

CONGREGATIONS

LEARNING LEADING CHANGING

MAY/JUN 2002



Self-Care

The journey from burnout
to authenticity

55-61

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This project is a joint effort of the Alban Institute and the Indianapolis Center for Congregations. Funded by Lilly Endowment Inc.

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LEARNING LEADING CHANGING MAY/JUN 2002

Self-Care

19 IN FOCUS

Good-Enough Self-Care

Alban Institute consultant *Jacqueline J. Lewis* reminds clergy to heed the true self

4

Committing to Mutuality

Pastor *David J. Wood* speaks with Eugene Peterson about how collaboration with the congregation is at the heart of self-care

8

Reaching Our Limits: Burnout or Transition?

Pastor *Karen Minnich-Sadler* encourages leaders to consider burnout in a different light

11

Great Expectations, Sobering Realities

Pastor and seminary professor *Michael Jenkins* reports the results of a recent study on clergy burnout

14

A Novel Kind of Sabbatical

Pastor and writer *Dell Shiell* proposes innovative ways to fund sabbaticals

FEATURES

28

The Abilene Paradox Goes to Church

Pastor *Jerald L. Kirkpatrick* says avoiding conflict can lead congregations to act against their own best interests

COLUMNS

31

THE LEADING EDGE

Alban Institute president *James P. Wind* offers an early analysis of the findings from the Duke Divinity School's Pulpit and Pew Project

36

ASK ALBAN

Indianapolis Center for Congregations director *John R. Wimmer* suggests remedies for congregational stress

DEPARTMENTS

3

FIRST CLASS MAIL

16

PERSPECTIVES

When Clergy Get Cancer

Pastor *Donna Schaper* describes how an illness can teach clergy to leave behind old roles—and take on new ones

32

REVIEWS

35

LEARN MORE

CONTRIBUTORS



JINKINS



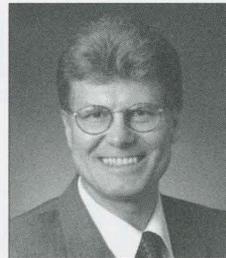
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Faith and Patriotism

MANY OF THE ASSERTIONS MADE by Diana Bass ("Lift High the Flag . . . Oops, the Cross!" JAN/FEB 2002, page 24) are right on. However, she is not being honest if she believes that . . . "[w]hen conflated with faith, patriotism becomes religious nationalism—a danger to both the secular state and the church" (page 27).

The flag and the cross are reminders of the sacrifice it took to gain religious freedom. September 11 has brought the ideal of freedom into an intense light. That light, if allowed to illumine our past, will show why people are embracing their religious heritage and their national identity. The reason is simple: both are forever intertwined. Most churches have both an American flag and the flag of the Christian church displayed. Again, that is not an error. Our freedoms, like it or not, were gained by the sacrifice of many women and men in times of war. When an enemy strikes us at home, it is perfectly natural for many in our country to expect the church to be the place they can go to for spiritual and patriotic nourishment.

There is no doubt that the leadership of the church must be vigilant, to insure that patriotism and one's walk with God are not so intertwined that they become one. But let us not feel reluctance to display the cross and flag on the same podium. The truth of the matter is, there would be no free way to express our religious beliefs were it not for both!

Rev. John Clarke

First Congregational Church
Stanford, Connecticut

I READ WITH GREAT INTEREST the article by Diana Bass about the pressure of patriotism to impose flags in the sanctuary. As a Presbyterian, I would amend her criticism about our theology not having a clear doctrine on the separation of church and state to say that the "essential tenet of the Reformed Tradition" is the sovereignty of God over the affairs of nations as well as souls. In our better theological moments, Presbyterians have resisted the invasion of any civil symbols into sacred sanctuaries—though in some quarters those moments were rare long before September 11.

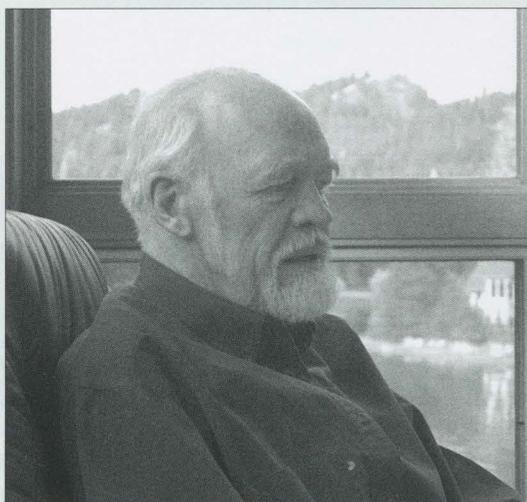
Ms. Bass is not the first to confuse the Niebuhr brothers. It was H. Richard who wrote *Christ and Culture*. Words from Reinhold's lesser known book of 1958, *Pious and Secular America*, speak more directly to the failure of church in the times of crisis in the culture. Reinhold says that we are "pious" in that we enjoy devotion and loyalty, and we are "secular" in that the objections of our religiosity are practical and material. Then he offers this comment:

Genuine piety sets up an authority for the individual conscience which prevents the state or the community from becoming an idolatrous end of human existence. Religious faith makes a rigorous affirmation, "We must obey God, rather than men," in opposition to all tyranny. But, unfortunately, piety develops its own idolatries by claiming a too simple alliance between the divine will and human ends.

(*Pious and Secular America*, page 6)

Recognizing our depravity, it should be no surprise to a theologian that pious patriots cannot see past the hoped-for end to a war. More central to Bass' question is the obvious point that civility is the essence of civil religion, and our desire in the church not to offend in times of

continued on page 27



Committing to Mutuality

AN INTERVIEW WITH EUGENE PETERSON

David J. Wood

Eugene Peterson is perhaps best known for his 20 books, including *Under the Unpredictable Plant: An Exploration in Vocational Holiness*, and his paraphrase of the Bible, *The Message*, to be published in full this spring by NavPress. His primary vocation has been the pastorate. He “planted” a new congregation, Christ the King Presbyterian Church, Bel Air, Maryland, which grew to 500 members in his 29-year tenure.

I traveled to the home of Eugene and his wife, Jan, in Lakeside, Montana, for a few days of conversation about his understanding and experience of pastoral life. I settled quickly into the Petersons’ comfortable home on the shores of Flathead Lake, and into the Sabbath-like pace. For 30 years, the Petersons (now parents of three grown children) traveled here every summer from Maryland to return to their Montana roots and to be refreshed by the beauty and serenity of the land. After retiring from Christ the King and teaching spiritual theology for five years at Regent College, Vancouver, British Columbia, Eugene came home. Here he would complete his translation of the Old Testament. He is now set to begin work on a five-volume work on spiritual theology.

Recently Eugene, with Jan’s full support, took himself off the speaker’s circuit. After a few remaining commitments, he is off the road. It was time to give up pulpit and podium for pen and paper. He is as certain now as he was throughout his pastoral ministry that if he is not rooted in time and place, his words and witness will lose their gravity. He dwells in a place of solitude but not of isolation. He and Jan provide hospitality to a stream of family and

friends. They are active in a local Lutheran congregation. Eugene spends time with pastors, helping them reflect on their work. The couple’s life is uncluttered by e-mail or TV.

Peterson, raised a Pentecostal in Kalispell, Montana, was the son of a Pentecostal pastor mother and a butcher father. (He played high school basketball with Pentecostal classmate Phil Jackson, who later won fame as a coach in the NBA.) After college, Eugene set off for New York, where he attended Biblical Theological Seminary (now New York Theological Seminary). Though his sojourn from Pentecostal to Presbyterian began in fall 1954, Eugene’s Pentecostal roots would continue to nourish his theological imagination.

While earning a master of divinity degree in English Bible at BTS, Eugene coached a winning church basketball team at Madison Avenue Presbyterian Church, where the celebrated George Buttrick held forth.

Eugene earned a second master’s degree at Johns Hopkins University, Baltimore, in Semitic languages. Married, and with a family on the way, he took a pastorate in White Plains, New York. Yale University, within commuting distance, accepted him into its Ph.D. program in Old Testament under scholar Brevard Childs. But before beginning his studies, he realized where his vocation lay: “I am a pastor.” His turning to the pastoral life was not a renunciation of intellectual life or of his passion for biblical languages. But from then on his service to the church and his intellectual flourishing would be shaped by the pastoral vocation. In 1962 the Baltimore Presbytery asked him to start a congregation, and his long ministry began in earnest.

David Wood: Eugene, what's your reading of the current "clergy self-care" movement?

Eugene Peterson: My initial response is that it narrows the context of pastoral work and identity. I'm wary of the term "self-care." We're such incorrigible, selfish persons that I'm loathe to give it a fancy term that makes it OK.

Maybe the most important thing I did as a pastor in this area was not to assume that I needed to protect myself from the congregation and its supposedly insatiable demands. Instead, I sought to foster a collaborative relationship.

How did you do that?

Here's what I said: "Help me. I have needs. I can't function well without help from you. We're in this together, we're doing the same thing, we're worshipping together, we're living the Christian life together. You've asked me to do certain things to help you do it—to lead you in worship on Sunday, to visit you when you're sick, to help administer the church. But I need help in all of this." I worked to create conditions in which this kind of collaboration would flourish. For example, I would take my elders and deacons on retreat twice a year, and we'd spend 36 to 48 hours talking. We'd talk about needs—their needs and mine, and how we could help each other do what needed to be done. They became very imaginative and sensitive, coming up with things I would never have thought of.

It sounds as though you would not separate "self-care" from "congregational care."

Right. From time to time—three or four times a year—I would write a congregational letter on topics such as "Why your pastor keeps a Sabbath," "Why your pastor reads books," "Why your pastor stays home with his family on Friday nights." I

wrote about these practices not to seek approval or to justify what I was doing with my time, but to invite [members] into the same kinds of practices—practices that should matter to all Christians. This kind of writing helped me remember why these practices were so important to my life as a pastor, our life as a family, and our life as a congregation.

Once I wrote a letter titled "Why your pastor never repaired his television set." Again, I didn't do it with an attitude of moral superiority toward television. I simply related our experience as a family and how positively our life together was shaped by the choice not to repair our TV. Of course, there was an implicit invitation in the narrative: "Next time your TV breaks, try leaving it broken for six months and see what happens."

In what ways is the pastoral life unique?

One thing unique about this life is that no other calling has quite as much intimacy in it. This is where things can go wrong for pastors. Intimacy is vulnerability—it's a place where there could be much betrayal, exploitation.

One way to deal with this danger is to refuse the intimacy and say, "I'm a functional pastor. I'm not a relational pastor." You may succeed as a manager or a program director, but you will fail as a pastor.

If you're going to negotiate this tricky terrain of intimacy, you must have a strong commitment to mutuality. It's not exactly like a marriage, but there are parallels. It is precisely the demand of intimacy that many pastors find so hard to sustain.

What allows you to stay in that intimate engagement and not be overcome by it?

A term that occurs in the literature of the spiritual masters is "detachment." Now detachment is the cultivation of a relationship that is present, but not taking

ownership, not being messianic or managerial. It gives the other person freedom—it allows the "other" to be "other."

This way of relating requires detachment from a "need-based" relationship. It is inherent in the gospel, but it's easy for it to get skewed by sin or co-opted by sin in the guise of compassion. I love the phrase in T. S. Eliot's *Four Quartets*: "Teach us to care and not to care."

Caring, but not caring. They're both part of the same thing. It's an art. You make mistakes along the way. You don't learn it in your first year in the parish.

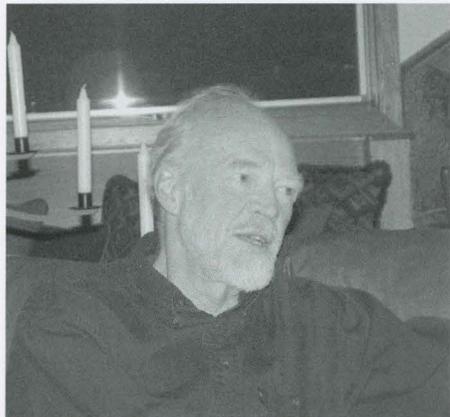
It sounds as though you are not going to hold a congregation responsible for what is your responsibility. At the same time, you won't let them hold you responsible for what is their responsibility. Coming to this kind of understanding must take some effort.

It has to be learned, and it has to be learned without assuming an adversarial position. I refused to let any of this become adversarial. I'm even a little hesitant to use the word "negotiation" to describe the process I have in view. We're friends. We're brothers and sisters in Christ.

If you can see your relationship with parishioners as friendship "with mutuality and affection," that undermines the hierarchical structure almost from the beginning. People feel that they're being valued for their own sake, not for what you can get out of them or how you can use them.

That is why I insist on the importance of a pastor's going to people's homes—because you're on their turf. They're the host. You're the guest. It's hard to maintain that hierarchical function when you're at their mercy.

That's one way a pastor can practice mutuality rather than talk about it.



I don't think pastors "burn out" because they work too hard. I think burnout comes from working with no relational gratification.

Yes. Friendship is at the heart of it. There's a lot of talk about spiritual direction these days, which is good. But spiritual direction at its best is friendship—that is, paying attention to somebody with affection and appreciation.

Over 15 or 20 years, I was in the homes of parishioners three or four times. These visits were not prompted by crises—they were simply pastoral visits. When I left my congregation, I realized that many of these people had come to think of me as their best friend.

