

CHAPTER 2

SURVEY OF EARLY AND CONTEMPORARY RESEARCH

This chapter seeks to survey the extensive research relating to ministry stressors experienced by the pastor and his family. Some of the findings from different studies result in statistical differences; nevertheless, a clear pattern is evident. The findings are typically linked with physical and emotional issues, so in order to delineate the differences, chapter 3 will focus on the four predominant health challenges resulting from stressors, while this chapter examines the ministry stressors for pastoral families, according to recent data. A definition of the pastor's duties according to the biblical record will be outlined, and the distinctions between and among stress, burnout, and depression will be presented.

The Pastor: A Definition and Description of Duties

From the biblical record, we understand the word “pastor” traces back to New Testament times. Ephesians 4:11 is the single instance where the actual word “pastor” is utilized. However, the literal meaning of the word “pastor” is “shepherd,” as used in both the OT and NT in a figurative sense for rulers and leaders. Of the 12 times the word is used in the NT as a metaphor for “leader,” it is translated as “pastor” only in Ephesians 4:11.⁶⁵

The New Testament contains three verses utilizing the word “pastor” in various forms. Ephesians 4:11, “And He Himself gave some *to be* apostles, some prophets, some

⁶⁵ Homer Kent, “Pastor,” *Tyndale Bible Dictionary*, 993.

evangelists, and some pastors and teachers.” Acts 20:28, “Therefore take heed to yourselves and to all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God which He purchased with His own blood.” And 1 Pet 5:2, “Shepherd the flock of God which is among you, serving as overseers, not by compulsion but willingly, not for dishonest gain.”

Commentators and biblical scholars interpreting Ephesians 4:11 suggest that Paul intended “*pastors and teachers*” to be the same, a single group serving the church. This is actually one office, but with it comes the responsibility of two ministries. “Pastors and teachers together formed a group who complemented the work of apostles, prophets, and evangelists.”⁶⁶ As Homer Kent explained, “Pastors and teachers are named as one grammatical unit (by use of just one article in the Gk text).”⁶⁷

Paul, as noted in the book of Acts, mentioned pastors in Acts 20:28; however, this reference is in another form. It appears in “the related verb ‘*to shepherd*’”⁶⁸ This is the responsibility of local church leaders as also denoted in John 21:16 and 1 Peter 5:2.

Peter likewise emboldened the leaders in 1 Pet 5:2, saying, “*shepherd*” or “*tend*” the flock of God which is among you.” The verb “*to shepherd*” is used to describe the work of local church leaders.⁶⁹ W.E. Vine defined the word “*tend*” from the verb *poimaino*, which means “to act as a shepherd.”⁷⁰ Further insights reveal:

⁶⁶ Ibid.

⁶⁷ Homer A. Kent, *Ephesians: The Glory of the Church* (Chicago: Moody, 1971), 72.

⁶⁸ P. T. O’Brien, *The Letter to the Ephesians* (Pillar New Testament Commentary. Grand Rapids, MI.: Eerdmans, 1999), 299.

⁶⁹ Kent, “Pastor,” 1993.

⁷⁰ William Edwy Vine, *Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words* (Zondervan, 1981), 427.

Common translation of the Greek noun *poimen* (Eph. 4:11) and its verb form; also the Hebrew *raah* (Jer. 3:15; 10:21; 12:10; 22:22 KJV). Literally, a shepherd or one who keeps animals (Gen 4:2; 13:7; 46:32, 34; Exod 2:17; Isa 13:20; Jer 6:3; Luke 2:8, 15, 18, 20) but used figuratively of those called by God to feed (Jer 3:15; John 21:16), care for (Acts 20:28), and lead (1 Pet 5:2) His people, who are His “flock” (Num 27:17; 1 Kgs 22:17; Jer 3:15; 10:21; 12:10; 22:22; Ezek 34:2, 5, 7–10; Zech 10:3; John 21:16; Acts 20:28; Eph 4:11; 1 Pet 5:2).⁷¹

The biblical record affirms that there were New Testament pastors leading specific churches during the early days of the church:

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| 1. James, half-brother of Christ, pastor of the church in Jerusalem, and possibly the author ⁷² of the Letter of James | Acts 12:17; 15:13-21; 21:18 |
| 2. Apollos, eloquent Alexandrian Jew who may have pastored the church in Corinth for a time ⁷³ | Acts 18:24-28; 1 Cor. 3:6; Titus 3:13 |
| 3. Timothy, Paul’s faithful companion who pastored in Ephesus | 1 Tim. 4:6-16 |
| 4. Titus, Paul’s young friend who pastored a church on Crete | Titus 1:5 |
| 5. John, the beloved apostle who authored five New Testament books ⁷⁴ and pastored the church at Ephesus ⁷⁵ | 1 John |

⁷¹ B. Spencer Haygard, “Pastor,” *Holman Illustrated Bible Dictionary*, 1250.

⁷² This point is widely disputed by scholars.

⁷³ This too is a matter of dispute.

⁷⁴ John’s authorship is a matter of some dispute among scholars.

⁷⁵ H. Willmington, *Willmington’s Book of Bible Lists* (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale, 1987), 230–31.

Today, most Protestant laity understand the term pastor to be synonymous with clergy or minister. Contemporary culture would also avow that a pastor is one who provides spiritual leadership and guidance to a particular church community or congregation. These men and women are called to apply their gifts the world over and function in many diverse capacities. In a typical church, a pastor can be a senior pastor, an executive or assistant pastor, worship, youth, children's, or counseling pastor, or a minister to seniors.

The elements of the pastor's job description are often up for debate and can be interpreted differently depending on whom one asks. About 400 AD, Augustine summarized his definition of the pastor's vocation when he proclaimed:

Disturbers are to be rebuked, the low-spirited to be encouraged, the infirm to be supported, objectors confuted, the treacherous guarded against, the unskilled taught, the lazy aroused, the contentious restrained, the haughty repressed, litigants pacified, the poor relieved, the oppressed liberated, the good approved, the evil borne with, and all are to be loved.⁷⁶

According to Augustine's account, there are 15 elements to the pastor's responsibilities, and yet, if he faithfully fulfills them all, he risks the possibility or inevitability of the last aforementioned mentioned duty, "love," not being reciprocated by the very ones he is commanded to give love.

⁷⁶ Augustine, Sermo CCIX. www.lcms.org/graphics/assets/media/CTCR/ChurchMinistrybookpercent20annivpercent20essays.pdf. Accessed 2006-08-08.

Stephen Pattison suggested that pastoring “is that activity, undertaken especially by representative Christian persons, directed towards the elimination and relief of sin and sorrow and the presentation of all people perfect in God to Christ.”⁷⁷

These descriptions are overwhelming and might discourage some pastors from accepting the call, realizing that this is an undertaking no human would engage in with even the slightest hope of absolute success. Parishioners today expect a considerable amount from their pastor and, when a specific need arises, they are often blind to the other commitments their pastor is seeking to fulfill, and that he is not omniscient nor able to be omni-present as God is. Tim Franklin reminds congregants: “Your Pastor Is Only Human!”⁷⁸ He argues that “most sheep do not understand the incredible demands or expectations that are upon ministers to perform provide and produce.” These three duties alone, if not properly balanced and managed, will constitute a perfect storm in the life of any pastor. H.B. London and Neil Wiseman, in co-authoring varied works aimed at advising and counselling pastors, contributed their expertise to *Pastors at Risk*:

Contemporary pastors are caught in frightening spiritual and social tornadoes which are now raging through home, church community, and culture. No one knows where the twister might touch down or what values the storms will destroy. Something has to be done. Ministry hazards are choking the hope out of pastors’ souls. They feel disenchanting, discouraged, and often even outraged. ... Fatigue shows in their eyes. Worry slows their stride. And vagueness dulls their preaching. ... Overwork, low pay, and desperation take a terrible toll as pastors struggle to make sense of crammed calendars, hectic homes, splintered dreams, starving intimacy, and shriveled purposes. Many hold on by their

⁷⁷ Stephen Pattison, *A Critique Of Pastoral Care*, 2nd ed. (SPCK: London, 1993), 13.

⁷⁸ Tim Franklin, “Your Pastor Is Only Human!” *Charisma* (Apr 30, 2001), www.charismamag.com/index.php/features2/310-christian-living/1041 (accessed Mar 12, 2012).

fingernails, hoping to find a hidden spring to refresh their weary spirits and scrambled thoughts.⁷⁹

The modern pastor's job description has evolved over the past decades and is, at present, all-encompassing. He typically speaks a minimum of twice weekly and anticipates that the time he is dedicating to study and preparation will produce eternal results. In addition, he is expected to be always on call: overseeing a corporation that requires planning services, attending prayer meetings, board meetings, celebrations like graduations, various parties and fellowship meetings, dedicating babies, baptizing, officiating at funerals, weddings, and marriage reaffirmations, visiting those in hospitals and shut-in, continually casting a fresh church vision and mission, raising the resources to build new buildings, all the while maintaining the perfect marriage and demonstrating perfect parenting skills.

The demands placed upon pastors are overwhelming, and the stressors encountered by pastoral families, as a result, are vast. How can pastors and their families survive the ubiquitous pressure encroaching on every aspect of their lives? Is it possible to thrive in ministry and to do so at a healthy pace with set priorities, and to finish the race set before them with little regret? Robert Murray McCheyne, the nineteenth-century preacher and minister in Scotland, exhausted himself until his health was compromised. He died before his thirtieth birthday. Prior to his death, he penned a missive that pastors today might well heed: "God gave me a message to deliver and a horse to ride. Alas, I have killed the horse and now I cannot deliver the message."⁸⁰

⁷⁹ www.family.org/pastor/resources. See also www.parsonage.org

⁸⁰ Quoted in Elizabeth Skoglund, *Burning Out for God: How to Be Used by God Without Being Used Up* (Downers Grove, Ill: InterVarsity Press, 1988), 12.

