

LIFT

Ministry Group December Resource

Politics and Pastoral Health

In a 2021 survey focused on reasons why pastors are considering quitting ministry, Barna reported that 38 percent of pastors name “current political divisions” as a reason for why they’ve considered stepping away from ministry.

The political fervor that sweeps our nation, communities, and churches is having a significant effect on the morale and mental health of our pastors.

Let’s look at some issues ministers face during, and immediately following an election cycle:

1. In a culture where people’s every word is scrutinized, pastors often struggle under the **stress** of knowing what to say. Are their words going to be misinterpreted or twisted to support a political or personal agenda?
2. Many pastors feel **isolated** from church members during election season as they attempt to mediate the divisions that unfortunately find their way into and permeate the church’s membership. Ministers feel more like referees trying to break up two boxers in a ring than shepherds tasked with guiding their sheep toward health and spiritual maturity.

<https://www.barna.com/research/pastors-quitting-ministry/#>



Election Exhaustion

After a divisive election in our nation, many of our pastors are mentally and emotionally exhausted from navigating the rollercoaster of opinions and expectations held by their congregants.

Pastors were torn between parishioners who felt that leadership failed to go far enough in supporting a particular party’s platform and others who felt as though the pastor went too far in espousing values that could be construed as political.

Discuss: What difficulties did you face during the election season? Did you feel pressured to align with a particular set of political values? Did you feel push back when you spoke about moral issues facing our nation?

Although the election is over, the rhetoric and posturing on social and mainstream media persists. Divisive dialogue continues on places like Facebook, TikTok, and X continuing to fan the flame of disunity and undermining the peace that once characterized our churches.

Discuss: Has the divisive political climate permeated your church membership? What effect has it had on the interpersonal relationships among your congregants?

3. Many ministers often feel like political pawns rather than pastors as they come out of election season and struggle afterward to recapture their spiritual **identity** and authority with church members.

4. **Insecurities** mount with pastors who feel ill-equipped and uninformed when it comes to knowing a variety of candidate positions or party platforms.

According to Barna, only one in five pastors (20%) say they are equipped to lead on "politics and civic engagement," with 45% of pastors saying this is the realm they are least equipped to lead.

<https://www.prnewswire.com/news-releases/most-pastors-feel-ill-equipped-to-talk-politics-new-research-from-state-of-the-church-302304419.html>

5. Some pastors are having to **grieve** the loss of families who left the church because of political divisiveness allowed to fester in the church.

6. Many ministers struggle with **discouragement** during election season when their congregations are more focused on establishing a political identity (such as being seen as either conservative or progressive) than they are in being part of a long-term discipleship process where the character of Christ is being built in them.

7. Many ministers are **weary** of social media interactions and **leery** of participating in online discussion forums having been emotionally drained from the critical interactions they've experienced on those platforms.

Discuss: What other issues might a pastor face during or after an election cycle?

Take time to pray for one another and your congregations.

How do we recover from the election fallout?

After 9/11 it took months to clean away the debris from ground zero. Slowly life returned to the area and with it a renewed focus on the future. This election cycle was messy, but it was in no way as cataclysmic as the events that brought down the Twin Towers. However, recovery may seem to be just as daunting when you are rummaging thorough the emotions, bitterness and anger that has been strewn about our churches and communities.

Here are five steps on resetting the spiritual atmosphere of your church after the election:

1. Refocus on the mission.

A great place to start is by refocusing the congregation on the church's overall mission. Jesus said in Luke 19:10, "For the Son of Man came to seek and save those who are lost." Winning souls to the Kingdom is a far greater objective than winning voters to a cause or people to a political party.

2. Re-emphasize our corporate identity as the Body of Christ.

Next re-emphasize that there is but one Body for which we as believers are a part. Paul wrote in Ephesians 4:4, "For there is one body and one Spirit, just as you have been called to one glorious hope for the future." Although we may differ in many ways, we are united in Christ by one glorious hope!

3. Rehearse reconciliation.

Rehearse with your congregation their role in leading reconciliation. Paul wrote in 2 Corinthians 5:18-19: "All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation: that God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting people's sins against them. And he has committed to us the message of reconciliation." We are not just bystanders to it, but we are participants in it.

4. Re-establish the priority of unity.

A house divided cannot stand. Paul wrote in 1 Corinthians 1:10: "I appeal to you, dear brothers and sisters, by the authority of our Lord Jesus Christ, to live in harmony with each other. Let there be no divisions in the church. Rather, be of one mind, united in thought and purpose." It is important as a congregation that we unite around the person of Christ.

5. Reset boundaries for the next election season.

The next election cycle has already begun. Determine now how you are going to address moral issues, communicate early what people can expect from the pulpit, and keep Jesus (rather than causes) at the center of your preaching. Ministers certainly have the right to hold their own political views, but projecting partisanship can isolate members of your congregation, not just from you, but from Christ.

Discuss: Take some time as a group to discuss these ideas and what plans you have to put in place for the next election cycle?

