



Clergy Self-Care

by

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Dedication

Dedicated to the late Anne Van Dusen, whose care and concern for the well-being of congregational leaders led to the 2008 "Conversation about Caring for Congregational Leaders and Their Families" and this special report.

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Introduction

As I set out to write this report, I quickly became aware that there are a plethora of self-care books on the market. A number of them even deal specifically with clergy self-care. Why produce another report? What would differentiate it from all the others? What would make it most useful—particularly to members of the clergy (regardless of denomination or gender), but also to their professional colleagues, their families and their friends?

Perhaps it would be helpful to set forth my personal introduction to the issue of clergy self-care (or the lack thereof) and the perspective that I have tried to capture for readers in the chapters that follow. Shortly after I began to attend church on a regular basis—and long before I had any thought of entering seminary to pursue ordination—I was asked if I might consider working with several West African clergy in Washington, DC for whom English was a third language. The expressed need was for a volunteer tutor who could help them with their everyday and liturgical English skills and who would be willing to do it without payment. Given everybody's time constraints, it was also clear that the bulk of these English lessons would have to take place on weekday evenings.

As we sat with our Bibles, our prayer books, and our cups of tea, the tutoring sessions soon developed into friendships; the topics covered in our conversational English practice expanded to include many of the daily events of work and church; and I began to see and to understand the pressures of clerical life. I summed up my volunteer work in those years with the phrase: "Who cares for the caretaker?"

Fast forward to 2008. I had graduated from seminary and seen (and heard) a lot more of clergy life in the intervening years. When the Alban Institute asked me if I would be interested in developing a report on the topic of clergy self-care, I agreed to give it a try. You are holding the results in your hand: a practical handbook that does not pretend to be original in its discussion of the need for clergy self-care, but in which I have attempted to distill some of the ideas, approaches, and best practices of the many books on the market that address that need. I readily acknowledge the contributions of those authors to my understanding of the topic of self-care and recommend their books for areas in which you might want to delve deeper.

The Alban Institute's interest in clergy self-care has also been ongoing, including multiple publications dealing with the topic. In June 2008, Alban organized and conducted a two-day invitational roundtable for clergy and other church leaders with an interest and expertise in self-care issues, calling it simply "A Conversation about Caring for Congregational Leaders and Their Families." Participants were open and honest in their contributions. Many of the topics and ideas that were raised and discussed during that meeting have been useful in expanding my own understanding and have found their way into this report. References to "the Roundtable" or "a Roundtable participant" reflect statements made as part of the June 2008 "Conversation" discussions.

The current handbook has been written with several audiences in mind. It has been written primarily for clergy who know (or who ought to know) that they are not doing everything that they should be doing to care for themselves on a regular basis. It is

written for clergy who think that everything is just fine in their lives, but who wonder if there's any facet of basic well-being that they're missing. It is written, finally, for the spouses and partners, family members, clergy colleagues and congregational leaders who see issues on the horizon or problems already arrived in the life of a clergy person or in their own life as a result of that affiliation.

Finally, my intention in writing the book is to speak directly to a felt or impending need in a simple, easy-to-grasp way. I have not included in-depth psychological discussions, extensive Scriptural interpretations, or complex diagrams based on family systems therapy, although the book does touch on some of those areas in the following chapters. For those who are seeking to pursue those topics in-depth, there are other books on the market (as I have noted above), written by persons far more qualified in those areas than I would be.

Here you will find a discussion of four major areas in a clergy person's life for which wellness is both critical and too often elusive: the emotional, physical, intellectual and spiritual components of his or her overall well-being. The discussions that follow are, in large part, a synthesis of ideas and practices that are already out there. Collected into a single report, the intention is to provide focus, direction, and help with negotiating the shoals of clergy life: staying healthy, recognizing when a problem exists and needs to be addressed, preventing small problems from growing into major ones, and finding ways to minister with newfound patience, joy and enthusiasm for pastoral duties and life in general.

Meditation

"Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you....Do not let your hearts be troubled, and do not let them be afraid." (John 14:27)

Emotional Well-being

As I reviewed the self-care literature, I noticed a number of words (or the equivalents thereof) that reappeared with some frequency. The appearance and reappearance of these same concepts, from one book to the next, was an early clue to their importance as areas for attention, both positive and negative. Most of these concepts reappear across several of the four components of well-being discussed in this report—emotional, physical, intellectual, and spiritual. Virtually all of them can be related (positively or negatively) to the state of our emotional health.

(The lists below are in alphabetical order, rather than in order of priority. They are included for easy reference at the beginning of the "Physical Well-being," "Intellectual Well-being," and "Spiritual Well-being" sections as well. The positive concepts most relevant to each topic are highlighted and marked at the beginning of that section with an asterisk.)

Key Concepts— Positive

balance *
boundaries *
grace
renewal
reserve
resilience
rest *
sabbath *
sabbatical *
time *
transformation
wellness
wholeness

Key Concepts— Negative

burnout
emptiness
overload
overwork
spiritual dryness
stress

Emotional Well-being: Focusing on Clergy

Being a pastor is probably not a very good job for the thin-skinned, the fragile at heart, or the easily-wounded, yet with our "yes" response to God's calling we embark on the process from seminary to ordination to finding ourselves pastoring a church. Many, perhaps most, people enter the profession with an abundance of caring and love, but without the useful thick hind of a rhinoceros needed to get them unscathed through the all-too-frequent emotionally fraught days, months and years of service.

Emotional well-being can be hard to hold onto in clergy life even under normal circumstances. There is inevitably too much to do and too little time to do it. There are too many people needing care, wanting attention, asking questions, making demands (which may appear to be, or may actually be, incessant, impossible and/or in conflict with the equally valid requests of others), and so forth. At times of greater-than-usual conflict—whether in the church writ large, in one's own

congregation, in a marriage or partnership, in the family situation, or in other parts of one's life—stress levels are likely to zoom up just as energy levels are hitting bottom. Burnout is an ever-present possibility!

The negative concepts that come into play in terms of playing havoc with one's emotional well-being are likely to encompass feelings of emptiness, overload, overwork and/or stress. A pastor who, deep down, feels himself emotionally empty is unlikely to be able to assist others to live with joy and grace, to recognize the good or cope with the bad parts in their lives and to reach their fullest potential. A pastor who regularly feels overloaded or overworked will not be able to give other people her full attention, may find herself forgetting appointments or may let important tasks pile up undone or fall in the cracks until it reaches the point of major crisis. A pastor who is stressed out most of the time is not likely to be an effective leader of a congregation. He certainly does not provide a good role model for the adult and youth members who are looking to him for guidance on "right living."

The professional literature makes it a point to distinguish between "good stress" and "bad stress." Good stress is an emotional high, not an emotional low. It may be described as a sense that there is a full plate of things to accomplish and projects to pursue, but the plate is not so loaded down that it may break of its own weight before you can get to it. Good stress is the pressure that tells you, and allows you, to start reducing what's already on that plate, not just piling on additional amounts over and above what you're able to take off of it in the interim. Bad stress is the pressure that threatens to put you over the edge.

Gwen W. Halaas talks about acute stress as a common phenomenon that is often out of our control.

It may be the result of illness or injury, separation or divorce, moving, financial difficulties, death or illness of a family member, or a new call or new job. It may be caused by a car accident, staff turnover, capital campaign or building project, problem at your child's school or renovation of your home.

Common emotional symptoms of stress include irritability, anger, depression, and anxiety. Common physical symptoms include muscle tension, tension headaches, stomach aches or bowel problems (diarrhea or constipation), high blood pressure, heart palpitations, chest pain, and dizziness.¹

How do you know if you are stressed out? What are the telltale signs that you have moved beyond a reasonable level of pressure to an unsustainable one? Obviously, that level will differ for each individual, but several resources exist to provide clergy with some guidelines for self-assessment. A good place to start might be with two basic, comprehensive reviews: an inventory of the recent and current stressors in all of the major parts of your life and an honest listing of any ongoing emotional and/or physical symptoms that you are experiencing. Halaas' list above provides one such set of guidelines for identifying stressors and symptoms.

Richard Swenson, in writing about the need for restoring margins in our lives, expands the list of symptoms to include such manifestations as withdrawal, apathy, negative thinking, a feeling that things are slipping out of control, difficulty making decisions, forgetfulness, sudden tears and outbursts of temper.²

The potential number of stressors in the life of a clergy person is equally expandable.

Roy Oswald, in a now-classic book on clergy self-care written for the Alban Institute, provides a comprehensive list of more than sixty events that he designates as "life changes for clergy," each with an assigned stress value ranging on a scale from 11 up to a maximum of 100. Oswald's list ranges over such areas as death and divorce, health-related issues, and problems having to do with the church building, staff, congregation or finances. He emphasizes the point that because people differ in their reaction to life-changing events, an individual's rating on the scale is not a predictor of illness. "Some people have high adventure needs along with a certain psychological hardiness....Others are thrown off balance by relatively minor changes in their routine."

At the very least, however, use of the rating scale should serve as a reminder of the number and intensity of stressors in your life. As Oswald notes, "[w]e simply do not have limitless ability to adjust to change around us. Too many changes make us sick. If they continue unabated they will eventually kill us. This is part of what it means to be a finite human being."³

Once you've assessed your likely stress level and the components contributing to it, what can you do to alleviate the problem? What remedies exist to move you from a state of stress—which may manifest itself through any or all of the physical and emotional symptoms mentioned by Halaas, Swenson, Oswald and others—to a state of well-being?

Clearly, the presence of physical symptoms should be a wake-up call for a visit to a medical doctor to rule out any underlying physical problems. Barring a physical basis, however, the emotional symptoms (e.g., irritability, anger, depression, anxiety) would point to the need for a renewed effort on your part to change either your behavior or your reactions. What would it take to incorporate into your life as many as needed (or as many as possible) of the positive key concepts found on the list at the beginning of the chapter as well as other tried-and-true techniques for the reduction of stress?

Among the key concepts impacting on emotional well-being are the need for balance and boundaries, the body's need for adequate rest, the rationale for Sabbath and sabbaticals, and the appropriate use of time. Although these concepts are discussed separately, they can not be compartmentalized; they overlap and flow into one another in multiple ways: Sabbath is related to rest; boundaries assist in keeping our personal time from being infringed upon; sabbaticals help to restore balance.

Beyond the key concepts, there are many additional means of stress reduction from which to choose. These might include breathing and relaxation techniques, anger management, cultural and recreational diversions, supportive interpersonal relationships and large doses of good, old-fashioned laughter.

Balance

Balance entails the ability to establish priorities, put things into perspective and not let any one part of your life overtake and push out everything else. Balance requires identifying each of life's major areas—God, family, personal needs, work (and other related facets of professional life), volunteer and charitable efforts, friendships and other interpersonal relationships, social life, recreational life, exercise and other healthy and health-related practices, etc.—and finding the time to attend to them.

When the parts of our life get too out of balance, inevitably some people and/or activities wind up being short-changed. When we give too much attention to some areas at the expense of others over the long term, we often forget that there will be a price to pay—in terms of our own well-being and the well-being of any other people who are part of the equation. Clergy are often expected to put church and pastoral duties ahead of all else—and indeed there are some such duties that require and deserve that level of attention.

However, while a visit to a dying parishioner who has suddenly taken a turn for the worse outranks showing up on time for a longstanding personal dinner invitation, someone's impromptu request for a meeting to talk about Christmas decorations does not clear the bar! The latter needs to be met with a response along the lines of "I'm sorry, but I can't do it this evening. I was just on my way out to an appointment. What's your availability for tomorrow or next Tuesday?" I have personally known too many clergy whose response would instead be to take off their coat and sit back down, pretending to care at that moment about nothing so much as the best proportion of red versus white poinsettias, while silently swallowing their annoyance and frustration and probably doing awful things to their blood pressure as well!

I am not suggesting here that, as the person responsible for the church property and its assets and charged also with the pastoral care and feeding of the church members, that you ought to go off to your fiddling lesson even if the building has caught on fire and appears about to collapse. But if we are honest with ourselves, we should admit that's rarely the case. Most self-care manuals suggest that, over the long run and barring the occasional crunch times that go with the job, the pastor should be limiting his church work to fifty hours weekly.

There's always going to be more work that you *could* be doing, but that doesn't mean you *should* be doing it. Balance entails knowing when to work and when to stop working. While you are overly concerned with doing every possible thing to please your denominational supervisors and/or your congregational members, you are probably not noticing that (choose any or all) your significant other is feeling ignored and may be wondering about the continuing viability of the relationship, your children have grown resentful, your friends are all worried about you and your health is deteriorating.

Boundaries

As clergy, we hear and read frequently about the need for maintaining the boundaries between church and state. In the context of our own lives, it is imperative that we also attend to the need for boundaries between church and individual. Establishing boundaries for our personal lives facilitates our ability to maintain the balance that we need in order to continue to function well—both as clergy and in each of the other parts of our lives.

We can establish boundaries to set limits and minimize encroachments on our time, space and personal lives. In the section on balance, it was noted that a work week of fifty hours ought to be the maximum hours worked under most circumstances. You might want to visualize it as a box containing those hours, not unlike a good-sized candy box that contains fifty individual pieces of chocolate. When the chocolates are gone, they are gone—and there won't be any additional candies until a new box arrives the following week.

If a genuine emergency arises, more chocolates can be obtained from the storeroom (more hours can be diverted into the box), but that should not become a routine occurrence or response lest even the storeroom stock become depleted and unable to be restored. Other temporal boundaries can be established to mark off entire days or months; they are discussed below under the section headings of Sabbath and sabbatical.

Establishing spatial boundaries is important for clergy who live in a church-owned parsonage or rectory, particularly if it is situated next door to the church or in the immediate vicinity. If there are additional family members who live there also, the life of the entire household will be impacted by the existence of boundaries or the lack thereof. Expectations regarding the extent to which church-owned housing is available to be visited or otherwise accessed by the members of the congregation may differ according to the faith tradition or local community norms, but the need for reasonable boundaries is clear.

To avoid later misunderstandings, ideally those boundaries ought to be established at the beginning of a call. If the move has already taken place, then it will be more difficult to change peoples' habits, but consider that it will take a tremendous toll on one's health and well-being not to do so. Life in a fish bowl is, unfortunately, too often the norm for clergy and their families and it serves no one well to have it exacerbated by unfettered access into their private surroundings as well as their more public lives.

