

www.clergyfund.org

ELCA BISHOPS TOLD OF URGENT NEED FOR HEALTH, WELLNESS OF LEADERS

Oct. 20, 2006 CHICAGO (ELCA)—Citing statistics gleaned from health analysis reports, the president of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA) Board of Pensions said the church may not be able to grow unless its professional leaders embrace a stronger health and wellness discipline. About 2,500 people took the online health risk assessment in 2006. John Kapanke said:

- "A fairly low percentage" of the church's professional leaders actually live healthy lives. "We must change our ways to keep this church viable."
- Data from the 2006 shows professional leaders have an average of 4.3 risk factors, he said. The data show that about 1.8 of the risk factors are related to "medical risk" or inherited conditions that a person cannot control.
- About 2.5 factors are lifestyle risks, lack of exercise, poor eating habits, some smoking and some excessive alcohol consumption. All of the statistics are above average, and some are significantly above average.
- In the 2006 data about 71 percent of the participants have risk factors because of poor nutrition;
 - 69 percent are overweight;
 - 64 percent are at risk for the consequences of high blood pressure;
 - 63 percent indicate that they have poor emotional health;
 - 35 percent are at risk for the consequences of lack of physical exercise; and
 - 13 percent indicate they take medication for depression.
- "It gets worse," Participants in the health plan have much higher incidence of "catastrophic claims," which are claims of \$25,000 or more, when compared to participants in a national database in which the ELCA participates. That database—the National Data Cooperative—includes health plan participants from the ELCA and about 37 other corporations.
- "Our catastrophic claims, as compared to others in that group, were three times higher."
- Trends in health for ELCA professional leaders are "deteriorating," which is why the Board asked for the Watson Wyatt analysis.
- Health care costs may affect the church's mission
- Kapanke emphasized the importance of a balanced lifestyle for good health and includes emotional, physical, vocational, intellectual and social/interpersonal well-being.
- "We are not making improvements," he said in the interview. "In fact we're going the other way."

"We firmly believe that healthy leaders enhance lives, and if we don't have healthy leaders ... we're not going to have effective leaders, and we won't be able to grow this church. There is a correlation between healthy leaders and having a viable church." See: Live Well <http://www.elcabop.org/LiveWell>
UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST (UCC) Quelhorst, Ralph (2001). "A Devastating Study on Clergy Morale." ucc.org April, 2001 (United Church of Christ).

- 27% of congregations from every denomination and faith community have experienced a conflict within the last two years that led some people to leave the congregations.
- 70% of the pastors fight depression on a regular basis
- 70% of pastors do not have a close friend
- 1 in 5 pastors are in the advanced stage of burnout.
- 50% of pastors surveyed are so discouraged that they would leave the ministry if they could, but they have no other way to make a living

PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH (U.S.A.) “Committee on Preparation for Ministry; Charlotte Presbytery. The Looming Pastor Shortage.”

- 30% enrollment in PCUSA seminaries are Presbyterian whereas in 1970 it was 85%
- Less than 60% of seminary students at PCUSA are interested in parish ministry
- “Dropout rate” of pastors during the first five years of ministry has increased four fold in the last 30 years “Report on Clergy Recruitment and Retention to the 216th General Assembly (2004) of the Presbyterian Church.” The Board of Pension of the PC (U.S.A.). 2004.
- Stress—while ‘stress’ is experience in many profession, studies have identified particular situations that a specifically impact pastors’ feelings about their work. The leading ‘stresses’ are:
 - Inadequate skills in managing what are perceived to be unrealistic expectations of the congregation.
 - Unrealistic expectations of pastors enter a new call, especially their first call.
 - Feeling lonely or isolated
- Various studies noted that many pastors are not caring for their physical health as well as they should.

PULPIT & PEW PROJECT AT DUKE UNIVERSITY DIVINITY SCHOOL Carroll, J. W. (2006) God's Potters: Pastoral Leadership and the Shaping of Congregations. Grand Rapids, MI.

- Mainline Protestants score lowest on positive feeling and energy
- Correlate to lower measures of health including clergy isolation and loneliness, difficulty of having a private life, being treated differently, lack of agreement (between pastor and congregation) about the role of pastors little time for relaxation or being with children; spousal resentment of time demands and salary.

