4-1-2012

Bearing One Another’s Burdens: Enlisting the Congregation in Clergy Care at Second Presbyterian Church

Jeffrey W. Gibelius

Follow this and additional works at: https://digitalcommons.fuller.edu/dmin

Part of the Missions and World Christianity Commons

Recommended Citation
Gibelius, Jeffrey W., "Bearing One Another's Burdens: Enlisting the Congregation in Clergy Care at Second Presbyterian Church" (2012). Doctor of Ministry Projects. 79.
https://digitalcommons.fuller.edu/dmin/79

This Project is brought to you for free and open access by the School of Theology at Digital Commons @ Fuller. It has been accepted for inclusion in Doctor of Ministry Projects by an authorized administrator of Digital Commons @ Fuller. For more information, please contact archives@fuller.edu.
Please **HONOR** the copyright of these documents by not retransmitting or making any additional copies in any form (Except for private personal use).

We appreciate your respectful cooperation.

Theological Research Exchange Network (TREN)
P.O. Box 30183
Portland, Oregon 97294
USA
Website: [www.tren.com](http://www.tren.com)
E-mail: [rwjones@tren.com](mailto:rwjones@tren.com)
Phone# 1-800-334-8736
Ministry Focus Paper Approval Sheet

This ministry focus paper entitled

BEARING ONE ANOTHER’S BURDENS: ENLISTING THE CONGREGATION IN CLERGY CARE AT SECOND PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

Written by

JEFFREY W. GIBELIUS

and submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Ministry

has been accepted by the Faculty of Fuller Theological Seminary upon the recommendation of the undersigned readers:

Date Received: April 30, 2012
BEARING ONE ANOTHER’S BURDENS: ENLISTING THE CONGREGATION IN CLERGY CARE AT SECOND PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

A MINISTRY FOCUS PAPER
SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY OF THE SCHOOL OF THEOLOGY
FULLER THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY

IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT
OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE
DOCTOR OF MINISTRY

BY

JEFFREY W. GIBELIUS
APRIL 2012
This paper seeks to promote the possibility of a long-term senior pastorate at Second Presbyterian Church by introducing a model of clergy care that is biblical, Reformed, and goes beyond clergy self-care to enlist the congregation as a partner in caring for the pastor. Second Church is a thriving congregation of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) in Carlisle, Pennsylvania. It has enjoyed several pastorates of twenty years or more and wants that pattern to continue. Abbreviated pastorates harm congregations and pastors. Long-term pastorates are more likely to result when pastors are physically, emotionally, and spiritually healthy. Traditional methods of clergy care, however—especially clergy self-care—have not been effective at maintaining clergy health.

Part One of this paper will describe relevant demographic features of Central Pennsylvania in general and Second Church in particular. Second Church’s informal theologies also will be reviewed along with the history of pastor/parish relationships at Second Church. This will be done in order to present a full picture of the ministry context.

Part Two presents theological and other resources often cited in addressing the relationship between pastor and congregation. The ecclesiologies of Calvin’s Institutes and the Book of Order will be examined along with examples of the pastor-parish relationship in the Bible. Insights gleaned from family systems theory also will be considered.

Based on these theological and psychological insights, Part Three will present a vivid description of what a healthy relationship between pastor and congregation can look like and how such a vision might be achieved. Implementation of this vision includes strategies of sharing, equipping, and covenanting that enlist the congregants in caring for their pastor. Specific methods for employing these strategies at Second Church—and evaluating outcomes—will be suggested, along with a timeline for introducing the initiative.
To parish pastors everywhere and to the congregations they serve
May your burden be lifted and your hands strengthened for serving God together
I would like to thank my parents, Nancy and Werner Gibelius, for encouraging me to follow my call and supporting my decision to enter parish ministry. I also want to acknowledge the role that the Rev. Dr. Charles D. Lindholm, Rev. Dr. Coleman B. Brown, and Robert E. Van Vranken, Esq., played in my development as a person and as a pastor. I am especially grateful to the congregations that I have served—Community Presbyterian Church in Deer Park, New York; Westhampton Presbyterian Church in Westhampton Beach, New York; The First Presbyterian Church at Caldwell in Caldwell, New Jersey; The Presbyterian Church at Pluckemin, in Pluckemin, New Jersey; and Second Presbyterian Church in Carlisle, Pennsylvania—for bearing the burden of ministry with me as well as sharing the joys.

I am thankful for my wife, Kari Gibelius, who has patiently encouraged me through the seven years since this project began to take shape. Our three wonderful children—Andrew, Aaron, and Alexandria—also have contributed immensely to my ministry and to this project, each in their own way through their sacrificial love and especially during times when I was in residence studying in California or unavailable to them while writing at my computer. I could not have completed this work without my family’s tireless support. Finally, I want to thank Dr. Archibald Hart, my project advisor, for his passionate dedication to clergy health and to congregational well-being, and Lisa Marie Sandoval, my project editor, for her rigorous commitment to academic discipline.
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS ........................................ iv

INTRODUCTION ........................................... 1

PART ONE: CONTEXT ........................................

Chapter 1. THE SCOPE OF THE CLERGY HEALTH CHALLENGE 10

Chapter 2. SECOND PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH AS A CARING “SECOND FAMILY” 33

PART TWO: THEOLOGICAL FOUNDATIONS ...................

Chapter 3. NATURE AND PURPOSE OF THE PASTOR-PARISH RELATIONSHIP STEMMING FROM THE REFORMED PERSPECTIVE 57

Chapter 4. A BIBLICAL FRAMEWORK FOR CONGREGATIONAL INVOLVEMENT IN CLERGY CARE 95

Chapter 5. IMPLICATIONS OF FAMILY SYSTEMS THEORY FOR CLERGY CARE 119

PART THREE: THE CLERGY CARE INITIATIVE ............

Chapter 6. VISION, GOALS, AND STRATEGIES OF THE CLERGY CARE INITIATIVE 143

Chapter 7. THE CLERGY CARE INITIATIVE: IMPLEMENTATION AND ASSESSMENT 158

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION ............................ 176

APPENDICES ........................................... 182

BIBLIOGRAPHY .......................................... 187
INTRODUCTION

The associate pastor chose all three members of her sabbatical planning and support team because she saw they had a special sensitivity to the physical, emotional, and spiritual needs of clergy. This team included a wife of a retired pastor, a recent seminary graduate, and a former school superintendent. These lay people were charged with working with the pastor to ensure that her upcoming sabbatical was as restful, nurturing, and renewing as possible. They had met as a team once already and had spoken at length about the need for pastors to take uninterrupted time away from the demanding routine of meetings, appointments, and deadlines so that they might be renewed and revitalized for ministry. So it was surprising when the lay members of the sabbatical planning and support team scheduled a meeting which required the pastor’s presence during her upcoming vacation, a time when she had planned to be away with her family. The pastor then volunteered to interrupt her vacation to come back to the church to attend the meeting. Before her vacation was completely sabotaged, the team declined her offer and rescheduled it to be at a more convenient time for everyone. Unfortunately, many stories of clergy and congregation do not end as happily, and the result is that pastors and the congregations they serve suffer as clergy health and energy declines.

Clergy health and wellness is a more complex issue than it may seem at first. Clergy and congregation are so interconnected—and, in some ways, interdependent—that pastor and parishioner must work together if pastoral fitness and enthusiasm are to be maintained over years of ministry. Parishioners and pastors both need to understand the
benefits of sharing the responsibility for clergy care, recognize opportunities for such care, and covenant to be partners in this faithful and biblical endeavor.

This single incident of lay people and pastor cooperating in the near sabotage of a much needed vacation illustrates some of the challenges that clergy face when it comes to maintaining their personal well-being. When such incidents occur routinely on multiple occasions over the course of years in ministry, it is no wonder that Presbyterian clergy leave the ministry at a rate that currently equals that of other professions; and, the number only grows.\(^1\) At the same time, clergy across several mainline denominations, including the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)—also known as PC(USA)—are becoming less healthy.\(^2\) Over 20 percent of Presbyterian clergy report that they have seriously considered leaving ministry in the previous two years;\(^3\) and an increasing number are acting on that impulse.\(^4\) This sad exodus of weary clergy is largely unnecessary.

The traditional approach to the task of clergy care, as illustrated by the title of Roy M. Oswald’s classic, *Clergy Self-Care*, is to encourage clergy to take care of

---


\(^3\) Research Services of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), *2001 Survey* (Louisville: Research Services of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), 2002), 1.

themselves. Clergy self-care typically includes pastor-initiated practices such as stress management, boundary-setting, managing congregational and personal expectations, and physical exercise. This approach, however, tends to ignore the ways in which clergy and congregation are interconnected. Many clergy are caught up in internal emotional webs of relationships that make self-care extremely difficult in the best of circumstances, especially when such care is not actively supported by the congregation. When self-care is the only care that clergy receive, the result is often that pastors receive very little care at all. In the end, their spiritual, emotional, and physical health declines.

Since clergy and congregation are deeply interdependent, clergy health needs to become a priority for parishioners as well as pastors, as both suffer negative consequences when a pastor is less than fit for ministry. Some consequences in the congregation may be subtle and slow to manifest, but their cumulative impact can be serious. Unhealthy pastors have less time and energy to serve their people and to inspire them. They are more likely to go through the motions of ministry without intentionality. They may seek to leave their local ministry setting for another parish that appears to be more supportive of clergy or seek to leave ministry altogether, under the label of “burn-out.” When pastors experience chronic exhaustion or feel disconnected from God, their sense of spiritual and emotional well-being declines in much the same way parishioners’ sense of well-being declines when they feel exhausted or alienated from God. A pastor’s

---


7 This relationship will be explored in Chapter 5.
situation should be of particular concern to congregations. When pastors feel unhealthy in any area of life, their preaching, teaching, pastoral counseling, and even their personal character likely reflect this condition. Marital affairs, alcohol and drug abuse, and other forms of escapism also become more likely when pastors are in poor health. In addition, pastors in poor health often model an unbalanced life and unhealthy practices (such as over-eating, workaholism, and a lack of rest and exercise). This sets a bad example for the congregation and new Christians in particular. When pastors serve at less than their physical, emotional, and spiritual best, significant opportunities for ministry are lost. Ultimately, the kingdom of God suffers, and individual parishioners and the congregation as a whole are likely to be harmed in profound and lasting ways. Over the long haul, unhealthy clergy tend to create unhealthy churches.

While certain threats to clergy health cannot be avoided, many of them can be addressed if clergy and congregation work together to care for the pastor. In the end, both pastor and parish benefit. Just as unhealthy clergy tend to create unhealthy churches, healthy pastors are more likely to foster healthy parishioners. Pastors who are physically strong, emotionally whole, and spiritually connected tend to have more energy, enthusiasm, time, creativity, spiritual insight, patience, and humor. They are better able to lead, listen, and learn. They set an enhanced example for the congregation and are more able to be involved in the community. All this tends to excite congregations and to lead to long-term spiritual growth and strength.

For this reason, this ministry focus paper presents an approach to clergy care at Second Presbyterian Church in Carlisle, Pennsylvania, which supplements clergy self-care
techniques with strategies that promote clergy care by the congregation. Second Presbyterian Church is a 178-year-old, middle-class, 750-member congregation of the PC(USA). Second Church has thrived during eight pastorates averaging twenty years or more over the past 140 years, and it wants that pattern to continue. The goal is to create a sustainable and mutually beneficial relationship between pastor and parish. The purpose is to avoid abbreviated pastorates due to feelings of stress, burn-out, and isolation, as these are costly to the congregation and to the pastor.

Long-term pastorates are more likely to result when pastors are physically, emotionally, and spiritually healthy. Traditional methods of clergy care, however, especially clergy “self-care,” have not been particularly effective at promoting clergy health at Second Church and others like it during more recent years. Due to the interdependent nature of the relationship between pastor and congregation, pastors cannot maintain their personal health effectively without the active and informed encouragement and support of their congregations.

This paper seeks to promote the likelihood of future long-term pastorates at Second Church by introducing a model of clergy care that enlists the congregation as an informed and active partner in caring for the pastor. The initiative described herein is based on insights and resources from the Bible, the Reformed tradition, other faith traditions, and family systems theory. Pastor and congregation will join in a series of events and structured conversations that will help parishioners to see how they benefit from healthy clergy. These will inform parishioners of the unique physical, emotional,

---

and spiritual needs that pastors have and will increase parishioners’ understanding of how to address those needs. Overall, this strategy will facilitate the formation of clergy care covenants between the pastor and congregation.

Part One of this paper will describe the ministry context of this project. Chapter 1 will offer a brief overview of the state of clergy health within mainline Protestantism and the PC(USA), along with a brief history of attempts to promote clergy health. The demographic features of the greater Carlisle area also will be presented. The region’s relatively non-transient nature, its emphasis on family ties, and the influence of several local employers will be examined. Chapter 2 will profile the congregation in depth. Demographics will be presented, and Second Church’s informal theologies and slogans also will be reviewed. This discussion regarding ministry context will conclude with an overview of pastor-parish relationships in the congregation.

Part Two will set forth the theological foundations of this project. Chapter 3 will explore resources from the Bible and the Reformed tradition. This will include a presentation of resources often cited in addressing the relationship between pastor and congregation, particularly ones that address contemporary challenges faced by parish clergy. Representative Reformed ecclesiology will be examined along with examples of the pastor-parish relationship in the Bible. Biblical images of the clergy-church relationship and concepts such as covenant and stewardship, which are at the core of Reformed theology, also will be introduced. Chapter 4 will add theological insights and best practices from other Christian denominations. Chapter 5 will present the insights that family systems theory contributes and their particular implications for clergy care. It will
be seen that the pastor’s natural interdependence with the congregation often creates barriers to clergy self-care that must be overcome. The chapter will conclude with an examination of how pastors’ internal influences, such as family of origin, contribute to interdependence and create barriers to clergy self-care. These also must be addressed.

Part Three of this paper will present a ministry strategy as a possible solution to the clergy health challenges described in Part One. Chapter 6 will describe the overall vision of this project and the desired goals that it has been designed to achieve. This will entail a vivid description of what a healthy, caring relationship between pastor and congregation might look like. Chapter 7 suggests specific methods for employing the strategies to achieve the vision at Second Church. It sets up a timeline for introduction and implementation of clergy care initiatives and presents a way for evaluating outcomes. Finally, suggestions for how such a vision might be achieved in other contexts will be offered.

Just as Tip O’Neill said that “all politics is local,”9 I believe that all ministry is “local.” Most that is good and enduring that happens spiritually occurs not at the national or even the Presbytery level but in the local congregation or in small groups of people, who are committed similarly to Christ and one another. Congregational strength, then, is the key to the spiritual vitality and growth of a denomination. However, if congregations are to be strong and healthy in the years ahead, their pastors must be strong and healthy as well.

This paper is an attempt to provide one more tool in the effort to keep congregations strong. The kingdom of God is not served well when pastorates are cut

---

short, when clergy marriages end in divorce, or when clerical scandals rock local congregations. We can maintain clergy health and well-being at optimal levels if a pastor, parish, presbytery, and denomination collectively work together to take care of one another. In the end, all partners in caring will benefit and PC(USA) local churches will be places where people are able to build balanced and life-transforming relationships with God and one another through the power of Jesus Christ.
PART ONE

CONTEXT
CHAPTER 1

THE SCOPE OF THE CLERGY HEALTH CHALLENGE

American clergy are facing a health crisis. A recent article in the *New York Times* recently reported the following information, which is quite alarming: “Members of the clergy now suffer from obesity, hypertension and depression at rates higher than most Americans. In the last decade, their use of antidepressants has risen, while their life expectancy has fallen. Many would change jobs if they could.”¹ This is cause for great concern not only to pastors but to the congregations they serve. For the past few decades, the proposed solution to this clergy health crisis has involved a variety of initiatives aimed at equipping pastors to take better care of themselves through practices such as stress management, physical exercise, and boundary-setting. Unfortunately, attempts at clergy self-care generally have not improved pastoral health. In fact, overall clergy health has been on the decline, according to Rae Jean Proeschold-Bell. An expert in the area of clergy health, he notes that “several church bodies began pastoral wellness programs in

the 1980s and 1990s, but later studies showed these programs had not solved the problem.\textsuperscript{2}

This chapter will begin with a description of the relatively poor state of clergy fitness in the United States. It will argue that clergy who are in poor health physically, emotionally, and spiritually are more likely to harm their congregation, leave their current calling for another church, or abandon ministry altogether. Following this will be a brief presentation of the history of approaches to clergy care in the United States and a consideration of the effectiveness of those efforts. The chapter will conclude with an analysis of how the cultural demographics of Central Pennsylvania impact local approaches to clergy care. Ultimately, it will demonstrate that clergy health is too important to be left to the pastor alone.

