

A Revision of Pastoral Care



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Presented to the Faculty of the
Department of Religion
In partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of
Bachelor of Arts in Religion

07 May 2002
Gustavus Adolphus College
St. Peter, MN

To My Parents, much love and thanks for your continual help. It is a big year for us all.

To Jesus, "Better is one day in your courts, better is one day in your house,
Than thousands elsewhere." Psalm 84:10. I am dropping my nets.

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Acknowledgements

Pastors Charles Christensen (Trinity Lutheran), Alan Bray (First Lutheran), Rachel Larson (Chaplain, Gustavus Adolphus College), Bruce Eldevik (Luther Northwestern Seminary Library), All Staff at Folke Bernodotte Library (GAC) for being lenient and graceful on late fees and ILL due dates, expertise of Dr. Darrell Jodock and Dr. Faith Kirkham Hawkins and entire GAC Religion Department, Proclaim Student Ministries, and Grandma Joan for the coconut cream pie.

"As a management consultant to churches, the most common problem I see among clergy is overwork or compulsive work. Overworked pastors are trying to do the best they know how, and the best they know is to never let up." -Speed B. Leas¹

The Parable of the Talents: Using the gifts given you to accomplish things for God.
-Luke 19:11 (NRSV)

"My ministry is hindered by my being pulled in so many directions. I feel I am not grounded anymore."
-Pastor, St. Peter, MN

National tragedies like September 11th have a way of disorienting culture in a fear-provoking way. The brash and emotional wrecking ball of violence raised questions about "America." It awakened people from an all-too-innocent slumber and made them take notice of America's role in the world community.

How did America immediately respond to the attacks? September 11 will be branded into the minds of people in the U.S. the way the death of JFK was for another generation. College campuses had to pause and come to grips with what had happened. Within the Gustavus Adolphus College community, a special chapel service was held where reflection could take place. The Chapel was completely full for that service.

People of all faiths—but important for this conversation—Christians found their way into churches everywhere in search of some piece of meaning, some truth to cling to. People sought out their church leaders to provide comfort and some sense of what had happened and what was going to ensue. People sought out their clergy to provide emotional support and counseling so they could cope and understand.

Were pastors ready? No. No one can be ready for an unexpected national tragedy. One result was a network of over 300 pastors who formed the Ground Zero

¹ Speed B. Leas, *Time Management: Working Guide for Church Leaders* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1978) 21.

Clergy Task Force to begin to address such issues.² Even though no pastor could have been ready, people continually turn to pastors in the time of tragedy. Being designated as clergy, or on a more personal level, answering God's call to service, carries a specific responsibility. People often take advantage of the fact that clergy are waiting within or just outside the walls of the church, ready to help and respond with a message of hope.

Christians continually attach expectations to clergy. These expectations, though, have become a burden to most clergy as they struggle under the weight of society's changing viewpoints and tolerance for outward expressions of faith, violence in multi-media, and the like. Words such as "post-modern," and even "post-Christian," are entering everyday philosophical and ethical thought. Through the maelstrom of rhetoric and cultural shifts, the pastor's responsibility is to hold up the Gospel to people—for the Gospel is still a message of hope.

Ironically, this paper is titled "A Revision of Pastoral Care." What is the church's responsibility when pastors are becoming burnt-out shells of their former selves, hollowed out by the increasing expectations and demands put on them by their jobs? It is not so easy to dismiss clergy stress as "everyday" or "typical with every job," for the demands of the job go beyond working for a typical boss. The job brings together faith and personal relationships, joy and sorrow, and the everyday mortar with which each person is constructed. The church, though, is not the only place to question or point fingers. It cannot be left only for the church to handle. This issue falls into the laps of every congregant who desires a passionate leader, shepherd, and listener. Leaders who have passion and vision shape the future of Christian congregations. These people do not appear out of thin air.

² Speaker Rick Del Rio, NYPD Chaplain, 10 April 2002.

This paper will examine clergy stress as it appears in the lives of everyday pastors today. From personal interviews, I will identify some of the major factors that are causing clergy stress and inhibiting ministry on a day-to-day basis. These factors are manifesting themselves in new ways for each new generation of pastors. 2 Corinthians 11 will be examined to show that stress is not a new issue facing clergy, but has roots in Paul's own struggle with the Corinthian congregation. Paul's troubled response to stress is poignant in 2 Cor 11, and thus relevant to a pastor's struggle. Different means of answering some of the difficult questions will be offered in an attempt to understand what the issues are and how best to respond. I will offer some models for proactive approaches by congregants, their churches, and finally pastors themselves.

The bibliography for this paper contains a wide array of sources and articles dealing with pastoral care for pastors and with clergy self-care. Popular journals contain constant conversation among clergy. One can see from magazines such as *Leadership*, an offshoot of *Christianity Today*, that writers and editors consider clergy stress an important and provocative issue. These popular magazines should not and do not form the basis for research but help frame the conversation and identify language that is currently spoken in clergy circles.

"Clergy self-care," an approach for holistic health, is now coming to the forefront of discussions. Why? The issue has been there for some time, but finally, it is being more widely addressed. Clergy stress, due to unrealistic responsibilities, profoundly deteriorates and inhibits productive ministry. Clergy care starts with proactive solutions and forums for conversation initiated by the church and congregants to ensure that future leaders are empowered to find a grounded and healthy lifestyle.

What's Really Going On?

The constant resurfacing of clergy stress in society raises the questions: why and what is being done? Because clergy stress in itself may seem innocuous, its current place (on the periphery) as an issue facing churches should be a cause for concern. As early as 1971 (Mills-Koval), psychologists were studying the issue of clergy stress where clergy felt emotions "often severe in nature":

Frustration, anguish, depression, and doubts about one's competence...Stress was experienced across the entire lifespan...The most commonly reported source of stress, as might be predicted, was one's relationship to the congregation, particularly in the realm of personal and ideological conflicts.³

Physical signs are manifesting within the lives of pastors, and still the issue is deferred and soon forgotten. There now needs to be a much more aggressive approach to increase awareness and provide ideas for aiding the persistent issue of ignored clergy stress.

Stress can be defined as "harmful physical and emotional responses that occur when the requirements of the job do not match the capabilities, resources and needs of the worker."⁴

One understandable question is, "So what?" Every Christian or non-Christian alike would be concerned and empathetic with the undue amount of stress clergy struggle with on a daily basis, yet; "that sounds just like my life." Everyone deals with considerable amounts of stress and difficulty in life: what sets clergy stress apart from other types of stress? Cameron Lee's study of the interpretations of the Ministry Demands Inventory (MDI)⁵ reveals the dynamics of clergy stress:

³ Cameron Lee, "Specifying intrusive demands and their outcomes in congregational ministry: A report on the ministry demands inventory," *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 38 (1999): 4, 477.

⁴ National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health, *Stress at Work* <<http://www.cdc.gov/niosh/atwork.html>> (01 April 2002).

⁵ See Lee's discussion of what the MDI is and interpretation styles in his methods section.

As with other careers, the effects of work-related stress for ministers is not confined to the domain of the workplace, but has a global impact that may extend to other relational areas. What makes this of particular importance to clergy is that the typical social environment of the ministry is already characterized by a vagueness of boundaries between work and family life.⁶

There often are no clear boundaries where a clergyperson's work starts and ends. This ambiguity makes for continual struggle. Pastors are caregivers. They constantly offer energy to their congregation out of the inner fire and passion for God and people:

We [clergy] interact with people when they have physical, emotional, and intellectual concerns as well. When people are sick, we visit them in the hospital or at home and we are expected to pray for them. When people have emotional problems, we make ourselves available for pastoral counseling. When people don't understand their life situation, we help them think things through intellectually so they can function better. Clergy are still at the top of the list of those individuals turn to when they have a problem.⁷

Clergy experience stress in dealing with people in so many different realms. When people seek pastoral counseling, it is not usually—though they may claim it—about one single issue but a complex mix of many different struggles with which pastors need to be able to empathize.