Summary: "The job is demanding, and pastors perform their duties among a dizzying array of requests and expectations. Congregations are not always easy places, and the responsibilities can sometimes wear down the best pastors. It is not a job for the faint-hearted, but requires a balance of intelligence, love, humility, compassion and endurance. Most importantly, it demands that pastors remain in touch with the source of their life and strength. Like all people of faith, good pastors need moments to renew and refresh their energies and enthusiasm to determine again "what makes their hearts sing."

www.biblicalrecorder.org

Culture, isolation push some to depression

 EMAIL  PRINT

19. October 2009 by Greg Warner, Special to the Recorder
It's a prescription for tragedy.

A high-profile, high-stress job with impossible expectations for success starts you down the road to depression.

Then a stigma against weakness and treatment, along with a cultural and professional code of silence, keeps you on that destructive path until you can't take it anymore.

Sometimes the result is the unthinkable — suicide.

Most often, however, depressed ministers suffer in silence, unable to talk about it even with family. Sometimes they leave the ministry. Occasionally they get help.

What kind of personal pain would cause a pastor to abandon his family, his calling and everything else around which he has built his life?

Members of Sandy Ridge Baptist Church in Hickory are asking themselves that question after their pastor, David Treadway, 42, committed suicide early Sunday morning, Sept. 27.

Those who counsel pastors say our Christian culture, especially Southern evangelicalism, creates the perfect environment for depression among pastors.

It's a job that breeds "isolation and loneliness" — the pastorate's "greatest occupational hazards," said Steve Scoggin, president of CareNet, which counsels many North Carolina Baptist pastors.

"These suicides are born out of a lack of those social supports that can intervene in times of personal crisis."

"We create an environment that makes it hard to admit our humanity," Scoggin added. "...We believe that (pastors) are not supposed to struggle as others do."

"We invite depression by unrealistic expectations," said H.B. London, vice president for pastoral ministries at Focus on the Family, based in Colorado Springs, Colo. "We set the bar so high that most pastors can't achieve that, and because most pastors are people-pleasers, they get frustrated and feel they can't live up to that."

A pastor is like "a 24-hour ER" who is supposed to be available to any congregant at any time, said Scoggin of CareNet, a statewide network of pastoral counseling centers that is a subsidiary of North Carolina Baptist Hospital.

When pastors fail to live up to the frequently impossible demands — imposed by self or others — they often "turn their frustration back on themselves," to self-doubt and to feelings of failure and hopelessness, said Fred Smoot, executive director of Emory Clergy Care in Duluth, Ga., which is responsible for providing pastoral care to 1,200 United Methodist ministers in North Georgia.

Matthew Stanford, a neuroscientist who studies how the Christian community handles mental illness, says depression carries "a double stigmatization." Society in general still places a stigma on mental illness, while Christians make it worse by "over-spiritualizing" depression and other disorders — dismissing them as a lack of faith or a sign of weakness.

The result is a culture of avoidance.

"You can't talk about it before it happens and you can't talk about it after it happens," said Monty Hale, director of pastoral ministries for the South Carolina Baptist Convention.

It's a silent conspiracy in which both the church and pastor are complicit, the experts say. The congregation creates impossible expectations that can lead pastors to depression, then punishes a pastor who seeks professional help. Meanwhile, pastors often deny themselves both the prevention measures that could avoid depression and the treatment that could cure it.

"There is a tendency to keep it quiet to protect your career," said Scoggin. The added tragedy, he said, is that depression is treatable for most people.

But even treatment can come at a high price.

“You are committing career suicide if you have to seek treatment,” said Stanford, “particularly if you have to take time off.”

Depression “is a darkness like no other,” said Stanford, an evangelical Christian who teaches at Baylor University in Waco, Texas.

Most depression does not lead to suicide, but almost all suicides begin with depression. Experts say it’s a rare outcome to a common problem. But Baptists in the Carolinas are asking tough questions after a spate of suicides and attempts by pastors in recent years.

In addition to Treadway, two other ministers in North Carolina attempted suicide in the past couple of years, said Scoggin. And three depressed pastors in South Carolina have taken their own lives in the last four years, said Hale, although most were not publicly acknowledged as suicides.