**The Poor State of Clergy Health**

Clergy health is in a state of decline equal to and sometimes even exceeding that of the general population. Marriages suffer. Obesity is climbing. Mental distress is growing. Simply put, pastors are hurting, and because of this their congregations are as well.

People once thought pastors to be generally healthier than the population as a whole. Now, a series of recent studies has revealed that pastors across the country are less fit than their neighbors.\textsuperscript{3} Even more shocking is that the clergy divorce rate is slightly

\textsuperscript{2} Proeschold-Bell, “A Holistic Approach to Wellness.”

\textsuperscript{3} Vitello, “Taking a Break.”
higher than that of parishioners. The PC(USA) is no exception to family discord. According to Andrew J. Weaver et al., “In a study of 189 Presbyterian clergymen, their wives and laity, the ministers and their spouses experienced greater loneliness, more emotional exhaustion, and lower marital adjustment than their lay counterparts. . . . almost one in three had family difficulties.” Relational and emotional concerns are areas where people seeking pastoral counseling often desire help. When clergy themselves suffer from relational and emotional crises, it is especially difficult for them to assist parishioners with these very same issues.

The obesity rate among Methodist pastors in North Carolina is more than 10 percent higher than that of their neighbors, and Presbyterian pastors are right behind. According to data gleaned from a 2008 survey, 66 percent would be categorized as either overweight or obese. This is particularly serious in that obesity is “often a precursor to other chronic conditions such as hypertension, heart disease, diabetes, and arthritis.” According to PC(USA) research findings, 18 percent of Presbyterian pastors have not had a physical in the past two years, despite the fact that the denomination’s Board of Pensions covers 100 percent of the cost of such physicals. In the same study, 20 percent

---


reported experiencing worry about burn-out. This reveals that even though many pastors are concerned about their physical and emotional health, they currently do not do all they can to improve their well-being.

According to that same 2001 study, 10 percent of Presbyterian pastors stated that they had little or no peace during the previous four weeks, with another 10 percent complaining of little or no energy during that same time period. This is significant because pastors often are viewed by parishioners as personal role models whose lives are examples of what life in Christ can look like. Even more troublesome is that 4 percent admitted to feeling depressed or downhearted during the past month. These pastors, through no fault of their own, may well be poor witnesses for Christ.

Signs of poor physical health in clergy typically include obesity and stress-related illnesses, such as skin diseases and heart ailments. Signs of poor emotional health in a pastor might include frequent angry outbursts, unprovoked tears, panic disorders, depression, and relational difficulties with family or parishioners. Signs of poor spiritual health might include the pastor’s lack of a vital personal prayer life, loss of enthusiasm for preaching, and unexplained feelings of guilt or shame. In many cases, clergy can deal with severe issues in all these areas. This is because physical, emotional, and spiritual health impact one another. For example, physical illness can lead to emotional depression, which in turn can create feelings of distance from God.

---


10 Ibid.

Identifying poor clergy health has little to do with assessing pastoral ability to carry out daily tasks—such as preaching, teaching, visitation, and administration. Sick pastors often can carry out these tasks quite efficiently in the short term. However, clergy health is not about short-term competency but about long-term fitness, vitality, energy, and enthusiasm. It has to do with pastors’ ability to offer themselves to their congregation and to God as a highly tuned instrument of grace and renewal on a daily basis for many years.

Clergy health can be described in various ways. It is more than the absence of serious illness; it is wellness or fitness in mind, body, and spirit. A more holistic and all-encompassing term for “clergy health” might be shalom, the Hebrew word for wholeness or peace. Gwen Wagstrom Halaas, a family practice physician and director of Ministerial Health and Wellness for the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, equates clergy health with simple life balance.12 Clergy are determined to be healthy when there is a balance between energy leaving the pastor during the course of ministry and energy returning to the pastor in the form of nurture, refreshment, and restoration—which likely comes from many sources. Healthy clergy are not physically weak or sick. They are not emotionally drained. They are not spiritually numb. In other words, healthy clergy are physically strong, emotionally charged, and spiritually attuned to the work God is doing in the world. Finally, it can be said that clergy are healthy when they are functioning physically, emotionally, and spiritually so as to have sufficient energy and attention resources to focus on and meet the challenges of the day.

12 Gwen Wagstrom Halaas, The Right Road (Minneapolis, Fortress Press 2004), 9.
Congregational health can be described in a similar way. In a healthy parish, all parts of the congregation work toward a common goal (cf. Ephesians 4:16), each according to God-given abilities (cf. 1 Corinthians 12:4-7). This achieves the net effect of people growing closer to God and to one another on a regular basis over time (cf. 1 Corinthians 12:24b-26). Healthy congregations are also able to overcome challenges and seize opportunities. Finally, they are able to function effectively and confidently even during times of pastoral turnover. Sadly, poor clergy health can impinge on the potential and possibility for healthy congregational life.

The High Cost of Poor Clergy Health to Congregations

Common signs of clergy unfitness easily can be overlooked until much damage already has been done to the congregation. Clergy and congregations are related so intimately that poor clergy health almost always tends to lead to poor congregational health over time. Congregations may experience this effect in a variety of ways, some subtle and some obvious. Jim Robey is a United Methodist pastor with nearly four decades of experience in ministry. He serves as a trainer/mentor with Coaching4Clergy, a non-profit devoted to enhancing clergy effectiveness. In a recent interview conducted by a branch of the Alban Institute, Robey was asked about the ways he has seen clergy respond to stress. Robey responded, “A number of clergy move from congregation to congregation in relatively short periods of time. Others indicate stress by acting out sexually. Still others develop addictions to alcohol or drugs or gambling or other harmful habits.”

\[13\] Ibid.
The least frequent but most devastating impact of poor clergy health on a congregation is clergy moral or ethical failure. For each high-profile instance of a pastor committing a sexual or criminal offense, there are likely hundreds of similar scenarios playing out in relative obscurity in congregations large and small that never make public headlines. In the words of Mark Englund-Krieger, executive presbyter of Carlisle Presbytery, due to active clergy misconduct the consequences for congregations are “devastating on congregations. . . . divisive and draining. . . . [and] can take several pastors after that to get through it.”\(^\text{14}\) The consequences of an affair within the congregation or theft from the church coffers can include lack of trust of future pastors, anger, hostility toward lay leaders, and parishioners experiencing a crisis of faith.

When pastors fail morally or ethically, a career is ruined and the whole church is deprived of an otherwise effective servant of the gospel. The recent high-profile case of Vienna Presbyterian Church in Virginia involving sexual abuse of teens by an associate pastor is one such example.\(^\text{15}\) The incident became national news, likely cost the congregation severely in legal fees and lost contributions, and created a loss of confidence in the clergy who remained. The damage probably will take years to repair, and the teenage victims may never fully heal. The congregation certainly will not be the same.

While no field is immune to such ethical failures, moral failures occurring in a church setting often leave the possibility for recovery by the pastor down to nil. Linda R.

\(^{14}\) Mark Englund-Krieger, executive presbyter of Carlisle Presbytery, phone interview by author, Carlisle, PA, July 24, 2011.

Wolf Jones explains, “If a basketball player makes headlines for driving at twice the legal speed limit, the ensuing publicity may be more work to him than the cost of the traffic ticket. Politicians have been caught up in raids with people other than their spouses and managed to keep their jobs. Clergy are rarely afforded such privilege or forgiveness.”

Parishioners look to clergy for proof that it is both possible and rewarding to follow Christ on a daily basis. When clergy fail morally their witness is compromised and the Christian life itself seems less compelling in the eyes of parishioners. They wonder why they should pay the cost of discipleship, if their pastor is unwilling or unable to do so.

A more common negative effect of poor clergy fitness is when pastors leave one congregation for another congregation or leave ministry altogether in hopes of finding a healthier situation. Each time pastors move to another congregation, bonds with parishioners are broken and new relationships must be formed with a new pastor. Frequent turnover among pastors means that relationships between pastor and parishioners necessarily tend to become shallower over time. Even more concerning is the fact that the rate of clergy staying in parish ministry in the PC(USA) is on the decline. Researchers have noted a “quadrupling in the number of people leaving the profession during the first five years of ministry, compared with the 1970s.”

Similarly, according to a study conducted by the PC(USA) Board of Pensions, a growing percentage of clergy are leaving ministry during their first five years on the job. From 2002 to 2005 the rate

---

16 Linda R. Wolf Jones, Clergy Self-Care (Bethesda, MD: Alban Institute, 2010), 39-40.

was 30 percent, and the number leaving continues to grow each year. When clergy leave parish ministry, especially for work in the secular world, parishioners can be left wondering if the pastor suffered a crisis of faith or if the pastor ever truly was called to ministry in the first place. The Board of Pensions also notes that “this number [of clergy leaving ministry] is more significant when one considers that 30% of all [current] pastors are going to retire in the next ten to fifteen years. And that fewer people are being ordained than retire each year [to begin with].” If the tide is not stemmed through better clergy care and other means, the net result very well could be a clergy shortage of crisis proportions.

When clergy feel that they need to leave ministry for the sake of their own health and well-being, they create losses for the denomination that are hard to calculate but are nevertheless very real. During that same 2002-2005 time period, nearly four hundred installed pastors left parish ministry altogether, and over three hundred of those pulpits subsequently were not filled with installed pastors. The Board of Pensions recognizes that these numbers reflect poorly on the “the effectiveness of . . . our care and nurture of pastors in their early critical years.”

When clergy leave for other professions, sometimes no one comes along to serve the congregation that remains. Larger congregations are more likely to be able to replace

---

18 Board of Pensions, Supporting Mid-Career Pastors, 12; see also Board of Pensions, Report on Clergy Recruitment and Retention to the 216th General Assembly (2004), 8-9.


20 Ibid., 13.

21 Board of Pensions, Supporting Mid-Career Pastors, 12.
an installed pastor who leaves, but the cost of that pastor leaving prematurely is still significant. Englund-Krieger reports that in Carlisle Presbytery there is almost always a drop in membership, offerings, mission support, and worship attendance whenever a pastor leaves one of the larger congregations.\(^\text{22}\) He ascribes this to larger congregations taking much of their vision, direction, and inspiration from the pastor. Seasons of decline during the interim period are almost always the result. Frequent pastoral turnover in these congregations due to poor clergy health means that seasons of decline come more frequently, and precious momentum is lost.

The most common negative effect of poor clergy health is hardest to see, but collectively it proves the most costly for congregations. Englund-Krieger calls it a simple “lack of pastoral energy.”\(^\text{23}\) As clergy become less physically, emotionally, and spiritually healthy, their ability to serve their congregations with vitality is severely compromised. According to the PC(USA) \textit{Book of Order}, which prescribes the standards to which all PC(USA) congregations and clergy must adhere, pastors are required to pledge that they will serve their congregations with “energy, intelligence, imagination, and love.”\(^\text{24}\) If clergy are drained completely of energy, it is impossible for them to fulfill this vow.

Englund-Krieger would argue that in his experience the health of the congregation rises and falls with the energy level of the pastor. For example, when the pastor’s energy level tapers due to physical illness, distractions at home, or a desire to coast into

\(^{22}\) Englund-Krieger, interview.

\(^{23}\) Ibid.

retirement, a congregation of any size or stature inevitably can feel the impact lost in pastoral effectiveness. Pastoral energy, says Englund-Krieger, translates into pastoral availability and sensitivity, enthusiasm and creativity, deep pools of grace, and expansive and inspirational visions. When pastoral energy wanes, so do all these positives in congregational life. While he is aware of instances of clergy failure and clergy leaving for other callings due to burn-out and other forms of poor health, Englund-Krieger more often sees the phenomenon of tired pastors simply going through the motions of ministry. While it is difficult to calculate the cost of missed opportunities for mission and ministry due to clergy fatigue, a high price certainly is paid by the congregation. It can be measured in terms of lives that are left untouched by Christ and lives that never fully realize their full potential in Christ.

A lesser known but important cost to congregations of generally poor pastoral fitness comes in the form of higher shared health care and insurance costs. In the PC(USA), all congregations proportionately bear the cost of full clergy health care, including that of retirees. The Board of Pensions is aware that as congregational budgets tighten, health care costs are a growing burden. The Board of Pensions has concluded, “To the extent that . . . Ministers of Word and Sacrament suffer mental and physical health problems because of working conditions, costs are increased for healthcare, death, and disability benefits. This reality impacts the entire Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) because congregations share in the funding of the Benefits Plan.”25 In this respect, it is not only the local pastor and the local congregation who suffer when the leader is in poor

---

health but every congregation in the denomination as well in the form of higher health care insurance costs.

While it is difficult to quantify the costs to congregations of poor clergy health, the costs are real nonetheless. Clergy minister to others through the use of their bodies. When those bodies are at less than their best, the congregation is going to feel it one way or another. Oswald sometimes helps people see the need for clergy care by posing the following situation to emphasize his point:

“Would you feel some anger if you paid a handsome tuition to attend an Alban Institute Seminar by Roy Oswald, and I showed up sixty pounds overweight, my clothes reeking from smoke, and seemingly depressed and distracted?” Usually participants say “yes,” they would feel cheated. Members of our congregations are similarly disappointed when they come to church and their pastor is too stressed to listen to them and too burned out to show any real caring.26

Even the intangible cost of congregational disappointment is too high a price to pay for declining health among pastors, because this trend can be reversed.

**Efforts to Support Clergy Fitness in American Protestant Congregations**

Clergy health has not been always as poor as it is now. Nor has there always been literature that deals explicitly with matters of clergy care. In her article, “Soul Care and the Roots of Clergy Burnout,” spiritual director and leadership consultant Anne Dilenschneider observes that the nature of Protestant ministry in the United States changed greatly with the advent of the assembly line.27 Prior to that time, in what might be called the pre-“Professional” era, ministry was seen as a unique calling which widely

---

26 Oswald, *Clergy Self-Care*, 6.

was understood and respected by the pastor’s family, the congregation, and the community. Pastors lived primarily in parsonages or manses and largely were maintained by the congregation. Formal financial compensation lagged behind that of other occupations requiring similar levels of education and expertise; but supports in the form of “clergy discounts,” widespread respect, and personal gifts were abundant. Pastors and parishioners likely understood their relationship much as members of a large, loving family would.

Once assembly lines became widespread around 1920, people began to see work in general from a different perspective. Productivity and efficiency were valued over employee satisfaction. Specialization was seen as the way to increase effectiveness. The work of pastors was not exempt from this paradigm shift. By the 1960s and 1970s the era of “Pastors as Professionals” had arrived. Seminary training began to focus less on helping future pastors think theologically and grow spiritually and more on equipping them for the daily tasks of ministry, such as preaching and counseling. Ministry became less of a calling and more like the accounting profession, in which goals and measurable outcomes were expected to be achieved. The pastor-parish relationship was shaped by the ways in which other professions related to their “clients” and “customers.”

Statements of clergy ethics were adopted along the lines of those used by counselors, lawyers, and educators. In the “Pastors as Professionals” era, parishioners were seen as fundamentally different from pastors. Church members were as much consumers of ministry as partners in it. It was believed that they needed to be protected

---

28 Ibid.
from the abuses of power by clergy, and pastors were discouraged from receiving gifts from parishioners or becoming too closely dependent on them for fear of violating the pastor-parishioner relationship. During this same era, many pastors insisted on compensation and benefit packages more on a par with those of other professions, and they sought to own their own homes rather than have the congregation supply a house. The “Professional” era was characterized by a distancing of pastors, emotionally and otherwise, from their parishioners in the hopes of providing more objective guidance to lay people and more satisfaction to pastors through greater compensation and the trappings of professionalism.

