

# **Job Satisfaction and Educational Needs Among Directors of Christian Education in The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod**

**A Summary**

**Author: James H. McConnell, PhD**

## **Introduction**

The purpose of this study was to investigate the sources of satisfaction and dissatisfaction among Directors of Christian Education (DCE) in The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod (LCMS). One specific intent was to determine what variables might influence or determine satisfaction and dissatisfaction in DCE parish ministry. Another intent was to determine if any of these variables might be predictors for likelihood to leave ministry in future years. The final intent was to determine what, if any, additional educational needs in ministry preparation might be needed.

## **Rationale**

The rationale for this study was to provide an opportunity to survey DCEs throughout the United States who were actively serving congregations and give them an opportunity to respond to issues of satisfaction/dissatisfaction in their ministry. The gathering of such information provided information to help the Concordia University System evaluate curricula in the area of DCE preparation, to improve competency skills, and to support the LCMS and congregations in the retention of these workers and in increasing job satisfaction. The following three research questions guided the survey:

1. Are Directors of Christian Education satisfied with their job?
2. What additional educational needs might be addressed through the Concordia University System Director of Christian Education preparation programs to promote job satisfaction?
3. What is the ability to predict satisfaction and likelihood to leave Director of Christian Education ministry during the next three years?

Issues of satisfaction/dissatisfaction were reflected in the survey questions that were asked of the respondents and covered these areas:

- The degree of satisfaction experienced in ministry through the work environment; relationships with congregational members, congregational leadership, and staff; support and services provided by the district and Synod and overall satisfaction with one's present ministry;
- The degree of satisfaction related to workload and compensation, opportunities for continuing education, personal spiritual needs, and time available for personal life;

- Competency/skill level satisfaction in areas of ministry such as Biblical knowledge, singles, small groups, evangelism, parents, marriages, diversity, crisis management, team members, and children/youth;
- Satisfaction or agreement with statements related to commitment to ministry, effectiveness in ministry, support of family, balance between work and personal life, fulfillment through the ministry, salary and finances, and calling;
- Satisfaction with the work environment concerning a positive climate, trust, a sense of professionalism and teaming, clarity and flexibility regarding responsibilities, adequate work space, and communications;
- Satisfaction with the pastor/administrator in regards to approachability, respect, administrative skills, professional relationship, support, and mentoring;
- Satisfaction with parents and students and their expectations of the DCE;
- Overall job satisfaction level as increasing, decreasing, or staying the same;
- Satisfaction in dealing with feelings of isolation, self-doubt, depression, discontentment, anxiety, anger, disillusionment, frustration, and inability to relate to others;
- Areas that provide the most satisfaction and dissatisfaction in ministry;
- Biggest issues being faced in ministry; and
- Likelihood to leave DCE ministry in the next three years.

Two types of data were collected in this study: questionnaire and written response. The survey was largely composed of questions using a Likert scale. However, thirteen questions regarding demographics, specific elements of satisfaction and dissatisfaction, issues of concern, and likelihood to leave Director of Christian Education ministry provided an opportunity for the respondent to state an opinion in his/her own words.

### **Data Collection**

The survey was distributed by mail to all Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod Directors of Christian Education who were actively serving a congregation. That list, totaling 514, was derived from the official listing of Directors of Christian Education maintained and published by the Concordia University System. For the purpose of this study, the survey did not include lay-practitioners or others actively serving as Directors of Christian Education without certification. In total, 394 surveys were returned via mail or through telephone follow-up providing an overall response rate of 76.7 percent. Of that number, 361 surveys were completed with usable data for a usable response rate of 70.2 percent. Thirty three surveys were returned from individuals no longer serving in ministry positions they once filled and 120 surveys were not returned at all. The surveys of those who left ministry positions and missing surveys were all treated as missing data.

## **Major Findings**

### ***Demographic Data***

- About 50 percent of the DCEs actively serving congregations are under the age of 36, yet almost 10 percent are over the age of 51.
- 60 percent are male, 75 percent are married, 3 percent are divorced or widowed.
- 78 percent are the primary wage earner and slightly over 50 percent have children at home or in college.
- About 85 percent are graduates of a Synodical university, the majority from River Forest, St. Paul, or Seward.
- 57 percent have been in ministry 10 years or less, and over 85 percent have been at their present church for ten years or less.