Treadway’s death doesn’t follow all the patterns of stress-induced depression. Unlike most depressed pastors, the Hickory pastor told his congregation months ago that he was in treatment. And those closest to him say there were no signs that pastoral stress pushed him over the edge on that morning he took his life while in his parked car.

“This kind of blindsided us,” said Rodney Powe, worship pastor of the 900-member church. “I don’t know that we could have done anything different to prevent this.”

Although Treadway had talked about his depression, Powe said, “for people like me who didn’t understand (depression), it was difficult” to come to terms with the pastor’s death and the stigma of mental illness.

Counselors who have since met with the staff and others have discussed the clinical characteristics of the disease, he said. “For me to see it as an illness has helped me sort through it.”

Those who don’t experience depression tend to trivialize the suffering of those who do, he said. “We just say, ‘Come on, get over it. We have the hope of Christ and the Holy Spirit. You should be able to get over it.’”

“People look to pastors as being impervious to any kind of pressure,” said Powe, who has worked at the church for nine years. “We’re professional Christians. We’re supposed to be above this.”

While tragic, Treadway’s death has not crippled the church, he said. “I’m not the least concerned about our church moving on and reaching out to the community. ... The work is bigger than an individual.”

The good news, counselors say, is that most ministers eventually are able to deal with their depression and put their problems, and their jobs, in perspective.

“Most pastors don’t stay depressed,” said Smoot. “They find a way out of that frustration.”

Sometimes that means learning to live with their demons.

“Depression is part of the human condition,” said Scoggin. “... Some people simply find ways to gracefully live with it. Like other chronic illnesses, you may not get over it. Many, many people have to learn to live with it.”

www.religion-online.org

Why Pastors Leave Parish Ministry

by Ralph C. Wood

Ralph C. Wood's most recent book is *The Comedy of Redemption: Christian Faith and Comic Vision in Four American Novelists* (Notre Dame). This article appeared in *The Christian Century*, (December, 13, 2005, pp. 33-35.) Copyright by The Christian Century Foundation: used by permission. Current articles and subscription information can be found at www.christiancentury.org. This material was prepared for Religion Online by Ted and Winnie Brock.

Book Review: Pastors in Transition: Why Clergy Leave Local Church Ministry. By Dean B. Hoge and Jacqueline E. Wenger Eerdmans, 271 pp.

Why do pastors leave the ministry? Several common issues emerge from the research of Dean Hoge and Jacqueline Wenger: preference for another form of ministry, the need to care for children or family, conflict in the congregation, conflict with denominational leaders, burnout or discouragement, sexual misconduct, and divorce or marital problems. Of these factors, which form the basis for the central chapters of *Pastors in Transition*, two are especially important: conflict and a preference for specialized ministry. A close third is the experience of burnout, discouragement, stress and overwork. As the authors explore these factors, they provide significant insights into what can be done to help people stay in ministry.

Hoge and Wenger's study is part of the larger Pulpit and Pew research project on the state of pastoral ministry, based at Duke Divinity School and funded by the Lilly Endowment. Hoge has authored two previous volumes (one co-authored with Wenger) on the status of the Catholic priesthood. *Pastors in Transition* is the first book-length Pulpit and Pew publication to examine the state of Protestant clergy.

The authors conducted extensive interviews with clergy who have left parish ministry, voluntarily or involuntarily, and with denominational leaders from five church bodies -- the Assemblies of God, the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, the Lutheran Church -- Missouri Synod, the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) and the United Methodist Church. The narrative is peppered with numerous quotes from clergy and enhanced with helpful graphs and concise summaries of the findings.

Hoge and Wenger learned, first of all, that polity matters. This finding is most clearly illustrated by the high degree of dissatisfaction expressed by United Methodist clergy in relation to their denomination's deployment systems and the level of support they received from judicatory officials. Among the denominations

included in the study, "the United Methodist Church stands out for the level of centralization, supervision, and commitment to its clergy."

