



# Clarity of Purpose

## Personal Foundation 2 of Sustainable Leadership

### Introduction

This fact sheet examines the importance of a 'clarity of purpose' for the Christian leader and the relationship with sustainable leadership. Leader Survey results from the National Church Life Survey in 2011 and earlier years show that those with a strong clarity of purpose are more likely to be thriving in ministry rather than burning out.

NCLS Research has conducted extensive research into sustainable leadership - avoiding burnout and moving from surviving to thriving in ministry. Most church

leaders face many challenges in ministry and also experience many encouragements. Numerous factors need to be taken into account to understand why some leaders struggle while others manage



well. Some factors may be difficult or even impossible to change. Clarity of purpose is one area where change can occur - where a leader can examine their own identity, priorities, practices, and relationships to consider what could be different and how positive results could flow.

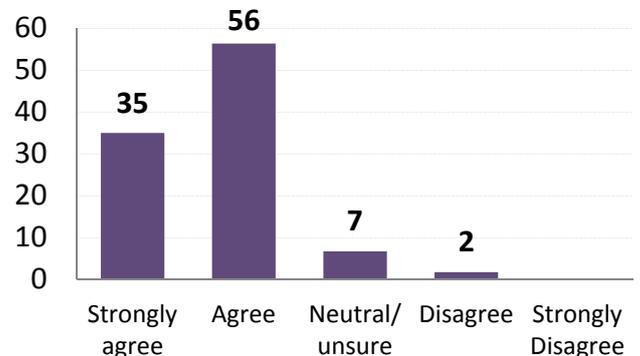
### What is clarity of purpose?

A personal sense of purpose, or calling in ministry is an important foundation that most leaders share. It can act as a reference point, an internal compass to help stay on course and persevere. As such, it is associated with lower burnout in church leaders. NCLS Research have identified several questions that relate to a leader's personal sense of purpose and call, and these questions correlate positively with a sense of satisfaction and achievement in ministry, and negatively with emotional exhaustion and depersonalisation - the main features of burnout. Figures 1 and 2 show the

responses of almost two thousand senior church leaders to two of these key questions.

*" My life has a strong sense of purpose "*

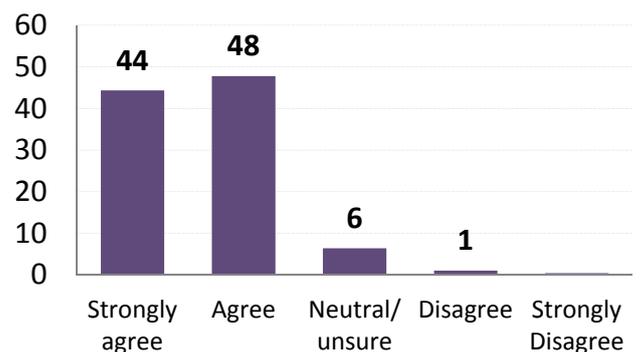
**Figure 1: Life has a strong sense of purpose**



Source: 2011 NCLS Leader Survey Senior Leaders ( n=1,875, weighted).

*" I have a strong calling on my life "*

**Figure 2: Strong calling on life**



Source: 2011 NCLS Leader Survey Senior Leaders ( n=1,871, weighted).

The results show that almost all senior leaders (over 90%) express a strong sense of call and purpose for their life. Such leaders are more likely to be thriving in their ministry - less emotionally exhausted and more satisfied with their work and having a sense of achievement in it.

It's clear that having a strong sense of purpose and call is the norm for most senior ministers, and this is also true for assistant ministers. Lay leaders however (whether a principal leader of a church or team members) do not have quite as strong levels. Table 1 shows using the following questions that lay leaders do not tend to be as strong in this area.