One outgrowth of this understanding of the pastor-parish relationship was the emphasis on clergy self-care. As pastors began to report problems in dealing with the many pressures and stresses of ministry, their health began to decline. The advice from experts such as Oswald and others was that clergy must learn to care for themselves. The congregation no longer could be trusted to do it in ways that would not lead to a blurring of boundaries or a conflict of interest. The unwritten sub-text was that essentially congregations were not able to care for their pastors or that such care was inappropriate. In other words, pastors had to care for themselves because no one else would.

With the rise of intentionally missional and emergent congregations in recent decades, a new paradigm for pastoral ministry emphasizing practical experience over

29 See John Peters Webster, Rekindle the Fire: Antidote to Burnout (Orland, ME: Grenfell Reading Center, 1997), 140-141.

30 Oswald, Clergy Self-Care, 10.

academic training is developing. At the same time, at least one prominent pastor of a traditional congregation has advised what might be called a post-“Professional” approach to the pastor-parish relationship. Both of these movements seek to re-define the pastor-parish relationship.

This new era is characterized by a desire to move beyond an ethic of boundary-setting and maintenance of professional distance to one of collaboration and mutual ministry. The perks provided to pastors in the pre-“Professional” era are long gone. Significant differences between ordained ministry and other fields of service now have become more apparent; the trappings of the “Pastor as Professional” era are a liability in a time when authenticity is more significant to parishioners than academic credentials.

The challenge in the post-“Professional” era of ministry is for pastor and parish to work together to form a partnership of caring, with the pastor both giving and receiving support from the congregation. In this model, parishioners are not treated as customers or clients; rather, they are fellow stewards with the pastor in a vibrant and unique pastor-parish relationship. In his address to the Presbyterian Pastoral Care Network in 2003, church consultant Hugh Halverstadt made this observation regarding recent trends toward

---

32 For the purposes of this project “missional” and “emergent” congregations can be described as congregations that intentionally target people born after 1980 who shun traditional structures, including conventional church architecture, and who seek to be highly focused on discipleship and outreach. These congregations have been emerging as an outgrowth of and response to seeker-oriented mega-churches. Reggie McNeal, The Present Future: Six Tough Questions for the Church (San Francisco: John Wiley and Sons, 2003), does a good job of dealing with these issues within the larger contextual discussion of the Church.

33 For example, see John Piper, Brothers, We are Not Professionals (Nashville: Broadman and Holman, 2002).

involving presbyteries and congregations in clergy care, “This is a win-win approach.
The shared goal of this effort is not the health of the pastor *per se* but the health of the
pastor-parish relationship, that the congregation might benefit over the long term.”

Even while self-care remains the standard approach to clergy care, people are beginning
to recognize that self-care alone is insufficient to keep pastors well. This is largely
because church observers are realizing that when clergy care is left to pastors alone, it
rarely occurs with sufficient energy and consistency to be effective.

**Current Clergy-Care Initiatives within the PC(USA)**

Presently, the PC(USA) seeks to address the clergy health crisis in a variety of
ways. In addition to conducting extensive research, The Board of Pensions—which is
concerned especially with rising clergy health care costs—has introduced several
initiatives. One is “Stewardship of Self,” a program of clergy self-care emphasizing
pastoral education in healthy living practices.\(^{36}\) The denomination also has begun to offer
“Credo,” a popular conference workshop for mid-career pastors designed to help them
look at their lives holistically and make good decisions for the future of themselves and
their families.\(^{37}\) Additionally, the medical plan of the Board of Pensions now includes
free preventative annual exams for all members as an incentive for members to get
physicals and screenings for common illnesses. These efforts largely are focused on
encouraging pastors to take better care of themselves.

---

\(^{35}\) Ibid., 6.

\(^{36}\) Board of Pensions of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), “Stewardship of Self,”

The denomination has not completely ignored more comprehensive approaches to clergy care. In a recent publication The Board of Pensions calls clergy care a “shared responsibility,” through which “members [i.e., pastors] can improve their own lives and thus fulfill a responsibility to help care for the greater Presbyterian Church community.” In this quotation, one can see a growing awareness in the denomination that all church members benefit when clergy are well cared for and that the responsibility for clergy care is not the pastor’s alone.

Another clergy care initiative has come in the form of the Presbytery Pastoral Care Network. The members of this network have made it their mission to help presbyteries support pastoral health and fitness. They host annual conferences and create resources designed to help interested presbyteries to care for their clergy members. This initiative is a much needed addition to the overwhelming emphasis on clergy self-care. Through enforcing terms of call that include appropriate compensation, sabbatical leave, spiritual renewal days, and other health-enhancing practices, presbyteries can create structures in which clergy self-care is more likely. Individual presbyteries provide varying degrees of support to pastors. Some have a staff person devoted to clergy care (such as the Presbytery of Atlanta), and many provide annual clergy retreats or support groups. All recognize that clergy care is a part of the mission of the Committee on Ministry, as set forth by the Book of Order.

Unfortunately, the level of clergy support varies widely from presbytery to presbytery, and

---


40 PC(USA), Book of Order, sect. G-11.0502a.
it is largely voluntary. Pastors usually can opt from these support systems if they choose, and many do for a variety of reasons.

The Board of Pensions currently does not offer any programs or materials designed specifically to help congregations to care for their pastors more effectively. In a recent Board of Pensions report intended to improve clergy retention in the denomination fifty suggestions were given to presbyteries, while only one was for the local congregation.41 While the Book of Order requires congregations to pledge to support their pastor, it does not include specific examples of how this can be done by congregations except through prayer and the provision of “fair pay.”42

Many of the efforts by the denomination to improve clergy health are too new for their full impact to be seen. In the meantime, many clergy continue to suffer from poor physical, emotional, and spiritual health. The congregations they serve likely will feel the impact through high health care costs, lack of pastoral energy, frequent clergy transitions, or even clergy moral or ethical failure. The entire denomination bears the cost of this health crisis. Self-care techniques alone do not work to maintain clergy health. Supplemental care from presbyteries and the larger denomination may be part of the solution.

The ecclesiastical body that is most impacted when pastors are sick, however, is the local congregation. The local congregation is in an ideal position to help come alongside pastors to promote their health. Congregants are very close to their pastors and exert great influence over them, individually and collectively. Congregants know the pastor’s family situation, ministry context, work habits, and other patterns of behavior very well. They

41 Board of Pensions, Supporting Mid-Career Pastors of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), 5.
42 PC(USA), Book of Order, sect. W-4.4006b3.
create many of the expectations (realistic or unrealistic) that the pastor seeks to fulfill. Consequently, they are in a position to hold the pastor accountable for good health practices through formal and informal congregational supervisory structures. Most congregations, however, are not aware of the power they have or their responsibility to use it to promote pastoral health. One analysis sums up the situation this way. Stephen McCutchan writes: “Churches appear to be in a state of massive denial about the stress of ministry and the human needs of pastors. Too often both ministers and their congregations assume that the pastor has the responsibility to care for others but is somehow immune to the necessity of being cared for.”

When congregations begin to embrace fully their unique responsibilities for clergy care, both pastors and their parishes can become healthier.

**Factors That Inform Approaches to Clergy Care in Carlisle, Pennsylvania**

Carlisle is a small town located twenty miles west of Harrisburg, Pennsylvania. With approximately eighteen thousand residents, it contributes less than 10 percent of the population of Cumberland County. However, its significance is disproportionate to its size. This is due largely to its strategic location and status as the county seat. Situated at the crossroads of several major interstate transportation routes that serve the entire eastern seaboard, Carlisle is home to multiple national trucking and warehousing firms. Vacationers often travel through Carlisle on their way to southern shore destinations. The

---


town is nestled in the middle of a fertile valley bounded on the north and south by ridges of low mountains. These geographical features once made it an ideal location for farming; they now make it a bucolic, semi-rural location for raising a family.

As the county seat, Carlisle hosts county social service agencies, court houses, correctional institutions, and other government facilities. This has attracted a large number of lawyers and service firms related to the legal field. Local people are served by the Carlisle Regional Medical Center and eight nursing homes,\(^45\) drawing patients and residents from the surrounding communities. Carlisle also is known widely for its diverse and outstanding educational and cultural institutions, including Dickinson College, the Penn State-Dickinson School of Law, the U.S. Army War College, and the Central Pennsylvania Youth Ballet. Carlisle Barracks, the second-oldest military installation in the country, is neighbored by the Army Heritage and Education Center and many Carlisle residents work with military-related institutions in the area.

Manufacturing was once the dominant employment industry in the Carlisle area. Before that, farming was king. However, now more people are employed in trucking or service and retail areas of the economy than in either agriculture or light industry. Combined employment in the educational, military, governmental, and health-related sectors currently exceed that of any other sector in the county.\(^46\)

These not-for-profit institutions are all public service institutions known for a somewhat paternalistic relationship with their employees rather than an adversarial one.


\(^{46}\) Ibid.
Employees of these institutions often enjoy tenure or near-tenure with their employers. They usually receive generous health and education benefits. Many allow for sabbaticals, guaranteed pensions, family leave, and retirement after relatively short careers. In return, employees reward their employers with high degrees of loyalty. Carlisle is not known for its entrepreneurial spirit or risk-taking behavior among employers or employees.

Pennsylvania is a state that retains its residents at a rate higher than two-thirds of the rest of the United States. This means that many Carlisle residents likely grew up locally or have extended family within a short drive. Pennsylvania is a “senior”-friendly state. It does not tax pensions, and it offers property tax rebates to senior citizens. For these and other quality-of-life reasons, many people born in Pennsylvania choose to retire here.

Average income in the area is just slightly above that of Pennsylvania as a whole. Local Republican candidates for elections often run unopposed. Service organizations such as Rotary, Kiwanis, the Lions Club, American Legion, and Veterans of Foreign Wars remain active and vital despite difficulty in attracting younger members. Carlisle is a place where serving on the board of the YMCA or library is still a badge of honor, and volunteering with the local Scout troop or soccer team is tacitly expected. In fact, Carlisle honors select citizens each year for their service to the community with the Molly Pitcher Award and the Alexis DeToqueville Award.


48 Pennsylvania Department of Labor and Industry, Cumberland County Profile.

Tiny Carlisle is the home to no less than sixty-one houses of worship, all but two of which are Christian and Protestant. No single congregation or denomination dominates. Dozens more churches dot the local landscape, and new congregations continue to be formed. A small but significant number of Mennonites live and worship in the area as well. Despite the large number of congregations and the wide variety of worship options open to people, there is very little “church hopping” among parishioners. Members tend to stay where they join. For this reason, Carlisle can be considered a “churched” area that is becoming even more “churched.”

The local population is over 90 percent Caucasian and aging. In fact, 35 percent of Cumberland County residents are age fifty or more. Consequently, health maintenance is a major concern, especially as people grow older. A study sponsored by the Carlisle Health and Wellness Foundation determined that residents of western Cumberland County, where Carlisle is located, are more likely to suffer from excess weight, diabetes, and asthma than people in the rest of Pennsylvania. People in the rest of Pennsylvania tend to be “sicker” than the nation as a whole.


Greater Carlisle Chamber of Commerce, Carlisle Pennsylvania, 1.

Ibid.

Carlisle Area Health and Wellness Foundation, 2007 Health Status Assessment Snapshot (Carlisle, PA: Carlisle Area Health and Wellness Foundation, 2007), 2.

their relatively poor health, efforts to improve the situation by local organizations have not been embraced yet by the populace.

Due to all these factors and influences, people in the Carlisle area tend to value duty and doing the right thing, even at cost to themselves. They treasure family, staying together, and caring for one another, even at the price of foregoing economic opportunity. They esteem service and sharing personal resources with others, so that everyone can receive proper provision for needs. More importantly, they value loyalty, which comes in the form of sticking with a group or organization even when allegiance becomes difficult to maintain.

**Summary**

The average Carlisle resident is likely to be white, over thirty-five, overweight, Republican, conservative, and a native to Pennsylvania (if not Cumberland County). More often than not, that individual is a church-going protestant and volunteers with some local service organization. There are relatives in the area, and usually there exists a relationship with the military as a veteran or as related to one.

The cultural context for pastoral care in Carlisle is characterized by such positive qualities as a high regard for service, faith, duty, family, and loyalty. These values can be drawn on as valuable resources for developing a more comprehensive strategy for pastoral care to face current stresses that cause poor spiritual, emotional, and physical health in pastors. At the same time, however, Carlisle suffers from relatively poor health itself and possesses little urgency about improving health in general. When poor health is taken for granted culturally, the task of maintaining clergy health at optimal levels becomes more difficult for pastor and congregation alike—particularly in Carlisle, Pennsylvania.
CHAPTER 2
SECOND PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH AS A CARING
“SECOND FAMILY”

Second Presbyterian Church is a congregation with many values, but caring is at its core. One might not expect this given its relatively large size, multiple ministries, location near the intersection of several busy interstate corridors, and its ambitious marketing slogan: “Grow with Second!” However, the congregation values loyalty, stability, and caring most of all over other typical leading values of relatively large churches—such as outreach to the poor, church growth, spiritual growth, community involvement, or ministry excellence. These latter values are definitely important to the congregation, but in Second Church they are secondary to that of caring for one another in ways similar to that of a large extended family.

Overview of Second Presbyterian Church in Carlisle, Pennsylvania

The congregation’s building is situated in a quiet neighborhood in the middle of a flat and fertile valley bounded on North and South by steep, low-rising mountain ranges. Jennifer McKenna, Second Church’s associate pastor, has suggested that these somewhat protective mountains shape the congregation’s identity even more than the intense inter-
state truck traffic that passes through the community daily and might create the illusion that Carlisle is a highly transient community.\(^1\) The mountains shield Carlisle from much severe winter weather and help to define it as a place of safety and relative comfort: a shelter from storms and even a good place to call “home” and raise a family.

There are three PC(USA) congregations in town and twenty-five mainline Protestant congregations within a five-minute drive of Second Church. Second Church is an off-shoot of First Presbyterian Church, which is located in the heart of Carlisle, on the town square. The two congregations split in 1833 over the issue of outward signs of personal conversion. The founders of Second Church were the more conservative and traditional faction.\(^2\) When they could not force the pastor to resign, this group received permission from the Presbytery of Carlisle to form their own congregation, which they proceeded to do, only one block away. The congregation has moved its building twice since that time and now is situated on the very edge of Carlisle Borough. Despite its rocky and contentious founding, the congregation has enjoyed relative peace over its 178 years. A review of the congregation’s definitive church history yields few stories of either external controversy or internal conflict.\(^3\) The congregation has managed mainly to avoid these kinds of tensions.

The approximately 750-member congregation currently has a mailing list of over five hundred households, including both members and “friends,” who essentially are

\(^{1}\) Jennifer McKenna, interview by author, Carlisle, PA, August, 2011.


\(^{3}\) Ibid., 11-17.
people who are active in the congregation’s life but have not joined. Approximately three hundred households provide regular financial support to the congregation’s ministries.\(^4\) The unadjusted average Sunday morning worship attendance for fifty-three Sundays in 2010 was 319 people spanning two weekly, Sunday morning services.\(^5\)

Hard financial and job data are not available for the congregation; but an informal analysis of the congregation reveals that the majority of members currently are employed, or once were employed, in service-related or white-collar positions. Professionals such as doctors, judges, lawyers, military officers, financial planners, professors, and teachers outnumber blue-collar positions. As a result, in the community the congregation is considered to be well-educated and middle to upper-middle class.

Carlisle is home to several educational and government institutions, including an undergraduate college, a law school, a graduate school for Army officers, typical agencies related to county administration, a professional school of ballet, and several elementary and secondary schools. In addition, the state capital is an easy commuting distance. As a result, a large proportion of the congregation is personally familiar with patterns of employee-employer relationships common to non-profit institutions. These members are likely to take their cues for caring for their clergyperson from these experiences rather than from corporate settings or industrial work practices. In such an environment, benefits like sabbatical leave, tenure, and cost-of-living increases are likely


to be more accepted as ways to care for employees and clergy than practices common in the commercial sector such as bonus pay, compensation time, and special gifts and prizes.