Arguably, many pastors today recognize themselves in McCheyne's testimony. Whether consciously or unconsciously, pastors fear they are in danger of "killing the horse." The list of reasons is endless. William Willimon, in his book, *Pastor*, lends some personal insights on what causes may result in someone's exit from pastoring:

1. The work of the church is never done.
2. The church does not give us a clear picture of the expectations and tasks that we are to fulfill.
3. The church is a haven and refuge for people in great need.
4. People in ministry must function as a "persona" (term used by Carl Jung indicating a mask).
5. Pastors may be exhausted by failure.
6. The church and its ministry are not valued by the surrounding culture.
7. Pastors serve in institutions that are declining.
8. Much of the church and its ministry is a "head trip."
9. Poor time management wears down many in the church.
10. Ministry is often a mess.
11. Pastors and laity must be in general harmony⁸¹

The significance of the pastor fulfilling the pastoral duties that are outlined in the New Testament is not only crucial for the health of the clergy family, but also the health and vitality of the church. Adding to the biblically mandated list of responsibilities for the pastor will leave both vulnerable. According to the biblical record, the pastor is accountable for specific duties:

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| 1. To administer the ordinances | Matt 28:19-20 |
| 2. To be a man of prayer | 1 Tim 2:1 |
| 3. To warn his flock | 1 Tim 4:1, 6 |
| 4. To study the Word | 2 Tim 2:15 |

⁸¹ William H. Willimon, *Pastor: The Theology and Practice of Ordained Ministry* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2002), 316.

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| 5. To preach the Word | 2 Tim 4:2; Acts 6:2-4 |
| 6. To exhort and rebuke | 1 Thess 5:12; Titus 2:15 |
| 7. To watch over souls, his own
and those of others | Acts 20:28-31; Col 4:17; 1 Tim 4:6; 6:11;
Heb 13:17 |
| 8. To feed and lead his flock | Acts 20:28; 1 Pet 5:2 |
| 9. To be an example to all | 1 Cor 11:1; 4:16; Phil 3:17; 2 Thess 3:9;
1 Tim 4:12; Heb 13:7; 1 Pet 5:3 ⁸² |

The voluminous data collected from surveying clergy confirm that if the pastor allows more and more expectations and demands to infiltrate his world, these will be the causes of stress and burnout.

“Being a pastor today is more difficult than any other time in history.”⁸³

Contemporary clergy are imperiled, and the very profession is, by some accounts, in serious trouble.

Most statistics say that 60 percent to 80 percent of those who enter the ministry will not still be in it 10 years later, and only a fraction will stay in it as a lifetime career. Many pastors—I believe over 90 percent—start off right with a true call and the enthusiasm and the endurance of faith to make it, but something happens to derail their train of passion and love for the call.⁸⁴

Leadership featured two book reviews by Greg Asimakoupoulos on the pastoral crisis. He indicated the gravity of the issue by delivering a cautionary message:

⁸² Willmington, *Bible Lists*, 230–231.

⁸³ Gary L. Pinion, *Crushed: The Perilous Side of Ministry* (Springfield, MO: 21st Century Press, 2008), 11.

⁸⁴ Krejcir, “Statistics on Pastors.”

“Warning: the list of endangered species is growing. To bald eagles, koalas and spotted owls, add another: ordained pastors energized by what they do.”⁸⁵

Paul Beasley-Murray’s⁸⁶ indispensable work entitled, *A Call to Excellence: An Essential Guide to Christian Leadership*⁸⁷ should be given a special place on the bookshelf of every contemporary pastor and his wisdom heeded. Beasley-Murray personally engaged in gathering data regarding the pastoral attrition rate. His findings concur with Asimakoupoulos’ prediction.

A few years ago I went through the names of all those who had been trained for the Baptist ministry at Spurgeon's College, London, in the period 1955–1985. During those 30 years 406 students left Spurgeon's to serve in Baptist churches: but of this number only 268 stayed the course. Of the remaining 138, 38 moved into some other form of Christian ministry—whether in a para church organization or in some other denomination—but 100 left Christian ministry altogether. In other words, 25 percent of those trained at Spurgeon's and subsequently ordained left the Christian ministry altogether. Indeed, the final fall-out figure will almost certainly be higher: there is still plenty of time for a good number of those trained in the 1970s and early 1980s to leave Baptist ministry. It could well be that ultimately almost one third of those trained at Spurgeon's will not remain in Christian ministry. What is more, Spurgeon's is not exceptional—indeed, some theological colleges may have an even higher percentage of their graduates no longer in Christian ministry. Certainly there is no reason to believe that ministerial fall-out is substantially lessening.⁸⁸

⁸⁵ Greg Asimakoupoulos, “The New Endangered Species,” *Leadership* (Winter 1994), 123.

⁸⁶ For further details on Paul Beasley-Murray’s excellent ministry, see www.centralbaptistchelmsford.org. As part of his wider ministry Paul is also Chairman of *Ministry Today*, an interdenominational organization, whose aim is ‘to provide a supportive resource for all in pastoral leadership, so that they may not only survive, but also grow and develop, becoming more effective’ in their ministry. He is also General Editor of its journal, *Ministry Today*, which appears three times a year, both in hard copy and also as e-journal. For further details see www.ministrytoday.org.uk

⁸⁷ Paul Beasley-Murray, *A Call To Excellence: Essential Guide to Christian Leadership* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1995).

⁸⁸ *Ibid.* *Taking Stock* (the report of the Committee of Enquiry into the state of the Ministry among Scottish Baptists) (Baptist Union of Scotland 1986), reported that “the number of resignations annually has doubled since 1981.”

In some parts of the world, Christian ministry is in crisis, and shepherds are leaving their flocks in hopes of finding what they envision as greener pastures. Furthermore, many do not necessarily choose to remain in their ministerial calling but opt instead for secular work. David L. McKenna, former consulting editor for *Christianity Today* and national radio commentator, brings his expertise of more than 50 years in Christian education to this issue and argues that the landscape of clergy health is devastating. He suggests, however, that we consider salvaging servants of God rather than discarding them:

Sometimes the ministerial profession looks like a desert over which a cowboy has ridden and moved on, leaving the debris of burned-out pastors on the trail behind ... Broken-down, burned-out and cast-off former pastors sit on the sidelines in our churches, sell real estate for a livelihood, and serve as guidance counselors in the public schools. If they could be renewed rather than rejected, there would be no shortage of pastors.⁸⁹

McKenna's reflections are particularly telling; many pastors sit on the sidelines, watching the game from the dugout. Many are reeling in pain as a result of some injury sustained in the pastorate. David L. McKenna recommends that these pastors be recovered, brought back into ministry. The questions might be: "Is there truly any genuine concern about bringing them back to life and vitality in ministry? Is anyone even paying attention, recognizing that the ministry dugouts are filled to capacity and overflowing with wounded ministers?" Many are eager to get back in the game and others, who were once enthusiastic about the call, are now apathetic and ready for early retirement.

⁸⁹ David L. McKenna, "Recycling Pastors," *Leadership* (Fall 1980), 18–19.

Social-networking sites, websites, blogs, books, journal articles, seminars, conferences, and retreats attract millions of users, readers, and attendees to their outreach, and for varied purposes. No doubt some of these webmasters, writers, authors, and consultants mean well in targeting a special group of people they believe is critically ill. They appear to be sincere; their intention to attract interest and ultimately to influence people to change their lives before they are destroyed. The critically ill individuals who are their target audience members are not the incurable patients experiencing hospice care, nor the ones fighting for their lives in the intensive-care unit of a hospital. Instead, the intended subjects are pastors. Many of them are visiting such sites and taking the bait, hooked by alluring and virtually inescapable titles such as: “A hidden cancer among the ordained,”⁹⁰ “Bad news about your Pastor,”⁹¹ “Stress and Burnout in Ministry,”⁹² “The Pressures on Pastors,”⁹³ *Running on Empty*,⁹⁴ “I am a Wounded Minister,”⁹⁵ and *Crushed: The Perilous Side of Ministry*.⁹⁶

For the stressed out and suffering pastor attempting to hide his or her condition, stumbling upon such places might provoked the same kind of initial reaction one has when approaching a horrific automobile accident on the expressway. While inching by the awful wreckage, you determine you will not to peek at the fatalities as the police officer slowly waves you on, but you simply cannot help but look. The vehicular carnage,

⁹⁰ Urban T. Holmes, *Spirituality for Ministry* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1982), 47.

⁹¹ Rick Murphy, “Bad News About Your Pastor,” maranathalife.com/lifeline/bad-news.htm (accessed Mar 12, 2012).

⁹² Croucher, “Stress and Burnout.”

⁹³ Mark Brooks, “The Pressure On Pastors,” thecharisgroup.org/2011/01/06/the-pressure-on-pastors/ (accessed Mar 12, 2012).

⁹⁴ Fil Anderson, *Running on Empty: Contemplative Spirituality for Overachievers* (Colorado Springs: WaterBrook Press, 2004), 1.

⁹⁵ Guy Greenfield, *The Wounded Minister: Healing from and Preventing Personal Attacks* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2001), 13.

⁹⁶ Pinion, *Crushed*.

no doubt, leaves vivid memories forever etched in your mind. The same is true of reading the shocking statistics regarding clergy health revealed on or in each of the aforementioned resources.

The recent rise of clergy carnage is frightening, and the increase continues at an alarming rate. Shockingly, most pastors are tempted “not to peek” and to ignore the reality of the problem in their own lives. Many shudder at first glance, while others would just as soon pass by as if they are being “waved on.” Could it be that the facts hit too close to home? Should the pastor continue keeping the burdensome secret that he is in crisis, all the while perpetually expressing the appearance of “super-pastor” strength, or is it time to come clean? To admit the truth? “I think I may be a critically ill pastor!” What, then, is “the bad news” for clergy? How critically ill is today’s pastor?

One indicator may be found in the number of resources dedicated to the matter of clergy health and renewal from one of the leading Christian endowment organizations: the Lilly Endowment Inc.⁹⁷ The Endowment is clear and unapologetic about its mission: “Recognizing the importance and necessity for busy pastors to have an opportunity to take an extended break for renewal and refreshment, Lilly Endowment in 2000 introduced a new competitive grants program.”⁹⁸ The National Clergy Renewal Program exists to promote renewal for American clergy. It “annually provides as many as 120

⁹⁷ Lilly Endowment Inc. is an Indianapolis based, private philanthropic foundation created in 1937 by three members of the Lilly family – J.K. Lilly Sr. and sons J.K. Jr. and Eli – through gifts of stock in their pharmaceutical business, Eli Lilly and Company.