That didn't happen because we did things like playing golf together or going to ball games. Friendship grew out of the way we learned to pay attention to one another's lives over time. In many ways, it was this kind of relational work that kept me from burnout.

I don't think pastors "burn out" because they work too hard. People who work hard often do so because they're good at what they're doing and they enjoy doing it. I think burnout comes from working with no relational gratification. Relationships become laborious and draining. Pastors can lose touch with relational vitality when their relationships are driven by programmatic necessity. When this happens, pastors can lose the context for love, hope, faith, touch, and a kind of mutual vulnerability. In the midst of the congregation, pastors become lonely and feel isolated—and that isolation can be deadly to the pastoral life. Those are the conditions in which inappropriate intimacies flourish.

I think the epidemic (if it is an epidemic) of sexual misconduct by clergy has less to do with clergy overindulging intimacy or not being careful about intimate relationships, and more to do with the absence of genuine intimacy.

Many pastors I know who are vital and alive to their work have an unmistakable

relational quality. It strikes me that there is little space in their lives for inappropriate relationships because they are so oriented by good relationships.

That's right. I think "self-care" requires caring well for others. One principal way to keep your sanity, your health, and your emotional equilibrium is to care for somebody else.

I can remember times when I felt hemmed in or felt that I couldn't do this work anymore. One way I got through those times was to care, in very deliberate ways, for someone else. It's amazing how caring for someone else helps you forget about yourself.

Let me shift gears here. Sabbaticals are widely regarded as a principal strategy for sustaining good ministry over the long haul. As I recall, you had one sabbatical in 30 years. In your 24th year of ministry, you spent 12 months in Montana with your wife, resting, reading, and writing. But ordinarily you had two months a year away from the congregation—in Montana. Part of that time was vacation and part was study and writing. That strikes me as an annual sabbatical rhythm. How did this rhythm shape your practice of ministry?

My congregation always gave me a month's holiday. And then, on their own, the session [church governing board] decided to give me an additional month for writing. They didn't ask me. They didn't consult me. They just gave it to me. It was part of that "help me" sort of thing, except I hadn't said "Help me" right then. I'd write for a month, and I'd just be with the family.

The 12-month sabbatical I received was, again, a "help-me" thing. I told them I would like to stay there [in the congregation] forever if they wanted me, but I didn't think I could do it without a sabbatical. They were generous and gave me

a 12-month sabbatical. When I came back from time away, I was energized, fresh, and ready to go.

How would you contrast or compare the rhythm of standard sabbatical policies to the two-month annual arrangement you had?

I was grateful for the annual rhythm. In the Presbyterian Church, we're given a month's vacation and two weeks' study leave. People work hard on those study leaves. You're supposed to produce something. It wouldn't be that much different to add two weeks to it and tell [pastors], "Do anything you want to do. Read. Go to a monastery. Photograph wildflowers. Write." For me it would be to write, but not everybody's a writer.

The almost total incomprehension by our society of what a pastor does puts pastoral identity at risk almost every day. Two months would not be inappropriate vacation and leave for the needs we have.

Those annual two months away must have been sustaining.

Very much so. One of the side benefits from my annual time away was that it developed a competent lay leadership. Over the years I did less and less of what ordinarily is seen as what pastors do. The laypeople did it very naturally, easily, because they were trusted. I think it's important to trust people to do things. They're not going to do it the way you did it. They are going to make mistakes, but you make mistakes too.

There is no question that any strategy of clergy "self-care" must include the development of a competent congregational leadership.

Let's talk for a minute about the engagements you had beyond the congregation. Throughout your ministry you taught in a seminary/university context.

Teaching was a natural for me. It was what I loved to do, and I was in a place where there were schools. I just happened to be in the right place at the right time for somebody to know who I was and what I was doing.

I'd teach one semester a year, either spring or fall. I taught at a university, a seminary, usually alternately. I have often wondered, if I had been in a rural place with no schools for 500 miles, or even 50 miles, what would I have done? Was there anything I could do other than that? I think I would find a place to work part time that wasn't too demanding that would put me in a different environment for a few months a year, or a half-day a week.

I have a friend who lived in farming country. Every summer he worked in the fields at harvest time. He worked half a day for six weeks. But he got to know farmers. It was totally refreshing for him.

Your teaching placed you in a different setting and role. I don't hear you suggesting that these engagements should be thought of as a way to escape the parish.

Oh, no. It was to feed the parish, actually. I never felt that teaching drained energy from pastoral work. If I had felt that, I wouldn't have done it. My main work was the congregation. This was a way to bring fresh blood into it.

Another engagement beyond your congregation was your weekly gathering with a group of pastors for lectionary study and collegial conversation.

That was an important part of my pastoral life. It became part of the rhythm of our life. The pastors who did this with me still call me and write to me about how significant and sustaining it was for them.

When did you meet?

Every Tuesday they'd come to my study at noon. They would bring a bag lunch. I'd have a coffeepot. We'd meet for two hours. We were serious about what we were doing but not terribly disciplined. There was small talk. Sometimes somebody would come with a personal crisis. We'd drop everything and just spend the time listening and praying.

The group included a variety of pastors and backgrounds. There would be 15 or 16 in the group, and fewer than half were Presbyterian. We had Presbyterians, Pentecostals, and Roman Catholic priests. We even had a rabbi for a number of years. It was very ecumenical. What brought us together was a conviction that preaching was the primary task we had to do, and we wanted to do it as well as we could.

Most of the time when we met, we would focus on the lectionary texts for the coming Sunday. It varied from the Old Testament to the Epistle to the Gospel, every season. We wouldn't necessarily preach on the texts we discussed. It was the discipline of being together around the Bible, thinking preaching, thinking sermon, thinking interpretation, that was highly significant.

I can imagine that the group came to think of one another as friends.

We'd often have one evening a month, Friday evening usually, when we'd have a potluck supper together. Another significant thing we did: in late spring, as close to Pentecost as we could make it—we never met through the summer months—we would take a day away together for a silent retreat. We would end the day with the celebration of the Eucharist. Even though we did that only once a year, it did a lot to build the solidarity of the group. It was a culmination of a whole year of relationships, prayers, and conversations. ❀

Reaching Our Limits: Burnout or Transition?

WHAT WE TERM "BURNOUT" MAY BE A CALL TO SOMETHING HIGHER

Karen Minnich-Sadler



Val Bochkov

Burnout is a pressing concern of clergy—perhaps today more than ever before. Exhausted, overwhelmed, and caught up in a vocation that no longer embodies the meaning it once had, a pastor may fear that the clergy life, which once made sense, has disintegrated beyond repair. As increasing numbers of clergy suffer the symptoms, we must wonder why burnout seems so widespread today, after decades in which the malady was much discussed and presumably well understood.

Could it be that some of the “burnt-out” clergy are experiencing something more fundamental than exhaustion? If so, does a common theme unite some of these struggles? Could these experiences of burnout have more to do with personal transition and growth issues than with dysfunction? And if that is so, could an

understanding of the process help us persevere through these crises with more compassion for both others and ourselves? If we better understood the concept that feelings of distance and alienation are a necessary part of the transition, would we be less likely to believe that we need to leave a relationship, a congregation, or the ministry to achieve resolution in our lives?

Things Fall Apart

“Constructive-developmental personality theory,” an idea developed by psychologist Robert Kegan, deals with human growth and the ways we understand our relationship to the rest of the world. It also addresses those terrible times of transition when everything falls apart and one is caught totally off balance, feeling that nothing makes sense anymore and uncer-

tain that it ever will again.¹ Although in one sense we are always growing and learning, and changing, these times of profound transition are few. If we fail to understand them, they can overwhelm us, for the way we have understood the world and ourselves to function is giving way.

Transition is a time of profound loss, for if we are to view the world from a new perspective, our old way of understanding must die. For people who are autonomous (self-differentiated),² this time of transition is especially intense, and can cause us to question our closest relationships, our call to a particular congregation, or the vocation of ministry itself. It is this process on which I reflect.

Church leaders who see the world from the vantage point of autonomy (self-differentiation) often experience this transition as a vocational crisis. Autonomous

people tend to experience a sense of completion for themselves and their lives through their vocation. For pastors, the tie to vocation is especially strong because our vocations are intertwined with our faith.

Rather than saying "I have this job to do within the church" or "I have been given this task as a child of God," we are likely to assert that not only is our work what we do but also who we are. This intermingling of self and vocation has more to do with seeing life through the lens of autonomy than it does with faith issues. Autonomous people in other vocations would tend to feel the same: that their vocation somehow completes them and tells them who they are. For church leaders, however, the tie of self and vocation is so strong that we often have difficulty seeing ourselves as people apart from our work. We tend to equate our call as pastors with our call as children of God; we have difficulty seeing where vocation ends and self begins. As a result, ongoing tension in the congregation or a job loss can catapult clergy into a time of painful questioning that plants the seeds of transition.

Life Turned Upside Down

Aging increases the possibility that transition will occur. Many second-career pastors now enter the ministry in their 40s or beyond. Because of their maturity, it is more likely that transition for these pastors may begin at a fairly early stage of ministry (that is, within the first five years). If that happens, these pastors may find themselves wondering why they ever turned their personal and professional lives upside down to answer a call that they now question.

For example, I was ordained at age 44, with a background and interest in behavioral dynamics. I felt prepared to meet whatever life and the parish might

throw at me. But I was unprepared for how quickly I would feel my limitations, and how overwhelming that experience would be. I vacillated between despairing that the congregation would never change and feeling inadequate to the call. It became clear to me, because of my experience with Kegan's theory, that more was at stake than my needing to learn new skills and information. Life has a way of taking us to our limits and, in so doing, issuing an invitation to journey. While we may not know what lies ahead, we sense that to refuse the invitation could mean that something precious, struggling to be born, might not be given voice and life.

Directing Anger Outward

As we step out on the first stages of the journey, we feel that the world no longer works as it should. We can direct these feelings toward our spouses, our congregations, or the church itself; but the common thread is the conviction that if only they would straighten up, I would be OK. What we are struggling to do is to hold onto ourselves—keep ourselves together—in the face of a situation that no longer makes sense. Blame and anger are directed outward.

Sooner or later in this journey, however, we will reach a place where we begin to question ourselves, and to believe that we are the ones who do not "work" anymore. The world is OK and everyone else seems to have a place in it, but we feel disconnected, insubstantial; we have no idea whether life will ever come together again in a meaningful way.

Kegan discusses this process in detail in chapter 9 of *The Evolving Self*.³ One idea, I believe, may be particularly helpful to us in ministry—the concept of pushing away people and things that represent our old way of understanding the world.

When we begin to move away from our old way of understanding, we natu-

rally reject what has been part of the old perspective. We will eventually recover these things in new and richer ways, but that recovery is still far in the future. For quite some time, we will be in a vulnerable state of mind, feeling that we may need to jettison certain commitments such as marriage, leadership of a congregation, or the ministry as vocation if we are to get our lives together and move on. At this point the pain may be so deep and the struggle so oppressive that we seek relief at any price. What is happening, though, is that we are confusing our partner in marriage or our partners in work with the side of ourselves we now have trouble accepting, the part that no longer works and that we want to abandon as quickly as possible.⁴

No Solid Ground

An added complication to this time of transition: Autonomous people tend to identify strongly with certain principles—such as integrity, justice, competence—and see these principles or standards as part of who they are.⁵ Thus, if an autonomous person's integrity or competence is questioned, one may feel that that his or her very selfhood is being challenged.

As this autonomous way of seeing begins to disintegrate, one will also feel a disintegration of the standards with which one has identified. Suddenly a void opens where universal principles used to be, and the individual is no longer certain of truths on which to rely. A by-product of the awareness that one no longer stands on the solid ground of standards is despair or cynicism. For a child of God, the anguish of this stage may result in a choice to opt out of ventures or relationships to which one had been deeply committed.

Kegan describes this juncture as a sense of leaving the moral world behind,

What we will come to realize in a deeper way, if we allow enough time to the journey, is that we do indeed see through a glass darkly but that God is still with us and anchors us on life's continuing journey.

feeling beyond good and evil, or having no way to distinguish wrong and right that is worthy of one's respect. If the journey ended here, we would be left with despair or cynicism.⁶ While these feelings are intrinsic to the time of transition, they are not to be permanent stopping places for the people of God. The fact that we cannot see God's truths accurately and completely does not mean that no truths endure to be known. What we will come to realize in a deeper way, if we allow enough time to the journey, is that we do indeed see through a glass darkly but that God is still with us and anchors us on life's continuing journey.

The Necessity of Grief

Throughout this process we will grieve because our understanding of the way life works has suddenly, it seems, been wrenched from us. We will mourn specific losses; we will mourn that loss is a fact of life. What we are most mourning, in a myriad of ways, is the loss of ourselves and our place in the world as we knew it. This transition does not happen overnight or in one giant step; it is an ongoing process that includes times of extraordinary intensity.

We will have moments of joy and peace when things seem to come together, but will likely then find ourselves thrown into turmoil once more. Our way of seeing affects every part of our lives, and we will come to see in new ways, piece by piece, before final resolution

comes. But grace abounds, always grace. Our glimpses of peace and renewed joy in life are a taste of what lies ahead. We can trust the purpose of the journey because we know that God is present in it.

