

## CONCLUSION

A plethora of works has been published over the past four decades, contributing in invaluable ways to previous research in the area of pastoral well being. Works written by pastors and psychologists/psychiatrists also offered substantive research from which to draw with respect to considering challenges that pastoral families encounter as a result of overwhelming ministry stressors and in relation to integrating the development of a strategic health regimen. Currently, there is a surplus of research and resources about and for the pastor. Conversely, what is conspicuous by its absence from these incredibly helpful works is the consideration or comprehensive research directed toward the challenges and health of other members of the pastor's family, i.e. spouse and children.

In my thesis, I have analyzed the most identifiable ministry stressors relating to the pastorate as well as the four predominant challenges pastoral families encounter: physical, emotional, relational, and spiritual. I have observed the emergence of what I refer to as the trickle-down effect of overwhelming ministry stress on the minister's family. Through both research and qualitative case studies, my research concern, therefore, not only enlarges on this debilitating and sometimes dangerous vocation, but also sheds light on the magnitude of the problem and leads to the natural development of a strategic health plan for the pastor that, if implemented, will no doubt result in an encouraging exponential positive effect on his/her, marriage, family and the universal church.

So, why is this thesis important and needed? Jesus addressed these same issues. Jesus said to his disciples, “All of you will be made to stumble because of Me this night, for it is written: ‘I will strike the Shepherd, and the sheep will be scattered.’” The quotation is from the book of the prophet Zechariah (13:7). The language in this passage is reminiscent of the warning language about the siege of Jerusalem (and the destruction of the temple) and the times of the end of the age. Today’s spiritual shepherds are assaulted with various temptations, trials, and tribulations, and some are being taken out, to Satan’s great glee.

My thesis contends that the carnage of clergy loss is increasing, and that the collateral damage now reaches far beyond the pastor. The impact is being felt by the pastor’s family as well as by the greater (universal) church. My hope has been to elucidate the undeniable problem in today’s pulpits. Our pastors are unhealthy and they, along with their families, are suffering from arduous ministry demands creating almost unavoidable health challenges.

The work of continuing current and updated research as well as confronting this problem is indeed an ongoing task, and my thesis seeks to educate not only the clergy community, but also all those affected by their very crucial calling.

It is my fervent hope and prayer that in this work I have made an original contribution to this field and that it might produce much fruit in the form of healthier pastors and healthier pastors’ families.

First, I hope that my research levels the playing field for clergy in arguing that all pastors have a fighting chance when confronting conflict and crisis in ministry, a chance

glimpsed through my focus on and with the inclusion of several key biblical precedents of God's leaders who confronted stressful situations. When confronting the reality of daily stressors, struggles and challenges in ministry life, it is not uncommon for the pastor to feel alone in the fight and abandoned by God, as though he or she were the exception to the rule of God's impartiality. Admittedly, our ministry does not take on depth, meaning, or sincere compassion until we suffer. In that I concur with Kenneth Boa in his assertion: "In the University of Life, stress and affliction are not elective courses; they're a required part of the curriculum."<sup>403</sup> It's been said that "experience is a cruel teacher; first the exam then the lesson."<sup>404</sup> I hope that my own endurance of years of unique ministerial stressors, crisis, and challenges will offer significant tutoring, guidance, and wisdom for up-and-coming ministry leaders.

Second, I hope that my thesis has filled a significant gap in scholarship. Specifically, after analyzing data, I have tried to shed light on the omission of critical research in regard to the exponential impact that ministry stressors have on the pastor's family members. In examining the current works, essential contributions to this very issue are considerably lacking.

Third, chapter 3 of my thesis has introduced untapped research in regard to a disorder gaining prominence within the lives of pastoral families who are suffering from traumatic experiences in ministry: i.e., Post Traumatic Stress Syndrome (PTSD). In regard to PTSD being a disorder afflicting clergy, this may be new information or even ignored data to some in scholarship and ministry; however, Thomas Fischer sheds light

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<sup>403</sup> [http://www.kenboa.org/text\\_resources/free\\_articles/5390](http://www.kenboa.org/text_resources/free_articles/5390). Accessed Mar 15, 2012.

<sup>404</sup> <http://www.catholicnews.com/data/movies/12mv006.htm>. Accessed Mar 15, 2012.

on this disorder within the pastoral experience. He contends that “[n]ot all wounds are visible ... and for the pastoral family many are emotional and spiritual wounds which many times outlast the physical pain.”<sup>405</sup> Fischer continues: “Pastors, no less than others, experience the pain of living in a broken, conflicted, and sinful world. The experience of this pain can affect pastors in remarkably dramatic ways.”<sup>406</sup>

Fourth, through qualitative case studies I have considered the overall results in the responses of my subjects and, with great delight, report that for each of them regardless how arduous the ministry is at times, the Pastors, Pastors’ Wives, and Pastors’ Kids stood by their callings, would do it all over again if offered the chance, and thankfully still maintain close-knit family ties with one another and are not holding God hostage as a result of these challenges. The case studies provided anticipated as well as surprising findings. The information gained in the interview process also validated most of the research cited in this study.

