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Dissertation Abstract

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Abstract

Clergy Health and Congregational Wellness: A Partnership for Wellbeing

Drawing from studies conducted by a number of denominations and theological institutions and from books and articles gathered from the Alban Institute, the Davidson Clergy Center, and the Pulpit and Pew Project of Duke Divinity School, as well as from many other resources, this study highlights the current state of clergy physical, emotional, and spiritual health. The statistics indicate a rise in clergy ill health and in the number of pastors leaving their profession in the last 20 years that is startling. Many of the statistics cite such factors as chronic church conflict, mismatch of pastors and congregations, unreasonable expectations of the pastor, low clergy income, in-fighting in unhealthy congregations, poor support for clergy spouses and children, etc. as contributing to the ill health and dissatisfaction of clergy. From the statistics gathered, it is clear that many pastors are leaving their ministry positions each month. Even more research needs to be conducted in this area in order to accurately determine the number of ministers leaving the ministry.

George Jacobs, Director of the Davidson Clergy Center, an ecumenical renewal center for clergy in North Carolina, estimates that the equivalent of an entire seminary class is leaving their churches every day. Many ministers have been thrust into a CEO type role like a business corporation, for which the pastor isn't trained or equipped. The study suggests that a number of pastors have functioned upon an unhealthy, even idolatrous pedestal which is unrealistic and has harmed their physical, emotional, and spiritual health and has not furthered the health and spiritual growth of their congregations. The increased and unrealistic expectations of the pastor, the changing nature of ministry, and doctrinal battles have caused heightened stress and burnout among clergy. The study documents the fact that clergy burnout has reached a crisis point.

It is the thesis of this dissertation that healthy, thriving pastors who lead balanced lives make for healthy, thriving and faithful congregations and vice versa. Conversely, unhealthy congregations can contribute to the unhealth of their pastor and unhealthy pastors can harm a healthy church family. From a family systems perspective, the health of the pastor and the health of the congregation directly affect and influence one another. The study also indicates that the church (the congregational family) functions more like a family than any other institution.

In the midst of the troubling statistics regarding clergy health and retention, rather than focus upon a traditional disease or pathology model, the dissertation proposes a new ministry framework from a positive wellness and partnership approach. Drawing from family systems researchers and therapists from the last 25 years, the dissertation sets forth a behavioral theology of wellness. The behavioral qualities (strengths) of optimal family, group, and organizational well-being are defined. Seventeen strengths (characteristics) of optimal family functioning are presented in the following overall categories: Faith-Commitment; Communication-Openness; Affirmation-Appreciation; Time Together-Cohesion; Time Apart-Autonomy; Service-Valuing Others; Resiliency-Adaptability.

Next, the dissertation asks the overall question, “What does clergy and congregational wellness look like in a wholistic systemic understanding?” “Wellness Behavioral Covenants” for the pastor, congregational leaders, and members are presented. Of particular interest is a Wellness Covenant for congregations that is presented as a helpful tool for use when dealing with and working through conflict. A comprehensive behavioral wellness vision for pastors, congregational leaders, and members is set forth in the areas of, Spirituality-Being; Stewardship-Doing (physical health, emotional health, time management, leadership, financial resources); and Partnership Mutual Care – New Knowing.

The dissertation is also grounded in a shared partnership design – the pastor and the congregation sharing ministry together in mutual partnership. A new operational structure for the church is envisioned to promote the health of the pastor and congregation as they function together. It is called a Mutual Support Team (MST), and important advisory committee selected by the pastor and approved by the governing board of the congregation. The purpose of the MST is to monitor, nurture, and protect a positive and healthy congregational culture, ensuring that congregational conflict can be successfully worked through with positive and healthy long-term results. The MST communicates the shared ideas, hopes, dreams, expectations, and concerns of the congregation to the pastor and also interprets the roles, functions, dreams, and needs of the pastor to the congregation.

In the concluding chapter, the dissertation highlights and discusses the issues of optimal clergy self-care as well as the issues of strong congregational wellness. The study argues that the approach, “Here is what the pastor needs to be healthy and effective, and here is what the congregation needs to do in order to be strong and resilient,” has not fully addressed the concept that pastors and congregations do not operate independently of one another. Indeed, isolating and treating separately the health dynamics of each has led to a distorted understanding. The pastor and congregation function in an interactive manner, influencing one another toward greater or lesser health and wellbeing. The church will benefit from learning to understand the systemic nature of this relationship and how such understanding can promote the health of both the pastor and the congregation.

Finally, the study suggests that the pastor, in a balanced way, needs to recover his/her priestly role as the spiritual leader of the flock. The pastor is not called to be the super-human, over-functioning leader who abuses his/her physical, emotional, and spiritual health for the sake

of the congregation. Rather, the pastor's call is to be fully human – sharing his/her calling and talents, and strengths and weaknesses in a realistic and healthy manner. In so doing, the pastor models and encourages the congregational leaders and members to do the same.

Seekers and members are looking for a community of faith where conflict can be worked through and learned from, and where the tradition of the pastoral office is appreciated, honored and respected. In such a climate of intentional and graceful visioning (as the Apostle Paul describes in Philippians Chapter 4) where both the pastor and congregational family are positively supported, the whole congregational body has an opportunity to experience a taste of the beloved community. For wellness is more than the absence of disease. When positive harmony and wellness thinking happen, the whole body flourishes. Wellbeing in the whole community moves toward the Old Testament ideal of *shalom* itself.

Personal Biography

William E. Christian (Bill) was born August 6, 1949, in Jacksonville, Florida. He graduated from Samuel W. Wolfson High School in 1967. He attended Hampden-Sydney College, a small Presbyterian liberal arts college in Hampden-Sydney, Virginia from 1967 -1971. In May, 1971, he graduated with a Bachelor of Arts degree, majoring in History and Political Science.

In August, 1971, he married Melinda Loftis. They have been married for 36 years and have two grown sons, William Jackson Christian, age 29, who graduated from the College of William and Mary, and Warren Edmund Christian, age 25, who graduated from Davidson College. Melinda is currently serving as a public school science teacher in Asheville, NC.

From the fall of 1971 through the spring of 1975, Bill pursued a Doctor of Ministry degree from Union Theological Seminary in Virginia. During his theological education, he focused primarily on pastoral care and counseling and was influenced by his professor, Dr. William B. Oglesby, Jr., Professor of Pastoral Counseling at Union. In May, 1975, he graduated with a Doctor of Ministry degree. In May, 1976, under Dr. Oglesby's mentorship, he completed a Master of Theology Degree from Union in pastoral counseling and graduated with Honors.

Bill completed a 1½ year residency in Clinical Pastoral Education as a resident chaplain at the Medical College of Virginia (VCU) in 1977-1978. From 1978 to 1980, he completed a post-doctoral residency in pastoral counseling at the Virginia Institute of Pastoral Care (VICare) and was awarded a certificate in 1980. Also in 1980, he became a certified Member of the American Association of Pastoral Counselors (AAPC).

From 1980 to 1994, he was the founding Executive Director of the Volunteer Emergency Families for Children (VEFC) non-profit ministry in Virginia. VEFC served children-in-crisis who were abused, neglected, or had run away through a network of completely volunteer, state-approved foster care families, recruited by the religious community. During this tenure at VEFC, Bill continued serving as a pastoral counselor and in 1998 he was certified as a Fellow in AAPC.

In 1994, he entered the Ph.D. program in Education at VCU in Richmond, and completed all but his dissertation there.

In 1997, Bill began serving as an intentional Interim Specialist Pastor of the Presbyterian Church, USA. He addressed his work from a family systems perspective, viewing the entire congregation as a congregational family. In the last 10 years, he has served 12 different churches of 75-750 members as Interim Pastor in Virginia, North Carolina, and South Carolina. He presently is the Interim Pastor of the Conover Presbyterian New Church Development and is also the founding co-director of the Black Mountain Pastoral Care and Counseling Center. In June 2006, he passed the written and oral exams and became licensed as a fee-based practicing pastoral counselor in North Carolina. He has specialized recently in clergy and congregational health and wellness issues which is reflected in his just completed dissertation: Clergy Health and Congregational Wellness: A Partnership for Wellbeing.

In memory of

Dr. William B. Oglesby, Jr.

Professor of Pastoral Counseling
Union Theological Seminary in Virginia

who taught me and so many others a relational
theology of grace and acceptance.

In honor of

Glenn Q. Bannerman

Professor Emeritus of Recreation
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who taught me and continues to teach so many others
the importance of playful rejoicing
in spiritual formation

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for inspiring me to take on this study
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A Partnership for Wellbeing**

A Dissertation

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**Ordinarius: The Rev. Dr. Robert W. Herron, Ph.D.
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Introduction

In my work as a family systems pastoral counselor and minister, over the years, I have heard a number of stories of pastors being strongly encouraged or forced to leave their position by a small yet powerful faction of the congregation. Often this group may be as few as two to ten members. Having served on a number of denominational committees which oversee and support the work of the minister, in the last ten years I have begun to hear more and more stories of pastors and congregations who were experiencing heightened conflict which has resulted in the pastor's leaving. I have become alarmed by the frequency of these stories. Much of my impetus to conduct this study arose by the number of ministers I know who have burned out of doing professional ministry and/or been asked to leave a conflicted ministry situation. These troubling stories have caused me to re-think how ministry is done; namely how can pastors and congregations develop a more positive, trusting relationship which leads to strong, sustaining, and healthy congregational ministry and growth. From my perspective, many pastors need more emotional and spiritual support and nurture from their congregational leaders and members.

Here is one story which I have heard too many times throughout my professional ministry.

John and his wife, Harriet, and their two middle school children arrive in their new town and move into their new house four miles from the church. The church, a Protestant congregation, has been losing members for over twenty years; at one time the congregation was 800 members, but now it has a membership of less than 400. The search committee wined and dined John and his family; encouraged him to come, complimenting him on his sermon delivery and worship leadership. The search committee liked that he wanted to help the church grow and to reach back into the community to get more young families and their children involved. John

is a “Type A” personality and had served two other congregations successfully, helping each of them grow significantly. He felt a call to serve this church and liked the challenge of re-developing this congregation.

John worked very hard getting to know and visit all of the families in the congregation and enjoyed a seven or eight month honeymoon. He felt there was something missing in his attempt to bond with the leaders of the congregation. He felt that he was often compared to the last pastor who was well liked, but stayed less than four years.

During his second year, John felt like he began to run into what he called “passive resistance.” Governing board members would appear supportive, and go along with his suggestions, but they seemed to hold back their thoughts and ideas. When he encouraged the Board to share their ideas, they would not say much. A few began to voice some displeasure with his sermons – they were too long and not entertaining enough. At the end of his second year, the personnel committee chair didn’t follow through with his performance evaluation, saying that it could be done every other year. John voiced his concern, but acquiesced to this time table.

John chalked this passive resistance up to grieving the former pastor and sought to keep his composure and his chin up through it all. He had learned through several pastoral leadership workshops the importance of seeking to maintain a “non-anxious” presence. He would come home and complain to Harriet, who also felt like something was missing in their relationship to the leaders of the congregation. It was stressful for both of them and caused them some sleepless nights, but they tried not to worry too much about their increasing concerns.

During his third year, John noticed that a few of the congregational leaders began missing worship frequently and would go out of their way not to even speak to him or his wife. One

member of the search committee who was very close to the former pastor began worshipping at a neighboring congregation of another denomination.

John confided with one Governing Board leader about these members' silence and resistance, and was told not to worry about it, saying, "You can't please everyone, don't let it bother you." Having not experienced this kind of strong passive resistance before and feeling somewhat confused and embarrassed by it, John didn't share these concerns with fellow ministers or with his denominational leaders.

At the next Governing Board meeting, the Governing Board members who had distanced themselves from the pastor and had been less active in the church the previous several months, presented John with a long list of grievances and asked him to submit his resignation. John was shocked! The Governing Board leaders stated they spoke for about 50% of the congregation who were not happy with his leadership, his preaching style – he just wasn't a "fit for this congregation."

John asked for a special meeting to deal with the grievances. John saw the two disgruntled leaders huddled in the parking lot for over an hour before the special meeting. The conflict only became more enflamed at the special meeting. John called his denominational representative who took the attitude, "welcome to the ministry; you've met your Waterloo, but you can make it through this tough spot." He felt unsupported by this denominational leader who did not have much training in conflict management resolution. John felt he was left pretty much on his own. Defensively, he touted all of the progress the congregation had made during his three year tenure – new young families, more youth, a larger fellowship hall, etc.

For the next several weeks, the congregation was filled with tension during worship. It seemed the congregation was becoming polarized; about 50% wanting John and Harriet to stay

and 50% wanting them to leave. Harriet encouraged John to resign, saying ministry wasn't worth being treated this way. At the next Governing Board meeting, John resigned; he didn't want to hurt the congregation or have the church split. He received a two month severance package. Years later, he and his wife still did not understand why these two powerful Governing Board leaders were so negative about his ministerial leadership and style. They continued to be baffled about how these two long term patriarchs of the church had such a powerful influence over so many in the congregation.

John left the professional ministry. He was labeled as a minister who just couldn't handle parish ministry. John became depressed. He and his wife entered into professional and vocational counseling and decided to change careers. He went back to graduate school and obtained a Masters in Business Administration. Today he is a successful corporate Human Resources Consultant, helping businesses update and transform themselves in the digital information age. As a result of the pain and anguish which the congregation went through, for the first time in their 60 year history, the congregation hired a professional church assessment leader who guided them through a 9 month intensive congregational history and self-study. They discovered that out of the seven ministers who had been called to their church, a congregational pattern of a "beloved pastorate" followed by a "difficult pastorate" had repeated itself three different times.

Unfortunately, while the specifics may change here and there, this story is played out in church after church every month – harming dedicated pastors, their families, and the congregations and their witness for years to come. As the body of Christ, the people of God are called to a more healthy life-giving approach to ministry – this approach I am suggesting is a wellness partnership model from a systems (wholistic) perspective.

Thesis – Healthy, Thriving Pastors Make for Healthy, Thriving Congregations and Vice Versa

Each pastor, congregational leader and member has the ability to create healthier, more beneficial physical, mental, and spiritual responses to life's challenges. This study will set forth a more positive and healthier vision than this current "dis-ease" that is affecting a number of pastors and congregations in the unsettled and the rapidly changing culture of 21st century ministry.

It is the thesis of this dissertation that healthy thriving pastors who lead balanced lives make for healthy, thriving and faithful congregations and vice versa. Conversely, unhealthy congregations can actually contribute to the unhealth of their pastor (pastors), and unhealthy pastors can harm a healthy church family. In a systemic manner, the health of the pastor and the health of the congregation directly affect and influence one another.

This study will address from a behavioral perspective, group or family characteristics that systemically promote health and well-being on the part of the pastor and the congregational family. It is further hypothesized that as the health of either the pastor or the congregational family is improved, the wellbeing of both will be improved and their witness in the world will be enhanced.

Paul, in his letter to the church at Philippi, set forth a positive vision for pastors and congregations seeking wholeness and wellness.

So if there is any encouragement in Christ, any incentive of love, and participation in the Spirit, any affection and sympathy, complete my joy by being of the same mind, having the same love, being in full accord. Do nothing from selfishness or conceit, but in humility count others better than

yourselves. Let each of you look not only to his/her own interests, but also to the interests of others. Philippians 2:1-4

With Paul's vision of the church as a goal, it is important to first take a realistic look at the current state of clergy and congregational health.

Clergy Health and Burnout

These are difficult and demanding days for those who serve as pastors and ministry professionals. Peter Drucker, the late leadership guru, said, “the four hardest jobs in America (and not necessarily in order, he added) are the president of the United States, a university president, a CEO of a hospital and...a pastor/minister.”¹

Startling Statistics

Clergy in large numbers are facing the advanced stages of burnout, moderate to severe depression, high incidence of heart disease and heart attack, obesity, and in general despair.

