

# Clergy Wellness in COVID

A webinar for lay leaders

(please go ahead and put your name/congregation in the chat)

# Some norms for our time together:

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- We will begin and end on time, and with prayer
- Please stay muted, but feel free to put your comments and questions into the chat!
- We work from the assumption that our clergy *and* our congregations are all trying our best
- Please keep clergy, congregations, Bishop, and Diocesan leadership in your prayers

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It feels impossible to make a right choice regarding reopening or not. I'm very nervous about risking my and my family's health because folks want in person church. I'm completely unsure how to balance my kids and work, and there doesn't seem to be a viable, affordable, and safe solution to this. I'm very nervous about folks stopping their giving because they are unhappy that there isn't real church.”

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**Big Idea:** Many clergy are struggling now in ways that are new, just as we all are. There is a role for lay leadership in understanding the unique challenges facing our clergy, and in mobilizing and encouraging support for them.

# What is the canonical role of the Vestry/Bishop's Committee?

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- “agents and legal representatives of the Parish in all manners concerning its corporate property and the relations of the Parish to its clergy”
- Approve candidates for holy Orders
- Manage congregational relationships with Clergy (specifically Rector/Vicar/Dean/PIC)

# What is the canonical role of the Rector/Vicar?

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- Worship, to include music
- “spiritual jurisdiction of the parish”
- Use of property and space
- Option to preside over Vestry meetings
- The hiring and firing of staff, including other clergy

# What does it mean to be in Mutual Ministry Relationship?

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- This is not the same as an employment relationship
- Mutual ministry involves the mutual work and care of priest and congregation, as called together by God
- Vestry/BC in particular is charged with investing in, evaluating, and caring for this relationship alongside the clergyperson
- Regular check-ins on what is working (and what needs work) in the mutual ministry relationship help keep congregational leadership strong, in any context

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It is lonely. All the labor involved seems hardly worth it many days with so few participating in anything I lead. I feel guilty and inadequate because I can't think of more creative ways to connect people. I fear that the congregation is slipping away and when we are able to return will not be able to support a vital program. Creating video worship is very difficult, at times enormously frustrating and feels terribly vulnerable. There is little to no direct positive feedback for it. Every decision feels fraught and no-win.

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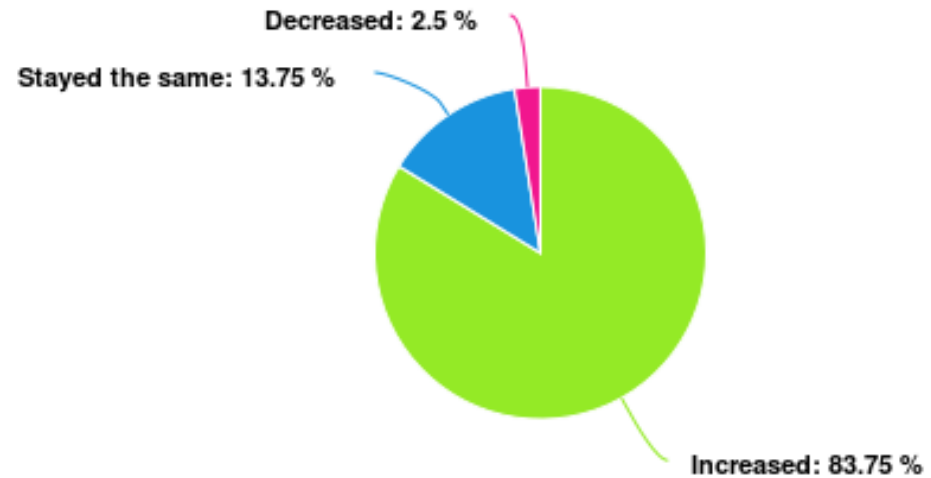
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We are seeing unprecedented levels of stress among clergy across the church, in all geographical locations and denominations. Some potential outcomes of this may be:

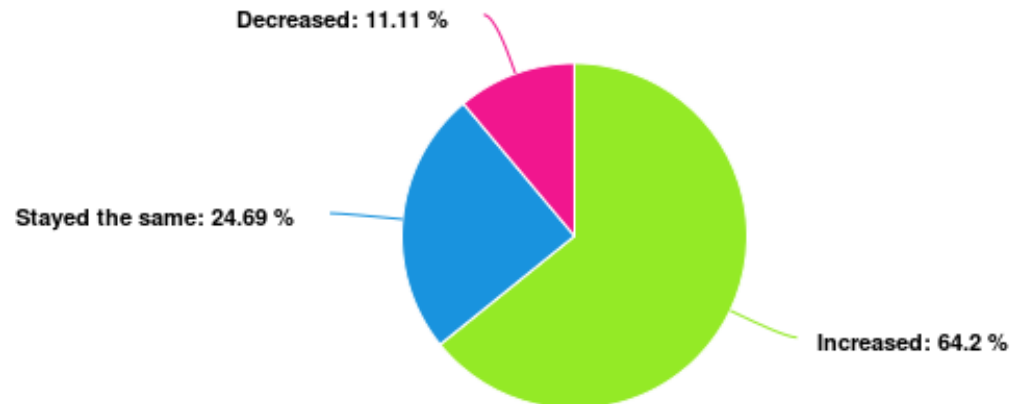
- Early retirements
- Clergy seeking new calls sooner than they may have otherwise
- Decreased mental health, to include increased risk of suicide or other major mental health events among clergy

How are our  
Olympia  
clergy doing?  
(we asked  
them)

2. In the past 9 months my ministry/vocation related stress has (pick one)



3. In the past 9 months my home and personal life related stress has (pick one)





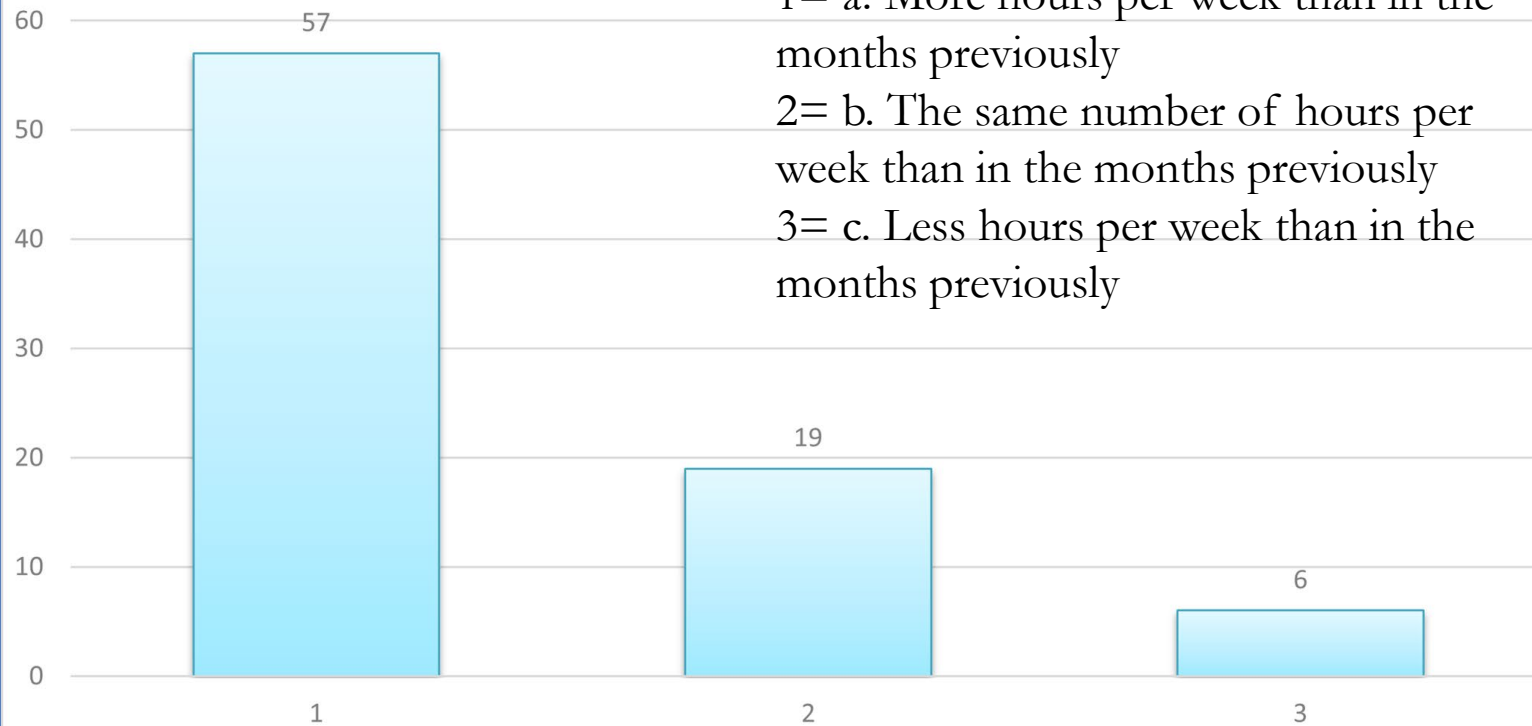
11.