⁹⁸ www.lillyendowment.org/religion_ncr.html

grants of up to \$45,000 each, directly to Christian congregations for the support of a renewal program for their pastor.”⁹⁹

The financial resources being committed by just one organization to the revitalization of ministers and the congregations they serve are astonishing to say the least. “Since 2000 the Endowment has invested nearly \$29 million in this program for more than 700 congregations and their pastors.”¹⁰⁰ The organization elucidates that the renewal time is not a “vacation”¹⁰¹ for the pastor, but instead is a time “for intentional exploration and reflection, for drinking again from God's life-giving waters, for regaining enthusiasm and creativity for ministry.”¹⁰² The National Clergy Renewal Program is already anticipating a plethora of submissions for the 2012 calendar year. They expect “awarding as many as 150 grants of up to \$50,000 each directly to Christian congregations for the support of a renewal program for their pastor. Up to \$15,000 of the grant may be used for congregational expenses associated with the renewal program.”¹⁰³

Reports on Clergy Health: The Statistical Data

Perhaps organizations like the aforementioned Lilly Endowment have come forward to assist as a result of the comprehensive data collected over several decades by experts like the author who asked, “What is going on with the Pastors in America?”¹⁰⁴ Such is the provocative title of an article by Dr. Richard J. Krejcir, founder of Into Thy Word

⁹⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰⁰ www.clergyrenewal.org

¹⁰¹ Ibid.

¹⁰² Ibid.

¹⁰³ Ibid.

¹⁰⁴ Krejcir, “Statistics on Pastors.”

Ministries.¹⁰⁵ He identifies staggering statistics on the health of clergy and their families, as well as clergy attrition rates. Krejcir’s query is an important one and might demand a follow-up article with the intent of broadening the question to include research from pastors worldwide, as universal studies and statistical data suggest that the problem of clergy health affects pastors globally.

More than 18 years of research prompted Krejcir to report interesting “pastoral trends” and to suggest that “pastors are in a dangerous occupation.”¹⁰⁶ In fact, pastors are involved in “... perhaps the single most stressful and frustrating working profession, more than medical doctors, lawyers, politicians.”¹⁰⁷ Tragically, survey results reveal that “over 70 percent of pastors are so stressed out and burned out that they regularly consider leaving the ministry.”¹⁰⁸ Dr. Krejcir joined Francis Schaeffer in compiling this research and, to further authenticate their findings, comparable data was extracted from other groups such as the Barna Research Group, Focus on the Family, and Fuller Seminary. The data provided by these other groups validated Schaeffer and Krejcir’s results:

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

¹⁰⁵ Currently the Francis A. Schaeffer Institute of Church Leadership Development is in partnership with Into Thy Word Ministries (another Francis Schaeffer vision). Our current task is the collecting articles and essays by the late Francis Schaeffer, as well as researching his materials and making application of them to help lead the church into a better more biblical direction. www.intothyword.org.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid.

- Almost forty percent polled said they have had an extramarital affair since beginning their ministry.
- Seventy percent said the only time they spend studying the Word is when they are preparing their sermons.¹⁰⁹

The perils of ministry are mounting, and forecasters are predicting a massive storm developing on the horizon. The tempest is targeting pastors, and it may be that there are some who are being ordained into ministry without realizing the impending hazards. What are these dangers?

The Alban Institute's Roy Oswald suggests that there are potential risks clergy and their families will encounter that should be anticipated before someone is commissioned into ministry. Many inexperienced yet sincere clergy enter the pastorate much like someone heading to the beach for a day of sun and fun. In their earnestness to enjoy the day while heading straight for the tempting waters, they are simply naïve about the perilous underlying current in the big beautiful ocean. Oswald acts as a lifeguard who plants a caution flag in the sand and keeps watch, hoping the pastor will avoid the treacherous yet tempting current. His list of warnings should not be overlooked:

- Some will be unable to endure the stress of ministry and will experience physical and emotional breakdown.
- Approximately a quarter of these clergy will experience a failed marriage.
- Within the first ten years of parish ministry, roughly half will either be fired by their congregations or forced to move. Another 15 percent will be forced out of their parishes during the last ten years of ministry.
- Some will lose their sense of calling and begin placing money and status above the goals of the kingdom.
- Some will lose all sense of physical stewardship and allow their bodies to balloon to double their normal weight, making them far less credible healers in their members' eyes.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid.

- Some will get so caught up in ministry successes and workaholic behavior that they will cease being good models of grace.¹¹⁰

Survey outcomes sadly indicate the massive ministry fallout, as contemporary clergy frequently cave in to stress and burnout at appalling rates, just as Oswald's first warning indicates. In such occurrences, the pastor will usually eventually succumb to substantial health issues and will also witness his family's yielding to calamitous circumstances of epic proportions, not to mention the deteriorating health of his church.

Is this simply a passing phenomenon or is it an insoluble problem? Australian pastor Rowland Croucher comments: "Research 25 years ago showed clergy dealing with stress better than most professionals. Since 1980, studies in the U.S. describe an alarming spread of burnout in the profession. For example, Jerdon found three out of four parish ministers (sample: 11,500) reported severe stress causing "anguish, worry, bewilderment, anger, depression, fear, and alienation."¹¹¹

Croucher spoke from personal experience when citing the tremendous continual pressures pastors are under as one of the reasons that clergy are quitting the pastorate. He opened up about his own experience and candidly described the day he began feeling utterly worn-out, without any strength to carry on:

It was a gray, cloudy April morning in Canada, the children had gone to school, his wife to work. After a slow start to his morning, pastor Rowland Croucher decided to do something he'd never done before. He turned the

¹¹⁰ Roy Oswald, foreword to Gary L. Harbaugh, *Caring For the Caregiver* (Washington D.C.: Alban Institute, 1992), vi-vii.

¹¹¹ Croucher, "Stress and Burnout in Ministry."

phone down, put a note on the front door, and went back to bed. He was burned out – and within two months, he resigned [the] pastorate.¹¹²

Mass numbers of pastors are surrendering their pastorates. Similar stories are surfacing from clergy the world over. Evidence affirms that pastors everywhere are being crushed by an overwhelming weight of responsibilities placed on them and determining that the overall health risks are too much of a price to pay for themselves and their families. Curious as to what his peers were undergoing in making their decisions to resign, Croucher produced a comprehensive study of 10,000 ex-pastors in Australia alone, and his findings revealed relatively unsurprising results, i.e., only “a quarter left without the hurt, conflict, loss of health, or boredom that characterized the majority.”¹¹³ And the majority of these clergy confessed to suffering an enormous amount of pain when leaving the ministry.

In the late 1990s, Dr. Krejcir re-tested data gathered earlier¹¹⁴ by surveying and collecting information from 1,050 individual pastors¹¹⁵ at two clergy conferences in Pasadena, California. When asked whether or not the pastor “had a close associate or seminary buddy who had left the ministry because of burnout, conflict in their church, or from a moral failure,”¹¹⁶ the results were unanimous: All 1,050 pastors responded affirmatively. As the founder and director of *Into Thy Word Ministries*, a missions and discipling ministry, there is a call upon Dr. Krejcir’s heart to bring discipleship materials to pastors and everyone else who needs them, here and overseas. He is the author of

¹¹² Ibid.

¹¹³ Croucher, Rowland. “Why clergy are leaving the church,” *Ministry Today* 1 (1994), ministrytoday.org.uk/magazine/issues/1/295/.

¹¹⁴ *FASICLD (Francis A. Schaeffer Institute of Church Leadership Development)*. This quest started in 1989 as a *Fuller Institute* project that was picked up by *FASICLD* in 1998.

¹¹⁵ 416 [pastors] in 2005, and 634 [pastors] in 2006. Krejcir, “Statistics on Pastors.”

¹¹⁶ Ibid.

numerous articles, curricula, and books, including *Into Thy Word*. He is a nephew and disciple of Francis Schaeffer and an ordained pastor, a teacher, and speaker. He is a graduate of Fuller Theological Seminary in Pasadena California (Master of Divinity) and holds a Ph.D. in Practical Theology. He has amassed over 20 years of pastoral ministry experience, mostly in youth ministry, including serving as a church growth consultant.

The survey he conducted indicated the following:

- Nine hundred and forty-eight (90 percent) of pastors responding stated they are frequently fatigued, and worn out on a weekly and even daily basis (they did not say *burned out*).
- Nine hundred and thirty-five (89 percent) of the pastors surveyed also considered leaving the ministry at one time. Five hundred ninety (57 percent) said they would leave if they had a better place to go—including secular work.
- Eight hundred and eight (77 percent) of the pastors we surveyed felt they did not have a good marriage.
- Seven hundred and ninety (75 percent) of the pastors surveyed felt they were unqualified and/or poorly trained by their seminaries to lead and manage the church or to counsel others. This left them disheartened in their ability to pastor.
- Seven hundred and fifty-six (72 percent) of the pastors surveyed stated that they only studied the Bible when they were preparing for sermons or lessons. This left only 28 percent who read the Bible for devotions and personal study.
- Eight hundred and two (71 percent) of pastors stated they were burned out, and they battle depression beyond fatigue on a weekly and even a daily basis.
- Three hundred and ninety-nine (38 percent) of pastors said they were divorced or currently in the divorce process.
- Three hundred and fifteen (30 percent) said they had either been in an ongoing affair or had had a one-time sexual encounter with a parishioner.
- Two hundred and seventy (26 percent) pastors said they regularly spent time in personal devotions and felt they were adequately fed spirituality.
- Two hundred and forty-one (23 percent) of the pastors we surveyed said they felt happy and content on a regular basis with who they are in Christ, in their church, and in their home.¹¹⁷

In “The State of the Clergy,”¹¹⁸ G. Lloyd Rediger, author of *Clergy Killers*,

stated:

¹¹⁷ Ibid.

It is likely that few other professionals are studied more than clergy. Why? Because they are an important part of America's self-image and because they have a newsworthy mystique. Because the role of clergy reflects the changes in contemporary spirituality. Because of recent scandals and breakdowns among clergy.¹¹⁹

Earlier extensive psychological research on clergy concentrated on concerns relating to impairment,¹²⁰ burnout,¹²¹ and misconduct,¹²² even as it found indications that most clergy claimed they thrived in their occupation during periods of high stress.¹²³ Could this finding become the exception rather than the rule as pastoral stressors continue to mount?

Ed Stetzer, Vice-President of Research and Ministry Development at LifeWay Christian Resources, suggests that:

Many oft-quoted statistics speak of miserable and unhappy pastors, but that's not what we see when we actually ask them. There is discouragement and loneliness, but when 98 percent agree it is a privilege to be a pastor, we also know there is a great honor to being a pastor.¹²⁴

¹¹⁸ G. Lloyd Rediger, "The State of the Clergy," home.comcast.net/~glrediger/columns/survey.html

¹¹⁹ Ibid.

¹²⁰ J. R. Meloy, "Narcissistic personality and the clergy," *Pastoral Psychology* 35 (1986), 50-55; 104. S. P. Von Stroh, R. A. Mines, and S. K. Anderson, "Impaired clergy: Applications of Ethical Principles," *Counseling and Values* 40 (1995), 6-14.