The Lutheran Church – Missouri Synod (LCMS) commissioned a study to assess clergy health by Alan & Cheryl Klass. Between 1988 and 1997, 1,305 clergy were surveyed. 20% of the clergy were found to be well on their way to burn-out and another 20% were in advanced stages of burn-out.²

When asked the question, “What is it like being a parish pastor these days?” two-thirds of the responses were negative. The pastors elaborated the following problems:

- church conflict – people beating on each other
- mismatch of pastors and congregations
- the difficulty getting help to pastors
- poor support for clergy spouses and children
- low clergy income
- grossly unreasonable expectations of pastors
- infighting in sick congregations
- congregations where a few members dominated the vast majority.³

The Fuller Institute of Church Growth conducted a survey in 1991 of 1,000 US pastors and the findings were also troubling:

- 80% of pastors believe their pastoral ministry has negatively affected their families
- 75% reported a significant stress-related crisis at least once in their ministry
- 50% felt they were unable to meet the demands of the job
- 90% felt inadequately trained to cope with ministry demands
- 70% have a lower self-image than when they began their professions.
- 50% had considered leaving the ministry within three months prior to completing the survey.⁴

It is obvious that clergy today have higher demands and less physical, emotional, and spiritual support. Clergy salaries have not kept pace with other professions and the pastoral position is not as respected as it once was.

Rev. Terry Swicegood, in a lecture quoted in the recent book, God's Potters, by Jackson Carroll, "Mamma, Don't Let You Babies Grow Up to be Preachers," sums up the problem.

There's a growing crisis in the church, which robs our churches of good pastoral leadership and brings pain and hurt upon pastors and pastors' families... Conflicts in congregations between parishioners and clergy are increasing because of the changing nature of the church and because the churches are embracing cultural values rather than biblical ones. Pastoring has become a profession that extracts so much that it is nearly inhumane to expect the person to consistently manage all of the multiple and conflicting expectations.⁵

John Sanford, in his book, Ministry Burnout: A Special Problem, published in 1994, highlights several other key factors in lowering ministers' morale and leading to depression and

burnout. Unlike many professions such as an engineer or a mechanic, a minister faces a continuous onslaught of services, weddings, funerals, parish conflicts, sick persons to see, shut-ins to see, classes to teach, and administrative tasks to perform. The job of ministering is never finished.⁶

Sanford also highlights the following:

1) The minister cannot always see results from his/her work and know if his/her work is having results.

2) The work of the minister is repetitive.

3) The minister is constantly dealing with people's expectations.

4) The ministering person must work with the same people year in and year out.

5) The minister is continually working with people in great need and this is draining.

6) The minister must function a great deal of the time with his persona (his mask).

7) The minister may become exhausted by the failure of his/her program initiatives.⁷

The statistics gathered from other religious and denominational sources are also troubling. Pastor Mark Driscoll, in his 2006 article, shares these statistics:

- Fifteen hundred pastors leave the ministry each month due to spiritual burnout, contention, or moral failure in their churches.
- Eighty percent of pastors and eighty-four percent of their spouses feel unqualified and discouraged in their role as pastors.
- Fifty percent of pastors are so discouraged that they would leave the ministry if they could, but have no other way of making a living.
- Eighty percent of seminary and Bible school graduates who enter the ministry will leave the ministry within the first five years.

- Seventy percent of pastors constantly fight depression.⁸

George Thompson, Seminary Professor at Interdenominational Seminary in Atlanta and author of the new book published in 2006, How to Get Along with Your Pastor, states there are now 1300 ministers per month who involuntarily are forced to leave their churches each month.⁹

George Jacobs, Director of the Davidson Clergy Center, a highly respected center where clergy find renewal and restoration, in a 2005 article, estimates that an equivalent of an entire seminary class are leaving their churches every day. He went on, “If you thought about that with accountants, attorneys, or doctors, it would be on the news every night.”¹⁰

In a major study commissioned by Duke Divinity School in their “Pulpit and Pew” Research Program, Dean Hoge and Jacqueline Wenger in 2002 studied why 900 ministers representing five major Protestant denominations left the professional ministry. The primary reasons were as follows: preference for another form of ministry; the need to care for children or family; heightened conflict in the congregation; conflict with denominational leaders; burn-out and discouragement; sexual misconduct; and divorce/marital problems.¹¹

In their book, Pastors in Transition, published in the Pulpit and Pew series in 2005, Hoge and Wenger report that heightened conflict within the congregation often directed against the pastor looms large. 27% of the minister respondents said that major conflict in the congregation was the primary reason they left the professional ministry.¹² The five primary conflict issues in the congregation which were cited most often in this study were: conflict over the pastor’s leadership style; finances; changes in worship style; staff relationships; and building projects.¹³

In Hoge and Wenger’s study, 75% of the pastors indicated that they felt lonely and isolated. The pastors also reported, “I felt drained by the demands, I did not feel supported by denominational officials, I felt bored and constrained.”¹⁴ There is a sense in which pastors who

left were tired of being put up on the ministerial pedestal and they felt like they were not able to be their true selves.

In their recent book published in 2003, Pastors at Greater Risk, H.B. London, Jr. and Neil Wiseman share that many ministers don't make it to retirement because they are burned out, asked to leave, or have a moral breakdown. They cite the following statistics:

- 80% of ministers say they have insufficient time with their spouse and that ministry has a negative effect on their family.
- 40% report a serious conflict with a parishioner once a month.
- 33% say that being in ministry is an outright hazard to their family.
- 75% report they've had a significant stress-related crisis at least once in their ministry.
- 58% of ministers indicate that their spouse needs to work either part time or full time to supplement the family income.
- 45% of ministers' wives say the greatest danger to them and family is physical, emotional, mental and spiritual burnout.
- 21% of ministers' wives want more privacy.
- Ministers who work fewer than 50 hours a week are 35% more likely to be terminated.
- 40 percent of ministers have considered leaving the ministry in the past three months.¹⁵

The pastor's family often catches the brunt of the physical, emotional, and spiritual demands placed on the pastor. And it takes its toll on the pastor's family. Here are some more troubling statistics regarding the pastor's family:

- 80% of pastors' spouses feel their spouse is overworked.
- 80% of pastors' spouses wish their spouse would choose another profession.
- The majority of pastor's wives surveyed said that the most destructive event that has occurred in their marriage and family was the day they entered the ministry.¹⁶

In the 2002 survey of over 2500 pastors by the Duke Divinity School research project, Pulpit & Pew, Jackson Carroll, the Director of the research project, reported that roughly a quarter of the pastors scored "significantly lower on mental health questions than the general public." Carroll reported that many pastors felt their ministries were ineffective and doubted their calling.¹⁷

The demands of the ministry lead to marital strife; yet the minister's marriage and family is supposed to be perfect. Leadership Magazine in its Fall 1992 issue reported the following marriage problems faced by many pastors:

- 80% insufficient time together
- 71% use of money
- 70% income level
- 64% communication difficulties
- 63% congregational differences
- 57% differences over leisure activities
- 53% difficulties in raising children
- 46% sexual problems
- 41% pastor's anger toward spouse
- 35% differences over ministry career
- 25% differences over spouse's career¹⁸

The heightened stress on ministers is telling on their physical and emotional health. Not only are clergy facing challenges to their emotional health in advanced stages of burnout and depression, many are in poor physical health. Many clergy are overweight and have a higher incidence of heart disease and heart attack than the general population. The above mentioned 2002 Pulpit and Pew study of more than 2,500 religious leaders, “Which Way to Clergy Health,” found that 76% of clergy were either overweight or obese compared to 61% of the general population.¹⁹ Dr. Gwen Halaas, the project director of the Ministerial Health & Wellness Program of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, states that in the 1950s researchers found that clergy had lower rates of disease and lived longer than any other professional group. Yet a generation later, Dr. Halaas reported that Protestant clergy had the highest overall work related stress of various religious professionals and next to the lowest amount of personal resources to cope with the strain.²⁰

In an October 2006 report by Bishop John Kapanke, President of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA), he called his denomination to a courageous plan for stronger health and wellness among its clergy. Kapanke told the Conference of Bishops that a crisis exists in the ELCA denomination and needs urgent attention. He estimated that only a low percentage of church professional leaders actually live healthy lives. He concluded the church would not be able to grow unless its professional leaders embrace a stronger health and wellness discipline. Citing 2006 ELCA health assessments working with the Mayo Clinic, he cited the following concerning health statistics among ELCA clergy:

- 71% have risk factors because of poor nutrition
- 69% are overweight
- 64% have high blood pressure and are at risk for heart attack and stroke

- 63% indicated they have poor emotional health
- 35% do not participate in any physical exercise

Bishop Kapanke, citing the ELCA Clergy Health plan, shared that the trends in catastrophic health claims have risen 3 times higher as compared to non-clergy in the group. Kapanke concluded that healthy leaders enhance the lives of others and empower and train effective lay leaders and thereby grow the church. “If we don’t have healthy leaders, we risk not having a viable church.”²¹

At the same time, many congregations are having problems coping with the radically changing culture. In the 1950’s and 60’s, the congregational family lived in a friendly supportive environment, yet the 21st century environment has sometimes become less friendly and even hostile. Not only are clergy feeling the effects of stress and burnout, but so are lay leaders in the congregation. Many volunteer leaders become overextended and over-committed, becoming exhausted which can lead to a cynicism, depression, and burnout. We are losing some of our most committed lay leaders out the back door.²²

Many suffer from hurry sickness – life in the fast lane – it seems everything is moving faster. In Bowling Alone published in 2000, Robert Putnam documents that people today are feeling more and more isolated and disconnected and he chronicles how the social norms have broken down. People come to the church community seeking social relatedness and this can be overwhelming to the congregational leaders.²³

Lynne M. Baab in her book, Beating Burnout in Congregations published in 2003, states:

1) Many people in our congregations are infected with the epidemic of hurry sickness in Western culture.

2) In order for congregations to be places of rest, lots of things have to be done by lots of people.²⁴

Baab highlights 6 different kinds of congregations that are susceptible to congregational burnout:

- 1) a congregation with frequent clergy turnover
- 2) a very active congregation with high standards and lots of programs
- 3) a large congregation where the support staff do the administrative work
- 4) a congregation where the same people are approached for money over and over
- 5) a small congregation
- 6) a congregation where people cannot change jobs.²⁵

These statistics gathered from a number of denominations and pastoral researchers are very concerning. While these statistics vary in the degree of seriousness of the situation for pastors and their families, all agree that there is a growing health crisis among clergy. In addition, all agree that many pastors (whether it is several hundred to 1500) are leaving their church positions every month. Indeed it is a serious problem which needs much greater attention. There are many pastors who are thriving as they provide pastoral leadership to their flocks; they, along with other family members are leading healthy lives. Yet, an increasing number are not, and some churches and denominations have denied and/or not fully acknowledged this health crisis affecting both many pastors and congregations.

Unrealistic and Unspecified Expectations, Stress and Burnout

A number of pastors try to be all things to all people, and suffer from the illusion that they can be “super minister.” Somehow God has infused them with extra energy, stamina and

drive; and how hard they work is evidence of their true calling as an ordained servant of God. Unfortunately, some ministers take on the persona of the “man/woman of God” to the point that they actually live into that over-functioning, almost God-like role; and many congregational leaders encourage the pastor functioning in this manner. The pastor is next to God, he/she speaks for God, etc. Besides unrealistic expectations that congregational leaders place on the pastor, they also have unspecified expectations of the pastor which are never verbalized, yet are still projected upon the pastor. Congregational leaders and members forget that underneath the persona is a real person with strengths and growing edges, with needs and struggles, a family to care for, and with limitations. In a word, they are human. First, they are a child of God and their responsibility is first to love God, second to love their spouse, third to love their children, and fourth to function as pastor – their job. It is not the whole of their life and their identity.

In my observation, unfortunately it sometimes takes a crisis in the minister’s life, i.e. a divorce, death of a close family member, being terminated by a congregation, or major health event, before the pastors reestablish a healthy physical, mental, and spiritual balance in their lives.

Many pastors who work 70-80 hours a week, seeking to keep all of the programs going, leaders happy, and members nurtured, aren’t even aware that they are “chronically stressed.” Such stress can harm the body and soul. Some function as Type A personalities and are actually hooked on stress. They become addicted to their own adrenalin and cortisol rush and unconsciously seek ways to get those adrenalin surges.

Stress and Burnout in Ministry – They Are Different

Ministers need to understand that stress and burnout are closely related, but they are not the same. It is important to note that stress and burnout are not what happens to the person, it is the person's physical and emotional reaction to what he/she thinks (perceives) has happened and how he/she feels and reacts to what has happened. Hans Selve defines stress in terms of the response your body makes to any demand on it. There is "good stress" (eustress) which is associated with elation, joy, fulfillment, mastery, achievement – and there is bad stress (distress) which is prolonged, chronic, or too frequent stress. Originally the term "stress" came from physics – the application of sufficient force to an object to distort it. Stress comes from outside the organism causing the body to respond in either fight or flight. The body fights when it is more angry and flees when fear takes precedence over anger. The brain interprets what's happening and the body often responds automatically. Adrenalin and cortisol are pumped into the blood stream; blood is diverted from various organs to brain and muscles; breathing and heart rate increase, blood pressure increases, etc. The body is on full alarm alert.²⁶ When the body adopts a lifestyle operating continuously in alarm mode, the stress becomes chronic and begins to slowly take its toll.²⁷

Stress is "hurry sickness." The warning signals of stress overload include insomnia or disturbed sleep, low energy, headaches, chronic tiredness, high blood pressure, and teeth grinding. Unfortunately, seldom does the disease of over-stress slow the victim down – not until a stroke, heart attack, ulcer, accident, or external crisis or accident occurs.

Stressors come to clergy often in four different categories :

- 1) Factors related to poor diet (too much caffeine, refined white sugar, processed flour, salt, etc.) and poor exercise habits.

- 2) Vocational factors including career uncertainty, heightened conflict in the congregation, lack of clearly defined ministry functions, conflict between church expectations and personal and family needs, lack of opportunities to de-role and be yourself, loneliness, and time management frustrations.
- 3) Psychological factors (great life change stressors – death of spouse, divorce, personal injury or illness.)
- 4) Spiritual causes of stress such as despair that the church isn't growing, anxiety over financial problems, even prayer can be stressful.²⁸

Ministers and congregational leaders need to understand that burnout is different from stress. Dr. Archibald Hart defines burnout as emotional exhaustion or compassion fatigue. Hart says the most conscientious pastors who are strong people helpers and pleasers are most vulnerable.²⁹

Pastors who are experiencing burnout will often begin to believe they are ineffective as a pastor and begin withdrawing from responsibilities. They may begin to avoid social and interpersonal contacts and treat themselves and others in an impersonal way.³⁰

Christine Maslach defines burnout as a state of physical, emotional, and mental exhaustion marked by physical depletion and chronic fatigue coupled with feelings of helplessness and hopelessness ... she suggests that a negative self-concept develops and negative attitudes toward life, work, and people increase. She offers the following signs: decreased energy; feeling of failure; reduced sense of reward while pouring more of oneself into the job; an inability to see a way out of problems; etc.³¹

Personality factors also increase the propensity to burnout such as: the pressure to succeed; over-sensitive person who is vulnerable to criticism; the authoritarian person who comes across insensitively; being guilt-ridden; having inner directed hostility or rage.

Yet, the key to the stress-burnout problem is the clash between expectations and reality. Many of the expectations of each congregational member cannot be met, and pastors do not have the luxury of choosing the laypeople that they work with. Pastors are on call 24/7 for major crises, when there is an emergency situation of one of the members or when a congregational member dies. And in counseling with parishioners, pastors are exposed often to the negative/crisis sides of people's lives.

Dr. Archibald Hart describes the difference between burnout and stress in the following table.

Differences Between Burnout and Stress

- Burnout is characterized by disengagement.
- Stress is characterized by overengagement.

