

A Barna Report Produced
in Partnership with
Brotherhood Mutual

Barna



LEADERSHIP TRANSITIONS

HOW CHURCHES
NAVIGATE PASTORAL
CHANGE—AND
STAY HEALTHY



For more information about this study and to see the complete findings, check out our 2019 report:

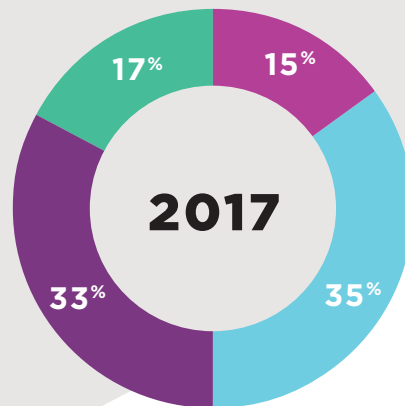
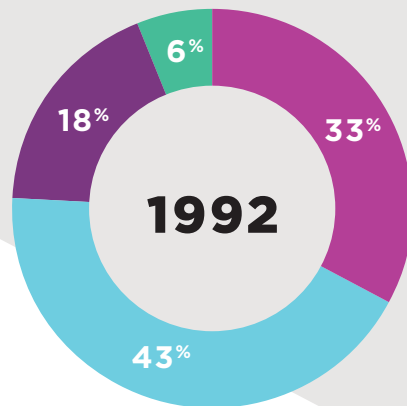
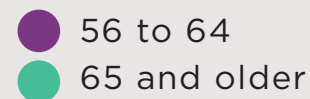
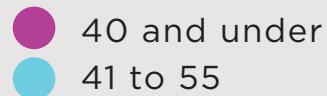
Leadership Transitions

The full report is available at shop.barna.com or through Barna Access membership.



Leadership Transitions in Context

Aging Clergy



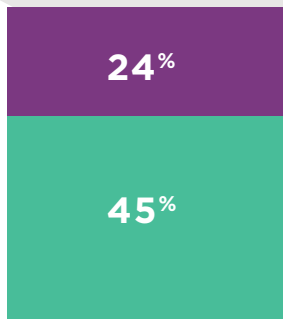


Leadership Transitions in Context

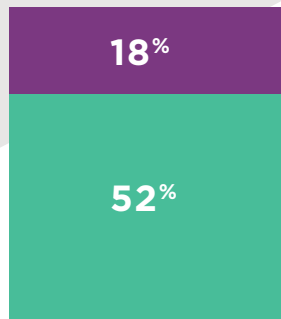
Shrinking Candidate Pool

- agree strongly
- agree somewhat

It is becoming harder to find mature young Christians who want to become pastors



A lot of young leaders seem to think other kinds of work are more important than vocational ministry



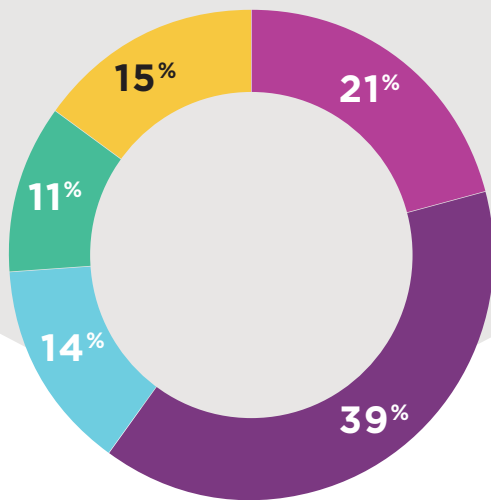


Leadership Transitions in Context

Diminishing Cultural Credibility

% among U.S. adults

- very credible
- somewhat credible
- not very credible
- not at all credible
- not sure

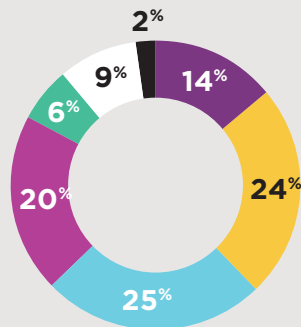


CHURCHES IN THIS STUDY'S SAMPLE

Barna

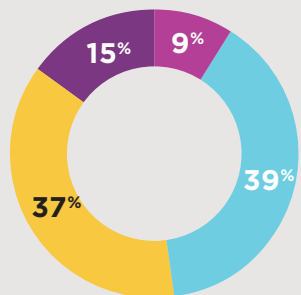
% among churchgoers

Church size

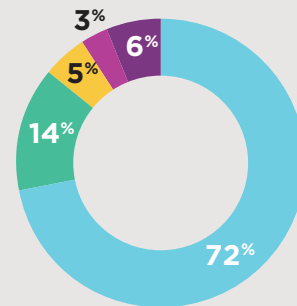
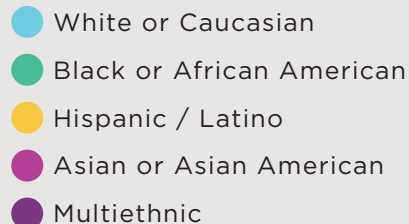


Median church size: 130 members

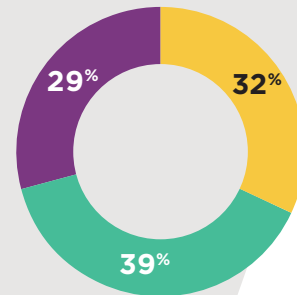
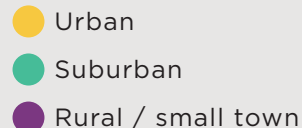
Largest age group in congregation



Primary ethnicity of congregation



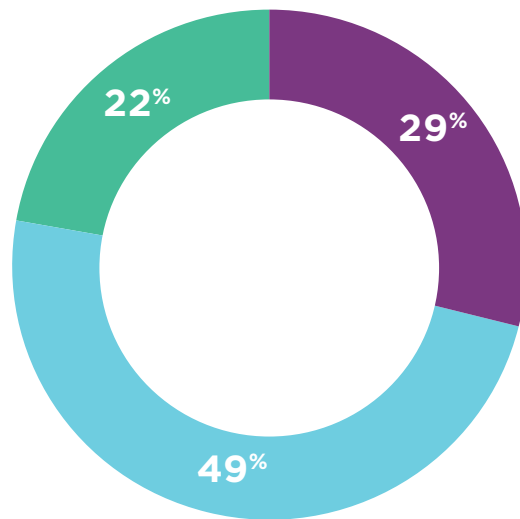
Church location



OUTCOMES AMONG CHURCHGOERS WHO HAVE EXPERIENCED A TRANSITION

Barna

- Positive
- Mixed
- Negative



RESEARCHERS INTERVIEWED:

Barna

- **1,517 practicing, self-identified Christians** (18 years and older) whose church had undergone a leadership transition within the past five to seven years
- **249 incoming senior pastors** who had come to their current church within the past five to seven years
- **70 outgoing senior pastors** who had left a church within the past five to seven years
- **129 church staff members** (other than the senior leader) whose church had undergone a leadership transition within the past five to seven years

- Team Assessment
- Reflection Questions
- Activities & Actions
- Focus on the Players



Be Prepared for Anything

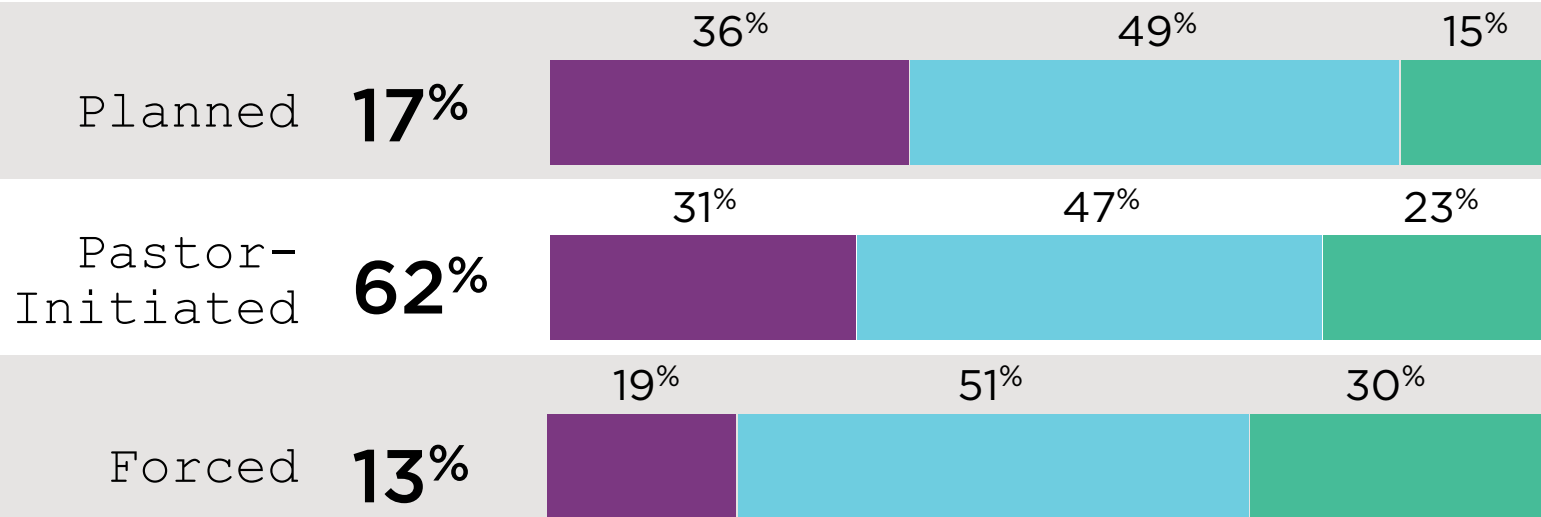
What effect does advanced planning have on transitions?

Barna

ULTIMATE OUTCOME OF TRANSITION

TYPE OF LEADERSHIP TRANSITION

Positive Mixed Negative



8% don't know



Be Prepared for Anything

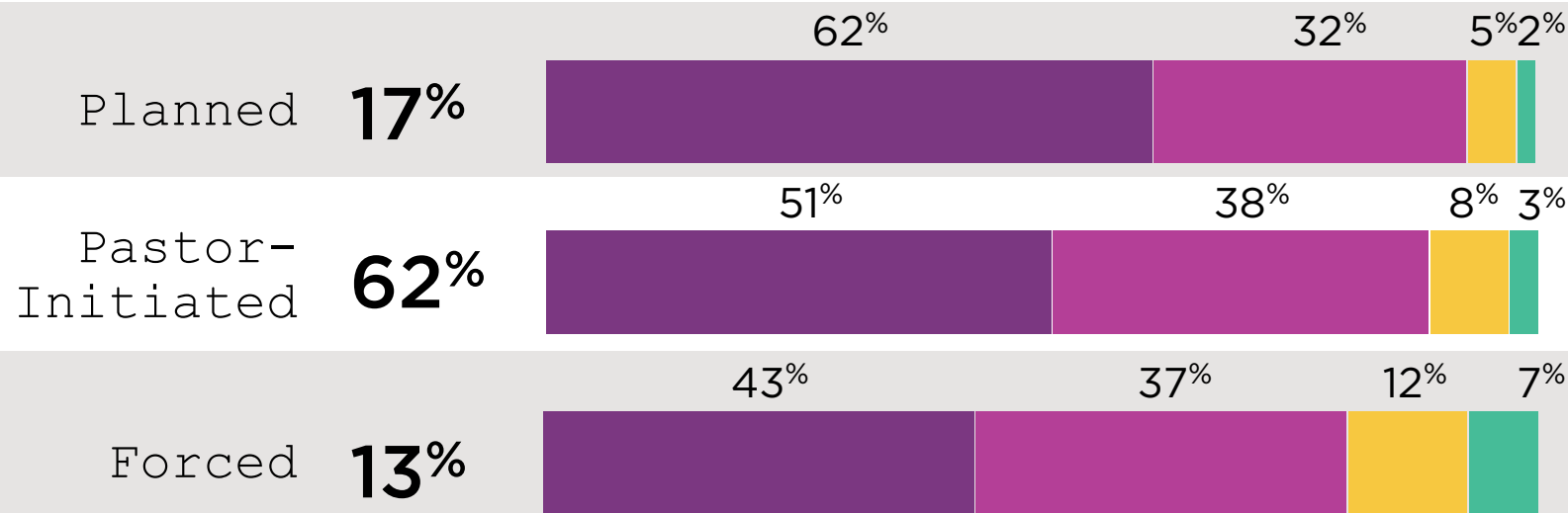
What effect does advanced planning have on transitions?