¹²¹ W. N. Grosch and D. C. Olsen, "Clergy Burnout: An integrative approach," *Journal of Clinical Psychology* 56 (2000), 619-32.

¹²² W. B. Berman, "Ten Commandments for avoiding clergy malpractice in pastoral counseling," *Journal of Psychology and Christianity* 16 (1997), 286-272; A. B. Brewster "Clergy sexual misconduct: The affair everyone remembers," *Pastoral Psychology* 44 (1996), 353-362; M. G. Davies, "Clergy sexual malfeasance: Restoration, ethics, and process," *Journal of Psychology and Theology* 26 (1998), 331-339; M. F. Ruzicka, "Predictor variables on clergy pedophiles," *Psychological Reports* 81 (1997), 589-590.

¹²³ K. R. Meek, M. R. McMinn, C. M. Brower, et al., "Maintaining personal resiliency: Lessons learned from evangelical Protestant clergy," *Journal of Psychology and Theology* 31 (2003), 339-47.

¹²⁴ David Roach, "Survey: Pastors feel privileged and positive, though discouragement can come," (Oct 5, 2011), www.lifeway.com/Article/Research-Survey-Pastors-feel-privileged-and-positive-though-discouragement-can-come (accessed Mar 12, 2012).

However, Stetzer acknowledges what the data overwhelmingly shows, in this statement: “Pastors feel privileged, but clearly the reality of constant service can take its toll.”¹²⁵

Wayne Whitson Floyd, education program manager of the Alban Institute,¹²⁶ recently penned his thoughts after many media outlets suddenly suggested the emergence of a new phenomenon: “clergy burnout.” Floyd writes: “[It] seems to be news to everyone ... except clergy.”¹²⁷ Nevertheless, while clergy may indeed realize they are stressed out, taking a chance in being honest about it to anyone might suggest weakness or cause people to doubt their leader and that, for most pastors, is out of the question.

Pastors are inclined to fall victim to the syndrome of telling congregants to “do as I say, not as I do.” Periodically, preachers mount their pulpits and unconsciously preach their own problems. Admittedly, the pastor’s own personal issues become great sermon material, but he carefully includes and delivers the lesson with only the parishioner in mind, purposefully avoiding the elephant in the church, the “stressed pastor” who is in obvious need of intervention by those who truly care about his well-being.

After realizing the magnitude of clergy stress and burnout, founding pastor of Mars Hill Church in Seattle, Washington, Mark Driscoll, prepared a missive for his elders’ meeting on May 22, 2006. The crucial content was later included in an article Driscoll

¹²⁵ Ibid.

¹²⁶ The Alban Institute based in Herndon, VA., was founded in 1974 as a major resource for American congregations facing the challenges of a changing society. While today’s challenges are even more pressing than they were three decades ago, the opportunities have never been clearer for congregations to be vital communities of faith, health, and leadership. Alban stands at the forefront of knowledge and experience regarding congregational vitality and positive trends across denominations and faith traditions. See www.alban.org.

¹²⁷ Wayne Whitson Floyd, “Clergy Burnout,” (Aug 23, 2012), www.alban.org/conversation.aspx?id=9169&terms=percent22seems percent20to percent20be percent20news percent20to percent20everyone percent22 (accessed Mar 4, 2012).

wrote entitled “Death by Ministry.”¹²⁸ Sparked by the candid confessions of his good friend, Pastor Darrin Patrick, after he publically admitted to burdens in pastoral ministry while speaking at a recent Reform & Resurge Conference, Driscoll divulged:

I have pushed myself to the edge and over the edge of burnout throughout my nearly ten years in vocational ministry. Subsequently, I have been doing a great deal of research that I am compiling in hopes of not only improving my own life but also the lives of the leaders at Mars Hill Church and the churches in our Acts 29 Network.¹²⁹

Driscoll’s concern, in trumpeting the message for clergy health, is being heard loud and clear, and it is capturing the attention of many. “At least twenty-two separate organizations exist in the U.S. solely to deal with pre- and post-pastoral burnout indicating this is a widespread problem that has only been identified and researched since the 1950s.”¹³⁰

What does the landscape of the overall health of clergy look like? Years of data now reveal that the scene resembles the site of a war-torn battleground. Statistics indicate that clergy are threadbare and battered:

- Ninety percent of pastors work more than 46 hours a week.
- Eighty percent believed that pastoral ministry affected their families negatively.
- Thirty-three percent said that being in ministry was an outright hazard to their family.
- Seventy-five percent reported a significant stress-related crisis at least once in their ministry.
- Fifty percent felt unable to meet the needs of the job.
- Ninety percent felt they were inadequately trained to cope with ministry demands.

¹²⁸ Mark Driscoll, “Death by Ministry,” www.cnbc.ca/strengthen/death-by-ministry-by-mark-driscoll (accessed Mar 12, 2012).

¹²⁹ Ibid.

¹³⁰ Ibid.

- Seventy percent say they have lower self-esteem now than when they started out.
- Forty percent reported a serious conflict with a parishioner at least once a month.
- Thirty-seven percent confessed to having been involved in inappropriate sexual behavior with someone in the church.
- Seventy percent do not have someone they consider a close friend.¹³¹

Ministry stress is well researched and documented. Psychologist Richard Blackmon proposed that “pastors are the single most occupationally frustrated group in America. Incidents of mental breakdown are so high that insurance companies charge about four percent extra to cover church staff members compared to employees in other professions.”¹³² After more than 35 years counseling pastors and other religious leaders, Blackmon’s colleague Archibald Hart¹³³ admitted,

When I go home, I can shut it off. I have an answering service that will screen through my calls and make sure only the emergencies get through. But a pastor, he can’t do that. If he hired an answering service, that church would fire him. He is supposed to be available to everyone for everything all the time.¹³⁴

Clergy do sometimes complain about the workload as well as various other ministry grievances, as expressed in one pastor’s confession, “I do not know where my

¹³¹ 1991 Survey of Pastors, Fuller Institute of Church Growth. Cited in eds. H. B. London and Neil B. Wiseman, eds. *Pastors At Risk* (Wheaton, Ill.: Victor Books, 1993), 22.

¹³² Richard Blackmon, *Current Thoughts and Trends*, May 1999 (Colorado Springs, CO: NavPress), 14.

¹³³ Dr. Archibald Hart is a licensed psychologist, certified biofeedback practitioner, and board-certified fellow in psychopharmacology. A former dean of the School of Psychology, Hart is now Senior Professor of Psychology and is best known for his research on the hazards of ministry, depression, anxiety, divorce, stress, and sexuality. Among his numerous books are recent publications *Stressed or Depressed* (2005) with daughter Dr. Catherine Weber, *Safe Haven Marriage* (2003) with daughter Dr. Sharon Morris, *Unveiling Depression in Women* (2002) also with daughter Dr. Catherine Weber, *Unmasking Male Depression* (2001), and *The Anxiety Care* (2000). His most recent book is *Thrilled to Death: How the Endless Pursuit of Pleasure is Leaving us Numb* (2007). He is an active member of the Prescribing Psychologists Register and president of the International Network of Christian Counselors.

¹³⁴ Tina Dirmann, “Pastoral Pressures Test Faith,” *Los Angeles Times* (Jan 29, 1999), articles.latimes.com/1999/jan/29/local/me-2802 (accessed Mar 10, 2012).

work starts and where it ends.”¹³⁵ Too many pastors find themselves fraught, trying to set boundaries, while struggling with the realization that there is a transition underway: decades ago, congregants were content with their own families providing emotional comfort and support. Parishioners today are more demanding of their pastor and find him to be the “go-to guy.” The pressure pastors feel to perform and produce, while remaining polite, is insane. Not only is he required to be “all that” for his family and the church, but he also feels that same constant pressure to be so for the world as well. Pastor John Huffman confessed what is truly at the heart of every pastor:

If I’m coaching Little League or basketball, I’m not just Dad out there, and I can’t just tell the referee his eyesight is needy, because I’m the pastor. But that’s OK, I guess. It’s kept me on the straight and narrow when I really wanted to wrap the referee’s whistle around his throat.¹³⁶

Dr. William Grosch, a 42-year veteran in the medical field specializing in psychiatry, and David C. Olsen, a certified marriage and family therapist, concluded that clergy burnout is a result of multiple influences:

Understanding how clergy, who begin their careers with high idealism, optimism, and compassion, burn out is difficult. One body of research suggests that clergy, among others, burn out because of the systems in which they work. From this perspective, burnout is the result of external systemic factors such as bureaucracy, poor administrative support, and difficult work conditions. The other body of research suggests that burnout is the result of intrapersonal factors such as high idealism, Type-A personality, narcissism, and perfectionism.¹³⁷

Are these findings comparable with current data and are they consistent across the various denominational groups within Christianity? The research affirms that clergy

¹³⁵ W. Evers and W. Tomic, “Burnout among Dutch Reformed Pastors,” *Journal of Psychology and Theology* 31 (2003), 329-338.

¹³⁶ Dirmann, “Pastoral Pressures.”

¹³⁷ Grosch and Olsen, “Clergy burnout.”

carnage is no respecter of persons or denominations. In empirical studies, as recently as 2007, researchers in Australia, the UK, and the US concurred with previous findings, as follows:

Consistent findings across all six studies indicated a high level of work-related burnout among the samples of clergy, irrespective of religious denomination or country. In combination, this work demonstrated the wide range of matters currently being investigated by researchers as well as the variety of methodologies being employed with the social scientific study of religion and related disciplines focused on clergy work-related psychological health, stress, and burnout.¹³⁸

So substantial are the stressors affecting contemporary clergy that \$12 million are being dedicated to a seven-year research program, initiated by the Duke Clergy Health Initiative in 2007. The study involves United Methodist clergy in North Carolina, and its objective is to increase knowledge and improve the overall health of clergy. In 2008, a unique series of focus groups was held to seek clergy opinions and insights in small-group settings. Participants included several pastors as well as most district superintendents. So telling are the initiative's current findings that a plethora of media outlets are publishing the results. The continuing survey of 1,726 pastors has so far revealed that clergy suffer from stress-related illnesses more than most Americans. The results uncovered unhealthy practices by many clergy, resulting in ailments, disorders, and diseases such as obesity, arthritis, diabetes, high blood pressure, asthma, and depression.¹³⁹ Reports by the Institute's researchers, Rae Jean Proeschold-Bell and Sarah LeGrand, suggest that the clergy obesity rate among those between 35–64 years of age is

¹³⁸ Christopher Alan Lewis, Douglas W. Turton, and Leslie J. Francis, "Clergy work-related psychological health, stress, and burnout," *Mental Health, Religion & Culture* 10/1 (2007), 1–8.