Second Church also has a reputation for being the spiritual home of many community leaders and volunteers. Several of the largest and most active civic and charitable organizations have members of Second Church on their boards, and members of the congregation regularly have been the recipients of the two highest local awards for community service. Annual recognition dinners for these events sometimes seem as much like church reunions as community functions.

Chapter 1 of this project noted that a comparatively high rate of current Pennsylvanians were born in the state. This means that many residents are likely to have large extended families that can be visited within minutes or hours. It also means that Pennsylvania has one of the largest populations of elderly people: over 1 million residents, the fourth highest in the nation, representing 16 percent of the state population, second only to Florida. In comparison to states with highly transient populations, or states where upward mobility is prized, Pennsylvanians value longevity in an area as well as family connections.

Second Church is no exception to this rule. Three-generation families abound in worship each Sunday morning. It is also common for adult siblings and their families, and even former spouses and their families, to worship together. In fact, both pastors’ extended families are actively involved in the congregation. More evidence of this is

---

6 Cohn, “Magnet or Sticky.”

McKenna herself, who is not just the associate pastor but someone who was raised in Second Church. She is praised fondly as a “daughter” of the congregation. Similarly, two pastors who retired from the congregation, each after serving for over three decades at Second Church, remain active in congregational life as do former pastors’ children and grandchildren. In short, while all the members are related to one another through baptism, many are related by blood as well.

The implications of this “family” culture for clergy care might be that the congregation will want to do everything it can to retain a pastor, in order to keep the congregational “family” whole. Congregants also may take for granted that their pastor will stay in the congregation until retirement and beyond. They may not be aware that there are pro-active, caring steps that they can take to increase the likelihood of pastoral longevity. Second Church’s “family” culture likely means that the congregation will be more open to caring for clergy by extending benefits that promote family life (e.g., family leave for medical reasons) and long tenure (e.g., an extra week’s vacation after thirty years of service) than they would be to benefits that are specifically related to performance (e.g., providing incentive pay for achieving specific worship attendance goals during a given year).

**Demographic Analysis and Congregational Values**

Second Church is “corporate” in size, aging, middle-class, and offers a full range of ministries with the leadership support of a large staff. The congregation has a special relationship with its staff, and the leadership responds in kind with much energy spent on
caring for members. Both demographics and congregational values lend themselves strongly to form an overall feeling and umbrella value of “family.”

A close demographic analysis of Second Church’s membership reveals three additional features that are significant to understanding the context of clergy care at Second. First, although several young families have joined the congregation in recent years, there are still nearly twice as many members over sixty years of age as there are under forty years of age, 345 people versus 175 people. As a result, the perspectives of older members, many of whom no longer work, are likely to dominate conversations about approaches to caring for clergy. These members are also likely to be the greatest resources for caring, due to their sheer numbers and day-time availability.

Second, there are 32 percent more women in the congregation than men, 424 females versus 327 males. Although the congregation’s three governing boards include almost equal numbers of gender representation overall, the disproportionately high number of women in the congregation likely impacts the congregation’s approaches to clergy care. For example, what might be thought of as forms of caring traditionally associated with women (e.g., written expressions of affection and appreciation) might dominate over forms of caring often associated with men (e.g., financial recognition of a job well done). The large proportion of women also might account for the high value placed by the congregation on “caring” and “relationships” over values that traditionally might be associated with men, such as “mission accomplishment,” “excellence,” and “growth.”

---

8 Crouch, Second Presbyterian Church Annual Statistics, September 14, 2011. All statistics in this section are taken from this source, unless otherwise noted.
Third, almost half the active members in the congregation, 373 members, has served on one of the three governing boards (Elders, Deacons, Trustees) during their time at Second Church. Consequently, a large proportion of the congregation is generally familiar with the practice of thinking about the life of the congregation in sophisticated, strategic, and sensitive ways. These have been members for significant periods of time; and during their terms of service, they well may have been privy to confidential conversations about personnel matters and staff care. They are not rookie leaders or new to the faith. Such experienced leaders might be personally familiar with the high cost of clergy turnover to congregations and the stresses faced by clergy. As such, they constitute a potentially motivated and informed resource to draw upon in the effort to create systems of support focused on clergy care.

The congregation puts a high value on staff. The congregation’s 2011 annual budget totals over $720,000; and approximately 70 percent of this goes to compensation for the eleven full-time and part-time employees, with 30 percent for the congregation’s supporting two pastors alone.\(^9\) Informal annual reviews are performed by the Personnel Committee to assess the fairness and adequacy of staff compensation, and that committee feels that the salary and benefits package for the pastor and associate pastor are currently in line with those of their PC(USA) colleagues with similar experience working in similar local church settings.\(^{10}\)

\(^9\) Price, Second Presbyterian Church Annual Report, 37.

\(^{10}\) Robert Hervey, oral report of the Personnel Committee to the Session of Second Presbyterian Church, Carlisle, PA, November 2011.
Much staff energy and time are devoted to caring for members of the congregation, especially the 10 percent of the congregation over the age of eighty. As the senior pastor, I regularly make hospital visits, participate in almost every funeral service—about fifteen to twenty-five per year—and send birthday and anniversary notes to elderly parishioners. These acts of pastoral care constitute approximately 10 to 20 percent of the job. The associate pastor makes hospital visits, offers communion to homebound members, leads a caregivers support group, and resources the congregation’s formal caring ministries: the Board of Deacons, Stephen Ministry, and Christ Care small groups. These activities comprise approximately 40 to 60 percent of an associate pastor’s responsibilities. Even the congregation’s sexton, music director, secretary, youth coordinator, and Christian educator devote approximately 10 to 25 percent of their time to caring ministries, including attending funerals for parishioners, sending notes, and coordinating lay and pastoral visitation of homebound members. Staff meetings regularly include detailed care updates on parishioners and conversations about how various staff members can integrate their caring efforts on behalf of a given parishioner or member family.

At an officers’ retreat in March 2011, all members of the Session, Deacons, and Board of Trustees were invited to reflect on Second Church as a congregation. They responded to several questions designed to illicit what these leaders saw as the

11 Crouch, Second Presbyterian Church Annual Statistics, September 14, 2011.
congregation’s core values and implicit ecclesiology. Through this process, the officers came to recognize how high a value they place on caring.

In order to ascertain the congregation’s implicit theology, the officers were first asked, “What worship songs or hymns seem to reflect best your personal thoughts and feelings about God and/or your relationship to God?” They selected fifty-nine different hymns. The five most popular responses were *Great Is Thy Faithfulness* and *How Great Thou Art*, followed closely by *It Is Well with My Soul*, *Spirit, Spirit*, and *What a Friend We Have in Jesus*. These songs are known for their gentle, caring, and encouraging qualities. Leaders’ preference for them reveals the congregation’s desire for relationship with God that is nurturing in nature rather than confrontational.

In order to ascertain the congregation’s implicit ecclesiology—essentially, its understanding of itself as part of “a church”—the officers were asked, “What song or hymn could be described as our congregation’s anthem (i.e., a song that reflects who we are or who we are trying to be)?” While twenty-eight hymns were suggested, the most common

12 The data in this portion of the discussion comes from Second Church’s leadership retreat held at the church building in Carlisle, Pennsylvania, on March 5, 2011.

13 Church Secretary, *Retreat Minutes* (Carlisle, PA: Second Presbyterian Church, March 5, 2011). All questions and responses are from this source, unless otherwise noted.

one cited was *Here I Am, Lord.*\textsuperscript{15} This is a song of comfort as well as an expression of the congregation’s commitment to caring for one another. In singing the refrain, parishioners make this promise to God: “I will hold your people in my heart.”\textsuperscript{16} Overall, the musical preferences and the meaning they hold for Second Church’s leaders illustrate both a longing for intimate connection with God and with one another. The congregation’s focus is less on reaching outward to the community and more on strengthening internal bonds through caring.

In order to discover how Scripture informs the congregation’s ecclesiology and sense of purpose, the officers then were asked, “What Bible verse or story seems to be a ‘life verse’ for our congregation, i.e. a verse or story that inspires, describes, or guides us?” There were sixteen passages referenced, with the most popular response being the Parable of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10:25-37), followed closely by Paul’s description of the varieties of spiritual gifts and ways of serving God (1 Corinthians 12:4-31). These passages the officers selected specifically highlight calls to service, especially service to others in need. The leadership of the congregation, then, could be said to see its particular calling from God as one to care for one another as well as all of God’s people.

Later, the officers were asked this: “Describe our congregation using a metaphor.” The purpose of this question was to see what common images reflect the congregation’s self-understanding. A variety of responses were submitted, with the congregation being compared to everything from “a guiding star” to a “one-size-fits-all hat.” Nearly half the


\textsuperscript{16} Ibid.
responses, however, included some reference to “family” or “home” (where a family lives); and almost all the metaphors implied that the congregation is a community of encouragement, comfort, safety, and warm relationships.

In 2005, the congregation advertised itself with this phrase: “Make Second Presbyterian Your Second Family.” The campaign was not successful in eliciting visitors, but it did yield “Second Family” as a common and popular way of describing the manner in which the congregation functions. In essence, “Second Family” is the church’s overarching umbrella value.

When the officers were asked, “What does the term ‘We’re a Second Family’ mean to you?” the most common answer was this: “Caring for one another like family would.” Nearly all the responses to this question mentioned “caring,” “support,” “sharing,” or “helping.” It was no surprise, then, that when asked to “use only three words to describe our congregation,” “caring” was the word most often used—by over half the respondents. In addition, one-quarter of all respondents listed “giving,” “generous,” or “supportive” as one of their three words. These are all caring-related terms as well.

The members of Second Church live out their collective understanding as a family in the many ways that parishioners care for one another as brothers and sisters and daughters and sons might. When a long-time, but long since retired, employee of the church needed to move, members of the congregation moved all of his possessions to his new home without charge or expectation of reward. When parishioners move to nursing home facilities, church members visit them on a regular basis as they would their own parents. When parishioners die, dozens of people in the congregation contribute food for
memorial repasts, offer to usher, and visit the grieving family—even when they did not personally know the deceased.

The officers also were asked to list the congregation’s strengths as they perceived and experienced them. The officers made a long list. Strengths included volunteerism, music, sermons, pastoral and staff leadership, and the multi-generational diversity of the congregation. Once again, however, topping all these strengths was “caring support within [the] church.” Specific references were made to the work of the Deacons, Stephen Ministers, and pastors as well as informal acts of member-to-member caring by individuals. This reveals the congregation’s understanding that member care is every member’s responsibility and privilege and that such acts of caring define Second Church as a congregation. Clearly, the church officers think of the congregation they are part of as a large, loving, caring, extended family.

Second Church’s architecture even reflects this understanding of the congregation as family and reveals the way in which the congregation perceives the pastor-parish relationship. In the late 1960s, when the congregation chose to move approximately two miles from its land-locked downtown location to the growing suburbs on the edge of town, it not only left behind its building but released a powerful symbol of how it saw itself. The former building had an ostentatiously tall steeple. This building may have been appropriate for an era of tall-steeple preachers, in which the pastor was both metaphorically “placed on a pedestal” by the congregation and literally elevated by the parishioners. The pastor was seated in a throne-like chair on a raised platform above the congregation and away from it.
The current building, completed in 1971, has no steeple whatsoever. The pastor, instead of sitting isolated from the congregation, sits in an ordinary pew with the parishioners, often alongside members of his or her own family and other worshippers. There is an elevated platform (chancel) and pulpit in the “new” sanctuary, but these architectural features primarily serve the purely functional purpose of enabling the congregation to see more effectively. Most of the service is led by the pastor from “the floor,” which is literally on the same level as the congregation. The rounded sanctuary, the lack of a steeple, and the egalitarian seating arrangements of the building ultimately reflect the congregational understanding that the pastor is, in the deepest sense, “one of us”—part of the congregation, part of the “family.” Not surprisingly, the pastors, including former pastors, are referred to almost exclusively by their first names, just as parishioners are, with no titles or honorifics.

The church hallways are relatively and sparsely decorated, with few bulletin boards. The single largest display consists of mostly framed black-and-white photos of the congregation’s previous pastors. In another congregation photos of former pastors, if displayed at all, might function as a reminder of a proud era in the congregation’s history. In Second they function more as photos of family patriarchs and matriarchs do in biological families, reminding people of specific ancestors and the family’s spiritual “DNA.” Just as biological families are reluctant to omit photos of the black sheep of the family, so the Second Church display includes equal-sized photos of all previously installed pastors and not just the most recent ones or those most historically significant or beloved. It is as if the congregation is saying to potential members, “If you want to
understand who we are, don’t study our list of mission partners, our annual report, or even our newsletter. Look at our family photos.”

**Clergy Care and Pastoral Relationships: A Past Case Study**

Jack Larson was the associate pastor and director of music at Second Church from 1973 to 2004. During that time he worked with two different heads of staff, an interim head of staff, another associate pastor, and several lay staff people. He also remains an active participant in many ministries in the life of the congregation. His long experience gives him a unique perspective regarding the recent history of clergy care at Second Church. Overall, his perspective is that the congregation cared for him and the senior pastor through both official and unofficial avenues, with unofficial support being just as important as official support.\(^{17}\)

When interviewed, Larson said he felt that the congregation overall was very caring, generous, and supportive of his ministry. He has no complaints about the level of care he received from the congregation during his tenure. Rather, he primarily blames himself for any lapses in his well-being, suggesting that he could have performed better self-care over the years, albeit with the congregation’s blessing and assistance.

Official forms of care-giving during his tenure were largely in the areas of compensation, benefits, and recognitions of significant milestones in his ministry. For the first twenty-five years of his ministry at Second Church, there was either no standing personnel committee or a personnel committee in name only. Larson explained that with

\(^{17}\) John L. Larson, interview by author, Carlisle, PA, September 13, 2011. All information for this section is taken from this source, unless otherwise noted.
fewer staff people (less than half the current number of employees) many personnel matters could be handled informally; it also was not clear, however, to whom pastors should speak in the event of a personnel-related issue or request. One of the single most caring and supportive acts of the Session was when it took the initiative in offering Larson almost half the money he needed in order to purchase his own home. At the time Larson did not see the benefit of owning his own home. However, “the Session,” he says, “dragged” him into it. Larson was so reluctant to appear as requesting special consideration that he now admits, “If I had had to ask, it never would have happened.” The loan was not a gift; it was fully repaid, with interest. However, without the loan, Larson might not have been able to purchase a home. He credits the Session with taking the initiative in this process in helping to care for him financially in a way that has been a blessing in retirement. Essentially, Second Church was thinking about his future and being proactive in providing for him. Apparently, for the Session it was important to exercise foresight in caring for the pastoral staff.

Another expression of official support came in the form of a $1,000 bonus Larson received one year for serving as acting head of staff for six months during a pastoral vacancy. Once again, this extra monetary compensation was initiated by the Session and not by Larson. In this situation as well, if it had been up to Larson to request such compensation, it probably never would have happened. Despite having fully earned the bonus (and saving the congregation many thousands of dollars in the process), he did not want to be accused of being opportunistic or greedy. Consequently, he left it to the
Session to take the first step. Occasional notes of commendation from the Session, after especially challenging periods of ministry, also were received and appreciated.

Larson is especially grateful for three formal recognitions of his ministry during his tenure. These came upon the twenty-fifth anniversary of his ordination, the twenty-fifth anniversary of his arrival at Second Church, and upon his retirement. In each case, Larson received a substantial cash gift, funded by individual parishioners’ voluntary contributions for the occasion and many official accolades. When one of the anniversaries initially was forgotten, and that of the senior pastor was remembered, Larson was disappointed but did not voice his frustration. He says, “I didn’t think it was my job to bring this up.” The congregation corrected their oversight two years later, for which Larson was very appreciative. According to Larson, this was definitely a case of “better late than never.” The risk in such situations is that the congregation’s oversight might never been corrected and the pastor-parish relationship might well have suffered as a result. This incident reveals that Second Church desires to care for its pastors but sometimes needs prompting to do so and sometimes needs instruction in how to do so.