### ***Are DCEs satisfied with their job?***

- DCEs are very satisfied in ministry, especially with the work environment, relationships with the pastor(s), relationships with parents, and relationships with the children and youth.
- Skills and competencies in the areas of office management, outreach, counseling, evangelism, effectiveness as a DCE, sense of direction in ministry, and opportunities to update or develop skills also brought satisfaction to the DCE, but on a somewhat lower level.
- Satisfaction was also stated in support services provided by the District and Synod and time available for personal life and family.
- The response of DCEs to the degree of satisfaction in their jobs showed 82.78 percent somewhat or very satisfied with their position and only 8.33 percent somewhat or very dissatisfied. There was no significance in regards to gender, age, marital status, university attended, years in ministry, or years at present church.
- In the area of compensation, continuing education, and personal/spiritual needs, DCEs were very satisfied with salary and benefits and felt there was adequate opportunity for continuing education. However, there was uncertainty as to whether or not their congregation had a plan to encourage on-going education.
- Concerning achieving a balance between professional and personal life and their relationships with staff, DCEs are very satisfied with the level of achievement in both of these areas. The same was true in the attainment of personal/spiritual needs.
- DCEs view the job as a ministry and a calling from God, and they have a strong sense of commitment to ministry.
- There is strong agreement in being treated as a valued professional, having a voice in decisions that affect them, and having their overall needs met.
- In the area of pastor/administration, DCEs feel confidence, respect, and recognition from the pastor. There is also strong agreement that the pastor is

sensitive to the needs and abilities of the DCE, is approachable, is flexible, and is a strong advocate for the DCE and the staff.

- Concerning parent's attitudes and the relationship between parents, youth and the DCE, there was great satisfaction with the respect, the supportive nature, and the appreciation shown by parents.
- There was no strong evidence of dissatisfaction created by unrealistic expectations of parents or the relationship between the DCE and the parents.
- Concerning the pivotal questions asking for the level of satisfaction with DCE ministry, the vast majority, 82.27 percent, stated a satisfaction level that is increasing or staying the same.
- Only 17.73 percent of those surveyed stated a decrease in the satisfaction level of ministry. While no significant difference was noted in gender, age, marital status, etc., further research showed that the 32–36 year olds were growing in their increasing satisfaction level and had a lower rate of decreasing satisfaction than the 22–26 year olds.
- Concerning feelings experienced in ministry, DCEs report not struggling with feelings of depression, disillusionment, anger, or inability to relate to others. However, concerns were expressed with being overwhelmed, frustrated, isolated, discontent, anxious, and experiencing self-doubt.
- When examined closer, results showed that female DCEs who had no children at home or in college expressed more concern about self-doubt and stronger feelings of anxiety in ministry. Females, as a whole, stated stronger feelings of being overwhelmed in ministry and an inability to relate to others.
- In the area of self-doubt, the youngest DCEs (22–26) experienced less, while the oldest (52–62) experienced the most. At the same time, the youngest expressed the highest level of discontentment, while the oldest expressed the least.
- Over 50 percent of the DCEs who have been in ministry 1–5 years experienced anxiety, while less than 5 percent of those in ministry 26–30 years experienced anxiety.
- DCEs ages 52–62 stated the lowest level of frustration, while the 22–26 year olds stated the highest.
- Concerning inability to relate to others, those 22–26 years old expressed a high level compared to the 52–62 year olds. Those in ministry 6–10 years stated much less inability to relate to others compared to those in ministry 1–5 years.

**What additional educational preparation do DCEs need?**

- DCEs feel highly competent and adequately prepared by their universities in areas of children/youth ministry, teaching the faith, dealing with congregational responsibilities and expectations, ministering to team members, ministering through small groups, ministering to parents, managing personal spiritual growth, and dealing with conflict.

- DCEs expressed less confidence in their skill and preparation in dealing with stress, ministering to non-members (evangelism), and ministering to those in crisis.
- They expressed low confidence and preparation in ministering to singles, ministering to those from diverse backgrounds, ministering through contemporary worship/music, and ministering to marriages.
- It is interesting to note that those with 11–15 years in ministry expressed a much higher level of competency in ministering to non-members than those with more than 31 years in ministry.
- Nearly 25 percent of the responses focused on dissatisfaction due to responsibilities in the congregation without adequate training or education.