The denomination sets up a standard of dependence between clergy and denominational leadership that is hard to live up to. Furthermore, social trends such as greater freedom of choice and the tendency of pastors' spouses to be working outside the home have made the itinerant model increasingly difficult to implement. The authors conclude that "the more a pastor's career is determined by his or her denomination, the more conflict that pastor will potentially feel with denominational leaders."

Conflict in the parish also looms large. The top five conflict issues cited by pastors who left ministry were pastoral leadership style, church finances, changes in worship style, staff relationships and building projects. Organizational and interpersonal issues, rather than doctrinal differences or hot-button issues such as homosexuality, were the most likely to motivate pastors to move on. "Most notable about the main conflicts experienced by ministers who left parish ministry is their 'everyday,' prosaic nature." As they reflected on this finding, Hoge and Wenger "came to believe that the conflicts most often experienced by our participants are ones that could probably be resolved and in the process offer growth experiences for both pastor and congregation."

The importance of collegiality to pastors' flourishing emerges in several places in this study. Isolation and loneliness contributed directly or indirectly to pastors' moves out of local ministry. Of those who left due to sexual misconduct, 75 percent indicated that they were lonely and isolated. In all five denominational groups, the top motivating factors for leaving were the same. Pastors reported:

"I felt drained by demands."

"I felt lonely and isolated."

"I did not feel supported by denominational officials."

"I felt bored and constrained."

Furthermore, Hoge and Wenger discovered a consensus among judicatory officers regarding pastors who have left local church ministry: "These pastors tended to be loners in the district or presbytery, for whatever reason not part of ministerial friendship groups or action groups."

Leaving ministry is hard to do, and ex-pastors said "there are at least parts of ministry" that they miss. "Their accounts were remarkably consistent: they most missed leading worship and being a meaningful part of people's lives." Pastors who had left ministry under circumstances not of their own choosing or who felt that they had in some way been mistreated mourned the loss of pastoral ministry most intensely. The researchers note that "several interviews were interrupted when pastors cried." Former pastors who were content with their new vocational setting also told of their love for local church ministry. The sense of loss says something important about the good that is intrinsic to the work of pastoral

ministry and about how this work shapes a way of life that is not easily transferable to other vocational contexts.

The gap between the ideal and the reality of pastoral ministry also matters. A significant gap between pastors' ideal about how long it should take to accomplish particular tasks -- preaching, teaching, pastoral care, administration - - and the amount of time it really takes has a direct and predictable bearing on their level of stress and dissatisfaction. Striking a balance between what one wants to do in ministry and what one has to do is crucial.

This raises the critical question of encouraging pastors to manage their work in ways that take into account both their particular skills and capacities and the full breadth of demands and tasks that make up pastoral ministry. A correlative question is how congregations might become more active in helping pastors strike this balance.

There are two issues on which I would have liked to see the authors elaborate further. They assert in one of their introductory chapters that pastoral ministry is no more difficult today than it was four decades ago. Hoge and Wenger concede that ministry is different -- indeed, they mention both differences that have emerged in Protestant life since the 1960s and differences in seminary graduates. However, they contend that the differences do not translate into a greater degree of difficulty. They leave unexplored the social and cultural changes of the past 50 years and the possibility that these changes have made pastoral ministry more difficult as well as different. The proliferation of communication technologies, the changing structure of everyday life (due largely to technology), the growing complexity of family life, the changing understandings and norms of sexual conduct and the expansion of consumer culture (as evidenced by unprecedented levels of consumer debt) are only a few of the conditions that present pastors with new kinds of demands.

The authors' apparent dismissal of this possibility is puzzling, and it prevents them from raising questions about social and cultural factors that may contribute to the negative experience of pastors. Addressing these new challenges would not diminish the challenges of past decades; nor would such a discussion need to claim too much for current circumstances. Rather, it would help pastors to make the connection between larger cultural shifts and their experience of the work they are called to do.

A second issue is the authors' assumption that collegiality among pastors, though important, is inherently limited because "ministers feel unavoidable competition with each other, which gets in the way of forming healthy support groups." But is such competitiveness inevitable? Or is it possible for denominations and judicatories to create conditions under which competitiveness becomes less likely and strong collegiality more common?