Barna

SMOOTHNESS OF TRANSITION

TYPE OF LEADERSHIP TRANSITION

- Extremely smooth, with few difficulties
- Major obstacles that had to be overcome
- Some difficulties, but relatively smooth
- Extremely difficult



8% don't know



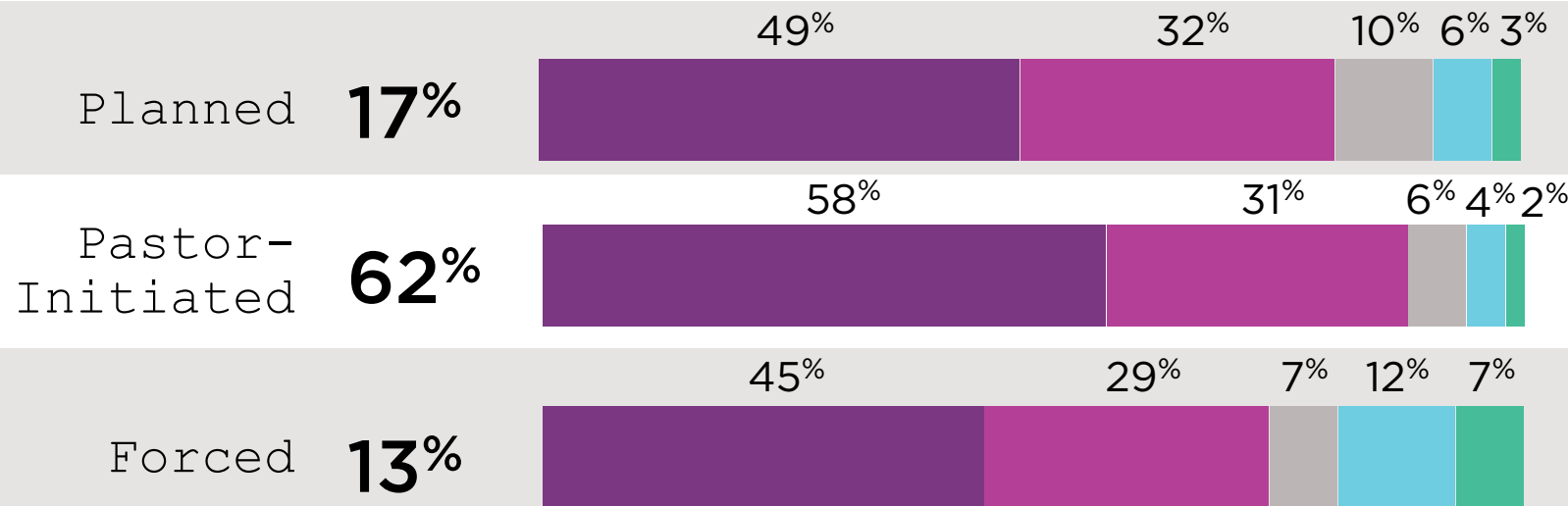
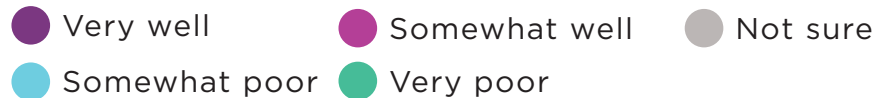
Be Prepared for Anything

What effect does advanced planning have on transitions?

Barna

COMMUNICATION AROUND REASON FOR TRANSITION

TYPE OF LEADERSHIP TRANSITION



8% don't know



Be Prepared for Anything

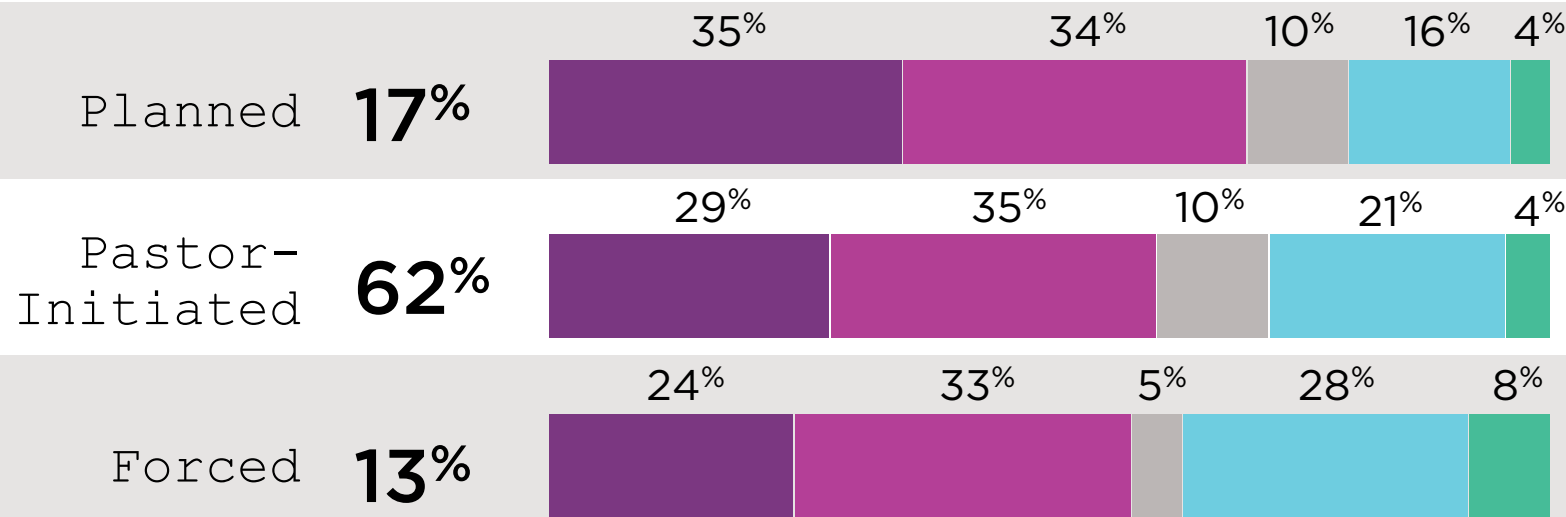
What effect does advanced planning have on transitions?

Barna

CHURCH ATTENDANCE DURING TRANSITION

TYPE OF LEADERSHIP TRANSITION

Very strong Somewhat strong Not sure
Somewhat weak Very weak



8% don't know



Be Prepared for Anything

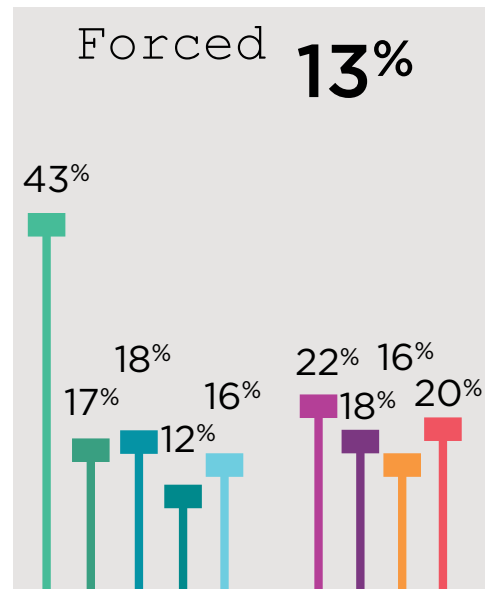
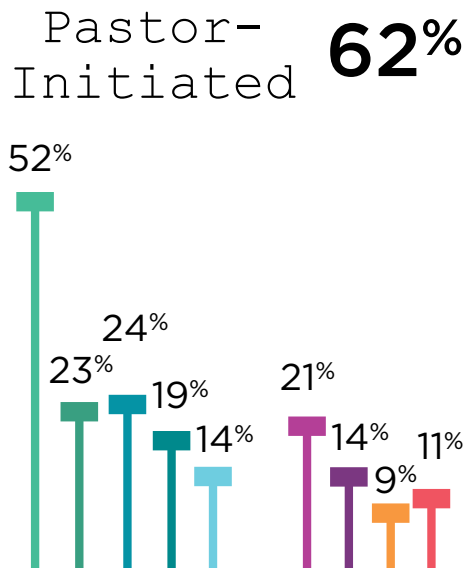
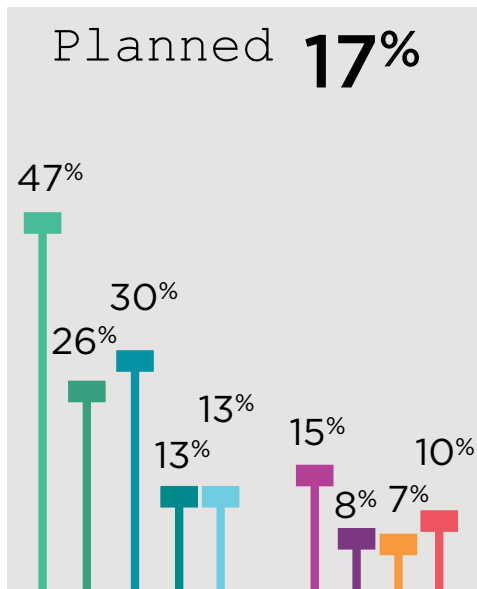
What effect does advanced planning have on transitions?

