

a ministry of thriving

THE ENTWINED PURSUIT OF BOTH
HEALTHY MINISTERS AND MINISTRIES

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about this project

This paper was written to address the question of how best to support pastors and church planters in their work today. The Ministry of Thriving matrix was developed with the support of a grant from the Lilly Endowment Inc.

The Collective is a network of churches, ministries, and organizations intent on collaborating in the work of renewing culture and flourishing San Diego.



The church needs leaders that are thriving both personally and professionally if the cities of today are to flourish.

FLOURISH SAN DIEGO PROVIDES AN ECOSYSTEM FOR PASTORS TO GROW INTO THE RESILIENT, ADAPTIVE LEADERS NEEDED TO EMBODY THE GOSPEL IN ITS FULLNESS AND THUS LOVE OUR CITY TO LIFE.



a ministry of thriving

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Working in faith circles, it may be easy to agree on the goal of thriving ministries. But defining what “thriving” means might be more problematic. If we jump immediately to the work of building thriving ministries, we may miss the vital connection between thriving ministries and thriving ministers. More consequentially, we may completely bypass how each synergistically contributes to the flourishing of our city.

TWO DIMENSIONS TO THRIVING LEADERS

Flourish San Diego believes that the kind of ministry that produces redemptive kingdom influence in our cities today requires a holistic formation and training of pastors. Our approach advocates the simultaneous pursuit of two critical dimensions of pastoral formation:

1. **Personal Well-Being:** Pastors must thrive as resilient people
2. **Professional Competency:** Pastors must thrive as productive leaders

DATA



VISUALIZING A MINISTRY OF THRIVING

These two dimensions of pastoral formation take visual shape in this matrix. In our work with pastors over the last decade, Flourish has seen anecdotally how an emphasis on each quadrant shapes the minister and the ministry. Our experience is now reinforced by research conducted over the last year.

BRINGING SHALOM TO OUR CITY

A ministry of thriving is not focused merely on the personal growth of ministers or merely on the effectiveness of their ministries. As we redefine what constitutes “thriving,” our focus will integrate both the thriving of the minister and the thriving ministry towards the broader mission of God’s plan to redeem all things. A ministry is truly thriving if it is bringing shalom to our city.



OUTCOMES

OFFERINGS

THE RESILIENT LEADERSHIP ECOSYSTEM

Flourish San Diego’s programming all contribute to a pastor’s growth into fruitful, resilient ministry. The ecosystem’s interconnected elements work together to cultivate both personal flourishing and professional competency. Uniting these often dichotomized approaches of pastoral support stimulates a vision of becoming the resilient, adaptive leaders needed to transform our city.

the need

FOR A MINISTRY OF THRIVING

A FALSE DICHOTOMY

In the last 150 years, the church has often and unknowingly embraced a false dichotomy in equipping ministers for the church. On one side, the dominant paradigm focuses on conveying important head knowledge and best practices for growing a congregation. The ideal pastor is seen as an effective teacher and leader. In this view, they would be measured on knowledge, performance, and productivity. Many seminaries institutionalized this approach striving to cultivate strong theological insight and standard doctrinal convictions.

Taking another approach, almost as a corrective, many organizations and ministries have developed to complement pastoral training in spiritual formation, emotional intelligence, and well-being. To these organizations, the ideal pastor is one who fellowships intimately with the Lord and as a result of being transformed by mercy and grace, is motivated by love to live a kingdom life. Ministries like Renovaré, and writers like Dallas Willard and Richard Foster, represent this approach of ministry preparation which strives to cultivate deep soul formation.

Today's church faces the challenge of resisting the false dichotomy that places these two dimensions of pastoral flourishing in opposition to each other. We cannot simply attach prayer retreats and paid sabbaticals to a pastor's job description thinking that will give the necessary "spiritual oomph" to perform according to people's expectations. We also cannot assume that we can take spiritually mature, emotionally healthy, and relationally gifted pastors and make them productive leaders by placing them on a treadmill of pastoral performance.

