministers.

Church of Scotland ministers record levels of emotional exhaustion consistent with Presbyterian ministers in the USA and clergy in the Church of England: 43% feel drained by fulfilling their ministry roles, and 41% experience fatigue and irritation as part of their daily experience. Church of Scotland ministers record similar levels of satisfaction in ministry as Presbyterian ministers in the USA and higher levels than clergy in the Church of England: 88% gain a lot of personal satisfaction from working with people in their current ministry, and 85% are really glad that they entered the ministry. The high scores of positive affect should not, however, divert attention from taking seriously the problem of negative affect. It is really not acceptable that two in every five ministers should accept fatigue as part of their daily experience.

### **Exploring differences**

The research was designed to explore the impact of five different sets of factors on wellbeing in ministry. These were styled: personal factors (sex and age), personality factors (psychological type and emotionality), the Dark Triad of subclinical pathologies (Machiavellianism, Narcissism, and Psychopathy), the Bright Trinity of positive psychology (Purpose in Life, Emotional Intelligence, and Intrinsic Religiosity), and contextual factors (including forms of ministry, support mechanisms, and lifestyle preferences).

Of all five sets of factors, personality (psychological type and emotionality) emerged as most important. This finding suggests that the largest contributor to resilience resides in the psychological profile of individual ministers. Routine profiling could help to target support strategies where they are most needed and to those to whom they would be most beneficial. By way of contrast, contextual factors accounted for relatively little difference in resilience.

Of the range of support strategies explored by the survey, the role of mentor emerged as the most successful in helping ministers to focus on the aspects of ministry that resourced them. From the insights of positive psychology, both purpose in life and emotional intelligence emerged as enhancing resilience. The importance of this finding is that intervention strategies can help to develop both factors.

### **Building the future**

Both the theology of individual differences and psychological type theory value growing self-awareness as central to healthy human development. A Church that has taken seriously an

investigation into resilience and wellbeing among its ministers, may also wish to invest in continuing ministerial formation programmes that offer sustained opportunities for exploring the implications of individual differences both for healthy human flourishing, and for flourishing ministries fulfilling God's call to a diversity of people.