The Evangelical Church in America (ELCA), while providing some solid foundations for candidates to build from as a person in seminary, is finally taking larger strides in addressing this issue. Roy Oswald of the Alban Institute has given lectures, done studies, and counseled Lutheran pastors who are struggling and written the book, Clergy Self-Care, as a resource. More energy needs to be directed at understanding and providing practical applications for the issue. In the ELCA and across denominations, the lack of denominational support is causing seminaries to struggle to find students eager to attend. Why are so few people now going into seminary? Younger members of

⁶ Cameron Lee, "Intrusive demands," 488.

⁷ Roy M. Oswald, Clergy Self Care: Finding a balance for Effective Ministry (Nashville: Abingdon, 1980) 9.

congregations are seeing the current model of ministry and can be more apt to choose secular jobs than deal with the stress that afflicts clergypersons. Are seminaries preparing students for practical application, or is it a "sink or swim" mentality? From the way current clergy are coping, it appears to be the latter.

Problems call for a change. The change does not necessarily have to be radical, but it is change nonetheless. Roy Oswald, who is at the forefront of understanding what is happening with clergy, has offered these startling numbers:

Approximately twenty percent of the [ELCA] clergy I have worked with in seminars score extremely high on the Clergy Burnout Inventory (see chapter 8). Among clergy in long pastorates (10 years or more) the number jumps to fifty percent. The number is lower for younger clergy who generally score higher on stress scales...The tragedy is that our best clergy—the hard-working, dedicated folk who have given too much of themselves for too long without replenishing the cup—are burning out.⁸

This issue is having an impact on ELCA pastors across the country, why then is there not more specific programming for pastors? Why do so many pastors go through burnout and struggle with depression? What is happening to cause this issue? The supposed role models are struggling themselves. Answers are needed now.

Not Just Facts and Figures: Personal Interviews and Narratives for Identification of Current Clergypersons' Specific Stress Points

To get at the heart of the issue of clergy stress, I felt it was necessary to conduct interviews of three currently active, ordained ELCA clergy.⁹ The issue initially appears to lie at two specific levels: clergy and congregation, and there it must be identified, discussed and understood. With the sensitive nature of this issue, delving into clergy's

⁸ Oswald, *Clergy Self-Care*, 3-4.

⁹ I received from Gustavus Adolphus College's Institutional Review Board's (IRB) approval on 22 March 2002, IRB #113697.

lives, it is important to listen to pastors. What are their concerns, hopes and fears of being in such a position as ministry? Often in personal, one-on-one interviews so much more is being said than just the words. Non-verbal communication may reveal additional insights about the person and their passion for service to God and others.

Each pastor must be seen apart from their primary role as "pastor" and accepted as a human being. Pastors Charles Christensen, Alan Bray, and Rachel Larson are fervent in their roles as pastors. They love God, the Church, and people so much they decided to give of their lives in service. This is not being said to make a pastor sound noble, but to show the depth of concern and compassion they bring to a job. They bring intellect and years of study. Chaplain Rachel felt her call to ministry over the course of many years in college. Dubbing herself more fundamentalist in her beliefs (a "fundy") in High School, early collegiate biblical studies got her thinking about ministry. Because she graduated in 1980, she did not receive as much support, as women were not ordained until 1970. Yet, she did not let that stop her from pursuing ordination. She has been a nurse and a chaplain in a hospital, so compassion for others is an important part of who she is.

Pastor Alan Bray said he felt his call earlier in eighth and ninth grade. He grew up with some strong pastors as role models, yet he went on to teach English for seven years. He had a variety of experiences, from living in Hong Kong to working with inmates in the South Dakota prison system. He had always enjoyed working with the church and realized he wanted to take a more active role than committees and church councils. Pastor Charles Christensen, or Pastor C, knew early from involvement in high school that he was being led toward ministry. When war for the United States came and

so did the draft, Pastor C was very much against it and decided seminary would thus be his best option. He entered seminary in the middle of the third quarter. He feels a deep love for God and the church, and said it was important to “check our calls,” being in constant conversation with God’s desire for people.

Methodology for Interviews

Each pastor (Bray, Christensen, and Larson) selected for these interviews has an important role in the local community. Minnesota, originally settled by Scandinavian and German pioneers, has a high percentage of its population claiming to be Lutheran. St. Peter, a town of about 10,000 people, has two separate ELCA-affiliated churches and an ELCA college; it is therefore important to look within the ELCA tradition. All three pastors interviewed are relatively new (two years or less) within the community, but are not new to ordained ministry. Each brings a variety of experiences to their work.

The interviews had specific parameters in order to keep them as much the same as possible for each interviewee. The interviews were generally one hour in length, and followed the same basic format of prepared questions. Numerous follow-up questions were asked as a way to get the interviewee to expand on their thoughts. The pastors were not forced to answer any question they felt might violate pastoral confidentiality but were asked to be honest in the comments and answers. Building initial rapport and connection, and establish a comfortable setting for them to talk (i.e. office, favorite chair, cup of coffee) was important. Even though only three pastors were interviewed, individual and collective voices came through in surprising ways, as is revealed later.

The Interview Questions

The design of each question let the pastor reflect and explore ideas about clergy stress. They open dialogue on a wide range of smaller issues by attempting to affirm the pastor, and provide a place for them to express their current attitudes and feelings. I will list the questions and rationale behind them.

Background Questions: These questions help gain a framework for where the pastor is physically and emotionally in life and ministry. They help see who the whole person is, taking into consideration the other responsibilities each has outside the parish.

- How many years have you been in ordained ministry? How long have you been at this church? Are you the only full-time/part-time clergy person at your church?
- Age?
- What relationships are present in your life that have the greatest influence on you? [What other spheres of relationships are you concerned about?]
- Did you experience what is understood as a “call” to ordained ministry? What was the experience like for you?
- What did you image being an ordained pastor would be like? [Responsibilities, pressures, rewards...]

Communication Questions: How were a pastor’s expectations communicated to them?

Were expectations clear or not? Where do pastors spend the bulk of their time? How is their time spent, and where specifically are they encountering these issues?

- When you came to interview at the church where you are currently serving, did the call committee discuss with you what responsibilities they expected of you? If they did not, did you raise the question with them? If they did, what responsibilities did they propose before you accepted the call they extended?
- Did you negotiate with the call committee? Hours? Day[s] off each week, etc.?
- What are your responsibilities as a pastor? [Preaching-sermon prep, planning worship, leading worship, visitation {hospital, shut in, nursing homes}, teaching confirmation students, pastoral counseling, funerals, weddings, baptisms, marriages, administration]
- How many hours a week would you say you put in each major area of responsibility? What do you spend most of you time doing? Name your top four or five.

Clergy Stress: These questions delve right into the heart of the issue. The pastors were asked to reflect and think about attitudes for themselves and among the peers they associate with closely. Usually numerous follow-up questions encouraged the pastor to elaborate on their experiences.

- Every pastor, at some point, must feel as if much of what happens at the church rides on their shoulders. It is a very individualistic attitude ["I can do it all myself."] How has that idea translated for you, and how have you dealt with it?
- What do you see as some main issues that pastors struggle with that cause intense frustration/burnout?
- What are some ways non/verbally they attempt to communicate this to appropriate people (their congregations, fellow staff, family, peers, and higher-ranking clergy)?
- How, as a pastor, do you see communication being improved?

The Pastor as a Person: These questions are directed at looking the big picture. Who is the pastor? What makes a pastor unique? What does a pastor think or dream about to make the church better or live in a Christ-centered way?

- What do you wish someone would tell your parishioners about you as their pastor (that you do not believe you can tell them!)?
- What do you wish someone had told you about, do you wish someone else had counseled you, as you were preparing to go into the parish?
- As your role as a pastor, you are constantly in a position where you are giving to other people. What are some ways (non sabbatical) you are spiritually fed and renewed?
- How many sabbaticals have you taken? What did you do? What was the experience like?
- Dream a bit: If more staff members were added to your church, what kinds of projects would you like to do with your extra time?
- Any closing comments this has raised in your mind?