Barna

EMOTIONS OF CONGREGATION DURING TRANSITION



TYPE OF LEADERSHIP TRANSITION

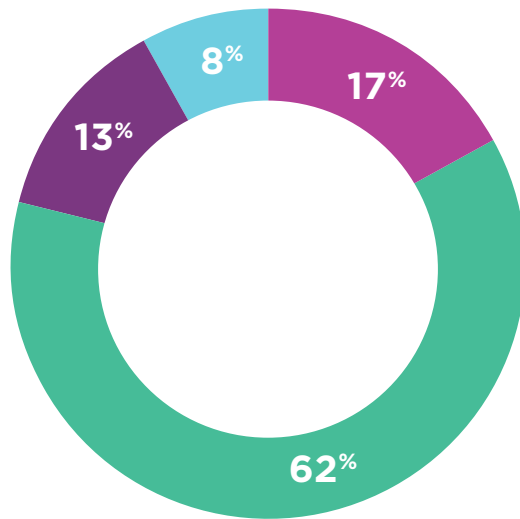


① Before the Transition

TYPE OF LEADERSHIP TRANSITION

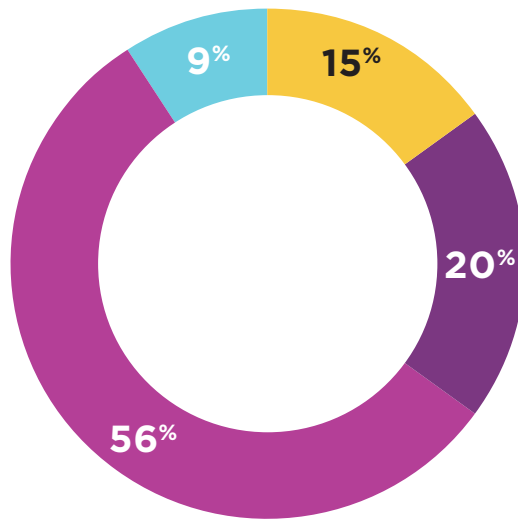
Barna

- Planned
- Pastor-initiated
- Forced
- Don't know



DIRECTION OF LEADERSHIP TRANSITION

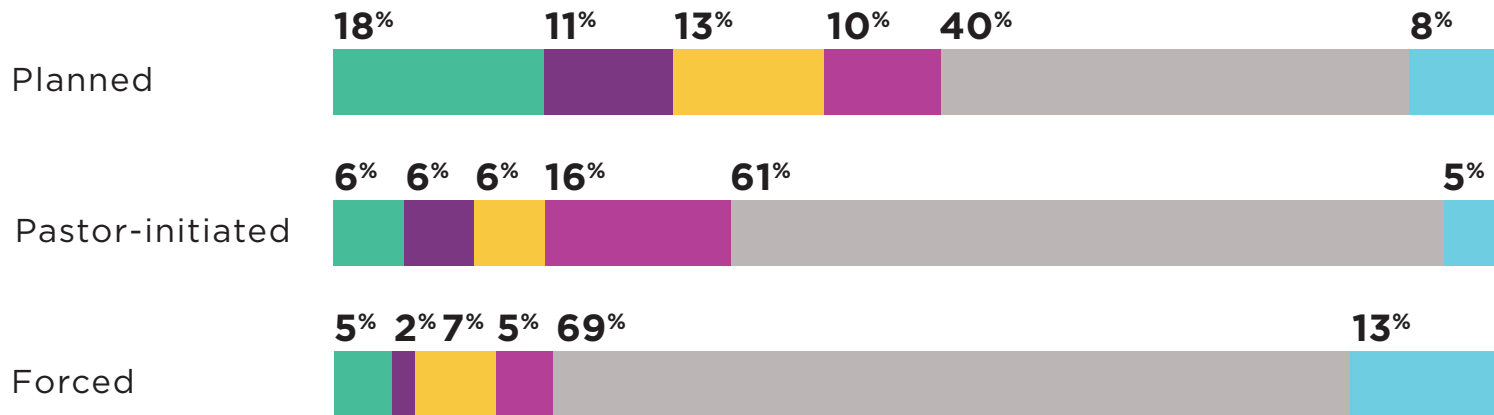
- Step back
- Withdraw
- Depart
- Don't know



DIRECTION OF LEADERSHIP TRANSITION

% among churchgoers who have experienced transition within 5 years

- Transitioned from senior pastor to co-pastor/
joint senior pastor arrangement
- Transitioned from senior to associate pastor
- Transitioned from senior pastor to another
leadership role (e.g., elder, teacher)
- Left any leadership roles, but continued to
attend the church as a member
- Left the congregation entirely
- I don't know



OUTCOMES, BY DIRECTION OF TRANSITION

Barna

● Positive ● Mixed ● Negative

Transitioned from senior pastor to co-pastor or joint senior pastor arrangement



Transitioned from senior pastor to associate pastor



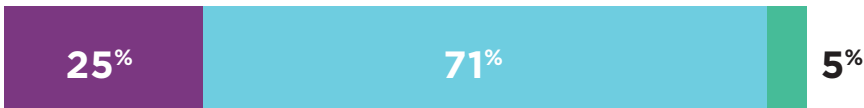
Transitioned from senior pastor to another leadership role in the congregation (e.g., elder, teacher)



Left any leadership roles, but continued to attend the church as a member of the congregation

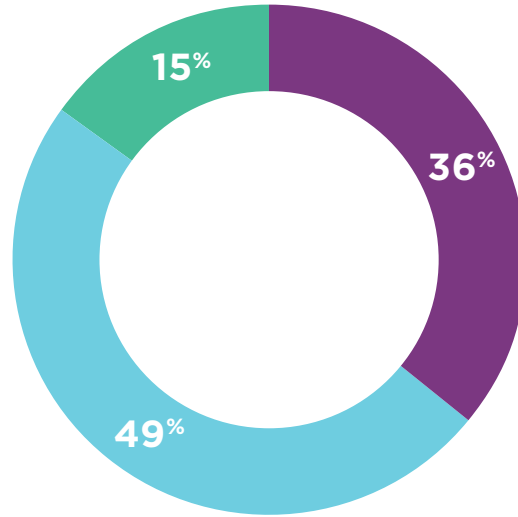


Left the congregation entirely



OUTCOMES OF PLANNED TRANSITIONS

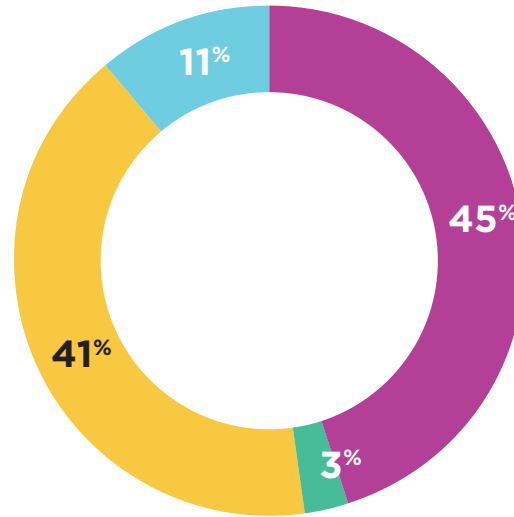
- Positive
- Mixed
- Negative



CURRENT SENIOR LEADERS ON THE IMPORTANCE OF DEVELOPING A PIPELINE OF FUTURE MINISTRY LEADERS

Barna

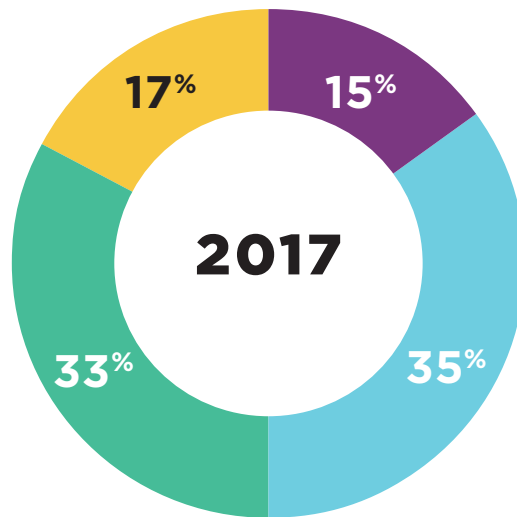
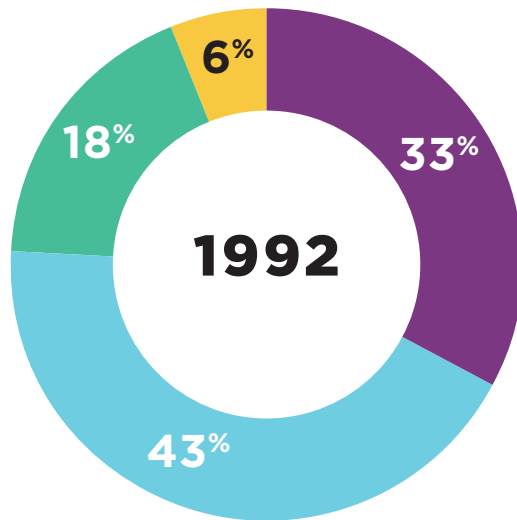
- High priority
- Delegated to staff
- Thought, but no action
- Not a priority



PASTOR AGE BRACKETS: 1992 VS. 2017

Barna

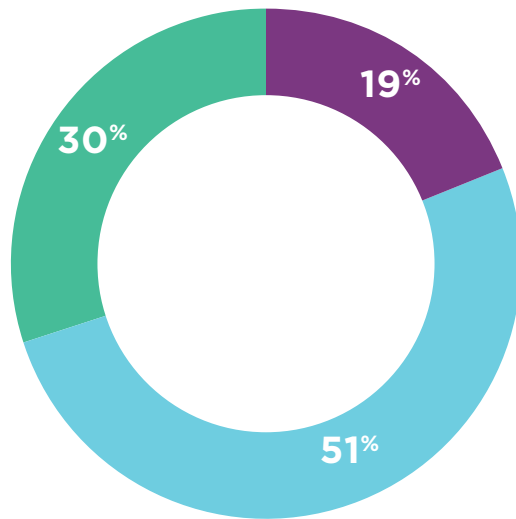
- 40 and under
- 41 to 55
- 56 to 64
- 65 and older



n=1,033 U.S. Protestant pastors 1992; *n*=5,067 U.S. Protestant pastors 2011–2016.

OUTCOMES OF FORCED TRANSITIONS

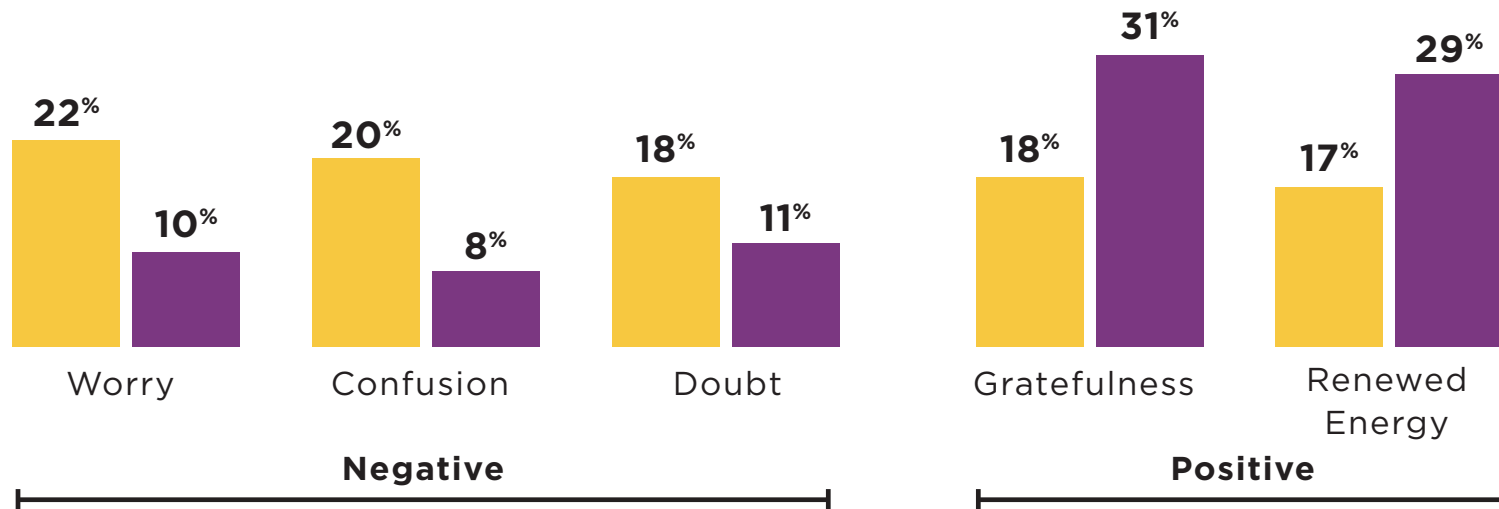
- Positive
- Mixed
- Negative



CHURCHGOERS' EMOTIONS DURING AND AFTER TRANSITION

Barna

● During ● After



② During the Transition



Let's Keep Talking

Barna

What should you communicate during transitions?