The way forward to a ministry where the minister, the ministry, and ultimately our cities thrives is one that pursues the personal well-being of the minister as well as the professional leadership capacities they employ in the challenge of this current moment.

CHALLENGES IN CONTEXT

In this alien post-Christendom world, pastoral leadership is complex, fraught with loss, fears, and anxiety. The current bifurcated models of ministry preparation are coming up short. Even before the COVID-19 pandemic of 2020, churches in North America found themselves in uncharted waters characterized by declining attendance, cultural marginalization, and a generalized irrelevance to those we hope to attract.

This presents a challenge in the leadership competencies pastors need today. In a world where the pace of change in the world was relatively slow, and culture was relatively stable, the former approach to ministry preparation suited the need. Where once a good leader would be defined as one who could find and execute "best practices" to achieve growth and success. It was possible to manage one's way to "success." Today, leadership competencies must be expanded to understand the current cultural moment and what new forms and practices will need to be developed in order to faithfully be the church today and for the coming generation.

This actually leads to the challenge of personal resilience for the pastor. Leading congregations into an unknown world requires people who have been thoroughly transformed by the good news of Jesus Christ. These ministers must embody genuine gospel strength and humility such that an anxious congregation will follow them as they navigate the unknown. In a time when best practices do not exist and cannot be leaned upon, the congregation will lean upon the authentic and resilient leader.

Flourish San Diego seeks to support pastors and church planters in both dimensions of thriving. Only in this way will they be prepared to lead the church in a way that contributes to the flourishing of our city.

the definition

OF A MINISTRY OF THRIVING

Grammatically, "A Ministry of Thriving" allows us to think about pastoral well-being as well as flourishing with regard to pastoral leadership capacities. Pursuing both dimensions at the same time leads to ways of contextualizing the church with a fresh vitality and allow her to have a "faithful presence" both to God and to the neighbors we are called to love. This points to something that feels new and right, but is actually ancient and true for today.

In using the phrase, "A Ministry of Thriving," we are distinguishing between three distinct outcomes of which only one captures the sense of thriving we are advocating.

We do not merely mean:

1. A ministry that is thriving – where the inordinate focus is on a ministry that is effective and productive. The danger is a church where the minister and thus the ministry runs on strategic planning and programming rather than the sustaining power of the gospel embodied in transformed lives.

Nor do we merely mean:

2. A minister that is thriving – where the inordinate focus is on a thriving and resilient minister. Of course, we certainly want ministers to thrive, but they must also lead effectively in the role to which they have been called. The potential unintended outcome is poor stewardship of the organization and a diminished redemptive influence.

Instead, when we talk about "A Ministry of Thriving" we are referring to:

3. A ministry intent on a thriving city – where a thriving minister effectively leads the church to be what God has called her to be, both a sign and foretaste as well as an agent and instrument of the Kingdom.

A ministry is truly thriving if it is bringing shalom to our city.

THE MISSION: CITIES

It's not that the church of God has a mission, it is that the God of mission has a church.

The overarching story of the bible is one of God's activities within time and space to redeem and restore a good but marred creation. The body of Christ has been graced with a vocation to be a primary means of God's restoring, renewing, and redeeming all of creation. This is God's mission and the church is God's means.



In this time of decline, without steadfast clarity on God's mission, churches may fall into the trap of believing that their mission is one of self-preservation. The means of a healthy ministry to renew creation can become an end in and of itself. Similarly, church planting movements, with their emphasis to add more life-giving churches in a city, is exciting and right. However if merely planting more churches becomes the mission, this too confuses means with ends.

Clarity regarding God's mission (*missio dei*) is critically important if we are to avoid being distracted by making a good thing ultimate. Thriving churches are a good thing. Thriving ministers are a good thing. Thriving church planting movements are a good thing. But none of these good things in and of themselves expresses the fullness of God's redemptive purposes on earth. They are important submissions, or means by which we contribute to God's broader mission.

WHY CITIES?