¹³⁹ The Clergy Health Initiative's published research paints a striking picture of the health of United Methodist clergy in North Carolina and the factors affecting it. Learn more and read the media coverage related to these findings. See divinity.duke.edu/initiatives-centers/clergy-health-initiative.

nearly 40 percent, or over 10 percent higher than among the local population. Proeschold-

Bell writes:

We had a pastor in our study group who hadn't taken a vacation in 18 years ... These people tend to be driven by a sense of a duty to God to answer every call for help from anybody, and they are virtually called upon all the time, 24/7.¹⁴⁰

Reports from within the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America showed similar findings. Reports from comparable surveys revealed the ELCA clergy found that “69 percent of its pastors are overweight, 64 percent struggle with having high blood pressure, and 13 percent depend on prescription antidepressants.”¹⁴¹

Presbyterian pastors fared no better. A 2005 survey showed that, “[four] times as many ministers leaving the profession during the first five years of ministry, as compared with the 1970s,”¹⁴² citing ministry stress and burnout as the reason.

Sadly, clergy peers just over the border experience similar pressures in ministry. Statistics reveal that Canadian clergy are not exempt from ministry stressors. The Task Force on Clergy Wellness of the Anglican diocese of Nova Scotia and Prince Edward Island rendered its findings in 2003,

emphasizing the importance of developing self-care and support systems within the diocese and parish communities. Of particular concern was the difficulty that clergy often have in setting and maintaining boundaries concerning time off and setting realistic expectations for themselves and their parishes.¹⁴³

¹⁴⁰ Paul Vitello, “Taking a Break from the Lord’s Work,” *The New York Times* (Aug 1, 2010), www.nytimes.com/2010/08/02/nyregion/02burnout.html (accessed Mar 10, 2012).

¹⁴¹ Ibid.

¹⁴² Ibid.

¹⁴³ Report submitted in November 2003 to the Right Reverend Fred Hiltz, Bishop of Nova Scotia and Prince Edward Island. “Bishop’s Commission on Clergy Wellness - An Update - March 2005,”

International surveys revealed similar findings: “Hardly a week passes without an article about work stress in a UK national newspaper.”¹⁴⁴ Coaching specialist Katherine Everitt-Newton suggested that stress has become an epidemic. She writes: “Estimates from the latest HSE—Labor Force Survey indicate that self-reported work-related stress, depression or anxiety accounted for an estimated 11.4 million lost working days in Britain in 2008/09.”¹⁴⁵ This epidemic has infiltrated the clergy environment as well. In 2005, *Christianity Today* reported on the stress contagion among clergy in the UK as a result of a survey conducted by Evangelicals Now. The findings were enlightening. After interviewing “300 ministers”¹⁴⁶ from major Protestant Christian denominations,¹⁴⁷ the data revealed that “stress is the most pressing problem for UK pastors.”¹⁴⁸ Of the pastors responding to the survey, “[t]he statistics shows that 98 percent of pastors suffer from stress; feeling depressed 86 percent, feeling angry 83 percent, suffering from family tension 82 percent, sexual temptation 82 percent; from writer’s block 70 percent; and loneliness 63 percent.”¹⁴⁹

[www.nspeidiocese.ca/mailling/2005/03_2005/Wellness percent20Commission percent20UpdateMarch.pdf](http://www.nspeidiocese.ca/mailling/2005/03_2005/Wellness%20Commission%20UpdateMarch.pdf) (accessed Oct 10, 2011).

¹⁴⁴ Katherine Everitt-Newton, “Stress at Work – Employer Responsibilities,” cognitusuk.com/stress-at-work-employer-responsibilities (accessed Mar 12, 2012).

¹⁴⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁴⁶ *Evangelicals Now* received 145 replies by post, among which 61 pastors were from the Church of England, 41 from the Independent Evangelical sector, 13 were Presbyterians and there were 30 others including Grace Baptists, Baptist Union, Methodists and Church of Scotland.

¹⁴⁷ K. Y. Eunice, “UK Evangelical Survey Reveals Stress as Biggest Problem for Pastors,” *Christian Today* (Jul 7, 2005),

www.christiantoday.com/news/ministries/uk.evangelical.survey.reveals.stress.as.biggest.problem.for.pastors./307.htm (accessed Mar 1, 2012).

¹⁴⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁴⁹ *Ibid.*

Has the American workforce been similarly hindered by stress-related illness? And has the American economy suffered as a result? Christina Maslach,¹⁵⁰ a pioneer in the research on job burnout, informed her readers in *Banishing Burnout* that “[j]ob stress is estimated to cost the U.S. economy \$300 billion in sick time, long-term disability, and excessive job turnover.”¹⁵¹

In a 2002 journal article, Weaver and Flannelly compared Protestant ministers and Catholic priests and nuns in regard to ministerial stress and concluded that

“[e]xisting research indicates the Protestant clergy report higher levels of occupational stress than Catholic priests, brothers, or sisters. Catholic nuns reported the lowest work-related stress, whereas female rabbis reported the highest stress levels in various studies. Occupational stress appears to be a source of family stress among Protestant clergy.”¹⁵²

Perhaps the reason for this interesting finding lies within the mandates of Catholic canon law. One provision—which should be considered a non-negotiable directive within the “bylaws” of Protestant churches—is this one: “Catholic canon law requires a priest, unless there is a grace reason to the contrary, to take a spiritual retreat each year, and four weeks of vacation.”¹⁵³

The indications that most clergy stressors result from the overwhelming weekly expectations put upon them by those seeking counsel and advice in areas of mental health are in themselves revealing. Many parishioners regard ministers as spiritual gurus, able to pinpoint a surefire remedy for any medical condition or life circumstance. Weaver

¹⁵⁰ Maslach is best known as the author of the Maslach Burnout Inventory (MBI), the most widely used research measure in the burnout field.

¹⁵¹ Michael P. Leiter and Christina Maslach, *Banishing Burnout: Six Strategies for Improving Your Relationship with Work* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2005), 2.

¹⁵² A. J. Weaver and K. J. Flannelly, et al., “Mental Health Issues among Clergy and Other Religious Professionals: A Review of Research,” *Journal of Pastoral Care & Counseling* 56/4 (2002), 393–403.

¹⁵³ Vitello, “Taking a Break.”

claimed: “Given that millions of Americans are frequently involved with religion, it is not surprising to find that clergy are front line mental-health counselors.”¹⁵⁴ Similar findings captured the attention of clergy and laity in a report on mental health submitted by the Surgeon-General of the United States. The discoveries showed “that each year one of six adults and one of five children seek mental health services from a health care provider, a clergy person, a social services agency, or a school service.”¹⁵⁵ True, parishioners find spiritual support and significant solace in their pastor’s wisdom and guidance, especially during the chaos and crisis that often interfere with family stability. However, how much responsibility can one pastor realistically be expected to shoulder before he senses the first signs of too much ministry-related stress?

The Hartford Institute released recent findings published in the *Yearbook of American and Canadian Churches*,¹⁵⁶ estimating that there were 600,000 clergy¹⁵⁷ serving in various denominations in the United States ... though the figure¹⁵⁸ did not include independent churches.¹⁵⁹ Considering those numbers as well as the hours pastors spend at the diversity of job-related duties, one would have to ask: “How many clergy are truly prone to this rising stress-burnout epidemic? And what are the stressors they encounter most?” Or, perhaps, one of the first questions to be asked and answered is this one: What is a pastor and what are his specific responsibilities?

¹⁵⁴ A. J. Weaver, L. A. Revilla, and H. G. Koenig, *Counseling Families across the Stages of Life: A Handbook for Pastors and Other Helping Professionals* (Nashville, Abingdon Press, 2001).

¹⁵⁵ David Satcher, “Mental health: A report of the Surgeon General – Executive summary,” *Professional Psychology: Research and Practice* 31/1 (2000), 5–13.

¹⁵⁶ www.electronicchurch.org/

¹⁵⁷ That figure included retired clergy, chaplains in hospitals, prisons and the military, denominational executives, and ordained faculty at divinity schools and seminaries.

¹⁵⁸ “There’s no way to know how many there are,” said Jackson Carroll, Professor Emeritus of religion and society at Duke Divinity School. In addition, the figures provided by the denominations to the *Yearbook* may not be that accurate, Carroll said. Nevertheless, at present it is the best figure to use.

¹⁵⁹ “Fast Facts,” *Hartford Institute for Religion Research*, www.hartfordinstitute.org/research/fastfacts/fast_facts.html (accessed Mar 1, 2011).

Stress, Burnout, and Depression Defined and Differentiated

It is important to understand the difference between stress and burnout and how each infiltrates and impacts clergy in contemporary culture. Internationally renowned as the “Father of Stress,” Canadian Hans Selye is celebrated as the first scientist to define it. A physician, endocrinologist, and researcher, with three earned doctorates and 42 honorary doctorates to his credit, Dr. Selye is revered as a pioneer in this research. In 1926, during his second year of medical school, Selye began to pursue an interest in this field:

He began developing his now-famous theory of the influence of stress on people's ability to cope with and adapt to the pressures of injury and disease. He discovered that patients with a variety of ailments manifested many similar symptoms, which he ultimately attributed to their bodies' efforts to respond to the stresses of being ill. He called this collection of symptoms—this separate stress disease—stress syndrome, or the general adaptation syndrome (GAS).¹⁶⁰

While a student at McGill University in Montreal in 1936, Selye began to be fascinated by research into the subject of stress. In 1945, after joining forces with the University of Montreal, he and a team of 40 research assistants continued this area of study by working with 15,000 laboratory animals:

He [Selye] first observed the symptoms of GAS after injecting ovarian extracts into laboratory rats, an experiment he performed with the intent of discovering a new hormone. Instead, however, he found that the extract stimulated the outer tissue of the adrenal glands of the rats, caused deterioration of the thymus gland, and produced ulcers and finally death. He eventually determined that these effects could be produced by

¹⁶⁰ Ibid. Selye spent a lifetime in continuing research on GAS and wrote some 30 books and more than 1,500 articles on stress and related problems, including *Stress without Distress* (1974) and *The Stress of Life* (1956). So impressive have his findings and theories been that some authorities refer to him as “the Einstein of medicine.” He was the first director of the Institute of Experimental Medicine and Surgery, Université de Montréal (1945-76). After retiring from the university, he founded the International Institute of Stress in 1977, in his own home in Montreal where he would spend 50 years studying the causes and consequences of stress. More than anyone else, Selye has demonstrated the role of emotional responses in causing or combating much of the wear and tear experienced by human beings throughout their lives.

administering virtually any toxic substance, by physical injury, or by environmental stress. Selye was able to extend his theory to humans, demonstrating that a stress-induced breakdown of the hormonal system could lead to conditions, such as heart disease and high blood pressure, that he called “diseases of adaptation.”¹⁶¹

A name was finally given to this condition—stress. Selye argued it was “the state manifested by a specific syndrome which consists of all the nonspecifically induced changes within a biological system.”¹⁶² It is virtually impossible to live a life completely free of stress.