**What is the ability to predict satisfaction and likelihood to leave DCE ministry within the next three years?**

- Concerning likelihood to leave ministry in the next three years, 20.78 percent are somewhat or very likely to leave, and 72.02 percent are not very or not at all likely to leave ministry by 2007. Additional testing failed to show any significance based on gender, age, marital status, university attended, years in ministry, or any other variable.
- “Overall satisfaction with present ministry” is not a strong predictor of likelihood to leave.
- While 8 percent stated a somewhat or very dissatisfied view of ministry, another 27.89 percent stated they were somewhat or very likely to leave ministry in the next three years. This research indicates that 3 in 10 certified DCEs will leave ministry over the next three years.
- Overall satisfaction and likelihood to leave are not simple effects that can be attributed to single causal factors. However, there are factors and demographic variables that affect satisfaction/dissatisfaction and whether or not DCEs are more or less likely to leave.
- No specific age group or gender was more likely to leave. In fact, “likelihood to leave” is a common thread woven throughout all ages groups in similar proportions:

1. Ages 27–31	33.7%
2. Ages 22–26	32.8%
3. Ages 32–36	26.0%
4. Ages 42–46	26.0%
5. Ages 47–51	24.0%
6. Ages 52–62	23.5%
7. Ages 37–41	22.5%

### Qualitative Responses of Respondents

- What three things provide the most satisfaction in ministry?
  1. Youth/family ministry 31%
  2. Teaching 19%
  3. Serving 12%
  4. Equipping 11%
  5. Relationships 10%
  6. Teaming 9%
  7. Specific roles 7%
- What three things provide the most dissatisfaction in ministry?
  1. Duties/responsibilities 25%
  2. Volunteers 25%
  3. Staff 19%
  4. Ministry frustrations 15%
  5. Financial 7%
  6. Politics 5%
  7. Personal 4%
- What is the biggest issue faced in ministry?
  1. Future 27%
  2. Skills 21%
  3. Environment 19%
  4. Volunteers 14%
  5. Finance 9%
  6. Staff 8%
  7. Education 2%
- Those who stated that they were somewhat or very likely to leave in the next three years were asked to state the specific reason for leaving. They were:
  1. Career change 27%
  2. Personal concerns 20%
  3. Family issues 18%
  4. Salary 15%
  5. Pastor/staff relations 15%
  6. No reason 4%

- Reasons for leaving most often listed according to age were:
  1. Ages 22–26                      Marriage, starting family
  2. Ages 27–31                      Salary, changing careers, family demands, job issues
  3. Ages 32–36                      Family demands, salary
  4. Ages 37–41                      Unclear/demanding job expectations, finances, seminary
  5. Ages 42–46                      Synodical issues, seminary
  6. Ages 47–51                      Seminary, age, career change
  7. Ages 52–62                      Issues with pastor, age, career change

**Recommendations**

- While this study indicates Director of Christian Education satisfaction, it also provides an abundance of data that can be acted upon to make a difference in ministry:
  1. Reasons for satisfaction/dissatisfaction
  2. Reasons for leaving
  3. Gender concerns
  4. Age related issues
- Measures to increase satisfaction can be undertaken quickly and economically by:
  1. Educating congregations and staff on the value of positive, supportive relationships.
  2. Emphasizing boundaries between ministry and personal life, clear job descriptions, varying lifestage needs and personal spiritual life for DCEs.
- Sharing this research with congregations so they can evaluate and compare their situations with this study.
- Helping congregations explore ways to enhance a supportive environment for younger DCEs.
- Assisting congregations in identifying ways to support and retain older DCEs in parish ministry.
- Helping congregations understand the importance of continuing education and skills development for DCEs.
- Encouraging districts to provide a mentoring program for DCEs new to the area.
- Over half of the DCEs who plan to leave are doing so for personal reasons associated with lifestage or lifestyle change. Measures should be taken to retain these workers through incentives such as bonuses tied to years in ministry/years at present church, reduced work loads for new parents, raises related to lifestage levels such as college, continuing education, loans for home purchase, and flexible job descriptions to allow the DCE to remain in his/her ministry.

**Summary**

While the findings of this study indicate that Directors of Christian Education are generally satisfied with their ministry, there are specific variables that do affect their satisfaction and likelihood to leave ministry. While there is no way to guarantee the retention of these workers, evaluating the educational curriculum and integrating needed competency skills and training can enhance the profession and ministry longevity. At the same time, improving relationships in the parish and taking preventative action regarding factors that create dissatisfaction can help both the Director of Christian Education and the congregation.