Appropriate boundaries in terms of personal life, including both private and public behavior, should be so obvious that it pains me even to have to mention them. The whole issue of clerical sexual abuse of vulnerable individuals, both children and adults, is a scandal with roots firmly embedded in the individual and systemic failure to establish and enforce appropriate boundaries. Unlike the temporal and spatial boundaries, sexual abuse is not something likely to be amenable to my exhortation for clergy boundaries. In such instances, professional and denominational help is needed.

Rest

There's nothing particularly complex about the fact that a body—and that means everybody—needs rest. While the amount of sleep needed for maximum functioning can and does differ from person to person, a typical adult person needs an average of seven to eight hours of sleep per night to be at her or his best.

Human bodies were never meant to function on all cylinders around the clock. We were created with the need for rest and when we are deprived of it, it takes an emotional toll. We are likely to be less patient and more irritable, to cry or to lose our temper more easily, and to have decreased powers of concentration. That's hardly a set of qualities that makes for good pastoral care or even good human relationships! Adequate time to allow our bodies to rest is a must.

Sabbath and Sabbaticals

Balance, boundaries and rest are essentials that must be included in a discussion of emotional self-care. Sabbath and sabbaticals are among the optional extras that can provide the extra margin: the ability to build either or both into your life will help tremendously in finding, restoring and/or maintaining a state of emotional well-being.

Sabbath is a time of rest and respite. Its origin goes back to ancient times and is rooted in the Bible. We are told in the book of Genesis that on the seventh day, with the work of creation finished, God rested. ("So God blessed the seventh day and hallowed it, because on it God rested from all the work that he had done in creation."⁴ The Israelites were subsequently commanded, through God's words to Moses, to follow God's example in their own lives. ("Six days shall work be done; but the seventh day is a sabbath of complete rest, a holy convocation; you shall do no work."⁵ It would behoove all clergy to reflect on this commandment and to consider instituting a sabbath tradition in their own weekly lives.

Observing a personal sabbath doesn't have to be scheduled for the weekend and it doesn't even have to encompass a full day. The point is to have a time each week, preferably recurring on the same day and over the same hours, when you set aside the cares and obligations of the job and you provide yourself with an opportunity for your batteries to be recharged in whatever manner works best for you.

Sabbath time can be spent in prayer, reading, writing, singing, nature walks, or gardening. It might involve looking at art, visiting a museum, listening to music, or virtually any other peaceful and uplifting activity. The list of possibilities is endless and can vary from week to week. Sabbath time is not time taken away from work. Rather, it is time needed to allow you to work more fruitfully during the rest of the week.

Sabbaticals take the concept of sabbath and extend it out to a longer period of time: a month, six months, or up to a year. For those clergy who can negotiate the time for a sabbatical (or who were able to get it included in their initial contract), an extended period of time away from the daily job can restore flagging spirits, avoid burnout, and renew the enthusiasm for ministry as well as provide an opportunity for intellectual and spiritual growth.

Sabbaticals may be structured in advance and are usually undertaken with a specific project or planned activity in mind. Additional self-care benefits, however, are found in the indirect, intangible consequences of sabbatical time: personal renewal and refreshment, restoration of balance, a clearer picture of priorities—what is important and what less so, on the larger scale of life.

There is no doubt that Melissa Sevier has articulated the feelings of many clergy in describing her own sense of being overwhelmed by the demands of pastoral life: "It is as though our bucketful of time and energy has been turned upside down and the last drops are being drained out of it. Sabbath, and sabbatical, are about keeping the bucket balanced between what is being poured in and what is being poured out."⁶

Failure to maintain a balanced life is frequently a self-care issue for clergy. If loss of personal balance was an existing issue prior to starting a sabbatical, Sevier offers four practical disciplines that can help in its restoration: worship, pray, de-complicate

and observe. Based on her own experienced needs, she suggests that it can be useful to open yourself up spiritually and emotionally as part of your sabbatical practices: let God speak to you in worship at a time and place in which you do not have to prepare or lead the service; re-establish your prayer life; simplify your daily schedule and allow room in it for spontaneity; and pay greater attention to the things and the people that are important to you.⁷

It is worth noting that these practices would be equally useful, outside of the sabbatical setting, as clergy struggle to maintain a healthy balance between the multiple parts of their personal and professional lives.

Use of Time

The demands on most clergy's time generally go far beyond what can reasonably be accomplished in the hours available. As Ronald Sisk has noted: "The ministry is a job that is never completed. There is always one more visit that could be made, one more telephone call....In 20 years as a pastor I never once went home at the end of the day having completed everything that I could have done."⁸



The internal and external pressures to do more (more meetings, more pastoral visits, more written work, more liturgical planning, more fundraising, more of just about everything connected with the church!), combined with the realization that some items (and not just the relatively inconsequential ones) from the to-do list are falling in the cracks or otherwise being left undone, would create an emotional strain and drain on any person's psyche. To those work-related time pressures, add in the need for—and limited availability of—time for personal life, time for family life, time for rest and exercise and fun.

It quickly becomes obvious that many pastors are dealing with a potential for disaster, lurking in the shadows in the form of burnout, emotional exhaustion, physical problems, or the use of addictive substances as an escape from the endless pressures and demands on one's time.

The importance of determining priorities, setting aside time for other-than-work-related activities, and letting go of unrealistic expectations (whether it be the expectations that we impose on ourselves or those imposed on us by others) is critical to maintaining one's emotional well-being. Oswald expresses this need simply and clearly: "In order to function well in the clergy role over the long haul, we need to take regular time for ourselves" on a daily basis, on a weekly basis, on a quarterly basis, on a yearly basis, and on a sabbatical basis every four years.⁹

The calendar week has 168 hours, never more and never less. If fifty hours are spent doing work-related tasks and another fifty are allocated for the amount of sleep that a typical adult needs to stay healthy, that leaves roughly sixty-eight hours available for all other activities of life: personal prayer, personal hygiene, dressing, shopping, preparing/eating/cleaning up after meals, exercise, family activities, recreational activities, shopping and other errands, reading and answering mail, medical and dental appointments, reading, practicing sports or music, volunteer and school activities, and on and on. A day off each week? It's part of that sixty-eight hours. Sabbath time? It needs to be fit into that sixty-eight hours.

There's something severely off kilter when so many pastors work well beyond fifty hours a week and still feel guilty about not doing more than they do. If you're among them, you need to stop and to reassess what your work habits are doing to yourself and, if applicable, to your family life. You need to take a deep breath, to be honest with yourself about your emotional state, and to resolve to make the changes that are needed to arrive at a better balance in your life.

If you don't have the foggiest idea what sorts of changes you would need to undertake, keep reading. There are many approaches to reducing stress and moving toward a more balanced life, several of which are described below.

Stress Reduction

If you see yourself reflected in these descriptions—an overloaded, overworked, unhappy, or stressed-out clergy person—you can set about lowering your stress level and increasing your contentment quotient through intentional changes to your current habits and routines. You can determine what it will take to arrive at a better balance between work life and personal life—and then do it.

You can establish and maintain appropriate boundaries with respect to your person, job and living conditions. You can put yourself on a schedule to be sure that your body is receiving adequate rest at night and that sleep deficits are not allowed to build up to untenable levels. You can build in a weekly time for a personal sabbath and perhaps even look into the possibility of a future sabbatical. You can analyze your use of time and make whatever adjustments are needed to insure that no one aspect of your life is regularly commanding an unreasonable amount of your time at the expense of other, equally important areas. In short, you can alleviate the stress in your life.

Instituting new approaches and necessary changes in your day-to-day routine and sticking to them will lead to a less stressful, more balanced life overall. In addition, there are specific techniques for stress reduction that should also be part of the picture. You can pick and choose among such proven stress reducers as breathing and relaxation techniques, anger management, cultural and recreational diversions, supportive interpersonal relationships and large doses of good, old-fashioned laughter.

The better-known, formal breathing and relaxation techniques include meditation, bio-feedback, contemplative prayer and yoga. Books and courses are readily available for those who might be interested in learning more about these and similar practices. Informally, just getting in the habit of stopping to breathe deeply, to pray briefly, and to take a moment to center yourself can be a tremendous help when the

demands seem to be coming from all directions at the same time. If you know that one of your problems, particularly when you are under stress, is a short temper, you can (and should!) address the issue through learning about anger management techniques and how to use them in your own life.

Cultural and recreational diversions aren't just fun; they are important ingredients in the stew of life. They allow you to get away from the workplace physically as well as emotionally; they give you a respite from the seemingly endless demands of work on your time and attention; and they reduce tension through an engagement of your mind and body in the music, the talk, the artwork or the game. It doesn't much matter whether you are concentrating on the notes of the violin or on the moves of the running back; the goal is to allow yourself to be fully present in any healthy activity that can pull you away for a time from the immediate stressors in your life.

A critically important component in maintaining your emotional well-being is having a support network on which you can rely. Participants at the Alban Institute Roundtable on self-care emphasized the unhealthy isolation that is felt by so many clergy members. Your support network should be an important and ongoing part of your life, not something hastily cobbled together at the time to help you through a crisis situation. It may include family members, friends, colleagues from other churches or faith traditions, or other members of a group that has been organized for the explicit purpose of providing mutual support to its participants. Your network may possibly include some people affiliated with your own church with whom you have developed close relationships over time, but that situation should be approached with the utmost care.

What you want and need in your network are people with whom you can step out of your clergy role; people whom you can trust to love and support you, especially when you are feeling too drained to do it for yourself; and people who don't expect you to be perfect, but who will be honest with you when you are giving indications of not thinking clearly or fairly about a situation. A common saying in the field of addiction is particularly relevant with respect to the need for a support network in the overall context of self-care - that only you can do it, but you can't do it alone.

Finally, don't forget about laughter. It's cost-free; it's wonderful for releasing tension; and it can give you a new perspective and a fresh outlook on a difficult matter or impasse.

Emotional Well-being: Clergy Families

All of the self-help literature related to clergy makes it abundantly clear that being the spouse, partner or child of a pastor can be exceedingly stressful and, at times, downright aggravating. If you are the other adult in the household, there is a very good chance statistically that you are the primary (or only!) source of emotional support for your clerical spouse or partner. It is also likely that the provision of emotional support does not flow (or is minimal, at best) in the other direction.

This situation may be due to any of a number of reasons. The non-clerical partner may not want to add to the care-giving burdens of an already over-burdened spouse. She or he may not want to use up already insufficient time together with a recitation of concerns and problems. He or she may feel the need for an objective and empathic pastoral ear outside of the nuclear family.

A clergy spouse may not be able to confide in friends because of the expectations for clergy and clerical family life that they hold, expectations which do not comport with the reality of day-to-day existence. Worse yet, it is all too often assumed by the congregation, family, friends and people generally that the other half of a clergy couple doesn't need to go "outside" for pastoral care or emotional support. Whatever the reason, the result is the same—a situation in which you may be in need of care and have no place to turn for receiving it.

Much of the advice in the "Focusing on Clergy" section applies equally to you. To a great extent, your well-being will depend upon your finding a way to arrive at and maintain a balance in your life, in collaboration with your spouse to the extent possible and on your own initiative for the rest of it. Establishing boundaries should also be a mutual effort, again to the extent possible, so that the outside world perceives that you are on the same page and so that nobody can play you off against one another in terms of your commitments to family time, space, and life.

You can establish your own standards and routines for getting adequate daily rest and for carving out a weekly sabbath, even if an abbreviated one; you can look into sabbatical possibilities on your own job; and you can do your utmost to assure that your use of time is as balanced, productive and peaceful as you can possibly make it. You can investigate stress reduction techniques to deal more expeditiously with the pressures in your own life, which may not include as many demanding meetings and personal requests from church members, but which are pretty certain to be stress-producing in their own right.

Clergy children may have a similar set of issues to confront as they struggle with their emotional well-being and with maintaining "normal" outside relationships while living as part of a nuclear family in which Mom, Dad, or both are pastors. There is often an expectation on the part of the adult congregation that the pastor's children will be "good" in all significant (and perhaps even some insignificant) ways: well-behaved, average to excellent in their schoolwork, smiling, friendly, helpful, and regular attendees at Sunday school. They are regarded as though they were essentially smaller or younger extensions of the clergy parent, rather than differentiated human beings with their own personalities, preferences, qualities and individual quirks.

Depending upon their age and the force of their personality, classmates may be inclined to treat them as goody-goodies based solely on their parentage—a form of prejudice that doesn't happen to the children of doctors, lawyers, or most other "ordinary" white collar professionals.

Clergy children (or pk's, as they frequently refer to themselves - shorthand for preachers' kids) may choose to live up to the goody-goody label or to manifest antisocial behaviors as a form of rebellion against it. In either case, they will be acting out—positively or negatively—from a pre-set role rather than just being themselves. Since self-care is likely to be more difficult for children (who are not yet emotionally mature or secure and may still be trying to find their own persona) than for adults, it is important for the adults in the family to assist them in finding healthy ways in which to grow, to form their own ideas, to take appropriate risks, and to be themselves.

Emotional Well-being: Clergy Colleagues and Congregations

Your colleague or pastor may be overloaded, overworked, depressed and on the verge of total burnout—and still not be willing to admit that there's anything wrong. Colleagues and parishioners can do more than just sit back and lament what's happening; they can play a part in ameliorating the situation. While self-care is just what the name implies, emotional well-being can be assisted through other sources as well.

Close friends can sit down and talk honestly with a suffering colleague about what they're seeing, what they can do to help the situation, and what the individual can (and, in some cases, must) do to help herself. They can organize themselves into a support network where none exists or expand a support network that is already in place.

If the pressures are of a temporary nature (such as an illness in the family or a fire in the church) rather than longstanding and systemic, friends and colleagues can pitch in to assist with the extra burdens—offering time, providing an extra set of hands or wheels and sharing resources until the crisis passes.

Members of the congregation can take a hard look at what it is that they are expecting of a pastor and whether their demands are unrealistic. Renegotiation and prioritization of both the ongoing and ad hoc pastoral responsibilities and the list of events, activities and meetings in which the pastor is expected to be involved may be long overdue. An angry, frustrated, tired, and overburdened pastor is not going to be able effectively to lead the church or care for its people. Realistic expectations mean better outcomes for everyone.