Dr. Selye’s 50-plus years of crucial research in the area of stress have contributed greatly to contemporary culture. Much is now known about how to define and understand this misunderstood human condition (once dismissed as nonexistent), confronted daily by millions of human beings. Prior to Selye’s work, when individuals who endured exorbitant amounts of pressure, burdens, and the weight of life manifested various physical and emotional reactions, no one knew what to call it. Dr. Selye articulated a theory about these forces and gave them a name. North Americans now understood this condition named “stress.” Internationally, however, people still struggled with this unnamed condition. After a paper on the issue was presented in France, it was found that there was no word in French for stress, so they coined one: *le stress*. Similarly, when asked to speak in Germany, there was no German word for stress, so it was named *der Stress*. Selye is therefore, without doubt, the founder of the concept of stress.¹⁶³ Selye’s

¹⁶¹ “Hans Selye,” *Encyclopædia Britannica Online* (2012), www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/533770/Hans-Selye (accessed Jan 30, 2010).

¹⁶² Hans Selye, *The Stress of Life* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1956), 54.

¹⁶³ “Nobel Prize Winners & Famous Hungarians,” www.americanhungarianfederation.org/FamousHungarians/sciencemathandtech.htm (accessed Sept 30, 2011).

concept of stress transformed our understanding of physical and mental illness, allowing for innovation and fresh possibilities of medical treatment for the suffering.

Simply put, *stress* is a “strain felt by somebody: [a] mental, emotional, or physical strain caused, e.g., by anxiety or overwork. It may cause such symptoms as raised blood pressure or depression.”¹⁶⁴ The way the human body responds to the pressures or burdens of life, both emotionally and physically, is called stress. This pressure-induced stress often prompts a plethora of mental (emotional) and physical symptoms. When stress is present, people may exhibit tension, irritability, lack of concentration, feelings of fatigue, and insomnia. Physical symptoms may manifest themselves as “cotton mouth,” a racing or pounding heart, breathing trouble, irritable bowel syndrome, sweating palms, and headache. These are only a few of the numerous emotional and physical symptoms brought on by stress.

How does stress differ from burnout? People today understand and tend to collapse stress, burnout, and even depression into one condition; however, it is important to note they are three very different ailments. Thanks to Dr. Selye’s research, we now better comprehend stress and related phenomena and their impact on physical and emotional health. But how did society first come to understand burnout—where did research into it originate?

On December 5, 1999, an obituary notice in *The New York Times* lauded Herbert Freudenberger as the “coiner of burnout.” Dr. Freudenberger died at 73, after years of suffering with heart complications. For 40 years, he “maintained a private practice in

¹⁶⁴ www.gostress.com/stress-definitions/

Manhattan ... wrote books and more than 90 articles, and taught at universities in New York and elsewhere.”¹⁶⁵ Freudenberger authored *Burnout: The High Cost of High Achievement* in 1974, and has since been credited by the *Oxford English Dictionary* with being the first to define *burnout* as “the extinction of motivation or incentive, especially where one's devotion to a cause or relationship fails to produce the desired results.”¹⁶⁶

Another well-respected researcher in the field of burnout is Christina Maslach, professor of psychology at the University of California, Berkeley. Maslach's research centers on “job burnout,” which she defines as “lost energy, enthusiasm and confidence.”¹⁶⁷ She argues that

[b]urnout is the biggest occupational hazard of the twenty-first century. It's a phenomenon that has been increasing everywhere, creeping into every corner of the modern workplace, growing like a virus, poisoning the increasingly alienated, disillusioned, even angry relationship people have with the world of work.¹⁶⁸

In her book, *Banishing Burnout*, Maslach argued

When burnout hits you then you've got trouble with a capital T. Burnout is far more than being blue or having a bad day. It is a chronic state of being out of synch with your job, and that can be a significant crisis in your life.¹⁶⁹

Maslach certainly described the mood of many clergy today who encounter enormous stress and run the risk of yielding to burnout.

¹⁶⁵ Douglas Martin, “Herbert Freudenberger, 73, Coiner of ‘Burnout,’ Is Dead,” *New York Times* (Dec 05, 1999), [www.nytimes.com/1999/12/05/nyregion/herbert-freudenberger-73-coiner-of-burnout-is-dead.html?scp=1&sq=Herbert percent20Freudenberger, percent2073, percent20Coiner percent20of percent20 percent91Burnout, percent92 percent20Is percent20Dead&st=cse](http://www.nytimes.com/1999/12/05/nyregion/herbert-freudenberger-73-coiner-of-burnout-is-dead.html?scp=1&sq=Herbert%20Freudenberger,%2073,%20Coiner%20of%20percent91Burnout,%2092%20Is%20Dead&st=cse) (accessed Nov 1, 2011).

¹⁶⁶ Ibid.

¹⁶⁷ Maslach, *Banishing Burnout*, 2-3.

¹⁶⁸ Ibid., 3.

¹⁶⁹ Ibid. 2.

Archibald D. Hart is recognized for his extensive work with clergy and churches through psychological training, education, and consultation in the area of stress, depression, and anxiety. He explains that

Burnout is a syndrome of emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and reduced personal accomplishment that can occur among individuals who do people work of some kind. It is a response to the chronic, emotional strain of dealing extensively with people.¹⁷⁰

Hart affirmed the obvious widespread confusion in the minds of most people in appreciating or even understanding the differences between burnout and stress:

There are some similarities between burnout and stress. There are also many differences. A few similarities are legitimate and real. Many are erroneous.

Why should we differentiate between burnout and stress? For three important reasons:

- The causes of burnout are quite different from those of stress.
- The cures for burnout are significantly different from those for stress.
- The acceptance of the essential differences between burnout and stress can help delineate more effective preventive mechanisms.¹⁷¹

Hart's discernment in differentiating between burnout and stress can help clergy greatly in comprehending their own mental and physical condition when sustaining themselves through ministry pressure. In his article entitled "Depressed, Stressed and Burned Out: What's Going on in My Life?" Hart asked the question many clergy ask. In hopes of educating the clergy, he listed the significant differences between burnout and stress:

¹⁷⁰ Archibald D. Hart, "Depressed, Stressed, and Burned Out: What's Going on in My Life?," *enrichment journal*, enrichmentjournal.ag.org/200603/200603_020_burnout.cfm (accessed Oct 15, 2011).

¹⁷¹ Ibid.

- **Burnout** is a defense characterized by disengagement.
- *Stress* is characterized by over-engagement.

- In **Burnout** the emotions become blunted.
- In *Stress* the emotions become over-reactive.

- In **Burnout** the emotional damage is primary.
- In *Stress* the physical damage is primary.

- The exhaustion of **Burnout** affects motivation and drive.
- The exhaustion of *Stress* affects physical energy.

- **Burnout** produces demoralization.
- *Stress* produces disintegration.

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

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

- **Burnout** produces a sense of helplessness and hopelessness.
- *Stress* produces a sense of urgency and hyperactivity.

- **Burnout** produces paranoia, depersonalization, and detachment.
- *Stress* produces panic, phobic, and anxiety-type disorders.

- **Burnout** may never kill you but your long life may not seem worth living.
- *Stress* may kill you prematurely, and you won't have enough time to finish what you started.¹⁷²

As already stated, stress, burnout, and depression are commonly linked and sometimes confused with one another.

Another significant factor is depression, which is so widespread in society today that it is often called the “common cold” of mental illness.¹⁷³ Estimates are that it disrupts

¹⁷² Hart, “Depressed.”

the lives of thirty to forty million Americans.¹⁷⁴ Dr. William C. Shiel, Jr. first compared depression's prevalence among the sick with the commonality of a cold. Steven Paul, chief of clinical neuroscience at the National Institute of Mental Health, explained that "[d]epression is like a fever. It's a nonspecific response to an internal or external insult. Like fever, it has a number of origins and treatments."¹⁷⁵ This "fever" (depression), responding to an insult, commonly infects and plagues the clergy family and is more rampant within ministry than one might realize. The adage "starve a cold, feed a fever" might be a good prescription for healing, but people are often confused about the correct remedial plan. Which one is helpful for the suffering pastoral family?

"Starve a cold, feed a fever" apparently has nothing to do with nourishment; it refers to temperatures. The one suffering with a cold should remove himself or herself from the obvious causes of the cold and stay warm while healing. To "feed a fever" suggests the same thing as to "starve a cold." The goal is to get warmer so as to sweat and then break the fever. Prescribing this as a remedy to the "fever" of depression in the infected pastoral family is nearly impossible. To do so would mean the healing process is dependent on removing themselves from the "causes" of the fever, which is almost impossible, as the culprits causing unhealthy challenges lie within the very environment of the pastorate.

¹⁷³ Neil T. Anderson, *Christ Centered Therapy: The Practical Integration of Theology and Psychology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan 2000), 275.

¹⁷⁴ *Newsweek* (May 4, 1987), 48-57.

¹⁷⁵ Nancy Chapman, "Depression: The Common Cold of Mental Illness," www.hooah4health.com/mind/suicideprev/depressionCold.htm (accessed Feb 10, 2012).

“According to the National Institute of Mental Health, more than 19 million people in America will suffer from depression in any given year.”¹⁷⁶ Depression carries with it a variety of symptoms and is not something one just snaps out of. There are also a number of forms of depression affecting the body and the soul:

In the 1950s and '60s, depression was divided into two types, endogenous and neurotic. Endogenous means that the depression comes from within the body, perhaps of genetic origin, or comes out of nowhere. Neurotic or reactive depression has a clear environmental precipitating factor, such as the death of a spouse, or other significant loss, such as the loss of a job. In the 1970s and '80s, the focus of attention shifted from the cause of depression to its effects on the afflicted people. That is to say, whatever the cause in a particular case, what are the symptoms and impaired functions that experts can agree make up a depressive disorder?¹⁷⁷

Neil Anderson, author and president of Freedom in Christ Ministries, explains: “Depression is both an agony of the body and of the soul.”¹⁷⁸ Pastors are not exempt from this feeling of despair. “According to 2002 statistics from the U.S. Bureau of Labor and Statistics, 70 percent of pastors reported that they constantly fought depression.”¹⁷⁹ The causes of depression are numerous, and Christian counselors suggest that the Christian community has been fed a pack of lies about this matter, and that it is high time they arm themselves with the truth:

The Christian counselor’s task is made more difficult by a number of myths about depression that are widely accepted and sometimes preached. It is not true that depression always results from a sin or a lack of faith in God, that all depression is caused by self-pity, that it is wrong for a

¹⁷⁶ Brenda C. Coleman, “Doctors Prescribing More Antidepressant Medicines,” *Denver Post* (Feb 18, 1998), sect. A, 3.