It's clear that communication is a strong factor in the experience during and success of a transition



**OF CONGREGANTS STRONGLY
AGREE THEIR CHURCH
COMMUNICATED CLEARLY
ON A PLAN AND PROCESS
FOR SUCCESSION**

n=1,517 Congregation / Churchgoers; *n*=129 Church Staff; *n*=259 Incoming pastors; *n*=70 Outgoing pastors

Fielding Dates: Church Staff & Pastor Study: March 16, 2017 – April 27, 2017; Fielding Dates: Congregation (Vendor: Nielsen): March 17, 2017 – April 4, 2017.



Let's Keep Talking

Barna

What should you communicate during transitions?

Unfortunately, communication with and to congregants is often neglected during transitions



31%

**OF CONGREGANTS
STRONGLY AGREE THAT THE
CONGREGATION HAD A HIGH
DEGREE OF INPUT IN THE
SUCCESSION PROCESS**

n=1,517 Congregation / Churchgoers; *n*=129 Church Staff; *n*=259 Incoming pastors; *n*=70 Outgoing pastors

Fielding Dates: Church Staff & Pastor Study: March 16, 2017 – April 27, 2017; Fielding Dates: Congregation (Vendor: Nielsen): March 17, 2017 – April 4, 2017.

My church communicated very well on...

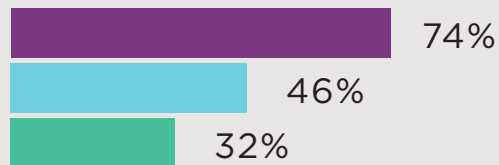
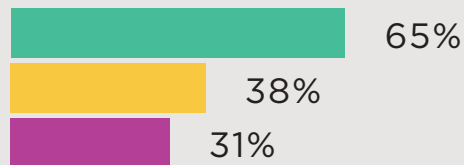
Overall experience during transition

Smooth Conflicted Difficult

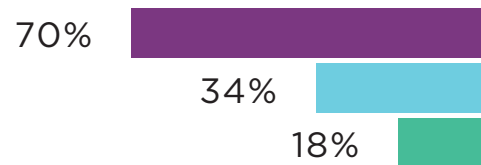
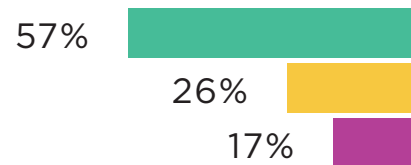
Outcome after transition

Positive Mixed Negative

THE REASON FOR THE TRANSITION



THE TIMELINE OF THE TRANSITION



My church communicated very well on...

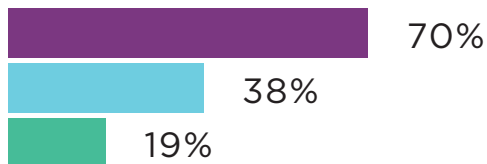
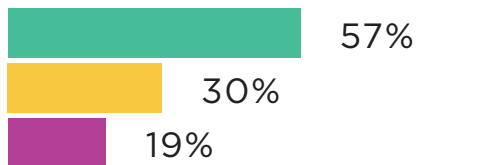
Overall experience during transition

Smooth Conflicted Difficult

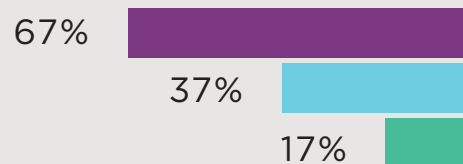
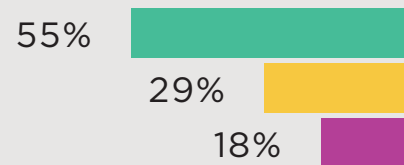
Outcome after transition

Positive Mixed Negative

THE PROCESS OF FINDING A REPLACEMENT

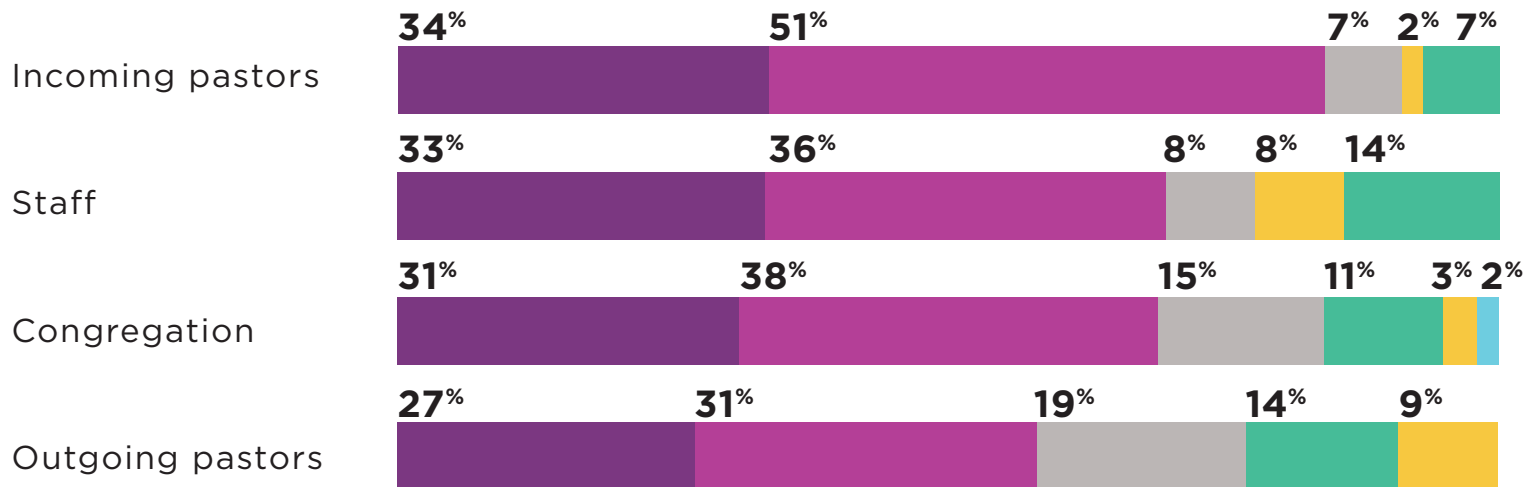
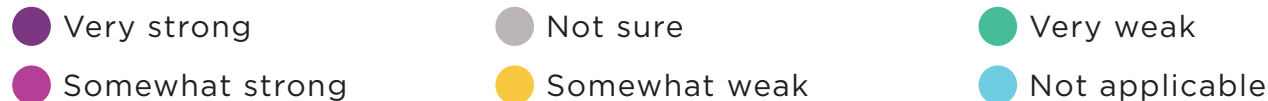


THE REQUIREMENTS FOR A REPLACEMENT



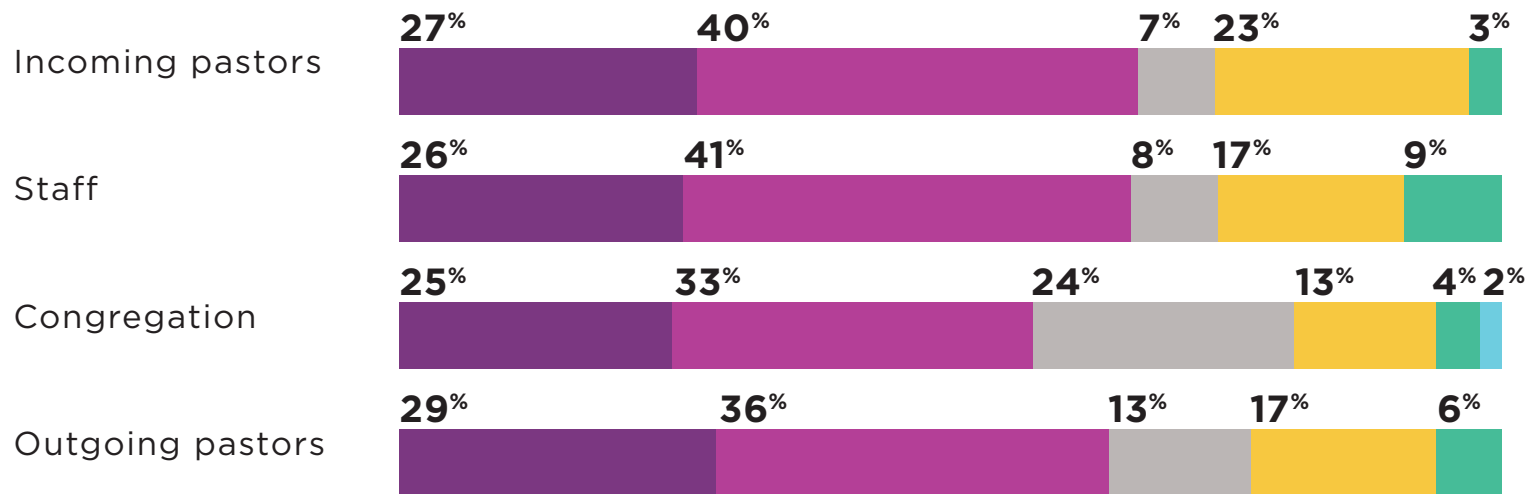
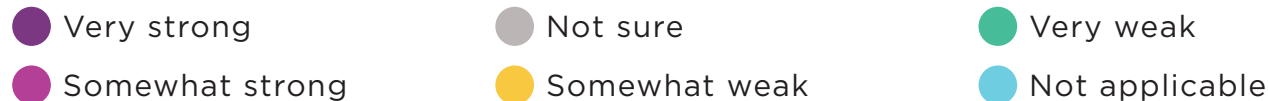
TEACHING & MINISTRY STYLE DURING THE TRANSITION