- In burnout the emotions become blunted.
- In stress the emotions become over-reactive.

- In burnout the emotional damage is primary.
- In stress the physical damage is primary.

- The exhaustion of burnout affects motivation and drive.
- The exhaustion of stress affects physical energy.

- Burnout produces demoralization.
- Stress produces disintegration.

- Burnout can best be understood as a loss of ideals and hope.
- Stress can best be understood as a loss of fuel and energy.

- The depression of burnout is caused by the grief engendered by the loss of ideals and hope.
- The depression of stress is produced by the body's need to protect itself and conserve energy.

- Burnout produces a sense of helplessness and hopelessness.
- Stress produces a sense of urgency and hyperactivity.
- Burnout produces paranoia, depersonalization, and detachment.
- Stress produces panic, phobia, and anxiety-type disorders.
- Burnout may never kill you, but your long life may not seem worth living.
- Stress may kill you prematurely, and you won't have enough time to finish what you started.³²

So pastors are increasingly at risk for burnout and chronic stress disorders. It is important that clergy learn to distinguish between severe burnout and chronic debilitating stress. In this time of epoch change, the stress of ministry is likely to increase as shrinking congregations stretch churches financially and young worshipers demand changes in worship.³³ As the demands of the ministry and expectations increase with a “consumer driven” attitude, i.e. a “Pastor how can you serve me?” mentality, the burnout and stress issues also increase. Yet the pastor’s health and in some cases, their very lives may be in jeopardy. A number of cardiologists and cardiac health professionals have seen an alarming increase of ministers having heart attacks. Dr. Carl King, Director of the Cardiac Rehabilitation Program at Forsyth Hospital in Winston-Salem, NC, shares that ministers now rank as one of the professions most likely to suffer a heart attack on the job and need rehabilitation.³⁴

In interviewing a number of cardiologists in Western North Carolina, they have observed that some denominations and churches do not provide enough of a “safety net” and support for pastors who have suffered the consequences of a heart attack resulting in job dislocation, termination, etc. Some pastors of small churches may not have access to health insurance or paid vacation when a health crisis strikes.

Some pastors believe that if they pray hard enough or adjust their attitude, the problem will go away. In many cases, pastors are caught by the ministerial persona which they have

adopted through their ministry years. Unfortunately, they are often embarrassed to admit that they need help.

Notes

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Managing Conflict – Moving Toward Wellbeing

Many clergy and congregational leaders are more personally aware of the “war stories” that go on inside the life of a number of churches that are reflected in the previous statistics. We have gotten to the point that these painful stories of toxic church conflict have become too commonplace. A number of pastors, denominational leaders, and congregational leaders have developed an attitude of, “Well, that’s just the politics of the church; it’s just the way it is and you can’t do anything about it!” Unfortunately, too often it has become sport to talk and gossip about such chronic conflict over the coffee table or in the church parking lot.

In my profession as a pastoral counselor and pastor, I hear such war stories once or twice a month. Here are some that I am aware of:

- A new Clerk of Session was almost hounded out of office by former Clerks of Session unhappy that he set up more open communication and frequent reporting of committees and pushed for frequent rotation of the Clerk’s position.
- A pastor who, after gaining the worship committee’s approval, changed the worship service from a traditional model to a “come and be surprised by grace” blended service model was subsequently asked to leave when three powerful old guard members complained and undermined his leadership.
- A denominational official asked a new church development pastor to conduct a second congregational vote on the pastor’s call immediately before the chartering and installation service was to take place, even though the pastor had already been overwhelmingly elected by the congregation to serve. Several days later the pastor had a heart attack and subsequently resigned the position.

- A talented organist was asked to resign because she had had a minor stroke and played one hymn with several mistakes during her first Sunday back after her recovery period.

Chronic church conflict has become accepted as a way of life in some churches. In too many churches, this kind of conflict has become an epidemic – the kind of conflict that results in pastors, choir directors, and church staff leaving their positions and too often the professional ministry itself.

Yes, conflict is inevitable and it is impossible to live and grow without some disagreement and discord. And conflict is natural and it can be the crucible for new spiritual growth and transformation. Yet, in the congregational family we have to develop more healthy ways of monitoring the levels of conflict as Speed Leas and others of the Alban Institute have encouraged church leaders to do through the years. In a word, we need to learn to identify the conflict and develop a culture of working through the conflict and learning from it without wounding people, their profession, and their health.

Sometimes church leaders forget that when there have been multiple pastoral firings, resignations, or debacles resulting in the pastor's leaving, the church gets a reputation as a toxic or conflicted place in which to conduct ministry. Pastors are increasingly shying away from churches with this chronic pattern.

When this pattern is repeated by the pastor or ministry professional leaving, we have already focused upon what happens to the pastor, but what happens to the congregational family? Often both the pastor and the congregation suffer in their spiritual health. Church growth researchers contend that if active visitors smell conflict and tension in the congregation, invariably they will shy away from that congregation. I believe they are looking for a positive spiritual home where they might grow through the encouragement to use their spiritual gifts, fit

in, and make a positive contribution. When chronic conflict becomes accepted as a way of life in a congregation, the church suffers in its life together; and in its evangelism, discipleship, and mission to the world. At the end of the day, newcomers and newer members are looking for a community of faith where conflict can be worked through and learned from, and where the tradition of the pastoral office is appreciated, honored and respected. In such a climate of intentional and graceful visioning where both the pastor and congregational family are positively supported, the whole congregational system has an opportunity to experience a taste of the beloved community. Ironically, this is precisely the spiritual gift that many seekers are looking for in selecting a congregational home. People are looking for a household of God where such peace can be sought and wellbeing in the community can flourish. Such is the Old Testament notion of *shalom* itself. *Shalom* (peace) is not the absence of conflict, rather it is an understanding that the conflict can be addressed creatively. In this spiritual harmony, the gifts of ministry are multiplied and the fruits of the Spirit are evident.

A Wellness, Partnership and Systems Approach

A Wellness Foundation

We have looked at the current situation of clergy and congregational health and have seen that there are a number of serious problems. Rather than focus on the negative, this study is grounded in a wellness/strengths foundation as a beginning vision to address and re-frame the issues of pastors leaving the ministry in such large numbers.

Until recently, understanding of human functioning and behavior has been oriented around a pathological or disease model. The medical, psychological, and even the religious community have operated largely from this traditional model that diagnoses the pathology or the problem and then attempts to remedy the disease or dysfunction. With a preoccupation towards eradicating illness, society has only recently begun to ask the question – how does one define a healthy person, a well-functioning family, a vibrant organization, a thriving church, or a well society?

In the last 30 years, psychologists, therapists, and pastoral researchers and theologians have begun asking, what behavioral qualities (characteristics) make for wellbeing and optimal health? Well-being in the nuclear family, organizational, and congregational family is more than the absence of problems, illness, crisis or pain.

Recent research by brain researchers has demonstrated that the mind has the ability through positive and wellness thinking to actually lower blood pressure and de-stress the whole body.¹ As has been noted, stress and burnout are not what happens to the person, it is the individual's physical and emotional reaction to what he/she perceives has happened and how he/she feels and reacts to the situation. The individual through his/her positive thought process,

has the ability to create healthier beneficial physical, mental and spiritual responses to life's everyday problems and challenges.

The World Health Organization defines health as the ability of an individual to achieve his or her potential and to respond positively to the challenges of the environment. It is concerned with thriving rather than merely with coping. Gwen Halaas, Project Director of the Ministerial Health and Wellness Report of the ELCA denomination states that ideal health is a state of complete physical, mental, social, and spiritual well-being and that neglect of any component of health predisposes one to or creates an unhealthy state.²

Wellness lies very close to the heart of the gospel. III John 2 declares: "Beloved, I pray that all may go well with you and that you may be in good health just as it is well with your soul."³ Jesus' ministry was primarily a ministry of healing and restoration. Jesus caused the blind to see, the lame to walk, and the oppressed to be set free. Jesus made people well, called them to love and enjoy the new abundant life they have found in His Kingdom.

Paul declares that when one part of the body suffers, the whole body suffers. Paul calls us "to mature in our spiritual life and respond to the upward call of Christ until we come to the fullness of life."⁴ To be in union with Christ is to be made well in a spiritual and ultimate sense.

In the Old Testament, the Hebrew word, *shalom*, (peace), as noted earlier, at its essence means well-being and harmony in and for the community. Wellness, wholeness and abundant life is the will of God for all of God's people. In our baptismal promises, we affirm each newly baptized believer as a precious and unique child of God. At baptism, each believer is made whole in Jesus Christ. The church is about intentional ministries that enhance physical, emotional, and spiritual health and wellbeing.

Revisioning a Shared Partnership Design

In my experience of pastoring churches as an Interim Specialist having served 12 different congregations of 75 members to 750 members, I have observed that many parishioners will look up to and have almost a magical view of the pastor, and respect him/her as a “God-like” servant. In a recent Bible study that I lead weekly, a member of the class made this point so clearly. She exclaimed, “Like it says in Revelations, I regard you ministers as the ‘angels of the Lord’ sent to us to lead us and tell us what God is like... you ministers can do no wrong in my book.” This view has been expressed to me in many of the different congregations I have served. However, another parishioner once said, “You know, not many of you ministers have the total package. We need a pastor who has it all together and will give us a flawless service.” A number of Christian denominations and churches have idolatrized the ordained office of the minister and have forgotten that he/she is first of all human with strengths, growing edges, weaknesses, and everyday needs and struggles.

This pervasive and chronic idolatry of the minister has contributed to the ministers’ buying into over-functioning stance in a perfectionistic, God-like manner. A number of researchers have labeled this pattern, the minister’s “God complex.” Rev. Pam Cranston, Chair of the Clergy Wellness Commission of the Episcopal Diocese of California states, “There is a false notion that effective ministry is about the imitation of Christ...living a life dying to self and living for other people doesn’t mean you have to kill yourself...Jesus already did that, ministers don’t have to!”⁵ In many cases, the minister has relished his/her “energizer bunny” role as the super-human overfunctioner. They have liked their perch up on their lofty pedestal. Conversely, congregational leaders in some churches have underfunctioned (or not been encouraged to use

their gifts) in their discipleship ministerial responsibilities. Yet at the same time, many congregational leaders have relished their position as the pastor's "watchdog" and overseer.

In some congregations, this unhealthy expression of ministry whereby the pastor greatly overfunctions and the congregational members underfunction, has set forth an attitude of, "Pastor, work yourself to the grindstone and we'll continually evaluate your performance and let you know how you are doing." In these congregations, it is all about the pastor and the way he/she performs, and this performance is reviewed every week. This dynamic can lead to frustrated expectations and the sense that the pastor is never doing enough. This attitude breeds mistrust and heightened conflict between the pastor and congregational leaders.

Lloyd Rediger, in his acclaimed book, Clergy Killers, postulated that the minister has been thrust into the CEO role like a business corporation, a position that he/she isn't trained or equipped for. Rediger asserts that the minister has lost his/her primary role as spiritual leader of the flock. The chief function of the pastor is to help the congregation discern and embrace the spiritual calling of the congregation. Rediger states, "Another reason for the epidemic of incivility toward the clergy lies in the business model for church operation. Most congregations and denominations are now run as a business rather than as a mission, causing a change in expectations. The pastor, though, not trained for such a role, must now function as a manager responsible for keeping the customers and stockholders happy."⁶

George Jacobs, Executive Director of the Davidson Clergy Center near Charlotte, NC (a well respected ecumenical clergy renewal center which works with pastors from all over the country who have burned out) shares, "Ministers need to be seen as real people, they are people who have the same strengths and weaknesses as the members they serve...they all deserve to live a balanced life."⁷

While ordained ministers have enjoyed the power, respect, and honor of being up on the pedestal, they and the congregations they serve have done so at a price. When the pastor is encouraged to over-function for the members in many cases, the gifts and spiritual strengths of the leaders and members of the congregation are not realized. As William Easum of Easum/Bandy Associates shares in his article, The Church of the 21st Century, “The church is called to mobilize the God-given spiritual gifts and talents of the laity, and focus upon making disciples rather than ‘just running and maintaining’ the church.” Easum continues, “The trend is toward fewer church leaders attending seminary and more laity taking hands-on responsibility for ministry.”⁸ The pastor clearly needs to move toward becoming the equipper of the laity as they, with the Spirit’s leading, discover and embrace their gifts and then positively and joyfully “catch fire” with their calling. We need to re-discover all over again Paul’s vision of the beloved congregation honoring and building up one another as found throughout Paul’s epistles.

This new design, I call a Shared Partnership Model. Firmly grounded in a wellness foundation, my purpose in this dissertation is to invite pastors and congregations into a new way of thinking about their ministry together. Re-framing and imagining ministry from a faithful and positive perspective, let us dream a new dream of pastors, leaders, and members of congregations nurturing and caring for one another in more of a life-giving manner.

In her new book, Partnership: A Transformative Vision for Pastoral Leadership in the Web of Congregational Life, Marcia Bailey defines partnership in a helpful and trusting manner: “Partnership is a freely chosen non-hierarchical relationship of mutual vision and responsibility with equal commitment between clergy and lay people.”⁹

In this new way of thinking, the congregation is able to envision itself and actually risk moving toward the beloved community Christ calls us toward. As Dr. Balmer Kelly, former

Dean of Union Theological Seminary in Richmond, VA, and my beloved seminary professor said over and over again in seminary class, “Our gracious God doesn’t love any one of us more than any other one of us.” In this agape love, God’s Spirit is set free to move through the entire congregation. And then God’s Spirit can be trusted to build up the loving acceptance in a contagious way. When people find a haven of hope and acceptance, ministry thrives, lives are changed for Christ’s sake, and gifts are multiplied.

Leaders do not use their roles to set themselves above or over against the pastor, other leaders, or congregational members. Such a positive re-framing of ministry and actually risking to visualize and enact such a design offers a new liberating clearing; a space to explore ministry and life together from a healthy thriving perspective – the way Jesus called us and encouraged us to be. When the pastor and congregation are realistic and balanced with one another in their expectations, and trusting in their support of one another, the Spirit is often present, ministry is multiplied, and the witness of the church flourishes.

Toward a Systems View

With a wellness/positive strengths foundation and employing a shared partnership design, it is important to understand the inter-relatedness of ministers and congregations. A systems perspective helps us understand this connection.

Systems thinking has long been a part of the natural sciences – astronomy, biology, zoology, anatomy, ecology, etc. The heart must function in close relation to the lung in order to drive the cardio-vascular system. The water we drink and the air we breathe are dependent upon the sun, rain, clouds, trees, etc. which are all part of the ecological system that sustains life. According to systems thinking, there is no such thing as isolated cells, organs, individuals, families, etc. One cannot isolate things in order to fully understand them. Systems theory

contends that every person and every thing is not only interrelated, but interdependent upon a larger system for life and well-being. Each part is connected to every other part in a fluid interdependent manner. How the parts interact with the whole and the inter-relationship with one another can and does produce something new.

Systems thinking has greatly influenced theologians and pastoral researchers in the past twenty-five years. They have demonstrated that every congregational family and individual family is also a system. Each family member is interrelated to every other family member, and the behavior of each person affects every other person in the family or system. Changes in one individual will produce changes in other family members, as well as in the total congregational system.

Not only are individuals related to individual family systems, but the families of a congregation compose that church's congregational family system. It has been the work and teaching of Rabbi Edwin Friedman, who wrote Generation to Generation, that helped pastors see that congregations, perhaps more than any other human institution, resemble a family. It is Friedman's thesis that each leader and member of a congregation must emotionally interrelate to his/her family of origin, immediate family, each family in the congregation, and the corporate church family.¹⁰ Specifically, Friedman emphasized the need for the pastor to understand his/her family of origin dynamic – how the pastor acted in his/her family of origin would directly influence his/her actions in their immediate family, and also how they would relate to their congregational family in their position of leadership.