Fifth, my thesis not only singles out the major ministry stressors contributing to the four predominant health challenges the pastoral family faces, it also integrates the development of a strategic overall health plan for the pastor. I would like to point out that I believe that this section of my thesis is significant, in fact, indispensable. In speaking from 34 years in full time-ministry as both an evangelist and pastor, I can certainly identify with the hurt and heartache associated with serving in this particular calling. Therefore, I would gain considerably by hearkening to my own strategy for long-term health as outlined in chapter 5.

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<sup>405</sup> [http://ministryhealth.net/mh\\_articles/328\\_ptsd\\_pastoral\\_experience.html](http://ministryhealth.net/mh_articles/328_ptsd_pastoral_experience.html). Accessed Mar 15, 2012.

<sup>406</sup> [http://ministryhealth.net/mh\\_articles/328\\_ptsd\\_pastoral\\_experience.html](http://ministryhealth.net/mh_articles/328_ptsd_pastoral_experience.html). Accessed Mar 15, 2012.

As a minister, I have endured a barrage of challenges over especially the past five years. Experientially, I recognize the value in confronting this problem head on. Clergy carnage continues to soar. Richard Krejcir's recent findings that "doctors, lawyers, and clergy have the most problems with drug abuse, alcoholism, and suicide"<sup>407</sup> are revealing and proves how essential this work is.

Finally, I have achieved my twofold thesis goal. My research question, which examines the challenges pastors and their families' encounter emerging from periods of overwhelming ministry stress, has produced substantive information that integrates a health plan for the pastor so that he may not only survive, but also thrive in ministry.

I have investigated older and new information in an effort to confirm the enormity and seriousness of the problem while also looking out for new areas of concern that will allow for the advancement of knowledge and make a considerable contribution in this field.

Admittedly, this is depressing stuff. Often, pastors and their families are islands unto themselves, and they resort to suffering in isolation because the stakes are too high in revealing the truth about how desperate and discouraging things are. Dr. Neil Doggie's assessment of an ethics conference on health care he recently attended is revealing. When considering the recurring as well as the underlying themes of suffering, pain, hopelessness, frustration, and despair, Soggie was struck by what he interpreted as "the deep 'unfixableness' of humanity."<sup>408</sup> Dr. Soggie clearly points out that "although the conversation at this particular conference did not touch on the 'spiritual,' the spiritual was

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<sup>407</sup> [http://www.intothyword.org/articles\\_view.asp?articleid=36562&columnid=](http://www.intothyword.org/articles_view.asp?articleid=36562&columnid=). Accessed Mar 15, 2012.

<sup>408</sup> <http://www.chac.ca/alliance/review/docs/suffering.pdf>. Accessed Mar 15, 2012.

in fact the topic that begged to be discussed.”<sup>409</sup> The pastor and spirituality are not oxymoronic. They belong together. Ongoing research and helpful resources must continue to be developed. May it never be concluded of the clergy community that we are simply “unfixable.”

This thesis began by stating a disturbing issue in contemporary culture. There is a problem in our pulpits, as pastors, due to overwhelming ministry stressors and health challenges, are abandoning them. The research analyzed the magnitude of this problem and its trickle-down effect on every member of the pastoral family as well as the universal church. Surprisingly, certain data reveals that regardless of the adverse aspects of ministry, most pastoral families maintain a strong love for and commitment to God, their family, and the church. Nevertheless, the stressors continue to mount and the challenge to maintain a healthy lifestyle is difficult for most.

The biblical leaders who persisted with audacious courage through tremendous trials set the bar for the modern-day pastor and his family to continue persevering through triumph and tragedy. Most of these servants of God struggled through physical, emotional, relational, and spiritual challenges that frankly make those facing most pastors pale in comparison. And yet, according to Scripture, they are the pattern the pastor is to follow.

“The point of research is to discover truth. What is done with this truth can lead to health and growth. Many of us are praying that organized religion will pay attention to the emerging data about clergy needs.”<sup>410</sup> The truth is that we must hasten in sending out

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<sup>409</sup> Ibid.

<sup>410</sup> Rediger, “The State of the Clergy.”

the clarion call by providing education and resources to address and solve this problem. Recognition and appreciation is given to the organizations that are addressing the problem of clergy health. Thankfully, the truth about clergy needs and clergy health is no longer being ignored. Over the past 40 years, recognition of the desperate straits of the health of the pastor and his/her spouse has been growing, and the data is revealing. Perhaps sixteenth-century German Protestant Reformer Martin Luther had a divine vision when he gave ten qualifications for the preacher.