It is our contention that widening the scope of a church's mission to the city level, encourages broader and more holistic thinking about how redemptive kingdom influence can bless our

neighbors. It allows for a world that isn't divided into the sacred and the secular. It is a world where all Christians are "on mission with God," or in the Lord's service "full-time."

When we inform our definition of what a thriving ministry or a thriving minister is with a lens to being the church for the city (seeking the shalom or thriving of the city) we encounter many corrective benefits. These include helping churches:

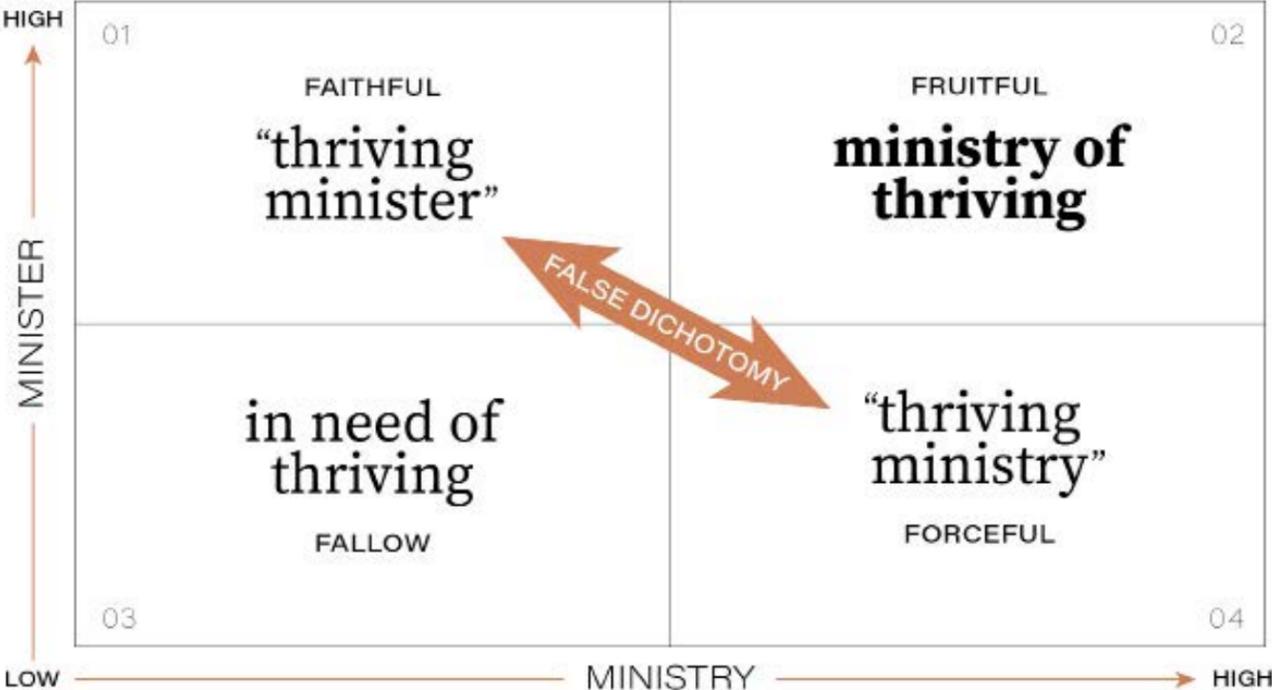
- Focus the church's calling to seek the shalom of the city
- Form disciples who serve from a gospel transformed heart
- Steward gifts on God's mission, not merely an organization's mission
- Help apprentices of Jesus see their place in God's kingdom work
- Lead people to a greater clarity of purpose and fulfillment in life

the matrix

OF A MINISTRY OF THRIVING

This Ministry of Thriving matrix illustrates how overemphasis and under emphasis between personal well-being and professional productivity can form or malform our beleaguered pastors. We offer this diagram to be used as a diagnostic, capable of helping ministers (and those tasked with caring for them) diagnose their current and hoped for outcomes.