Emotional Well-being: Alban Roundtable Reflections

Participants in the June 2008 Alban Roundtable highlighted the sense of isolation as a major problem that many clergy face in terms of their emotional well-being. Given the unique position in which clergy find themselves, where can they find the avenues of support that they need? Can they even admit to needing such external supports?



One of the participants was emphatic: "If you're isolated, you're either going to implode with all of that pressure or you're going to inappropriately use the pulpit or whatever it is as your therapy zone, because you have to let that out somewhere."¹⁰

Suggestions for dealing with the isolation and the denial (of the need for support) flowed among group members. "Sometimes one of the things we can do is help encourage one another to be encouraged to find supportive systems."¹¹ Ideas for people who might be part of your personal support system included therapists, other counselor types, clergy from your own or different denominations, family members, friends, and people from outside the church who are in your life in any shared capacity and with whom you have developed a closeness along the way.

The additional point was made that supportive systems don't just happen; you have to be intentional about making them happen.¹²

Emotional Well-being: Meditation from Scripture

For everything there is a season, and a time for every matter under heaven: a time to be born, and a time to die; a time to plant, and a time to pluck up what is planted; ...a time to keep, and a time to throw away; a time to tear, and a time to sow; a time to keep silence, and a time to speak.

-- *Ecclesiastes 3: 1-2, 6-7; NRSV*

Physical Well-being

As I reviewed the self-care literature, I noticed a number of words (or the equivalents thereof) that reappeared with some frequency. The appearance and reappearance of these same concepts, from one book to the next, was an early clue to their importance as areas for attention, both positive and negative. Most of these concepts reappear across several of the four components of well-being discussed in this report—emotional, physical, intellectual, and spiritual. Virtually all of them can be related (positively or negatively) to the state of our physical health.

The lists below are in alphabetical order, rather than in order of priority. They are included for easy reference at the beginning of the "Emotional Well-being," "Intellectual Well-being," and "Spiritual Well-being" sections as well. The positive concepts most relevant to each topic are highlighted and marked at the beginning of that section with an asterisk.

Key Concepts— Positive

balance *
boundaries
grace
renewal *
reserve *
resilience
rest *
sabbath
sabbatical
time
transformation
wellness *
wholeness *

Key Concepts— Negative

burnout
emptiness
overload
overwork
spiritual dryness
stress

Physical Well-being: Focusing on Clergy

The need for physical health and well-being is certainly not solely the concern of pastors and other clergy. Clergy persons face the same issues around caring for their physical body as everyone else. There are, however, a few differences that impact on clergy's need for, and ability to maintain, a state of physical well-being: they are working in jobs that are often high in stress and low in physical activity; their jobs involve irregular work hours in both day and evening time frames; and they are apt to find themselves frequently in surroundings (such as church-related home visits and social or communal events) that include food offerings.

Since clergy are frequently looked at as potential role models by the members of a congregation, it is helpful for their parishioners as well as for their own healthy functioning if the behaviors that they are modeling are positive, healthy and conducive to an overall physical well-being.

In the "Emotional Well-being" section, we looked at some key concepts that can impact on emotional well-being. A similar group of key concepts might be identified for their potential impact on physical well-being. At a minimum, that group would need to include balance, renewal, reserve, rest, wellness and wholeness. Achieving the physical well-being implied by those broad concepts entails paying attention to everything that one does with and for one's body.

The following sections cover a number of health and health-related topics, any or all of which may be relevant in your own life: food (including nutrition and weight issues), alcohol and other addictive substances, exercise and sports, sleep and rest, health and medical matters, and sexuality.



Food, Nutrition, Weight

What do you eat and when do you eat it? I suspect that for many readers, there is at least one food-related problem in your life, but elemental hunger is not among them. Very few of us have personally known starvation or famine. We are blessed to have more than enough food—and food of great variety—with which to sate our hunger. On the other side of the equation, however, the quantity and types of food that we eat and the circumstances under which we eat it can play a significant role in our overall physical well-being.

Let's start with quantity. The problem of obesity is a major problem in the United States in the 21st century, among both children and adults. It is not a problem from which clergy are immune. To the contrary, the nature of clergy jobs is such that it may be more of an occupational hazard for us than for the population at large.

In a 2001 survey of ordained ministers and rostered lay leaders in the Evangelical Lutheran Church of America (ELCA), it was reported that the weights of 68 percent of the ordained ministers in the survey fell into the overweight or obese range; the comparable statistic for the general U.S. population was 61 percent (overweight or obese).¹³

An interdenominational survey of religious leaders in that same year (2001 *Pulpit & Pew* survey) reported a finding that "76 percent of clergy are overweight—79 percent of men and 52 percent of women."¹⁴ In some areas of life, being in the majority can be a comforting place to be, but overweight is not one of them!

Overweight and obesity can mean a greater susceptibility to a number of serious health problems, such as heart disease and diabetes. They add to the strain and drain on your body and your energy level. If you are not only consuming too much food, but are also eating the wrong kinds of food, you are doing further harm to your body and your physical well-being. As in so many other facets of life, the key to good nutrition is balance. A diet that consists in large part of coffee and pastry in the morning and whatever fast food is available during the rest of the day is not a balanced diet. Rather, it is a self-care nightmare!

If the preceding paragraphs apply to you, it is time to do a serious reassessment of your eating habits. Dieting is not easy and no honest self-care handbook author should pretend to tell you otherwise, so let's call it paying sensible attention and care vis-a-vis your eating habits. You know what you need to do (and, optimally, want to do) about the excess pounds, so I'm just going to reiterate it here: get a medical check-up if you're substantially overweight; reduce your food intake; vary your diet so that all of the necessary food groups are covered; eat meals at regular hours; snack sensibly; and remind yourself as often as necessary that the goal is a slow weight loss over time through better eating habits.

As for what not to do: do not, under any circumstances (except, perhaps, under the direct supervision of a medical doctor) reduce your daily caloric intake below a recommended minimum; do not omit any of the nutritional food groups (celery sticks, grapefruit and dry toast do not constitute a balanced diet); and do not try to see how quickly you can get the needle on the bathroom scale to move downwards. A quick loss of weight too often is due to a diet so restricted that the dieter falls off the wagon, leading to his regaining all of the pounds that were lost plus a few more besides.

Dieting regimens that require measuring cups and scales and specific amounts of designated foods are not likely to be compatible with a typical clergy work schedule, so you will not find that level of detail included here. Instead, I offer some practical suggestions for healthy eating with a goal of sensible weight reduction and maintenance:

- Eat three moderately-sized meals daily. Add two small snacks at other times of day if you are feeling hungry between meals. (A piece of fruit is a small snack; half of an apple pie with ice cream is not!)
- Try to include all of the major food groups in your diet in reasonable amounts: fruits and vegetables (preferably fresh, if available; alternatively, frozen, dried or canned); protein-providing dishes (fish, poultry, meat, eggs, dairy products, legumes, nuts); starches (rice, other grains, pasta, bread, potatoes). You may interpret "reasonable" more liberally with respect to the consumption of fruits and vegetables than with respect to most starch-based dishes.
- Don't totally eliminate fats and oils, but use them sparingly. Herbs and spices, on the other hand, may be used freely to add taste and interest to meals (unless they are contraindicated for medical or health reasons).
- Don't deny yourself a piece of your own birthday cake. The goal is to lose weight sensibly, not to make yourself so miserable that you go out and drown

your sorrow in excess calories. (On the other hand, you don't need to partake of every pie, cake and death-by-chocolate delight that finds its way into the room. Remember that the parishioner who's offering you the goodies is probably the same person who's remarking on how Pastor So-and-so really needs to take off some of those excess pounds!)

- If you lose track of your intake for a day or a week, don't throw the whole weight loss project to the winds! As soon as you become aware of the lapse, think realistically about what caused the derailment (busyness, emotional upset, just plain lack of paying attention) and find a better way to deal with it. Ratchet up your resolve to get back on track and return to a pattern of sensible eating habits without self-flagellation, but also without delay. Remind yourself continually that eating a balanced diet and getting/keeping your weight down will contribute greatly to both your physical and your emotional well-being.

Addictive Substances

There are probably few pastors reading this who have not known—or, at a minimum, been made aware of—an addicted colleague. The pressures of clergy life can lead to a reliance on alcohol, tobacco, or drugs (prescription, over-the-counter, or illegal) as an "antidote" to tension, pain, overload, loneliness, demands on one's person, feelings of inadequacy or any of the other stressors that too often come with the job.

The use of these substances, however, is an unwise temporary fix that only masks the underlying problem and ultimately makes it worse. To state the obvious as simply as possible, over-consumption of alcohol, tobacco, or legal drugs—or any consumption of illegal drugs—is stupid, counterproductive, and bad for your health. It is certainly not a path to meeting your body's needs for balance, renewal, reserve, rest, wellness and wholeness.

The resources for dealing with addiction may be inadequate, but they do exist. The first part of the problem is getting past the denial. If any of the following statements sound familiar, you need to consider that you very likely are kidding yourself and that you need help: "I'm not an alcoholic; I just like to have a couple of drinks to relax me when the going gets tough." "I'm not addicted; I could stop (drinking, drugging, smoking) whenever I want, but I don't feel any need to do so." "Alcoholics are people who sneak drinks all the time; I only drink when I'm not working."

Where do you get help? There are Alcoholics Anonymous (AA) meetings in every town and city. Narcotics Anonymous (NA) and other twelve step programs and self-help groups also exist, although they are not as ubiquitous as AA. You probably don't want to (and shouldn't) attend the meetings that are held in your own church, even though all of these programs are expected to operate on the basis of strict confidentiality.

If you don't know the location of other meetings, you can go on-line to AA's website (www.aa.org) to find information on the meetings in your vicinity. If you're computer-challenged, just open up your local phone book. If there's a "Community Information" section, it will have listings for addiction services and there's a good chance that you will also find a general information number for Alcoholics Anonymous in the white pages.

If addictive substances are part of your regular lifestyle and you're adamant that you don't need help to stop using them, consider the possibility that you may be wrong (in addition to the fact that you are engaging in behaviors that are unhealthy, unwise and, in the case of illegal drugs, against the law as well.)

Consider, also, that others may be seeing your behavior differently. Do a reality check; talk to someone you can trust and get a second opinion. (Get a third one, if you're still unconvinced.) If you need help, get help! A common saying in the field of addiction, is perhaps even more relevant in terms of the self-help that is needed here: Only you can do it, but you can't do it alone.

Exercise and Sports

If you're not generally inclined toward sports and fitness, it's easy to find excuses not to exercise. (If you are so inclined, you can probably skip this section.) The endless rounds of meetings, both in and out of the church; on-site church activities; pastoral visits and the like—often starting in the morning and running right through the evening hours—mean that you have to be really intentional about fitting regular exercise into the schedule. (Nobody ever said that all of this self-care was going to be easy. The results, however, are worth it!)

A balanced diet and regular exercise are two main keys to a healthier self. Both need to be pursued in moderation; enough, but not too much, applies as a general rule to both food and exercise. Richard Swenson describes the most important aspect of fitness as cardiorespiratory endurance ("the body's ability to deliver and use oxygen") and suggests that a regimen of "thirty to forty-five minutes of sustained exercise—walking, jogging, swimming, bicycling—three or four times a week" is desirable to condition and build up the cardiorespiratory system.¹⁵

The benefits of this type of exercise accrue to more than just a healthier body. Swenson (a medical doctor as well as a self-care author) also affirms that "*one hundred percent* of people who exercise to the point of cardiorespiratory fitness will experience an increased sense of well-being."¹⁶

Starting an exercise regimen may be easier than sticking with it. A few tricks to sustaining it are to choose a form of exercise that you like (or, at the least, if you can't think of any that you like, find one that you don't thoroughly dislike) as well as one that fits your lifestyle. If your favorite exercise necessarily involves multiple other participants and a specialized locale, it's probably going to be more difficult to engage in it on a regular, several-times-a-week basis than would be the case with another form of exercise. You want to find something that you can do by yourself, whether at home or in the proximate neighborhood. (That's not to say that you should give up engaging in your beloved doubles tennis game; just don't rely on it for your three-to-four times weekly workout!)

In addition to engaging in regular exercise (or while you're trying to push yourself to do what you know you really need to do in that regard), you can get in some extra self-care by increasing your activity in multiple, easy-to-carry-out ways. Walk up or down a flight (or two) of stairs instead of waiting for the elevator. Park the car in a spot a little further away from the entry door of the church or meeting locale than you would usually do. If you're taking public transportation, get off the bus a block early or exit the subway at the opposite end of the station from your destination. Once you've gotten into the habit, you'll find that none of these activities take much

time or effort, especially when viewed in terms of the positive impact that they have on your overall physical well-being.

One last hint on the exercise front: At a time in my life when I was trying to fit too many things into too-short days, I asked one of my professors whether it was permissible to exercise while praying. He told me with a smile that I had the question backwards—is it permissible to pray while exercising—and that the answer is that it is always permissible to pray! Don't ignore the possibility of multitasking while you're going through your chosen exercise routine.

Sleep and Rest

The need for sleep and rest, discussed briefly in the earlier chapter on emotional well-being, is even more applicable in terms of our physical well-being. The typical adult body needs an average of seven to eight hours of sleep per night for its maximum functioning. When we are sleep-deprived, we are simply not going to be operating at our best. In the short term, an adrenaline rush may allow us to keep on going past our normal limits, but over a longer period of time we can not sustain a level of physical activity or endurance beyond that with which we are endowed by our Creator.

To the extent that we have control over our sleeping environment and our nighttime habits, we should endeavor to make them conducive to getting adequate, sound, and regular rest each night. A focus on appropriate preparation for sleep is particularly important for people who find it difficult to unwind from the day's activities and concerns or who have trouble falling asleep for any reason.



Rochelle Melander and Harold Eppley offer a checklist of twenty items that can have an impact on what they call your "sleep hygiene," including both your sleeping environment and your sleep-related habits.¹⁷

Their suggestions include going to bed and rising at approximately the same time each day; avoiding alcohol, caffeine, nicotine, heavy foods or strenuous exercise too close to bedtime; having a comfortable bed and bedding; keeping the television elsewhere; having a bedtime ritual to let go of the day's worries; and using the bedroom solely for "sleep and sex."