Understanding the process does not lessen its intensity. The experience is necessary for growth and cannot be avoided. The process is indicative of neither dysfunction nor an inability to handle matters appropriately. From the perspective of human development, this time of transition beyond autonomy will be one of the deepest and most profound of our lives.

Hope Is Present

Understanding the process can give us insight into what is happening and perhaps encourage us to persevere through the journey without making major decisions we may regret for the rest of our lives. Hope is present: although the struggle feels like death, we know that in reality new life struggles to be born. Eventually we will realize that nothing has been lost, that what has come before is recovered in new ways, and so we are doubly blessed.

The call of Abram in Genesis 12 is applicable to this experience, for Abram was called from his country, his familiar place, out into the unknown. He was given a promise by God that the journey had purpose. Even such a promise can be hard to hang onto when we arrive at the most difficult places and have no idea

where or when the journey will end; but we, like Abram, can believe that journeys always contain possibilities for new life.

God tells Abram that God will bless Abram so that Abram in turn may be a blessing. That is, after all, what makes the journey worthwhile. As we grow and experience new life again and again, we are put in a place where we can be a greater blessing to those who too must make the journey, and who perhaps find parts of the journey difficult to bear. We bring into the process ourselves—not our expertise, but our compassionate and understanding presence made possible because of the compassionate and understanding presence of God—and in doing so, provide for others what every human being in existence needs: a tangible affirmation that we do not make this journey alone.⁷

We, like Abram, embark on this journey with no guarantee, except that God goes with us. At times that will be all we have, but it will be enough. We learn this truth and live it because—by the graciousness of God—we come to that place in our own journey where we are able to say, with absolute conviction, that the journey was indeed worthwhile. ❀

Notes

1. This theory is presented in detail in Robert Kegan, *The Evolving Self: Problem and Process in Human Development* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1982), and applied to contemporary life issues in Kegan, *In Over Our Heads: The Mental Demands of Modern Life* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1994).
2. The capacity to understand self as separate from others, holding one's own opinions and views.
3. Kegan, *Evolving Self*, 255–273.
4. *Ibid.*, 250.
5. *Ibid.*, 102.
6. *Ibid.*, 232–233.
7. Karen Minnich-Sadler, "A Congregation in Conflict: Applying Robert Kegan's Constructive-Developmental Personality Theory to the Underlying Issues" (D.Min. project, Lutheran Theological Seminary at Philadelphia, 2000), 36–37.



Steve McCracken

Great Expectations, Sobering Realities

FINDINGS FROM A NEW STUDY ON CLERGY BURNOUT

Michael Jenkins

Jim stands in the study of his church in Walnut Valley, a small rural community in the Midwest. He received the call to this two-point parish—the other congregation of which is 15 miles to the north—shortly after graduating from seminary. Jim is single, 34 years old, and a former high school biology teacher. Both congregations have welcomed him warmly, and Jim feels like a child on Christmas morning. He cannot remember feeling so excited about life, about his future, or his vocation. As he unpacks box after box of books, new biblical commentaries, and tattered seminary textbooks, arranges

them on the shelves of his study (the “Pastor’s Study,” a sign on the door reads), and hangs on the wall his newly framed diploma, “Master of Divinity,” Jim imagines the prospects of his new calling. Morning is broken, indeed.¹

As we observe Jim settling into his first congregation, we have the benefit of knowing, from our historical vantage point, something he does not yet know. As we watch him, we know that in less than three years Jim will leave these congregations. He will walk away from his new vocation. He will return to teaching biology in a public school. He will depart

ordained ministry feeling disappointed, defeated, and depressed, hurt beyond words, angry at the Church, bitter toward his seminary and his denomination—and toward himself. He will feel that he has failed, and that others, whom he trusted with his new vocation, others who should have known better how to help him, have failed him too. The bright possibilities he imagined on that first morning in his study will remain forever unrealized.

Sadly, Jim’s story is not unique. Recent studies have shown that a worrying proportion of pastors leave ordained ministry burned out, wounded, emotion-

Seventy-four percent of pastors responding to our survey reported that the greatest stress they experience relates to having “too many demands on their time.”

ally and spiritually damaged, some never to return to church either as pastors or lay persons. Perhaps the best-known study of clergy burnout to date is one conducted by Alan C. Klaas' company, Mission Growth Ministries, under a commission from the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod's Board of Higher Education. The study found that approximately 40 percent of that denomination's pastors were experiencing mild to severe burnout.

The findings of the Klaas study would be startling at any time but, considering the shortage of pastors nationwide, they are alarming—not only for Missouri Synod Lutherans, but for all sorts of Lutherans, Presbyterians, Episcopalians, United Methodists, Disciples of Christ, Baptists, and other denominations as well. Thus, two years ago Austin Presbyterian Theological Seminary entered into a partnership with the Favrot Fund to study the incidence of ministry burnout, its causes, and possible resources for burnout prevention among our seminary's alumni (focusing on the experience of pastors in their first seven years of congregational ministry), and to offer a conference to help these pastors develop strategies to better resource their ministries.² This article explores generally what our study revealed about the stresses and challenges pastors face, and the resources they have found to support their ministries. The actual survey results and a more detailed summary analysis of the study are available online through the Alban Institute's

Web page (www.alban.org/periodicals).

The study was conducted in two parts. Initially, we surveyed alumni of Austin Seminary. After receiving and analyzing the data from this survey, we subsequently convened a focus group from among our alumni to follow up on questions and incongruities in the initial research. The survey was mailed to 272 pastors, 161 of whom completed and returned the survey form. The final response rate was 59 percent. Our alumni are predominantly ordained Ministers of Word and Sacrament in the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), but the respondents included United Methodist, Disciples of Christ, Episcopalian, Missionary Baptist, and Unitarian ministers as well. With respect to their ages, the largest groups were in the 25- to 38-year range (28 percent) and the 45- to 56-year category (44 percent). Only 1 percent of the respondents were under 25.

We were particularly struck by the conversation generated among the 15 pastors in the focus group. Broadly representative of the survey respondents, this group reflected a hard-won realism about the difficulties of pastoral leadership, but their enthusiasm for ministry and their love of the church was palpable. While seminary administrators, professors, and denominational leaders often are on the receiving end of criticism from struggling pastors (“Why didn't you prepare me better?” “Where is the presbytery [or conference, or association] when I need your

help?”), the pastors with whom we spoke expressed gratitude both for their seminary training and for the support they continue to receive from their judicatories. The pastors were not misty-eyed idealists. They acknowledged gaps in their training and made specific recommendations regarding areas of the seminary curriculum they would like to see changed. They recognized problems in their various denominational structures and were specific in their criticisms of ecclesiastical officials who have been less than helpful. But they generally took these limitations and failings in stride, understood them in context, and (perhaps most compelling) took responsibility for finding resources for their own ministries. Indeed, they seemed rather surprised—and frankly pleased and relieved—to discover that there are denominational resources, seminary continuing education events, workshops from groups like the Alban Institute, and other kinds of help that could better equip them for various areas of the church's ministry, such as stewardship and church finance, leadership, and evangelism. Many of the recently ordained pastors had been trying to produce the resources they needed on their own. Both their resourcefulness and their ignorance of existing resources were something of a surprise to those of us who reflected on the focus group's discussion.

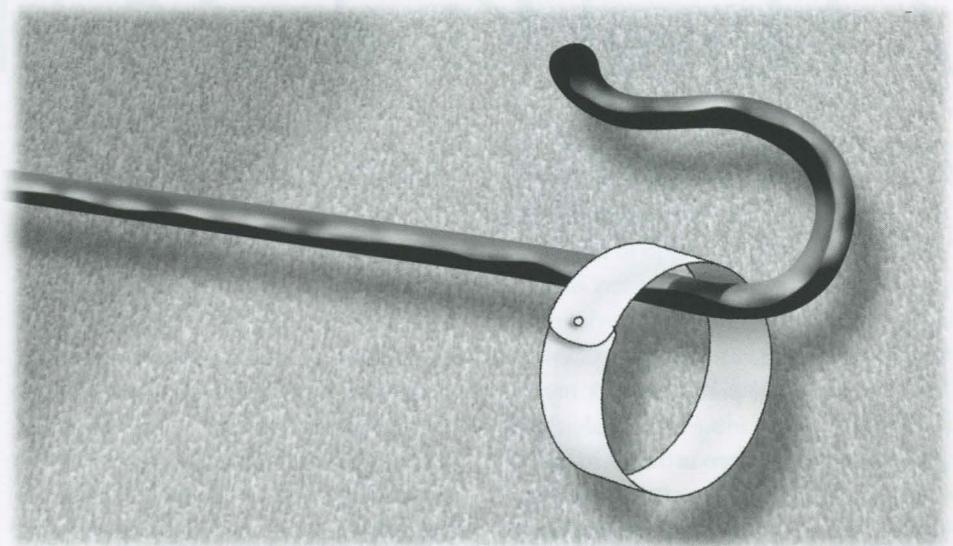
Competing Commitments

A historical perspective serves to frame one of the most significant findings of the survey and focus group conversations. As the first data began to emerge from the most recent national census, newspapers across the country observed that Americans are experiencing a time crunch. Commutes are longer, work schedules intrude increasingly on family life, and families are frequently torn

among conflicting commitments. Pastors are no exception. They are not immune to the sorts of factors that contribute to the general time crunch. However, they also fall prey to any number of specifically ministerial “crunches,” such as expectations among parishioners that pastors are “always on call,” confusion over the purpose and role of Sabbath, and difficulties negotiating family roles and the demands that overlap with ministry activities.

Seventy-four percent of pastors responding to our survey reported that the greatest stress they experience relates to having “too many demands on their time.” This was by far the most significant stressor in pastors’ lives. For the sake of comparison, “feeling drained in fulfilling my functions in my congregation,” the next highest reported cause of stress, was at 47 percent and—surprisingly, especially in light of the Klaas study—“criticism of me and what I have done” stood at only 11 percent.

The root cause of the time crunch was an issue that the survey failed to illuminate adequately, but when the research team spoke to the focus group, the cause became apparent. Overwhelmingly, the pastors in the focus group told us that they felt incompetent in determining priorities among the competing values and ideals that guide their ministries, and that they were unable to distinguish between goal setting with reference to their congregational ministries and goal setting in their own professional and personal lives. The pastors were, by and large, using planning calendars and Palm handhelds. They scheduled regular office hours and generally took days off and vacations, but they did not know how to determine which meetings were more crucial than others, which ideas deserved closer scrutiny, immediate planning, or omission, and which committees required their attention, because they simply did



Steve McCracken

not know how to critically assess the essential values that might guide them in their investment of limited time and energy. Many of them reported that they are “flying by the seat of their pants,” with little organizational consensus in their congregations (or comprehension in their own minds) as to how they should sort through the variety of issues, concerns, and crises that cry out for their attention. It has been said that being a pastor is like being a dog at a whistlers’ convention. The pastors with whom we spoke related to this grim joke.

The implications of this observation are compounded by the experience of many schools and denominational offices that coordinate or offer continuing education for pastors. While conventional wisdom says that awareness of a professional deficiency should provide the motivation to gain the necessary training and new skills, relatively few pastors who complain about deficiencies in goal setting and strategic planning (as well as other areas, such as church finance) seem willing to use their limited continuing education allowances to attend training in these areas. The continuing education programs that continue to attract the largest

attendance offer high-profile “names” (celebrity scholars and preachers) speaking on biblical and theological subjects. However, the focus group with which we spoke expressed considerable interest in seeking out assistance in goal setting and strategic planning once it became clear to them, in their small group conversations, that such assistance might help alleviate the time crunch in their own lives.

Conflict Takes a Toll

Pastors consistently reported that interpersonal conflicts—the ordinary grind of disagreements over policies and goals and personalities in their churches—were among the more difficult aspects of pastoral leadership. This was not a surprise to the research team. But the aspect of these conflicts that caused the pastors the greatest distress was not the technical, but the personal. This was something of a surprise. The pastors felt fairly confident that they have some effective tools to use in dealing with conflict management and negotiation (some pastors bring these skills from prior careers, some from seminary course work, and others from print resources and workshops). They also said

continued on page 24

A Novel Kind of Sabbatical

CONSIDER A HOME AND MINISTRY EXCHANGE

Dell Shiell

Okay, I am excited. My congregation has a sabbatical policy, and it's my turn. But when I bring up the subject for discussion, either at home or at church, the response is always the same: "What is this going to cost? How are we going to pay for it?" Everyone agrees (well, almost everyone) that I deserve a break. Now I have to get creative and figure out how to take a sabbatical within some serious budget constraints. What do I do?

If the person thinking these thoughts could be you, consider a home exchange. Perhaps even give thought to a home and ministry exchange. A home exchange is two households swapping homes. (You live in ours and we'll live in yours.) A ministry exchange adds the possibility of swapping pastoral duties as well. (You serve my parish and I'll serve yours.)

Why Exchange?

This sounds complicated. I need my sabbatical to lift me up, not wear me down. I need more energy, not more work.

A sabbatical is meant to revitalize you, so you want a sabbatical you can afford to enjoy. If you are going to get any refreshment at all, you need to get out of town—and that gets expensive. Lodging is a major expense for travelers, and a home exchange helps you control that expense.