" I know what the **purpose** is for my life "

" I am very **intentional** about how I live out what matters to me "

**Table 1: Comparison of leaders for Clarity of Purpose**

|                     | 'Purpose' | 'Intentional' |
|---------------------|-----------|---------------|
| <b>All Leaders</b>  | <b>90</b> | <b>76</b>     |
|                     | %         | %             |
| Senior Ministers    | 91        | 76            |
| Assistant Ministers | 90        | 77            |
| Lay Leaders         | 81        | 73            |

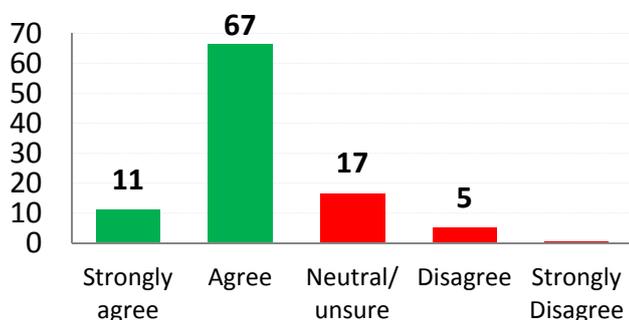
Source: 2011 NCLS Leader Survey ( n=2,119, unweighted).  
\*Respondents not working 'full-time' (>30 hrs per week) are excluded.

Similarly it was found that leaders with no theological training were significantly lower in agreeing with these questions. It should be borne in mind therefore that such leaders may be more vulnerable in testing times or less likely to stay in leadership.

### The importance of Clarity of Purpose

Whilst being strong in this area is common for leaders, its importance is illustrated by the differences in those who do not have this quality as strongly.

**Figure 3: Intentional about living out what matters**

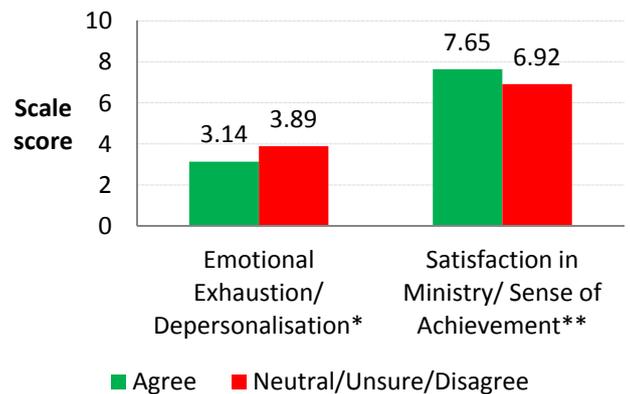


Source: 2011 NCLS Leader Survey Senior Leaders (n=1,866, weighted).

The question "I am very intentional about how I live out what matters to me" has a similar pattern to the earlier

questions as shown in figure 3, where those who agree are shown in green and those who are neutral, unsure, or disagree are shown in red. Figure 4 shows that the green group are significantly higher in a positive outcome (Satisfaction in Ministry and Sense of Achievement), and significantly lower in a negative outcome (Emotional Exhaustion/Depersonalisation).

**Figure 4: Intentional living - significant differences in positive and negative outcomes**



\*Scale for Emotional Exhaustion in Ministry (SEEM). Groups are significantly different (p < .001)

\*\*Satisfaction in Ministry Scale (SIMS). Groups are significantly different (p < .001)

Source: 2011 NCLS Leader Survey Senior Leaders (n=1,866, unweighted).

The same differences are evident when the other questions from this personal foundation are profiled in the same way. In other words, having a strong clarity of purpose is associated with thriving in ministry. This means having a higher satisfaction and sense of achievement in the role, and also being lower in emotional exhaustion and its typical distancing and coping behaviour (depersonalisation).

Church leaders generally have a high clarity purpose, which NCLS believes functions as a resilience factor in the face of the challenges and demands of ministry. Where this quality is threatened, leaders may well be more vulnerable to burnout and less likely to thrive.

### Data sources

Powell, R., (2011) [computer file], 2011 NCLS Leader Survey. Sydney, Australia: NCLS Research.

### Citation

Sterland, S. (2014) : Clarity of Purpose: Personal Foundation 2, Factsheet 1.14003. Sydney: NCLS Research.