Health and Medical Care

Self-care for the maintenance of our physical well-being certainly starts with what we can do for ourselves—eating and sleeping properly, getting enough exercise, and exercising restraint in our use of potentially addictive substances. It also includes, however, knowing when to utilize the services of the medical profession on our own behalf.

Clergy need the same regular health and medical attention recommended for everyone in your age and gender demographic. If anything, the high stress level of the job makes adhering to a regular schedule of check-ups even more important. Regular physical examinations with an internist or general practitioner are a must, as are periodic dental and vision check-ups.

Gwen Halaas (who, like Richard Swenson, is a medical doctor as well as a self-care author) provides a wellness guide of physical health measures—both routine and disease-related—that merit attention.¹⁸



In addition to the standard uses of routine check-ups and their indicated follow-ups (such as monitoring blood pressure and cholesterol levels, performing screenings for various cancers, updating immunizations), they provide early clues to whatever else might be happening health-wise with respect to your body.

Routine check-ups, combined with on-going attentiveness to whatever else your body might be telling you, can help with the early discovery and subsequent management (what Halaas calls "living well with disease") of such acute or chronic diseases as diabetes, heart disease, cancer, arthritis, asthma, and osteoporosis.

Intimacy

The topics discussed so far—addressing our human need for appropriate nutrition, exercise, rest, and health care, and the issue of addiction—are, for the most part, noncontroversial. It is also generally accepted that a healthy physical life includes human warmth and touch. However, there is less agreement on "what's acceptable" in this category and "what's not acceptable" than is the case for any of the other areas above.

On questions of sex and intimacy, different denominations prescribe differing standards for their clergy members. The Roman Catholic Church does not allow its

clergy to be married, unless they were ordained married clergy members in another denomination who were subsequently accepted into the Roman Catholic fold. It also does not condone sexual relationships (whether heterosexual or homosexual) for clergy outside of marriage.

Orthodox Christian priests may be married, so long as the marriage took place before their ordination. Most other Christian groups have no proscriptions on their clergy regarding heterosexual marriage. Some also accept practicing homosexuals into their clergy ranks; others do not. For clergy whose relationships fall within the guidelines of their denomination, a healthy, mutually-enjoyable sexual life is a blessing that adds to their personal well-being and their ministry. But what about the others?

There are perhaps two main points to remember pertaining to our human need for intimacy. One is that intimacy and sex are not synonymous. Touch can also play an important role in meeting that need in our lives. Bruce and Kate Epperly remind us that "vital, renewed and renewing ministry is nurtured and sustained by appropriate and sacred touch," which they go on to describe as touch that is "well-boundaried, welcome and loving."¹⁹

The second point, more critical than the first because it involves the physical and emotional well-being of people outside ourselves, is that there are some types of touch that are always outside of the boundaries—including any sexually-related touching of minors and any touch that is not mutually acceptable to both parties.

Touch appropriately used—whether it be through a handshake, a hug, a "high five" or another means—is beneficial for others as well as for ourselves. As Bruce and Kate Epperly sensitively state this need for, and use of, touch:

Precisely because touch is a central medium of divine incarnation and healing, we are called to the highest level of care in touching others. We must also see to it that we nurture our own quality experiences of healing touch for ourselves through appropriate channels such as therapeutic massage, reiki healing touch, or healthy social or familial relationships. It is when pastors ignore or repress their own healthy needs for touch that they unconsciously (and sometimes even consciously) foist their own needs for touch inappropriately upon congregants.²⁰

We all need touch as an expression of human warmth and caring. The goal is to find a healthy way of incorporating it into our own lives and, as appropriate, providing it in the lives of those to whom we are connected by family, friendship, or ministry ties.

Physical Well-being: Clergy Families

Physical well-being is a gender-neutral and family-neutral issue. Just as the advice, suggestions and cautions in this section are relevant for both clergy and non-clergy, they are also equally applicable to spouses, partners, and children (although the guidelines for children will differ in some respects depending upon their age).

Since obesity often cuts across families, a mutual effort might be made to schedule more meals to be eaten together at home and fewer consumed "on the run" between outside commitments. It's easier and more economical to consume a balanced diet in

one's own home, where you have control over both the ingredients and the preparation (and number!) of dishes.

In addition to better meal habits, if members of the family can agree to join in some form of exercise together—such as bicycling or going out for a walk—that's also going to have a positive impact on everyone's physical well-being.



Finally, if there is *any* suspicion of substance abuse in the family—dad drinking too much, mom too reliant on pills, teenagers using marijuana or inhalants—other family members should not close their eyes to it or look the other way. Someone needs to take the initiative in determining whether a substance use problem exists and the extent of it.

Outside resources are available (online, over the phone, or in print) to advise on how to conduct an intervention or to locate a self-help program. For a more entrenched or resistant addiction, an outpatient or residential treatment program or the help of other professionals (such as a trained counselor, therapist or medical doctor) with a background in the addictions field may be needed.

Physical Well-being: Clergy Colleagues and Congregations

The same spotlight on diet, weight and exercise that I've shone on a clergy member's family falls also on you. Anything that you can do to encourage, assist or—at the very least—not hinder your colleague or pastor in attaining and maintaining an appropriate weight level and in getting reasonable amounts of exercise and rest is both indicated and useful. If she is overweight, you are not helping when you press a supersized chocolate chip muffin on her at the monthly interfaith council meeting or when you insist that he have a cup of coffee and a piece of homemade apple strudel during a pastoral visit.

Likewise, scheduling back-to-back late afternoon and evening committee meetings at the church may allow the parishioners time to have dinner at home, before or after their participation in one or the other meeting, but will virtually insure that a pastor who is expected to be at both meetings will not eat a healthy or balanced dinner that day and will probably skip the exercise time as well.

As for the colleague or pastor whom you suspect (or know) is using addictive substances at an unacceptable level, you are not helping him by ignoring the situation. None of the following responses is a valid excuse for doing nothing: you

don't know for sure that a problem exists; you are aware of the pressures currently on him and are sympathetic to his plight; you don't want to get involved; or you don't want to cause trouble for him with the congregation or the denominational hierarchy.

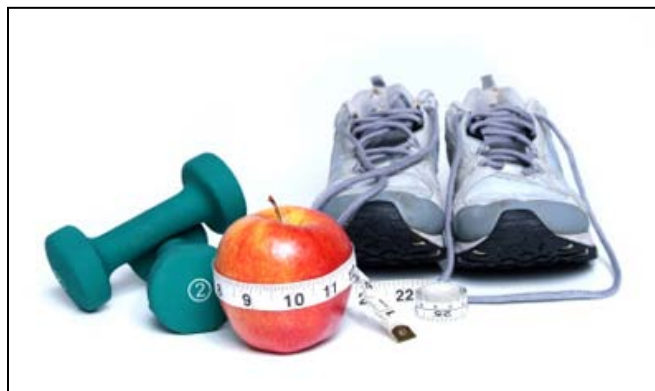
Resources are available, interventions can be effective when properly and thoughtfully carried out, and self-help programs are ubiquitous. Members of a congregation facing this dilemma might do better to bring in a knowledgeable and objective outsider to advise them of the most appropriate action. Clergy colleague action is less of a threat and seems to me to be required by virtue of both our profession and our faith.

To use a biblical-style analogy: if your friend's ox is about to step into a pit and he hasn't noticed, do you let it fall in or do you rush over and pull the reins hard in the opposite direction to keep it from hurting itself?²¹ Is it better to risk "hurting" a friend in order to help her or is it better to let her "crash and burn" because you didn't think it was your place to make the first move?

Physical Well-being: Alban Roundtable Reflections

Alban Roundtable participants were clear as to the importance of wellness and the role of exercise in achieving that goal. One member of the group emphatically pointed out the link between mind, body and spirit and summed up his impression of the need for greater physical self-care: "My sense of clergy help, physical help, is we are in deep trouble, overworked and out of shape and we're just inviting so many things to hurt us."²²

Some of the group members spoke of looking forward to regular physical activity; others admitted to engaging in it with distinctly less enthusiasm. As one person jokingly (or perhaps only half-jokingly) put it: "I've been trying for a long time to hire someone to exercise for me."²³ He went on to admit, however, that he swims three times a week.



Others spoke of running every day and exercising as well as paying attention to their diet and trying to get a good night's sleep on a regular basis.²⁴ It was suggested that a congregation that valued wellness should make a point of including a membership to a local Y or gym (for both the pastor and family) as part of the clergy compensation package.²⁵

For the most part, it was agreed, regular self-care practices do not easily fit into already over-busy clerical lives, but there was general consensus that they are critically important and need to be intentionally pursued in order to stay healthy. One suggestion that emerged was to write everything down, however simplistic it might seem, as a self-reminder of what needs to be done to maintain one's balance and well-being.

As one group member expressed it, "I write it down to remind myself....I've got walking, exercising, even praying on here. I need to remind myself not to get so off base that I forget to do the basic things - because when I'm in crisis mode, sometimes I forget things [like my daily walk] that keep me centered, that keep me well."²⁶

Physical Well-being: Meditation from Scripture

Do not be among winebibbers, or among gluttonous eaters of meat; for the drunkard and the glutton will come to poverty, and drowsiness will clothe them with rags.

-- *Proverbs 23:20-21; NRSV*



Intellectual Well-being

As I reviewed the self-care literature, I noticed a number of words (or the equivalents thereof) that reappeared with some frequency. The appearance and reappearance of these same concepts, from one book to the next, was an early clue to their importance as areas for attention, both positive and negative. Most of these concepts reappear across several of the four components of well-being discussed in this report—emotional, physical, intellectual, and spiritual. Virtually all of them can be related (positively or negatively) to the state of our intellectual health.

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time *
transformation
wellness
wholeness *

Key Concepts— Negative

burnout
emptiness
overload
overwork
spiritual dryness
stress

Intellectual Well-being: Focusing on Clergy

It is not too much of an exaggeration to say that emotional and physical self-care and well-being are essential to life itself. Neglect in either of those areas can lead to serious physical or emotional health problems, burnout, illness, or other breakdown of the mind or body. Neglect of one's intellectual well-being—the self's need for mental stimulation and growth throughout life—may not lead to such dire consequences, but to say that it is less likely to be life-threatening does not detract from its importance in a balanced and overall healthy life.

While the need for intellectual self-care is not dealt with as extensively in the current self-care literature as other topical areas, intellectual well-being is nevertheless an important factor in maintaining a healthy and balanced clerical life.

Leading a balanced life requires, at a minimum, paying attention to the well-being of

mind, body and spirit and providing nourishment to all three of those parts. While it is generally more obvious when we are neglecting our body, and arguably perhaps more important when a clergy member is neglecting the spiritual side of life, the feeding of our mind on a regular basis is what makes us more rounded and interesting human beings, better preachers and role models, and more enthusiastic and thoughtful participants in the shared life of our faith community or church.

Relevant key concepts with respect to immediate and life-long intellectual well-being would include balance, renewal, reserve, sabbath, sabbatical, time and wholeness. Reflecting on these concepts helps us to understand why intellectual pursuits continue to be important throughout a lifetime, how they are beneficial for both career and personal reasons, and where they can be inserted into already over-busy and overloaded schedules. Activities conducive to intellectual stimulation and growth may be categorized as: single event (reading a book), short-term (attending a lecture series), longer-term (pursuing an advanced degree) or continuous (spending a half-hour daily with puzzles that actively engage the mind).

A balanced life includes "food for the mind" in whatever form suits you best. These pursuits, for each of us, can also be expected to change over time - as our interests expand and depending upon our finances, family obligations, and the needs and demands coming from other parts of our life in one era as opposed to another.

It is not likely that you will feel up to the demands of a doctoral program if you are coping with a new pastorate and have recently discovered that you are about to become the parent of twins (although it is not impossible and, I expect, not unheard of). You could, however, still attend an occasional open-to-the-public lecture (frequently available at local campuses, libraries, or bookstores) on a topic that appeals to you. This may not be the year to commence writing a book, but we really can find enough time to read a book, even if it's just a few pages each day. It requires intentionality, but it is possible and it is worth it.

The important thing to remember, in terms of your intellectual well-being, is that you can and should be doing a variety of things to keep your mind lively. It doesn't much matter what they are, so long as they are healthy and mind-engaging activities that optimally serve also to distract your attention temporarily from the daily cares and duties of the job. Exercise for the mind is not unlike exercise for the body—however and to whatever extent you can engage in it, it is an essential component of your overall well-being.

Intellectual stimulation can come from cultural pursuits (museums, art exhibits, lectures, concerts, films) as well as from books, puzzles, and one-on-one or group discussions of important economic, philosophical, or other topics. It can come from continuing education or other course work, either on an ad hoc basis or as part of a certificate or degree program.

Reading

Reading for personal growth, learning and pleasure is different from reading in the course of sermon preparation. We all do a lot of the latter; many of us don't do nearly enough of the former. That's not to say that we shouldn't be doing the requisite background reading—scripture, commentaries and other source materials—in conjunction with upcoming sermons that we will be preaching.

The reading generally associated with sermon preparation, however, is just not varied enough to meet all of our "nutritional" requirements. The reading that we do in our pastoral capacity needs to be supplemented with the reading that we do as generalists; that is, as intelligent and thinking people who are interested in the larger world. Reading in that larger category might include good fiction and nonfiction, poetry and classics, current events and history, "how to" books, short stories, essays, magazines in our fields of interest, and so on.

Like many of you, I love reading scripture and learning more about its history and its interpretation, but I also know that I am a more fulfilled person and a better pastor for the time that I spend reading in other fields as well. An unexpected benefit, apart from the sheer enjoyment of encountering new ideas and new ways of looking at the world, is that some of those ideas and anecdotes inevitably find their way back into your sermons as well as your professional and pastoral conversations.

Some of you may already have a pile of books on the shelf that you would love to get around to reading "one of these days." Others haven't done much reading since graduating from seminary and wouldn't even be sure where to begin in starting a personal reading-for-pleasure program. If the pile of books is sitting there waiting for you, you have the easier task of just making time for them.