This systemic perspective also operates with each congregational member. The actions of any one congregational member are related to and impinge upon his/her immediate family, each family in the congregation, and the congregational family. In essence, this dissertation sets

forth a new ministry framework which takes seriously a wellness-strengths approach from a nuclear family and congregational systems foundation.

It is the thesis of this study that the wellness of the congregation is related to and affects the wellness of the individual congregational members and vice versa. By implication, as the congregational leaders and members incorporate new strengths in their own families, it will strengthen the congregational system -- as the congregation embraces new strengths, it will enhance the wellness and the health of the other leaders, families, and members. To gain a basic foundation in family wellness, we will now turn our attention to a behavioral theology of wellness, focusing upon the building blocks of family functioning. These strengths or characteristics are foundational for optimal family functioning in the pastor's family as well as in all the families of the congregation. These same strengths also enhance all group and congregational functioning. In the next section, I will describe the seventeen wellness characteristics from a nuclear family perspective. Later, they will be incorporated into a pastor and congregational behavioral wellness framework.

Notes

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Foundational Wellness Characteristics of Familyhood

In the last 20 years, family researchers, psychologists, and family therapists have begun asking, “What qualities or characteristics make strong, healthy, growth-oriented nuclear families?” After more than a century of understanding human behavior from a disease or pathological model, asking, “What is wrong?” so that the problem or disease can be eradicated, family researchers have discovered that family growth and well-being are more than the absence of problems, illness or pain. Throughout this study, the terms strong, healthy, growth-oriented, well-functioning, nurturing, and mature are used interchangeably to describe families or groups who function well.

Delores Curran, in her book, Traits of a Healthy Family, found fifteen traits (characteristics) of strong nuclear families which I have adapted for this study.¹ Nick Stinnett studied over 14,000 families and found six primary characteristics of health which all strong families possessed.² Using Curran’s work and Stinnett’s study as primary resources, I have looked at the family wellness literature from the following pioneer researchers and therapists in the family wellness movement: Murray Bowen, Edwin Friedman, Jerry Lewis, Salvador Minuchin, David and Vera Mace, David Olson, Herbert Otto, Nick Stinnett, and Carl Whitaker, and Stephen Covey. From a systems perspective, these characteristics also apply as foundational behavioral characteristics of the congregational family. I have selected seventeen strengths (characteristics) of strong, well-functioning nuclear families which are comprised within seven overall categories: Communication – Openness; Affirmation – Appreciation; Time Together – Cohesion; Time Apart – Autonomy; Faith – Commitment; Service – Valuing Others; Resiliency – Adaptability. (Appendix A) While these seventeen behavioral characteristics cannot cover every area of successful family functioning and congregational living, I believe

these strengths are a credible compilation of family strengths as validated by many researchers studying family wellness in the last quarter century.

As a Family Systems Pastoral Counselor, I believe Edwin Friedman is right that the congregational church family functions more like an individual family than any other human institution.³ Therefore, we need to first look at the behavioral basics of family relationships and systemic functioning as the place to start as we address family, pastor, and congregational wellness.

The following seventeen foundational wellness characteristics can help pastors, congregational leaders, and members assess their behavioral health in their nuclear families and as a congregation. These are fundamental healthy patterns of human behavior and relatedness. They can also be used to help assess the health of one's family of origin. In the appendix, these 17 characteristics have been adapted for those who would like to survey these behavioral strengths as they apply to the congregational family. (Appendix B)

I. Faith – Commitment

Strength 1:

Family members share a religious faith which informs their spiritual beliefs and practice.

There is an inescapable core of strength that religious faith gives to families. Strong families have a common belief in God as an Infinite Power which is greater than themselves. For Christian families, this abiding faith in God through Christ provides a well-spring of mutual support, the courage to love one another, and freedom to become who God has called them to be. There is a core or foundation of shared beliefs which sustains the family and gives it hope and

direction. These families seem to possess a deep faith in the goodness of God which translates into a reverence for life that is lived out with their whole being. They make a point of bringing God into their daily lives where their faith may be spoken and taught often, or more quietly lived out and shared. Strong families possess a sense of greater good and count on a power higher than themselves; it gives them strength and purpose.⁴

These families naturally pass on their faith to their children and are able to teach their children not just by verbal lessons, but more powerfully by their example of love, compassion, and discipleship. Even the adolescent who decides to reject the faith of the family can still be accepted by the family. The adolescent's questioning is seen as an important step in gaining deeper spiritual commitment.

Families that aren't so strong place their commitment primarily on their family itself. Thus, this family assumes the total burden of all the questions of existence and has to absorb all of the triumphs and tragedies of life themselves. They are rooted in their own idolatry. Other families attempt a constant search for the meaning of life, never really resolving or pulling together the questions of existence into a meaningful whole and faith perspective. Still other families develop a comfortable formula of going to church because it is the right thing to do, yet never move to a deeper relationship or acknowledge a fuller presence of God in their lives.

Growth-oriented families become a seedbed where faith in God is experienced, cultivated, and developed. Young children experience faith as it is modeled by the parents. Later, the child decides he/she wants to belong to a believing community of faith. Then faith development often takes on a searching quality where the parent's beliefs are tested. As one's spirituality deepens, he/she is able to claim his/her own faith perspective.

Strong families help family members grow spiritually to the point whereby they are able to fully affirm their lives as precious gifts of God. They count on their faith not just to make them happy or comfortable, but in faith they move out into the world to act on God's behalf. They discover that where there is the care of another, there is the care of God. The gap between loving God and loving their neighbor is bridged not just as they recite the Ten Commandments and Lord's Prayer, but also as they journey out to care for, trust, and not trespass against their neighbor.

As healthy families launch their children emotionally to find their own place in life, so do they launch their children spiritually to follow God's calling. For the Scriptures teach us that family is formed by calling people out of families to a new family of God so they can embrace their purpose and make their unique contribution. Abraham is called from his family in Genesis 12:1-3 to a new land where all the families of the earth shall bless themselves. Indeed the household of God is formed by people who hear new words of hope and discipleship. "Who are my mother and my brothers? Here are my mother and my brothers. Whoever does the will of God is my brother and sister and mother." (Mark 3:33-35).

I. Faith – Commitment

Strength 2:

Family members teach a sense of moral responsibility and values to their children and each other.

Strong, healthy families operate from a clear and well thought out set of values. Parents are able to pass on to their children an important sense of right and wrong. Parents have arrived at a consensus of values which they model to their children, yet do not have to agree on every

moral issue and may themselves have differing values. Most importantly, growth-oriented families are able to discuss and talk about the process through which even with conflicting factors, one can weigh questions, and reach a moral decision. Family members can disagree, yet in the process, they still care about and respect the other person. In such a process, the child learns that honesty and care for one another are of primary importance. Somehow these families know that ultimately values cannot be taught, but they can teach a process for arriving at values.

Parents in well-functioning families know that they model a sense of morality to their children primarily on two fronts: by what they say and how they act to each other in the home, and by what they say and how they act to others. When there is consistency and congruence on both of these fronts, children learn to respect people, to be honest and treat others as they would like to be treated. In families that aren't so strong, there is a great deal of inconsistency in parents' words and behavior which leaves the child confused about how to act in the world and how to treat other people. Children read the disparity all too well. It is not enough just to model moral decision making to children, parent(s) need to be willing to listen to their children's value-oriented questions and tell them what they think is true and good about human existence.

In nurturing families, the parent(s) do not stand over their children screening every activity, idea or book which their children experience. To censor and limit everything that a child sees or reads, does not teach moral responsibility. Healthy families know that preaching or moralizing children only invokes guilt in the child.

Healthy families instill in their children a sense that each person is responsible for his/her own actions and behavior. This modeling is imparted to the child as the parents are able to take full responsibility for their own actions and behavior. At times, this results in the parent needing to openly confess his/her mistakes and misjudgments. To the degree that the parent is honest to

him/herself and to others, he/she is able to encourage his/her children to accept responsibility for their own behavior. Accepting responsibility for one's own behavior is to admit one's sins and shortcomings and ask forgiveness. In less well functioning families, there is little conscience and the blame for any problem of a family member rests outside of the family member.

In summary, teaching a child how to arrive at his/her own set of values, to trust in his/her choices and to stand by the child in those choices, is helping the child develop a sense of moral responsibility.

II. Communication – Openness

Strength 3:

Family members have direct and open communication. They listen to and understand each other.

Of all of the behavioral characteristics that are given by family researchers and family systems counselors as important attributes of strong families, open and direct communication between family members is listed as one of the most important ingredient to healthy family functioning. Stephen Covey, noted family author, suggests that creating a warm, caring, supportive, encouraging environment is probably the most important thing you can do for your family.⁵ Communication keeps you and the other person on the same pathway; it makes you feel loved and vital to the other person.⁶

In the current “fast-paced” and “on-the-go” existence, it seems difficult even for well-functioning families to take enough time to establish patterns of effective communication among members. Yet it is in families and congregational families that we share ourselves as we communicate our joys, hopes and dreams as well as our fears, frustrations and disappointments. It is precisely as other family members reveal themselves to us that we feel cared about. Loving

relationships are enhanced as the partners can share their positive and negative sides of their personalities and know that their thoughts and emotions are heard and accepted. Empathic listening -- listening within the other's frame of reference is modeled and highly valued.

Well-functioning families have the ability to respond to each other's emotions. In families that are not functioning as well, there is a tendency to want to immediately react to another's feeling and try to get the family member to change his/her stance, behavior, or attitude. In other families, attempted communication by a family member is sometimes ignored or given an apathetic response. In some families, family members "talk at" or "talk about" other family members, rather than "talking to" them.

In strong families, there are no family secrets. Family members feel free to share at significant depth and trust other members to hear their pain, embarrassment, disappointment or hurt. In healthy families, there is an openness towards each other and others which seems congruent – what the family members project to each other and others on the outside is how they seem on the inside. There is a harmony and balance between what they say and how they act.

II. Communication – Openness

Strength 4:

Family members acknowledge each other's feelings and parents and children respond to each other's emotional needs.

Families wanting to grow in this area learn to express the full range of human feeling – from anger to excitement; from grief to joy; from fear to affection; from guilt to happiness. Emotions can be naturally expressed and understood without disapproval. Joy and gladness over

a success, accomplishment or event in the life of a family member is naturally and spontaneously celebrated.

It is primarily in his/her family that a child learns that his/her emotional responses to life are acceptable or unacceptable. In less healthy families, one or more family members attempt to control the emotive responses of other members. At times, parents feel the need to control the emotional responses of their children as a projection of their own fear of emotions. In less well functioning families, anger and sadness are not tolerated well. In some families, loving and caring are seen as a sign of weakness. In certain families, feelings are so unwelcome that family members are not even aware of their own feelings and emotions. Therefore, they cannot recognize these feelings in others. When feelings are unpleasant or seemingly unacceptable, one tends to deny them or ignore them. In these families the result is that the family member wishing to express his/her emotions feels misunderstood or that his/her feelings are not appropriate.

In strong family functioning, members are able to recognize feelings in their inner selves and respond from their own inner experience to other family members. Not only are the feelings acknowledged, but the family member is able to communicate back the feeling whereby the other family member feels understood. In healthy families, members are able to console one another, and emotional needs of family members can be met cross-generationally.

Perhaps hurt and anger are among the most difficult feelings to be accepted and encouraged in family life. Yet feelings of hurt and anger are identified as pure and natural feelings of the soul. Pain can be shared openly and immediately and support of the family member expressing the pain is assured. When family members fight in strong families, they are able to make up afterward.

In well-functioning families, family members are able to naturally listen to, comfort and respond with care. They are able to respond with empathy which is defined as the ability to put oneself in the shoes of another and see with his/her eyes, hear with his/her ears and feel with his/her heart.

II. Communication – Openness

Strength 5:

Family members share a sense of trust and are trustworthy, yet broken trust can be mended.

It is appropriate that the characteristic of trust be the final strength in the category dealing with “Communication and Openness.” For genuine trust in each family member is the end result of open and direct communication where feelings are expressed and acknowledged and where each member’s concerns are taken seriously.

Developing a sense of trust is the first developmental task of the newborn infant.⁷ The baby learns to trust his/her parents as his/her basic needs of food and physical comfort are met. As the child grows and relates to his/her parents, there is a constantly shifting balance between care and control and freedom and reliance upon self. In families, and through parental love, the infant needs to learn that his/her parent(s) will be good to him/her and that the world is a safe place to be and live. The child needs to develop trust in his/her parent(s) and in the world which becomes the cornerstone and foundation for further growth, personhood and faith. In a word, as is pointed out in I John 4:19, “We love because Christ first loved us.”

Strong families provide the place and climate where children realize that they are loved and can first return their mother’s love with a smile of their own. In such secure and safe

surroundings, the newborn decides to become engaged in and affirm life. He/she decides to trust that his/her parent(s) will care for him/her. As Ernest Boyer stated in his wonderful book A Way in the World, “Trust comes from knowing that there is a place where you might go when you need to be held, but that you will not be held back when you go forth.”⁸

After the child learns to trust his/her parent(s), a sobering part of obtaining adulthood is to realize that his/her parent(s) are not perfect, and cannot always be trusted. Ultimately, the child learns that his/her parent(s) made mistakes in raising him/her along the way and are in need of forgiveness for the parenting job they did. In healthy families the parent(s) model forgiveness to their children by admitting their weaknesses, mistakes and shortcomings in everyday occurrences along the way. This gives their children freedom to also forgive. Such modeling also enables the children to admit their shortcomings and seek forgiveness.

An important key to mending broken trust is the family member’s ability to assume responsibility for his/her problem or mistake. As Stephen Covey points out, the family member who does not forgive will always be a victim until they forgive.⁹ In well functioning families, the process of forgiveness is taught and has the following steps: the family member feels displeasure or anguish that he/she needs to express; he/she sees him/herself as an agent in the problem or mistake; the family member expresses his/her need for forgiveness and his/her regret and/or sorrow; the rest of the family accepts his/her confession and broken trust is not only mended but there is the opportunity for a renewed and deeper relationship.

The Scriptures emphasize the importance of forgiving others as God has forgiven us. In the Lord’s Prayer, in Matthew Chapter 6, we know that unless we ourselves forgive, then we have no hope of forgiveness from God. As we experience trust and forgiveness, first learned in

the family, we are able to trust and then forgive others along the way which become the hallmarks of full personhood.

III. Affirmation – Appreciation

Strength 6:

Family members affirm, support and care for one another and promote each other's happiness.

In well-functioning families, family members like one another and are able to affirm other family members. Caring and support are intrinsic characteristics which are nurtured and woven into the family's personality. In these families, after facing the wear and tear of the office or the struggles and pressures of school, family members are able to return to an accepting and enjoyable haven where they can recoup from the day and grow. Strong families demonstrate that appreciation and help family members grow and flourish as each person's self-esteem is boosted; and it has a positive ripple effect.¹⁰

While this kind of care sounds simple and easy, it in fact requires a delicate balance of independence and interdependence as well as a clear commitment on the part of each family member to nurture the family's life together.

In less than healthy families, it is sometimes difficult to affirm and support family members without subtly taking away the person's freedom to be who he/she is meant to be. Sometimes parents, out of seeking to meet unmet or unfulfilled needs of their own childhoods, think they know what is best for their members. In some of these families, for a myriad of reasons, it is easy to want to live for other family members rather than simply letting them live. Yet no one can finally tell another person the meaning of his/her life.

This type of healthy caring requires a commitment to the family which goes beyond oneself and might be described as a certain selflessness. In Galatians 6:2 believers are called to bear one another's burdens. It is not to be wrapped up in one's own importance nor to be afraid of reaching beyond oneself. To care in this manner, family members have to look inward and give up certain pretensions about themselves. In this process, family members do not need to over-assert their own interests, but rather may sacrifice for others, thereby obtaining a personal fulfillment which leads to a sense of wholeness. As family members help other family members grow and actualize their potential, they grow in wholeness themselves. Martin Buber in his classic work, I and Thou, put it, "The person who steps out of the essential act of pure relation has something more in his/her being, something new has grown there. We receive what we did not have before in such a manner that we know it has been given to us."¹¹

II. Affirmation – Appreciation

Strength 7:

Family members show affection and intimacy for one another in different ways.