Each interview ended with an opportunity to ask questions. I emphasized that this was not a one-time interview but the beginning of a conversation that would last over the course of the semester. The meeting ended always with prayer. These interviews led to some interesting discoveries and trends relating to the nitty-gritty issues that pastors are

dealing with on daily basis. The pastors did not choose to answer all the questions. As the interviews revealed, the manifestations of these problems come in some basic forms.

The Issues: What's really going on?

At my denomination's clergy retreat, I sought direction from my experienced peers but could find no clear sense of pastoral identity among my colleagues. Most seemed burdened with discouragement. My closest friend desperately wanted out of the ministry. He wondered how to lose his 'call.' I found that quite troubling.¹⁰ (A non-ELCA clergy person speaking to the issue of clergy stress.)

In this section, I will lay out, analyze and discuss some issues borne out of the many conversations I had with all three pastors. Each pastor alluded to many of the situations described later, but because of the sensitive nature of the issues I am using few direct quotes. This is done out of respect for them, their family and their privacy. The first prevalent issue is clergy not being able to find pastoral identity due to the morass of unrealistic expectations. These expectations are thus a large component of clergy stress. Pastor Christensen noted that, "expectations are complicated [in today's society]. Pastors have lost [their] base." Expectations and who applies pressure to whom is difficult to sort out. While expectations are a large category in referring to responsibility, I will talk about clergy stress in three major components: initial outside perceptions, job descriptions, and the implications on practical life.

When I approached a class this past fall, a seminar on Paul composed mostly of seniors, I asked a very open-ended question: What qualities or responsibilities should a pastor have? For the next five minutes, the class brainstormed a chalkboard full of ideas and characteristics. It looked a little like this: shepherd, kind, listener, leader,

¹⁰ David Fisher, The 21st Century Pastor (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1996) 23.

compassionate, etc, etc. When the dust settled, it was clear that the students had very high expectations. The board was crammed with words that when combined came very close to omniscient and ubiquitous. Even the "bare" necessities are quite interesting because of the high level of expectation. The class's many ideas and expectations are staggering, but not too far from the rest of society.

People do and should expect a lot from their pastors. Not merely leaders within the Christian religion, pastors serve in so many other capacities that may be unseen. They are also voters, grief counselors, and concerned parents at PTA meetings. The face seen on Sunday morning leading worship or speaking about God, is also the same person one sees ordering at the drive-through at McDonald's or a getting a speeding ticket. In the movie, "Keeping the Faith," a priest and a rabbi are good friends and comment similarly that "Rabbis are supposed to be the people Jews don't have time to be" and "Priests are the people Catholics don't have the discipline to be." Parishioners want them to be at the Scandinavian Meatball Dinner planning meeting and the hospital bedside. However, the perception is to think these can happen simultaneously.

People seek pastors for guidance. Clergy are God's ambassadors. They bring a message of God to people in the form of the Gospel. This good news needs to be proclaimed every Sunday, and people look to clergy for an encouraging word. When something seems skewed, clergy are sought out to be an example or person that can bring light to the situation.

Communication about the expectations for pastors begins in the job description. Each church puts together a description of what they are looking for in a pastor. Because the needs of every church are so different, each list will be different. All three pastors

who were interviewed are serving in what the ELCA classifies as a small town, or 10,000 people or fewer. The job description contains not only what is expected of all ELCA rostered ministers but usually the church's own addendum with specifics. A job description could look like Appendix A. As Appendix A shows, the list of expectations for pastors is quite long and difficult. Each pastor who was interviewed acknowledged that they had a "reasonably clear" to "clear" understanding of what the church explicitly expected of them. Each received a job description. Yet, Pastor Bray and Christensen made similar comments that reflected their ideal: "in a traditional understanding, a pastor does what is required." This is very open ended! One human individual who is capable of making mistakes and being wrong can not always live up to or display the qualities looked for. Yet, even acknowledging that, the assumptions go on.¹¹

With all job descriptions, people are held accountable to the responsibilities set out for them. There is still a continual idea or assumption that pastors lead perfect lives, ones that come close to accomplishing some unrealistic expectations. This is not true, and the "Fishbowl Syndrome," as I call it, is where pastors are elevated to a status where they are incapable of leading the lives they so desperately want to live, and when they do sin or make mistakes, live in depression and guilt. It becomes a mixture of the expectations they have for themselves while dealing with the congregation's. There is no hard and fast line between expectations and where the pastor's work stops. Thus, the ambiguity causes problems. While pastors are role models to people of all ages, they also deserve and need that same grace that they talk about every Sunday with the Brief Order of Confession and Forgiveness. "We have sinned against you in thought, word and deed,

¹¹ See also William Willimon's discussion of "ill-defined congregational expectations" in *Clergy and Laity Burnout*.

by what we have done and by what we have left undone.”¹² Corporate confession includes the pastor.

Beyond the list of expectations, pastors experience a significant amount of internal stress that rarely is seen by a committee or congregation. An issue that clergy are continually facing is that they never have enough time to complete their work. No matter how many hours they put into the office or how many phone calls they take, they still are not getting things done. This feeling is difficult because work or the idea of work is constantly looming over a pastor's head. Pastor Christensen said he was “renegotiating [his responsibilities] now” because he felt “overwhelmed by demands.” “The pace of ministry is too fast due to lots of programming at church.” Pastors take work home (physically and mentally) with them and cannot leave it in the office. Its internal nature is engrossing. It is simply not possible to gain rest when issues are always hovering in the periphery. Like any job, people take it home with them, but the intense nature of ministry continually pushes people to desire to improve or change their work habit to improve efficiency.

Due to their unending workload, many clergy feel they are not being efficient in ministry. The resulting feeling of failure is difficult to balance with life. All three pastors interviewed felt they did not have time to accomplish the things they really felt called to, but were bogged down with the smaller details of the parish. Many times the congregants themselves feel the strain. Their pastor constantly on the go has little time for the people within the church or themselves. Clergy job descriptions, as currently written, set up a pastor for failure and frustration. The type of responsibilities, such as administration of a church, preaching the Gospel most Sundays, helping others get

¹² See *Lutheran Book of Worship*.

spiritually grounded while doing that themselves is unrealistic to ask of a pastor or pastors.

Because of the significant number of expectations, conversation between the pastor and the parish can become very one sided. Pastors often have difficulty expressing emotion to people without coming across as arrogant or whining. "I find it difficult to be openly angry. It has its place, but doesn't need public expression." Pastor Bray is trying to tiptoe between communicating with the congregation and standing for his own ideas and beliefs, especially when he sees something wrong.

By not allowing enough time for themselves, pastors are bound to reach a dry point. If a pastor does not spend the time to rejuvenate him or herself, problems will arise. Congregants can not expect to come to church and be spiritually fed every week, while not giving the pastors the space and time to take care of themselves. The spiritual well within a person can only be full so long.

For clergy, the process of nurturing the well-being of parishioners can be made more difficult as clergy themselves struggle with issues related to their own well-being...Hart (1984) asserted that many clergy fail to understand and/or take care of their body. Speaking to the complexity of the problem, Hart further noted that far too many clergy have developed a lifestyle that is isolated and sedentary. Conflict within the congregation is another large stressor for pastors.¹³

Thus, the struggle can go unnoticed even by the pastor. Conflict also elevates stress levels within the parish.

Jock E. Ficken, an ELCA pastor from Illinois, says conflict does five major things to pastors: pushes them from sound judgment, affects preaching, makes pastors reluctant to lead, affects family, and isolates a pastor.¹⁴ Conflict can be seen in two principal

¹³ Priscilla W. Blanton and M. Lane Morris, "Work Related Predictors of Physical Symptomatology and Emotional Well-Being Among Clergy and Spouses," *Review of Religious Research* 40 (1999): 4.

¹⁴ Jock E. Ficken, "Shielding your heart from strife," *Leadership* 19 (Spring 1998): 29.

ways: to promote growth or ‘pruning,’ or as something that tears a pastor down. There is always room for a healthy amount of conflict within any position, but again, it needs to be addressed quickly and proactively. People are passionate about what they believe and who they are in relation to God.