¹⁷⁷ “Depression,” www.medicinenet.com (accessed Jul 10, 2011).

¹⁷⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁷⁹ Colleen Capes Jackson, “Local pastor an expert on ‘clergy killers’,” *COV News* (Apr 25, 2008), www.covnews.com/archives/2675/ (accessed Feb 1, 2012).

Christian to ever be depressed, that depressed feelings can be removed permanently by spiritual exercises, that happiness is a choice or that a depressed Christian is a “contradiction in terms.” Christians, like everyone else, get depressed, and the causes can be grouped into two major categories.¹⁸⁰

Author and clinical psychologist, Gary Collins urged his readers to educate themselves about the causes for depression along with the approaches to treating it.¹⁸¹ It is unfortunate that some pastors who may be experiencing what Hart calls “a simple (though quite painful) depression ... could be inappropriately seeing it as burnout.”¹⁸² If the pastor is diagnosed with depression, the remedy is different than that for burnout. With depression, “particularly of the endogenous [neurological] type, effective relief may be only weeks away through appropriate medication.”¹⁸³ Finding the cure for burnout, however, “may require much more complex and significant life changes. Burnout may require many months or even years of adjustment for effective recovery.”¹⁸⁴ Hart concluded:

A body system exhausted by overwork, pushed beyond reasonable endurance, and depleted of resources could become burned out. But burnout can also be reached by roads quite different from those of stress and depression.¹⁸⁵

¹⁸⁰ Collins, *Christian Counseling*, 106–11.

¹⁸¹ (1) Biological factors, (2) Learned helplessness (sense of being trapped and unable to remedy an intolerable situation), (3) Parental rejection, (4) Abuse, (5) Negative thinking, (6) Life stress, (7) Anger, (8) Guilt.

¹⁸² Hart, “Depressed.”

¹⁸³ *Ibid.*

¹⁸⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁸⁵ *Ibid.*

Stressors in Ministry Reported by Clergy Families

The *American Heritage Dictionary* defines a *stressor* as “an agent, condition, or other stimulus that causes stress to an organism.”¹⁸⁶ The stressors in ministry for the pastor and his family are endless, and the challenges people encounter as a result can be horrifying to say the least, if not life-threatening. In his book, *The Stress of Life*, Dr. Selye cautioned his readers regarding the implications of continual stress on the body:

Among all my autopsies (and I have performed well over a thousand), I have never seen a person who died of old age. In fact, I do not think anyone has died of old age yet. To permit this would be the ideal accomplishment of medical research ... To die of old age would mean that all the organs of the body had worn out proportionately, merely by having been used too long. This is never the case. We invariably die because one vital part has worn out too early in proportion to the rest of the body. The lesson seems to be that, as far as man can regulate his life by voluntary actions, he should seek to equalize stress throughout his being! The human body—like the tires on a car, or the rug on a floor—wears longest when it wears evenly.¹⁸⁷

In 2005, Volume 53/6 of *Pastoral Psychology* presented findings from five studies, conducted over a period of years, in which researchers evaluated coping mechanisms among clergy and clergy spouses when encountering ministry stress.¹⁸⁸ The stressors that pastors and their spouses acknowledged were intriguing, but not surprising. Findings obtained from the male clergy taking part in the study detailed a variety of stressors:

Stressors facing clergy include role conflicts, proliferation of activities, discrepancy between amount of time in administrative duties versus pastoral duties, spiritual dryness, perfectionism, no time for study or to be alone, failure of dreams, unwelcome surprise, frustration, feelings of

¹⁸⁶ “Stress,” *American Heritage Dictionary*, www.answers.com/topic/stressor#ixzz1mJMB5OfZ (accessed Mar 1, 2012).

¹⁸⁷ Hans Selye, *The Stress of Life* (McGraw-Hill, 1984), 431.

¹⁸⁸ Various “coping mechanisms” will be introduced in chapter 6, below.

inadequacy, fear of failure, loneliness/isolation, and unrealistic expectations of oneself, the senior pastor, one's congregation, and of one's denomination.¹⁸⁹

The clergy wives admitted to various other stressors, different from those affecting their husbands. Many of these women are fraught with substantial concerns unique to the natural innate tendencies of the female nesting syndrome. These pastors' wives and mothers often struggled to maintain any sense of normalcy in regard to their family and personal life and acknowledged they were sometimes at their wits' end:

Stressors reported by wives of male clergy include lack of defined boundaries between family and work, a "fishbowl" existence, inadequate finances, pressure/expectations from congregation and community to fulfill idealized roles, loss of personal identity, loss of control over personal living environment, adjustment to frequent moves, anger, perception of being second class, lack of tangible results of work, loneliness, lack of social support, work related time demands, unwelcome surprises, routine absence of spouse/father, lack of parallel growth, lack of spiritual care, and psychological disturbances.¹⁹⁰

At first reading, the numerous stressors appear insurmountable and, admittedly, the healthiest family might be in danger of caving in when loaded down with such incessant stressors. However, it is interesting that the studies revealed that many of the pastoral families surveyed were amazingly successful at managing the stress, for

¹⁸⁹ Richard Blackmon, *The Hazards of Ministry* (Ph. D. dissertation, Fuller Theological Seminary. Pasadena, CA: 1984); C. Ellison and W. Mattila, "The needs of evangelical Christian leaders in the United States" *Journal of Psychology and Theology* 11 (1983), 28-35; Evers and Tomic, "Burnout among Dutch Reformed Pastors;" J. Gleason, "Perception of stress among clergy and their spouses," *The Journal of Pastoral Care* 31 (1977), 248-251; T. Hall, "The personal functioning of pastors; A review of empirical research with implications for pastors," *Journal of Psychology and Theology* 25 (1997), 240-253; M. Morris and P. Blanton, "The influence of work-related stressors on clergy husbands and their wives," *Family Relations* 43 (1994), 189-195; D. Ostrander, C. Henry, and D. Fournier, "Stress, family resources, coping, and adaption in minister's families," *Journal of Psychology and Christianity* 13 (1994), 50-67.

¹⁹⁰ D. Baker, "Peer support: An intervention program for ministers' wives," *Journal of Pastoral Care* 43 (1989), 16-24; D. Baker and J. Scott, "Predictors of well-being among pastor's wives: A comparison with non-clergy wives" *Journal of Pastoral Care* (1992).; W. Douglas, "Minister's wives: A tentative typology," *Pastoral Psychology* 12 (1961), 11-16; Gleason, "Perception of stress", 248-251; P. Valeriano, "A survey of minister's wives," *Leadership* 2 (1981), 64-77.

“[h]ealthy adjustment is not so much the absence of stress—which is, of course, impossible—as the learning and utilization of effective coping resources and skills.”¹⁹¹ Still, other surveys revealed that pastoral “fall-out” remains significant due to certain stressors, and pastors expressed common conclusions as to why that is true. These findings were telling, and it is important to briefly investigate some of the more common stressors as well as to add some which may appear shockingly uncommon and yet are just as burdensome. In developing a more comprehensive awareness, and in order to more fully understand the complexity of what the clergy family confront, varied stressors will be reviewed, although not in any particular order of importance, occurrence, or commonality among clergy.

Conflict

Surveys indicated that conflict was universally experienced by congregations within all denominations. As the shepherd in charge of leading the sheep, the pastor is inevitably involved in some way, and his ability to bring a sense of calm and reason to the conflict will determine how much, if any, negative impact this will have on the church.

Findings indicated that persistent conflict with congregants is the number one reason why clergy decide to un-saddle their horse, hang up their stirrups, and bid the ministry “good riddance”:

- More than 19,000 congregations experience major conflict every year.

¹⁹¹ D. Ostrander, C. Henry, and D. Fournier. “Stress, family resources, coping, and adaption in minister’s families,” *Journal of Psychology and Christianity* 13 (1994), 50-67.

- Twenty-five percent of the churches in one survey reported conflict in the previous five years that was serious enough to have a lasting impact on congregational life.
- Only two percent of church conflicts involve doctrinal issues.
- Ninety-eight percent of church conflict involves interpersonal issues. Control issues ranked as the most common cause of conflict (85 percent).
- About 40 percent of church members who leave their churches do so because of conflict.
- Very small numbers (16 percent) of churches report positive outcomes from conflict.¹⁹²

Pastors surveyed in 2004 by *Christianity Today* were asked to pinpoint the sources of conflict they had experienced in their pastorates. Control issues topped the list at 85 percent: vision or direction—64 percent: leadership changes—43 percent: the pastor’s style—39 percent: financial—33 percent: theological or doctrinal—23 percent: cultural or social differences—22 percent: and “other” came in last at 16 percent.¹⁹³

Antagonists

Antagonists in the church may include a group of people who basically have it in for their pastor. G. Lloyd Rediger, an ordained minister, called these culprits “Clergy Killers.” He argued that they utilize tactics similar to schoolyard bullies who intentionally intimidate their peers. In a more extensive description, Rediger’s website explains that a “Clergy Killer [is] a person in a congregation or church hierarchy who emotionally abuses (persistent bullying) a pastor often resulting in the pastor’s

(1) being forced out of the church,

(2) leaving the ministry,

¹⁹² David & Diane Noble, *Winning The Real Battle At Church* (BHC Publishing, 2009), 171.

¹⁹³ Erin Reed, “Leadership Surveys Church Conflict,” *Leadership Journal* (Fall 2004), www.christianitytoday.com/le/2004/fall/6.25.html (accessed Mar 10, 2012).

- (3) suffering severe emotional distress and, in some instances,
 (4) committing suicide.¹⁹⁴

Rediger is viewed by many as an authority on the rising phenomenon of pastors being bullied. He lectures and leads workshops, and his passion in helping clergy spiritually, mentally, and physically in these horrific situations resulted in a groundbreaking work entitled *Clergy Killers and The Toxic Congregation*, in whose pages Rediger shows himself to be

... a strong advocate and defender of those he perceives to be unfairly and inappropriately challenged by people so out of control they become vindictive and unwilling to negotiate disagreements and problems.¹⁹⁵

From every indication, antagonists are not going anywhere, and they continue to settle in at churches and then quickly leap into attack. They have been around, taunting clergy, for a very long time, and it is nearly impossible for the pastor to carry out the mission of the church while antagonists lurk around every corner.