In healthy families, physical contact is positive, spontaneous, tender and non self-conscious. Families growing in this area understand that affection is expressed in a variety of ways – a smile, a pat on the back, a hug, loving words, a tender look, etc. In fact, the more spontaneous the affection, the more it generates a feeling of closeness and a sense of shared intimacy. In strong families, physical contact is not limited to arrivals and departures and it is not dictated by gender identity (i.e. men and boys can hug others and each other as freely as women and girls.)

In our culture, there is a prevalent “taboo on tenderness” whereby people, especially men, have felt uncomfortable expressing any kind of affection. In less well functioning families, a cold and distant relationship is seen as a demonstration of inner strength by family members. In some families, children are taught not to touch or show affection because family members believe any show of affection has sexual implications. It is important that children are taught the differences between “good and bad touching” and how to react when physically threatened. Yet at the same time not undermine a positive attitude concerning affection with family members and close friends. Healthy families are able to move away from the role stereotypes such as the “strong and silent male” or the gushy and insincere female.”

There are three basic types of intimacy all of which are important in strong families’ functioning. The first type of intimacy is intellectual intimacy in which family members share ideas, information, and facts. Family members are affirmed through the use of their intellect. The second type of intimacy involves physical closeness which includes everything from shaking hands to sexual intimacy. Strong families recognize the need for spontaneous affection – hugging and being held – of family members through their lives. The third type of intimacy is emotional intimacy, whereby one’s dreams, hopes, fears, and feelings are shared. Hugging is not always appropriate in congregations, yet such corporate rituals as passing the peace are important to share physical touch.

In Jesus’ ministry, the miracle stories of the gospels stress the healing significance of physical contact. In Matthew 9:24-26, the woman with a hemorrhage is made well by touching Jesus’ garment. In Matthew 9:27-31, Jesus healed two blind men by touching their eyes. In Romans 12:9-10, Paul calls on the Christian believer to “let love be genuine...and love one another with brotherly affection outdoing one another showing honor.”

III. Affirmation – Appreciation

Strength 8:

Family members have a good sense of humor and enjoy playing together.

The capacity and willingness to be playful, humorous, and even child-like which is taught in families is a most significant characteristic of well-functioning families. It is one of the purest ways whereby families celebrate life, each other, and the world around them. Playfulness in families is the ability of family members to let go and enjoy a game just for the fun of it; to laugh and make jokes; to loosen up and be silly or hilarious at times; to celebrate another's sense of humor and to even be able to laugh at themselves. Happy families have incorporated the natural instincts of playfulness and laughter into their family personalities and have realized that such instinctual activities are natural cures for eradicating depression, seriousness and even panic.

In less healthy families, a playful attitude is viewed as being childish and irresponsible. The result is an over-serious attitude with which these families approach their life, work, and problems. This seriousness obsession can play a powerful role in the cause and continuation of the families' dilemmas and problems.¹²

Joy and gladness are consistent themes throughout the biblical witness and are seen as a primary way of experiencing the presence of God. As Psalm 126:2-3 states, "Then our mouth was filled with laughter, and our tongues with shouts of joy; then they said among the nations, 'The Lord has done great things for them. The Lord has done great things for us; we are glad.'" The Westminster Shorter Catechism answers the question, "What is the chief end of man (humans)?" with the statement, "The chief end of man (humans) is to glorify God and enjoy Him forever."

Playful family rejoicing is characterized by delight and spontaneity. Healthy families know how to have fun and value their playfulness. Happy families discover that self-created joys earned by hard work, excessive worry, and material consumption do not satisfy. In playful spontaneity and humorous laughter, family members can suddenly be struck by a moment of grace and accept a power greater than themselves. Scott Peck, in his classic work, The Road Less Traveled, reflects on the nature of grace, stating that because we are accepted by a loving God, we can relax and just be human.¹³ Lost in the absorption of family fun, time stands still and family members faintly understand that there is something better to come in eternity as they rejoice in what already is. As Jesus said in Matthew 18:3, “Unless you change and become like little children you will never enter the Kingdom of Heaven.”

III. Affirmation – Appreciation

Strength 9:

Family members share a sense of their history which is understood through stories, family traditions, ceremonies, rituals and reunions.

Active family rituals, traditions, reunions, and ceremonies are literally part of the glue which holds strong families together. In strong families, there are a number of traditions which are celebrated throughout the year. Extended family members can count on gathering at the lake every Fourth of July for a festive family reunion and picnic. Through celebrating such traditions and family gatherings, families preserve a sense of their history, develop a sense of belonging, come to understand their place in the family and even grasp a sense of hope for their family in the future. Covey asserts that such traditions reinforce the connection of the family, demonstrate loyalty and provide family renewal.¹⁴

It is through such family reunions and gatherings that family members discover who they are, a unique people with a distinct history. The strong family's sense of itself is carried on through family stories and legends which contain a rich oral tradition. Often elderly family members tell stories about their past and voice their hopes for the family's future to younger family members.

Besides family traditions, well-functioning families abound in active daily family rituals. Whether it's the bedtime ritual of bringing a drink of water, reading a story and saying prayers, or the weekly celebration of a couple going out to dinner every Friday night with friends, rituals provide important meaning to existence. Rituals are important because they convey truth in a concrete rather than an abstract way and they make the truth a current reality. For example, children often recognize as ritual, a simple action which parents take for granted, such as tucking a child in bed at night. For the child, it conveys the constant truth that the parent loves the child. When the parent forgets, he/she discovers quickly how important the ritual is to help the child acknowledge that truth, and sleep securely through the night.

Rituals also provide an important continuity and stability for the family as the family changes over time. Rituals provide a balance between continuity and change. Ernest Boyer states "Rituals mark the eternal at times of change. Living human life in the context of the family produces an understanding that discovers in every change the element that never changes."¹⁵

Less healthy families find it difficult to embrace active family rituals which limits their ability to change and adapt. Having few rituals or traditions, there is no strong anchor of continuity for the family in the midst of change. In some families, there is little capacity to incorporate new routines into the active family rituals as changes occur in the family over time.

III. Time Together – Cohesion

Strength 10:

Family members have a secure sense of solidarity and a high degree of interdependence.

No human being is an isolated unit. People are born into families with parents and siblings, and families function best when the family has a solid sense of itself as a corporate unit. Family members are dependent upon one another for security, protection, respect for individuality as well as mutual love. In strong families, there is an ability to work together to create new ideas, new solutions, that are better than any individual family member could ever come up with alone.¹⁶

The family is an interdependent system which needs a delicate balance of emotional closeness and distance. Certainly an important characteristic of healthy families is the ability to nurture both a sense of belonging and a sense of separateness among family members. Pastoral theologian, Herbert Anderson, calls this most difficult balance, “the life long agenda of learning how to live together separately.”¹⁷

Less healthy families will gravitate toward a dependency which is too close or enmeshed. Each member is tightly connected to other members and closeness becomes suffocating. In these families, it is difficult to have distinct feelings or ideas because togetherness is understood in terms of sameness. In some families, there is such an exaggerated sense of distance and isolation that there is little room for mutual giving. Family members are not really accessible to one another.

Well-functioning families have learned the art of interdependence with a fluctuating balance of closeness and distance. There is mutual giving and taking and a smooth rhythm

between individuality and interdependence. Family members can risk being close because they have the freedom to be separate and distinct individuals.

The Biblical view of families affirms that one is never a person alone, but only in the context of covenantal community.¹⁸ Healthy families covenant with one another to look upon each other with favor and commit to love one another. Biblically, “the family is a community of covenant-making, covenant-keeping, covenant-breaking, and covenant renewing people.”¹⁹

The theme of covenant-keeping is primary in Matthew 18:20 when Jesus says, “Where two or three are gathered in my name, there am I in the midst of them.” In this text, Jesus is teaching his disciples the value of keeping covenant specifically while working through and solving conflicts. Through their covenanting process of loving God and each other, strong families possess a cohesiveness which reflects a unity of purpose, even when there is strife in the family. The results of this unity of purpose are described in Ephesians 4:15-16, “Rather, speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into Him who is the head, into Christ, from whom the whole body, joined and knit together by every joint with which it is supplied, when each part is working properly, makes for bodily growth and upbuilds itself in love.”

IV. Time Together - Cohesion

Strength 11:

Family members spend quality time together and foster togetherness and fellowship conversation and enjoy shared experiences.

In Stinnett’s research, when he asked children what makes for a happy family, their frequent response was not money, cars, fine homes, etc. it was doing things together.²⁰ The ritual of sharing meals together provides continuity and meaning to the family’s daily routine.

During breakfast, family members share their hopes and fears of the day and then journey outward. During dinner, they can dialogue about the happenings of the day as they come back together. At mealtimes, one of the parents can discuss the upcoming family weekend retreat and hopefully get everyone's ideas and input. Well-functioning families try to set aside mealtime as the time for the family to be together. Even with conflicting obligations carrying family members in different directions, strong families value mealtime together and put a high priority on building that time into their schedules. It becomes perhaps the primary time in which the family can communicate with one another.

Unfortunately, in many families, the tradition of families eating together and spending quality time together has declined. Stephen Covey states that families consistently rate this characteristic as the hardest to enact. There is a real gap between what matters most to them and how they are living their lives.²¹

In less well functioning families, the television, the computer, the internet, and video games have taken over the family as the primary communicators and are part of the mealtime menu. In many families, watching TV or spending time on the computer takes up much more of the family members' week than does sitting down, relaxing, and conversing with the rest of the family. Studies have shown that by the time the average child in our society has finished high school, he/she has spent 11,000 hours in the classroom and 15,000 hours watching TV.²²

Strong families have developed the art of knowing how to structure and manage their time well. The way in which families spend their leisure time says a great deal about what they value. Healthy families are able to structure ways in which each family member has quality time with every other family member through one-on-one conversation and/or sharing a mutual experience. Each parent has separate time with each child and parents are purposive about

scheduling time to be alone together on a regular basis without the kids. Strong families have established a comfortable balance of sharing in events together as well as participating in activities separately or with part of the family unit. Parent(s) are able to take vacations without their children and children enjoy trips away from their parents as well. Many family researchers suggest a weekly family time where the whole family makes this event a high priority is most important.²³ Another important structural time is set one-on-one bonding times with each member of the family.

Well-functioning families really enjoy being together and are able to offer companionship to one another. They know that time spent together casts off loneliness and isolation and provides the contentment of sharing life and its meaning together. Genesis 2:18 affirms one of the important reasons God created persons was so that people would not have to live alone.

IV. Time Together - Cohesion

Strength 12:

Family members share in household responsibilities and family roles are flexible.

Strong, well-functioning families recognize and celebrate each person's gifts and talents. Similarly, it is understood that each person has different needs and interests. In their life together, they nurture the importance of each person being his/her true self and not being hampered by stereotypical roles. Healthy families realize that gender should not determine one's destiny. They divide the household tasks of the family. The serving role is not always attached to the female gender and the breadwinning role is not always put on the male gender.

In well functioning families, the various professional and working roles and responsibilities outside of the home, as well as the various tasks and chores inside the home, can be shared. In fact, the roles can be interchangeable according to the circumstances, particular needs, and interests of family members. In contemporary families, the husband often does the cooking and takes an active part in nurturing the children, while the wife might function as a primary breadwinner, pay the bills, and nurture the children.

Ephesians, Chapters 5 and 6, provides a thorough discussion of the duties and responsibilities of the Christian household. In describing the duties of the husband, wife and children, it is clear that all members of the household are responsible persons who have choices and rights and are not simply the property of the male head of the house and responsible to him.

Paul calls husbands and wives to “Be subject to one another out of reverence for Christ.” (Ephesians 5:21). This is a significant statement in which there is no placing the husband over the wife; rather, it is an admission that Christ is the head of the Christian household. In Galatians 3:28, Paul summarizes, “There is neither male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus.”

Paul is calling the members of the family to a mutuality of love with the husband and wife functioning as equal partners. Mutual submission to Christ and mutual love for one another provide the framework within which the family lives and works.

V. Time Apart - Autonomy

Strength 13:

Family members respect the individuality, need for solitude, and personal autonomy of each member.

In growth-oriented families, each member encourages the other family members to define their individuality and life goals apart from the togetherness pressures of the family. The highest calling of a strong family is to nurture children in such a manner that they are able to physically, emotionally, and spiritually leave the nest and fully embrace their calling to full personhood. The noblest act for parents is to also be able to let go and continue to fulfill their own life's purpose and journey. For parent(s), the question becomes not, "How can I hold on to my children?", but "What will help my children live fulfilled lives?"

Healthy, well-functioning families recognize the distinctiveness of each person's gifts and can celebrate his/her uniqueness. Such respect for the uniqueness of each person in the family means, for instance, that each person has the freedom to be alone. Also, children's interests, fads, clothes, and friends are respected. Families, parent(s), and children are permitted to be a part of their respective peer groups without ridicule or nagging. Parents look forward to the time when the teenagers begin to move out of the nest. In growth-oriented families, parents come to appreciate the fact that family members see things differently as a strength, not a weakness in the family's relationship.²⁴

Strong parenting is rooted in gratitude which knows that children are a precious gift from God. For each person is created in the image of God (Genesis 1:26), and God loves each person who is of such value that even the hairs on his/her head are numbered (Matthew 10:30). God creates each person and gives the newborn child to the family to rear up. The first act of stamping the individuality of the child comes as the family names the new member. The gift of growing up becomes the challenge of embracing one's purpose in life.

Gaining autonomy is indeed a lifelong process in which one becomes increasingly able to distinguish sharply between what is important and what is not. Autonomy is about gaining the

freedom and confidence to be one's self and become differentiated from family, while still remaining connected to family. It is the art of coming to accept oneself as one is, affirming one's purpose, using one's talents – coming to love oneself and still enjoy one's family. The longer range goal of full personhood is to take all of the fragments of life and cast them into a meaningful whole.

As one gains this selfhood, he/she learns more of what is sacred about life. Ultimately, one is drawn closer to God and becomes less afraid to approach the throne of God. One anticipated that his/her loneliness can be transformed into prayerful solitude. One finds a treasure outside him/herself and is drawn more and more to God and to others. One becomes more open to God in such a way that he/she holds onto life, family, and others loosely and is ready to die. There emerges an inner freedom to the person's purpose. One looks to God, and his/her own existence takes on a secondary importance. As Henri Nouwen shared in a number of his works, as one is drawn to God, he/she grasps the vision that our life is not a possession to be defended, but a gift to be shared in community.²⁵

V. Time Apart - Autonomy

Strength 14:

Family members respect a clear separation between the generations with an appreciation of each generation's contribution and role.

In growth-oriented families, the three generations of children, parents, and grandparents each has a distinct and clear role to play in the family and extended family. Family members are eager to accept all of their members and there is a mutual respect for each generation's contribution. Older family members and grandparents are honored for who they are and what

they have done. The elders of the family are revered and appreciated for their wisdom. Just as these families welcome grandparents, so do they welcome the very young. The family is aware of its past, and children listen to the elders' stories and gain a sense of their family's identity. Family members make a conscious effort to gather as a people at reunions, anniversaries, and other family functions.

In healthy families, there is an acknowledgement of each generation's responsibility in the extended family. The parent(s) do the primary nurturing and the grandparent(s) serve in the back-up position; the grandparent(s) are relieved to be done with the parenting task. In less functional families, the three generations spend most of their time together and stick together like glue. Harmony, cooperation, loyalty, and security are considered most important to the exclusion of individual freedom and growth. Often these families seem somewhat closed to the outside world; there is little privacy and everyone is into everyone else's business. "In these families, often the adult children are controlled by aging parents until their parents die."²⁶

In growth-oriented families, the parents are relieved to let go of their adult children, and the parents' marriage is vital enough to generate closeness between the partners when the children leave. This parenting function is virtually extinguished and time together is cherished – new life evolves. Companionship and romance are revived – empty rooms bring peace, not bareness. At this stage, the generations tend to group together – adults turn to adults and sibling turn to each other. The young adult children help each other leave the nest, and parents reexamine their relationship to their own parents.