In Larson’s recollection the congregation did a good job of caring for him as a pastor, as measured by standards of the era and through official channels. However, in particular, Second Church excelled in the area of informal care-giving through unofficial avenues. He remembers fondly a surprise fiftieth birthday party arranged by some staff and parishioners. Unsolicited compliments from the congregation, relating to his preaching or worship leaders, also helped Larson to feel like he was making a difference. Small spontaneous gifts, tailored to his preferences, often re-energized Larson for
ministry. He once casually mentioned to a parishioner how much he enjoyed chocolate chip cookies; a few days later, dozens of cookies were waiting for him in his office when he arrived. These incidents reveal the congregation’s desire to care for Larson and how, when prompted, the congregation responded in ways that made a memorable impact on him as a pastor.

Larson also gives thanks for parishioners’ expressions of genuine concern. He remembers particular comments, such as “You look tired” or “You need to get some rest.” These observations sometimes gave him the “permission” he needed from the congregation to take time to recover or simply to say, “No,” to certain invitations. Larson was quick to add, “I would have said, ‘No,’ more often but I would have needed help saying, ‘No.’” In other words, he would have needed help from the congregation in prioritizing his responsibilities and declining assignments as often as he probably should have for his own well-being and for the congregation’s long-term benefit. Too often the person encouraging Larson to take the time off was not in a position to ensure that Larson actually could take that time off without neglecting what he felt were his responsibilities. There was a lack of follow-up communication on the part of observant and compassionate parishioners with the Session. Good intentions on the part of caring parishioners were not sufficient; some form of congregational action needed to be taken to ensure that Larson received appropriate time off.

In general Larson remembers the congregation as supportive and flexible, encouraging and generous. He is glad that neither his supervisor nor the Session kept close track of the pastors’ sick days, vacation, compensation time, or weekly hours. “I
always felt the freedom, if I was overwhelmed,” says Larson, “to take a few hours off” without judgment or recrimination. He did not have to account for every minute or keep rigid office hours. This gave him the flexibility to take care of himself and to work late into the night assisting an ill parishioner, preparing a sermon, or arranging a new piece of music for the choir. Without such flexibility, Larson says he likely would have sacrificed his health before forsaking what he perceived to be his duties to the congregation. In this same vein, Larson also highly values the help he received from the secretaries and other support staff. Their assistance enabled him to prioritize and accomplish more without feeling that he was alone in facing the challenge. These incidents illustrate that Larson was much more likely to perform self-care when he felt that an authoritative body, such as the Session or the staff, was both encouraging him to care for himself and giving him explicit permission to do so.

During his interview Larson did not readily offer suggestions for how the congregation could have cared for him more effectively during his tenure. After thinking about this for some time, however, he offered some feedback in hopes of helping current and future pastors at the church. First, it would have been helpful if the Session had simply insisted that Larson take his full annual vacation (he took a few sick days but almost never took his full vacation). In the early years, during times when Larson felt the congregation was understaffed, Larson was reluctant to take time off, even when his supervisor, the Reverend Mike Ferguson, strongly encouraged him to do so. Here, Larson notes that Rev. Ferguson was leading by example and taking his fully allotted vacation. When asked why he did not take his full vacation when his supervisor encouraged and
modeled it, Larson said that he was concerned that he would be abandoning people in need in the congregation, discounting the fact that the senior pastor would have been willing and able to provide coverage while Larson was away. When pressed on this Larson clarified his statement and mentioned his concern of being perceived by the congregation as abandoning particularly those people with whom he felt he had a uniquely special relationship, one which was not easily transferable to another pastor.

This clerical mindset reflects the bind that clergy often face; they are torn between caring for others and caring for themselves. Fortunately, this changed for Larson but only when there was a new head of staff and only when another associate pastor who helped with congregational care had been hired.

When asked if the congregation could have done anything differently to ensure that he took his full vacation, Larson responded: “If it was made obvious to me by the Session that they felt it was my responsibility to take time off, it would have been different.” This sort of explicit permission-giving by the congregation through the Session was vital for Larson. Given the Presbyterian structure of governance and decision-making, the Session and not simply the head of staff would have had to take the initiative in ensuring that Larson was caring for himself by taking his fully allotted vacation. This case study reveals that for dedicated and conscientious pastors like Larson if self-care is to happen, they need to know that the congregation’s highest lay leadership approves and even advocates their taking time off. Also, knowing that there is an acceptable plan of coverage in place during the time of the pastor’s absence seems to be an important issue as well. If these pastors do not feel that permission has been granted,
and that a system of adequate pastoral coverage is in place, highly committed pastors are unlikely to take all the time they need to rest. Instead, they will seek to provide what they perceive as sufficient care for the congregation at their own expense. The long-term consequence is likely to be poor clergy health in one form or another.

Larson described the Advent-Christmas and Lent-Easter seasons as the most difficult for him personally. He felt that there simply was not enough time to get all the essential work done that he needed to do, much less to take time off or to exercise regularly. Compounding these feelings of stress were feelings of guilt. Larson explains, “I never went through a Christmas or Easter without feeling guilty about people I didn’t get to see.” As a result he always had mixed feelings about these seasons. For a pastor to be ambivalent about these two high and holy seasons is a serious concern. Perhaps the Session, once made aware of the challenge he faced, could have worked with him and the rest of the staff to create reasonable and mutually agreed upon expectations for visitation and other important tasks.

The impact of unreasonable expectations on Larson was not simply emotional or spiritual. Larson admits, “I got [physically] sick every January.” The Christmas burden that Larson felt was so excessive caused him to enter the New Year weak, run-down, and with an energy deficit. During such times the pastor is likely to be too overwhelmed to remember to ask for help or might simply be unwilling to ask for help for fear of appearing to be weak, self-serving, or shirking his or her responsibilities.

Larson noted that the way pastors allocate their time needs to change the longer they stay in a given congregation. Over time deep relationships are built with more and
more people, and the expectations for visitation tend to increase. He simply had more
funerals to do and more people wanting pastoral visitations by him personally. However,
his other job responsibilities were not decreased accordingly. This reflection led to
Larson’s observation that maintaining adequate staffing levels is vitally important for
clergy care. Conscientious pastors will not take care of themselves if they feel the
congregation is under-staffed and spiritual needs will go unmet in their absence.

Finally, Larson reluctantly suggested that if the congregation really wanted him to
be healthier they might switch to offering healthier foods at church functions. As a single
man, Larson was often sent home with leftover food after events. Well-meaning
parishioners often sent too much food, and it was rarely the healthiest types of food.
Nevertheless, Larson felt obligated to take the food and sometimes to eat it—all of it, so
as not to offend anyone.

**Clergy Care and Pastoral Relationships: Present**

Channels of clergy care at Second Church have changed only slightly since Larson
retired. The congregation still follows the Presbytery’s lead in providing at least the
minimum, mandated compensation and benefits. It also has adopted the Presbytery’s policies
for Sabbatical and Family Leave. This allows for pastors and associate pastors to take paid
time off every seven years or during a family emergency. The Session remains willing to
follow the Presbytery’s lead in setting standards for clergy care, but it rarely initiates such
efforts apart from the Presbytery in a formal capacity. Making things more difficult is the

---

Presbytery’s practice of communicating its clergy support policies to local Sessions almost exclusively through the local pastor, which puts pastors in the sometimes awkward position of appearing to advocate for themselves. The self-defeating temptation for the pastor is to say nothing and suffer, rather than to risk appearing self-serving by simply reporting the Presbytery’s actions and recommendations for clergy care.

A significant development in recent years has been the creation of an active Personnel Committee at Second Church. This committee effectively handles routine matters of hiring, compensation, and other concerns as well as employee recognition. Neither the Personnel Committee nor the Session currently sees ensuring that clergy receive proper care from the congregation or that clergy care for themselves appropriately as one of their vital responsibilities. The Session does not yet insist on pastors taking all of their allotted continuing education, vacation, Sabbatical or Family Leave time nor does it inquire about these matters. However, when employees request permission to use these benefits, the Personnel Committee has been very supportive. The tacit assumption is that the pastors will care for themselves and that when they need help they will ask for it, with the congregation’s leadership responding accordingly.

Much clergy care continues to be provided to the pastors through informal means, as it was in Larson’s era. The congregation’s strong ministry of Deacons treats the pastors and their families much as they would any other people in “The Second Family.” The outpourings of support when a senior pastor’s father died and when an associate pastor went through surgery were heartfelt and extensive. Significantly, very little care is extended to the pastors in recognition of their unique role, responsibilities, and stresses as
pastors. While it is helpful that pastors are treated just like other people—basically, someone with the same human needs as others during times of grief and illness—pastors have additional, unique needs that stem from their work. A truly comprehensive approach to clergy care will need to reflect both types of needs that pastors have.

**Summary**

Second Church has many important resources with which it can enhance its approach to caring for clergy. The demographics of the congregation tend toward warm expressions of appreciation and affection for the pastors, especially from older and female members. The congregation’s many retired parishioners are in a position to carry out several simple but significant acts of caring, too.

The congregation already deeply values caring and includes it as an essential part of its call and reason for existence. The congregation esteems its staff, has a strong history of benefiting from long-tenured clergy, and is highly motivated to continue that tradition. Finally, the Session in general and the Personnel Committee in particular appear to be open to the idea of taking more responsibility for clergy care and taking some initiatives in this area, especially if the initiatives are budget neutral.
PART TWO

THEOLOGICAL FOUNDATIONS
CHAPTER 3

NATURE AND PURPOSE OF THE PASTOR-PARISH RELATIONSHIP
STEMMING FROM THE REFORMED PERSPECTIVE

As a member congregation of the PC(USA), Second Church is firmly rooted in the Reformed tradition of theology. In this chapter, several authoritative pieces of Reformed literature will be reviewed. The examination will reveal what these sources teach about the covenantal nature of Reformed ecclesiology, especially the relationship between the pastor and the congregation. The literature review also will include three contemporary perspectives on the issues of clergy health and fitness from beyond the Reformed theological tradition. The PC(USA) values such alternative and contemporary perspectives in that they may reveal new insights into God’s wisdom as well as reinforce time-tested Reformed understandings of the Church.

Reformed Perspectives on the Pastor-Parish Relationship

John Calvin’s *Institutes of the Christian Religion*,¹ the PC(USA) Book of *Confessions*, and the PC(USA) Book of Order combine to paint a picture of a ministerial

---
¹ John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, ed. John T. McNeill, trans. Ford Lewis Battles (Westminster Press: Philadelphia, 1960). All citations from this source include the book, chapter, and section number in this format “1.2.3.” In many cases I have also included a page number, if necessary.
relationship between clergy and their congregations that is mutually beneficial and in which pastors and parishioners depend upon one another for support and spiritual nurture. Calvin is the founding father of what is now the Presbyterian branch of the Reformed tradition. In his Institutes, published in various languages in the middle third of the sixteenth century, Calvin sought to outline a new understanding of the role and place of the pastor within the parish. Calvin was responding to both abusive clericalism in the Roman Catholic Church and to burgeoning anti-clericalism in the rising Anabaptist branch of the Protestant Reformation.

There are two parts of the PC(USA) constitution. The Book of Confessions forms the first section and contains the authoritative theological standards for the interpretation of Scripture, the formulation of doctrine, and the organization of the Church. Three confessions in particular—the Heidelberg Catechism in 1562, the Second Helvetic Confession in 1561, and the Confession of 1967—address the pastor-parish relationship in depth, while a few others do it in passing. The Book of Order serves as the second part of the PC(USA) constitution and is reviewed and revised every two years. In describing and prescribing everything from PC(USA) governance to local congregational practices, the Book of Order expounds upon the nature of the pastor-parish relationship under various headings. These three core documents of Presbyterianism reflect a Reformed ecclesiology that sees pastors as performing a vital and unique function within, and as part of, the local congregation.

---


3 Ibid., sect. G-2.0100b.
This chapter explores several themes regarding the pastor-parish relationship contained within these sources above. The first theme examined regards the dominant metaphors for the Church in Reformed thought and how pastors fit into these metaphors. The second is the Presbyterian understanding of ordination and how this understanding may or may not set the pastor above the congregation or even apart from other members. The third theme encompasses the responsibilities all Christians share and what privileges they can expect from one another as brothers and sisters in the family of God. The fourth theme stems from the third and focuses on the unique responsibilities pastors have to their congregation and what responsibilities the congregation has to pastors. Collectively, an exploration of these themes reveal the ecclesiological parameters within which any systems of clergy care in the Reformed tradition must work.

Calvin’s *Institutes*

In the *Institutes* Calvin describes the Church in many ways. He uses parental metaphors, community metaphors, and the image of a church as a flock. Each of those images reinforces the understanding that parishioners are not simply in relationship with God, they are also in relationship with one another. The caring nature of those relationships, especially with regard to the pastor, is the focus of this section.

First and foremost, Calvin portrays the Church as an essential nurturing companion to God the Father and writes: “For those to whom he is Father the church may also be Mother.”⁴ While in no way sharing equal status with the Holy Trinity, Calvin sees the Church as supplying “motherly care,” “nourishment,” “maturing,” and “guidance” so

⁴ Calvin, *Institutes*, 4.1.1, 1011.
that all Christians might “reach the goal of faith.” Apart from the Church as “Mother,” there is no protection, shelter, or spiritual nurture for the Christian. For this reason Calvin warns, “It is always disastrous to leave the church.” In this metaphor, all people in the Body of Christ are God’s children—the pastor, too—and in equal need of the Church’s tender care and support. It must be noted that in this metaphor, pastors are not parents to the congregation, since Christ alone is Head of the Church; rather, they might be seen as the eldest child with a designated responsibility for helping the other children to mature and grow in faith. Despite this unique role within the family, however, the pastor remains a child with all the same needs as brothers and sisters in the family of faith.

Consequently, pastors differ from other Christians primarily through their role in the Church but not in their ontological relationship to God or needs for relationship to others in the congregation.

A second way Calvin describes the Church is through the metaphors of community and fellowship. In a section of the Institutes dealing with the doctrine of “The Communion of Saints,” Calvin describes the Church as a fellowship in which diverse gifts, burdens, joys, and anxieties are shared. Unity in this fellowship is based not on uniformity, such as outward similarities, but on common commitment to Christ himself and on the human need for one another. Simply put, no one person has all the gifts

---

5 Ibid., 4.1.1 and 4.1.4.
6 Ibid., 4.1.1, 1011.
7 Ibid., 4.3.1.
8 Ibid.
9 Ibid.
necessary to be the Church; rather, it is only in fellowship with others that all of the diverse spiritual gifts are present and a local church can function properly.\textsuperscript{10} Recognition of mutual need and affection born of their common connection with Christ leads parishioners to concern for one another and to share both joys and sorrows. Calvin asserts, “If truly convinced that God is the common Father of all and Christ the common Head, being united in brotherly love, they cannot but share their benefits with one another.”\textsuperscript{11} For a Christian person to do any less than live in shared fellowship with others would be to deny those other persons a potentially deeper relationship with Christ and to the Father. Calvin explains that through this sharing and in this diversity, “a community is affirmed, such as Luke describes, in which the heart and soul of the multitude of believers are one,” referencing Acts 4:32.\textsuperscript{12} In various places, Calvin refers to this fellowship alternatively as the “Society of Christ,” the “Society of God,”\textsuperscript{13} and simply as “the flock.”\textsuperscript{14} All Christians are part of the “Communion of Saints” and “God’s children,” and as such each Christian is “one of the flock.” These speak of the deep, familial connections that Christians share with one another in the local congregation.

Encompassed within this metaphor of how church members depend on one another for mutual benefit and care is the understanding that without one another a church would cease to function properly and be spiritually lost. The pastor is not the

\textsuperscript{10} Ibid., 1014.
\textsuperscript{11} Ibid., 1015.
\textsuperscript{12} Ibid., 4.1.3, 1014-1015.
\textsuperscript{13} Ibid., 4.1.1, 1011 and 4.1.3, 1015.
\textsuperscript{14} Ibid., 4.1.4, 1016 and 4.1.5, 1019.
shepherd or owner, as these roles and relationships belong solely to God. Instead, as a fellow Christian, the pastor is “one of the flock”\textsuperscript{15}—albeit one with a special responsibility to the other sheep. The pastor is privileged to share the gospel with them and offers the sacraments to them. It is not, then, the pastor’s responsibility to replace the Good Shepherd, who is Christ and the true Head of the Church. Instead, the pastor imitates Christ by attending to the needs of the flock to which the pastor belongs.\textsuperscript{16}

Calvin uses the terms “pastor,” “minister,” “presbyter,” and “bishop” virtually interchangeably throughout his \textit{Institutes} and defends this practice as based on biblical usage.\textsuperscript{17} These varied terms do not in themselves give insight into how Calvin sees the role of Christians who were ordained to preach and administer the sacraments. For the purposes of this examination, the term “pastor” will be used for persons selected to perform these two crucial functions in the local church.