In the past 9 months I have worked, on average  
(choose one):

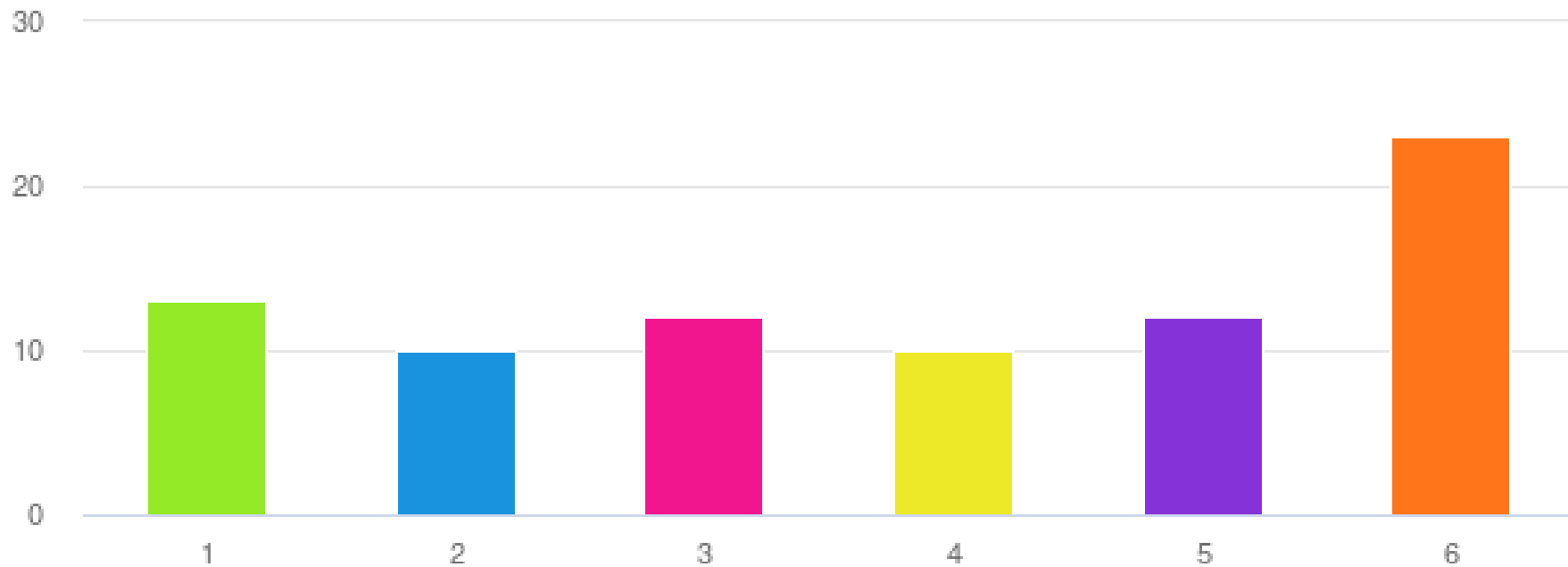
1= a. More hours per week than in the  
months previously