"The family in the Bible is presented as intergenerational and the actions of one generation have a continuing impact upon those who come after."²⁷ As Exodus 20:5 indicates, "The Lord God is a jealous God wanting His people to love Him and visiting the iniquity of the

fathers upon the children to the third and fourth generations.” As the three generations come together, they transmit the stories and promises to the next generation. In Genesis 5 and Matthew 1, the long lists of genealogies attest to the importance of transmitting the family’s inheritance and purpose to the next generation.

In Ephesians 6:1-4, children are to honor their father and mother, and parents are not to provoke their children to anger, but bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord. The love and honor are to be mutually imparted to each generation.

VI. Service – Valuing Others

Strength 15:

Family members trust others – friends, neighbors, and strangers are welcomed and accepted. The family enjoys making strangers into friends.

Strong, well-functioning families receive neighbors, friends, and strangers into their homes with ease. Not only does the family give its own family members the precious freedom to come and go on their own terms, but also extends this invitation to friends and others. Friends of teenage family members enjoy coming over and feel accepted – not smothered or rejected by the family. Strangers and those needing help are not turned away. In well-functioning families, the home may even take on the look of a way-station because their basic attitude toward others is one of trust.

While it is important to be cautious and protective in strange situations, in less functional families, a fearful and defensive attitude exists with family members clinging to their property and looking at others with deep suspicion. Other people are increasingly viewed as a nuisance and a threat. Children in these families are often overprotected with a paralyzing fear of anyone

they do not know. Some families guard their family members and property so tightly that their family, life, and space cannot be permeated.

More healthy families have learned the art of hospitality. Henri Nouwen describes hospitality as “the creation of a free and friendly space where one can reach out to strangers and invite them to become friends.”²⁸ To give hospitality is to “provide friendship without binding the guest and freedom for the guest without leaving him/her alone.” “Hospitality” is a primary theme of the Bible. The Biblical view highlights not only our responsibility to welcome the stranger in our house, but also to be ready to receive the precious gifts which the stranger may possess. The stranger is carrying hidden treasures which can enrich the host family’s life. In Genesis 18, when Abraham received three strangers at Mamre offering food, water and a calf, they revealed themselves to him as the Lord, announcing that Sarah would give birth to a son. In Luke 24, when the two travelers to Emmaus invited the stranger to stay for the night, he made himself known in the breaking of the bread as their Lord and Savior.

When strangers can become guests, they can get to know the hosts, and in so doing, bring new life to one another. The greatest treasure the stranger has to give is him/herself. Our vocation is to convert the enemy into a guest, whereby the stranger casts off his/her strangeness, and brotherhood can be expressed. When the family invites others inside and creates a receptive place, the whole family grows from the relationship.

VII. Resiliency - Adaptability

Strength 16:

Family members deal with problems directly and openly and handle family crises in a productive and resilient manner.

Members of strong families are able to view stress and crises as opportunities to grow.²⁹ Healthy families do not run away from problems, rather they realize that problems are a normal part of living. They work at approaching problems “head on” and have developed good problem solving abilities as individuals and as a family unit. When there is a problem affecting the whole family, everyone is apt to be involved in the search for answers. An interdependent spirit exists that helps them through transitions of difficulties, and they seem to get stronger as a result of coping with life.

Growth-oriented families have learned that there are a number of options and responses to problems. They try not to allow themselves to be victimized or defeated by going with a fixed response to a new set of difficulties. Family members are aware of the complexities of life, and therefore entertain a variety of responses and avoid simplistic solutions. In the face of crisis, for the most part, they are able to maintain an optimistic and hopeful stance.

In less healthy families, family members are taught to act as if no problems exist. Conflict is hidden and unpleasant issues are usually ignored or denied. These families claim they have few problems and present a façade to the outside world. Sometimes, family members may overreact to minor problems producing greater stress and the potential for more problems. This overly anxious stance can result in a reactive crisis orientation to life whereby any difficulty is viewed as a major crisis.

Families who function well in this area of family life are able to judge the appropriate level of action to the problem and appropriately weigh their response. They seem to be able to adopt a preventive approach to family struggles and deal with problems early before they get out of hand. When a family member has a problem, others are able to come in and effectively lower the other person’s anxiety restoring a sense of balance in the family. This calming ability is

similar to an electrical transformer's ability to step-down an electrical surge to prevent harm to the system. It is like there is a resiliency net built into the family system.

Furthermore, growth-oriented families also seem to understand when their problems need assistance beyond themselves. They are open to reaching out and accepting outside help. They are not trapped with having to appear to be the perfect family with no problems. For example, after arguing over money and the kids for several months, a couple realized they were not coping well and sought out a marriage counselor to gain some important perspective. Well functioning family members are not embarrassed about their dilemmas and see turning to other friends, support groups, and professionals as a way of enriching their relationships. In this sense, family members are able to turn weakness into strength. Paul stated it well in II Corinthians 12:9, "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness."

VI. Resiliency - Adaptability

Strength 17:

Family members see themselves as growing, maturing, embracing and appreciating life.

An important characteristic of growth-oriented families is the ability of family members to respond favorably to life and become faithful partners in living. Strong families create a family climate whereby family members can affirm and embrace life as a good and meaningful place to be and to serve. As Paul Pruyser author of Minister as Diagnostician put it, "They have claimed their purpose in life and are cheerful participants in creation."³⁰

Strong families are able to weather the storms of life because they are adaptable and flexible.

In strong families, there is an overall vision which undergirds the family. The family has a sense of moving towards their purpose together as a family and separately as individuals. It may be a simple goal of “We make good and productive citizens,” or “our family breeds artists and doctors.” Abraham Maslow called this challenge the process of self-actualization. It is instinctual that humans will move toward growth and wholeness – to find their cosmic significance and live out their mission.

Somehow these families seem to be able to make peace with the inevitable changes and progressions in life. People are born, grow older, and die – relationships are started and ended. Families move from place to place. These families accept change and basically see it as a positive movement of growth and maturation. Not only do they accept change, they respond to change with a willingness to creatively risk in the face of change. Although change involves risks, healthy families are willing to take these risks because family members know that sometimes mistakes will come with risks, but even mistakes are a sign of growing. The decision to be a creative force of our own lives is a fundamental choice of all – it is the heart and soul of being human.³¹

Granted, moving through life presents a number of challenges which need to be overcome and even the most mature families have hurdles and transitions which can be quite traumatic, yet they are able to flow with the different life cycle phases and crises as they encounter them. Mature parents have the capacity to bond with their infants, yet can also begin letting them go as they grow older. Healthy families provide the atmosphere whereby the past and future can be brought together in a celebrative present moment. In less healthy families, there is a tendency to hold onto, and in effect deny, that family members are moving through

time and space. In such a family, more often than not, the present is denied, the past becomes a source of complaints, and the future is looked upon as a reason for despair.

There is a hopeful and forward-looking stance in well functioning family members even as they grow older. However difficult it is, family members are able to accept their life's accomplishments and failures, their joys and sorrows, their unrealized dreams and delightful surprises; drawing them into a meaningful expression of gratitude. They can look back and thank God for their lives which have been good even though there were some bad times. Indeed the elders of strong families can finally let go of life like they let go of their children and hold onto God's promise of eternal life to come. Through a life of trusting and hoping, these family members have banked a lot of trust in God and internalizing Jesus' reassurance not to be anxious about tomorrow, (Matthew 6:34) and believing that death indeed is swallowed up in victory (I Corinthians 15:55). The elders of strong families can die in a hopeful and peaceful way which teaches their sons and daughters to also die in grace.

Paul, in summing up his relationship with the Philippian congregation, encourages familyhood in an upbuilding and positive manner: "Finally, brothers (and sisters), whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is gracious, if there is any excellence, if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things. What you have learned and received and heard and seen in me, do, and the God of peace will be with you." (Philippians 4:8-9)

Notes

¹ Curran, Dolores. Traits of a Healthy Family. (Minneapolis: Winston Press, 1983).

² Stinnett, Nick & Nancy; Beam, Joe & Alice. Fantastic Families. (West Monroe, LA. Howard Press, 1999).

³Friedman, Edwin. Generation to Generation: Family Process in Church and Synagogue. (New York: Guilford Press, 1985). p. 1.

⁴Stinnett & Beam, p. 10.

⁵Covey, Stephen R. The 7 Habits of Highly Effective Families. (New York: Franklin Covey, 1997) p. 216.

⁶Stinnett & Beam, p. 73.

⁷Erickson, Erik. Childhood and Society, 2nd Edition. (New York: Norton, 1963) pp. 247-251.

⁸Boyer, Ernest. A Way In the World. (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1984) p. 108.

⁹Covey, p. 58.

¹⁰Stinnett & Beam, p. 51.

¹¹Buber, Martin. I and Thou. (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1970) p. 158.

¹²Friedman, p. 50.

¹³Peck, Scott. The Road Less Traveled. (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1978) p. 270.

¹⁴Covey, p. 280.

¹⁵Boyer, pp. 24-25.

¹⁶Covey, p. 171.

¹⁷Anderson, Herbert. The Family and Pastoral Care. (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1984) p. 61.

¹⁸Brueggemann, Walter. "The Covenanted Family: A Zone for Humanness," Journal of Social Issues Vol. 14 No. Winter 1977, p. 19.

¹⁹Ibid.

²⁰Stinnett & Beam, p. 98.

²¹Covey, p. 115.

²²Simon, Dr. Sidney. Helping Your Child Learn Right from Wrong. (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1977) p. 203.

²³Covey, p. 115.

²⁴Ibid., p. 255.

²⁵Nouwen, Henri. Life of the Beloved. (New York: Crossroad Publishing, 1992) p. 25.

²⁶Rhodes, Sonya. Surviving Family Life. (New York: G.P. Putnam, 1981) p. 198.

²⁷Brueggeman, p. 19.

²⁸Nouwen, Henri. Reaching Out. (Garden City: Doubleday, 1975) p. 55.

²⁹Stinnett & Beam, p. 10.

³⁰Pruyser, Paul. Minister as Diagnostician. (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1976) p. 77.

³¹Covey, p. 66.

Toward a Wellness Covenant for Congregation Leaders and Members

Gilbert Rendle in his helpful book, Behavioral Covenants in Congregations, stresses the importance of congregational leaders putting in writing a clear understanding of how they intend to relate to one another. Rendle states that such behavioral agreements will lead congregations toward more healthy behavior as we honor and respect differences among one another.¹

Based on the seventeen characteristics of optimal individual family functioning set forth in the previous chapter, Gilbert Rendle's behavioral covenants, and my pastoral experience, the following are Behavioral Wellness Covenants for the Congregational Family for pastors, congregational leaders and members.

Our Wellness Promises to God

- We promise to love and thank our God, both individually and together, for the gift of abundant life together which our loving God has given us.
- We promise as faithful stewards of God's Kingdom, to promote and enhance the health and well-being of our physical, emotional and spiritual bodies individually and collectively (in all that we do) to the glory of God.

Our Wellness Promises to Our Congregational Family

- We promise to actively encourage the physical, emotional, and spiritual health and wellness of our congregational leaders and members.
- We promise to our loving God to seek the kind of harmonious and up-building fellowship which the Apostle Paul describes in the 4th chapter of Philippians; namely to seek the best not the worst, the beautiful not the ugly, things to praise not things to curse, to focus upon what is true, noble, reputable, authentic, and gracious.

- We promise to develop, maintain and build up a congregational culture (atmosphere) which is healthy, open, loving, warm, generous where the fruits of the Holy Spirit are active and alive.
- We promise to seek what is best for the entire church family rather than what may be perceived best for any one member or small group in the church.

Our Wellness Covenant to Our Congregational Leaders (both ordained and not ordained)

- We promise to encourage and promote the physical, emotional, and spiritual health and wellness of our ordained and unordained congregational leaders.
- We promise to trust the pastor's leadership, acknowledging that he/she is only human and should not be burdened with unrealistic, magical, or unhealthy expectations.
- We promise to establish and maintain a Mutual Support Team (MST) for the Pastor and Congregation Leaders to support, nurture, and protect (when necessary) the pastor and members when some members are unhappy and make unhealthy or irrational claims concerning the pastor's leadership.

Our Wellness Covenant for the Governing Board of the Congregation

- We promise to treat one another with utmost respect and care, encouraging active and open discussion, debate in a spiritual, positive atmosphere.
- We promise to seek and discern the will of God together by the leading of the Spirit and sense of the group rather than just by a narrow majority voting system.
- We promise to support the decisions of the Governing Board with commitment, enthusiasm, and confidentiality (when confidentiality is called for).

- We promise to actively affirm and encourage each leader’s gifts as well as recognize, thank publicly each leader’s service in thanksgiving to God at least once a year during public worship and other church gatherings.

Our Wellness Covenant when Conflict Arises

- We promise to view the conflict and/or trouble as a challenge to be worked through with a spiritual attitude of, “what does the Lord have to teach us through this time of conflict?”
- We promise to trust and encourage the recommendations of the Mutual Support Team toward supporting the pastor and congregational leaders in resolving the conflict in a resilient manner.
- We promise to keep strict confidentiality and not to gossip about the conflict with other members or out in the community.
- We promise to affirm the best intentions of other leaders and motivations rather than the worst.²
- In summary, we promise to live by the Great Commandment – to love God in Christ and to love one another and ourselves as Christ loves us.

Notes

¹Rendle, Gilbert. Behavioral Covenants in Congregations. (Herndon: Alban Institute, 1999) p. 122-125.

²Ibid., p. 125.

What Would Clergy and Congregational Wellness Look Like Together?

A New Vision

As one participates in the family of God, all ministry is mutual ministry -- indeed an equal partnership between clergy and the congregational leaders and members. The congregational leaders have a responsibility for caring for and building up their clergy and their families as the minister(s) mutually care for the congregational leaders and members. The health and wellness of one directly affects positively or negatively the health and wellness of the other.

Drawing upon the seventeen wellness characteristics and also upon the helpful manual, Clergy Wellness and Mutual Ministry of the Episcopal Diocese of California¹ and applying them to congregational functioning, here are specific positive behavioral characteristics which set forth a new congregational vision – a faithful plan which will enhance the wellbeing of the pastor and his/her family and the congregational leaders and members and their families. In a wholistic manner, it will encourage the congregational family to thrive as a healthy household of God. Indeed, it is a whole new way of congregational being, doing, and knowing.

I. Spirituality -- Being

The “Being” of ministry involves responding to God’s call and grace as a child of God.

- Pastors, congregational leaders, and members take regular time for prayer, rest, meditation, study, and Sabbath rest.
- Pastors, congregational leaders, and members participate in corporate worship and corporate prayer and singing, etc.
- Pastors, congregational leaders, and members enjoy small group Bible study, prayer and support and such groups are rotated yearly so they do not become in-grown.

- Pastors, congregational leaders, and members plan for extended seasons of sabbatical rest, renewal, study, and growth.
- Pastors, congregational leaders, and members learn and enjoy prayerful release, “letting go prayers,” biofeedback, visualization, deep-breathing, and other release techniques.
- Pastors, congregational leaders, and members develop the biblical discipline of agape, the will and intention to work for well-being of others without blame.²
- Pastors, congregational leaders, and members develop at least one to three dear friends (beyond immediate family) with whom they can share deeply and transparently and with whom they can be themselves.
- Pastors, congregational leaders, and members go through the majority of their day feeling good about themselves – they feel blessed as a child of God.
- Pastors, congregational leaders, and members discern, embrace, enjoy, and update their calling/purpose as they go through their lives.
- Pastors, congregational leaders, and members believe the purpose of our existence is to learn how to love.
- Pastors, congregational leaders, and members affirm that God does not cause pain, and does not want to hurt us.
- Pastors, congregational leaders, and members leave plenty of space for the Holy Spirit to guide the ministry, live a balanced life, and enrich the congregation.