Barna



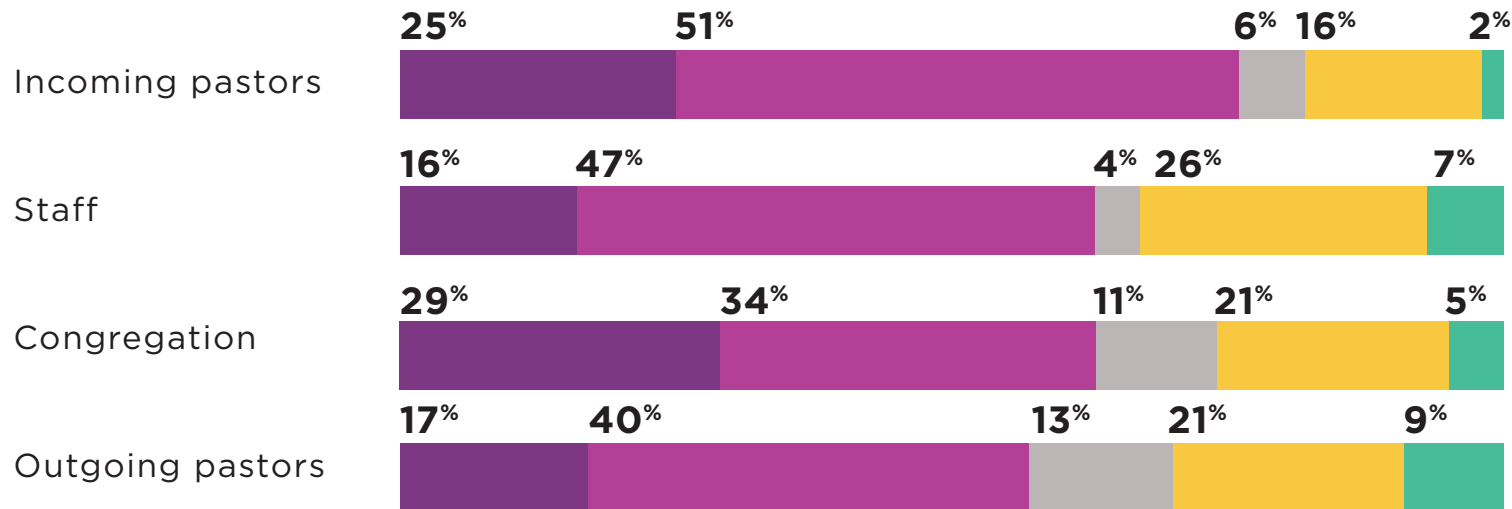
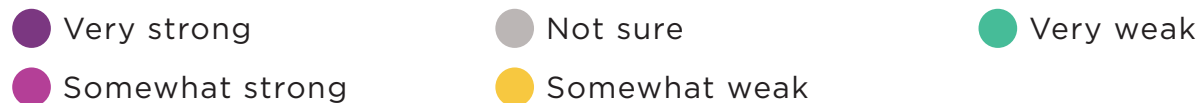
CHURCH FINANCES DURING THE TRANSITION

Barna



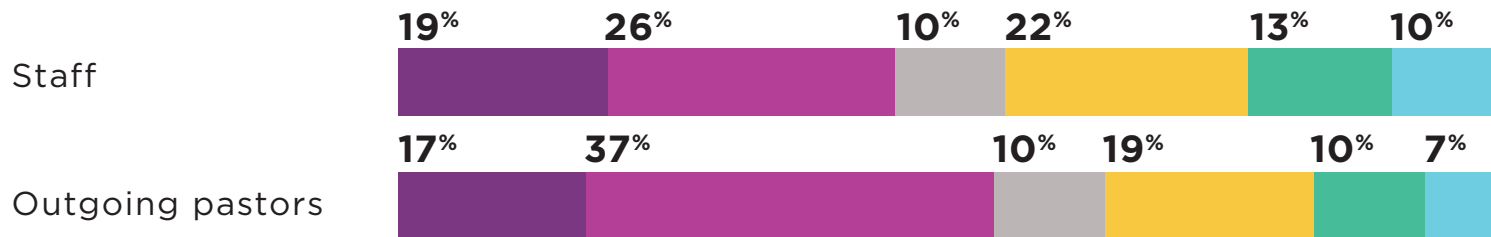
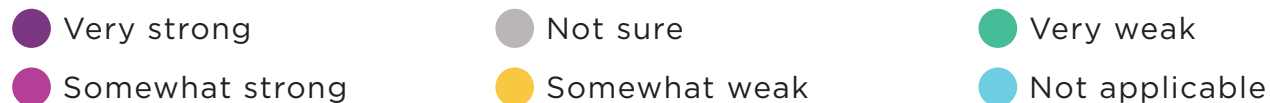
CHURCH ATTENDANCE DURING THE TRANSITION

Barna



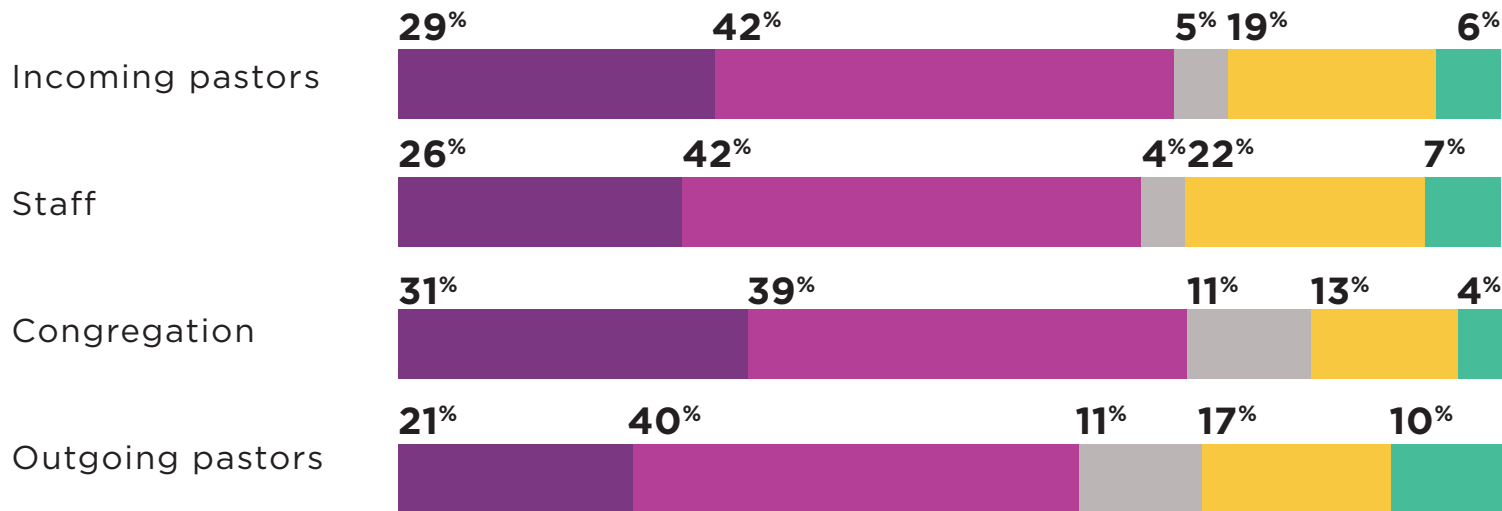
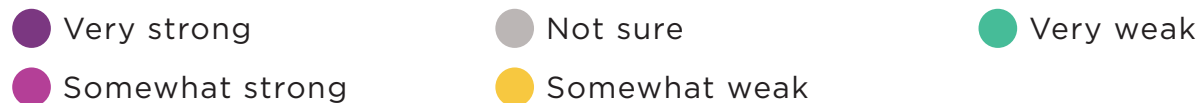
STAFF ENGAGEMENT DURING THE TRANSITION

Barna



CHURCH UNITY DURING THE TRANSITION

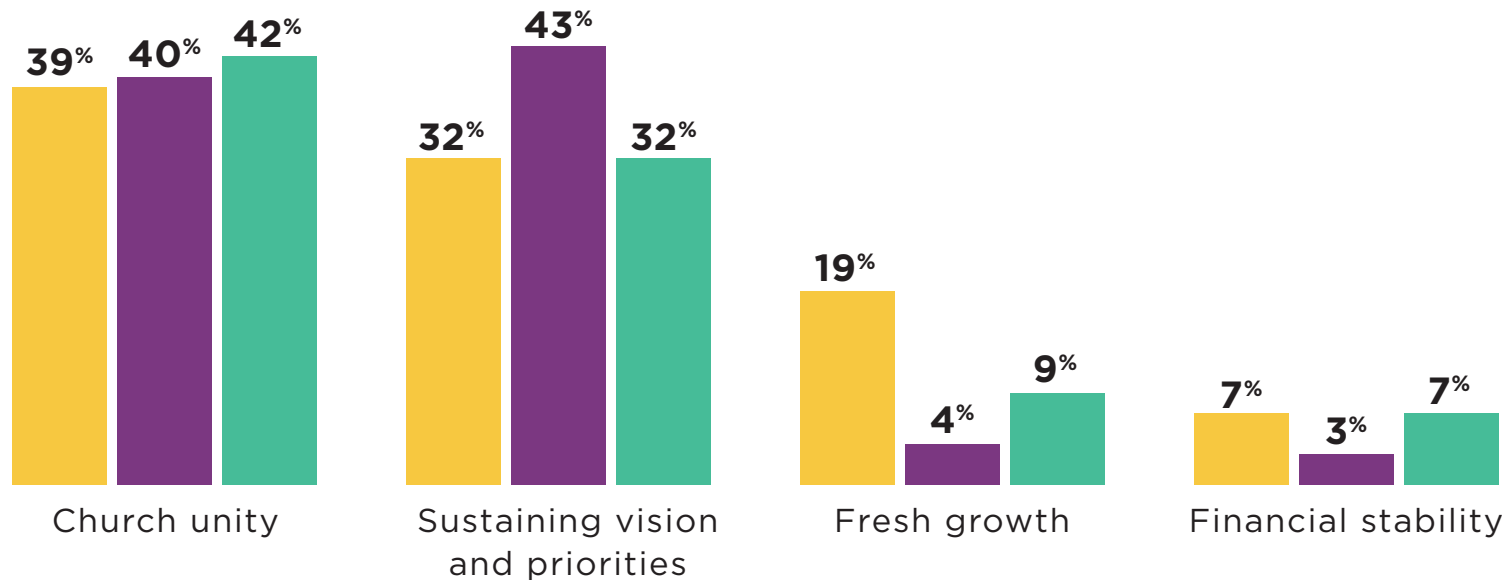
Barna



PERCEPTION OF HIGHEST PRIORITY DURING TRANSITION

Barna

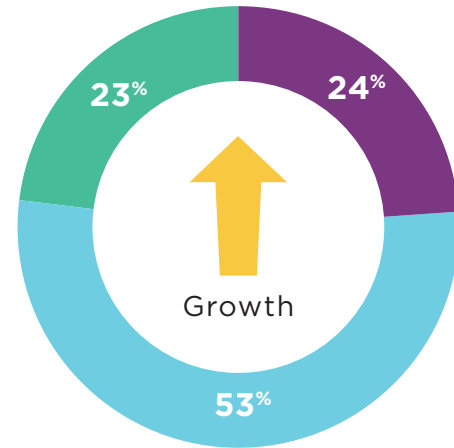
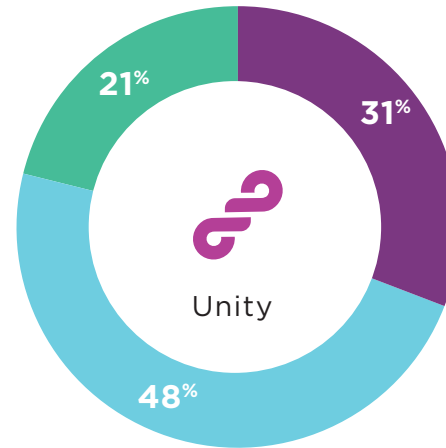
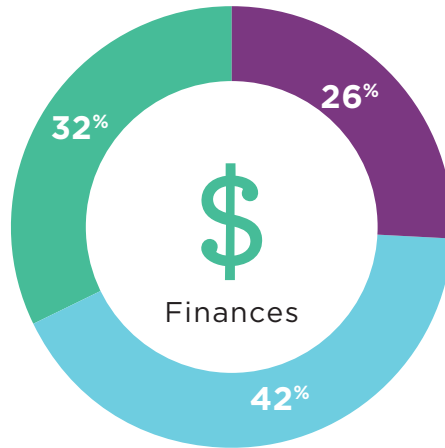
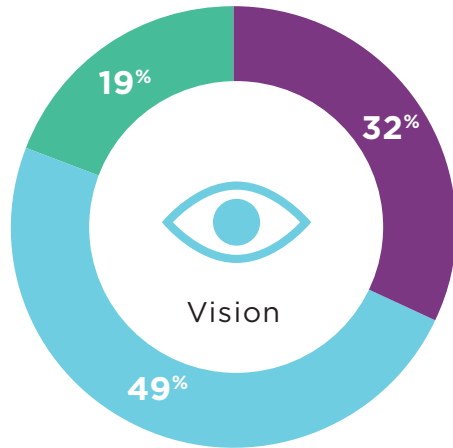
● Incoming pastors ● Outgoing pastors ● Congregation