Early in my ministry, conflict caused me to question my *ability* to lead. In recent years, it has caused me to question why I should lead. While at times I am blindsided by conflict, other times I know the right leadership decision will cause some conflict with some members.¹⁵

Pastors, as people who want to help, strive to make people happy and limit conflict.

Pastors struggle with keeping everyone happy and pleasing them, yet the first requirement is “Love the Lord your God” and then “Love your neighbor as yourself.”

Limiting conflict may not be possible, but if people are continually causing pastors to doubt their leadership skills, something is wrong.

Many pastors struggle with a superhero mentality. Many times pastors believe it is in their power to make changes within the congregation or by sheer will power continue to pilot it solo. Pastor Christensen had a relevant experience at one of his former parishes. He had heard that a certain church had a reputation for being difficult to pastors because of some internal issues, and it could not keep a pastor very long. A higher-ranking church official encouraged him to go, and he felt confident that he could “make some changes.” A close friend and mentor said it was completely foolish to try to change the congregation, but Pastor Christensen decided to accept the call anyway. After a heart-wrenching, exhausting, and deflating four or five years, Pastor Christensen left that congregation for a new one. Catholic thinker Henri J.M. Nouwen, reflecting on the current status of clergy, says:

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 28.

When you look at today's Church, it is easy to see the prevalence of individualism among ministers and priests...Stardom and individual heroism, which are obvious aspects of our competitive society, are not all alien to the Church. There too the dominant image is that of the self-made man or woman who can do it alone.¹⁶

Pastors must struggle with their own internal issues also. Accepting help can be a difficult challenge, especially for clergy.

So far, inter-church, inter-psyche clergy issues have been discussed. What happens when clergy leave the office? When asked about the circle of important relationships in their lives, all clergy cited their immediate families. While not all clergy are married or have families, it is important to consider how families fit into a clergy person's life. When the pastor is called away from the dinner table consistently by crisis or church responsibilities, who is the first to feel it? Clergy who have spouses continually mention the difficulty of maintaining that relationship. A study issued by the Religious Research Association in June of 1999 said about clergy spouses:

For [spouses], physical symptomology was influenced by the stress associated with inadequate social support and time demands and expectations...Our findings show that time demands and expectations are clearly creating stress for clergy spouses.¹⁷

When a spouse also struggles, more time needs to be spent working on the relationship. This important time is not always spent, resulting in serious marital issues. As much as pastors strive to be role models, if not enough time is spent working on a relationship then the chances for divorce are higher.

Children also play a large role in the pastor's life. The love parents have for a child is apparent in the way they fight for them. Pastors want to go to their children's little league game or choir performance or commencement. Pastor Bray has a daughter in

¹⁶ Henri J.M. Nouwen, *In the name of Jesus: Reflections on Christian Leadership* (New York: Crossroad, 1989) 38-39.

¹⁷ Blanton and Morris, "Work Related Predictors," 342-3.

junior high school who has Downs syndrome. With the special needs she requires, he has specific responsibilities. He likes to be at the bus stop when she gets home from school. All three pastors cited their spouses or children immediately when speaking of important relationships. Every pastor has the desire to be the best parent and see his or her children succeed in life. The ELCA Board of Pension's 2002 publication, "Ministerial Health and Wellness" said, "one in three pastors leaving ordained ministry had family difficulties."¹⁸ Based on separate conversations with them, the pastors I interviewed felt they had missed some aspect of the children's growth because of their overwhelming responsibilities. The continual stress and time spent at the church can keep pastors away from their children.

Stress in itself is not necessarily a bad thing, as it can push one to excel. Pastors are real people. Clergy more often now are finding their breaking points where they cannot function under the current demands being made of them. Their stress is not easily definable as it blurs the boundaries between the home and office, and the impersonal and very personal nature of people's faith. It is much easier to be able to hold many of these issues at arm's length but the clergy of the ELCA are asking, inadvertently through their problems, for help.

¹⁸ Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA), "Ministerial Health and Wellness" (Chicago: ELCA, 2002) 19.

Paul: A Role Model

Paul is a very important figure within the early church. His thoughts, written in letters to different early gatherings of believers in cities across the Roman Empire and beyond, laid foundations for a new religion, a new form of Messianic Judaism. In Antioch, it was first called Christianity (Acts). Current research on Paul is discovering new approaches to understanding this man and his impact on the contemporary church.

Paul was, in many ways, the church's first pastor, leader and theologian. The weight on him must have been incredible. Because of his impact, Paul many times achieves mythic proportions in the minds of Christians. What needs to be seen for our purposes is that Paul is not only a strong, passionate leader, but also a human being. He was susceptible to the same sorts of sins as others, needed God's grace, and loved the church. In the next few pages, I will sketch out Paul, reflecting his human side, and work exegetically through 2 Cor 11 as representative of his struggles. Paul did not have seminary training. There was no homiletics class, or pastoral care strategies and approaches. He was human, but his faith and action in response to Christ set him apart.

Saul to Paul: Setting His Context

Paul did not start out as a Christian or deny his Jewish identity in his life. Most people were not born into Christianity but into Judaism, a minority faith within the larger Greco-Roman society. The conglomerate of faiths made for tension. Little is known about Paul except for what he writes about in his letters. The fact that he did not start out as a devout follower of Christ—the fact that he persecuted Christians—makes Paul's encounter with Jesus and subsequent rise to apostle status important in shedding light on

his role as leader and pastor. In a society short on mentors, younger pastors and those considering ministry can look to Paul as a person who wrestled with many issues about himself and his identity as a leader in the church. Pastors can more easily identify with Paul because of his passion for the church and his role that becomes so evident in his writings.

He, in many letters, cited his Jewish roots. Paul repeatedly identifies himself as a Pharisee. His roots form his identity and may make listeners more open-minded because of the common background. Thus his argument: "Are they Hebrews? So am I. Are they Israelites? So am I. Are they descendants of Abraham? So am I" (11:22). The commentary in the *HarperCollins Study Bible* (HCSB) points out that "Hebrew" is an ethnic designation, while "Israelite" is religious.¹⁹ These references get down to the practical details of identity.²⁰ Paul actually *preferred* to be thought of as a Jew. He continually refers to his own history as a Pharisee. He felt it necessary to act "as a Jew to win the Jews" (1 Cor 9: 20).

Paul very well could be seen as the first "pastor." Latin for "shepherd," the roots of this word reflects what Paul has been doing in Corinth and in the many other churches he has helped to start. Because of his status as an apostle (by his own declaration), Paul feels a distinct calling in his life to serve Christ in an impassioned, all-encompassing way (2 Cor 1:1). Paul understood his call: telling his dramatic story to others. Because of

¹⁹ *HarperCollins Study Bible*, p. 2178, n. 11.22.

²⁰ For example: in a Pauline studies class, when we discussed categories (related to identity) with which we associate ourselves immediately, Dr. Hawkins was quick to write down both "female" and "White." Not to put words in her mouth, but "Christian" could probably be put up there also. This reinforces the fact that people today as in the 1st century have defining characteristics and groups. While not everyone likes to be lumped into a given category, it happens.

this call, Paul responds to the opponents in a mixture of frustration and disbelief (2 Cor 10:1 begins total response, 2 Cor 11:1 begins specific response).

Paul was quick to acknowledge his own frailties and failings—perhaps even arrogant. His human side tended to make him grapple constantly to make himself into a superman. (Rom 7:19, 24a “For I do not do the good I want, but the evil I do not want is what I do...Wretched man that I am!”) Paul should not have a mythical aura around him. He never found peace about his identity and was constantly calling himself into question, but he never lacked zeal or love for Christ. This was his foundation.

2 Cor 11: Paul’s Struggle with the Corinthian Church

The account of Paul’s opponents in Second Corinthians illuminates the complexity of pastoral stress. It is important in the Lutheran tradition to turn to the root of the Christian faith, the Bible, as a place that continually offers insight into the workings of the early church, understanding what precedents were set and often the results, good or bad. Paul’s opponents, as I will argue, can represent the elements of current pastoral stress. Paul was struggling with many of the same issues of misunderstanding of expectations.