By conceiving of collegiality in terms of "support groups," the authors fail to appreciate the potential for strong forms of collegiality that have the character of

friendship, in which fellow pastors share each other's lives and help shape each other's character. Friendship sustains pastors over time and not simply during crises -- it is the kind of collegiality that is crucial to the cultivation of self-knowledge, relational intelligence, the capacity to remain dynamically engaged with one's work and the ability to identify and negotiate conflict, all of which are relevant to preventing the dynamics that cause clergy to leave pastoral ministry.

In his book on the experiences of Roman Catholic clergy, *The First Five Years of the Priesthood*, Hoge claimed that one of the most important findings of his research was that priests left the ministry because they "felt lonely and unappreciated." Loneliness was the one factor always present among the various reasons priests resigned in their early years of ministry. Hoge claims that when loneliness "is absent, resignation from the priesthood is unlikely. Whether a priest is heterosexual or homosexual, in love or not, it will not drive him to resign unless at the same time he feels lonely or unappreciated."

This same dynamic appears to be present among Protestant clergy. The indication of loneliness and isolation among pastors who leave parish ministry warrants a more positive view of pastors' potential for collegiality and calls for a vigorous exploration of the conditions that encourage noncompetitive relationships between clergy.

Precisely because this book succeeds in providing us with an unprecedented, multid denominational reading of why pastors depart from ministry, it is bound to leave readers asking for an equally in-depth discussion of why pastors stay and how they thrive.

www.vcstar.com

A Facebook group to which I belong held a discussion of loneliness among senior pastors.

People commented that pastors tend to have few friends with whom they can relax and be themselves.

Clergy said they need to be guarded about what they say and wary of being judged on superficials, such as their attire. They said their work is so all-consuming that they rarely have time for friendships outside the congregation.

It isn't just senior pastors, participants said, but all clergy, and indeed most organizational leaders. Hierarchical leadership leaves them cut off from sustaining friendships, even cut off from their families.

My immediate contribution to the discussion was to say this:

— The No. 1 need is to have a life outside church — a life filled with nonchurch activities and nonchurch friends, where the pastor can be just a guy or gal. If the pastor has a family, life outside church should put family first. Children need a parent, not a role model standing in a pulpit.

— Second is to have healthy boundaries, where church work ends and rest of life begins. Fuzzy boundaries lead to loneliness.

— Third is to have realistic expectations of church members. To them, the pastor is never out of role. True intimacy with church members tends to be problematic.

Loneliness takes a serious toll. It can lead to sadness and depression. It can lead to boundary problems, acting out and inappropriate behavior. It can sap the pastor's energy and self-confidence.

Some laity impose isolation as a way to keep clergy under control, which is also a way to keep God small and nonthreatening. One pastor told me, "Many laypeople are unwilling to treat their leaders as human beings who need a compliment or kind comment from time to time."

Another told me, "I turned down a call to a small-town parish once because the chairperson of the calling committee said, 'We always know what's going on in the rectory.'"

Most constituents, I think, contribute to the loneliness unwittingly by making comments that treat their pastor as a curiosity and by not including the pastor in certain activities.

Politicians learn to exploit such behavior — although they still get into boundary troubles — and celebrities ride it to the bank. Clergy occupy a strange middle

ground: needing to be political but not possessing the politician's thick skin; serving as a local celebrity but not equipped to manage the spotlight.

As church staffs shrink and church institutions provide less collegiality to clergy, the pastor's loneliness seems likely to worsen. Dealing with that loneliness should be a primary task for both congregations and their denominations.

Nervous clergy might be malleable, but the Gospel is better served when clergy feel able to preach boldly, to tend to all constituents and not just the powerful, and to lead with godly vision, not paycheck anxiety.

Clergy who have full lives, including friendships, downtime and acceptance (of both their personalities and their flaws), will be more likely to connect with their constituents' lives.

Isolated clergy tend to get too institutional because institution is the one place they feel safe and competent.

It's unclear why, as clergy report, denominations have stopped working to promote collegiality among clergy. Maybe denominational leaders are themselves too lonely to imagine better. But they should take the lead in breaking down their mutual isolation.