Calvin insists that pastors are not optional in the congregation; indeed, they are indispensable. One of Calvin’s favored descriptions of the function of pastors within the congregation follows the instruction of the apostle Paul. Like Paul, Calvin calls pastors “Stewards of the Mysteries of God,”\textsuperscript{18} (cf. 1 Corinthians 4:1). This description signals the high priority that Calvin places on the pastor. Calvin argues that the marks of the true Church are faithful preaching (and hearing) of God’s Word and proper administration of

\textsuperscript{15} Ibid., 4.1.3.
\textsuperscript{16} Ibid., 4.3.6, 1059.
\textsuperscript{17} Ibid., 4.3.8, 1060.
\textsuperscript{18} Ibid., 4.3.6, 1058.
the sacraments.\textsuperscript{19} As preacher of the gospel, the pastor offers an avenue by which people come to faith. As dispensers of the sacraments, pastors invite Christians to experience God’s renewing grace through the pastoral office. In short, one way people experience “the mysteries of God” is through the pastor. The pastor’s role, then, is bound intimately with the essential “marks” of a true church. Without a pastor serving as a “Steward of the Mysteries of God,” there would be no true church.

Pastors, then, are present in the Church not by virtue of human preference but by God’s divine order.\textsuperscript{20} Calvin writes: “He instituted ‘pastors and teachers’ [cf. Ephesians 4:11] through whose lips he might teach his own; he furnished them with authority; finally, he omitted nothing that might make for holy agreement of faith and for right order.”\textsuperscript{21} In Calvin’s view, pastors serve as an integral part of God’s providential plan to bring people to faith.

Calvin sees God at work in several ways through God’s institution of the office of pastor as well as God’s free choice “to teach us through human means.”\textsuperscript{22} First, pastors are one of God’s many accommodations to human frailty. Calvin says, “God, therefore, in his wonderful providence, accommodating himself to our capacity, has prescribed a way for us, though still far off, to draw near to him.”\textsuperscript{23} In much the same way that God

\textsuperscript{19} Ibid., 4.1.9.
\textsuperscript{20} Ibid., 4.3.1.
\textsuperscript{21} Ibid., 4.1.1.
\textsuperscript{22} Ibid., 4.1.5.
\textsuperscript{23} Ibid., 4.1.1.
gave the sacraments as an accommodation to a human being’s “sluggish” capacities, in order for people not to be overwhelmed by God’s immediate presence, Calvin explains that God “also provides for our weakness in that he prefers to address us in human fashion through interpreters in order to draw us to himself, rather than to thunder at us and drive us away.” Since frail humans cannot bear the voice of God, God speaks through human means—for example, pastors—as if using a telephone or electronic speaker system. The pastor is one of the utilitarian means by which God addresses people in a way that they can bear. Pastors perform a very practical and necessary function within the congregation. Calvin writes:

Because God does not dwell among us in visible presence [Matthew 26:11], we have said that he uses the ministry of men to declare openly his will to us by mouth, as a sort of delegated work, not by transferring to them his right and honor, but only that through their mouths he may do his own work—just as a workman uses a tool to do his work.

Consequently, in God’s hands, pastors are tools that God uses to help God’s other children mature and grow in faith.

Second, in choosing to speak to God’s children through humans—in this case, pastors—Calvin argues that God “declares his regard for us.” God could have elected to use angels or some other non-human means to speak to God’s children, but God chose human means instead. As a result, in much the same way that Christ hallowed humanity
by being incarnated in human form, God hallows humans through using pastors as God’s chosen means of communication.

Third, by using pastors to instruct God’s children, God teaches humility and tests human obedience. As humans, pastors always fall short of perfection. In Calvin’s thought, however, God communicates through even the most sinful pastor, so long as humans are humble enough to listen to someone who they know is flawed. “When a puny man rises from the dust and speaks in God’s name, at this point we best evidence our piety and obedience toward God if we show ourselves teachable toward his minister, although he excels us in nothing.”29 Here Calvin makes an essential distinction between the person of the pastor (always frail, flawed, and needful) and the perfect Word of God that God supplies and the pastor preaches.

Fourth, God uses pastors and their preaching as a means of uniting God’s people to one another. Rather than choosing to speak to individuals directly without use of a human intermediary, God has chosen often to give human pastors the role of discharging and interpreting God’s Word on a regular, ongoing basis as a means to unite people with one another within their respective tight-knit church communities. In so doing, God draws human beings to one another by necessity in a way that would not be occur if God spoke directly. “Nothing fosters mutual love more fittingly than for men to be bound together with this bond: one is appointed pastor to teach the rest . . . . For if anyone were sufficient to himself and needed no one else’s help, . . . each man would despise the rest

---

29 Ibid., 4.3.1, 1054.
and be despised by them.”

Much like towns without home postal delivery might gather together regularly for conversation at the local post office, so Christians must gather together regularly to hear the Word of God as it is offered through the pastor in worship and teaching. Indeed, drawing on Ephesians 4:8-16, Calvin goes so far as to say that the pastoral office holds congregations together: “This human ministry which God uses to govern the church is the chief sinew by which believers are held together in one body.”

By God’s design, all people in a church are in some way dependent on the role of the pastor and bound to one another by this common need.

In review, for Calvin, the pastoral office is instituted by God, essential to the integrity of a true church, and vital to the unity of congregations. Pastors are fully human, and in God’s providence God has chosen to honor humanity by using these flawed humans to promote salvation. Calvin remains clear, however, that “the power to save rests with God.”

Calvin variously describes pastors as God’s “ambassadors in the world,” “interpreters of [God’s] secret will,” and as representatives of God’s person (cf. 2 Corinthians 5:20; Ephesians 6:20). In each case Calvin’s language reminds the reader that pastoral authority comes from God and not by any virtue of the pastor alone. Pastors are not powerful in their own right but only insofar as they mediate God’s grace and message. They are integral to the human experience of God’s grace, arrival to faith, and unity through community in Christ. In Calvin’s ecclesiology, then, the pastoral office is

---

30 Ibid., 4.3.1.
31 Ibid., 4.3.2, 1055.
32 Ibid., 4.1.5.
33 Ibid., 4.3.1.
an absolute necessity: “Neither the light and heat of the sun, nor food and drink, are so necessary to nourish and sustain the present life as the . . . pastoral office is necessary to preserve the church on earth.”

While Calvin holds the pastoral office in the highest regard, he does not require pastors themselves to exhibit perfection. Citing and summarizing the teachings of the apostle Paul, Calvin argues that pastors at the very least should hold to “sound doctrine,” live a “holy life,” and “not [be] notorious in any fault.” Calvin specifically teaches that the requirements for pastors should be no different than for deacons. In fact, the requirements for pastors differ little from the duties incumbent on all Christians: “Every member of the church is charged with the responsibility of public edification according to the measure of his grace, provided he perform it decently and in order.” What is striking about Calvin’s treatment of the person of the pastor is how low his qualifying standards for pastors are. He expects pastors, as humans, to be sinners “with an evil conscience” and would not rule out a candidate for ministry despite known sinful behavior, “provided his wickedness is not open.” Calvin is writing at a time when many clergy were widely known for their corruption, and he goes to painstaking lengths to distinguish flawed

34 Ibid., 4.3.2, 1055.
35 Ibid., 4.3.12, 1063.
36 Ibid.
37 Ibid., 4.1.12, 1026.
38 Ibid., 4.3.11, 1063.
pastors from the divine pastoral office, arguing that God can work through even the most morally compromised pastors.  

Although Calvin intimately connects salvation to the pastoral office, he does not argue for the ordination of clergy as a separate sacrament in the *Institutes*.  Instead, he reinterprets ordination to fit within his understanding of the Church and the pastoral office. In ordination, pastors (and Elders and Deacons) are selected for service within the congregation and are not set above the congregation. Ordination does not transform the recipients into a distinct class of Christian or a higher caste within the congregation. Rather, drawing on his interpretation of biblical incidents of the laying on hands (cf. Numbers 27:15-23; Deuteronomy 34:9), Calvin sees ordination as a time of consecration, or setting apart, in much the same way that financial gifts are prayed over before they are offered to God.  Similarly, Calvin compares the laying on of hands in ordination to Christ’s blessing of the children. Without changing their inner nature in any way, ordination assures pastors of their acceptance and God’s affection for them.  Finally, Calvin sees ordination as a time when “visible graces” are conferred upon the pastor.  Again, this act does not change pastors spiritually but equips them for their distinct calling. The difference in a pastor before and after ordination is one of function rather than essence.

39 Ibid., 4.5.14, 1097.
41 Ibid., 4.3.16, 1067.
42 Ibid.
43 Ibid.
Calvin outlines parallel responsibilities for pastor and parish. The pastor’s responsibilities to the congregation begin with the marks of the church: offering sound preaching and administering the sacraments faithfully. They also include teaching, administration of discipline, and care of the rest of the congregation. The pastor also must refrain from taking advantage of the congregation financially, as was common practice among many pastors in Calvin’s day. In short, says Calvin, “what the apostles performed for the whole world, each pastor ought to perform for his own flock.” The congregation, in turn, is responsible for listening to the pastor’s teaching and accepting pastoral authority. Calvin feels that it is a church’s responsibility to support pastors financially and rejects the Roman Catholic Church’s practice of preferring independently wealthy candidates for ministry, so that they would not become a drain on church funds. Instead, Calvin argues for a system in which pastors and congregations depend upon each other for mutual care and support.

In summary, Calvin sees the Church as a community of nurture and spiritual growth for all God’s children. Pastors are selected from the community of faith to serve a unique and essential function within a particular community: representing God and mediating spiritual connection with God through preaching and the sacraments. Other members of the community of faith are equally gifted, and all people are called to

---

44 Ibid., 4.3.6.
46 Ibid., 4.3.6, 1059.
47 Ibid., 4.3.15.
48 Ibid., 4.5.4, 1088-1091.
ministry of some kind. In ordination a pastor receives a new role but does not become a new person. The pastor is fully human and needful of human support and nurture from the rest of the church. When a church is functioning properly, all of its members—including the pastor—are giving and receiving care and using their gifts for the glory of God and the building up God’s children.

The Book of Confessions

The eleven documents in the Book of Confessions do not speak with one voice on every issue of faith, but the three confessions that deal directly and at some length with ecclesiology and the pastor-parish relationship clearly echo Calvin’s thinking on these matters. They employ the similar metaphors of family, society, and flock for the Church. These particular confessions also have the same high regard for the pastoral office. They present the pastor as fully human and merely set apart, not set above, for service to fellow brothers and sisters in Christ.

Both the Heidelberg Catechism—written by Zacharias Ursinus and Kaspar Olevianus—and the Second Helvetic Confession, composed by Heinrich Bullinger, were published soon after Calvin’s Institutes had been circulated widely. Both reflect his influence, imagery, and treatment of the subject of “The Communion of Saints.” The Heidelberg Catechism explains that this doctrine means “first, that believers one and all . . . share in one fellowship. Second is that each one ought to know that he is obliged to use his gifts freely and with joy for the benefit and welfare of other members.”49 Here the Heidelberg Catechism reiterates Calvin’s assertion of the essential unity of the Church and

49 Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), Book of Confessions, sect. 4.055.
the equality of its members. The interdependent nature of church membership also is restated in the injunction that all members are to help and support one another mutually.

The Second Helvetic Confession incorporates the “communion of saints” in its definition of the Church: “The Church is an assembly of the faithful called or gathered out of the world; a communion . . . of all the saints.”[^50] This means that in Christ people of faith are joined to God and also to one another as forgiven and renewed people. It goes on to call these saints “Citizens of One Commonwealth.”[^51] This image signifies the shared responsibilities that Christians have to one another and not only to God, much like citizens of nations have certain responsibilities to one another as well as to the government. The Confession does not indicate that some citizens of the kingdom are more or less deserving of support or esteem than others. The emphasis in this metaphor for the Church is unity and equality. Elsewhere the Helvetic Confession lists other names for the Church such as “Temple of the Living God,” “Bride of Christ,” “Flock of Sheep,” and the Church as “the Body of Christ.”[^52] In each of these metaphors all members of the Church are seen as equally gifted (although in distinct ways), equally in need of nurture and guidance, and equally essential to the well-being of the whole. The Confession also states unequivocally that Christ alone (and not the pastor) is head of a church.[^53]

The three statements in the Book of Confessions that deal closely with the pastor-parish relationship are united on the issue of the high office and essential role of the

[^50]: Ibid., sect. 5.125.
[^51]: Ibid.
[^52]: Ibid., sect. 5.130.
[^53]: Ibid., sect. 5.131.
pastor. Like Calvin in his *Institutes*, Bullinger in the Second Helvetic Confession affirms that the pastoral office is ordained by God and that pastors are the means by which God “effects the salvation of men.” This is a high understanding of the pastoral office. The Confession rejects the title of “Priest” for pastors, for the only priest is Christ himself. In doing so, it also rejects any idea that pastors belong to a separate and higher caste of Christ-followers. Instead, following Paul the apostle and Calvin, the Confession prefers that pastors be understood as “Stewards of the Mysteries of God.” This pastoral title once again highlights the core pastoral responsibilities of preaching and administering the sacraments.

Just as Calvin made a distinction between the person of the pastor and the pastoral office, so the Second Helvetic Confession argues that God’s Word is not compromised by a morally or spiritually flawed pastor. Just like a master builder can work with even a damaged hammer, God can work through the preaching of even the most “evil” human pastor. Ultimately, the effectiveness of a pastor depends not on the qualities of the pastor but on the qualities of God.

In the *Book of Confessions*’ understanding of ordination, the act does not impart special wisdom or status to the pastor; rather, it has to do with both role and function. The Second Helvetic Confession views ordination not as a sacrament but as an “ordinance of

---

54 Ibid., sect. 5.142.
55 Ibid., sect. 5.155.
56 Ibid., sect. 5.156.
57 Ibid., sect. 5.166.
Essentially, a person is designated for special service. Likewise, the Confession of 1967 describes ordination as a matter of selection for service rather than elevation for honor. “The church calls, trains, and authorizes certain members for leadership and oversight. The persons qualified for these duties . . . are set apart by ordination.” This understanding of ordination simply recognizes potential and skills that already exist in a person.

The Confessions build on Calvin’s belief that it was not inappropriate for pastors to receive financial support from the congregation and that pastors should depend upon their congregations and vice versa. The Second Helvetic Confession quotes Luke 10:7 and explicitly states that “the worker is worthy of his reward.” Included in the obligations of a church to its pastor are the provision of “all things necessary for themselves and their family.” These forms of support are rightly given by the congregation and rightly received by the pastor; they are not meant to be declined. In this way, both pastor and parish are inextricably linked and depend upon each other, remaining accountable to each other for mutual benefit.

In the understanding of the Church presented in the *Book of Confessions*, pastors use their gifts for ministry alongside others who also employ their gifts for ministry. Citing the example of the early Church, the Second Helvetic Confession observes, “By mutual services they helped one another in the governing and preserving of the

---

58 Ibid., sect. 5.171.

59 Ibid., sect. 9.39, 258.

60 Ibid., sect. 5.168.

61 Ibid.
Church.” In 1647, the Westminster Confession of Faith was the first confession to overtly state that the responsibility for ministry lies not just the pastor but with all people: “All saints being united to Jesus Christ their head . . . are obliged to the performance of such duties . . . as to conduce to their mutual good.” This call to care extends not just to a parishioner’s immediate friends and family but to “all those who, in every place, call upon the name of the Lord Jesus.” It is important to note that the confession in no way excludes the parishioner’s pastor from this circle of care and concern. Over three hundred years later the Confession of 1967 reaffirmed this understanding that all of God’s people can be expected to use those gifts in the congregation and in the world.