1. He should be able to preach plainly and in order.
2. He should have a good head.
3. He should have good power of speech.
4. He should have a good voice.
5. He should have good memory.
6. He should be sure of what he means to say.
7. He should be ready to stake body and life, goods and glory on its truth.
8. He should know when to stop.
9. He should study diligently.
10. He should allow himself to be vexed and criticized by everyone.<sup>411</sup>

Joan Borysenko suggests that “[e]very day brings a choice to practice stress or practice peace.”<sup>412</sup> Undoubtedly, peace is the desire of every pastor; however it is often difficult for pastors to enjoy moments of peace in an environment that lends itself to stress, heavy demands and perpetual crisis. The pastorate involves being in relationship or community with people. People have a propensity to need counsel and to be in crisis, and it is during those cataclysmic times that they need their pastor most. The pastor cannot just say, “I’m busy right now!”

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<sup>411</sup> [www.sermonindex.net/modules/articles/index.php?view=article&aid=15956](http://www.sermonindex.net/modules/articles/index.php?view=article&aid=15956)

<sup>412</sup> Joan Borysenko, *Inner Peace for Busy People* (ReadHowYouWant.com, 2009), xix.

David Fisher, author of *The 21<sup>st</sup> Century Pastor: A Vision Based on the Ministry of Paul*, reminded his readers that these dynamics in ministry are not a new issue for pastors:

For fifty years church leaders have spoken about a "crisis in the ministry" and "ferment in the ministry." Back in 1954, H. R. Niebuhr wrote about the church and ministry and called pastorate the "perplexed profession." Niebuhr correctly suggested that the crisis in ministry is primarily a crisis of identity. The communities in which we work no longer value our product or our role the way society once honored the church and its ministry. We are providing a service to a world that no longer wants it. Professional religious leaders are an anachronism in a secular culture. Even our congregations wonder about us. Contemporary Christians are affected by the secular nature of our world more than they may realize.<sup>413</sup>

Discouragement, disappointment, loneliness, rejection, and exhaustion are all familiar to any clergy person attempting to fulfill his call to ministry. Regardless of how correct Fisher may be in his assessment, and lest all clergy simply quit and abandon their callings, pastors must read Fisher's evaluation in view of what the apostle Paul affirmed to the Roman believers: "How beautiful are the feet of those who preach the gospel of peace, who bring glad tidings of good things!" (Rom 10:15, NKJV) Pastors follow a call of God in serving people, and Christ affirmed that those people would not always be on their best behavior nor appreciate the message or messenger. Although it is a gospel of peace, it is not always preached during peaceful times. Nonetheless, the rewards of pastoring and proclaiming the message of Christ are unequalled. The great "prince of preachers," Charles Spurgeon has penned a masterpiece for the minister in his reflection on a divine passage from the Proverbs. "He that watereth shall be watered also himself"

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<sup>413</sup> David Fisher, *The 21<sup>st</sup> Century Pastor: A Vision Based on the Ministry of Paul* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1996), 8.

(Prov 11:25). I shall lay my argument to rest with his inspiration and let it be a testimony to every pastor and his beloved family.

We are here taught the great lesson, that to get, we must give; that to accumulate, we must scatter; that to make ourselves happy, we must make others happy; and that in order to become spiritually vigorous, we must seek the spiritual good of others. In watering others, we are ourselves watered. How? Our efforts to be useful bring out our powers for usefulness. We have latent talents and dormant faculties, which are brought to light by exercise. Our strength for labour is hidden even from ourselves, until we venture forth to fight the Lord's battles, or to climb the mountains of difficulty. We do not know what tender sympathies we possess until we try to dry the widow's tears, and soothe the orphan's grief. We often find in attempting to teach others, that we gain instruction for ourselves. Oh, what gracious lessons some of us have learned at sick beds! We went to teach the Scriptures, we came away blushing that we knew so little of them. In our converse with poor saints, we are taught the way of God more perfectly for ourselves and get a deeper insight into divine truth. So that watering others makes us humble. We discover how much grace there is where we had not looked for it; and how much the poor saint may outstrip us in knowledge. Our own comfort is also increased by our working for others. We endeavour to cheer them, and the consolation gladdens our own heart. Like the two men in the snow; one chafed the other's limbs to keep him from dying, and in so doing kept his own blood in circulation, and saved his own life. The poor widow of Sarepta gave from her scanty store a supply for the prophet's wants, and from that day she never again knew what want was. Give then, and it shall be given unto you, good measure, pressed down, and running over.<sup>414</sup>

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<sup>414</sup> [www.biblegateway.com/devotionals/morning-and-evening/2011/08/21](http://www.biblegateway.com/devotionals/morning-and-evening/2011/08/21)