OUTCOMES, BY CHURCHGOERS' PERCEPTIONS OF THE CHURCH'S HIGHEST PRIORITY DURING TRANSITION

Barna

● Positive ● Mixed ● Negative

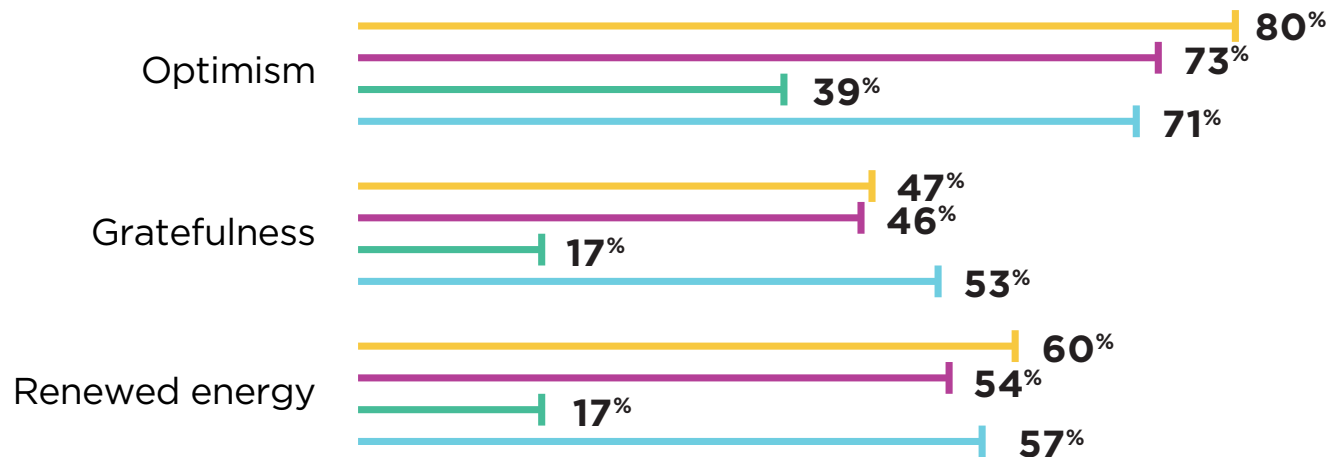


INCOMING PASTORS' EMOTIONS, BY THEIR PERCEPTION OF THE CHURCH'S HIGHEST PRIORITY DURING TRANSITION PART 1

Barna

● Fresh growth
● Church unity

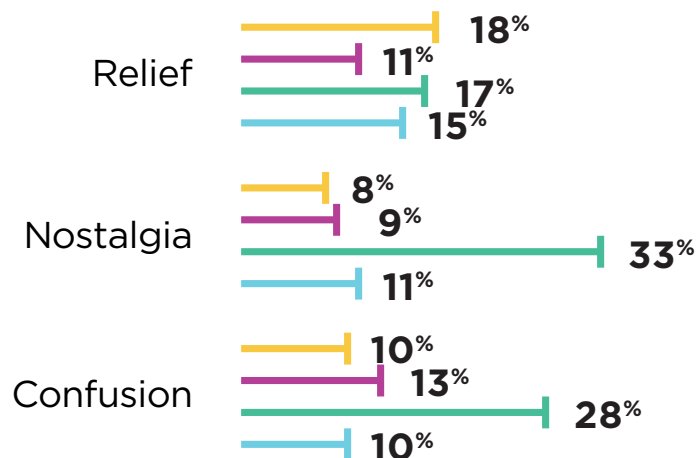
● Financial stability
● Sustained vision



INCOMING PASTORS' EMOTIONS, BY THEIR PERCEPTION OF THE CHURCH'S HIGHEST PRIORITY DURING TRANSITION

PART 2

Barna



INCOMING PASTORS' EMOTIONS, BY THEIR PERCEPTION OF THE CHURCH'S HIGHEST PRIORITY DURING TRANSITION PART 3

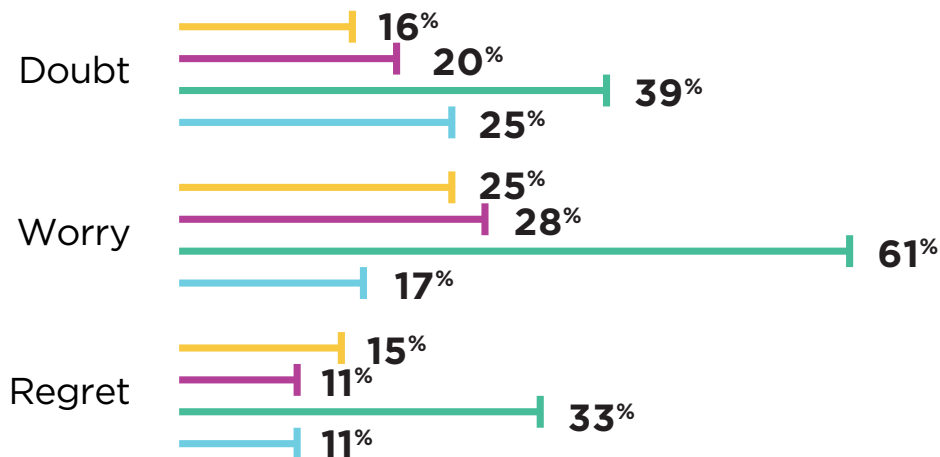
Barna

Fresh growth

Financial stability

Church unity

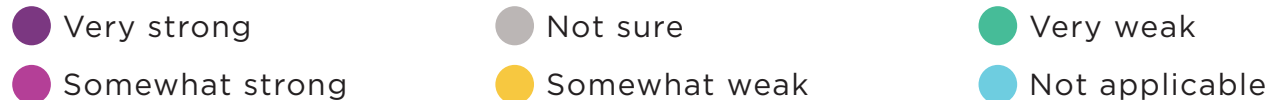
Sustained vision



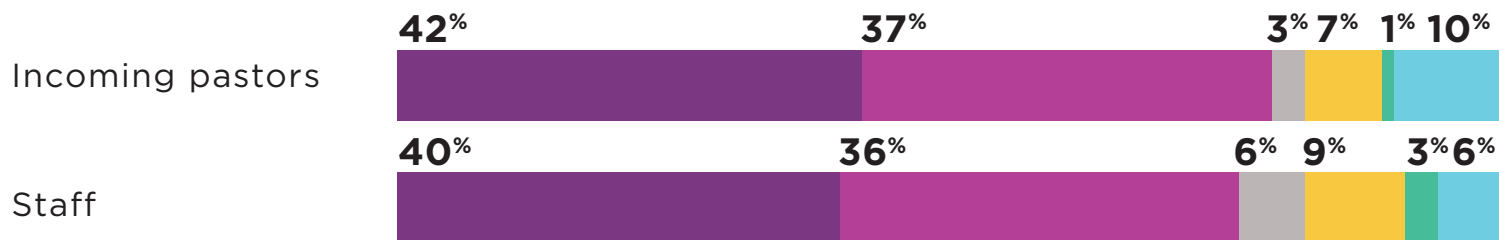
ASSESSING THE RELATIONSHIP

Barna

BOARD OF ELDERS / DIRECTORS & INCOMING PASTOR

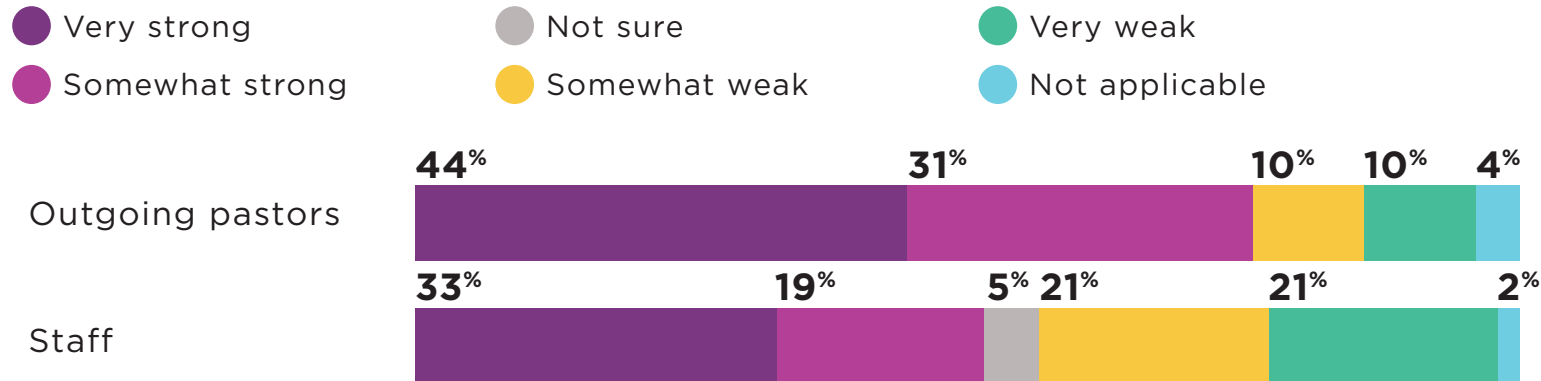


INCOMING PASTOR & CHURCH STAFF



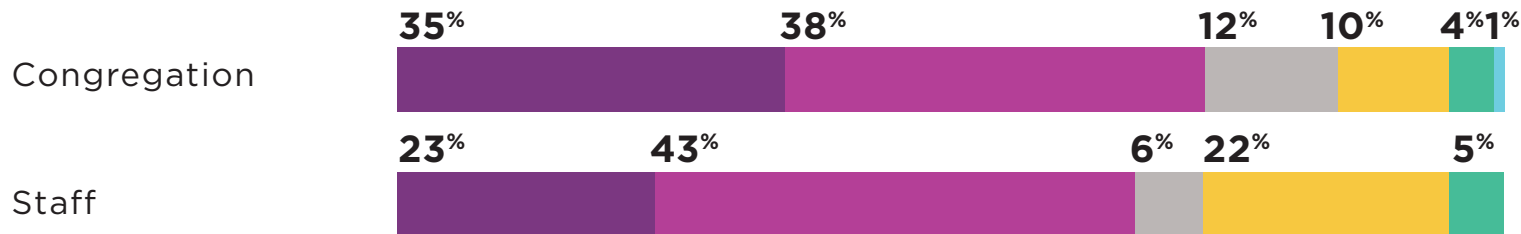
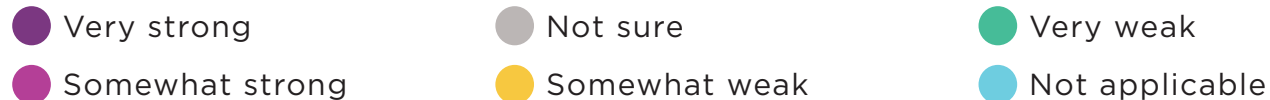
ASSESSING THE RELATIONSHIP

BOARD OF ELDERS / DIRECTORS & OUTGOING PASTOR

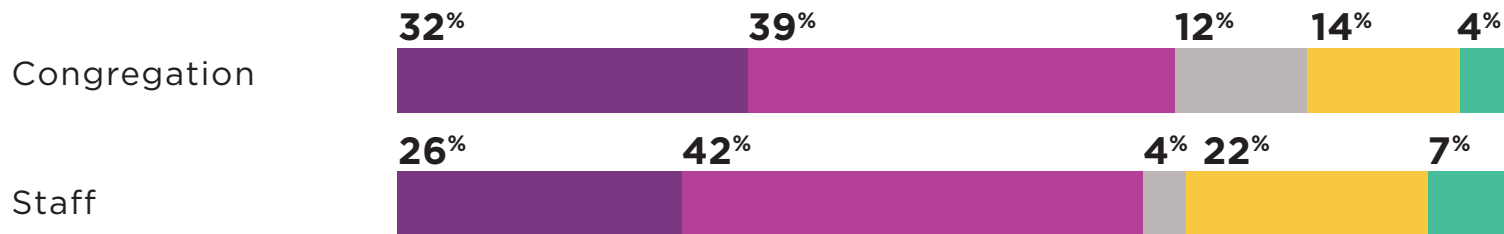


ASSESSING THE RELATIONSHIP

CONGREGATION & CHURCH LEADERSHIP



UNITY WITHIN THE CONGREGATION



③ After the Transition



Shifting Emotions

Barna

What emotions did you experience during the transition?