MINISTRY OF THRIVING MATRIX



TWO DIMENSIONS OF THRIVING¹

PERSONAL WELL-BEING
Pastors must thrive as resilient people.

PROFESSIONAL COMPETENCY
Pastors must thrive as productive leaders.

01 FAITHFUL

CHARACTERISTICS

- Importance of flourishing of the minister
- Authentic love
- Personal gospel renewal
- Healthy relationships, marriages, families
- Sustainable pace of life and level of stress

UNINTENDED OUTCOMES

- Ill-equipped to lead others through transformation
- Minimizes personal responsibility for results
- Under-values stewardship of gifts

CHARACTERISTICS & UNINTENDED OUTCOMES

02 FRUITFUL

CHARACTERISTICS

- Full-bodied understanding of the gospel
- Healthy entwining of personal flourishing and professional competency
- Gospel motivation to love and serve
- Leadership confidence combined with humility
- Quiet authority borne of authenticity
- Posture of learning, growth, and adaptation
- Influence through a demonstration of the Spirit's power
- Peace in surrendering the outcomes of their labors to the Spirit
- Commitment to engage in the mission of God
- Ability to equip others for gospel transformation
- Movement outward toward flourishing communities

03 FALLOW

CHARACTERISTICS

- Insufficient understanding of gospel power and renewal
- Ill-equipped for today's pastoral challenges
- Unable to respond to changing culture

UNINTENDED OUTCOMES

- Lack of gospel transformation
- Superficial spirituality
- Dwindling congregation
- Frustrated and weary minister

04 FORCEFUL

CHARACTERISTICS

- Idolizes productivity and effectiveness
- Predominant in North American culture
- Measures headcounts, offering sizes, programs offered
- Focuses on head knowledge and best practices
- Religious performance becomes obligation

UNINTENDED OUTCOMES

- Overly dependent on human strength
- Devalues the gospel's power and love
- Susceptible to worldly definition of success

the data

THE PURSUIT OF BOTH HEALTHY MINISTERS AND MINISTRIES

We have long observed that even after helping ministers think with missiological clarity and helpful paradigmatic shifts like focusing on city flourishing, the work of implementing change in our congregational cultures is actually the most challenging work. Furthermore, when a leader must move an organizational culture in ways it doesn't fully understand or appreciate, the leader's overall personal well-being and gospel humility is more critically important than ever. Personal well-being and professional vocational competencies work together.

On the Ministry of Thriving matrix a high value placed on both dimensions of pastoral flourishing is represented by the upper-right quadrant. We contend that ministers in that quadrant are happier, more satisfied, passionate about the ministry, affirmed in their calling, and overall more resilient. They would also be more effective leaders, clear about the nature of ministry, and more certain about the work that needs to be done.