Lack of adequate training in pastoral care

The pastorate is a unique calling in that parishioners often expect their pastor to have all the answers to their questions and concerns. Some clergy admit to being inadequately trained when it comes to counseling their congregants, but also confess they are to blame for not taking part in additional pastoral care training during their seminary period. A 1992 study by the Alban Institute revealed that “[t]here are few professions where there is

¹⁹⁴ www.clergykiller.org

¹⁹⁵ G. Lloyd Rediger, *Clergy Killers: Guidance for Pastors and Congregations under Attack* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1997), 49.

such an instant jump from student to head of the institution as when a seminarian moves straight into his or her own parish.”¹⁹⁶

Having to perform

Pastor Rick Warren of Saddleback Community Church in Lake Forest, California, is also founder of Pastors.com, a place for leaders within the Christian community to connect with one another. The avowed mission of Pastors.com is stated this way:

Our passion is *healthy pastors leading healthy churches*, so we’ve put together a flowing stream of content to nourish and enrich the lives and leadership of Pastors everywhere as well as a dynamic community where church leaders can draw encouragement and wisdom from one another.¹⁹⁷

Pastor Warren has been encouraged by many mentors during his years in ministry, but one in particular was John Bisagno, pastor emeritus of the 25,000-member Houston (Texas) First Baptist Church. At 17, Warren first picked up Bisagno’s classic work, *How to Build an Evangelistic Church*. The impact of reading his book was undeniable. Warren affectionately referred to Bisagno as his “long-distance mentor.”¹⁹⁸ So impressed was Warren with Bisagno’s influence on young pastors that he agreed to write the foreword to Bisagno’s new book, *Pastor’s Handbook*. In it, Warren stated, “My prayer is that an entire new generation of pastors and church planters will use this book to develop the necessary perspective, convictions, character, and skills needed for ministry in the 21st century from this giant of the 20th century.”¹⁹⁹ Bisagno has penned a brilliant work that

¹⁹⁶ Gilbert, B. G. *Who Ministers to Ministers? A Study of Support Systems for Clergy and Spouses* (New York: Alban Institute, 1992).

¹⁹⁷ www.pastors.com

¹⁹⁸ John Bisagno, *Pastor’s Handbook* (Nashville, B&H Publishing Group, 2011), ix.

¹⁹⁹ *Ibid.*

Warren says “represents a virtual seminary education in a single volume.”²⁰⁰ Bisagno offered insights into every aspect of the pastorate, including “preaching, leading, evangelism, discipleship, planting churches, transitioning churches, raising money, doing world missions, resolving conflict, motivating members and loving everyone.”²⁰¹ One of the first elements Bisagno focused on was “the pastor as God’s man.” In this section, he offered a crucial insight for maintaining the health of the pastor and his family. He advised the pastor to take care of his own family in regard to the stressor of performance.

Perhaps no other factor has the negative influence on a pastor’s family as does the feeling of “having to perform.” The daily pressure of life in the spotlight brings added stress to family life in addition to those already existing in the culture. Dear Pastor, be exceedingly clear with your family and your congregation that neither your spouse nor your children must ever feel any pressure to do or to be anything for any other reason than their love for the Lord Jesus.²⁰²

Intrusion

Living in the environment of a pastor’s home can bring incredible rewards to all parties involved. The Pastor’s children are unique in that they are able to have access to their “pastor” parent(s) and can view the pastorate from a distinct perspective. Other parents are not as easily accessible at times. These children understand with more clarity what their parent does, in contrast to children whose parents leave every morning and “go to work” or work in an office. Nevertheless, as awesome as it may be to have their pastor “father and mother” around and at their beck-and-call, they eventually realize that the recipients of dad or mom’s undivided attention is often the parishioner instead of them. The children often feel a sense of intrusion from parishioners. Their natural reaction is to

²⁰⁰ Ibid.

²⁰¹ Ibid.

²⁰² Ibid., 61.

begin building walls of defense, which eventually lead to attitudes that reflect their pain and their anger.

When children are too young to understand all the dynamics associated with the hectic life of the pastorate, it is easy to forgive any disappointment and quickly move on. However, when the children mature in age, the feelings of frustration and displeasure more readily manifest themselves and are difficult for even the most spiritually mature to conceal. Findings reveal that pastor's kids experience intrusion when the pastor breaks promises of clearly defined boundaries, and they are not the only ones inclined to experience this intrusion. Their pastor parents do so as well.

Pedestals

Research confirms that it is rather common for parishioners to put their pastor on a pedestal. Their intention in so doing is generally well-meaning as typically they hold their pastor in high esteem. It is biblical to respect the pastor, as Scripture attests:

Obey your leaders and submit to them, for they are keeping watch over your souls, as those who will have to give an account. Let them do this with joy and not with groaning, for that would be of no advantage to you (Heb 13:17, ESV).

We ask you, brothers, to respect those who labor among you and are over you in the Lord and admonish you, and to esteem them very highly in love because of their work. Be at peace among yourselves (1 Thess 5:12-13, ESV).

Let the elders who rule well be considered worthy of double honor, especially those who labor in preaching and teaching (1 Tim 5:17, ESV).

However, a pedestal for one's pastor can also create an unhealthy view of the pastor, suggesting he is above humans and has achieved a state of perfection. Pastors, like parishioners, are not perfect—just pardoned. And yet people enter churches every week evading the reality that their pastor is unquestionably flawed even though he is striving to be faithful to his God, his calling, his family, and the church.

“To many church members, the pastor does not have the luxury of being a mere mortal. He should be in [such] control of his life at all times that a spiritual disaster would not even be a possibility for him.”²⁰³

The pastor's mandate, according to Scripture, is to be blameless, and that, in and of itself, is a huge undertaking without people adding the extra pressure of the pedestal syndrome:

Sometimes we expect far too much of the people around us, and because no one can ever live up to those expectations, we are almost always disappointed. But wouldn't it be better if we just let go, and let people be who they are? Then we'd be able to see them as they are – with all their beauty and goodness in which we take joy, and with all their faults, which we can also see in ourselves. When we have put someone up on a pedestal, sculpturing them to fit our needs and desires by smoothing out the rough edges and creating new curves here and there, we cannot see the real person underneath our work. All we see is the illusion we have created. That is denying the person's real identity and is disrespectful. It's much better for our friends and for ourselves if we drop our expectations and illusions, and accept them all just the way they are.²⁰⁴

The pedestal syndrome or, as some call it, the “walking-on-water” syndrome is an impossible platform to live up to by any human standards. To speak of a “perfect pastor” is oxymoronic—the pastor is never perfect and, therefore, should never be viewed in that light.

²⁰³ S. Bailey, *Saving Your Pastor from Spiritual Burnout* (Life Worth Living Ministries and Christian Services Publishing, 1994), 25.

²⁰⁴ A meditation from the recovery book by Emotions Anonymous, *Today* (Hazelden Publishing, 1989). Cited in Mark Brouwer, “The Danger of Pedestals,” www.covenanteyes.com/pastorhelp/chapter-3-the-danger-of-pedestals/ (accessed Mar 7, 2012).

The dictionary defines the walking-on-water syndrome as “impossible for an unaided person, it is used as an example of an impossible task or, if apparently achieved, a miracle or an illusion.”²⁰⁵ Law professor F. LaGard Smith summarized the “walking-on-water” syndrome in a very deliberate way as it relates to Christian leaders:

Why do spiritual leaders crack before we know what is happening? Because, like us, they are only human, and because sometimes both we and they forget that fact. Isn't it odd that the conscientious spiritual leader goes around feeling like a hypocrite when he ministers to others knowing that he himself is not perfect, while spiritual leaders who never think about it that way are the real hypocrites? Even if we think of the preacher as one of the most righteous men we have ever known, in the back of our minds we are never fooled. We know that, regardless of whatever sterling character he may have, ultimately he cannot help but say to us: “Do as I say, not as I do.” Only Jesus Christ could have said, “Do as I say, and as I do.”²⁰⁶

Suing Pastors

As difficult as it might be to comprehend this scenario, the stressor of pastors being sued, while not among the most common pressures experienced by pastors, is not uncommon. In the August, 1993 issue of the *Clergy Journal*, Rediger referred to the increasing phenomenon of “... parishioners who target their pastors for destruction.” Rediger then introduced his reader to another form of this “personalized abuse.” He suggested it was the ultimate terror for a pastor.

It is the “scandalizing lawsuits ... brought against clergy, charging a variety of ... misconduct ... be[ing] hauled into court and accused of a felony. Whether guilty or innocent, this threat is so traumatizing that clergy can become depressed or angry just reading about such litigation against other clergy.”²⁰⁷

²⁰⁵ www.macmillandictionary.com/dictionary/british/walk (accessed Nov 18, 2011).

²⁰⁶ F. LaGard Smith, *Fallen Shepherds, Scattered Sheep* (Eugene: Harvest House Publishers, 1988), 152.

²⁰⁷ G. Lloyd Rediger, “The Abuse of Clergy – Metaphor or Scandal,” 1994, jmm.aaa.net.au/articles/8593.htm (accessed Feb 1, 2010).

Concluding Thoughts

The contemporary clergy landscape reveals the extensive carnage of clergy loss due to enormous ministry pressure and burdens. The pastoral fallout in pulpits globally is epidemic, and data suggest it continues to rise. The stakes are incredibly high for clergy serving in the pastorate today. The stressors are monumental and seem to be ever-increasing. As genuinely sincere as he may be in attempting to please God, his family, and his parishioners, the pastor runs the risk of losing it all if he does not keep his priorities straight and maintain a balanced life. The effect from the data analyzed is telling—clergy “quitting” is a contagion crossing denominational lines. Decades of research indicate that we are not much further along in rectifying this tremendous problem than we were, as pastors continue surrendering their pulpits due to overwhelming stress as well as to health and moral issues. Recognition should be given to the organizations mentioned above, which are designating millions of dollars to restoring and advancing clergy health. One finding in particular riveted me: the revelation that Catholic priests fare far better than do Protestant pastors in regards to overall health and stress. Their commitment to mandated clergy sabbaticals is surely an indicator that the Roman Catholic Church is on the right track in relation to clergy maintaining a balanced lifestyle.