2= b. The same number of hours per  
week than in the months previously

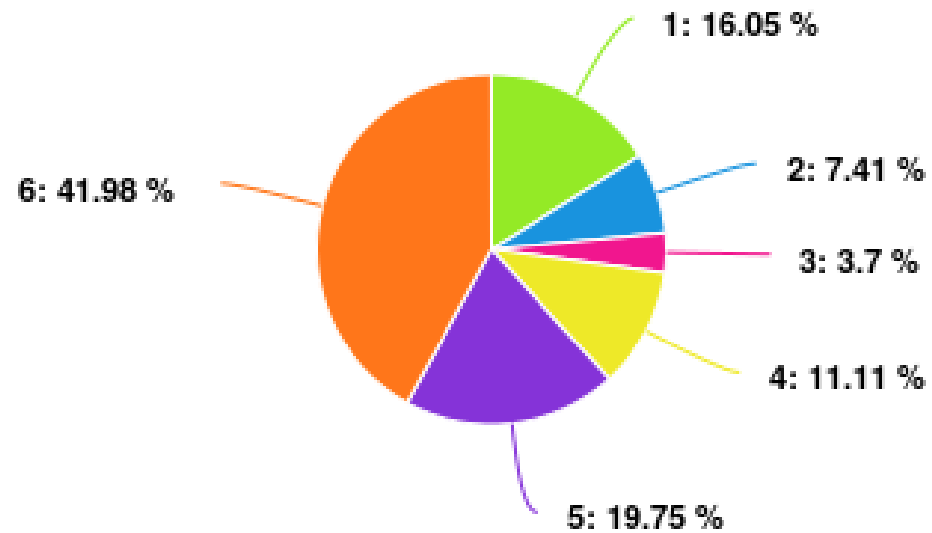
3= c. Less hours per week than in the  
months previously



4. In the past 9 months I have considered quitting ministry or retiring early (scale from 1=very frequently to 6 = never)

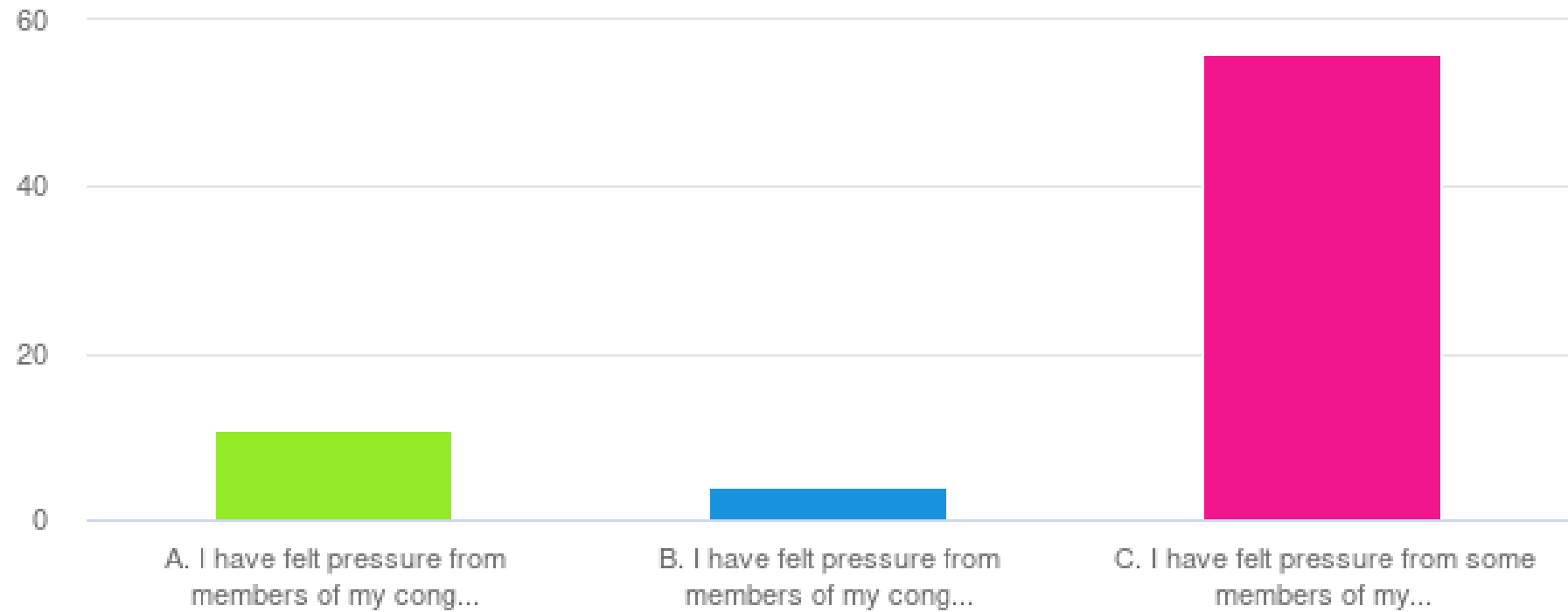


5. In the past 9 months I have considered leaving my current call and looking for a new one elsewhere (1=I am actively seeking a new position to 6=I have not considered this at all)