If the only books in the house are your Bible commentaries and other textbooks, a trip to the nearest bookstore or public library is in order. Look at the list of fiction and nonfiction recent best-sellers or just browse on the shelves in a category that interests you. Alternatively, you could try asking your most bookish friend what she's enjoyed reading lately; an added bonus is that she might offer to lend you her copy.

Whichever category you're in—a formerly avid reader who let it lapse under the pressure of "no time" or someone who's just getting used to the idea of reading for fun—you'll need to figure out how to make room in your schedule. Resolve to spend some set amount of time each week for your pleasure reading. Aim for a schedule that you think you can realistically stick to, whether it's a half hour each evening or a few hours over the weekend.

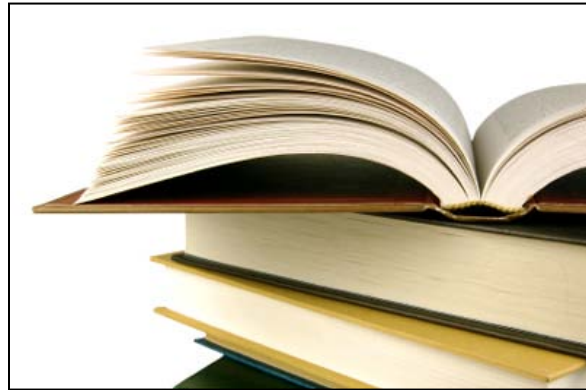
Think creatively, if necessary: If you take public transportation during the workday, can you devote some of the travel time to reading? Can you close your office door at lunchtime a couple of days each week and spend some of that time reading? If you have young children and you were never exposed to some of the wonderful classic children's literature in your own childhood, you could start by enjoying it now as a family. (I first read *Charlotte's Web* as an adult and I'm sure I appreciated it more then than would have been the case a couple of decades earlier!)

Continuing Education

While acknowledging there is personal growth, learning and pleasure to be gained in reading that is related to formal education, it is just enough different that it seemed to merit a section of its own. For one thing, the readings are generally prescribed, rather than self-chosen, and they are part of a larger curriculum rather than autonomous pieces that you picked up because they looked to be interesting.

Academic and assigned course reading also needs to be completed by a deadline (although the deadline may be quite flexible in the context of on-line distance learning). In my experience (and unlike library books, which are frequently renewed

just to give the reader time to finish them), books that haven't been finished by the due date (the end of the course, the final exam, or the submission of the final paper) are rarely read for pleasure over the weeks that follow.



On the positive side, formal courses greatly facilitate the question of what to read. At the beginning of the course, you are quite likely to be given a list of required readings, an ancillary list of optional readings, and maybe even yet another list of places to look for more in-depth readings pertaining to the subject at hand. Additionally, unless you are particularly disciplined in your personal pleasure reading regimen, the academically-required reading may provide an external level of discipline that you might find it hard to maintain on your own.

In terms of intellectual self-care and well-being, both forms of reading are equally valuable and not necessarily mutually exclusive. You may find yourself engaged in either or both at different times in your life. The trick, as with most other forms of self-care, is to find what works best for you, develop a reasonable program that allows for some degree of flexibility, and then carry through with it.

Sabbath and Sabbaticals

The concepts of sabbath and sabbatical are exceedingly useful in thinking about intellectual well-being and how to achieve it as a goal for our lives. While the main purpose of sabbath is generally thought of as rest ("So God blessed the seventh day and hallowed it, because on it God rested from all the work that he had done in creation."²⁷), rest need not be interpreted as sleep. In fact, it would be most theologically unsound to suggest that, on the seventh day, God slept.

If we can think of rest as a cessation of, or a pleasant and productive distraction from, one's daily labor, then sabbath (on whatever day of the week one can manage to schedule it) is an ideal time to engage in activities that enhance our intellectual well-being. We honor a regular sabbath time in our lives and keep it holy by not engaging in the same tasks at which we labor during the rest of the work week. To spend some of those hours in quiet reading is to remember the meaning and purpose of sabbath.

Sabbaticals—extended periods of time that are spent away from the workplace after an agreed-upon number of years on the job—may provide a more in-depth answer to your need for renewal. A sabbatical presents us with an opportunity to replenish the reserve that we all should have on hand, if we really understand and are serious

about engaging in healthy self-care. When we encounter periods of stress and overload that might otherwise throw us for a loop, it is extremely useful to have some margin of reserve on which to draw.

Sabbaticals are also an ideal time for attending to our intellectual well-being. In fact, almost anything that we choose to do with our sabbatical time—serious reading, academic course work, travel, writing, or other project—is likely to have an aspect of intellectual growth at its core or closely related to it.

Melissa Bane Sevier, in writing about what's involved in planning and taking sabbaticals (including her own first-hand experience with the topic), suggests choosing a field in which you might want to do in-depth reading and then moving forward with the project.

Her suggestions include reading about a favorite current hobby or sport or one which you are potentially interested in pursuing; reading associated with planned travel (such as the history, culture, or literature of a locale that you might be visiting); reading fiction with a plan in mind (multiple novels by the same author, for example); reading the history of a particular era; or reading about a particular faith tradition (deepening your knowledge of your own tradition or going outside of the box to study a different tradition about which you would like to know more).²⁸

Cultural Activities

As someone who has been a lifelong voracious reader, I tend to rely on the printed word for most of my intellectual care and feeding. However, I need to point out that there are many other, equally valid ways of approaching the issue of intellectual self-care and well-being. I would be remiss if I did not mention music, art, lectures, computers and puzzles as just a few of the additional ways of keeping one's mind alert and well-nourished.

Alban Roundtable participants also identified a number of such pursuits—such as the arts and culture, going to concerts and museums and listening to music in the car—as being among the various things that sustain them and help them build reserve against the stresses of ministry.²⁹



Many of types of activities (literary, musical, artistic) can be engaged in from multiple perspectives—some more active and some more passive ones, but all equally valuable for the mind and conducive to enhanced well-being. In addition to

reading books, journals, and whatever other printed materials you find interesting, you can write for your own pleasure or for others to read. In addition to listening to good music, you can learn to play a musical instrument (or improve your skill level on one with which you are already familiar). You can look at art, in galleries and museums, and you can create art in any form that appeals to you (drawing, painting, ceramics, sculpture, collage, photography).

It doesn't matter if you're particularly knowledgeable about, or talented in, the field (or fields) that you've chosen. Anything that involves using your brain cells is fine. If you're interested in it—and you have or can find the resources to pursue it—go for it!

(A note of caution: you can be far-reaching in your plans, but don't stray so far from the realm of possibility or practicality that you set yourself up for failure. If you've never tried your hand at jigsaw puzzles, you might want to assemble a couple of 100 or 200 piece puzzles before dumping the 1,000 pieces out of the box onto the middle of the living room floor.)

Intellectual Well-being: Clergy Families

Some of our intellectual pursuits will inevitably be solitary ones, but activities that can be engaged in with a spouse, partner or children may well turn out to be among the most satisfying ones.

Bruce and Kate Epperly, a married couple who happen both to be pastors, write about the need for a shared vision in a relationship, referring to it as "looking together in the same direction."³⁰ While intellectual pursuits are arguably not the same as vision, they represent a similar ideal. Family-oriented and joint projects get everybody on the same page and provide a mutual goal on which to focus.



Every geographic locale will offer intellectual and cultural resources that can be enjoyed as individuals or as a couple or family. Depending upon where you live, there may be different levels of resources available locally, including those of professional quality, community-based amateur works, or events presented through local schools or colleges. If you live in a community where you can visit art museums or attend concerts together, so much the better.

If finances are tight and entrance fees are prohibitive, find low-cost (or no-cost!) activities that you can enjoy together. If one of you used to play the flute and the other, the piano, until the demands of job and life got so heavy, dust off the sheet

music and resolve to find time for a musical duet at least once a week. Play Scrabble as a family. Borrow an educational DVD from the local library and watch it together. Read aloud to the children (or to each other).

The opportunities for intellectual and cultural stimulation and growth are unlimited. Some of them may require a bit of creativity on your part and others are as close as your own living room.

Intellectual Well-being: Clergy Colleagues and Congregations

Many years ago, the United Negro College Fund used as its tag line: "A mind is a terrible thing to waste." The statement is not only undeniably true, but it remains true well beyond the years of formal academic education. You don't trade in your brain in exchange for a seminary diploma or an ordination certificate. Intellectual growth needs to be a lifelong pursuit.

Many pastors get so bogged down in the heavy demands of their job that their lives become one-sided and unbalanced. They become far less interesting as people. Are you the kind of person whose company you would enjoy if you were stranded on the proverbial desert island? If not, consider that your intellectual life has been derailed—whether by inattention, job pressures, or other stressors in your life. A better balance needs to be restored (a statement applicable not only for you, but also for any of your colleagues who may find themselves in the same situation) for the sake of overall health and wholeness.



As difficult as it may sound to carry out, particularly if you are already on the verge of overload, my suggestion is that you find some well-rounded colleagues (you probably already know some, but haven't needed to identify them in your life in that way)—people who talk about ideas or enjoy word games or keep themselves informed about current events—and resolve that you are going to be as informed and alert as they are. Make it a point to get together with them socially—one-on-one or in a small group—even if it's only once every couple of months.

If you're in a rather isolated situation as far as clergy colleagues are concerned, you might look within the congregation for intellectual growth opportunities, with one major caveat: you are not looking to set up a Bible study or another church committee or to be cast in a leadership role on yet another project. On the other hand, by keeping your eyes and ears open, you may be alerted to a discussion group, book club or similar activity in an area of potential interest to you and in

which you would be welcome to participate.

Intellectual burnout can be an occupational hazard for clergy. Remember that by exercising self-care in this area of life and paying conscious attention to your intellectual well-being, you and your colleagues will be better pastors and better preachers as well as better-rounded human beings in general.

Intellectual Well-being: Alban Roundtable Reflections

The Alban Roundtable discussions, like the larger body of clergy self-care literature, focused less on intellectual needs than on the emotional, physical, and spiritual needs of clergy leaders. From the overall conversations, however, it was clear that the participants were thoughtful, articulate, and active in terms of their own intellectual growth and well-being.

When asked what helps them in building personal reserve to counter the stresses of ministry, one quick reply was: "I re-read Jane Austen's six perfect novels with some regularity."³¹ Another participant spoke of being influenced by reading Celtic Spiritualities to look differently at nature and to see God anew in the sunrise, the sunset and the flowers that grow in the earth.³²

In addition to reading books for personal pleasure and growth, several of the roundtable participants were themselves authors. One had produced a book based on her sabbatical experiences; another spoke of having written "two books of short stories about my life as a pastor and the stories are wonderfully funny and deeply sad."³³

Group members also put in a strong plug for the benefits of additional schooling, either in the form of single courses or full-scale academic degrees. As one participant enthusiastically exclaimed: "Continuing education? Life-long learning? Go back to your seminary! Go back to another seminary that you never went to! Enroll in a degree program." as she went on to describe a leadership skill-building program that would be starting at the end of the summer and in which she would be participating weekly for the following nine months.³⁴

Intellectual Well-being: Meditation from Scripture

God gave Solomon very great wisdom, discernment, and breadth of understanding as vast as the sand on the seashore, so that Solomon's wisdom surpassed the wisdom of all the people of the east, and all the wisdom of Egypt.

He composed three thousand proverbs, and his songs numbered a thousand and five. He would speak of trees, from the cedar that is in the Lebanon to the hyssop that grows in the wall; he would speak of animals, and birds, and reptiles, and fish. People came from all the nations to hear the wisdom of Solomon; they came from all the kings of the earth who had heard of his wisdom.

-- *1 Kings 4:29-30, 32-34; NRSV*

Spiritual Well-being

As I reviewed the self-care literature, I noticed a number of words (or the equivalents thereof) that reappeared with some frequency. The appearance and reappearance of these same concepts, from one book to the next, was an early clue to their importance as areas for attention, both positive and negative. Most of these concepts reappear across several of the four components of well-being discussed in this report—emotional, physical, intellectual, and spiritual. Virtually all of them can be related (positively or negatively) to the state of our spiritual health.

The lists below are in alphabetical order, rather than in order of priority. They are included for easy reference at the beginning of the "Emotional Well-being," "Physical Well-being," and "Intellectual Well-being" sections as well. The positive concepts most relevant to each topic are highlighted and marked at the beginning of that section with an asterisk.

Key Concepts— Positive

balance *
boundaries
grace *
renewal *
reserve
resilience
rest
sabbath *
sabbatical
time
transformation *
wellness
wholeness *

Key Concepts— Negative

burnout
emptiness
overload
overwork
spiritual dryness
stress

Spiritual Well-being: Focusing on Clergy

The subject matter of this section differs in one significant respect from the three sections that preceded it. Emotional, physical and intellectual well-being are equally important topics for all people, regardless of what they may do professionally, or even if they do not have a profession.

The earlier sections approach these well-being topics from the specific perspective of clergy needs because of the unique pressures and demands placed on clergy. They recognize that there are personal and professional factors to be taken into account for clergy that don't pertain to other professions or walks of life.

In the larger scheme of things, however, impaired emotional, physical or intellectual well-being will impact upon how anyone functions—on the job and in other human

relationship contexts—regardless of what they do (or don't do) for a living. The same cannot be said for spiritual well-being.



Clergy spiritual self-care and well-being are interwoven with all of the other facets of a clergy person's health and wholeness, but they are also unique in the role that they play in the individual's innermost life. How we are viewed by others as spiritual beings, how we view our own relationship with God, and how we deal with these issues all factor into our overall and ongoing spiritual health.

Key concepts related to spiritual well-being include the need for balance, the pursuit of renewal and wholeness, sabbath, and the more specifically spiritual areas of transformation and grace.

How We Are Viewed by Others

Whether or not they can pinpoint what they mean by it, I suspect that most people think that clergy are "different" in some way. Barbara Gilbert credits Clyde Reid with the identification and description of the "holy man" myth as it pertains to clergy—that "God has set aside a special group of people who are not ordinary humans, but who have godlike qualities of moral perfection, freedom from temptation and sinfulness and who are possessed with a special wisdom."³⁵

Both of these authors, it would seem, agree that the "holy man" myth must die. It is not grounded in reality; it leads to unrealistic expectations on the part of laity; and the aura which it confers upon the so-called "special group" presents a potential danger for feeding into a dark underside of clergy life.