The study of Paul’s opponents in Second Corinthians needs special attention because of its significance in showing people of faith today some of the various struggles and issues Paul dealt with in Corinth. Pastors today can look at Paul and model their ministry after his—the good and the bad indirectly. It is important to address the misconceptions, and help ameliorate situations where some of these bad habits may have been adopted.

In his interactions with the church at Corinth (and ultimately the opponents), Paul is attempting to define himself as the “pastor,” and regain status in the eyes of the Corinthians. In chapter ten, Paul is attempting to refute accusations that he is “tearing” down the congregation (2 Cor 10:8). He desires to be affirming, yet still have an influence when he feels the congregation needs correction. He repeatedly struggles with the Corinthians, a city that struggles with its eclectic mix of Jews and Romans. In chapter eleven, Paul begins by establishing his own identity in the maelstrom of critics. David Fisher also points out Paul’s struggle with identity:

I don’t think it is by accident that most of Paul’s pastoral metaphors are in his letters to Corinth. He was struggling with his pastoral identity against all sorts of cultural and ecclesiastical pressures. Paul does not try to hide his humanity but includes us in his struggle while telling us about his sense of himself as a pastor.²¹

Paul firmly believes that the opponents have deceived the church of Corinth. In 2 Cor 11:4 he says:

For if someone comes and proclaims another Jesus than the one we proclaimed, or if you receive a different spirit from the one you received, or a different gospel from the one you accepted, you submit to it readily enough.

He chides the Corinthians for their willingness to go along with ideas that have been, in his opinion, tainted by outsiders—the opponents. He admits to feeling “a divine jealousy” for the congregation (11:2). In 2 Cor 11:2, he adapts a Jewish metaphor of the Messiah as a groom and Israel as the bride to give a concrete, tangible example of his feeling of responsibility for the Corinthians. In this particular example, the church in Corinth is the bride and Christ the bridegroom.²² Paul, here, is grappling to communicate with a primarily Jewish audience using Jewish imagery. He uses the illustration in an attempt to show the importance and gravity of the relationship.

²¹ David Fisher, *The 21st Century Pastor* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1996) 26.

²² Victor Paul Furnish, *II Corinthians*, vol. 32A, Anchor Bible (New York: Doubleday, 1984), 499.

The opponents attack Paul based on his appearance and physical traits. Because they make the attack so personal, he feels a particular need to justify himself. He writes: “I may be untrained in speech, but not in knowledge” (11:16a). Paul asserts his own knowledge and throughout the rest of his defense of his ministry, begins to brag about himself, which follows the pattern of the opponents!²³ While he earlier tells the church that boasting is not a good thing, he then does it himself in self-defense. He realizes this: “But whatever anyone dares to boast of—I am speaking as a fool—I also dare to boast of that” (2 Cor 11:21b). He assumes this style in an effort to connect with the Corinthians. The style the opponents adopted had been effective, and he must also assume that style to reach them now.

Paul wants to serve the church, but the opponents attack him over the issues of accepting support, especially monetary. The Corinthians want to support Paul, but he is also trying not to be a burden to them (2 Cor 11:8). The church seems confused about how they can and should support Paul, especially after the opponents were attempting to “demand support” or exact money from the Corinthians as seen in v.20.²⁴ “For you bear it if a man makes slaves of you, or takes advantage of you” (11:20a). Communication and information, when misconstrued, may result in a misunderstanding that Paul must then sort out.

Furnish explains the social context.²⁵ Accepting financial support would result in an expectation of gratitude from a person. “Within Roman society explicitly—and the Corinth Paul knew was a Roman colony—the wealthy expressed and enhanced their

²³ *Ibid.*, 500.

²⁴ *Ibid.*

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 506.

power by becoming patrons of the needy.”²⁶ The person who received help also incurred indebtedness toward the benefactor. For Paul to accept assistance would have put him and his ministry in the debt of such a benefactor. He did not want this; its implications for his own life would have been negative: being in debt, unable to repay.

At base, the relationship [between benefactor and debtor] sprang not from friendship, although the conventions for friendship were there, but from the patron’s quest for power and prestige and from the client’s need to be helped.²⁷

Paul, through refusing support, was attempting to serve the Corinthians without being bound to individuals in indebtedness.

In what scholars refer to as the “Fool’s Speech” (2 Cor 11:1-16), Paul reveals his heart. Paul gives an account of what he has gone through on behalf of the Corinthian church: “I am a better one [minister of Christ]: with far greater labors, far greater imprisonments, with countless floggings, and often near death” (11:23). His list specifies what Paul has endured. Paul desires his actions to be representative of the words he spoke. He wanted to live out the expectations of him as a pastor. He continues: “Five times I have received from the Jews the forty lashes minus one. Three times I was beaten with rods. Once I received a stoning. Three times I was shipwrecked; for a night and a day I was adrift at sea; on frequent journeys, in danger from rivers, in danger from bandits, danger from my own people, danger from Gentiles, danger from false brothers and sisters” (2 Cor 11:24-26). Paul’s description gains momentum. He attempts to show that he cares for the church. *HCSB* makes an important point:

Adversity and virtue were closely linked in antiquity, so that the hardships given function are to not only magnify Paul’s great endurance, but also to prove that he is virtuous. The list of virtues [starting in 2 Cor 11:22] underscores the point.²⁸

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 507.

²⁷ *Ibid.*

²⁸ *HCSB*, p. 2172, n. 6.4-7.

He tries to thwart the abuse in 2 Cor 11:22. Paul's list allows the apostle to "castigat[e] Paul's opponents by describing their abusive acts and shaming the Corinthians by means of mock praise."²⁹ The list becomes a double-edged sword, allowing Paul to continue to assert himself. Paul is a misfit, because he does not fit into any one dominant social group. He struggles because he wants to ameliorate not only his own internal struggles over boasting and caring for the church (11:2), but also by being understood (yet, being persecuted) by both dominant cultures surrounding him. He is in the middle of a spiritually and physically draining confrontation, and beginning to wear down (11:27).

The next three verses bring Paul's expression of frustration and exhaustion to its peak (2 Cor 11:27-29): "...in toil and hardship, through many a sleepless night, hungry and thirsty, often without food, cold, naked. And, besides other things, I am under daily pressure because of my anxiety for all the churches. Who is weak, and I am not weak? Who is made to stumble and I am not indignant?" (2 Cor 11:27-29). He is showing a new side to himself. There is no doubt that he is an apostle, church leader, shepherd, and theologian. Paul is also a human being with human limitations. His work has taken an emotional, spiritual and physical toll. If Paul recognizes that his body is not what people would expect of an apostle, it is no wonder. The physical stress on his body is great. Stress becomes a spiritually deflating and physically destructive force on a person. Paul, an apostle, is no exception. The chapter ends with him saying, "If I must boast, I will boast of the things that show my weakness" (11:30). He is still concerned for the well-being of the community by setting examples for them even in the midst of his own struggles.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 2178, n. 11.20.

In studying the Bible, modern day-pastors can see Paul as a man passionate about his congregation, and yet struggling with his identity (both role and physical appearance), finances and expressing frustrations about the work in front of him. Pastors could very well look to Paul as a role model for ministry. Paul attempts to take on ministry by himself, and thus the burden of his own expectations falls on him. As seen by the stressors found in pastors today, it is evident pastors have been adopting—for good or bad—Paul’s methods of interpreting and responding to crises because of his role model status within the church. This “sublimation” of Paul as a role model can have damaging effects. Paul’s passion for establishing much of the theological backbone of Christianity and helping it get moving cannot be denied, but it needs to be tempered and understood that he was still a person capable of making mistakes. Paul’s role should not be viewed entirely negative as his life’s work is testament to a faith that helped Christianity get to its feet and is continually a light to others.

1 Cor 13 Reconciliatory Approach

This section is the most important in this work for one fundamental reason: hope. Through the first section, I painted a picture of three pastors. Each is unique in who they are and the way they serve God, with a unifying fact: the hope that Jesus Christ gave them that their calling was more important than some of things that have been causing stress. Their individuality embodies a passionate pursuit of God and love for people.