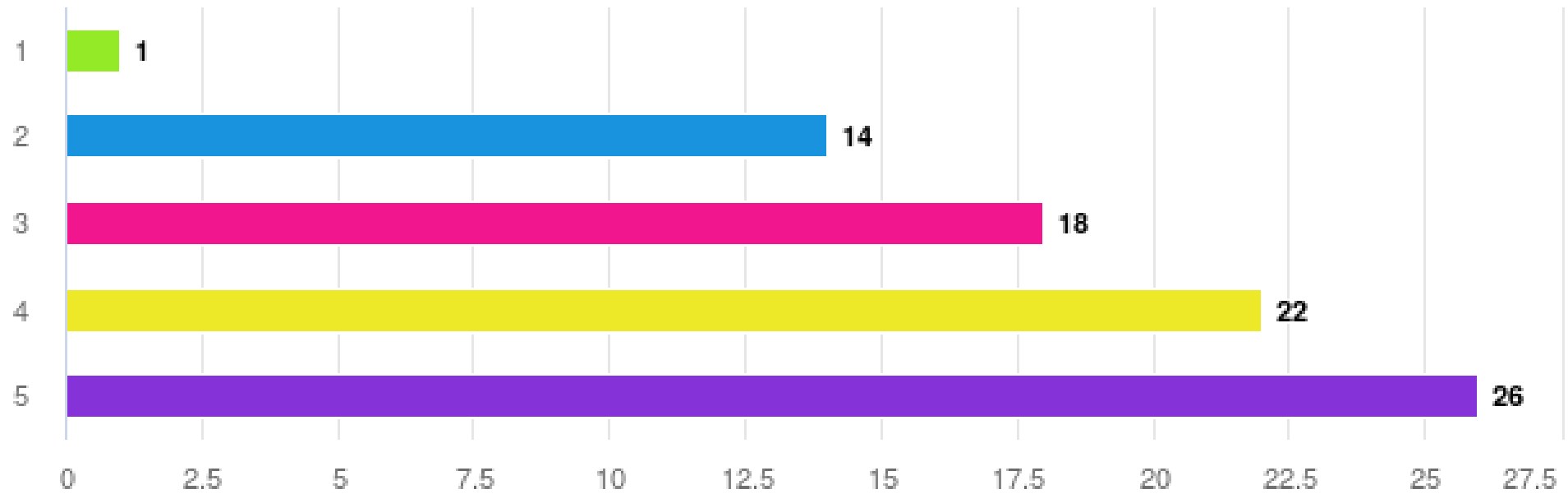


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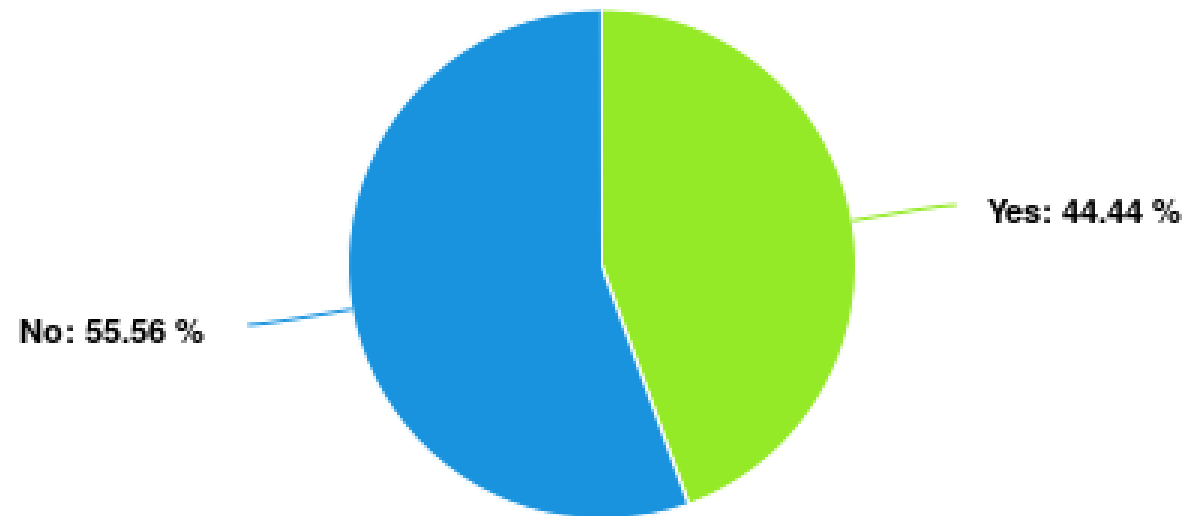
10. In the past 9 months(choose one):