A sabbatical is meant to stimulate you. Your budget is limited, but your

imagination is not. You are looking for more than just the pause that refreshes. You want an adventure. You want to go places, meet people, experience life somewhere else. A home exchange is more than budget friendly; most often, it is memorable. Your sabbatical won't last forever, but you want the memory of it (and the energy you get from it) to last as long as possible.

A sabbatical is meant as time away—time out from under the usual crush of parish life. If you have a family, you are probably not the only one to have this need. Other family members deserve a break as much as you do. Over and over, we are reminded that clergy families, not just clergy, suffer from stress and burnout. A home exchange gives the whole family a sabbatical.

A sabbatical gives the laity an opportunity to grow. Even though you are convinced that it would be good for your lay leaders to manage the ministry for three months without you, you know that some of them would be happier "managing without you" with a resident pastor. Even with a ministry exchange, plenty of growth will be taking place. The new pastor will do ministry, but will do it differently—it's inevitable. The lessons gleaned from the sabbatical may continue to emerge for months afterward, as you hear from your parishioners what people did—and did not—like about the way the new pastor did things while you were gone.

Three Models

I really care about the congregation I serve. How can I make sure they receive adequate pastoral leadership and care during my sabbatical? What are my options?

A sabbatical involving a home or ministry exchange may employ one of three models for managing pastoral duties.

The first model is the **traditional sabbatical**. This is for the person who chooses a home exchange but no ministry exchange. In this model, the person with whom you exchange homes has no responsibility for pastoral duties. Prior to your departure, the congregation arranges to employ another pastor, who will share pastoral duties with the laity. Key areas of concern include worship, pulpit supply, pastoral care, church programs, and church management. In most congregations, the minimum service required of the supply pastor, or part-time interim pastor, involves pastoral care emergencies and the Eucharist. Often, arrangements are made for a retired pastor or a neighboring pastor to provide these services. The lay leadership supervises and coordinates the bulk of these day-to-day pastoral duties.

The second model is the **full-time ministry exchange**. The pastor of another congregation agrees to exchange homes and pastoral duties with you during your sabbatical. The exchange pastor and your church leadership agree to the list of responsibilities, and these duties are put in writing. The Mutual Ministry

Committee or Pastor-Parish Relations Committee is introduced to the exchange pastor, and a plan is formed to facilitate the smoothest possible transition.

The third model is the **limited ministry exchange**. You and another pastor exchange homes and pastoral duties on a part-time basis. The laity is involved as they would be in the traditional sabbatical. However, there is no need to hire another pastor to fill in for essential services. A customized plan is developed for the exchange pastor to provide specific pastoral duties (i.e., worship, preaching, and pastoral care emergencies) only.

Each of these three models requires negotiation and communication skills.

You seek to balance your needs with those of your congregation. When you opt for a ministry exchange—either full-time or on a limited basis—the needs of your exchange partner and his or her congregation must be considered as well.

No Need to Burn Out

Imagine what a difference it would make if every pastor in every congregation could look forward to a three-month sabbatical every four years! Imagine especially what a difference this would make to pastors serving smaller congregations.

Imagine what a difference it would make if high school students saw the ministry as a profession where meaning-

ful service was rewarded with regular sabbaticals—instead of burnout.

A home or ministry exchange may not solve the sabbatical problem for everyone, but it is an affordable solution many have not yet considered. Like all other privileges in life, a sabbatical presents a set of opportunities and challenges. This is not surprising, since stewardship is involved. Each of us has unique gifts and ministries. Each of us lives and works in unique personal and professional settings. As you look ahead, I hope you will think of a home exchange or a ministry exchange as an additional resource for a most refreshing, stimulating, and memorable sabbatical. ☪

For specific steps to arrange a home or ministry exchange, see www.alban.org/periodicals and look under “Current Issue.”

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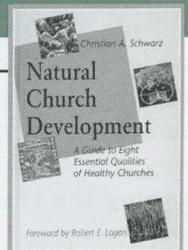
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When Clergy Get Cancer

RECEIVING THE GIFTS THAT COME WITH A CHANGE OF ROLE

Donna Schaper

When ordained people get cancer, we get it the same way other people do. One of a dozen triggers joins our genetic make-up, our exposure to carcinogens, and our immune system to compromise it, allowing cells inside us to grow in a life-threatening way. Our cancer also shares a psycho-spiritual pattern summed up by the poet W. H. Auden as “the foiling of a creative fire.” Not only has our biological immune system failed us, so has our psychological and spiritual system.

These cancers are not our fault. But they are our responsibility. We have to grasp hold of the triggers—biological, emotional, and spiritual—if we are to survive. Some may grasp all these and more—and still not survive. Cancer kills those who fight it admirably and those who don't. As writer Molly Ivins suggested in a *Time* essay after surgery for breast cancer, “cancer doesn't give a rat's ass whether you have a positive mental attitude.”

Clergy with cancer are different not just because we know so many facts. We have also seen nearly as much of cancer as doctors have. We know its pattern. We know way too much about cancer—and nothing at all about our own.

Knowing Too Much

Clergy go into cancer “role-heavy” and come out “role-light.” The role-heavy know too much about cancer, its cold sweats and night terrors, its demonic intrusions into intimate relationships. We know death comes far too slowly, and that prospects change so many times that the patient stops paying attention, as does the caregiver. We role-heavy ones possess the superior knowledge our life's work has given us, but our superiority gets in the way of knowing our own disease. We start out being “know-it-all” and end up as magnificently ignorant about the ways of life and death as anyone else.

By becoming “role-light,” I mean we get our work life out of the way of our survival. When we have cancer, we can't take care of others. They—parishioners, family members, friends, doctors—have to take care of us. Besides having cancer and having

to relinquish our health—or, in my case, my breast—we also have to let go of our customary role. Many of us really like the clergy role and are as close to it as we are to our breast. It is deeply a part of us. Letting it go is like going naked into the world, especially when we pretty much agree that cancer signals a compromised spiritual and psychological system as much as a compromised immune system. What? The clergy have lost faith? They don't believe what they tell us? Yes. That is the peculiar nudity of the clergy when we have cancer: We are paid to have stellar spiritual immune systems. When they fail us, they fail others as well.

In that vulnerability lies strength. Genuine faith has gaps; from time to time faith knows doubt. In fact, “hanging on” to our role or to our “Rock-of-Ages” faith will cost us the great awakening and clarifying that cancer is. It is the best wake-up call around, as countless survivors will tell you. Men with prostate cancer discover that sexual function is not their only identity. Women who have lost breasts will still be women. Cancer is a metanoia, a turning point, an opening into a new life. English novelist E. M. Forster said, “We must be willing to let go of the life we have planned, so as to have the life that is waiting for us.” That applies to both the ordained and unordained. Cancer tells you in no uncertain terms that it is time for a change and that loss is not loss of “everything.” God has a funny way of showing up when we let go of all the other props: clergy find deeper faith inside compromised faith.

Role Changes

These life changes are not a penance for the wrong we have done to get cancer. Rather they are the repentance, the chance to repair or reform whatever compromised our immunity initially. We know the routine—diet, exercise, vitamins, air, and water—the good things. Clergy join the rest of the human race in fighting for health in a world where the unhealthy chases us around in air, water, food, and lifestyle, where bioterrorism is waged on us not only from outside the country but also from within.

We not only change our lifestyle for greater overall health. We also are privileged to change and deepen our role. We get to be the care receiver instead of the caregiver. We get to “disrobe” and “defrock” in public and let others see our humanity. We will never again, if Christian, be so grateful that God sent Jesus in human form!

This disrobing is part of the great unquenching that cancer gives as a gift. The unquenching of the creative fire is something clergy desire as much as anyone else. Too many of us let too many people be our bosses. Too many of us live sedentary, “inside” lives, in offices, solving other people’s problems—problems they should probably solve themselves. Way too many of us say yes when we mean no.

The servant role is remarkably positive until it collapses into the slave role. It is elevated by choice and debased by lack of choice. When we clergy choose our role, we are servants in the holiest sense. When someone else tells us what to do, or how to be servants, not only is our creative fire quenched; our ministry becomes a form of slavery.

Likewise, faith is not faith when it is for show or for holding others up. Faith is faith when it holds us up, too, when we acknowledge our dependence on God.

The Chance to Receive

Cancer gives clergy special gifts. When people talk the classic cancer talk—“If there is anything I can do for you, just tell me” or “I will pray for you”—take them up on it. Be specific. The chance to receive will not return soon. I asked my staff to move my office to a lighter area in the church instead of sending flowers, candy, and Hallmarks. They had a good time doing it. I asked my congregation to run out-of-the-box errands, like taking the cat to the vet or getting my daughter to driving lessons. Cancer is a great teacher of assertiveness. We learn to say, “So sorry, but I just can’t talk now” and “Thank you so much for making my Thanksgiving pies. I never could have gotten to them myself.” Cancer is a clarifier: we learn to say what we need and want, not what others think we should need and want.

I was able to ask those who truly, if awkwardly, wanted to “help” to surround me with a blanket of prayer before and during the surgery. They did. It was the most powerful experience of church I have ever had. People prayed all over the country, as well as in a small service in our own chapel. The prayer did two things for me—it represented church, viscerally, and it gave others a way to “do something” as they genuinely wanted to.

The Pastor’s Pastor

I also made sure to ask someone outside my “system” to be my

pastor. I didn’t want to be part of my parochial church, but I did want to be part of church. This pastor gave me the greatest gift at my bedside because she was free of my role and I was free of my role.

My husband managed an e-mail list, sending out all the gory details and information. I have known pastors who kept their illness a secret—a mistake, I think. It means they don’t want to get naked in public. I can understand that; nonetheless, such silence puts the lie to the very preachings of community, support, and prayer that are our lifeblood and weekly sermon. Getting people to give out information is helpful—and we don’t have to do it ourselves! Choosing a pastor gives life and power to our own pastoral work at a later date. Yes, Virginia, even you need a pastor.

When we get out of the hospital, we can return to our role as slowly as we wish. We have been clarified by cancer, and we know more about how to be a child of God. That certain knowledge will do more to advance our ministry than keeping at it, through thick and thin, ever could. ❁

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Tim Teebken



Good-Enough Self-Care

ALBAN INSTITUTE CONSULTANT **JACQUELINE J. LEWIS** SAYS THAT RECLAIMING OUR AUTHENTICITY IS THE KEY TO SELF-CARE

Clergy self-care requires spending enough time to build and maintain transparent, truthful, and loving relationships with God, with those we love, and with ourselves.

It is Monday morning, and she is exhausted. She had planned to take the day off, but even when leaving the officers' meeting last evening, she knew she wouldn't. Driving home, she had begun to rehearse the speech she would give her daughter about missing her basketball game. She told herself Sarah would understand that God's work was more important. Sarah knows the deal. So why, she asked herself, do I feel like such a failure?

In my experience as a pastor, a doctoral student in psychology and religion, and a consultant to clergy and congregations, I hear a consistent theme running through conversations with clergy colleagues: We are overworked and overcommitted, and we are doing a poor job of self-care. At clergy gatherings we share stories like the one above as though they were rites of passage. We empathize with a colleague's heavy workload, but seldom do we encourage one another to change behaviors. We infrequently hold one another accountable for spiritual disciplines like Sabbath, personal devotions, exercise, worship, or staying in community. Our club is one in which membership often means having little life outside our ministries, and we believe, at some level, that such a life is as it should be. In congregations and specialized ministries, we often have poor boundaries; we spend little time exercising and playing; we miss out on prime moments with family and friends; and we seldom avail ourselves of the resources offered by the Source of our ministry. These behaviors are often encouraged by the church, by denomination-

al structures, by our culture, and by colleagues. We measure our worth by how much we do, not "how we be." Why is this so?

He can't wait until the meeting is over. On the way home, he will stop and have dinner with his friends, and a glass of wine. Well, he will have several, but he will tell his wife he had only one. Last year they talked about his drinking. He confided his concern that he was beginning to rely on alcohol to deal with the stress in his life. Demands from the congregation were incessant; the children were acting out. A few glasses of wine made it feel better. But when he told Elaine, she really lost it. Now he keeps his concerns to himself.

Poor clergy self-care is at the root of many maladies affecting the church. For some, lack of time with loved ones leaves us seeking intimacy and validation from our congregations when they would be better found in our private lives. Needy clergy caring for children and vulnerable adults may cross boundaries, searching for closeness or a reminder of our potency. In other instances, clergy who can't relinquish a sense of martyrdom and self-sacrifice hinder the growth of others gifted for ministry. Still others work so hard to please congregants and denominational staff that they neglect families, loved ones, and themselves in the name of serving God. Many clergy spend too little time drinking from the well of Living Water, and are spiritually parched and unable to fill the cups of others.

Why are clergy driven to behave in unproductive ways? Reason one: church culture expects it. To be a pastor, priest, or rabbi is to lay all on the altar of sacrifice—to work hard on behalf of self and congregation. The expectations of congregations leave the clergy with unclear

boundaries and unreasonable expectations of themselves and others. They must work hard, demand little of others, and live pious and holy lives, for their own salvation and for those they serve. They must keep silent about their fears, their passions, and their failures.