II. Stewardship – Doing

The “Doing” of ministry involves the management of one’s physical health, one’s emotional health, one’s time, one’s leadership (talents) and one’s financial resources.

Physical Health

- Pastors, congregational leaders, and members take their physical health seriously and have regular physical health check-ups, tests, dental appointments, and have a positive rapport with their doctors and dentist.
- Pastors, congregational leaders, and members seek out ways to de-stress and learn how to relax and be playful.
- Pastors, congregational leaders, and members regularly exercise for at least 30 minutes a day, 5-7 days a week, and maintain a healthy weight.
- Pastors, congregational leaders, and members eat a nutritious and healthy diet in consultation with their doctors and nutritionists.

Emotional Health

- Pastors, congregational leaders, and members give attention to their mental and emotional health through a support system of family, friends, colleagues, coaches, mentors, and therapists.
- Pastors, congregational leaders, and members seek balance in their lives and discover their strengths and weaknesses; they learn to enjoy their imperfections, and monitor their zealous perfectionistic ambition.
- Pastors, congregational leaders, and members encourage open and mutual feedback and the new learning which can come.
- Pastors, congregational leaders, and members view conflict as natural and inevitable with an attitude of what can be learned from the experience rather than primarily labeling blame. They do not let conflict become a “win-lose” or intractable situation if at all possible.

- Pastors, congregational leaders, and members understand that they will always possess a dual relationship with one another. Clergy can never completely “de-role” with parishioners, nor should they.
- Pastors, congregational leaders, and members take seriously the importance of keeping confidentiality – not gossiping about one another and do not spread rumors all over town. Parking lot talk and secret meetings are prohibited.
- Pastors, congregational leaders, and members seek denominational assistance and support early as conflict arises.

Time Management

- Pastors, congregational leaders, and members learn effective time management, establish boundaries, take 2 days off per week, and learn to say “yes” and “no” in their church work and secular work.
- Pastors, congregational leaders, and members enjoy helping members discover new gifts for ministry/service, and do not see themselves as indispensable or take their role too seriously. The same people don’t get asked to do the same thing over and over.
- Pastors, congregational leaders, and members regularly rotate leadership positions; an attitude of training new leaders in skill and ministry development is encouraged.
- Pastors, congregational leaders, and members have no more than a few leadership functions in the church for clergy -- i.e. lead worship/preach, teach, pastoral care, and set vision, etc. and two for the congregational leaders. They affirm a job for everyone and everyone with just one or a few jobs.³
- Pastors, congregational leaders, and members emphasize community more than standing committees. Only the important standing committees/teams are encouraged. Ad hoc

committees function to accomplish the task and then disband. The purpose and effectiveness of these committees are regularly assessed.

- Pastors, congregational leaders, and members set weekly goals and objectives and work toward a realistic weekly plan of accomplishing them in a balanced and healthy way.
- Pastors, congregational leaders, and members learn the art of not taking congregational worries and stress home with them and seek counsel when they are overly stressed.
- Pastors, congregational leaders, and members enjoy retreat times and vacation times at least 2 - 4 times per year as a family and at least two times a year as a congregational family.
- Pastors, congregational leaders, and members build in and respect Sabbath time (rest time) after handling urgent situations, emergencies, funerals, major celebrations, etc. which are part of the congregation's shared life.

Leadership (Talents)

- Pastors, congregational leaders, and members discover their purpose, confirm their calling through community, embrace their gifts, and live out their calling by their words, actions, and vision.
- Pastors, congregational leaders, and members enjoy sharing and leading others in how God has sustained and loved them through corporate worship and small group ministries.
- Pastors, congregational leaders, and members enjoy sharing in local and regional mission and service opportunities in groups and individually.
- Pastors, congregational leaders, and members take part in regular training and continuing education opportunities with an attitude (goal) of life-long learning and spiritual development.

- Pastors, congregational leaders, and members stay connected to higher judicatory and enjoy working ecumenically in the community within limits.

Financial Resources

- Pastors, congregational leaders, and members have a positive attitude toward giving of financial resources in thanksgiving to God with a cheerful attitude and the faith that the gifts may be multiplied.
- Pastors, congregational leaders, and members exercise personal responsibility in their oversight of their own personal finances with a spiritual attitude.
- Pastors, congregational leaders, and members enjoy developing and looking after their worship space and living space but do not idolize their space.
- Pastors, congregational leaders, and members take care of insurance, protecting important papers and wills, and such information is on file and openly communicated to others.
- Pastors, congregational leaders, and members keep accurate and timely financial records which are openly and frequently communicated with the congregation. A yearly audit is performed with an independent CPA.

Partnership Mutual Care – New Knowing

A new way of positive “Knowing” for the community of faith.

- Pastors, congregational leaders, and members have a responsibility to model wellness and a positive vision and mission of the congregation – to fashion their lives in accordance with healthy norms and with the gospel.
- Pastors, congregational leaders, and members are trained in a wellness model of ministry and update one another through workshops and seminars. Wellness learning and sharing are encouraged in a mutually supportive manner.

- Pastors, congregational leaders, and members establish a Mutual Support Team (MST) which meets at least monthly. This Team is chosen by the pastor and approved by the Governing Board to support, encourage, nurture, and protect the pastor as communication problems and conflict arise in the congregation.
- Pastors, congregational leaders, and members encourage members with medical training (nurses, doctors, technicians, etc.) to use their talents and experience in wellness education for the congregation.
- Pastors, congregational leaders, and members have behavioral covenants which clarify their working ministry relationships from a wellness perspective and such documents are adaptable and updated regularly.
- Pastors, congregational leaders, and members affirm and celebrate their pastor-congregation relationship expressing appreciation and thanksgiving at least once a year with a special event for clergy and their family and a separate event for the congregational family at least once a year.
- Pastors, congregational leaders, and members hold a health fair/check-up for the church and community at least once a year where blood pressure, cholesterol, stress check-up/counseling, body-fat index, healthy eating, and physical, emotional, and spiritual wellness resources are disseminated.
- Pastors, congregational leaders, and members see themselves as growing, learning, developing new talents, and embodying a culture of spiritual, emotional, mental, and physical growth and wellness – seeking wellness -- shalom in the community.

Notes

¹Cranston, Pamela Lee. Clergy Wellness and Mutual Ministry. (Oakland: O'Brien & Whitaker, 2000)

²Sisk, Ronald. Competent Pastor: Skills and Self Knowledge for Serving Well. (Herndon: The Alban Institute, 2005) p. 86.

³Baab, p. 51.

A New Structure for the Church: A Mutual Support Team

While much has been written about clergy self-care, the crisis in pastors burning out and leaving professional ministry, not much attention has been given to thinking about new congregational structures for supporting the pastor and congregation from a wellness perspective. When the pastor is threatened by some members who are upset with the pastor's leadership style and/or his/her personality, often the pastor ends up fending for him/herself. Since the pastor is thought by many to be the one to always "turn the other cheek" in Christian love, he/she literally at times has to "take it on the chin," as a mark of his/her Christ-like calling. Yes, sometimes pastoral leadership is lonely and ministers sometimes can be loners, yet such an attitude can be destructive to the pastor's health and well-being. And such an unrealistic mindset can harm the congregation's well-being. The lack of support and nurture of the pastoral leader in the midst of major conflict has been documented as a major reason many pastors are leaving the professional ministry altogether.

By the grace of God, we need to visualize new ways of knowing, doing, and being in the midst of congregational conflict. To address the issue wholistically and from a new paradigm, we have to look beyond the notion that it is just a matter of individual clergy self-care and competence on the one hand, and congregational excellence on the other. By isolating and separating these dynamics, we have not fully understood them. We have to recognize that the health of the pastor and the congregation is a shared endeavor. Since it is the thesis of this study that healthy clergy make for healthy congregations, and healthy congregations encourage physical, emotional and spiritual health of their leaders, I propose a new organizational structure for the church.

In the 1990's Roy Oswald of the Alban Institute developed the helpful video presentation entitled, "Why You Should Develop a Pastor-Parish Relations Committee." A number of denominations had such a committee which functioned in some churches during the last 30 years. Some churches have had a "Shepherding the Shepherd" Committee. Many churches have never had or seen the need for such a committee. Other congregations have had a pastoral care committee which functioned primarily to provide pastoral care for the congregational members. It has not occurred to a number of congregational leaders that the pastor needed any pastoral care at all. He/she is here to serve the members. Oswald states that when the relationship between the pastor and members of the congregation suffers, it is difficult for anything of significance to happen within the congregation.¹ Oswald continues that pastors and congregations need to work together to make a congregation thrive and he sets forth a number of thought-provoking exercises that leaders can do to make sure the congregation leaders, members and pastors are fulfilling a mutual vision of the congregation. Oswald believes that the charge of this committee is to monitor the quality of the relationship between pastor and congregation – it is not an evaluation committee, a salary review committee, or the channel for all of the complaints some congregation members have about their pastor. It functions as an advisory committee to the pastor as Oswald asserts, to seek to understand what it is like to be the spiritual leader of the congregation.²

Unfortunately, many churches have ceased operating with a Pastor-Parish Relations or Shepherding the Shepherd Committee. And often with the increasing business model many churches have adopted, the Pastor-Parish Relations Committee has evolved primarily into a Personnel and Evaluation Committee. In this evolution toward a corporate business model, the most crucial support and nurture function of caring for the pastor's physical, emotional and

spiritual health and wellness has been lost in many congregations – sometimes with harmful results to the pastor’s and congregation’s health. For congregations to thrive, this function of effectively shepherding the pastor and his/her family must be recovered in order for congregations to become healthier and more vibrant bodies.

Establishing a Mutual Support Team (MST)

From a wellness perspective, I am proposing taking much of the helpful framework of Oswald’s Pastor-Parish Relations Committee and updating it in a wellness framework to become a Mutual Support Team for pastors and congregational leaders and members. Its purpose and charge would be to monitor, maintain, and protect a positive and healthy congregational culture ensuring that congregational conflict can be successfully worked through with positive and healthy long term results. When conflict and communication issues arise in the congregation, this group acts as an important advisory group and primary support system for the pastor and his/her leadership. The Mutual Support Team (MST) communicates the shared ideas, hopes, dreams, expectations and concerns of the congregation to the pastor and also interprets the roles, functions, hopes, dreams and needs of the pastor to the congregation.

The MST helps the pastor monitor his/her workload, as well as the expectations of the congregation. From a wellness perspective, the purpose of this committee is to model positive healthy physical, emotional, and spiritual health of the pastor and congregation leaders. This committee is continually asking “how can we ensure that we are treating our pastor as a fellow and human child of God with strengths and weaknesses like everyone else?” He/she first is accountable to God, his/her spouse, his/her children, and then to his/her job as pastor. A second question MST is continually asking in a balanced manner is, “how can we make the relationship between the pastor and congregation more healthy and life-giving?”

Setting Up the Mutual Support Team

In developing the MST, it is important that the pastor have the authority to nominate 4 to 7 key leaders and members that he/she would like to serve on this important committee. By virtue of the pastor's calling, and with respect for his/her leadership, and the pastor's wellbeing, the pastor has the sole authority to nominate persons he/she can confide in and trust. From my perspective, and citing the statistics in the early chapters of this study, the Governing Board choosing this committee simply has not worked and we need to find a better way. The pastor having this recommending authority is very important so that he/she can be comfortable with each member of the team. I have heard of a number of pastors who have held back sharing more deeply because they did not trust several members of a pastor-parish relations committee. The pastor is encouraged to select several members who are also serving on the Governing Board. This Board of the church would have authority to approve the pastor's selection of the members on this committee. Individuals chosen will become one of the pastor's key support and nurture groups. The members chosen will at times deal with sensitive matters and trust and confidentiality between each member and the pastor is essential. It is very important that the pastor learn to trust the group and be real with them. Leaders not chosen to serve on this team need to respect the pastor's choice. This committee would meet at least monthly and more often when a crisis or major conflict emerges in the congregation. It is important to establish terms of service and to rotate the membership of the committee yearly.

It is important to note that the MST does not take the place of the Personnel and Evaluation Committee which regularly (at least yearly) evaluates the pastor, staff, and congregation on the progress they are making together toward meeting the overall goals of the congregation. The Personnel and Evaluation Committee give feedback and constructive

criticism concerning the pastor's progress when necessary. It will be helpful if several members of the Personnel and Evaluation Committee also serve on the MST.

The MST will serve to protect the pastor and when necessary make recommendations to the Governing Board when several members are seeking irrationally to derail the pastor's and congregation's positive leadership or make unfounded complaints. This new MST needs to be included in the hierarchy of the church as a check and balance on the whole congregational system. The MST prayerfully and spiritually serves as key shepherds providing pastoral care and ministering to the pastor and his/her family. This structural change needs to be developed and/or redeveloped in congregations who wish to risk new spiritual ways of being and becoming a more positive, successful, and thriving congregation in the 21st century.

Notes

¹Oswald, Roy. Why You Should Develop a Pastor-Parish Relations Committee, Leader Guide. (Herndon: The Alban Institute, 2001) p. 1.

²Ibid. , p. 2.

Concluding Thoughts

ELCA bishops were asked to describe a healthy pastor. They included good self-care, routine exercise, and good sleeping habits. They also said healthy pastors had good relationships, good marriages, supportive spouses, and a good relationship with their congregations. The bishops said healthy pastors had a passion and vision for ministry, an ability to handle stress and most importantly, the ability to seek balance in their lives. They were able to keep boundaries both personally and professionally and possessed the ability to be accountable. Finally, they were alive spiritually with a significant prayer life and a healthy alive sense of being called to ministry.¹

Recently, many books have been written on the importance and benefits of clergy self-care. Roy Oswald, in his classic work, Clergy Self Care, shares twelve important self-care strategies to help pastors prevent chronic stress and burnout. These helpful strategies are outlined in the Appendix C.

Ron Sisk, in his book, The Competent Pastor, outlines the key skills that a pastor needs (such as communication, time management, interpersonal leadership, spiritual development skills, etc) in order to function competently and gracefully in ministry. Rochelle Melander and Harold Eppley in their book, The Spiritual Leader's Guide to Self-Care, employ a week by week approach to helping clergy care for and nurture themselves as they conduct their ministry throughout the year.

Also, a number of books have recently focused upon what makes for a strong vibrant congregation. Peter Steinke and Ronald Richardson and others have employed family systems theory espoused by Murray Bowen, and most notably by Edwin Friedman to help congregations understand how they function as an emotional system. When the pastor is able to share his/her

dreams, function as a less anxious leader, and deal calmly with the resistance to change from the congregation, the pastor and congregation are able, hopefully, to move forward together and embrace more healthy change. From my perspective, some pastors are able to effectively function less anxiously through the conflict and/or resistance as Ed Friedman taught, yet many are not. When these pastors seek to employ this non-anxious approach without enough training, skill, and self-awareness, they can become overly stressed and it may harm their health and wellbeing. Waiting for the system to change and dealing with the resulting conflict can make pastors weary and that in itself can cause them to leave their congregation.

Paul Wilkes in his book, Excellent Protestant Congregations, surveyed many different types of Protestant congregations throughout America and found twenty-six traits of excellent congregations. These strengths are categorized around the church's approach to ministry, their sense of community, mission, and spirituality. These strengths of congregations are found in Appendix D-I.

In a thought provoking book, Traveling Together: A Guide for Disciple-forming Congregations, eight qualities of vibrant congregations (vibrant spiritual growth, authentic worship, equipping leaders, clergy and laity share ministry together, etc). These strengths are also detailed in Appendix D-II.