— *Tom Ehrich is a writer, church consultant and Episcopal priest based in New York. He is the author of "Just Wondering, Jesus," and the founder of the Church Wellness Project, <http://www.churchwellness.com>. His Web site is <http://www.morningwalkmedia.com>.*

Read more: <http://www.vcstar.com/news/2009/jul/15/too-many-senior-pastors-find-it-lonely-at-the/#ixzz14ARLDDIU>
- vcstar.com

www.ministerscouncilnj.org

DO CLERGY COLLEGIAL COVENANT GROUPS MAKE A DIFFERENCE IN THE LIVES AND MINISTRIES OF PARTICIPANTS?

by mincounciladmin on October 5th, 2010

In 2002, with a significant grant from the Lilly Endowment, the American Baptist Ministers Council established the "Together in Ministry" program. "Together in Ministry" (TIM) is the name used for clergy collegial covenantal groups. By the end of 2009, about 2300 Ministerial Leaders participating in about 225 groups were funded.

What happens when Ministerial Leaders participate in TIM or TIM-like groups? A recent study from Austin Seminary, sponsored by Lilly Endowment, revealed the following.

Ministerial Leaders who participate in clergy collegial covenantal groups are more likely to:

- Create a culture of lay- involvement within their congregations that includes higher participation in New Member's Classes, lay participation in worship, lay participation in communion, higher participation in service to the church, and the rotation of lay persons in leadership roles creating a broader base for gifts and abilities.
- Have an organized presence and involvement of youth that includes a youth minister on staff, comprehensive youth programs including conferences and camps, congregational events planned and led by youth, youth serving on congregational committees and boards.
- More intentional involvement in the community including a vision of the congregation as a change agent within the community, a strong emphasis on community service within the congregation, and an expectation that the pastor will represent the congregation in the community.
- Enjoy congregational support for continuing education including financial support for continuing education and congregational requirements for continuing education.
- Experience congregational growth when the ministerial leader has a sustained participation in a group of more than 2 years. Ministerial Leaders who participate in the groups for more than 4 years have even a greater chance of experiencing congregational growth. (For the full report, www.austinseminary.edu/cpl)

The first goal of the Ministers Council TIM groups was to overcome the sense of isolation and loneliness that Ministerial Leaders often experience. The evaluation initially focused on that goal with the following results.

- 84.4% reported an enriched perspective of self and congregation

- 83.4% reported enhanced opportunities for disciplined focus through focused study
- 74.4% reported a climate for mutual accountability among peers
- 89.1% gained a supportive network of colleagues who will pray for one another
- 74.6% gained a sense of other ministers being available for support in their work.

The group members were also asked to describe the value of participation in the TIM experience. They reported that they received encouragement and support to improve preaching and teaching and to enhance church leadership skills. Improvements in personal health, the reduction of stress, and connecting and networking with other pastors and congregations were common themes. TIM participants frequently share about having their perspectives broadened and becoming open to new ideas. (For a complete report of the effect of the Ministers Council funded TIM groups, ask for a copy of the 2009 report to the Lilly Endowment.)

The obvious conclusion is this. Ministerial leaders who participated in TIM groups are more spiritually grounded and better leaders because of the Together in Ministry Grants.

WHY DOES IT WORK?

Dr. Craig Dykstra of the Lilly Endowment's Department of Religion argues persuasively that effective ministerial leaders share this practice; they intentionally nurture networks of significant clergy friendships. Clergy who are connected with other clergy are significantly more likely to be effective than those who are vocationally isolated. Unfortunately, clergy who are isolated are significantly more likely to get into trouble than those who are connected by the bonds of shared vocation and friendship.

Why? It is within these vocational friendships that the issues and practices of ministry are explored, examined, tested, and often resolved. Friends in ministry help one another to mature in the practice of ministry, become more effective practitioners of ministry, and to avoid those serious mistakes that sometimes destroy vocations.

It is within these covenantal groups that ideas can be explored within the local context of community and tested against the realities of the local church. Within these covenantal clergy communities, skills are enhanced, encouragement to try something new is experienced and, perhaps most importantly of all, spiritual lives are deepened as Ministerial Leaders study scripture, share their hearts and pray together. It is within these conversations that disembodied ideas become embodied in the concrete lives of Ministers and ultimately in the lives of the churches.