DISCOVERIES

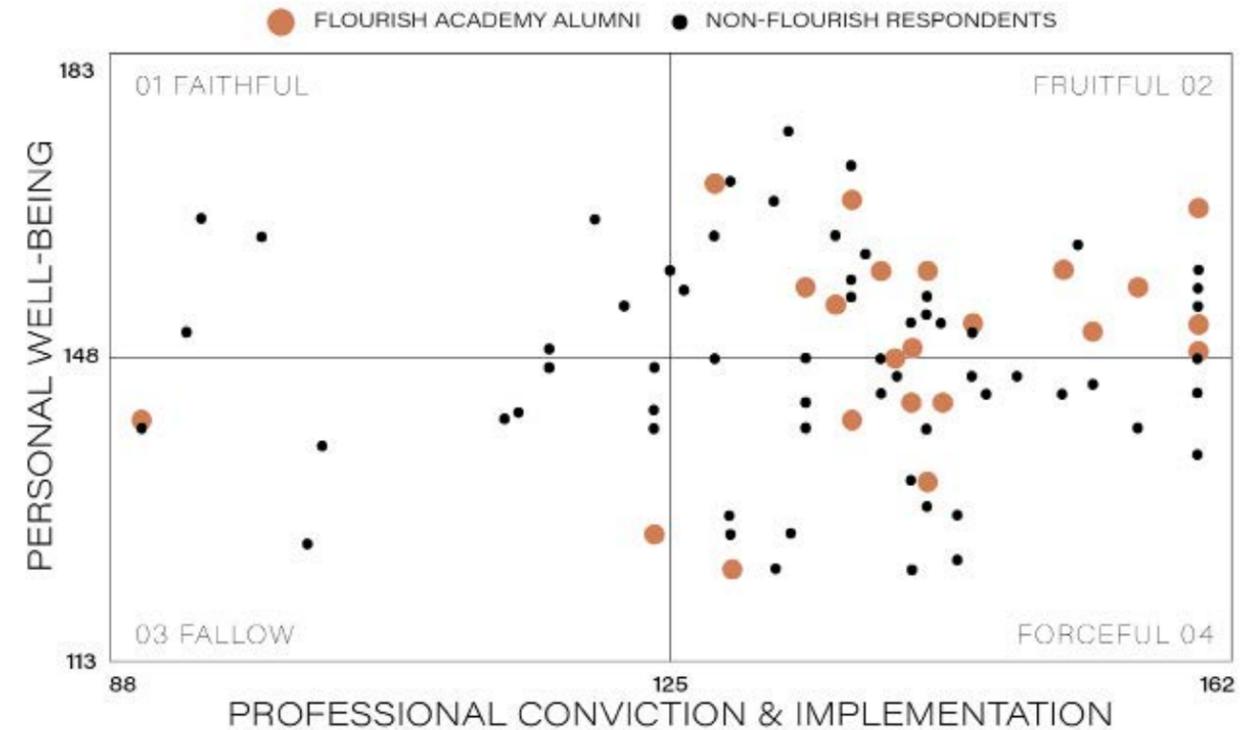
The single most important discovery from our survey² is the very close correlation between personal well-being and professional competency.

- When pastors indicated high personal well-being, they also indicated high professional productivity. Much of this could be attributed to how missiological clarity gave a clearer sense of purpose to ministers. A clearer sense of purpose yields higher scores in passion for their ministry.
- If a pastor scored low in personal well-being, it was also true that they were not particularly effective in leading the churches in ways that flourished the city.

It is because of this very close correlation that a thriving ministry cannot be had without a minister that is thriving. It is also true that you cannot have a thriving minister without a minister knowing how to lead through the adaptive challenges that face the church today. The two dimensions of thriving go hand in hand.



MINISTRY OF THRIVING SCATTERPLOT



Other significant insights from the survey can be easily visualized in the scatterplot chart above. The data is simultaneously affirming of the Flourish Collective Academy learning community, as well as highly indicative of the further work needed to encourage as many pastors and church planters as possible into the upper-right quadrant. A few observations:

- Alumni of the Flourish Collective Academy consistently score at or above the median (to the right) in leadership competencies that form the kinds of disciples that are a redemptive presence in the city.
- The majority of Academy alumni are in the upper-right hand quadrant indicating that they are also experiencing gospel renewal, emotional health, and generally flourishing as a person.
- Pastors and church planters that have not participated in the Academy recorded a much greater diversity of experience.³ Those to the left would likely experience uncertainty on how to lead their church to survive, let alone thrive, in this new post-Christendom world. Those on the bottom and to the right, likely feel like they are doing what they are supposed to do, but are not personally flourishing and are candidates to experience burnout.

There is one final insight worth mentioning: Leaders who had graduated from the Flourish Academy scored higher in resilience than leaders who did not participate. Alumni were more likely to score in the "high" and "very high" resilience categories as compared to their counterparts.⁴



training

FOR A MINISTRY OF THRIVING

Flourish San Diego's programming is designed to encourage pastors to consistently move toward and inhabit the upper-right quadrant of our matrix as resilient and effective leaders. Although our emphasis is on the younger leader and church planter, our programming is supportive and helpful for all pastors to discover their capacity to lead a ministry of thriving.