In the second section, biblical studies reveals insight into 2 Corinthians, an often overlooked book, as a place to start understanding the issue. Paul, a sinner, a human and not perfect by any means, reveals his passion and struggle. While people in the Corinthian community continually set him up with lofty ideals and expectations, he also can become stressed and lash out. He does not always find the best way to communicate the way he feels. So, there is an urgent issue that has biblical roots. The negativities have been pointed out, what now? An honest analysis is needed, and positive affirmation must begin.

Stress issues, basic life issues for pastors, can not be resolved without leaning and trusting in Jesus Christ ("Trust in the Lord with all your heart, lean not on your own understanding, in all your ways acknowledge Him and he'll make your paths straight." Proverbs 3:5-6, "Ask, seek, knock."). Let hope in Christ be the starting point of these ideas and strategies to improve clergy physical and emotional health while looking to the future of the Church. This chapter will be composed of three sections: Intergenerational Mentors: Affirming the College and Career Aged, Active Church: Responsibility and Action, and Active Pastor: Reflection and Reaching Out.

In the ELCA, as shown by the interviews and psychological studies, pastors are struggling. Yet, the issue should not be limited to small towns. It is evident, from the latest work coming out this month from ELCA leadership (i.e. "Ministerial Health and Wellness" document, Lilly Endowed grant applications), this epidemic is everywhere and thus needs to be understood in its community context. How do the problems fit within the framework of the community in which the pastor is working? Pastors must deal with different stressors in each context they are serving. The needs of a small town are very different from an urban setting. Thus, a different sensitivity needs to be applied.

The necessity for honesty and frankness is important in dealing with this particular issue. The church is at a crucial stage to help make life better for clergy. Right now, there are not enough ordained Lutheran clergy to go around. Thus, the demands put on the ones that are serving are even greater. The stress and demands do not get lighter as they age either. In many synods, the median age for pastors is getting older.³⁰ The number of younger pastors is also significantly low (less than 3% in SW MN).

Where are many new pastors coming from? An abundance of second career pastors serve congregations now. These men and women chose to leave whatever secular work they were doing earlier and enter into seminary to become an ordained clergy person. People's calls may change throughout their lifetime, and after gaining some practical life experience, middle-aged people are answering God's call. The call can take many forms and can come in many different ways. As Pastor Christensen explained, one must be constantly checking and rechecking a call in their life, because it very well could change.

³⁰ The SW MN synod, which includes St. Peter, where the median age is 45-49, is similar to national ELCA average. <http://www.elca.org> <17 March 2002>.

Intergenerational Mentors: Affirming the Young Adult and College Aged

For the continued strength of the church, younger adults must be encouraged and affirmed to consider parish ministry. One possible means is to use dialogue to bridge intergenerational gaps. If churches and their current pastors are going to receive fresh vibrancy, they need to be open to dialoguing with younger potential clergy. Younger people wish to bring their own, perhaps new, ideas to the table for conversation. So, if older clergy reiterate the status quo without dialogue, they will shut the door to future clergy. There must be ways to improve communication.

Honesty can create stronger intergenerational relationships. Young adults want to be taken seriously and treated as whole persons. It can be very easy at times to be comfortable with traditional ideas about, for instance, preaching and worship. Yet, to affirm those ideas without fresh perspectives and insights, coming from future clergy and congregants, is to miss a wealth of knowledge and passion. While the ELCA is founded on traditions, specifically liturgical worship, as a means for identity, it is also important to listen and respond to the needs of younger generations and how they perceive the world around them. This statement is not one of anti-tradition, but of open-minded thinking. Inflexibility within the church will continue the lack of new people entering seminaries. Younger people want honesty out of their future mentors.

The role of older clergy in affirming young adults is also important. Mentorships develop out of relationships between the two ages. These types of experiences for potential clergy are invaluable and life long. All the pastors I spoke with continue to refer to wisdom and or insights they gained from the different mentors with whom they worked. Practical experience and open, honest questions can help the younger person

explore their call and the mentor reevaluate their own. This two-way street can rejuvenate a pastor and affirm a young adult.

One organization, The Fund for Theological Education, Inc.³¹, based in Atlanta, Georgia, has been pursuing the idea of affirmation and mentorship in a very positive way. The Fund's primary goal is to encourage reflection earlier in life about entering into seminary. A non-denominational organization, the Fund chooses Undergraduate Fellows from colleges across the country who are potentially considering ministry. They receive a stipend and are flown to a summer conference dealing with vocational reflection. The conference, a full weekend experience, brings together the fellows and those in seminary who have won a similar award. A Fellow meets a wide variety of people from different denominations and is in conversation with them over the weekend. The Fund has professors and artists come in to speak to and encourage the students.

As part of their Fellowship, students are encouraged to find mentors. An additional stipend is given to help defray costs and provide an honorarium for the mentor's time. Hands on, experiential learning is gaining more and more momentum as the best way to learn more about a potential vocation. Seeing, experiencing, and being challenged in a safe setting, as their mentors are providing and modeling, puts ministry into perspective for young adults. The need for a mentor-experience is crucial to any field, but for ministry, discernment of call is dependent on reflection and experience. FTE is breaking ground by making this reflection possible.

At Gustavus Adolphus College progressive measures are also under way. Created with the help of a grant from the Lilly Foundation, the Center for Vocational Reflection is another source of affirmation and as the title infers, reflection. Its main purpose is to

³¹ See <http://www.thefund.org>

encourage students to consider their calls, not even necessarily related to parish ministry. However, the staff, each with a Masters in Divinity, can help find resources and encourage college-aged adults who are considering ordained ministry. The Center also provides stipends to students who choose to work in ministry or service-oriented programs over the summer. They determine an average salary and then supplement the lower summer salaries paid by such summer programs. This past summer the average salary was \$2700, and there were many students who received the full amount of the offered stipend. This incentive is just one of many to promote reflection and allow students to explore opportunities that finances may otherwise have prevented.

1 Cor 13 Church: Responsibility and Action

A 1 Cor 13 church is one that responds to pastors through love. For clergy renewal, compassion and sympathy for pastors must begin within the walls of the church. The 1 Cor 13 church must recognize and respond to the ever changing and mutating issue of clergy stress. As a society changes so do the factors clergy must respond to and incorporate into ministry. To see a problem and ignore it makes the situation only deteriorate. Would-be, extremely positive and effective leaders are being lost to jobs where more compensation and different, more manageable forms of stress are present. Morris and Blanton concurred with Carl Rassieur in saying:

Rassieur (1983) suggested that the church is the primary context of work/family stress experienced by clergy families and should therefore be the leader in taking responsibility for helping them manage that stress effectively.³²

³² Carl Rassieur, *Stress Management for Ministers* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1982) quoted in Priscilla W. Blanton and M. Lane Morris, "The Availability and Importance of Denominational Support Services as Perceived by Clergy Husbands and their Wives," *Pastoral Psychology* 44 (1995): 1.

Pastors are trying to ask for help from their churches. It is not an easy thing, as Morris and Blanton point out: "Protestant clergy and their families have indicated that they perceive a risk of losing status or security if personal or family difficulties become apparent (Mace & Mace, 1980)."³³ If clergy are having a difficult time asking, then it falls into the church's responsibility.

Pastor-Parish Relations Committee

One way to help support pastors within the parish is through what is known as a Pastor-Parish Relations Committee or "Mutual Ministry Committee." While committees such as these have existed for some time now, their importance has been undervalued. After describing a typical one, I will suggest some additions that may be helpful. This committee, made up of people within a congregation, is a way to improve communication on many levels within a congregation. It stresses valuing the opinions of pastors, laity, and people from within the congregation who all have things to contribute. If the committee was even missing one of these voices, it is easy to hear a one-sided story or get an incomplete picture of where the pastor and congregants are differing or agreeing on what is presently happening within the congregation. For true communication to happen, everyone needs to feel like they have an adequate amount of say.