Yet, while these books are helpful in isolating the important self-care strategies on the part of the pastor, and also identifying the traits of a strong and vibrant congregation, these books have left out of the equation the fact that pastors and congregations do not operate independently of one another. The approach, "Here is what the pastor needs to do to be healthy and effective, and here is what the congregation needs to do to be strong and resilient," has not fully addressed and understood that they are inter-connected in a living system. The approach of isolating and

treating separately the health dynamics of each has led to a distorted understanding. The pastor and congregation function in an interactive and inter-related manner. As I have sought to demonstrate, the health and thriving of one can positively or negatively affect the health and thriving of the other. We must seek to move beyond treating the wellness of clergy and health of congregations in an individualistic way, but learn to address them in terms of the health and strength of the whole body of the church.

As we look wholistically at clergy and congregational health together, we ask, “What are healthy patterns of human inter-relating? What are the healthy patterns of mission, worship, and discipleship?” We realize that we have come full circle for they are outlined clearly in the seventeen characteristics of family and human group functioning presented in this study.

Since I believe discovery of gifts and embracing one’s evolving call is the basis for all ministry in our new century, then the church has an opportunity to reform and transform its understanding of ministry itself.² As Tom Bandy, Bill Easum, Jeffrey Jones and other church researchers have noted, the roles of clergy and laity are changing. It used to be that the lay leaders’ function was to raise the money to pay the pastor to do the primary ministry and mission.³ Yet by recovering more fully the notion that we are all the priesthood of believers and when the laity are more fully trained and embrace their gifts and calling for ministry as God’s priests, it will enable the church to lower the pastor from his/her over-functioning unhealthy pedestal. Those that are gifted in pastoral care will handle the pastoral care ministry. Those gifted in preaching will preach. Those gifted in administration will do administration, and so on.

So as we move through the 21st century, there will likely be less sharp distinctions between ordained clergy and lay leaders. How enriching to recover the notion that every

believer (ordained and unordained) is called to ministry as a real person with special gifts, a unique calling, and yes, also with strengths, weaknesses, and growing edges before a loving God.

Pastors need to become more proactive and speak up concerning what they really need as they address their own and their families' physical, emotional, and spiritual needs. They need to take more responsibility in initiating new plans and structural changes to enhance the health of the whole congregation.

The pastor's key role in a balanced way, will be to recover his/her priestly role as the spiritual leader of the flock. Many pastors will gladly give up the corporate business over-functioning church leader model that has diverted them from their primary calling and tasks. The pastor's key function will be by virtue of his/her pastoral office, to help discern with the congregation, the spiritual vision of the church. Secondly, his/her function will be to help the leaders and members discover their talents, embrace their calling, and train and empower them to go out in the world and multiply their talents.

Wellness is more than the absence of disease, and it is more than maintaining normal health. It is a way of thinking that moves beyond "what can go wrong?" worrying and faith-defeating thinking, to a positive and optimal spirit which begins to think in a healthy, more life-giving, faith-risking manner. It is about allowing oneself the freedom to think differently, to promote health and to intentionally and creatively want to stimulate physical, emotional, and spiritual growth.

So how can pastors learn to reframe their calling as it is found in Christ's question to his disciples, "Do you love me more than all else? Then feed my sheep." It is often the affirmative response to this question that confirms pastors' callings and moves them toward ordained ministerial service. Yet this charge of Jesus, more than anything else, is not to over-function in

an idolatrous relationship with one's congregation as the "super-human pastor" at the expense of one's health and loving oneself. A second question has to be asked, "Do you love yourself first as a child of God?" To paraphrase I Corinthians 13:2, "If I have all faith so as to move mountains and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, but forget to love myself, it profits me nothing."

As Barbara Brown Taylor, noted Episcopal preacher and author, said so eloquently in her memoir, Leaving Church:

By now, I expected to be a seasoned parish minister, wearing black clergy shirts grown gray from frequent washing... Today those vestments are hanging in the sacristy of an Anglican church in Kenya, my church pension is frozen... This is not the life I planned, or the life I recommend to others. But it is the life that has turned out to be mine, and the central revelation in it for me – that the call to serve God is first and last the call to be fully human.⁴

In so doing, pastors have the opportunity to model as real people the death and new life paradox that Christ calls us toward as wounded healers to a broken world.

Congregations who are beset with frequent and chronic conflict need to love themselves more fully as well – for not only do pastors, leaders and members have callings, but also churches have callings. Chronic conflict in the church greatly diminishes the church's witness in the community and the world. People do not flock to conflicted churches. When the love of the congregational members and the love and support of the pastor and his/her family come together in a spiritual harmony, the fruits of the Spirit flourish, gifts of ministry are multiplied, and healing and wellbeing are realized to the glory of God.

There are too many pastors who are well trained and have excellent skills and experience who are leaving the professional ministry. Not to seek restoration of dedicated clergy indeed is a waste of talent -- it is unhealthy stewardship, and a lost opportunity for healing in the church.

William Sloan Coffin, the former Chaplain of Yale Divinity School used to say so often, “The chief reason for being, our *raison d’etre*, is not ‘*Cognito, ergo sum* -- I think, therefore I am,’ it is ‘*Amo, ergo sum* – I love, therefore I am.’ ”

Notes

¹Halaas, Gwen. “Ministerial Health and Wellness,” 2002. ELCA Division of Ministry, Board of Pensions. P. 10.

²Jones, Jeffrey. Traveling Together: A Guide for Disciple-forming Congregations. (Herndon: The Alban Institute, 2006). p. 93-94.

³Ibid.

⁴Taylor, Barbara Brown. Leaving Church: A Memoir of Faith. (San Francisco: Harper, 2006) p. x-xi.

Further Study

I have sought to address the crisis in clergy health and congregational conflict and set forth a positive wholistic beginning vision for clergy and congregational wellness. The overall health of the pastoral leader and the health of the congregation are interdependently connected.

For further research, it would be helpful to test out this new wellness shared partnership model of ministry with a number of churches; to field test this new model in order to see what affect an intentional positive wholistic model has on the behavioral life of a congregation. It would also be instructive for some churches to put into practice the Mutual Support Team (MST) as a structural change and to field test this change in order to see if the MST has a beneficial affect in de-escalating conflict and encouraging pastors to stay in their positions longer.

As a beginning study imagining a new way of being for the church, there are a number of other areas regarding the crisis in clergy health and wellness that need to be researched. First, the statistics researched and cited in this study are staggering –several hundred to 1,500 ministers of all denominations in America are leaving the professional ministry every month. That is 20-50 pastors a day giving up the ministry for a variety of reasons. It would be helpful if each major denomination would statistically track the number of ministers beginning ministry and the number leaving the ministry each year. Many church leaders and pastors are not aware of the magnitude of the problem. It seems that some denominations are approaching the issues of clergy retention and burnout prevention in a proactive and comprehensive manner. They are looking wholistically at the pastors’ physical, emotional, and spiritual health and openly dealing with this problem. Other denominations, it seems, are dealing with part of the overall problem, but not putting it together a comprehensive systemic health and wellness plan for the whole church and its pastoral leaders. We need to further test the accuracy of the statistics of clergy ill

health, clergy burnout, and clergy leaving the profession that have been cited in this study. Even if these statistics are somewhat inflated and perhaps only half this number of clergy are leaving each month, the issue still needs to be addressed.

Many cardiologists and heart rehabilitation directors are stating that they have seen quite a rise in the number of clergy heart attacks in the last ten to twenty years. They anecdotally report that it is one of the professions with the highest incidence of heart attacks. Yet in my research, it has been hard to verify this problem. For example, neither the American Heart Association nor the National Institute of Health keeps records on the number of heart attacks by profession. More study and statistical research needs to be done to verify the rise of heart attacks among clergy.

Chronic debilitating stress is being shown as a major risk factor for a number of diseases. Positive visualization and meditative thinking have been documented by brain researchers as effective ways to de-stress and calm the whole body. That is one reason I have chosen a positive wellness approach as a way of thinking differently and seeking to focus perhaps on ways in which the whole church body needs to de-stress. More study is needed in the areas of stress reduction for clergy and congregational leaders and members. A study of the ways in which denominational health and pension plans are addressing clergy stress and burnout issues would also be helpful. How much of a safety net is there for pastors who are dislocated, between positions, and disabled or needing to train for a new profession? These are important issues for further study and research on the important subject of clergy and congregational health.

Appendix A

Behavioral Family Strengths Profile

In the left hand column, assess the strengths of your immediate family, ranking them 1 through 5. 1-2 – Needs Growth, 3 – Adequate, 4 – Strong, 5 – Very Strong. In the right hand column, you can assess the strengths of your family of origin.

I. Faith – Commitment

Immediate Family		Family of Origin
_____	1. Family members share a religious faith which informs their spiritual beliefs and practice.	_____
_____	2. Family members teach a sense of moral responsibility and values to their children and each other.	_____

II. Communication – Openness

_____	3. Family members have direct and open communication. They listen to and understand each other.	_____
_____	4. Family members share a sense of trust and are trustworthy, yet broken trust can be mended.	_____

III. Affirmation – Appreciation

_____	5. Family members affirm, support and care for one another and promote each other's happiness.	_____
_____	6. Family members show affection and intimacy for one another in different ways.	_____
_____	7. Family members have a good sense of humor and enjoy playing together.	_____
_____	8. Family members share a sense of their history which is understood through stories, family traditions, ceremonies, rituals and reunions.	_____

IV. Time Together – Cohesion

_____	9. Family members have a secure sense of solidarity and a high degree of interdependence.	_____
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_____ 10. Family members spend quality time together and foster
tabletime conversation and enjoy shared experiences. _____

_____ 11. Family members share in household responsibilities
and family roles are flexible. _____

V. Time Apart – Autonomy

_____ 12. Family members respect the individuality, need for
solitude, and personal autonomy of each other. _____

_____ 13. Family members respect a clear separation between
the generations with an appreciation of each
generation’s contribution and role. _____

VI. Service – Valuing Others

_____ 14. Family members value service to others and contribute
to the general welfare of others as a unit and as
individual members. _____

_____ 15. Family members trust others – friends, neighbors, and
strangers are welcomed and accepted. The family enjoys
making strangers into friends. _____

VII. Resiliency – Adaptability

_____ 16. Family members deal with problems directly and openly
and handle family crisis in a productive and resilient manner. _____

_____ 17. Family members see themselves as growing, maturing,
embracing and appreciating life. _____

Appendix B

Church Family Strengths Profile (Adapted from Appendix A)

In the right hand column, assess the behavioral strengths of your congregational family.

The following are seventeen strengths of a congregational family. These strengths may also be used by individual families in assessing their strengths and growing edges.

I. Faith – Commitment

1. Pastors, congregational leaders and members share a religious faith which informs their spiritual beliefs and practice. _____
2. Pastors, congregational leaders and members teach a sense of moral responsibility and values to their children and each other. _____

II. Communication – Openness

3. Pastors, congregational leaders and members have direct and open communication. They listen to and understand each other. _____
4. Pastors, congregational leaders and members share a sense of trust and are trustworthy, yet broken trust can be mended. _____

III. Affirmation – Appreciation

5. Pastors, congregational leaders and members affirm, support and care for one another and promote each other's happiness. _____
6. Pastors, congregational leaders and members show affection and intimacy for one another in different ways. _____
7. Pastors, congregational leaders and members have a good sense of humor and enjoy playing together. _____
8. Pastors, congregational leaders and members share a sense of their history which is understood through stories, family traditions, ceremonies, rituals and reunions. _____

IV. Time Together – Cohesion

9. Pastors, congregational leaders and members have a secure sense of solidarity and a high degree of interdependence. _____

10. Pastors, congregational leaders and members spend quality time together _____
and foster tabletime conversation and enjoy shared experiences.

11. Pastors, congregational leaders and members share in household _____
responsibilities and family roles are flexible.

V. Time Apart – Autonomy

12. Pastors, congregational leaders and members respect the individuality, _____
need for solitude, and personal autonomy of each other.

13. Pastors, congregational leaders and members respect a clear separation _____
between the generations with an appreciation of each generation's
contribution and role.

VI. Service – Valuing Others

14. Pastors, congregational leaders and members value service to others _____
and contribute to the general welfare of others as a unit and as
individual members.

15. Pastors, congregational leaders and members trust others – friends, _____
neighbors, and strangers are welcomed and accepted. The family enjoys
making strangers into friends.

VII. Resiliency – Adaptability

16. Pastors, congregational leaders and members deal with problems _____
directly and openly and handle family crisis in a productive and
resilient manner.

17. Pastors, congregational leaders and members see themselves as _____
growing, maturing, embracing and appreciating life.

Appendix C

Twelve Strong Clergy Self-Care Strategies

- Pastors learn to balance the stress in their professional and personal lives.
- Pastors have an active and meaningful spiritual life; holding on to Christ to guide them.
- Pastors learn to let go through prayer, meditation, biofeedback, etc.
- Pastors take time out for themselves and their families on a daily, weekly, quarterly, and yearly basis.
- Pastors actively develop and nurture support networks and peer support groups.
- Pastors regularly engage in daily exercise.
- Pastors limit their intake of high fat foods and seek to maintain their weight.
- Pastors actively seek pastoral counseling and psychotherapy for their spiritual and emotional health.
- Pastors learn to manage their time wisely.
- Pastors learn to be assertive without being aggressive to gain further control of their lives.
- Pastors understand and enjoy the power of laughter and humor every day.
- Pastors monitor their ambition, realizing unchecked ambition can be hazardous to their health.
- Pastors enjoy hobbies, sports, arts, and other fun activities to detach from the world of work.

Adapted from Roy Oswald. Clergy Self Care: Finding a Balance for Effective Ministry. (Herndon: The Alban Institute, 1991).

Appendix D – I

Common Traits of Excellent Congregations

Approach

1. A vibrancy, and excitement about living a Christian life
2. Entrepreneurial – constantly looking for better ways to reach and serve people.
3. Draw not geographically or even denominationally, but philosophically
4. Reach beyond their comfort zone
5. Regularly evaluate themselves
6. Have a clear, yet changing sense of mission
7. Willingness to break up and reassemble
8. Unafraid of being vulnerable and of making mistakes

The Work

9. Laity are integral in leadership
10. Preach and practice forgiveness and acceptance
11. Believe in evangelizing without “evangelizing”

Community

12. See themselves as a unique community
13. In transforming the culture, hold government, agencies, and institutions accountable
14. Believe in partnerships with other churches, agencies, interest groups, government

Spirituality

15. Offer an ascent to God, a relationship
16. Traditional without being traditionalist
17. Bible at their core

18. Are innovative about different spiritual approaches
19. Tailor liturgies and program to different constituencies
20. Have powerful, life-situation preaching

Structure

21. Pastors have been in place for years
22. Training, training, training
23. Bring new members to full membership and participation
24. Call leaders, don't fill slots
25. Break out of their walls and into the world
26. Utilize media well

Adapted from Paul Wilkes. Excellent Protestant Congregations: The Guide to Best Places and Practices. (Philadelphia: Westminster John Knox Press, 2001).

Appendix D – II

Eight Qualities of Strong Disciple-Forming Congregations

- The congregation is a contagious place of spiritual growth and vitality.
- The congregation focuses upon authentic worship with an emphasis upon praise, reflection, and celebration.
- The congregation focuses intently upon and is committed to ministry in their community and the world.
- The congregation understands that discovery of gifts of each member and embracing their call is the basis for ministry.
- The congregation understands that both clergy and laity are called to ministry.
- The congregation places a strong emphasis upon equipping and training leaders and members in response to each member's gifts, talents, and interests.
- The congregation seeks to minimize their operational structure in order to maximize their mission involvement.
- The congregation understands that primary spiritual learning, pastoral care and support, and ministry take place through healthy small groups.

Adapted from Jeffrey Jones. Traveling Together: A Guide for Disciple-forming Congregations.

(Herndon: The Alban Institute, 2006).

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