

## Summary of Clergy Health and Clergy Stress Research

### *Clergy Health*

- Difficult to maintain a consistent personal schedule, given that congregation members may have need for pastoral care at times that can't be planned.
- Attending to others can lead to not paying sufficient attention to oneself
  - Not attending to diet and exercise
  - Not paying attention to bodily pain/physical decline/emerging health issues
- Emotional health can parallel physical health and follow it downward for many of these same reasons, leading to a “perfect storm” (unexpectedly strong emotional reactions, physical and/or emotional crash, etc.)

### *Clergy Stress*

- **Vocation:** A clear sense of being called by God to this particular work (vocation) buffers against stress.
  - Losing a sense of vocation associated with accelerated deterioration/departure from ministry.
- **Role ambiguity/anomie:** Ambiguity or shifting, different, conflicting visions of
  - who the pastor is
  - what the pastor should be doing (or not doing)
  - what authority the pastor has (or doesn't have)
  - how the pastor will be evaluated (and what counts as “success”)

will systematically deplete the pastor, leading to higher rates of burnout, misconduct, and departure from ministry.

- Sometimes different understandings about what should be done and who should do it lead to laypeople stepping into perceived vacuums (open/empty areas) in church life, which can lead to conflict.
- **Interpretation and Coping:** Patterns of responding to people/situations (often learned from childhood and supported by the family system) are critically important in determining how one feels and processes stress and whether stress is perceived as overwhelming and unmanageable.
  - How to deal with fear
  - How to please people and maintain their good regard
  - How to placate people to defuse/avoid confrontations with aggressive/angry/critical people
  - How to pursue/find intimacy

- **Declining authority/respect/remuneration associated with clergy role**
  - Pastor's feeling about the value/importance of this work not shared by congregants
  - Diminished remuneration (relative to inflation/cost of living) and limited health benefits mean that clergy are
    - often not able to live the lifestyle that many congregation members live/assume
    - have rapidly rising healthcare debt that may become unmanageable
    - in conflict with their spouse over financial issues/lifestyle constraints imposed by ministry, decreasing global marriage satisfaction.
  
- Tendency to work in **isolation** (or engage in emotional isolation) and **draw** more of one's **identity from workplace** role/performance/feedback
  - **Tendency to take greater control** over execution of workplace tasks, even when it excludes other people from involvement or creates conflict with fellow staff members
  - Greater need for control often leads to **living increasingly from event to event**, with a marked crash/depletion following the completion of each event; forward planning and systematic/strategic planning are significantly decreased and increasingly seem too difficult.