Pastor Bray furnished a very helpful description and outline of the purpose of such a committee. It contains the essentials to structuring a healthy and productive committee that helps rather than hinders ministry and the need to communicate. I will walk through some of the purposes, structure, and cautions and add specifics to

³³ Donald Mace and Victoria Mace, *What's Happening to Clergy Marriages?* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1980) quoted in Blanton and Morris, "Denominational Support Services," 201.

implement the committee in an effective way. For the committee to succeed it needs honesty and openness on all sides.

Purposes for a Pastor-Parish Relations Committee

Each pastor brings a unique style to ministry. Their gifts lie in specific areas and are reflected in their particular style of preaching and ministry in the church. The first purpose:

It provides a channel for giving the pastor(s) feedback about ministry in the congregation so that he/she is always in touch with how ministry is being perceived. He/She can then take steps to correct any misunderstandings or inadequacies before they become too difficult to deal with or erupt into major problems. The committee can help prevent crises, conflicts, and misunderstandings between pastor(s) and congregation and enhance an atmosphere of mutual understanding, trust, and cooperation.³⁴

This could be the single most important purpose of the committee. In any line of work, feedback is essential to understanding what is happening and how well one is performing in relation to the job description. It can be very difficult for pastors to be able to gauge their own work in response to what the congregation needs. To have an intentional place to learn and listen to what the congregations needs are, specifically the things that go left unsaid, can be exceedingly helpful in catching a glimpse of the larger picture.

This is another point where pastors and their congregations need to go back to the basics when dealing with communication. Communication cannot be a one-sided conversation. In any relationship, within or outside a church setting, how many problems and potentially divisive situations have been avoided simply by engaging in thoughtful conversation where honesty is central and the spirit of Christian love abounds? What an idyllic idea! It is easy to forget that these conversations are very difficult, and in some

³⁴ ELCA, *Mutual Ministry Committee* (Chicago: ELCA, 1995) 1.

situations impossible to have, because there is such a low level of trust and respect or a host of other issues that bar a spirit of Christian love. I will discuss some way to bridge this impasse in a later section.

A positive example of this first purpose: Pastor Christensen has lived in St. Peter all of fifteen months and is still adjusting to a new community. He was at his other parish for over fifteen years and built a strong group of friends who were difficult to leave. He is now in a co-pastorate position (which he wanted). The other pastor, though, is younger and has been in St. Peter for over five years. They are continuing to learn about each other's gifts and styles, thus carefully building bridges. A committee like this will help both pastors communicate better, and also the congregation can learn to appreciate, affirm and see what each is bringing to ministry so all can work together more effectively. Many crises can be avoided with open lines between a pastor and a wide range of representatives from the congregation. The bridges that this first purpose can make are important to the pastor and congregation.

The second purpose deals specifically with the pastor as a person. This one provides the committee with insight into what the pastor is feeling and thinking so they may be able to catch better glimpses of the pastor's vision or ideas. It says:

It offers pastor(s) an opportunity to reflect on ministry as he/she sees it. Here he/she can share both joys and frustrations, accomplishments and disappointments. This committee can serve as a "sounding board" when the pastor is faced with difficult situations and decisions.³⁵

Pastors, being in a position where they are constantly in front of people in a leadership role, need to be able to express their thoughts and feelings in a safe, open environment. Here pastors are able to get feedback on the planning and execution of new events or

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 1.

stylistic changes within the church. Congregants can provide necessary accountability and begin to see why pastors executed a plan the way they did. Both sides can ask questions of each other.

The committee can also lend support to the pastor when new ideas or programs the pastor is particularly passionate about come to the forefront of discussion. For a successful congregation the pastor must be able to put trust in the members of the committee as much as the members must trust their pastor.

Members of the Pastor-Parish Relations Committee serve as the pastor's advocates before official boards and committees of the congregation to bring about the initiation of change or the beginning of new programs where they appear to be needed.³⁶

New programs are vital to a church. When a congregation attempts to launch a new program, it is flexing its creativity in a way that may better serve the community. The pastor needs to have the freedom to be creative with ministry. To approach ministry only the same way year after year will undoubtedly miss the changes in society. When presenting new ideas, the pastor will feel more confident in proposing the new idea with part of the congregation understanding its vision and rationale. The Mutual Ministry Committee becomes a place where the beginnings of helpful and empowering conversation can happen.

As an addendum to the Mutual Ministry committee idea, churches should provide one morning every two weeks for local ELCA pastors (or with other denominations) to gather in peer support groups. This group would serve as a place to share one another's burdens and stress. Each individual must bring a certain level of trust and honesty to the group, and specific ideas on what the focus should be. Being a pastor should be a

³⁶ *Ibid.*

common denominator. Roy Oswald suggests having an outside, paid moderator as important.³⁷ I agree it is necessary for someone who is not specifically attached to the area to not be influenced by area politics. Personal politics have a way of getting in the way of helpful conversation and progress. The moderator would help facilitate and lead the sessions so they are not just "bitch and moan" sessions, as Oswald calls them. This person would help give everyone an equal voice and limit personality conflict among local ministers. The committee's role would be to hold the pastor accountable to such meetings if they proved effective. The committee would not be taking attendance, but remind the pastor that this is being done to help. This type of committee would help build rapport in a church.

An immediate way to help clergy has been suggested numerous times, and yet has gone unheeded: Clergy need protected time off. For pastors to take care of things around the home or get spiritually renewed, they need a complete break and mind shift away from the church and the church office. Whether this is the pastor's weekly day off, Sunday off, or longer term sabbatical, it must be protected. In Christian thought, Sunday represents Sabbath or rest. For clergy that's the day they are working their hardest. Negative effects of stress can cause physical stress on a pastor if no time off is given. They can begin to hurt a congregation rather than help.

One Sunday evening, the board gathered around me and prayed [after I got sick: chest pains, insomnia, etc.]. Then they asked, 'Pastor, you have taken care of us, Would you let us take care of you?' They did. They gave me time off, complete relief from my responsibilities...In weakness, I was met with mercy and compassion.³⁸

³⁷ Roy Oswald, *Clergy Self-Care*, 103.

³⁸ Mark Lauterbach, "How I Realized I Was Hurting People: and What I Did About It," *Leadership* 19 (Spring 1998): 33.

It is important for churches to be aware of their pastor's mental, physical and emotional state. It is not enough to have just the attitude of "time off" as the Stanton-Rich and Iso-Ahola study shows:

It is interesting that leisure behavior and leisure satisfaction independently contributed to the reduction of burnout and all its components [emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, etc.], while leisure attitude failed to do so. What this suggests is that having a positive attitude towards leisure is not sufficient; one has to actively participate in leisure activities.³⁹

Many pastors when taking vacations need the first four to five days to let their mind unwind. So even having the weekend off is not nearly enough time for real rest to begin. With more time off, crises can be stopped before they even start.

On Sundays, Pastor Bray's schedule looks like this: 3 A.M. up to tweak the sermon at the church, exercise, coffee, paper, breakfast with family, back to church, services, 12 noon home, crash. While this is just one way of working through a Sunday, it is not a day of rest by any means. So, let their weekly day off be that Sabbath for them. For sabbaticals, churches must prepare and decide who will make major decisions in the pastor's absence. The pastor can not and should not be bothered by administration or church related issues. The Mutual Ministry committee can follow the pastor's sabbatical as a resource and prayer line only.

A successful 1 Cor 13 Church is one that is not afraid to fail. Instead of being stuck in traditional thinking about clergy roles and ways of taking care of clergy, churches need to be able to evaluate, assess and in some cases, make changes to help protect clergy. Pastoral care does not necessarily hinge on one program such as the Mutual Ministry committee, but on the evaluation of such programs. If one program is

³⁹ Howard M. Stanton and Seppo E. Iso-Ahola, "Burnout and Leisure," *Journal of Applied Social Psychology* 28 (1998): 21, 1935.

not reaching the pastor, the church needs to look to other options while not letting the pastor be caught between programs.