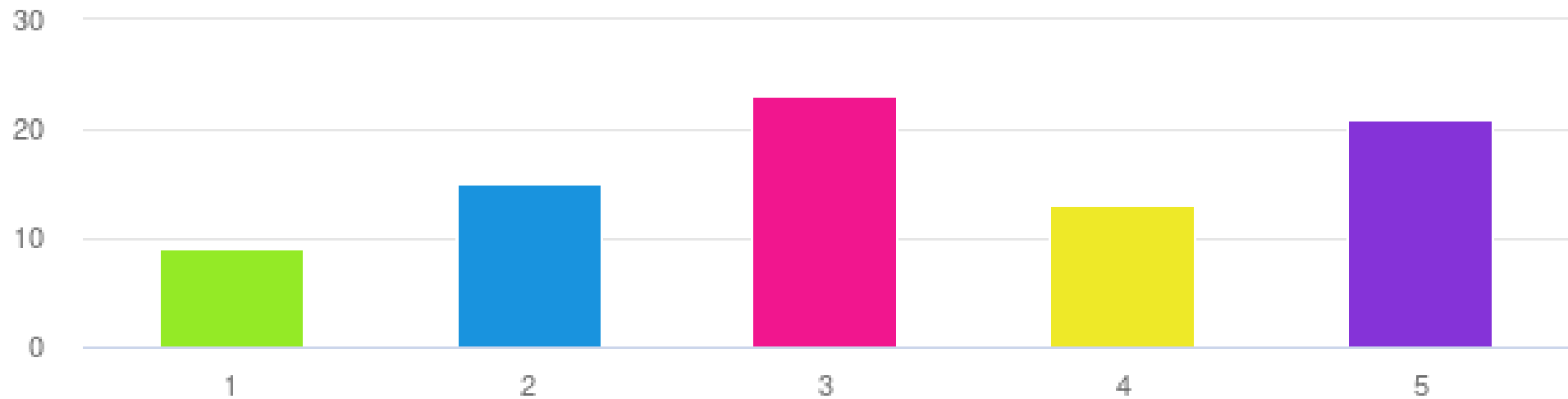
13. I feel supported in ministry by the lay leadership (vestry/BC) in my congregation: (1 to 5, 1=never, 3=sometimes, 5=frequently)



8. In the past 9 months lay leadership (vestry/BC) has encouraged me in self care practices (i.e. made sure I take days off or encouraged time away to recharge)



14. In the past 9 months the lay leadership in my congregation(vestry/BC) has encouraged and displayed flexibility in helping me to balance the demands of my personal life, mental health, and the work of ministry in congregational life. (1 to 5, 1=never, 3=sometimes, 5=frequently)



# Challenges all Clergy serving congregations are facing:

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- Adaptation to virtual environment
- Pastoral care for entire congregation in extended crisis
- Competing pressures from congregation re: opening buildings or not
- The same uncertainties, fears, limitations, and destabilization that their congregants are facing.