Reason two: clergy expect themselves to be "perfect." Claiming to be unashamed of the Gospel, they rely not on Christ's strength but on their own understanding of ministry. They expect to be tired, overwhelmed, overworked, and often underpaid. Consequently they are often joyless. They feel "dead," angry, and frustrated. Clergy tell themselves that this joyless living is selfless behavior. In fact it is self-defeating and, at its root, is often either a poor sense of self that needs to prove its worth or an aggrandized sense of self that needs to be the center of the universe.

Either way, clergy can be needy. What we need is authentic, intimate relationships with God, with dear friends and family, and with ourselves. A "false self" claims to have no need of love, care, time off, and play. Clergy and their congregations often conspire to keep pastors in this role.

Good-Enough Care

For psychologist Donald W. Winnicott, "good enough" caregiving facilitates healthy personality development.¹ The good-enough mother knows what her infant needs and gives it to him. When the hungry infant cries, the good-enough mother appears with the milk-filled breast or bottle. The infant, who at this point does not feel separate from the mother, gains a sense of power and control—"look what I made happen"—and the mother affirms this sense of magic. The mother's support of this sense of omnipotence creates an environment in which the infant learns to play, to create,

and to imagine. By demanding nothing, the good-enough mother places no encroachments on the infant. She holds the baby and mirrors a sense of wonder. Held in the mother's gaze and arms, the infant develops what Winnicott calls his "true self." This self feels real, spontaneous, and alive.

The good-enough caregiver knows just when and how to frustrate the baby. She leaves the room for longer periods of time. She allows the baby to cry for longer stretches before coming to comfort him. The baby learns to use objects placed in his way—a pacifier, a teddy bear, a blanket—to comfort himself. These objects are found by the infant and made into something that symbolizes the caregiver. Winnicott calls these "transitional objects" and the widening space between the infant and the caregiver "transitional space." Soon Mommy can be in the next room and baby feels fine. Playing, he recreates the experience of being with Mommy. Soon, the child can go off to school and feel comfortable. The good-enough mother has opened this ever-widening space in which the child learns to create and to play. Ideally, this space is filled with products of the growing child's imagination. Transitional space, for Winnicott, is the space in which art, music, math, and religion take place. It is the place of play, creativity, and all "true" living.

The False Self

Sometimes all does not go well. The care given to the infant is not "good enough." The environment is unreliable—Mom and Dad fail to show up when needed. The infant's cries go unanswered. The caregiver is preoccupied with himself rather than the child's needs. The environment is then filled with demands on the child. The child's sense of omnipotence is threatened prematurely. He

attunes to the needs in the environment rather than to his own needs. These expectations or failures feel persecutory to the infant, who has no capacity to reject them. Now the transitional space is filled with projections of another rather than the child's own creativity. The infant develops a compliant self—a false self. This self does not know how to ask for what it needs. It does not learn how to use transitional objects or how to live creatively. The false self hides the true self's needs for play, creativity, intimacy, and joyful living.

Implications of False-Self Development

Everybody has a little "false self." Most of us comply to some degree with the environment. We go to school when we are children and some of us color within the lines! We (in the U.S.) learn as adolescents to drive on the right side of the road. We compromise in relationships, and we behave publicly in socially sanctioned ways. But the false self can dominate our living. Seeking to please others, we ignore our own voice. We take our desires, fears, hopes, or insecurities and make them secret. We admit to no failures, and display a bravado that isolates us from those we love. We may need to protect our true self to the degree that we become self-destructive or suicidal rather than expose it.²

Many of us who enter helping professions do so out of woundedness. We seek to heal that broken child within ourselves and others. Even those whose childhood was ideal may have internalized expectations from adults that "winning" and "succeeding" mean helping others at the expense of our own needs. We learn early that it is selfish to take care of ourselves. Certainly the church has been less than healthy in its expectations for clergy. To sacrifice, to "lay down one's

To sacrifice, to "lay down one's life" for another out of love and service, is an ideal we hold—one often unexamined.

life" for another out of love and service, is an ideal we hold—one often unexamined. A colleague tells of hearing a sermon in which the preacher said, "Jesus already died, so I don't have to kill myself doing this ministry." Indeed, Jesus' life, death, and resurrection exemplify a fierce love of God, neighbor, and self that could free us to be our true selves in every aspect of life. Jesus' instructions to love God with our heart, soul, mind, and strength, and to love our neighbors as ourselves can be seen as a three-legged stool which, when one leg is out of balance, cannot stand. To be in authentic relationship with God, self, and neighbor is to give ourselves three important resources for good-enough self-care.

Recovering the True Self

O Lord, you have examined my heart and know everything about me.

Psalm 139:1

Authentic, loving relationship with God. The psalmist writes passionately about the love God has for each of us. It is love rooted in God's knowledge of us. God is everywhere, hemming us in behind and before, knowing the words we will say before we say them. The psalmist feels assured that if we go to heaven, God is there; if we go to the place of the dead, God is there. God knows us intimately because God created us in all of our complexity. We can't hide from God. Love of God demands truthfulness before the one who made me and loves me. This comfort

and a challenge invites me to "get real" with God, to be naked before God, and to reveal my inmost thoughts and fears. Believing that God already knows me, I can be my authentic self. I must spend time alone with God—reading God's Word, writing in my journal, praying. I may pray as I walk in the park or along the beach. I may sing my favorite spirituals or play my favorite gospel song and feel God's presence. To have an authentic relationship with God, I need to spend time with God, the source of my strength. God loves me just as I am, and holds me accountable to be who God intends me to be. Loving God authentically means also to worship God and to do that which pleases God, who desires our attention, praise, and adoration. When I worship God, I move out of myself, out of my role as preacher and priest, and into loving God with my time, my gifts, my heart. Clergy need to spend time when they can truly worship. Our loving, authentic relationship with God is the source of all other loving relationships.

Authentic, Loving Relationship with Self

"...But how can I have a baby? I am a virgin."

Luke 1:34b

"...I am the Lord's servant, and I am willing to do whatever he wants."

Luke 1: 38a

Mary was young, but she knew a few things. She knew she was a maiden of limited resources. Having known no

man, she knew that having a baby seemed an impossible job. She knew that she was God's servant, and was willing to do what she was asked. She knew also that being asked to serve made her blessed.

I need to know who I am. What are my gifts? My weaknesses and limitations? My resources? What makes me, in effect, me? What makes me laugh? What gives me delight or brings me sorrow? What are my blind spots? When I know myself, I can be authentic. Loving me means not hiding the truth about me from myself.

We clergy need to spend time alone to cultivate an intimate relationship with ourselves. We may need to keep an "artist's date" with ourselves. We can go to the museum to see paintings, run along a favorite hiking path, or sit in a shop and sip coffee with a favorite book. In these times, we can be mindful of our feelings and sensations, and take time to record them later. Some of us are vaguely aware of unresolved grief, guilt, or pain in our lives. We may need to spend time with a spiritual director, counselor, or therapist to work on these issues. To get to know and love ourselves—to delight in our

uniqueness and our particularities—is to cultivate an authentic love relationship with ourselves: one aspect of good-enough self-care.

Authentic Relationship with Neighbor

No one has ever seen God. But if we love each other, God lives in us, and God's love has been brought to full expression through us.

1 John 4:12

John's community truly understood that loving each other, whom we can see, is the only way to express our love of God, whom we cannot see. Paul gives the church at Ephesus clear instructions about the nature of a loving community. We are to tell each other the truth, because we belong to each other. We are to manage anger, not letting the sun go down on it. We are to watch our mouths, and say things that build each other up. We are to be kind to one another and forgive, as God has forgiven us (Eph. 4: 25-32). Paul starts by encouraging us to be honest. To love each other is to be true to each other and with one another. I must cultivate relationships in which I can be truthful. I need a community in which

speaking the truth about ourselves is the norm. Clergy need community. Find a support group that studies the lectionary and holds you accountable. Enlist a prayer partner or close friend with whom you can be transparent and vulnerable about growth edges and success. With your spouse or "significant other" share who you really are—your hopes, dreams, and fears. Invite your loved one to do the same.

Clergy are on the front lines, working to build the beloved community. Without a true sense of who we are, whose we are, and what our limitations are, our work will burn us out. Restoring our true selves with good-enough self-care is essential so that God can use us and bless those around us with our ministry. Loving God, neighbor, and self authentically and intentionally is good food for our journey. ☸

Notes

1. Donald W. Winnicott, *Playing and Reality* (New York: Routledge, 1971).
2. Winnicott, *The Maturation Processes and the Facilitating Environment: Studies in the Theory of Emotional Development* (London: Hogarth, 1965).

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*But this is what the Lord says...
"I will contend with those who
contend with you,
and your children I will save."
Isaiah 49:25*



Lilly Endowment Inc. National Clergy Renewal Program /2002

"As a deer longs
for flowing streams,
so my soul longs
for you, O God."
— PSALM 42:1



At the center of the congregation is the pastor. Spiritual guide, scholar, counselor, preacher, administrator, confidant, teacher, pastoral visitor, and friend, a pastor has a privileged position and performs many roles. In season and out, a pastor is called upon to lead communities to the life-giving waters of God.

The National Clergy Renewal Program, offered by Lilly Endowment Inc., is intended to strengthen Christian congregations by providing an opportunity for pastors to step away briefly from the demands of daily parish life and to engage in a period of renewal and reflection. The Endowment will provide as many as 100 grants of up to \$30,000 each directly to congregations for support of a renewal program for their pastor.

Applications are now being accepted. Applications must be postmarked by July 19, 2002, and the award announcement will be made by December 2002.



For information: Send an e-mail to clergyrenewal@yahoo.com, contact the program's Web site: www.clergyrenewal.org, call 317/916-7302, or write Lilly Endowment Inc., Religion Division, 2801 North Meridian Street, Post Office Box 88068, Indianapolis, Indiana 46208. Indiana clergy should apply only to the Lilly Endowment Clergy Renewal Program for Indiana Congregations.

Jinkins

continued from page 13

they felt confident that they could get additional training when they needed to. Their larger concern was the personal toll that interpersonal conflict takes over time on their energy levels, on their enthusiasm for ministry, and on their love for their congregations. They spoke of being worn down by the emotional damage of interpersonal problems within the congregation. One pastor likened it to the incessant drip, drip, drip of water torture.

Virtually none of the pastors said that the headline-grabbing conflicts, like the battles over gay and lesbian ordination that plague many denominations, cause them too much personal distress. They did not wish to diminish the seriousness of these issues, but, generally speaking, the pastors do not “live inside” these conflicts on a day-to-day basis. Rather, the small betrayals of trust, the corrosive influences of malicious gossip and backbiting, the apathy and despair in declining congregations (several of the pastors serve small congregations in rural communities where populations have been declining for decades), the thoughtless and snide remarks, the passive-aggressive digs among members and staff, the feelings of being stuck or trapped in a bad situation, of having their leadership subverted by retired pastors in the congregation or by the pastors who preceded them in a congregation but who refuse to give up influence there, of hearing the same complaints over and over again in the face of insolvable dilemmas—these are the kinds of things pastors said wear away their morale and try their souls. And yet they remain, on the whole, very excited about ministry and the future of the church.

Beneath the enthusiasm of the pastors with whom we spoke, however—just

under the surface of the apparently very real joy and authentic excitement they commonly expressed—is the world-weary heart of leaders who are becoming better acquainted with human nature in all its frailty and fickleness. Like Dante’s analogy of the gambler losing a game of dice, reviewing every roll in his mind, sadly—but sadly wiser—and alone, the pastors with whom we spoke, early as they are in the vocation of pastoral ministry, reflect a hard-won sadness, a sapiential sadness they did not possess prior to pastoral leadership that senses the risks, the stakes, and the loneliness of leadership. But virtually none of these ministers (a mere 6 percent) indicated that they wanted to leave their current congregations.

How are these pastors dealing with the pressures they are experiencing? By grounding themselves more deeply in the life of the spirit and by finding community wherever it can be found. Both strategies are time-honored. Yet the pastors’ responses were not unproblematic.

The Pastor’s Spirit

Pastors consistently saw Bible study and prayer as crucial resources for personal and professional wholeness and effectiveness. Looking back on their seminary training, many of them emphasized the value of their biblical and theological studies, in particular, as contributory to their pastoral ministry. They said that they felt well prepared to reflect biblically and theologically on the lives of their parishioners, and that their preaching and teaching, their leadership of worship, nourished them as well as their congregants. However, relatively few of the pastors are involved in regular disciplines of Bible study and prayer. Sixty-two percent are not “involved in disciplined study of sermon texts,” 62 percent do not “have disciplined or scheduled times for study,”

and 51 percent do not have “disciplined or scheduled times for prayer.”

A closely related finding was also somewhat discouraging: While pastors consistently recognized the value of having a pastor, a mentor, or a spiritual director of their own who could help them discern and deepen spiritually and emotionally, relatively few make consistent and disciplined use of such a personal resource. Of the pastors surveyed, only 41 percent have mentors at all. Only 22 percent make use of a spiritual director, and only 29 percent have utilized the assistance of a pastoral counselor or other therapist. In analyzing the data, our research team was compelled to ask, “If spiritual, emotional, and relational resources are as important to pastors as they say, what does it mean that so few of them have pastors, spiritual directors, or counselors of their own?”