Unfortunately, the "holy man" myth, in whole or in part, is not likely to disappear any time soon. In much the same way that a professional athlete's public persona and image are intimately related to his physical health and well-being and will be affected by his ability to perform on the field, a clergy person's image—both public and self—will be affected by the degree to which she is seen as a spiritual person.

For clergy, however, the expectations connected to the name or title are both higher and broader than most other professions. If a basketball player makes the headlines for driving at twice the legal speed limit, the ensuing publicity may be worth more to him than the cost of the traffic ticket. Politicians have been caught up in raids with people other than their spouses and managed to keep their jobs.

Clergy are rarely afforded such privilege or forgiveness. The outside world expects clergy members to be not only spiritual, but exemplary in their home, family, public and private lives to a degree that is not only unrealistic, but unhealthy for those who find themselves under that particular microscope. There are behaviors (egregious, unethical, cruel, or immoral) that are unworthy of the clerical state, but we clergy are all human and we know well that none of us is perfect.

In addition to the shorter leash that comes with most clergy titles, a life lived in a fish bowl is unrelenting in its around-the-clock visibility. The lifestyle demands on clergy do not begin and end with any stipulated work hours; there are no vacation days in which you can not be clergy, at least insofar as the eyes of the public are there to see you. Under most circumstances, clergy are expected to conduct themselves as befits people in a special relationship with God. Whether in or out of the pulpit, they are "in the role." One can well imagine that the pressures on female clergy are even more stringent than those experienced by their male colleagues.

A life lived in a fish bowl is also not conducive to a deep and private spiritual life. Burdened by the external and internal expectations that we are (or should be) possessed of a naturally deep spirituality—the expectations placed on us by others as well as the doubts that are all too likely to simmer or bubble up inside ourselves at some point in our lives—how do we cope? In shouldering the responsibility for the spiritual maintenance and growth in the lives of others, how do we insure our own spiritual growth and well-being?

Do we dare let our doubts and dryness be seen? How do we avoid finding ourselves in a situation in which talking about the spiritual life has replaced living the spiritual life? *Esse quam videri*—to be rather than to seem—has been a motto of schools, families and institutions for centuries. How do we maintain our authenticity as clergy while not succumbing to the dangers that lurk in the myth of the "holy wo/man?"

Our Relationship with God

As clergy, our relationship with God has two components that must be taken into account: self as pastor and shepherd of others and self as simply self. Both are important and ideally they will overlap as much as possible.

However, they may also diverge to a frightening degree, leading us to worry that we are being phonies on the job, speaking of God's will when we are not hearing God's word. We may worry that God is displeased because we are not being good enough as people or dedicated enough as pastors.

Most of all, we worry that God may have simply abandoned us without a word and we don't know how to get back to where we were in our faith life in those heady, by-gone days of seminary. Such worries, however, at least acknowledge that a problem exists - and the first step to dealing with a problem is to recognize it for what it is.

The worse situation is when pastors are so bound up in being the spiritual leaders of others that they lose sight of their own spiritual needs. Donald Hands and Wayne Fehr point out that "it is possible for a clergyperson to be alienated from self while ministering devotedly to the needs of others."³⁶

In their writings on spiritual wholeness for clergy, Hands and Fehr describe this "minister to others while ignoring self needs" syndrome in depth.

Parallel to this alienation from self very often is a lack of real personal relationship to God. The alienation from God is concealed by the cleric's immersion in "the things of God" - teaching, preaching, visiting the sick, praying with others, presiding at liturgy. ... Ordained ministers can live for years on the level of the "objective," church-mediated faith (what "we" believe), without reflecting much on their personal history with God, without any heartfelt personal love-involvement with God.³⁷

They go on to enumerate four spiritual dangers that threaten clergy in general, but which they believe are most imminent among those who neglect their own spirituality:

- the danger of 'pouring out one's cup' of wisdom, inspiration, and encouragement, without ever getting that cup filled up.
- the great danger of being eloquent about the spiritual life for others without living the spiritual life oneself.
- the danger of becoming addicted to substances and/or compulsive behaviors in order to escape from the intolerable burden one is carrying and to avoid facing one's own long-buried resentment, emptiness, etc.
- the danger of losing one's own faith (the occupational hazard of the clergy)...the awful possibility that it might all become hollow, just the work of one's own mind and hands (for others), with no more power or truth for oneself.³⁸

If you find yourself reflected in any of these passages, what do you do about it? If you are counseling and preaching God's grace to others while simultaneously missing God's presence with respect to yourself, is there anything that you can do to bring God back into the center of your life?

If one or more of the four spiritual dangers identified above rings a familiar, where-I-am or where-I'm-heading bell inside your own head, what are the remedies? Indeed, are there any remedies or is it a warning sign that a total change of professional direction is in order? Are there any spiritual self-care practices that you can call on to help restore your spiritual and overall well-being?

Barbara Gilbert reminds us that we are apt to "put our spiritual growth on hold" when life gets busy and that "a regular time with a spiritual friend, a specific discipline, or a group focused on spiritual growth are several ways to keep this part of us alive and growing."³⁹

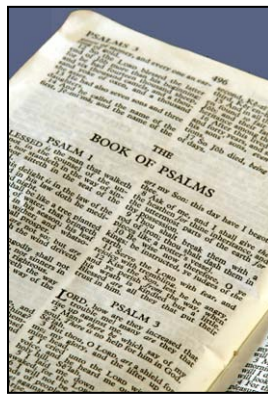
The next section lays out a number of self-care disciplines - some of which you are undoubtedly already using or have used in the past (such as common devotional practices,) and some with which you may not be familiar. The list is intended to be useful both for those who are feeling spiritually dry and those who might want simply to enhance their spiritual life, regardless of its current depth or perceived adequacy.

Our Spiritual Needs

It has been suggested that "the first step toward spiritual health is to understand how you got there."⁴⁰ Ronald Sisk recommends finding someone qualified with whom

you can talk and from whom you can get reliable feedback, such as "a Christian psychologist, spiritual director, or soul friend," and then making changes in your behavior that will facilitate movement toward greater spiritual growth.

Six areas that merit attention, as identified by Sisk, are prayer, Bible study, spiritual direction, evangelism, concern for the marginalized, and stewardship.⁴¹ Knowing how you got so spiritually lost, dry, or empty certainly can't hurt (and many self-care advocates stress the value of spiritual direction or its similar disciplines as a way to hear and be guided by a trained and trusted "other"), but knowing how you got there is not an absolute prerequisite for undertaking those first steps toward getting you out of there.



No single, definitive list of spiritual self-care practices exists; there are many forms and diverse paths that can help to move you toward a healthier spiritual life. The disciplines described in the clergy self-care literature tend to overlap and crisscross and are influenced frequently by an author's personal preferences. Start with one new spiritual practice and stick with it. Add additional practices to your regular daily or weekly routine according to your own personal preferences and abilities.

From a purely practical standpoint, I have categorized the possibilities as individual, one on one, or group activities. Practices that can be engaged in multiple ways—either alone or with others—are included in each relevant category for easier reference.

Individual Practices

Happily, the list of self-care disciplines that you can undertake alone—without needing to find a partner or to accommodate multiple time schedules—is longer than the multi-person alternatives. Personal practices could include ritual and/or extemporaneous prayer, contemplative prayer, reading scripture, meditation, silence, labyrinth, journaling and sabbath.

Prayer and scripture are fundamental to the spiritual life. Fortunately, even if we are experiencing all of the negative feelings listed at the beginning of the chapter—even when we are at our driest, emptiest and most overloaded—we can turn to ritual prayer and scripture. They don't require us to summon up a level of energy that just isn't there.

Neither engaging in ritual prayer nor reading scripture needs any particular pre-

planning, thought, or work. We can open our prayer book or Bible and just read, silently or aloud, starting either at a specific part or at random. We can recite from memory, perhaps repeating several times over, the prayers or passages that are embedded in our minds. If your spiritual life has withered, ritual prayer and scripture are two practices that you can turn to immediately while working on instituting (or restoring) some of the other spiritual self-care disciplines to your life.

Extemporaneous prayer may take a bit more effort than ritual prayer, but it requires no special skills. God is always there to listen to us and will not condemn us if we feel the need to express doubts, anger, questions. Speaking to God about what is weighing on our hearts and minds provides release from the tension of keeping it all bottled up within us.

After we have taken the first step and opened up to God (even if we do so with serious doubt that God is there or, if there, is listening to us), it will be easier to continue with the practice. It may help to remember that you are not alone in your hopes and your fears. The extemporaneous prayers that found their way into the book of Psalms represent perhaps the epitome of the genre. ("Hear my prayer, O Lord; let my cry come to you. Do not hide your face from me in the day of my distress....My heart is stricken and withered like grass....I lie awake; I am like a lonely bird on the housetop."⁴²)

Contemplative prayer, meditation, and silence are similar to each other in that each involves a certain degree of quiet and patience, a waiting on God and being open to God's voice. Many people find these times of silence to be a powerful and productive discipline; others are less enthusiastic about them. If you haven't tried one or more of them as a possible and cost-free addition to your spiritual self-care toolkit, you should definitely do so.

Labyrinth walking, journaling, and sabbath keeping are three additional, individual self-care practices that have many cheerleaders among clergy who practice one or more of them on a regular basis. They require concentration, intentionality, and a more active participation than some of the other spiritual disciplines, but can provide large rewards in the form of spiritual health and growth.

If you find that walking improves your emotional outlook, the labyrinth might be just the thing for you. While *walking* the labyrinth does require *finding* a labyrinth, many churches these days do have one that is either permanently in place or that can be rolled up like a carpet and unrolled for use.

If you like to write or have ever found yourself using writing as a way to get your thoughts and feelings out, journaling on a regular basis may be an ideal fit in terms of your personal spiritual practices.

Sabbath keeping—finding a few hours or a full day each week to step away from the demands of the job, to rest and to recharge your internal batteries—requires considerable discipline, but may be one of the most restorative practices that you can undertake to move from emptiness to fullness and from spiritual burnout to spiritual well-being.

One on One Pursuits

Having a spiritual director or a spiritual friend is highly recommended in clergy self-care literature. Roy Oswald, one of the preeminent thinkers and writers in the field, puts it succinctly: "If I were to choose one discipline to undergird all the others, it would be meeting regularly with a spiritual director."⁴³

A few caveats, however, are in order: Although a specific spiritual director may have considerable training and expertise in the discipline, the match needs to feel right to both of you. As in the choice of any counselor, therapist, or other professional with whom you will be sharing your innermost thoughts and from whom you will be receiving feedback and direction, you need to feel comfortable and respected. Not every practitioner will be a good match with every seeker. As Oswald points out, you may have to investigate and "test out" suitable persons before settling on one and making a commitment to the process.⁴⁴



Having a spiritual friend is a less formal way of pursuing the same goal - having a relationship of mutual respect and guidance with someone who understands you and the role of spirituality (its present state, how to deepen it, what it ideally could be) in your life and vice versa. A spiritual friend does not necessarily have any training or formation in spiritual direction, but each should have the insight, honesty and empathy to help the other along the path to a deeper personal faith and spiritual well-being.

Disciplines such as ritual prayer and scripture reading can also be profitably engaged in by two people - as speaker and listener or by alternating the spoken words and passages between them. The act of sharing in this way can also serve to deepen the spiritual experience. ("For where two or three are gathered in my name, I am there among them."⁴⁵)

Group Activities

Much of what might be termed "spiritual group activity" is simply an adaptation or expansion of the one on one practices above so that they may encompass additional persons. The concept of a spiritual friend with whom to meet, to pray and to speak honestly, for example, becomes a spiritual group, in which all of the members lift up each other.

The spiritual group may start out as a group or it may have started as two spiritual

friends and grown from there. The purpose and the goal remain the same; only the number (and, to some extent, the dynamics) changes.



Similarly, any number of persons can gather for ritual prayers, extemporaneous prayers, or the sharing of scripture. Although one member may take the lead, this kind of group activity is not intended to replicate a public worship experience in which one person is responsible for leading the service.

If a leader is needed, that role should rotate frequently, so that all can participate in the gathering as peers and share in the collegial spirituality.

Sacred Places and Retreats

"Sacred places" in which we can tend to our spiritual side away from the job site can be found, created, or carved out inside our home, outdoors in nature (in or near a garden, park, woods, lake or ocean) or in a quiet public space (such as a favorite, little-frequented room in a museum).

Further afield, there are also "sacred places" available to us beyond those that we create for ourselves. If time and circumstances allow, there are many monasteries, convents and retreat centers that accommodate individuals or groups that want a more isolated or more structured spiritual experience.

You can go alone or with a friend or partner. You can participate in a directed retreat or a group retreat. However you choose to do it, it is virtually assured that you will come out with your batteries recharged and renewed, more ready to deal once again with the world outside.

Spiritual Well-being: Clergy Families

Studies have demonstrated that clergy spouses can find themselves in an awkward situation in which their own spiritual needs and the expectations of the congregation are in conflict. A dual relationship of "husband and wife" as well as "pastor and parishioner" may not work for a specific individual or the couple, but typically a congregation assumes and expects that the partners or spouses of pastors will worship as part of the church and have their spiritual needs met in that same way.

While worshipping together may be the ideal, however, it is also becoming more

widely understood that it works for some families and is not fulfilling for others. There is no "one right way" to be a clergy couple or a clergy family.



When the well-being of the marriage or the family is out of balance or potentially at risk, supporting one another in your spiritual choices is more important than living up to others' expectations. Gilbert reminds us that "God calls us to faithful personal and family relationships as well as to faithful ministry in parish relationships."⁴⁶

Our roles as members of a clergy family are important, but ultimately they do not take precedence over our roles as marital partners and parents. It may be a difficult balancing act sometimes, but self-care in the pursuit of spiritual well-being should not be allowed to be sidetracked by an unwarranted guilt trip. Wherever each one chooses to worship, a pastor whose family is spiritually fed and happy will be a better pastor for it.

Spiritual Well-being: Clergy Colleagues and Congregations

The importance of spiritual well-being for clergy members cannot be overstated. I would be remiss, therefore, to end this book without some common sense advice for clergy colleagues and congregations.