Congregants may be less negatively impacted by transitions than you might expect. Harness their optimism to spur new visions for the future.

Outgoing pastors may need more emotional support, encouragement and celebration as they transition out.

Incoming pastors can bring plenty of new energy and vision—but will need to pay attention to the mixed emotions staff and congregants may be feeling.

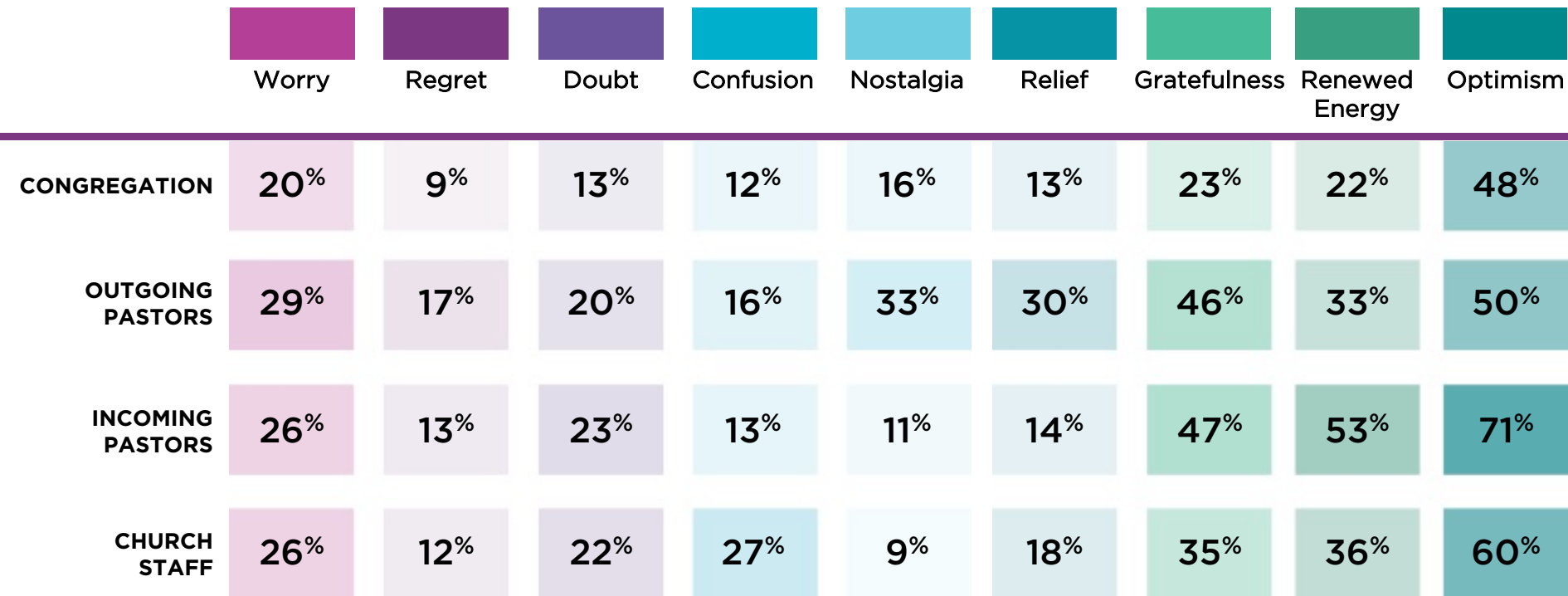
Church staff are the most likely to face confusion during times of transition. Clear communication about their roles and the new expectations will help.



Shifting Emotions

Barna

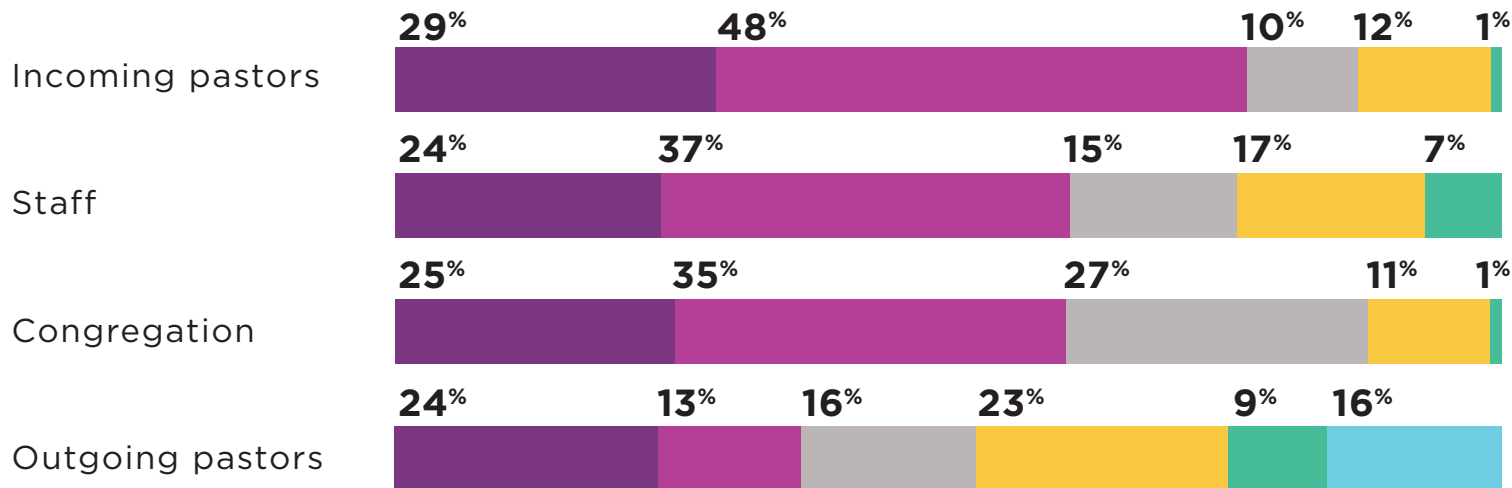
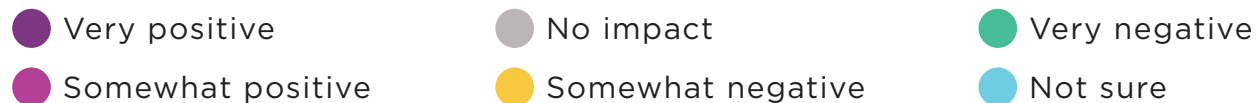
What emotions did you experience during the transition?



n=70 outgoing senior pastors, 259 incoming senior pastors, 129 church staff who experienced church transition, 1,517 practicing Christians who experienced church transition.

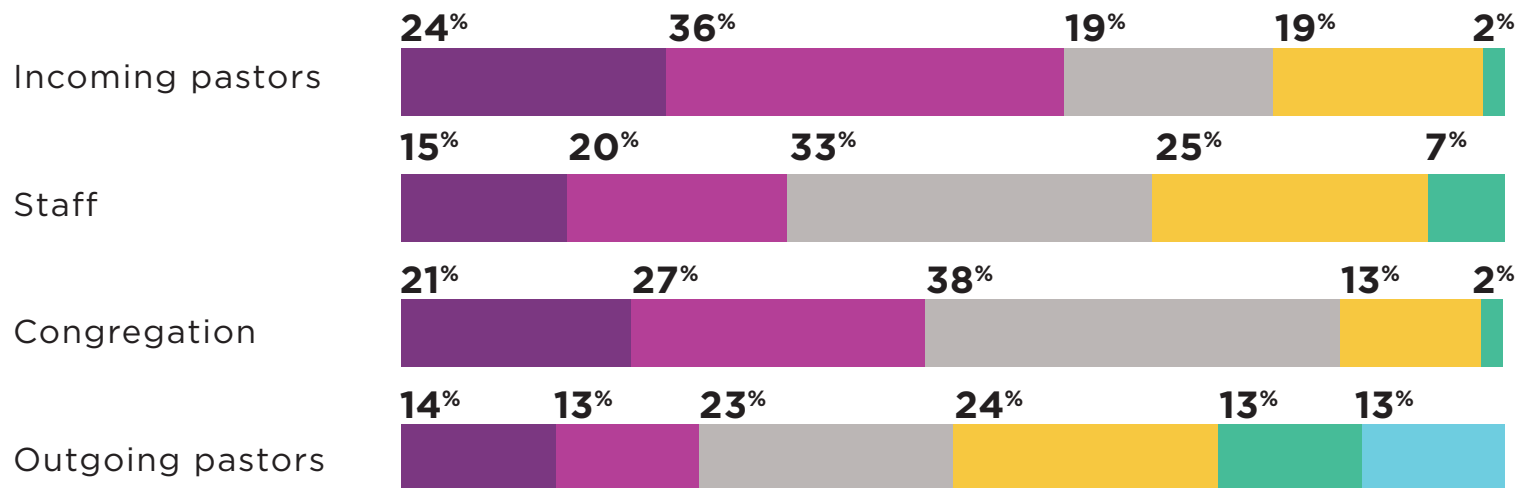
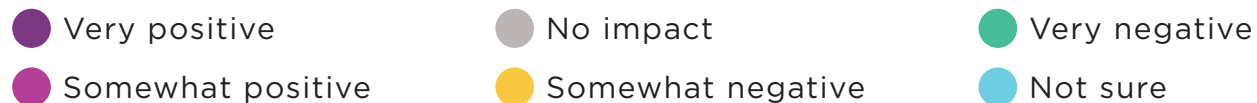
MINISTRY PRIORITIES & STYLE AFTER THE TRANSITION

