

Survey of Free Will Baptist Pastors

NAFWB Committee on Denominational Research

July 2019

Executive Summary

Introduction

Designed to target the lead pastor (sometimes called the “senior pastor” or simply “pastor”) of the churches of the National Association of Free Will Baptists, the survey collected a variety of information with the goal of helping denominational leaders better serve pastors and churches. The survey will also serve as a baseline for future research.

A list of the 2,020 churches in the 2018 *FWB Yearbook* was supplied to the committee by the Executive Office. A link to the survey was then emailed to the 808 pastors who had email addresses, and a postcard was mailed to the remaining 1,212.* As a result, there were 639 separate responses, resulting in a 3% margin of error for the survey at a 95% certainty level. The survey responses were gathered anonymously.

Demographics

The first question tells us 55% of our pastors are over 50 years of age, and 80% are over 40. This statistic could mean we will soon have a great lack of preachers. However, we do not have earlier surveys to know whether the average age of our pastors is indeed increasing, and we do not have accurate statistics regarding preachers not yet pastoring but ready to assume that role. We need more data and more research in this area.

Our pastors are predominantly Caucasian (96%), speak English as their primary language (99%), and are married to their first wife (94%). Concerning family size, 88% of our pastors’ families have less than 5 children with 65% having 2 to 3, and 73% of pastors say their oldest child is at least 18 years of age. Almost 12% of our pastors said they have at least one child in full-time ministry.

Ministry

Of those who responded to the survey, 35% began pastoring before the age of 25, and 76% before the age of 35. Over 58% of our pastors have pastored no more than 2 churches, and 34% of our pastors have pastored only 1 church.

Our churches are predominantly small with 51% averaging fewer than 75 attendees and about 68% averaging fewer than 100. We are also primarily rural with 46% of our churches located in the country, while only 31% are in a city. The remaining 23% are in the suburbs.

Of the pastors who responded, 62% consider themselves full-time, 6% part-time and 32% bi-vocational. The pastors reported that 41% of their wives are working full-time, 18% work part-time, 24% are not working and 17% are retired.

Retirement and Insurance

Most of our pastors provide the household insurance (63%), while some pastors rely upon insurance provided through their wives’ work (23%). On one hand, 78% of pastors have not opted out of the Social Security system with 12% of those wishing they had. On the other hand, 21% did opt out of Social Security with 28% of those wishing they had not.

39% of our churches contribute toward their pastor’s retirement.

When asked if they feel prepared for retirement, only 9% responded in the affirmative. Of the remaining respondees, 11% consider themselves already retired, 36% said they are not ready for retirement, 33% said they are somewhat ready for retirement, and 11% are not sure. Over 33% of those who have retired said they were not prepared for it.

Education

We wanted to find out our pastors’ experiences and attitudes toward education. We found that 66% of our pastors have now graduated from college and 29% from graduate school (20% with master’s only and 9% with doctorate degrees). Our next question was intended to find out the numbers and types of degrees from either a Bible college or seminary. Unfortunately, the question was poorly written in that the bachelor’s degree and the M.Div. were omitted. We apologize for this oversight. However, the question did confirm the graduate degrees mentioned in the previous question were almost entirely from Bible colleges and/or seminaries.

We discovered that 59% of our pastors attended a Free Will Baptist College with over 61% of those attending Welch College, 23% Randall University, 13% Southeastern Free Will Baptist College, 5% California Christian College and 5% other (such as a local institute).

We wanted to find out our pastors’ attitudes toward the need of an education. Therefore, we asked them to rate the importance of a Bible college/seminary degree on a scale of 1 to 10 for both an undergraduate and a graduate degree.

Undergraduate Degree: Over 50% of the pastors gave a ranking of 7 or above, and 23% chose the highest rank of 10. Weighted average: 6.3.

Graduate Degree: 64% gave a ranking of 5 or less. Weighted average: 4.7.

We also asked the best time when a preacher should earn his graduate degree. The results were split: 45% of the pastors said he should wait a few years, but 37% said he should go ahead and begin right after undergraduate school.

Study Habits and Personal Time

Over 85% of our pastors spend more than 5 hours a week in study time for their sermons, with 25% spending 11 to 15 hours and 29% spending more than 15 hours. Electronic sources are being used readily, with close to 9 out of 10 pastors using some printed works and some electronic sources.

A majority (93%) of our pastors spend at least 10 minutes a day in personal devotions. Just over 26% are in the 11-20 minute range, 35% are in the 21-30 minute range, and right at 32% are spending more than 30 minutes a day in their devotions. Prayer time is a very close parallel to this same pattern. The majority (91%) spend over 10 minutes in prayer with 39% in the 10-20 minute range, 24% in the 21-30 minute range, and 28% over 30 minutes.

While this question was in no way meant to stir up controversy in our ranks, we thought it fitting to find out what our pastors felt about the place of the King James Version of the Bible in our preaching, teaching, and personal study. In response to that question, 10% believe the King James Version is the only version that should be used for preaching, teaching, and personal study; 25% feel the KJV is the only version we should use for preaching and teaching, but consider other versions acceptable for personal study; 65% of our pastors indicated that other versions of the Bible are acceptable for both preaching and teaching.

Association Meetings

Occasionally, discussions arise concerning the necessity of attendance at local, state, and national association meetings. Questions were asked to find out what our pastors thought about these meetings.

First of all, we wanted to know whether our pastors made an attempt to attend these meetings. About 66% of our pastors say they try to at least occasionally attend the National Association (39% yearly and 27% occasionally). When asked to rate the importance of the National Association from 1 to 10, 40% gave a ranking of 10, and the weighted average was 7.8.

Regarding the state association meeting, 82% of pastors say they try to attend at least occasionally, with 68% attempting to do so yearly. When asked to rate the importance of the state association from 1 to 10, 37% gave a ranking of 10, and the weighted average was 7.7.

Concerning the local association meeting, 92% of our pastors say they try to attend at least occasionally with 82% attempting to do so yearly. When asked to rate the importance of the local association from 1 to 10, 30% gave a ranking of 10, and the weighted average was 6.6.

We also asked one more question about the local associations: "How many times should a local association meet yearly?" Of those answering, 37% said 2 times per year, and 31% said 4 times per year. The remaining responses were as follows: once yearly (16%), three times yearly (11%), and more than four times yearly (2%).

Final Questions

Two open-ended questions at the end of the survey asked the pastors how the denomination could serve them and their churches. A thorough analysis of the given answers has not been conducted as of yet. However, each and every response will be viewed, reviewed, and taken seriously in an effort to better serve pastors and churches.

Parting Thoughts

The committee would like to give a special word of thanks for the support and cooperation of Executive Secretary Keith Burden and his staff. Our future plans include a similar survey to be launched this fall to collect information about our churches with the goal of having the results published by the Leadership Conference in December 2019. Visit our website at www.nafwb.org/research for the results of this and future surveys and information regarding future research of the Committee on Denominational Research.

*Many of the 808 emails were rejected by email servers. In the case of addresses, many of them were eliminated when they went through a validation process by the mailing service we used. Finally, many postcards we mailed were returned. We deeply apologize if you are a pastor and did not receive an opportunity to fill out one of the surveys.

The Committee on Denominational Research was appointed by Moderator Tim York at the National Association of Free Will Baptists in Little Rock, Arkansas, in July 2018. The committee consisted of Dr. Danny Baer (Chair), Dr. Eddie Moody, Dr. Ron Hunter, Dr. Tim Eaton, and Mark McPeak. The committee was funded by a \$5,000 grant supplied by the Free Will Baptist Foundation.