These pastors also tend to approach Bible study, prayer, and reflection with their own pastors, mentors, spiritual directors, or counselors on an “as needed” basis—that is, when they feel especially burdened or in crisis, rather than allowing these resources to sustain and nourish them consistently. In the focus group, the pastors acknowledged that the lack of discipline and regularity in their seeking help could undermine relationships and exaggerate the lows they feel, but expressed doubt as to whether they would address the problem.

The lack of sustained and regular recourse to spiritual and emotional resources is compounded by the fact that most pastors (90 percent) understand their “listening and responding to people’s needs” to be a significant factor contributing to their personal and professional development (the same percentage as said that “Bible study and exegesis for sermon preparation” are positively contributory). While rendering pastoral care

to others is clearly rewarding, it can also drain the pastor of energy if not kept in balance. Balance is the key issue here to long-term spiritual and emotional health. The pastors with whom we spoke emphasize the health-giving dimensions of their giving care to others, but they do not seem to practice the health-giving dimensions of receiving care from others who could serve as their pastors and ministers. Care-giving was frequently practiced at the expense of care-taking.

In recent years, many have recognized that burnout is essentially a spiritual issue, whether rooted in hubris or vanity. The pastors with whom we spoke, despite their current enthusiasm, may already be unwittingly tempting burnout in their ministries by failing to recognize

adequately the limits of their resources and their need to be nourished by others in those disciplined, purposeful, and deliberately “unproductive” spiritual exercises of Sabbath and play, regular conversation with trusted mentors and spiritual directors, prayer, and prayerful reflection on scripture.

The Nature of Loneliness

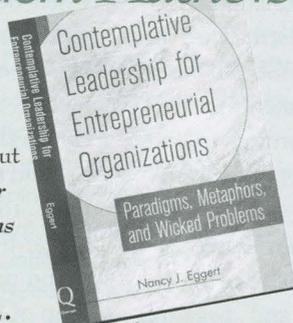
Pastors in our study also spoke often of loneliness. But it became clear in our conversations with the focus group that the loneliness of which they spoke was not the same reality for every pastor, nor did loneliness have a single, common root cause. For some pastors, loneliness was primarily a result of their physical distance from other persons. Loneliness, in

this case, is a synonym for a particular kind of aloneness. One pastor said that, in her geographically isolated parish, it is not unusual for her to spend the whole day without speaking with another living person. When she is not making visits, she is simply alone much of the time.

Another pastor, this one serving on the staff of a large, urban congregation, spoke of a very different kind of loneliness. While he is frequently in conversation with members of the congregation and staff, he yearns for a closer, deeper level of fellowship with his colleagues on the staff. They are all busy doing the work of ministry, shoulder-to-shoulder, day-in and day-out, but they seldom talk about the world of ordinary concerns that friends share as a matter of course.

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MORE INFORMATION ON CLERGY BURNOUT

To see the actual Austin Presbyterian Theological Seminary survey results and a more detailed summary analysis of the data, visit us on the Web at www.alban.org/periodicals.

Still other pastors spoke of the loneliness of the leadership position. Few of those with whom we spoke saw ministry as something they do alone, but they were conscious of the peculiar position and role the pastoral office places them in as a significant “leader” in the congregation. While friendships with members of their congregations may—and often do—bless their lives, these pastors are also aware of a difference between the friendly relationships they have with members of their congregations and the friendships congregants have with one another, as well as the friendships the pastors themselves have with people (often colleagues) outside of their congregations. One of the most poignant reflections shared with us came from a pastor who had been “badly burned” when she confided church-related concerns to a member of her congregation whom she thought of as a friend, only to discover too late that the person in whom she confided was not trustworthy.

This pastor’s experience highlighted the difficulties some pastors have in negotiating appropriate pastoral boundaries. Several of the pastors with whom we spoke, in fact, related their continuing struggles with discerning and defining a clear sense of pastoral role and the limitations this role places on their ability to be intimate and open with congregants.

Those pastors who are in ministerial support groups, including lectionary groups, generally speak positively of the

experience, often citing such groups as a significant resource for their emotional health and effectiveness in ministry. One pastor spoke of the members of such a group as “soul mates” with whom she had been able to share openly and deeply on a weekly basis. While her group was originally formed simply as a lectionary study group, it evolved into a support group. However, easily 36 percent of the pastors we surveyed do not participate in any such group, and often the groups that do meet (another 33 percent) function largely without intentionality, structure, or mutual accountability. They do not work to guarantee a “safe environment” for personal reflection, and, according to our respondents, provide little or no real support.

Unfortunately, this leaves many pastors in the position of keeping to themselves the most difficult and negative emotion-laden aspects of their experience, or of “dumping” most of their pain and frustrations on their spouses, partners, families, or closest friends. It can be wonderful, as one pastor reported, to be able to share his difficulties, even his anger and sadness, with his spouse (who is, incidentally, a pastor in another denomination), but there comes a point when the relationship is in danger of becoming overwhelmed by “church stuff,” particularly in times of crisis.

In contrast, another pastor explained that she does not speak of her pastoral work at all with her spouse. He is a mem-

ber of her congregation and, because she wants to avoid coloring his experience of the church, she draws a sharp boundary between home and church. However, as she acknowledged, this makes it all the more difficult for her to find an appropriate emotional outlet, a place she can go “to blow off steam.”

One of the most creative approaches to countering loneliness emerged from a group of women who went through seminary together. Now, as pastors and associate pastors in congregations across the country, they remain in regular contact with one another throughout the year by phone and e-mail, sharing frustrations and joys, and they come together on the seminary campus each year to study with a professor. Because they have known each other for several years, they are able to relate at a deep level of honesty and openness, calling one another’s hand when necessary, and providing a quality of mutual support that is simply impossible for mere acquaintances to give and receive. And, because they are in regular conversation (not only in moments of crisis) and their knowledge of one another is more than episodic, they can discern longer-term trends in each other’s personal and professional lives against the backdrop of knowledge of the whole person.

Serving in Troubling Times

After meeting with our focus group, a member of the research team remarked on how “into” ministry these pastors seem to be. And they are. They have great excitement about ministry and great expectations, and they find joy in the pastoral vocation. But they also face sobering realities.

Times are tough for pastors. Pastors are facing a range of concerns and needs in the contemporary church and in contemporary society that is simply staggering. They struggle to discover resources

that will sustain and nourish them and their congregations, sometimes against daunting odds.

When we met with the focus group on the morning of September 10, 2001, none of us could possibly have imagined what the world would be like just 24 hours later. Our pastors returned to their homes and awoke the next morning to a shattering new reality, in the midst of which they continue to serve, to preach, and to provide pastoral care, counseling, and spiritual direction. If they are to meet the challenges ahead, and if they are to meet these challenges not only for a moment but for years to come, they are aware that they will need something more sustaining than their enthusiasm alone. They have every right to expect that they

will not be alone in discovering the resources they need. ❁

Notes

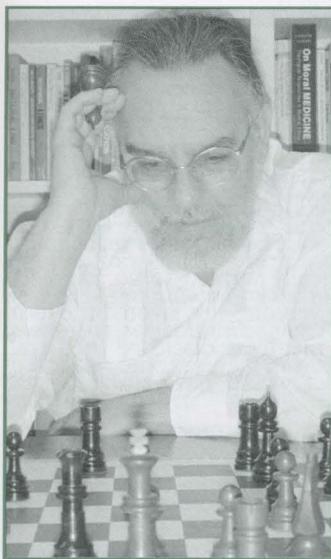
1. All names, locations, and incidents are fictionalized to protect the identity of pastors surveyed.
2. The Favrot Fund is a Texas-based endowment that provides grants for charitable and educational institutions. The study we conducted was administered by Keith Wulff of the Office of Research Services of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.). Ian Evison, director of research at the Alban Institute, and Michael Murray, consultant and Presbyterian minister, provided valuable technical advice. Alison Riemersma, faculty secretary, provided administrative support. I served as director of the project. The Resources for the Journey of Pastoral Ministry Conference, developed on the basis of this study, featured presentations and workshops by Jackson Carroll, Laura Mendenhall, David Bartlett, Scott Cormode, and Marjorie Bankson, and was provided at no cost to recent graduates of Austin Seminary.

First Class Mail

continued from page 3

crisis overpowers any confrontation with theological integrity. There is less thinking or "theologizing" in these matters than one would wish. Our "response" is usually more an emotional reaction that is rooted in a mixture of ambiguous allegiance and sentiment. So, too often, pastors in the church pass by the teachable moment in favor of being "nice." Thus, we have not got past Reinhold yet. We leaders of the church still long to be both pious and secular, patriotic and holy, and "all things to all people" without much memory of why.

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The Abilene Paradox Goes to Church

A MANAGEMENT CONCEPT SUGGESTS WHY SOME CONGREGATIONS CAN'T NAIL DOWN A DECISION

Jerald L. Kirkpatrick

The letter was crystal clear: "You have precipitously dismissed the most valuable member of the church staff. And now you will pay the price."

So it seemed. After 40 years of employment, the choir director at Sunnyvale Church was being let go. When the pastor and the personnel committee chair asked her to retire, she left the meeting in a huff. "I don't know what you're talking about."

Reaction was swift. One-third of the choir left for another church. The organist resigned in solidarity with the director. Word got around town that after years of faithful service, Sunnyvale was cutting Louise loose. What a shame. And what a surprise!

Prolonged Indecision

Well, not so great a surprise as one might think. Investigation disclosed that a sizable group of church members had had serious reservations about Louise for years—her choice of music, her manner of dealing with people, even her musical ability. Those people had repeatedly registered complaints to the liturgy and personnel committees, but no action was taken.

The committees themselves often discussed Louise's job performance, going so far as to warn her, "Things have got to change." For more than 20 years, it seemed, the committees were constantly preoccupied with changing Louise and the music program.

Nothing changed. Louise continued to do as she had always done. She bullied the pastor, ignored the critics, and verbally abused the choir. Her manner became more brusque. Finally, when the pastor and personnel committee could stand it no longer, they acted. But the reaction hurt the church. Members blamed one another for the debacle, even changing sides in the

debate. Before the dust settled, the pastor had left; the personnel chair had resigned; the church was divided.

Why hadn't things changed? Why didn't the people do what they wanted to do 30 years earlier? The answer is easy. The "Abilene Paradox" had come to church.

Feelings Concealed

The Abilene Paradox is a management concept introduced more than 25 years ago by Jerry B. Harvey.¹ Harvey asks why organizations don't do what their members agree should be done. His concept is based on an ill-fated outing he and his family made from Coleman to Abilene, Texas, on a hot summer night to eat mediocre cafeteria food. No one really wanted to go, but each agreed to make the trip, thinking everyone else favored the idea. Harvey contends that had family members disclosed their true desire to stay at home, no conflict would have surfaced later about having gone.

Old First Church had weathered many storms in its downtown location, including attempts to move the congregation to the suburbs. In recent years, however, a new generation had become active, and plans were under way to build a new sanctuary and office complex at the present site. The board appointed a building committee, and the committee hired an architect. After extensive listening sessions, the architect took what he had learned and produced a preliminary plan.

When the architectural model was shown to members, nothing seemed right. The bell tower was the wrong size. The sanctuary was not oriented properly. The traffic pattern in the office complex was unsatisfactory. The architect countered every complaint with survey results: "When we asked you about this, you said, . . ."

During this phase, First Church called a new senior pastor. In the first meeting after his arrival, he summed up what committee members already knew. The church did not need new buildings. Redecorating and minor remodeling would suffice. The committee paid the architect and thanked him for his time. The plans disappeared into a file cabinet, never to be seen again.

What had happened? The committee—and by extension, the whole congregation—had taken action contrary to the data it had for dealing with problems. As a result, problems were compounded rather than solved.² That, in a nutshell, is the Abilene Paradox. No one wanted to be the odd one out who disagreed with the other committee members. Although countless “parking-lot discussions” may have centered on the idea’s wrong-headedness, individual members could not bring themselves to do what they privately agreed must be done. No one wanted to be exposed to humiliation, ostracism, or criticism, so each person concealed his or her feelings from the group. I am reminded of Adam, who said, “I heard the sound of you in the garden, and I was afraid, because I was naked; and I hid myself” (Gen. 3:12).

Resisting a Firm Decision

Some years ago, when I served a congregation in southwestern Oklahoma, we decided we needed an associate pastor. We asked the judicatory for names of prospective ministers and began the search. Oddly, no potential candidate seemed to have the right qualifications. As we winnowed the portfolios, we discovered that every one had some deficiency; some were unqualified for any position. Finding no candidate who met our expectations, we asked the judicatory for more names. Even with two subsequent lists, we couldn’t agree on anyone. Finally, someone in the judicatory office said, “I’m not sure this person is available, but you might try her.”

We were elated. Here was a live one. We telephoned her; she was interested. We did a phone interview and liked what we heard. She agreed to visit us.

After the visit, at which we had met her and her family, we sat down to see if we wanted to negotiate with her. Here was the moment of truth. As the discussion went back and forth, I first thought we were ready to call her. Then reservations began to surface about her family. I pointed out that we were calling her, not hiring her family. More discussion followed. People wondered if she would stay with us only long enough to get a church of her own. I countered that two or three years were better than none.

Finally, it became clear that no one wanted to call an associate. Each had held this opinion for some time, but no one had expressed reservations in the committee. I understood then why it had been so difficult to reach this stage. We didn’t want to get

there. We were desperately looking for a reason not to call an associate. It was too painful to admit that we had neither the money nor the size to support another full-time pastor.