Each member is the church in the world, endowed by the Spirit with some gift of ministry and is responsible for the integrity of his witness in his own particular situation. He is entitled to the guidance and support of the Christian community and is subject to its advice and correction. He, in turn, in his own competence, helps to guide the church.

For over four centuries, from Calvin’s Institutes to the Confession of 1967, the Reformed tradition has advanced the distinctive notion that every member is called to ministry and that that ministry begins in the local congregation and extends to the world.

*The Book of Order*

The *Book of Order* gives practical expression to the PC(USA)’s Reformed ecclesiology by describing in detail the organizational principles and practices of the denomination. In so doing, the *Book of Order* draws on the language of Calvin and the

---

62 Ibid., sect. 5.160.
63 Ibid., sect. 6.146.
64 Ibid., sect. 6.147.
65 Ibid., sect. 9.38.
Confessions in describing and elaborating upon the relationship between pastor and parish in the PC(USA). Since it is eligible for revision by denominationally elected representatives every two years, it can be considered to be more reflective of current thinking in the Church than either the Institutes or the Book of Confessions.

In choosing metaphors for the Church’s self-understanding, the Book of Order begins with interpreting what it sees as the Book of Confessions’ core definition of a church: “The church is a community of people known by its convictions as well as by its actions.”66 The focus in this description is on what the Church does in the world rather than on what God has done in the Church. In other words, the focus in this definition of the Church is on the relationship of people to one to another rather than simply on their common relationship to Christ. Indeed, a church is not simply in communion with a heavenly Christ, it is the present embodiment of Christ and his values. “The church is the body of Christ, both in its corporate life and in the lives of its individual members, and is called to give shape and substance to this truth.”67 The Church is best understood, according to this thinking, as a community formed by God for the living of Christ’s love, beginning with its membership and extending out into the world.68

In this understanding of a church, the pastor is a brother or sister in Christ who has been given authority by God and by a local congregation to offer leadership to God’s people. The Book of Order draws on the Institutes and the Book of Confessions in calling pastors an “ambassador of God,” a “steward of the mysteries of God,” an “example to the

66 Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), Book of Order, sect. 2.0100b.
68 Ibid., sect. G-3.0300c, 2.
flock,” and the one who “feeds . . . with spiritual food.”69 While pastors have a unique role within the congregation and specific responsibilities to the congregation, especially preaching and the administration of the sacraments,70 they are not in any way above the congregation as a result of this calling and giftedness. The “Directory for Worship” in the Book of Order explains that “every Christian is called by God to serve the church; however, God calls some person to serve the church in particular and specific ways in congregations.”71 Ministers are “set aside” for service to the congregation; they are not set above the congregation.72

The PC(USA) is somewhat unique among denominations in that lay leaders and clergy are ordained to ministry with virtually identical language.73 The parity reflects the Reformed understanding that all people are called to ministry and that there should be no hierarchy of individuals leading a church. People called to the officially recognized offices—Teaching Elder, Ruling Elder, and Deacon—share responsibility for leading the people of God in collaboration with one another; and together with all members, they share responsibility for the whole life of the congregation. Even the PC(USA)’s adoption of the same formal term of “Elder” for both pastors (known as “Teaching Elders”) and lay leaders who govern the church (known as “Ruling Elders”) indicates that the difference between

70 Ibid., sect. G-6.0202b.
71 Ibid., sect. w-4.4006.
72 Ibid., sect. G-6.0201.
73 Ibid., sect. W-4.4000.
pastor and lay elders is in function and not in status. All officers are to be treated alike in terms of respect and in terms of care and support from the congregation.

While the *Book of Order* reflects a high regard for the pastoral office and other offices of leadership, it maintains a “low” understanding of ordination. For example, the *Book of Order* explains that “the existence of these offices in no way diminishes the importance of the commitment of all members to the total ministry of the church. These ordained officers differ from other members in function only.”  

Apart from a few enumerated responsibilities that are the prerogative of the pastor alone, the pastor has the same responsibilities as other Christians. Indeed, all of God’s people are called to ministry through baptism: “God calls a people . . . to use the gifts and abilities God has given, honoring and serving God in personal life, in household and families, in daily occupations, in community, nation, and the world.” In other words, other than performing a few highly specialized functions within the congregation, the pastor is to be seen as no different from other officers or church members.

The picture of Church created by the *Book of Order* is one of mutual care among all participants in a local congregation. The pastor is an essential part of this community as worship leader, preacher, moderator of Session, and caregiver, even though he or she is not technically a member of the congregation. Pastors are members of Presbytery. Nevertheless, the predominant description of care in the congregation is one of  

---

74 Ibid., sect. G-6.0102.  
75 Ibid., sect. W-1.4005.  
76 Ibid., sect. W-5.6001.  
77 Ibid., sect. G-6.0201.
“mutuality” without regard for office or membership status.\textsuperscript{78} The “Directory for Worship” suggests that even Sunday morning liturgies can be a setting for care of all worshippers: “The community of faith engages in the ministries of mutual care in its worship.”\textsuperscript{79} Worshipping pastors, presumably, would be included in that circle of care.

As presented in the \textit{Book of Order}, both pastors and parishioners are to be caregivers as well as care recipients. The mutuality that characterizes a church goes both ways.\textsuperscript{80} Pastoral care, as understood by the \textit{Book of Order}, is not simply the care provided by pastors but “the support which Christians offer one another in daily living and in times of need and of crisis in personal and communal life.”\textsuperscript{81} Pastors are to engage in care-giving and receive the congregation’s care as part of a larger network of care in which “all Christians are called to care for one another in daily living, sharing joys and sorrows, supporting in times of stress and need, and offering mutual forgiveness and reconciliation.”\textsuperscript{82} In giving and receiving care, all participants in the congregation—both pastor and parishioners—support one another.

According to the \textit{Book of Order}, every Christian is a “minister,” and “ministers of Word and Sacrament” are entitled both to give and receive care. In other words, pastors can expect to be cared for in the same way as all Christians, regardless of church membership. Under the heading “Non-member Privileges,” the \textit{Book of Order} states

\textsuperscript{78} Ibid., sect. W-6.1001 and W-6.3001.  
\textsuperscript{79} Ibid., sect. W-6.3011.  
\textsuperscript{80} Ibid., sect. W-7.3004d.  
\textsuperscript{81} Ibid., sect. W-6.1003.  
\textsuperscript{82} Ibid., sect. W-6.3002.
definitively: “All baptized persons. . . are entitled to . . . pastoral care.”Pastors in no
way are excluded from receiving care from their congregations; and, by virtue of their
baptism alone, they are specifically entitled to it through all the seasons of their life. At the same time, however, pastor and parish have some responsibilities to each
other that are unique to that relationship. When a pastor is installed, the congregation
specifically agrees to encourage, respect, and follow the pastor. Moreover, the
congregation promises to pay the pastor fairly and “provide for his (her) welfare,” to
“stand by him (her) in trouble,” and to “share his (her) joys.” These are vows of care
and support that supplement the Presbytery’s obligations with regard to care of its
members. In the same installation liturgy, the pastor also pledges, among other things,
to “serve the people with energy, intelligence, imagination, and love.” With these
words, pastors pledge to care for the congregation of which they form part. In the most
recent revision of the Book of Order, at the time of installation both the pastor and the
congregation make an additional vow to pray for each other. Through all of these vows,
pastor and parishioner bind themselves to each other in a pact of mutual care and nurture.

83 Ibid., sect. G-5.0301b.
84 Ibid., sect. W-6.3005-10.
85 Ibid., sect. W-4.4006b2.
86 Ibid., sect. W-4.4006b3.
87 Ibid., sect. G-11.0103g.
88 Ibid., sect. W-4.4003h.
Summary of Reformed Perspective

Calvin’s *Institutes*, the *Book of Confessions*, and the *Book of Order* depict the Church as a community in which God’s children, both members and pastor together, can be strengthened and supported. Pastors perform a unique and essential role within the church community. Pastors, however, have many of the same needs for care as others in the community; the pastor’s humanity is not altered or lost in ordination. In baptism all Christians are called to care for one another, and through baptism all Christians are entitled to that care.

Therefore, pastors need to receive care from their congregations even as they conscientiously give it. Some of this care will relate simply to the pastor as a person with the same human needs as others, and some of this care will address the unique obligations and stresses that all pastors face in ministry. In the Reformed tradition, all Christians are privileged to be part of a community in which Christ’s love flows freely and mutually between pastors and parishioners for the common good.

**Contemporary Perspectives on the Pastor-Parish Relationship and Clergy Care from beyond the Reformed Tradition**

Historical and authoritative resources within the Reformed theological tradition, such as *Calvin’s Institutes*, the *Book of Confessions*, and the *Book of Order*, provide the theological framework within which Presbyterians must discuss the issues of clergy care and the pastor-parish relationship. These sources, however, do not contain all the wisdom that can inform a contemporary congregation’s approaches to these issues. The PC(USA) acknowledges that other Christian traditions have much to teach. Moreover, the core
theological documents of the PC(USA) are meant to be somewhat timeless; they are not
tailored to current circumstances in the way that a modern author’s book can be. The
sources examined below are some of the best practical writings on these issues. They
come from the American Baptist, Evangelical, and Pentecostal traditions. There is much
overlap in the way that these traditions view the Church, but they offer a broader
perspective in their prescription for more effective care of clergy.

*LIFE IN A GLASS HOUSE: THE MINISTER’S FAMILY AND THE LOCAL CONGREGATION*
by Cameron Lee and Jack Balswick

Framing the American Baptist and Evangelical traditions and perspectives,
Cameron Lee and Jack Balswick—professors in the Department of Marriage and Family
at Fuller Theological Seminary in Pasadena, California—offer *Life in a Glass House,*
which focuses on the pastor’s family and how it relates to the local parish.90 Working
from a systems-based perspective, they argue that the stresses that pastors and their
families feel stem largely from the multiple complex systems to which clergy and clergy
families belong—most importantly, the congregational system itself. They also argue that
any proposed remedy for poor clergy health must take into account the huge role that the
congregation and these other systems play in the life of the pastor and the pastor’s family.

The authors suggest that clergy families are not especially unique in themselves.
What makes the needs of clergy families unique is the role they play within the larger
congregational family. They explain that another family in that position likely would

---

experience similar stresses (although those families might react in very different ways).  
This insight is important in that family systems have a tendency to label as weak the portion of the system that manifests imbalances within the system. Many congregations tend to blame pastors’ families, when those families exhibit signs of stress. Lee and Balswick maintain, however, that clergy families are not solely responsible for the troubles they face and that they cannot be expected to be solely responsible for developing a healthy response to congregational stress. In this sense, they offer a “low” understanding of clergy and clergy families—in other words, concluding these families are like every other family.

Recognizing that clergy and their families cannot care successfully and completely for all their needs, Lee and Balswick assert that responsibility for clergy care must be shared equally with the congregation. They write: “The congregation’s responsibility to care for the minister’s family is matched by the family’s responsibility to care for itself.” They offer a vision of “shared responsibility” for clergy care. This vision is rooted in their understanding of the congregation both as “family of God” and as “Body of Christ.” In these images, the pastor and the pastor’s family are connected strongly to the congregation and yet are differentiated from it, at least in healthy pastor-parish situations. Differentiation, as they use this term from family systems theory, means

---

91 Ibid., 57.
92 Ibid., 282-283.
93 Ibid., 275.
94 Ibid., 277.
95 Ibid., 283.
the ability of a person to relate intimately with a system but to remain distinct from it at the same time.  

Lee and Balswick use systems theory to explain the many reasons why congregations are not entirely responsible for poor clergy health. They point out the variety of ways that pastors themselves frustrate congregational care efforts—and even their own self-care efforts—through acts of self-sabotage and “an implicit acceptance of the idealized expectation that they have fewer needs than other[s].” In other words, pastors need to see the ways in which their own behavior reinforces a systemic culture in which clergy health is difficult or impossible to maintain. The remedy for poor clergy health, then, is for both pastor and parish to see how intimately they are related to each other and for each to appropriately give and receive care. “The solution is not for the minister’s family to become demanding and parade their needs before the congregation. Rather, every family in the church must begin to develop an ecological sense of the unity of the body of Christ.” Neither clergy families nor other parish families are free to say to the larger congregational system, “I have no need of you.” Ultimately, each family is dependent upon the whole system for support and the whole system is dependent on each family for proper functioning.

Lee and Balswick point out that the “professional” model of clergy preparation might see this interdependence as a “liability.” They see recognition of this mutual

---

96 Ibid., 29-39.
97 Ibid., 276.
98 Ibid., 282.
99 Ibid., 283.
dependence of pastor and parish as a congregational strength: each family needs the others, and no family is cut off from the support of others. This commitment to “Oneness in Christ” is both biblical and practical. To care for, or even to study, pastors and their family in isolation from the rest of the congregation would be a denial of this essential unity in Christ and could lead to skewed outcomes and inaccurate conclusions.

Lee and Balswick’s scholarly yet accessible book makes a unique contribution to the discussion of clergy care, because it looks at clergy and their families using a systems-based approach that is rooted in a biblical understanding of the congregation as a family. Their analysis, however, is also valuable because they do not limit themselves to traditional family systems categories. They introduce additional concepts that further account for the poor state of health for clergy and their families. These include idealization, impoverishment, and intrusion. “Idealization” is the tendency for clergy families to be seen by themselves or others as potentially more perfect morally or spiritually than other families in the congregation. “Impoverishment” is the phenomenon by which clergy families become isolated from the non-congregational world and consequently have fewer emotional resources than other families in the congregation. “Intrusion,” the phenomenon that gives Lee and Balswick’s book its name, describes the dynamic in which clergy and their families have more fluid—and often fewer—relational boundaries than other congregational families. Clergy family life is like living in a “glass house,” in that the life of those families seems to be under constant scrutiny.

\[100\] Ibid.
\[101\] Ibid., 8.
\[102\] Ibid., 59-60.
traditional clergy self-care nor systems theory deals directly with these issues that pastors face. A potential weakness of their analysis, however, at least in a Reformed setting such as that of Second Church, is that it does not address the positive or negative impact of other systems to which the pastor and the pastor’s family belong, such as the local Presbytery. Nevertheless, this book can be a useful starting point for congregations as they seek to understand some of the ways that they can support their pastor.

*Rest in the Storm: Self-Care Strategies for Clergy and Other Caregivers*
by Kirk Byron Jones

Stemming from an American Baptist tradition, Kirk Byron Jones is a former pastor and current assistant professor of Christian Ethics at Andover Newton Theological School, Newton Centre, in Massachusetts. His background as a pastor enables him to write with knowing compassion about the challenges that pastors face, while his background as a scholar of social ethics enables him to write with authority about the patterns of pastoral and congregational behavior that contribute to those challenges. In *Rest in the Storm*, K. Jones suggests that if pastoral health is to improve it will come only when pastors cease their “self-violence,” in the form of physical, emotional, and spiritual damage “that committed clergy and caregivers unleash inadvertently on themselves in the process of caring for others.”

He acknowledges that congregations play an important role in clergy health but argues that “more often than not, churches are not knowingly or

---

intentionally abusing their pastors.” In K. Jones’ perspective, clergy are primarily responsible for allowing such abuse to happen to themselves.

K. Jones locates the primary responsibility for poor clergy health with local pastors. While acknowledging the power and influence of the congregational system, he asserts that the pastor remains far more powerful and influential when it comes to maintaining personal health and well-being. In other words, even the healthiest congregational culture of caring can be resisted by a pastor who is simply not open to such care. He goes on to use the example that when congregations have unreasonably high expectations of their pastors, pastors often collude with the congregation by willingly embracing those expectations rather than resisting them. The solution for K. Jones is not necessarily a focus on the congregational system, but neither is it more workshops for the pastor on time management or stress reduction. Adjusting the congregational culture or adding a few more techniques to the pastor’s self-care toolbox will not help pastors who fundamentally misunderstand their role in ministry and their place within the congregation.