Supportive coaching and mentoring in both personal and professional dimensions characterize our programmatic offerings. From church planters to seasoned retirees, regardless (or even embracing) of denomination, we're curating environments of safe and trusted relationships centered around a kingdom agenda of loving our city to life.

RESILIENT LEADERSHIP ECOSYSTEM



OFFERINGS

THE FLOURISH COLLECTIVE ACADEMY

Our flagship learning community conducted each year. This is the logical entry point for the most comprehensive articulation of how to contextualize our faith in today's world. The work of the Academy reflects these key objectives:

- To make the case for how a robust notion of calling, vocation, and work is central to the formation of churches that seek the peace and prosperity of our city.
- To gain practical information and resources that would help churches embed a commitment to vocational stewardship in their churches.
- To develop relationships with like-minded church leaders pursuing whole-life discipleship.
- To champion spiritual formation, emotional health, and a journey of transformation as central to the discipleship process.

PASTOR PEER GROUPS

These groups are a setting to reinforce learnings from the Academy. It is both a place to pursue the spiritual formation journey with safe allies as well as offer just-in-time peer-coaching to one another.

CERTIFICATE OF RESILIENT SERVICE

We are partnering with the Seattle School of Theology and Psychology to offer programming that will strengthen a pastor spiritually, emotionally, relationally. Rich resources are offered in this certificate program that offers resources to deal with stress, strengthen resilience, heal trauma, and grow in emotional intelligence.

MINI-CONFERENCES

To address the desire for clarity of vision among pastors, we offer quarterly conferences to bolster the leadership acumen of the pastor. Seasoned leaders offer guidance on adaptive leadership and other emotional, relational, and organizational skills of the pastorate.

ANNUAL RETREAT

In response to our research, retreat settings have been the place where many San Diego pastors have experienced enlivening encounters with God. An annual Flourish retreat gives pastors a time to rest with intention, with just enough structure to encourage sustainable rhythms of spiritual practices.



FLOURISH SAN DIEGO

our mission

Flourish San Diego exists to help people and churches grow into the fullness of who they were created to be so that they can join God in flourishing our city.

CONTACT: Dr. Geoffrey Hsu
EMAIL: geoff@flourishsandiego.org
WEBSITE: www.flourishsandiego.org

endnotes

1. Burns, Bob, Tasha Chapman, and Donald Guthrie. *Resilient Ministry: What Pastors Told Us about Surviving and Thriving*. Downers Grove, IL: IVP Books, 2013. Our two dimensions of pastoral thriving roughly parallel the five themes of resilient ministry that emerged from this work to promote healthy, sustainable ministry that lasts. Our Personal Well-being axis roughly correlates with their themes of Spiritual Formation, Self-Care, Emotional and Cultural Intelligence, and Marriage and Family. Our Professional Competency axis correlates with their theme of Leadership and Management.
2. Thanks to a Lilly Endowment grant, we were able to conduct the 2020 Thriving in Ministry Planning Grant Survey. The survey was conducted from July 1 to Aug 4th 2020 with 86 complete responses. Participants were primarily lead pastors and church planters representing 67 unique churches and 6 nonprofit ministries. The total Personal Well-being score was positively correlated with total Professional Leadership convictions and implementation at a Pearson Correlation value of $r=.413^{**}$ (correlation is significant at the 0.01 level [2-tailed]).
3. The volatility for the non-alumni scores were significantly greater (the standard deviation for non-alumni was twice as large as that of Flourish alumni).
4. Smith, Bruce & Dalen, Jeanne & Wiggins, Kathryn & Tooley, Erin & Christopher, Paulette & Bernard, Jennifer. (2008). The Brief Resilience Scale: Assessing the Ability to Bounce Back. *International journal of behavioral medicine*. 15. 194-200. 10.1080/10705500802222972.





Flourish San Diego is a proud co-sponsor of the The Collective.

"A MINISTRY OF THRIVING" PAPER

11251 Rancho Carmel Dr Suite #501015, San Diego, CA 92150