What should be the most obvious statement of all warrants repeating here: clergy can help one another. They can be spiritual directors, spiritual friends, and members of spiritual groups. They can reach out to a colleague who appears to be suffering from spiritual dryness in ways that only another ordained minister can know. Our seminary training in pastoral care - to be an empathic listener, non-judgmental and a non-anxious presence - can be called on here with respect to colleagues as well as to the laity for whom it is usually intended.

Some years ago, a former spiritual director suggested that I could greatly benefit from a mini-retreat with a particular priest to address a spiritual dryness issue. I approached him reluctantly, not knowing what I was getting myself into and what it was going to cost me. I shall always be grateful for both the response and the retreat, which got me unstuck enough to move forward on my own and which was delivered, in his words, as "a gratuity of ministry."

Most of us don't have a lot of excess disposable income, but we have the skills to assist our clergy friends when they need it. As we frequently say in the field of addictions and other human services, when asked by people how they can make up

for the help that they have been given: "Pay it forward." We have all been helped by other clergy at some point in our own lives; we can all help others along the way.

Congregations can help to insure the spiritual well-being of their pastors and families by easing up on the pressures, demands and expectations imposed on them. Calls during holidays, vacations and at odd hours of the night should be limited to true emergencies that cannot be handled by anybody else. Pastors need uninterrupted time for private prayer and to reconnect one-on-one with God.

In that same vein, offering sabbaticals for the clergy should also be considered as a possibility - either within the initial negotiated salary and benefit package or as an extra benefit after a number of years on the job. Sabbaticals allow clergy an extended period of time to pursue spiritual growth, gain deeper knowledge and re-balance their personal lives and priorities - leading to more renewed pastorates and providing intangible benefits for both the clergy and the congregation.

Spiritual Well-being: Alban Roundtable Reflections

Roundtable participants were keenly aware of the dual roles within which most clergy find themselves living from day to day, which may be summed up as "pastor as symbol of the divine" and "pastor as ordinary human being." Participants expressed quite different feelings about the mystery of being clergy, ranging from terrifying to awe-inspiring.

Being a symbol can be scary, constricting and uncomfortable. It can also translate into a unique relationship with the divine. As one group member put it: "It makes me want to step back and not put on the robe. You know, I mean, take on the role, live the scripture, staying in that role, you're a living symbol of so much more than you are. And...you can't help but tremble whenever you do that."⁴⁷



Others felt that the symbols were useful in allowing them to move back and forth between the two roles: "I love the robe....I need the symbolism of *I'm now representing something much more than just my point of view and my insight.*"⁴⁸

It was agreed, however, that the dual roles could pose a problem. Because we are all human, at some points the two sides will inevitably clash, often over some minor "infraction" that would not be "a big issue" if the perpetrator were not a clergy person (or a "symbol of the divine").⁴⁹

The discussion underscored a point made earlier, that it's helpful if you can find a way to integrate the two different roles and the congregation can understand that it's not either/or, but both/and: "so it's not like, you know, Superman - stepping into a booth and changing your cape."⁵⁰

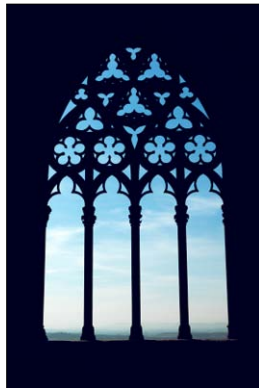
The bottom line, however, is that clergy are different and it is a difference that is very difficult to explain to others. We are called and we have responded. As one participant asked plaintively: "How do I make room and space for that secret call - the places where God fills up my soul, and helps me breathe, and be soaked in the Spirit, and enjoy the leisure of Christ?"⁵¹

We all must find for ourselves, with the guidance and help of others, the paths that lead us to personal renewal and to that place within each of us where humanity and divinity can meet without collision.

Spiritual Well-being: Meditation from Scripture

Hear, O Lord, when I cry aloud, be gracious to me and answer me! "Come," my heart says, "seek his face!" Your face, Lord, do I seek. Do not hide your face from me. Do not turn your servant away in anger, you who have been my help. Do not cast me off, do not forsake me, O God of my salvation!

-- *Psalm 27: 7-9; NRSV*



Conclusion

As pastors, clergy, and church leaders, we have a special role to play in the life of the church, but as flawed and overworked human beings we frequently have to struggle our way through it. I sincerely believe that our shared goal is to be the best church leaders and pastoral care givers that we can possibly be.

I hope that this volume has provided you with new insights and skills that will allow you to approach your daily roster of tasks - your liturgies, your pastoral visits, your program and financial planning, even your seemingly endless committee meetings - with renewed energy and enthusiasm for the clerical life.

In addressing the emotional, physical, intellectual, and spiritual concerns and needs that we all share, I hope that I have provided you with some impetus for greater self-care and a more assiduous pursuit of your own well-being. If this book leads even one reader to a closer relationship with God, self, family or congregation, it will have been well worth the effort.

As stated in the Introduction, the intention was to produce "a practical handbook that does not pretend to be original in its discussion of the need for clergy self-care, but in which I have attempted to distill some of the ideas, approaches and best practices of the many books on the market that address that need." I hope that I have succeeded in that task.



A Concluding Meditation from Scripture

Blessed be the Lord, for he has wondrously shown his steadfast love to me when I was beset as a city under siege. I had said in my alarm, "I am driven far from your sight." But you heard my supplications when I cried out to you for help. Love the Lord, all you his saints.

-- *Psalm 31:21-23a; NRSV*

Notes

1. Gwen Wagstrom Halaas, *The Right Road: Life Choices for Clergy* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2004), 29.
2. Richard A. Swenson, *Margin: Restoring Emotional, Physical, Financial, and Time Reserves to Overloaded Lives* (Colorado Springs, CO: NavPress, 2004), 50-51.
3. Roy M. Oswald, *Clergy Self-Care: Finding a Balance for Effective Ministry* (Herndon, VA: Alban Institute, 1991), 30-35.
4. Genesis 2:3, NRSV.
5. Leviticus 23:3, NRSV.
6. Melissa Bane Sevier, *Journeying Toward Renewal: A Spiritual Companion for Pastoral Sabbaticals* (Herndon, VA: Alban Institute, 2002), 91.
7. Sevier, 81.
8. Ronald D. Sisk, *The Competent Pastor: Skills and Self-Knowledge for Serving Well* (Herndon, VA: Alban Institute, 2005), 87.
9. Oswald, 121.
10. Alban Institute, Roundtable Discussion June 9-10, 2008, unpublished self-care transcript 3, 7.
11. Self-care transcript 8, 8.
12. Self-care transcript 3, 7.
13. Gwen Wagstrom Halaas, *The Right Road: Life Choices for Clergy* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2004), 2.
14. Halaas, 2.
15. Richard A. Swenson, *Margin: Restoring Emotional, Physical, Financial, and Time Reserves to Overloaded Lives* (Colorado Springs, CO: NavPress, 2004), 104-5.
16. Swenson, 106.
17. Rochelle Melander and Harold Eppley, *The Spiritual Leader's Guide to Self-Care* (Herndon, VA: Alban Institute, 2002), 124.
18. Halaas, 99-106.
19. Bruce G. Epperly and Katherine Gould Epperly, *Feed The Fire!: Avoiding Clergy Burnout* (Cleveland, OH: Pilgrim Press, 2008), 37.
20. Epperly and Epperly, 38.
21. Jesus's attitude toward providing care and intervening to heal or assist others is clear from many Scriptural passages, such as Luke 14:5 (on the necessity of pulling a child or an ox out of a well, even on the Sabbath).
22. Alban Institute, Roundtable Discussion June 9-10, 2008, unpublished self-care transcript 5, 3.
23. Self-care transcript 7, 16.
24. Self-care transcript 7, 11.
25. Self-care transcript 9, 5.
26. Self-care transcript 6, 4.
27. Genesis 2:3; NRSV
28. Melissa Bane Sevier, *Journeying toward Renewal: A Spiritual Companion for Pastoral Sabbaticals* (Herndon, VA: Alban Institute, 2002), 57.
29. Alban Institute, Roundtable Discussion June 9-10, 2008, unpublished self-care transcript 7, 10.
30. Bruce G. Epperly and Katherine Gould Epperly, *Feed the Fire!: Avoiding Clergy Burnout* (Cleveland, OH: Pilgrim Press, 2008), 109.
31. Alban Institute, Roundtable Discussion June 9-10, 2008, unpublished self-care transcript 7, 11.
32. Self-care transcript 7, 23.
33. Self-care transcript 1, 6.
34. Self-care transcript 8, 8.
35. Barbara G. Gilbert, *Who Ministers to Ministers? A study of support systems for clergy and spouses* (Herndon, VA: Alban Institute, 1987); 37-38.
36. Donald R. Hands and Wayne L. Fehr, *Spiritual Wholeness for Clergy: A New Psychology of Intimacy with God, Self and Others* (Herndon, VA: Alban Institute, 1993), 54.
37. Hands and Fehr, 54.
38. Hands and Fehr, 59-60.
39. Gilbert, 62.

40. Ronald D. Sisk, *The Competent Pastor: Skills for Self-Knowledge and Serving Well* (Herndon, VA: Alban Institute, 2005), 165.
41. Sisk, 165-7.
42. Psalm 102: 1, 2a, 4a, 7; NRSV.
43. Roy M. Oswald, *Clergy Self-Care: Finding a Balance for Effective Ministry* (Herndon, VA: Alban Institute, 1991), 102.
44. Oswald, 104.
45. Matthew 18: 20; NRSV.
46. Gilbert, 46.
47. Alban Institute, Roundtable Discussion June 9-10, 2008, unpublished self-care transcript 2, 22.
48. Self-care transcript 9, 12.
49. Self-care transcript 9, 13.
50. Self-care transcript 9, 11.
51. Self-care transcript 2, 9.

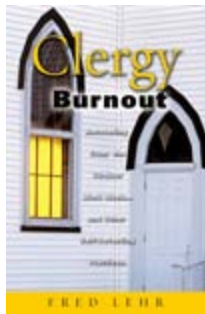
Resources



Blessed Connections: Relationships that Sustain Vital Ministry (Book)

Judith A. Schwanz, Author. Herndon, VA: Alban Institute, 2008.

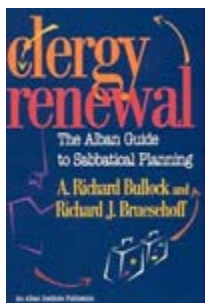
Why do fifteen to twenty percent of pastors leave their positions within five years of beginning them? And why do fifty percent of pastors feel unable to meet the demands of their jobs, ninety percent feel inadequately trained, and seventy percent experience low self-esteem? Seminary professor Judith Schwanz believes these statistics reveal breakdowns in *relationships*—with oneself, with others, and with God. This book is a primer for leaders who want to strengthen their ministries and lives by strengthening their relationships. Readers will get the most from this book by keeping an "Assessment Journal" in which they respond to the questions and suggestions listed at the end of each chapter.



Clergy Burnout: Recovering from the 70-Hour Work Week and Other Self-Defeating Practices (Book)

Fred Lehr, Author. Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2006.

Fred Lehr addresses the challenges of pastoral life that can lead to burnout, and offers advice on self-care practices that can help clergy maintain—or regain—balance and health in their lives. In particular, Lehr shows how clergy codependence is at the root of the burnout many clergy experience. He further argues that clergy must recognize their own codependence and "own" their part in this dysfunctional pattern in order to break through it. *Clergy Burnout* helps clergy combat codependence by showing how they can develop gospel-centered lives, become more spiritually mature, regain balance, set boundaries, and both embrace and use their own power to positive effect.



Clergy Renewal: The Alban Guide to Sabbatical Planning (Book)

Richard A. Bullock, Richard J. Bruesehoff, Authors. Herndon, VA: Alban Institute, 2000.

Clergy Renewal is a concise guide for planning effective pastoral sabbaticals. Richard Bullock and Richard Bruesehoff make a case for why congregations should provide their pastors with periodic sabbaticals—arguing that times for rest, study, and spiritual renewal can help keep ministry vital and growing for the long term. This book addresses obstacles to sabbaticals. It also offers suggestions for places to go while on sabbatical, advice on sabbatical policies, rituals for sending off and welcoming back the pastor, and funding possibilities. Throughout, the authors lift up the positive effects of a well-planned sabbatical for all concerned.



Clergy Self-Care: Finding a Balance for Effective Ministry (Book)

Roy M. Oswald, Author. Herndon, VA: Alban Institute, 1991.

Roy Oswald's book on clergy self-care provides a number of strategies for dealing with the stresses of clergy life. By offering effective self-evaluation tools, Oswald convinces clergy that they indeed do suffer stress and face the prospect of burnout. He recognizes that clergy are prone to a level of nonproductive self-sacrifice that they sometimes mistakenly interpret as following Christ. Churches need to recognize that they (1) have a vested interest in their clergy's success and (2) will benefit from knowing more about the elements of clergy stress and signs of burnout. Featuring holistic approaches to body and soul, Oswald's strategies steer clergy and church onto healthier ground.



The Competent Pastor: Skills and Self-Knowledge for Serving Well (Book)

Ronald D. Sisk, Author. Herndon, VA: The Alban Institute, 2005.

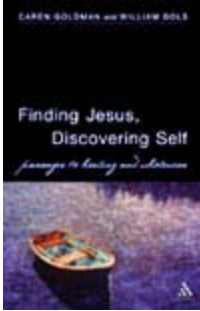
Competence in ministry is a moving target. A ministry technique that works in one congregation may not work in another, and what works now may not work in five years. But a competent pastor will be able to adapt to a variety of changes. When the competent pastor gets stuck, he or she knows what steps to take to get unstuck. Competence, defined by author Ronald Sisk as "the ability to do what needs to be done," requires ministers to understand themselves and others, to keep a realistic perspective on their lives, and to remain responsive to God's grace. This book will help pastors develop that understanding, perspective, and responsiveness.



Feed the Fire!: Avoiding Clergy Burnout (Book)

Bruce G. Epperly, Katherine Gould Epperly, Authors. Cleveland, OH: The Pilgrim Press, 2008.