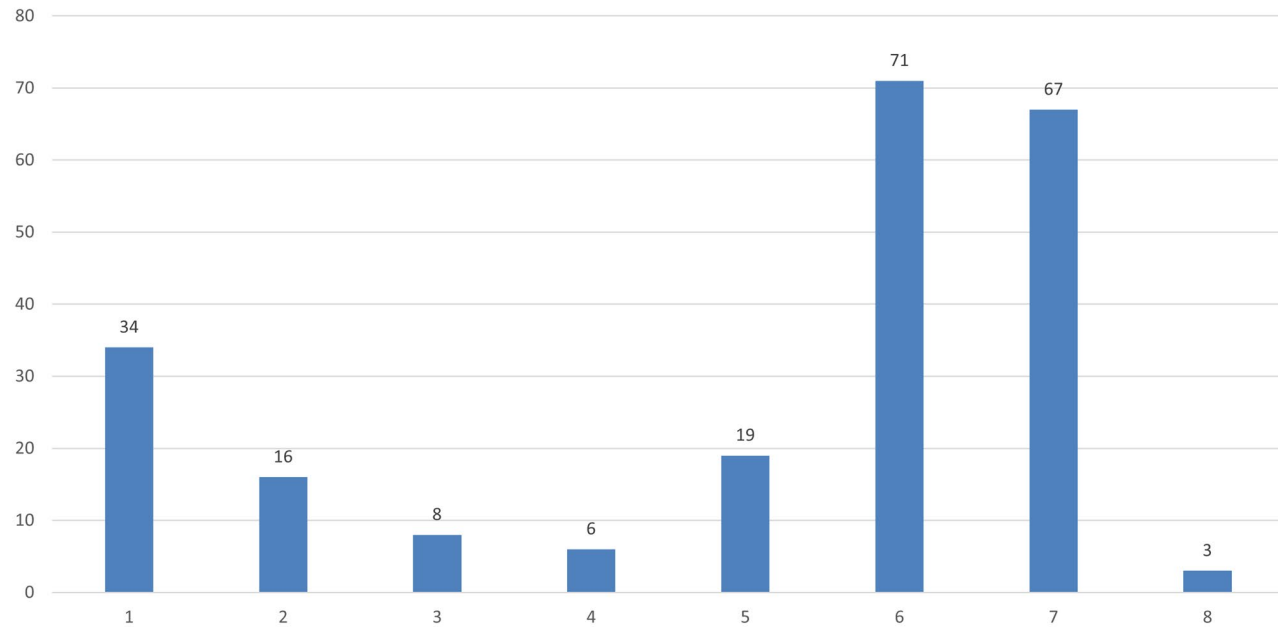


## Additional challenges some clergy are facing:

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- Loss of childcare options for their children
- School-aged children needing support in distance learning
- Spouses or partners who are essential workers/health care workers
- Being in a high risk health category due to age or health status
- Identifying as BIPOC
- Having spouses/partners/children who are BIPOC
- Uncertainty around their own job status, as congregational finances are impacted by COVID closures

9. Please choose which of the following are true for you or have been true in the past 9 months (choose all that apply):



1= a. I am in a high-risk health category

2= b. I have school aged children who are now learning at home

3= c. I have lost childcare resources for my young children

4= d. I identify as BIPOC

5= e. I have children/spouse/close family who identify as BIPOC

6= f. I have had to cancel vacation, travel or sabbatical plans

7= g. I have had to rapidly learn new technology skills that I did not need or use before

8= h. I have a spouse, partner, or close family member who is an essential worker

# Secondary Trauma/Compassion Fatigue

- Human beings who are constantly exposed to the stories, realities, and traumas of other people are at risk of secondary trauma, also known as “compassion fatigue.” Signs include:

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  - **Emotional** — feeling numb or detached; feeling overwhelmed or maybe even hopeless.
  - **Physical** — having low energy or feeling fatigued.
  - **Behavioral** — changing your routine or engaging in self-destructive coping mechanisms.
  - **Professional** — experiencing low performance of job tasks and responsibilities; feeling low job morale.
  - **Cognitive** — experiencing confusion, diminished concentration, and difficulty with decision making; experiencing trauma imagery, which is seeing events over and over again.
  - **Spiritual** — questioning the meaning of life or lacking self-satisfaction.
  - **Interpersonal** — physically withdrawing or becoming emotionally unavailable to your co-workers or your family.

# Empathy Exercise

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- Sit and write through the obvious stresses and challenges your clergy person is facing. What do you imagine would be very hard about this? What do you think your clergy person might need for support and encouragement right now?

# Ideas to support your clergy person:

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- Find a way to regularly check in with your clergyperson on how they are doing. Take notes, listen, and find ways to respond.
- Articulate, if you have not, that it is okay to need some extra time or flexibility right now.
- Actively encourage your clergyperson to take their day off. Suggest that at least once a month they take two days off in one week. Check to see if even more time is needed.
- Remember your priest's important days: birthday, ordination anniversary, anniversary of coming to be with your congregation. Get folks to sign a card, send emails, make a special video.
- Say thank you – even if you are not 100 percent satisfied with your priest's job performance, she/he/they are still with you, still trying and under enormous stress. Let them know you see and are grateful.
- Ask your clergyperson what they need, and work with them to see them get it.
- Other ideas??