Barna



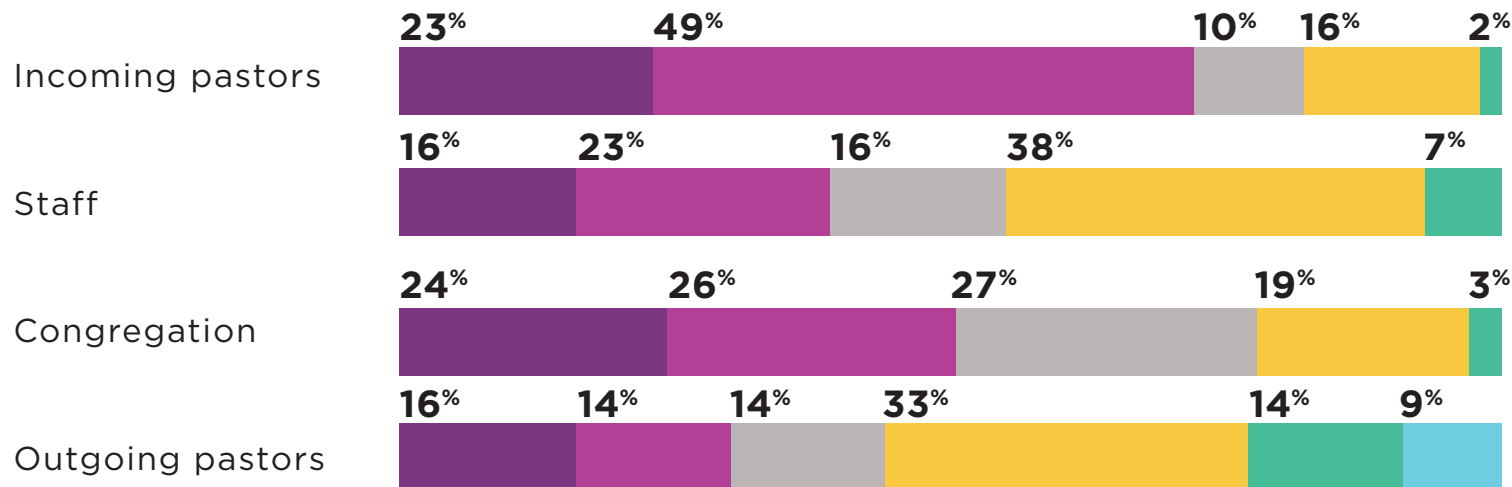
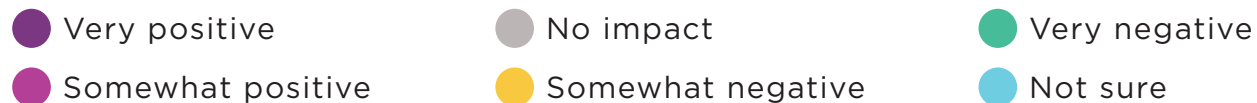
CHURCH FINANCES AFTER THE TRANSITION

Barna



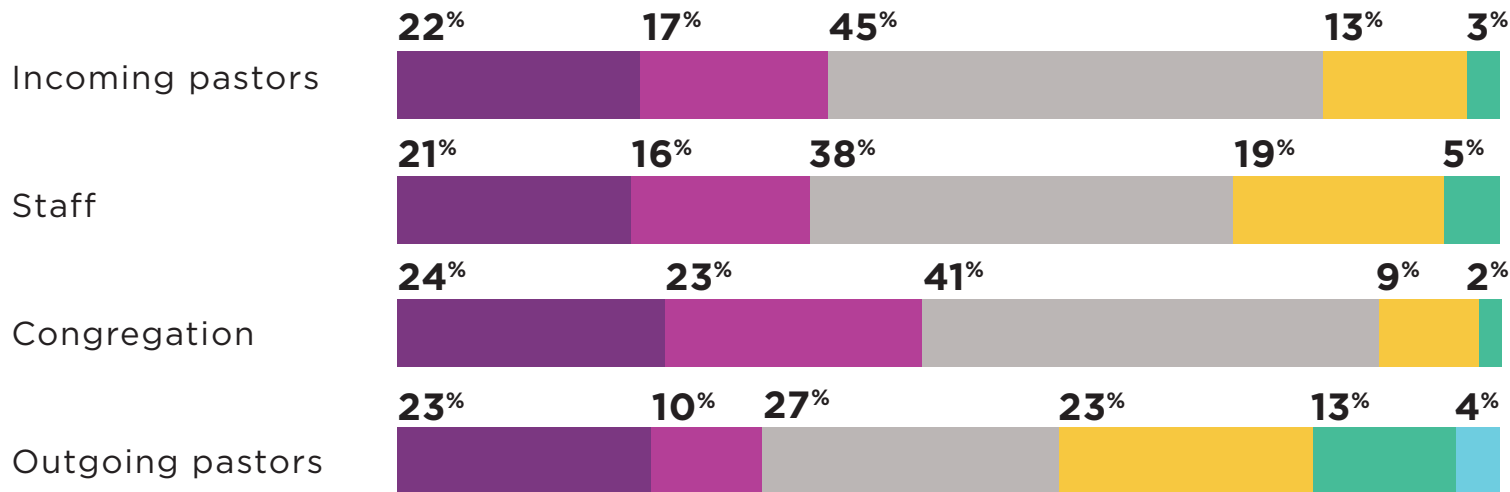
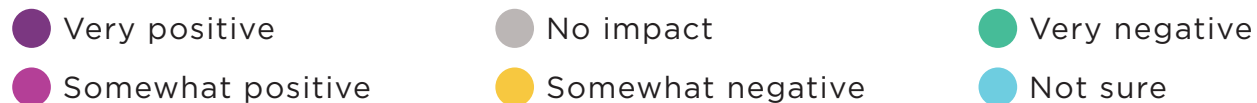
WEEKLY ATTENDANCE AFTER THE TRANSITION

Barna



STAFF RETENTION AFTER THE TRANSITION

Barna





Communication Breakdown

Risk
Factors

**NEGATIVE
OUTCOMES**

**MIXED
OUTCOMES**

**POSITIVE
OUTCOMES**

Reward
Multipliers

SOME PERCEPTIONS AND EXPERIENCES MAKE
A NEGATIVE OUTCOME MORE PROBABLE ...

... AND A FEW MAKE A POSITIVE SUCCESSION
EXPERIENCE MORE LIKELY.

"The plan and process of succession were communicated very clearly."

● 14% ● 45% ● 41%



"The plan and process of succession were not communicated clearly."

● 56% ● 35% ● 8%

n=1,517 U.S. practicing Christians 18 and older who have experienced pastoral transition within the past five years.



Strong Ties Between Leaders & the Led

Barna

Risk
Factors

**NEGATIVE
OUTCOMES**

**MIXED
OUTCOMES**

**POSITIVE
OUTCOMES**

Reward
Multipliers

SOME PERCEPTIONS AND EXPERIENCES MAKE
A NEGATIVE OUTCOME MORE PROBABLE ...

... AND A FEW MAKE A POSITIVE SUCCESSION
EXPERIENCE MORE LIKELY.

"The relationship between church leaders and
the congregation was very strong."

● 6% ● 42% ● 52%



"The relationship between church leaders
and the congregation was very weak."

● 70% ● 16% ● 14%



n=1,517 U.S. practicing Christians 18 and older who have experienced pastoral transition within the past five years.



Staff on the Same Page

Risk
Factors

**NEGATIVE
OUTCOMES**

**MIXED
OUTCOMES**

**POSITIVE
OUTCOMES**

Reward
Multipliers

SOME PERCEPTIONS AND EXPERIENCES MAKE
A NEGATIVE OUTCOME MORE PROBABLE ...

... AND A FEW MAKE A POSITIVE SUCCESSION
EXPERIENCE MORE LIKELY.



n=1,517 U.S. practicing Christians 18 and older who have experienced pastoral transition within the past five years.



Failing Finances

Risk
Factors

**NEGATIVE
OUTCOMES**

**MIXED
OUTCOMES**

**POSITIVE
OUTCOMES**

Reward
Multipliers

SOME PERCEPTIONS AND EXPERIENCES MAKE
A NEGATIVE OUTCOME MORE PROBABLE ...

... AND A FEW MAKE A POSITIVE SUCCESSION
EXPERIENCE MORE LIKELY.

"The church's financial stability was very strong."

● 4% ● 40% ● 56%



"The church's financial stability was very weak."

● 66% ● 24% ● 9%



n=1,517 U.S. practicing Christians 18 and older who have experienced pastoral transition within the past five years.

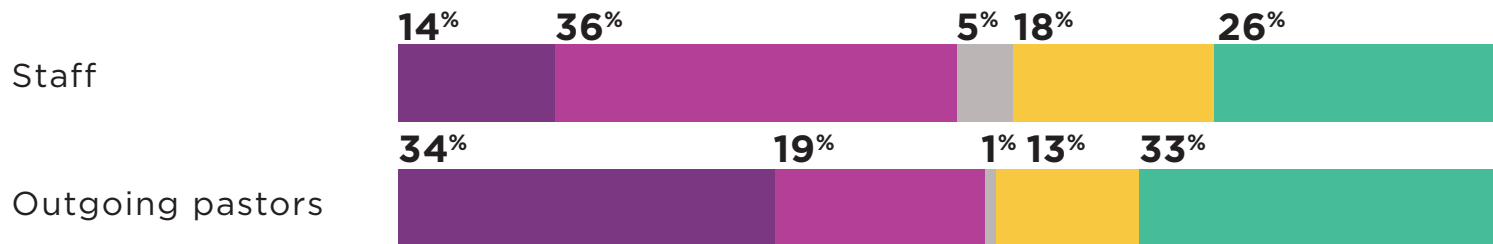
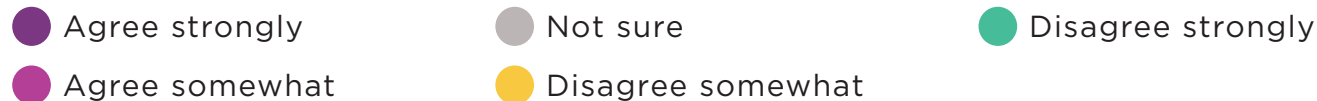
5 Marks of Successful Leadership Transition

By David Kinnaman

- ① Communicate Clearly, Honestly & Often
- ② Target Unity
- ③ If You Can, Plan
- ④ Aim for a Graceful Exit
- ⑤ Keep Asking *Why*

A CLEAR PLAN WAS IN PLACE BEFORE THE TRANSITION STARTED

Barna



ABOUT THE PROJECT PARTNERS

Barna Group is a research firm dedicated to providing actionable insights on faith and culture, with a particular focus on the Christian church.

www.Barna.com

Brotherhood Mutual is a national property and casualty insurance company with a heart for helping churches thrive.

www.BrotherhoodMutual.com

Get free Barna research to your inbox!

Text **BARNA** to **444999**



Barna

Learn where your city ranks and get an in-depth look at individual metrics from FaithView, our new subscription-based online database of city, state and national spiritual profiles.

VIEW NOW

FaithView

This new, interactive, customizable database offers clear and relevant insights into the spiritual climate, faith trends and practices in your city or region. Combine and compare from 200+ data points to get the wisdom you need to lead your ministry or workplace with confidence.



Subscribe Now



Millennial Non-Christians Show Greater Spiritual Curiosity Than Older Adults

[Read More](#)



Millennials Bring Ambition and Optimism to Their Work

[Read More](#)

The Mercy Journey

A critical element is missing in how we relate to one another today: mercy. In embarking on The Mercy Journey, the presence of Christians and the work of





For more information about this study and to see the complete findings, check out our 2019 report:

Leadership Transitions

The full report is available at shop.barna.com or through Barna Access membership.