With difficulty, the committee chair confessed our predicament to the candidate. She graciously accepted our decision, but did point out that we had strung her along for quite a while. A few months later, we hired a part-time youth director through a local employment agency. We all agreed that we had done the right thing.

Phony Conflict

Why did we focus on the candidate’s family or her career plans while hiding our agreement not to hire anyone at all? Harvey calls this behavior “phony conflict.”

Phony conflict occurs in the Abilene Paradox because people agree on the actions they want to take and then do the opposite. The resulting anger, frustration, and scapegoating—generally termed conflict—are not based on real differences. Rather they stem from the protective reactions that occur when a decision that no one believed in or was committed to in the first place goes sour. In fact, as a paradox within a paradox, such conflict is symptomatic of agreement.³

I believe that my own strong advocacy for calling an associate made the committee’s job harder. Since no one wanted to disagree with the pastor, each person assumed everyone else was on board. In fact, my response to questions about the candidate’s family or motivations could be seen as bullying. Had the committee failed to discover that the congregation could not afford another professional staff person, we might have continued on the road to Abilene, blaming each other when things did not turn out well.

Blame Game

That, in fact, did happen in a church served by one of my old classmates. The senior pastor lobbied for an associate; the committee found one and recommended him to the congregation. All sorts of reservations were evident, but no one spoke up. Finally, after two or three years of difficulty, in which the associate was judged a “wrong fit” and the senior pastor was characterized as a martinet, members resorted to expressing their frustration and anger in the offering plate. Both senior and associate pastors had to leave. Both were damaged, spiritually and professionally.

What is the alternative to “going to Abilene”? What can leaders and pastors do to avoid this potential disaster? Harvey thinks organizations can do many things; by extension, so can congregations. People must break the cycle of silence and blame that accompany the Abilene Paradox.

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Speaking Truth in Love

The best way is open confrontation—preferably in a group setting.¹ The accuser must tell the truth—speak the truth in love, as we church people are disposed to say. The accuser must own up to his or her position and prepare to take the consequences. This approach lets the group know that the accuser fears the committee is about to make a decision contrary to the church's best interests. One might say something like this:

I know I may have said things before that made you think I was supportive of what we are about to do, but I have had other thoughts. I don't think we will succeed in doing this. In fact, I believe we will be acting against the church's interests if we do it. I wonder if anyone else thinks as I do. Actually, I'm pretty sure most of you do. If we don't do something now, we will recommend a project to the church that is bound to fail, and hurt us in the process. I need to know where you stand.

The accuser can expect two kinds of results—technical and existential. For the accuser, the existential experience seems more important.

At my Oklahoma church, we experienced a technical result. We stopped negotiations with our candidate, regrouped, and hired a part-time youth director. Everyone agreed that our change of direction was warranted, and the passage of time confirmed that.

On the other hand, Sunnyvale Church suffered existentially. Many people felt hurt by the forced retirement of the music director. A sense of failure pervaded the congregation, and people looked for a scapegoat. The church did not resolve anything until members admitted their own complicity.

How does the Abilene Paradox come to church? It comes just as it comes to any other organization. All organizations are made up of human beings, and, as prophets have told us, humanity is prone to act against its own best interests. How is the Abilene Paradox prevented? One does that by recognizing the symptoms, confronting them, and being forthright with each other. Or, as we say in church, by speaking the truth in love. ☪

Notes

1. Jerry B. Harvey, "The Abilene Paradox: The Management of Agreement," *Organizational Dynamics* (summer, 1974). Harvey is professor of management science at George Washington University, Washington, D.C.
2. *Ibid.*, 20.
3. *Ibid.*, 28f.
4. *Ibid.*, 32f.

A Fresh Look at American Clergy

In early February I attended a fascinating meeting of advisors to Duke Divinity School's Pulpit and Pew Project to review some early and provocative research emerging from this massive project. In particular, we focused on the early findings of a new survey of American clergy. Project director Jackson W. Carroll's preliminary report from this survey, called "America's Pastoral Leaders," is a short document that is but an appetizer for what is to follow.¹

Although this survey is not the largest ever conducted, it is the most comprehensive, sampling ministers from more than 80 denominations and religious traditions. The survey proportionally weighted the numbers of clergy serving in small, medium, and large churches, as well as megachurches. They represented the regional mix of American congregations.

Surprising Discoveries

It will take years to analyze all the data, but even these preliminary findings merit attention. Here is a sampler of some of the surprising discoveries:

❖ American clergy report themselves to be surprisingly happy in their work. At the same time, they report significant concerns about denominational support, salary and benefits, opportunities for continuing education, their own spiritual lives, and their overall effectiveness.

❖ Carroll's findings about clergy happiness go against the grain of many contemporary portraits of clergy malaise: 74 percent of the carefully selected respondents said that they were "very satisfied" in their current positions. More than two-thirds felt "loved and cared for." They reported only moderate levels of stress.

I know that many readers will find these results astonishing. Some will wonder about the adequacy of the survey itself. Others will read these statements as signs of denial about just how bad things are. More, I hope, will want to see what more detailed analysis will bring. But for now we must take seriously that despite significant challenges, a strong majority of American clergy find themselves leading a good life.

Some findings fine-tune conventional wisdom, and others challenge it. The survey reveals that 71 percent of those interviewed held another occupation before entering the ministry. To those who have sensed that the day was coming when second-career clergy would become the majority, these data indicate that

the era has clearly arrived. Eighty percent of clergywomen are second career.

Significant differences are seen in academic preparation for ministry between Catholics and mainline Protestants on the one hand (69 percent of the former and 68 percent of the latter have master or bachelor of divinity degrees), and conservative Protestants and historic black Protestants on the other (32 and 42 percent have these degrees, respectively).

Daily Realities

The survey also probes the daily reality of clergy. Mainline and conservative Protestants report workweeks that average 51 hours. Roman Catholic priests and pastors of historic black churches report a workweek of roughly 10 hours longer. The majority of these clergy experience congregational conflict, and 21 percent consider the conflict significant or major.

The report shows us what congregations fight about. The issue most fought over is the renovation or new construction of church buildings. Conflicts over leadership, staff, worship, and finance come next on the list. Homosexuality, which consumes much energy and attention at the national denominational level, was reported as a cause of conflict in less than 1 percent of responses.

Another piece of conventional wisdom challenged has to do with clergy friendships. Once, many clergy believed that they should not become friends with parishioners. Here, we read that 60 percent value friendships with congregation members very highly.

Realities about clergy compensation come into view as well. The median compensation package for all Protestant clergy (including housing allowance or parsonage) is \$35,852; for those who are full-time clergy, it is \$40,000. Average total income for American clergy families comes to \$52,200. Within those aver-

continued on page 35



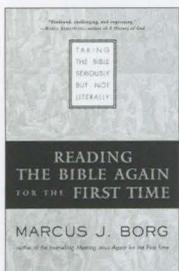
Rev. Dr. James P. Wind is the president of the Alban Institute. Prior to joining the Institute in 1995, he served as program director at the Lilly Endowment's religion division. Dr. Wind is the author of three books and numerous articles, including the new Alban Institute Special Report on Leadership.

BOOK REVIEW

Reading the Bible Again for the First Time

TAKING THE BIBLE SERIOUSLY BUT NOT LITERALLY

Marcus J. Borg
HarperSanFrancisco, 2001



In his latest work, New Testament scholar and Jesus Seminar member Marcus J. Borg has taken on one of the conflicts raging among Christians in congregations throughout North America: How shall we read, understand, and use the Bible? He identifies the conflict as pitting a fundamentalist-conservative “literal-factual” reading against a moderate-liberal “historical-metaphorical” approach. As a biblical scholar and churchman, Borg is convinced that the older, literalist way no longer persuades great masses of people, and favors the latter view. Although reared in a very conservative Lutheran milieu, he now calls the Episcopal Church his home and describes himself as “a nonliteralistic and nonexclusivistic Christian, committed to living life with God within the Christian tradition . . . [to affirming] the validity of all the enduring religious traditions” (p. x).

Borg has in mind a popular audience in this clearly written book and takes pains to lay out the need for “new lenses” (p. 3) for a postmodern reading of Scripture. Postmodernity moves us “beyond fact fundamentalism to a realization that stories can be true without being

literally and factually true” (p. 17). The Bible thus becomes strictly a human response to God—the ways in which Israel and early Christianity perceived and experienced God—not any special disclosure from God.

In three major divisions Borg lays out the implications of his point of view. The first lays the “Foundation,” which spells out what “historical-metaphorical” and “truth beyond fact” mean. In the second, he offers a tour of the Hebrew Bible, using his special lenses to reveal vistas not accessible to literalism. The last third of the book visits the Gospels, Paul, and Revelation, and reaches conclusions some readers will welcome. Others will doubtless feel Borg has jettisoned too much on his flight into the metaphorical.

Using this book with a group of adults in the church will introduce one strand of current biblical scholarship battles, provoke lively discussion, and force participants to grapple for themselves with the Bible in a fresh way. Borg challenges theological assumptions and traditions all over the place in his re-visioning of Scripture, but whether millions presently put off by literalism will follow his lead remains to be seen. And the eighty percent of Americans who profess belief in angels may wonder what Borg is fussing about.

Dr. Joseph I. Mortensen

American Baptist Churches of Michigan
Midland, Michigan

BOOK REVIEW

Ten Dumb Things Churches Do and How to Avoid Them

Philip Wiehe
Harrisburg, Pa.: Morehouse Publishing, 2001

Although Wiehe’s book comes with a colorful comic book-style cover, the inside is full of useful anecdotes of the mistakes churches create. The “dumb things that churches do”—of which the book lists ten—are not problems striking from the outside, but created from within the best of intentions.

The “dumb things” churches do include acting out of fear, engaging in poor planning, failing to recognize identities, and mishandling times of transition. Wiehe takes us carefully through each fault and at the end of the chapter advises how these errors might be avoided.



Any church or church group could read Wiehe’s book with profit, but clearly the book will be of greatest benefit to a church and search committee early in their transition. The chapters on pastoral transitions, resources, and worship are particularly useful, as Wiehe regularly reminds the local church not to try to be what it is not. Instead, look at who the local church is—its identity—and then match a worship style, resources, and plan to it. Only then, Wiehe urges, act.

One weakness of Wiehe’s book may be in its very cornerstone: the chapter on identity, which leaves the reader wanting more. Books like Hopewell’s *Congregation, Story and Structure* have done wonderful things for church identity, just as books

like *The Logic of Failure* and *Seeing Like a State* have illuminated the dangerous self-deception that can lurk in planning and in vision statement creation. By comparison, Wiehe's book falls short—unfortunately, since a bibliography of further readings would have easily offset the flaw.

Nonetheless, Wiehe has given us an insightful book that is especially useful to any church in clergy transition or considering transition. A local church and its leadership could take a shortcut to wisdom and better self-understanding through the brief pages of Wiehe's book.

Rev. Dr. Jeffrey L. Bullock

St. Barnabas on the Desert Episcopal Church
Scottsdale, Arizona

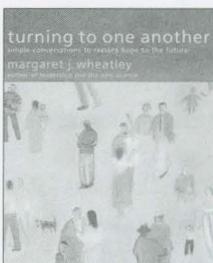
BOOK REVIEW

Turning to One Another

SIMPLE CONVERSATIONS TO RESTORE HOPE TO THE FUTURE

Margaret J. Wheatley

San Francisco: Berrett-Koehler, 2002



The events of September 11 have renewed interest in the concept of dialogue—cross-cultural dialogue, interfaith dialogue, dialogue across political, racial, and economic lines. Since last fall, even my local clergy group has expanded its membership to foster such dialogue. Muslim chaplains and Christian Science practitioners have joined the garden-variety Protestant, Catholic, and Jewish clergy and chaplains who already composed the group. If we get to know each other—our thinking goes—if we can talk more with each other, then perhaps we can find new ways to live and work together.

This same thinking undergirds Margaret J. Wheatley's new book. Appearing so soon after the events of September 11, its message is serendipitous. "I believe we can change the world if we start listening to one another again," she begins. "Simple, honest, human conversation. Not mediation, negotiation, problem-solving, debate or public meetings. Simple, truthful conversation, where we each have a chance to speak, we each feel heard, and we each listen well" (p. 3).

Easier said than done, perhaps, but Wheatley offers some starting places where such conversations might begin.

The first half of the book describes what good conversation is, what conditions—including simple listening—can foster this deep communication. The second half of the book leads from theory to praxis, offering 10 questions to launch serious conversations, beginning with "Do I feel a vocation to be fully human?" and ending with "When do I experience sacred?" Essays, poems, and quotations provide jumping-off places to start talking about the feelings and beliefs these questions expose.

Wheatley's simple conversations could open doors for people in many kinds of relationships. Couples preparing for marriage might want to spend several evenings working through her questions. Vestries and other governing bodies could use Wheatley's conversations to uncover their common goals and their shared visions. Even fractious denominations—on the ropes over homosexual ordinations or the authority of bishops—might find new unity of purpose by simply sitting down and talking to each other about things that really matter.

As Wheatley observes, "There is no power greater than a community discovering what it really cares about. Trust that meaningful conversations can change your world" (p. 145).