1 Cor 13 Pastor: Reflection and Reaching Out

While affirming young adults, current pastors must also be affirmed with words from the Bible. The Bible, being the source of information about the Christian faith, not only for Lutherans, but also for all Christians, offers continual encouragement. The Bible is still a place where people are learning about God, Jesus, and the Holy Spirit. Jesus said, "My yoke is easy and my burden is light" (Mat 11:30) Even when the disciples felt at times tremendous adversity, Jesus promised to help bear people's burdens. Jesus will provide rest and solace in the Gospel and his Spirit. In the "good news" of Christ, there is peace. That is what people of faith can claim and cling to.

For Lutheran clergy, the idea of works may come into play. Works, as dealt with specifically in Lutheran theology, may not in this instance, be about earning salvation, but works can be about winning approval in other people's eyes or using what they have done to please or appease God. It can be very difficult at times to distinguish between works (using one's own activities to please God), workaholics (working as a compulsory disorder), and "the job of ministry is never done" (a common pastoral line of thought as pointed out by Pastor Christensen). Is there a line between being able to accomplish tasks or living in the work? "We are saved by grace through faith, not by works, so that no one can boast" (Eph 2:8). Whatever the case, pastors need to be reminded of Eph 2:8 and its implications in their lives as Christians. Henri Nouwen uses another biblical example:

Jesus sends out the twelve in pairs (Mark 6:7). We [pastors] keep forgetting that we are being sent out two by two. We can not bring the good news on our own. We are called to proclaim the Gospel together; in community...it is Jesus who heals, not I; Jesus who speaks words of truth; not I; Jesus who is Lord, not I.⁴⁰

The idea of "works" is perpetually being revised in our minds as society moves into "postmodern," "post-Christian," or whatever term for change is likely to be applied to culture's status. Thus, it is important to realize who the healer is and who is in service.

The simplicity of the message of the Gospel and its form in song needs to be repeated not only to the congregants but also its leaders: "Jesus loves me." The reality of God's unconditional love and unconditional grace can still be an overwhelming idea and a reality that causes even pastors to stand in awe. They too are human, must deal with these awesome (with fear and trembling) truths as humans, while sinning and reconciling with God constantly. The Gospel was meant for everyone, and even though pastors are constantly reading, analyzing and presenting the gospel, that does not mean clergy are internalizing it. Congregants, as Christians, have the responsibility to tell the good news even to their own leadership.

It is important also for clergy to evaluate and analyze their own spiritual gifts. The Bible has verses directed especially at understanding the gifts. Gifts for different people lie in different areas. For some pastors, it may be in administration, for others it could be counseling or visiting the elderly. Pastors must be able to recognize and understand the incredible gifts they have been given to use in service of others. There are many types of personality and gift inventories available, but still experiential learning and honest conversations with someone who is trusted, as a mentor, can best illuminate gifts or potential gifts. Mentors do not always have to be for younger people. If people are

⁴⁰ Nouwen, *Reflections*, 40-1.

committed to continual learning and have a willingness to listen to constructive criticism, then pastors of all ages can continue to grow and respond to their congregations while having contact with a mentor. The pastor must be able and willing to ask for help if needed. Morris and Blanton's study affirms this need:

Lee and Balswick (1989) have indicated that the provision of effective care of ministers and their families depends upon clergy who are willing to communicate clearly (e.g., who, when, where, what, how) to their superiors their needs, rather than anticipating that denominations through 'divine interventions' (i.e., mind reading) will know.⁴¹

Even though pastors serve in a position of leadership, it is important to recognize the responsibility they have for taking care of themselves. A proactive approach is needed.

"Be still and know that I am God" (Ps 46:10) is an old message but can have a new twist. It is important for pastors who are constantly on the go to have the time to just be. While culture does not necessarily offer this time, Martin B. Copenhaver suggests:

Among the many ways we can witness to the world, I would add one: we can do nothing. We can "waste" time with friends...Make no mistake: such a witness takes courage. It is the courage to be and not do.⁴²

It is important for pastors to understand that being still is a way to keep grounded in the torrent of church administration and pastoral responsibilities.

Pastor Bray attempts to model a healthy lifestyle. An active jogger, he continually attempts to eat healthy and exercise in some way many times throughout his workweek. Health and fitness become increasingly important as people age. In a survey, 22% of ELCA clergy they get little to no exercise.⁴³ Physical health is consistently linked to mental health. He hopes by modeling this that others will take initiative to

⁴¹ C. Lee and J. Balswick, *Life in a glass house* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1989) quoted in Morris and Blanton, "Denominational Support Services," 33.

⁴² Martin B. Copenhaver, "The Courage to Do Nothing," *The Christian Ministry* (July-August 1994), 8.

⁴³ ELCA, "Ministerial Health," 45.

focus on physical health. It is crucial to be able to take care of oneself and thus be able to function and utilize time off more effectively with more holistic results. All three interviewed pastors developed a strategy for taking care of themselves. Prayer time and quiet meditation were mentioned most often. Active prayer life is a fundamental way to help stay grounded. If pastors are best to help congregations, self-care is the first important realization and action, and the second step is to ask for help.

Epilogue: A Story of Finding Balance

It is a difficult balance to find in life: time spent on something one is passionate about, such as ministry, and time spent taking care of oneself and the extras that life includes with or without permission. Finding balance in life for clergy becomes an important goal. Someone cannot be told to "balance!" The variables and issues in clergy stress can be corporate but also specific to one person. Balance becomes finding a way to find a place where one is grounded. It is a process, and that is what's important. Talking openly, opening doors, doors that lead somewhere...somewhere. Balance is a process, and that is what's important.

Appendix A

JOB DESCRIPTION: PASTOR AT FIRST LUTHERAN CHURCH JANUARY, 2002

OVERALL: The pastor shall oversee among the people of First Lutheran Church the ministry of Word and Sacrament which God has established and which the Holy Spirit empowers.

SPECIFICALLY: The pastor is called...

- to preach and teach the Word of God in accordance with the Holy Scriptures and the Lutheran Confessions;
- to administer Holy Baptism and Holy Communion;
- to lead worship;
- to proclaim the forgiveness of sins;
- to provide pastoral care;
- to speak for justice in behalf of the poor and the oppressed;
- to encourage persons to prepare for the ministry of the Gospel;
- to impart knowledge of the ELCA and its wider ministry;
- to endeavor to increase support given by FLC to the work of our whole church.
- to equip persons for witness and service;
- to guide persons in proclaiming God's love through word and deed; and
- to be diligent in the study of Holy Scripture, in use of the Means of Grace, in prayer, in faithful service and in holy living.

ALAN BRAY WAS CALLED BY FLC IN 2000...

- to preach effectively and persuasively, relating today's concerns to Biblical teachings;
- to be a warm, compassionate messenger of hope and care;
- to assist the congregation in planning and carrying out major goals for mission and ministry;
- to relate well to people of all ages; and
- to increase and inspire congregational growth in stewardship.

DON HOLMSTROM WAS CALLED BY FLC IN 2002 ON A HALF-TIME BASIS...

- to preach the Gospel (once a month);
- to assist in planning and leading worship (once a month);
- to develop relationships with the youth of FLC;
- to assist with confirmation;
- to continue life-long learning; and
- to provide warm, open pastoral care to the people of FLC.

Foundational
Lilly Endowment, Inc.

National Clergy Renewal Program /2002

"As a deer longs
for flowing streams,
so my soul longs
for you, O God."

— PSALM 42:1



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

The National Clergy Renewal Program, offered by Lilly Endowment, Inc., is intended to strengthen Christian congregations by providing an opportunity for pastors to step away briefly from the demands of daily parish life and to engage in a period of renewal and reflection. The Endowment will provide as many as 100 grants of up to \$10,000 each directly to congregations for support of a renewal program for their pastor.

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



For information, send an e-mail to clergyrenewal@yahoo.com, contact the program's Web site at www.clergyrenewal.org, call 1-772-916-7302, or write Lilly Endowment, Inc., Religion Division, 2801 North Meridian Street, P.O. Box 188068, Indianapolis, Indiana 46208. Indiana clergy should apply only to the Lilly Endowment Clergy Renewal Program for Indiana Congregations.

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