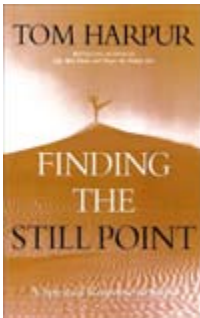
For pastoral husband and wife team Bruce and Kate Epperly, "feeding the fire" means engaging in those spiritual practices that open the mind and heart to God's lively energy. These practices enable pastors, in the Epperlys' words, to "live out their vocations over a lifetime with wisdom, effectiveness, energy, health, and compassion." Chapters are devoted to transforming our bodies, our minds, our spirits, and our relationships. A separate chapter explores our engagement with time. Also featured is a discussion of maintaining equanimity in the face of conflict and practicing "visionary leadership in unsettling times." The book includes stories of pastors who have applied transformational practices to their lives and work.



Finding Jesus, Discovering Self: Passages to Healing And Wholeness (Book)

Caren Goldman, William Dols, Authors. Harrisburg, PA: Morehouse Publishing, 2006.

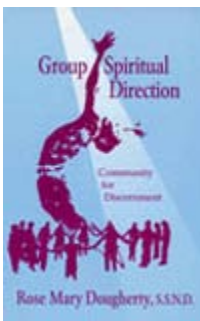
Caren Goldman (a Jewish author) and William Dols (an Episcopal priest) collaborate to present Jesus's life and teachings from a fresh perspective—a perspective that encourages us to raise questions rather than confirm pat answers, and that challenges us to examine our stories in light of Jesus's story. Gospel narratives are complemented with narratives from the authors' lives as well as with poetry, quotes, film scenes, and questions for reflection. Themes explored include "leaving home," "speaking one's truth," "weathering storms," "binding wounds," and "discovering God's kingdom." While it can be used for individual study, this book will be most fruitful when read and explored in community with others.



Finding the Still Point: A Spiritual Response to Stress (Book)

Tom Harpur, Author. Kelowna, BC: Northstone Publishing, 2002.

Convinced that most medically based stress reduction techniques fail to sufficiently address the causes of stress, Anglican priest Tom Harpur argues for spiritually grounded forms of meditation that can function as powerful sources of healing. He also believes that by slowing down, caring for ourselves more fully, and listening more carefully, we can not only be spiritually nurtured but also serve as instruments of renewal. Finding the "still point," for Harper, means finding that sacred place within ourselves from which we are able to observe and release the tensions that bring stress into our lives. And from that point, believes Harper, we can develop authentic compassion for others.



Group Spiritual Direction: Community for Discernment (Book)

Rose Mary Dougherty, Author. Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 1997.

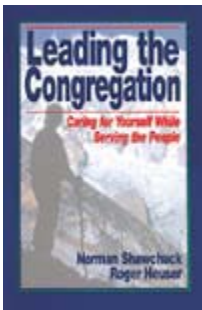
Rose Mary Dougherty has written this book "for those individuals who have an appreciation for spiritual direction and want to offer spiritual direction for themselves and others in a group setting." Drawing on the community practices of intercessory prayer and silence, group spiritual direction helps participants discern and respond to God's action in their lives. The author discusses the structure and format of small groups. She also addresses practical concerns—such as determining whether someone is ready for group direction, the role and care of facilitators, and common problems encountered in group direction. The book's appendix outlines a different approach to group direction for those engaged in ministry.



Journeying toward Renewal: A Spiritual Companion for Pastoral Sabbaticals (Book)

Melissa Bane Sevier, Author. Herndon, VA: Alban Institute, 2002.

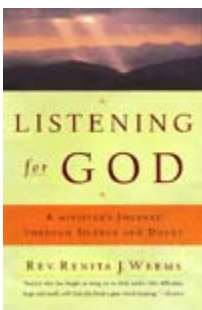
Melissa Bane Sevier draws on her own sabbatical experience to provide a guide for pastors considering or beginning a sabbatical. Acknowledging that many may fear the unknown consequences of renewal leave, she nevertheless addresses the personal and spiritual cues that the time is ripe for a sabbatical and explains why sometimes "the congregation needs you to go away for a while." She then reflects on the process of leaving her congregation, spending time away, and returning. Each chapter includes exercises for inspiration, contemplation, action, and further study. With additional information on funding sources, this book is essential for ministers who want to get the most out of their leave.



Leading the Congregation: Caring for Yourself While Serving the People (Book)

Norman Shawchuck, Roger Heuser, Authors. Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1998.

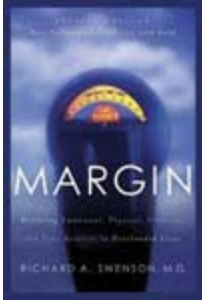
Providing a survey course on the roles, functions, and pitfalls of congregational leadership, *Leading the Congregation* could be subtitled "caring for oneself in order to midwife the growth and development of the congregation." The opening chapter cites the conditions that constrain a pastor's leadership efforts. Part One covers the pastoral inner journey. Parts Two and Three cover the "what, how, and why" of supporting a church's vision through addressing the interplay between pastoral and congregational authority. Later chapters discuss women in leadership, multi-cultural congregations, and congregational life cycles; an appendix provides leadership role description. Beginning and seasoned pastors should read this book at the inception of any new pastorate.



Listening for God: A Minister's Journey through Silence and Doubt (Book)

Renita J. Weems, Author. New York, NY: Simon and Schuster, 1999.

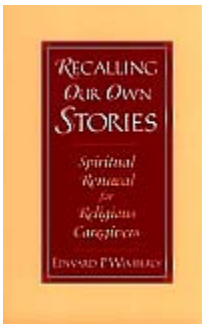
"Ministers rarely talk about the long dry periods in their spiritual journey. I know they don't because I am one..." So says Renita Weems in this memoir of her struggle with the experience of God's silence and her longing for a renewed sense of God's presence. Weems explores the mysteries of silence, prayer, ministry, marriage, mothering, and miracles. Included are prayers, personal stories, and journal entries that record her anger at God's seeming absence as well as her growing acceptance of the silence through which God speaks. This acceptance occurred not on a quiet mountaintop, but in the midst of a full family and professional life.



Margin: Restoring Emotional, Physical, Financial, and Time Reserves to Overloaded Lives (Book)

Richard A. Swenson, Author. Colorado Springs, CO: Navpress, 1992.

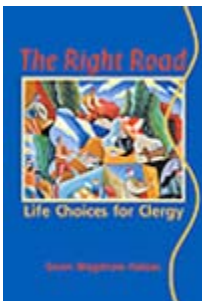
Richard Swenson, a medical doctor, convincingly argues what all too many of us experience: we are suffering a diminishing reserve of personal resources relative to what is demanded of us. This loss of margin has numerous emotional, physical, and social costs. Swenson encourages us to re-center our lives by learning to rein in the emotional, physical, financial, and time demands we endure. To this end, he first marshals evidence that we live in a particularly stressful era. But he does not simply diagnose. Instead, he also makes a host of prescriptive suggestions for life in four key areas: emotions, physical energy, finances, and time use.



Recalling Our Own Stories: Spiritual Renewal for Religious Caregivers (Book)

Edward P. Wimberly, Author. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, 1997.

Recalling Our Own Stories outlines harmful myths that can affect the deepest motivations for ministry and contribute to such recurring problems as resentment, over-functioning, the inability to forgive, and the inability to enjoy life. While knowledge of these myths is crucial for remaining true to one's calling, knowledge alone is not enough. Drawing on numerous examples, Edward Wimberly explores ways to rewrite one's stories. Such rewriting enables ministers to frame original stories in more fruitful ways, as well as to integrate those stories with more mature processes of discernment. As a result, religious caregivers—who are often vulnerable emotionally—will have more to offer as they experience growth and healing.



The Right Road: Life Choices for Clergy (Book)

Gwen Wagstrom Halaas, Author. Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2004.

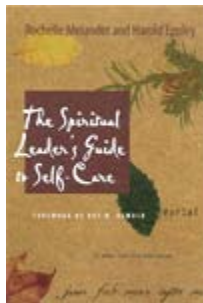
Written by Gwen Wagstrom Halaas—physician, professor of medicine, and director of ministerial health and wellness for the Evangelical Lutheran Church of America—*The Right Road* offers counsel and resources on healthy bodies, minds, relationships, intellects, and vocations. Halaas cites studies indicating that many clergy have problems at work, with depression, and in their families. For example, clergy have higher levels of obesity, high blood pressure, and heart disease than others. Healthy living, however, results in healthy leadership and communities. At 98 pages, this slim volume explores the vital question of how and why congregational leaders need to lead a good life.



Sacred Companions: The Gift of Spiritual Friendship and Direction (Book)

David G. Benner, Author. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2004.

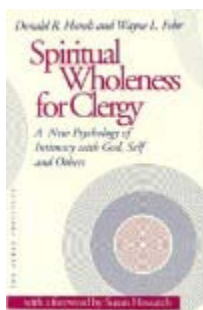
"We need companions on our spiritual journey. The modern world has taught us to value autonomy and individualism... We soon discover that our souls long for accompaniment, intimacy, and spiritual friendship." David Benner breaks the topic of *Sacred Companions* into three discussions: spiritual friendship, spiritual direction, and a combination of the two. The book explains that being a spiritual friend and a spiritual director are two different callings and tasks. In the third discussion, Benner talks about being a spiritual director in groups of people seeking spiritual companionship. He also explores possibilities of "soul friendship" in marriage. Here is a book for those seeking a fuller sense of God's presence.



The Spiritual Leader's Guide to Self-Care (Book)

Rochelle Melander, Harold Eppley, Authors. Herndon, VA: Alban Institute, 2002.

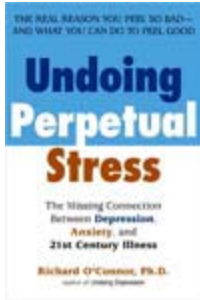
Defining "self-care" as "living the life God has intended for you," clergy couple Rochelle Melander and Harold Eppley have created a practical self-care guide for congregational leaders. Six key themes are addressed: creating a life vision, caring for yourself at work, nurturing relationships, caring for physical and material needs (such as the needs for a healthy diet, adequate exercise, and sound finances), caring for spiritual and intellectual needs, and sustaining a life vision. Each chapter offers suggestions for reflecting, connecting with a partner, and connecting with God. The book ends with an annotated resource guide to a wide range of topics—including friendship, vocation, and spiritual tools.



Spiritual Wholeness for Clergy: A New Psychology of Intimacy with God, Self, and Others (Book)

Donald R. Hands, Wayne L. Fehr, Authors. Herndon, VA: Alban Institute, 1993.

In her foreword, novelist Susan Howatch summarizes this book as describing "the great human quest for self-realization and integration—or the great call from God to fulfill his purpose by becoming the people he created us to be." Donald Hands and Wayne Fehr draw from hours of clinical therapy and spiritual direction to describe the various disorders that clergy suffer and to summarize the phases of healing: "uncovery" (purgative), "discovery" (illuminative), and "recovery" (unitive). Spelling out a healthy spirituality in relationship with self, others, and God, the authors synthesize the insights of Jungian depth psychology, the 12-step movement, and traditional Christian spirituality.



Undoing Perpetual Stress: The Missing Connection Between Depression, Anxiety, and 21st Century Illness (Book)

Richard O'Connor, Author. New York, NY: Berkley Books (Penguin), 2005.

Richard O'Connor argues that our minds and bodies are not equipped to keep up with the rapid pace of change in our lives, in technology, and in the world today. Many people develop what he calls "Perpetual Stress Syndrome," a state of overstimulation that can cause structural damage to our nervous systems, brains, and internal organs. This syndrome contributes not only to clinical depression and anxiety, but also to numerous physical problems. But health can be restored, says O'Connor, through developing the "core skill" of mindfulness and related cognitive, emotional, and relational skills. Here is a practical and down-to-earth manual for those seeking help from the debilitating effects of stress.

Alban Roundtable Participants

If the ideas and resources discussed in the preceding pages are supportive and helpful—and we hope they are—it is due to the gifted and diverse group that answered Congregational Resource Guide Senior Associate Anne Van Dusen's invitation to participate in a conversation about self-care. We are grateful to the people below for generously sharing their time and expertise with us.

Marcia Barnes Bailey is the author of *Choosing Partnership, Sharing Ministry*. She teaches at Colgate Rochester Crozer Divinity School, Eastern University, and Temple University. Marcia was a pastor for twenty years, most recently at Central Baptist Church in Wayne, PA.

Timothy Fangmeier is Wheat Ridge Ministries Staff Associate, working especially in the area of the care and development of church leaders. He is founder of *Gifted People*, a ministry of coaching and consulting to help build healthy congregations that manage change and conflict.

Carol Gerrish is a professional coach and founder of *Transforming Work*.

Cynthia Huling Hummel is the pastor of First Presbyterian Church, Waverly, NY. She is the author of *Glimpses of God's Grace: More Stories of Faith, Hope, and Love* and *The Lice Lady: Holy and Hilarious Moments in Ministry*.

Dean McDonald is the former Director, Cathedral College of Preachers, in Washington, DC. She is a licensed member of the American Association for Marriage and Family Therapy and American Association of Pastoral Counselors.

James Robey, who facilitated this conference, is a United Methodist minister, professional coach, and founder of *Attentional Growth, Inc.*, a non profit dedicated to promoting health and providing educational enrichment for members of the helping professions.

Graham Robinson is the pastor of Westminster Presbyterian Church, West Hartford, CT.

Melissa Bane Sevier is a minister at Versailles Presbyterian Church, Versailles, KY. She is the author of *Journeying toward Renewal: A Spiritual Companion for Pastoral Sabbaticals*.

Dennis Shaw, of Silver Spring, Maryland, leads workshops for returning U.S. veterans.

Mahan Siler is a retired pastor and congregational consultant with an interest in clergy support and accountability. He is the author of *Exile or Embrace?: Congregations Discerning Their Response to Lesbian And Gay Christians*.

Carole Wills is Board President, National Alliance on Mental Illness, Indianapolis, IN. She is the author of articles and a special resource report on mental health ministry.

Alban Institute Participants

The late **Anne Van Dusen**, convenor of this conference, was a Senior Research Associate, Congregational Resource Guide staff.

Claudia Greer is the Resource Editor, Congregational Resource Guide staff.

Wayne Floyd is the Education Program Manager