Rev. Kit Carlson

Church of the Ascension
Gaithersburg, Maryland

BOOK REVIEW

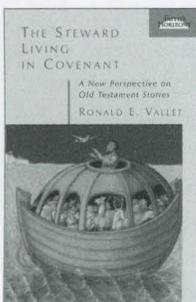
The Steward Living in Covenant

A NEW PERSPECTIVE ON
OLD TESTAMENT STORIES

Ronald E. Vallet

Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 2001

"The Christian church, as a covenant community," says Ronald E. Vallet in *The Steward Living in Covenant*, "may legitimately use the Old Testament as a basis



for understanding Yahweh and what it means to live as a steward in covenant with God" (p. 223). That's the premise for Vallet's book, and he does a good job supporting that premise.

Vallet, an American Baptist minister, is the general editor of Eerdmans' "Faith's Horizons" series, of which this book is the sixth. It is a companion volume to Vallet's earlier *Stepping Stones of the Steward*.

Everyone agrees that Christian stewardship should be biblically based, but Vallet thinks that in many churches that

biblical base is too narrow. He seeks to expand that biblical base by introducing (or reintroducing) the theme of covenant as it applies to Christian stewardship. "One of the principal ways that the church can be renewed and reformed is to remember and to live out the reality that the church is a steward of the gospel in covenant with God," says Vallet (p. 7). To expand our understanding of covenant, he uses the Old Testament stories of Abraham, Sarah, Isaac, Joseph, Moses, David, Ezekiel, and others. "These are stories of great characters, gifted and flawed but all important not for their individuality alone, but for their commitment and their roles as members of God's people in the world," says Wesley Theological Seminary's Bruce Birch in the foreword (p. 8).

The book is divided into six sections: "Creation and Its Aftermath," "Ancestors in the Faith," "From Slavery to Freedom and Wilderness," "The Failings of Royalty," "The Prophets and a New Covenant," and "Implications for the Christian Church." Each chapter in the sections explores a biblical story in detail. Joseph's story is one example: using it to illustrate mixed motives in stewardship (such as stewardship of a career instead of stewardship of the household of God), Vallet reminds us that we need to pay

attention to our motives, lest our stewardship to something other than God, no matter how seemingly altruistic, leads us into enslavement. It's an interesting and thoughtful thesis. Most of us, as Vallet notes, ignore this "dark side" of Joseph's story, seeing only the joyous family reconciliation and salvation from starvation. Vallet's honesty, maintained throughout his chapters, reminds us of the humanity of the Bible's "heroes." It's wise of Vallet to end his chapters with "questions and suggestions for individual or group reflection and action." In the case of Joseph's story, those questions and suggestions help us to consider in what ways Joseph was a good or bad steward and to think about the limitations of our own good intentions.

"Little more than lip service," says Vallet, "is given to the reality that our gifts as Christian stewards are to God, not primarily to an institution or its budget" (p. 70). His book opens our eyes to that oft-missed reality by reminding us of the covenantal nature of our faith. It calls us to remember that our covenant with God is one of both promise and participation.

J. Brent Bill

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Wind

continued from page 31

ages one finds considerable difference when congregational size is considered.

The data contain contradictions as well. The vast majority of clergy assess their health to be good, very good, or excellent. Yet data from a body-mass index indicate that 78 percent of males and 52 percent of females are either overweight or obese.

I cannot imagine anyone reading this first sampler of data without finding something provocative to argue about. Great! We have been operating with clichés and conventional wisdom about ministry for far too long. Carroll and his team have a lot of explaining to do as they roll out their reports. We will agree and disagree with their findings. But as we debate them, we will come closer to a fresh reading of our situation. Stay tuned.

Note

1. The Alban Institute has been invited to help Duke Divinity School publish many of the Pulpit and Pew Project's most significant findings. CONGREGATIONS and our Web site will report on some of the study results.

Learn More

RESOURCES ON SELF-CARE FROM THE CONGREGATIONAL RESOURCE GUIDE



❖ Bass, Dorothy C. **Receiving the Day: Christian Practices for Opening the Gift of Time.** (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2000). For busy people who see time as an adversary to be managed, this book provides a fresh vision of time as a gift from God, waiting to be unwrapped and savored with true presence and delight.

❖ Bullock, Richard A., and Richard J. Bruesehoff. **Clergy Renewal: The Alban Guide to Sabbatical Planning.** (Bethesda, Md.: The Alban Institute, 2000). Planned time away from the congregation for study, rest, and spiritual renewal can be beneficial for any pastor, as well as for the congregation.

❖ Jones, Kirk Byron. **Rest in the Storm: Self-Care Strategies for Clergy and Other Caregivers.** (Valley Forge, Pa.: Judson Press, 2001). This personal book looks at the ways clergy contribute to the stress and over-commitment that adversely affect their lives and offers practical advice on setting a pace that is sustainable.

❖ Oswald, Roy M. **Clergy Self-Care: Finding a Balance for Effective Ministry.** (Bethesda, Md.: The Alban Institute, 1991). This classic book on clergy self-care provides a number of strategies for dealing with the stresses of clergy life.

❖ Paulsell, Stephanie. **Honoring the Body: Meditations on a Christian Practice.** (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2002). Paulsell discusses practices—bathing, clothing, exerting and resting, and many others—that bring us into good relation with our bodies, thus allowing us to live fuller, less conflicted lives.

❖ Rediger, G. Lloyd. **Fit to Be a Pastor: A Call to Physical, Mental, and Spiritual Fitness.** (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2000). “Fitness is good stewardship,” argues Rediger in this sometimes technical overview of lifestyle adjustments that will help clergy function more effectively.

❖ Weems, Renita. **Listening for God: A Minister's Journey Through Silence and Doubt.** (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1999). “Just as there are seasons of the years, there are seasons of the soul,” writes Weems in this powerful memoir of a time when she could not feel God's presence and how she sustained her ministry during this dark time.

❖ Wimberly, Edward P. **Recalling Our Own Stories: Spiritual Renewal for Religious Caregivers.** (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1997). By “reauthoring” the “mythology” (unresolved personal problems or uncompleted developmental tasks) from their personal, family, and ministerial lives, clergy can become more effective.

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Managing Stress for Effective Ministry

Q

With all our programs and activities, my church seems to be under too much stress much of the time. What can I do to relieve the stress?

A

Congregational stress, like the personal and professional varieties, can both help and harm. Too little stress often means a congregation is not experimenting, taking risks, or exercising its creative potential. A congregation under too much stress is overwhelmed and irritable; over time it can become demoralized and unhealthy. The result in either case is diminished effectiveness in ministry.

Clearly the key is keeping the creative pressure high enough to maintain the healthy stress needed for effective ministry, while managing the stress to prevent it from leading to despair and burnout. You might consider these related ideas:

1. Manage expectations. Congregational stress gets out of hand when expectations are allowed to run wild. For example, I have worked with congregations as they conduct annual stewardship or capital fund campaigns. One of the major challenges in any campaign is determining how high to set the monetary goal. Congregations generally tend to set financial goals either ridiculously high or pitifully low. When the goal is too high, the congregation may experience marvelous increases in giving but end up feeling stressed because the campaign didn't meet expectations.

As congregational leaders, we need to strive for nothing less than excellence in ministry. Moreover, congregations are called upon by their spiritual mission and by their place in society to address the full range of human need and to witness for justice and peace. These are lofty expectations. But expecting too much of a congregation is as harmful as expecting too little. As you plan for excellence, surface as best you can the expectations and hoped-for outcomes—and take the time and care to ask where these expectations fit on a spectrum of manageability. Managing expectations is like adjusting a thermostat. Trust how you are feeling: if the spiritual temperature and stress are too high, try turning down the expectations; if they are too cool, turn them up!

2. Slow down by speeding up. In the spirit of 1 Corinthians 12, let me offer an analogy of the human body to congregational life. I've learned much about managing stress from my son, who has attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), which is characterized by impulsiveness, lack of focus, trouble completing tasks, and difficulty with organizational skills. (Sound like any congregation you know?) As you may know, ADHD is treated

with drugs like Ritalin. Conventional wisdom would suggest that the drug would chemically slow the body down. In fact, the opposite happens. ADHD is caused by a lack of activity in the part of the brain that controls focus, attention, and purposive action. So the prescription is not to slow the system but to stimulate the part of the body that controls attention. A drug like Ritalin, a stimulant, changes hyperactive behavior by speeding up the underactive "controlling" part of the brain, not by slowing down the body.

I believe a similar principle holds for congregations under stress from hyperactive program schedules. As with ADHD, the remedy is not necessarily to slow down on programming. Rather, overstressed congregations may need stimulation in the part of the system that controls purposeful action, focus, and attention. In other words, such congregations probably have an understimulated governing board or leadership team whose task it is to envision ministries, set priorities, and focus congregational attention on ministry. While there's no such thing as Ritalin for churches, stimulation comes from many sources: working harder at spiritual discernment, developing processes that clarify a sense of mission and purpose, and responding to the fresh winds of the Spirit. A stimulated (and stimulating) team of leaders that "controls" a congregation's sense of purpose helps reduce stress by focusing congregational energy, activity, and priorities.

You asked about "relieving" the stress (and others speak of reducing it). But as you can see, I view congregational stress as a useful part of effective ministry. Some stresses of ministry cannot be relieved. Churches near "Ground Zero" in New York have had no choice, for instance, about the stresses they have faced since September 11, 2001. But congregations under stress are sharing in the redemptive work of God in the world. Remember: you are not alone. Inviting God into our stress is the best advice of all.



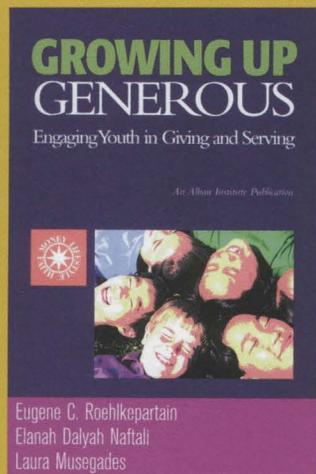
Rev. Dr. John R. Wimmer is the director of the Indianapolis Center for Congregations. He is an ordained United Methodist pastor with 15 years of experience as a parish minister in Indiana and North Carolina. Dr. Wimmer also has served as a teacher, writer, and church consultant working in the areas of finance, stewardship, and capital fund development.

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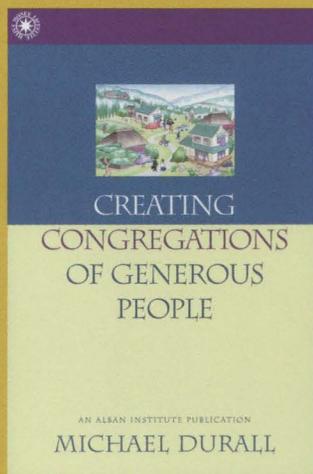


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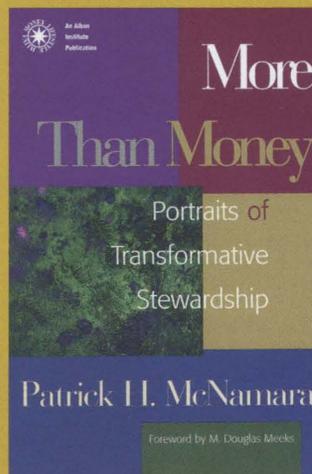
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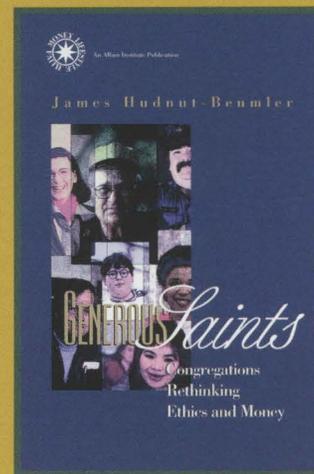
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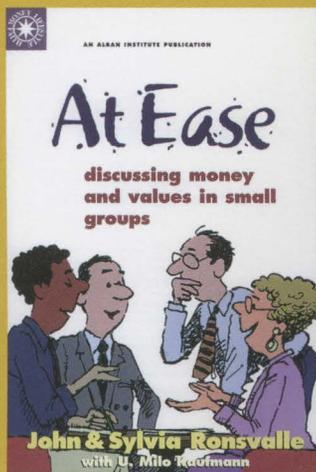
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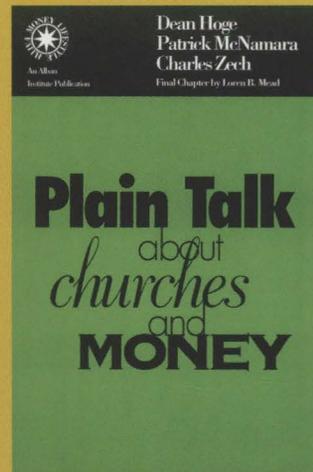
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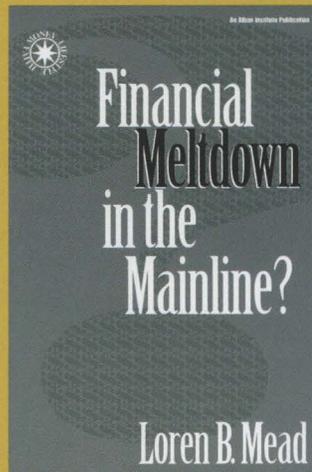
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