K. Jones suggests that the biggest obstacles to clergy health come not from the congregation but from the pastor. He identifies three attitudes that inhibit appropriate clergy self-care. First is the attitude of “indispensability,” which is the mistaken notion

\[\text{\textsuperscript{104} Ibid., 1.}\]
\[\text{\textsuperscript{105} Ibid., 16.}\]
\[\text{\textsuperscript{106} Ibid., 3.}\]
\[\text{\textsuperscript{107} Ibid., 20.}\]
\[\text{\textsuperscript{108} Ibid., 27.}\]
that the congregation will not be able to function properly without the pastor. This attitude gives the pastor a sense of importance.\textsuperscript{109} Second is the attitude of “invincibility,” which is the myth that pastors do not have the same needs for rest, affirmation, compensation, and other forms of care as other people do.\textsuperscript{110} This attitude gives the pastor a subtle sense of superiority and divinity. Third is the mindset that K. Jones calls “Denial of Personhood.” This is where unhealthy pastors forget that they have inherent worth as children of God and seek to prove their worth through constant achievement, an activity which helps them to feel worthy.\textsuperscript{111} K. Jones argues that no amount of congregational care can overcome these obstacles that pastors might erect through their own internal thought processes. Clergy health will not be realized until clergy attitudes toward ministry and toward themselves change.

K. Jones points out a weakness in Christian theology, including Reformed theology. It focuses almost exclusively on the holiness of self-sacrifice at the expense of attention to the divine imperative to care for oneself. He writes: “Operative is what I would term an unbalanced theology of sacrifice. There are many Scripture references, not to mention postbiblical examples that tout personal abandonment as a necessary and continuous act of faithful service. Self-sacrifice is a hallmark of our faith.”\textsuperscript{112} To help correct this imbalance, he lifts up the example in Mark 4:35-41 of Jesus’ return to the

\textsuperscript{109} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{110} Ibid., 20.

\textsuperscript{111} Ibid., 34.

\textsuperscript{112} Ibid., 15.
boat to rest during a storm. “Three cheers for the sleeping savior,” says K. Jones. He uses this to show that compassionate and faithful people can take time to rest and care for themselves, without negative consequences to the people they love.

K. Jones ultimately has a high view of clergy as people—they are worthy, even when not “performing”—and a low view of ordination. Pastors continue to have the same needs as others in the congregation, and pastoral roles that seem essential—for example, preaching and visitation—can be carried out effectively by others. In other words, while the pastoral office is vital to the congregation, it matters not who fulfills that calling on a given day.

*Rest in the Storm* is a helpful complement to Lee and Balswick’s work, which focuses so much on the power of the system to impact individual behavior. *Rest in the Storm*’s emphasis on the power of individuals to take steps toward health can give hope to pastors serving congregations that simply refuse to acknowledge their responsibility for clergy care. However, a potential weakness of his approach is that clergy who resist the idea of self-care may receive no care at all, if the congregation is not enlisted to help in some way. At Second Church, this has been the case. A care approach that enlists the pastor and the parish equally and accountably in the process will be most effective over time.

*Ministering to Your Pastor: How to Serve God’s Servants of the Harvest*
by Tobias Awasum

In his book, *Ministering to Your Pastor*, Pentecostal evangelist Tobias Awasum places responsibility for the poor state of clergy health in the United States directly at the

---

113 Ibid., 25.
feet of American congregations. Awasum, a Maryland-based evangelist and church planter, hails originally from the African country of Cameroon and is rooted firmly in the African Pentecostal tradition. His ministry and his writing are characterized by a strong emphasis on “the Word and the Spirit.” He argues that pastors are part of the Body of Christ, not separate from it, and they require and deserve the same care as all other parts of the Body. He goes on to say that when congregations ignore this fact, the Body of Christ expressed through the local congregation suffers. However, when congregations act on this understanding the Body thrives, and the individuals who supported the pastor are rewarded for their efforts. Awasum further maintains that no amount of support from other sources, including those by the pastor, can make up for lack of congregational support.

Rather than blame pastors for their poor fitness, Awasum suggests that Satan is ultimately responsible for the decline of clergy health. The devil, says Awasum, is aware of the vital role that pastors play in God’s ministry; and seeing this, Satan works in congregations to undermine pastoral support. Awasum writes: “The local pastor is the leading candidate on the devil’s hit list. . . . And the devil’s bounty hunters are sitting on our very own church pews . . . launching fiery darts to undermine the pastor’s authority and his welfare.”

114 Tobias Awasum, Ministering to Your Pastor: How to Serve God’s Servants of the Harvest (Shippensburg, PA: Treasure House, 1997).
115 Tobias Awasum, phone interview by author, Carlisle, PA, March 6, 2012.
116 Awasum, Ministering to Your Pastor, xvi.
117 Ibid., xiii.
attitudes towards him or her. This leads parishioners to neglect their responsibility to obey God’s Word with regard to pastoral support. The devil, concludes Awasum, has convinced parishioners to be at best lukewarm in their support of their pastor; congregations suffer as pastors weaken or leave ministry as a result. Awasum links the premature departure of clergy from ministry directly to lack of congregational support.\(^{118}\) He says, “The laborers are few because we have not treated the ones we have in the way of the Lord. [i.e. according to the Bible.].”\(^{119}\) Simply put, congregations are not providing the level of clergy care that God calls them to provide.

Awasum’s view of the pastor-parish relationship is drawn largely from the apostle Paul’s image of the Church as the Body of Christ (cf. 1 Corinthians 12). In his rendering of the Body, the pastor is not separate and apart from the local congregation but rather is a vital part of it. Due to the systemic nature of the Body, poor clergy health eventually negatively impacts every other part of the Body. “As long as they are in one body, when the pastor is not given his due care, other members of the body will suffer.”\(^{120}\) Citing 1 Corinthians 12:18 and 12:25, Awasum notes that parishioners often think of their pastor as separate from the congregation; and in so doing, they create in the Body a division where Christ meant for there to be none.\(^{121}\) When congregations turn a “blind eye” to the needs of their pastor the whole Body suffers.\(^{122}\) Awasum goes on to assert that pastors

\(^{118}\) Ibid., 6.
\(^{119}\) Ibid., 16.
\(^{120}\) Ibid., xvi.
\(^{121}\) Ibid., 50.
\(^{122}\) Ibid., 3 and 49.
have at least the same needs for care as other Christ-followers and that perhaps some pastoral needs are directly related to poor congregational care of clergy.\textsuperscript{123}

While locating pastors firmly within the Body, Awasum, nonetheless gives them an honored place within the Body. He has a high view of clergy, arguing that they are absolutely essential for salvation.\textsuperscript{124} In his view, pastors are not to be seen as hired hands of the congregation but rather as servants of God; parishioners are not free to order pastors around or neglect what God has commanded in the Bible regarding their care and support. In this sense, pastors are in the congregation but not entirely of it; they are due a special amount of respect.\textsuperscript{125} When pastors forget who their true employer is, or when parishioners seek to usurp God’s authority in the pastor, pastors feel caught in a vicious double bind. Pastors know that they need to assertively request proper compensation and support; but when they do, they are making themselves vulnerable to the congregation. Awasum states, “Any pastor who dares to make such a request or allow a genuine need to be known risks falling into a barrage of criticism. He risks the wrath of church members who will call him ‘ungrateful,’ ‘greedy,’ or a ‘money lover.’”\textsuperscript{126} In the end, they remain silent and the Body of Christ ultimately suffers.

The way out of this bind is for congregations to care for pastors with at least the same level of concern as they would have for any other member of the Body. When this happens, pastors are free to carry out their unique roles. Awasum explains: “The key is

\begin{footnotes}
\item[123] Ibid., 3.
\item[124] Ibid., 35.
\item[125] Ibid., 32.
\item[126] Ibid., 9.
\end{footnotes}
for each member to understand his or her own responsibility and make it a personal duty to fulfill that responsibility so that the pastor can fully attend to the ministry of the Word and of prayer.\textsuperscript{127} Due to the systemic nature of the Body of Christ—namely, the local congregation—support from outside the parish, such as peer care or clergy self-care, will be insufficient. Awasum writes:

> Even if an infected eye in a body receives the consultation of the best optician, undergoes the world’s expert surgery, and receives the best eye salve for its treatment (helps outside the body [i.e., from outside the congregation]), it will still take the cooperative working together of the veins, the nerves, the arteries, the muscles . . . and the entire body to effectively achieve the healing of that eye. In the same way the solution to pastors’ many troubles and the key to their spiritual competence in warfare lies in the hands of a holy, praying, loving, serving, supporting, obedient membership. Outside help . . . is the treatment and not the cure.\textsuperscript{128}

Support from outside the congregational system may be helpful on a temporary basis, but it is not part of God’s design for a church and does not come with the promise of specific rewards for those who give that support. The rewards of clergy care for parishioners are two-fold. First, the congregation itself is strengthened. Second, those who care for pastors are assured of heavenly rewards, says Awasum. Citing Matthew 10:41, Awasum boldly states that everyone benefits when clergy are properly cared for by their congregations:

> “The preacher’s reward is also the sender’s reward.”\textsuperscript{129}

Awasum’s Pentecostal perspective is a valuable addition to the Reformed view of clergy care, especially the way he locates the pastor within the Body of Christ. Indeed, it offers a Bible-based challenge to the Presbyterian practice of precluding pastors from

\textsuperscript{127} Ibid., 90-91.
\textsuperscript{128} Ibid., xvi.
\textsuperscript{129} Ibid., 57.
congregational membership. There are some factors, however, which might limit the utility of this perspective in a Reformed congregation like Second Church. Since it focuses so much on the local congregation, it ignores the possibility of support from higher adjudicatory bodies, such as the Session. The language about the devil’s responsibility for the decline of clergy health likely would lead to resistance from Second Church parishioners. Consequently, more general language about the pervasive and corrupting nature of human sin, even within congregations, likely would be better heard and received. Finally, Awasum elevates clergy so high within the church, calling the role of pastor “the single most important calling anyone on this earth could ever be privileged to serve in,” that he deprecates the importance of non-ordained members of the priesthood of all believers. Reformed churches such as Second Church would not want to deny the inherent dignity of all work before the Lord.

Summary of Contemporary Perspectives

Although these three sources come from beyond the Reformed tradition, they nevertheless have much in common with it. All of the sources agree with the Reformed sources that regardless of their official membership status pastors are part of the Body of Christ and not separate and apart from it. Likewise, they agree that the role that pastors perform is vital to the Body of Christ; therefore, the people performing that role should be held in high esteem and their health and well-being are a matter of vital importance to the Body. Finally, they agree that the solution for poor clergy health must come from within the Body of Christ—namely, the local congregational system, which includes the

130 Ibid., 32.
pastor. The sources from the Reformed tradition also recognize that there is a care-giving role from outside the local congregation, which is through Presbytery; but in practice this role is not highlighted or particularly developed in Carlisle Presbytery, of which Second Church is a member congregation.

Despite unity on these major issues, these sources differ from one another regarding the degree to which each part of the body is responsible for promoting optimal clergy health. K. Jones argues that pastors are the weak link in the system and that they must be the source of the solution. Awasum argues that even the healthiest pastor cannot overcome the influence of a congregation that neglects its biblical mandate to support the pastor, and therefore the congregation must be more actively involved in clergy care. Lee and Balswick, argue that responsibility for clergy health must be shared by both the pastor and the parish. The most comprehensive approach to improving clergy health likely will enlist both the pastor and the congregation side by side as teammates in the process of providing adequate care to clergy and their families.
In this chapter, several biblical models of caring for spiritual leaders will be examined. From the pre-Christian era the example of the priests and Levites will be presented along with descriptions of how Moses, Elijah, and the ancient kings were supported by their followers. The teachings of Christ on care-giving for leaders and the experience of Jesus and the disciples in receiving care then will be explored. Finally, the teachings of Paul and other New Testament writers will be presented along with illustrations of the interaction between spiritual leaders and their followers in the early Church. Ultimately, this chapter will lay the biblical foundation for the provision of intentional and systematic support for clergy by their congregations.

**Pre-Christian Care of Spiritual Leaders**

There exist multiple biblical precedents for the provision of intentional and systematic support for God’s leaders by the people of God. This begins early in the Old Testament. Such care-giving focused primarily on providing food for priests and their families and on making gifts to priests at times of celebration.
The priesthood as spiritual leadership was an essential and necessary part of the Hebrew community from the time of Abraham, and providing for that priesthood was always seen as the responsibility of the people and not the priest alone. The first mention of the priesthood in the Bible occurs early in the story of Abram, before God changed his name to “Abraham” (Genesis 14:18). Abram’s kinsman, Lot, had been taken prisoner in the course of a prolonged battle among the multiple tribal kings of the region around the Dead Sea, including Bera, King of Sodom (Genesis 14:1-13). Abram responded to this affront by marshaling his own forces against Chedorlaomer, the oppressive king of Elam, and the other kings with whom Chedorlaomer was allied. Abram was victorious and rescued Lot from the enemy (Genesis 14:16). The king of Sodom came out to greet and thank the victorious Abram upon his return. This king was accompanied by another king, Melchizedek, king of Salem and “priest of God Most High” (Genesis 14:18), who gave Abram a blessing and presented him with bread and wine. This kind of hospitality was likely an expected priestly function. In Genesis 14:19, Abram responded by giving to Melchizedek “a tenth of everything,” including all the spoils captured in battle (Genesis 14:20).

This exchange reveals that even in this early stage of the development of distinctly Jewish faith and practice, the people—represented in this case by Abraham—understood that priests and their people had mutual responsibilities. Priests were expected to bless the people and offer them special foods. In turn, the people had the responsibility of giving a portion of their possessions toward the priest’s support. While Melchizedek’s role and

---

1 All Scripture is take from The New Oxford Annotated Bible, New Revised Standard Version with the Apocrypha, 3rd ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), unless otherwise noted.
authority are not described specifically in this passage, it is clear that Abram recognized him as a spiritual leader and felt compelled to support him in his ministry to God.

The next time the priesthood is mentioned is in the era of Moses and Aaron. Some form of priesthood, a group of spiritual servants set apart from the general population, already existed at the time Moses ascended Mount Sinai (Exodus 19:22, 24); but, it was only when God instructed Moses to build the Tabernacle and gave detailed commandments regarding its construction that a formal priesthood was established among the Hebrews. The priesthood was instituted at the same time God gave Moses the rest of the Law, which is the foundation of Jewish culture and identity. In other words, the priesthood was founded essentially at the same time the Jewish people were established. From the beginning of the people of Israel, spiritual servant-leaders were seen as a necessary and vital part of the community.

At Mount Sinai, God formally established the role and function of the priesthood within the broader Old Testament community. God singled out Aaron and his male descendants in perpetuity to serve as God’s priests (Exodus 28:1). The purpose of this was to ensure the continued existence of priests, overall reinforcing the importance of the priestly office. God further ordered that the people should make for Aaron and his sons “holy garments for glory and for beauty” (Exodus 28:2). This shows that God wanted priests to be provided for and to be cared for in a distinctive way that reflected the people’s esteem for God. These priestly garments were to be fashioned from the finest fabrics and precious stones available, and the materials were to come from the resources of the people themselves (Exodus 28:3). This was the first way in which God ordained that the people were to provide for the physical needs of their priests. In addition, God
instructed that the priests would be allowed to eat the best portion of the animal sacrifices that they offered to God on behalf of the people in Tabernacle rituals (Exodus 29:26-28). In this way, God arranged for God’s spiritual leaders to be both fed and clothed by the people they were called to serve.²

When God apportioned the land of Israel, God made special provision for the care of the priesthood. God promised each of the Hebrew tribes that they would receive a designated portion of the land of Israel when they settled it, with the exception of the descendants of Aaron and Levi (Joshua 18:7). The expanded priesthood did not live from the land but rather would be provided for in a special way, from a portion of the people’s offerings. These offerings took the form of a tithe, or one-tenth, of the produce of the various other tribes’ lands. Most often these offerings were food. In exchange for their service to God and the people, the priests of Aaron and their assistants from the tribe of Levi were allowed to partake of the best of the food and other offerings to God (Numbers 18:8-21). This is how God arranged for the people to support the priests and their families. Not possessing an extensive land allotment of their own meant that the priests were almost completely dependent upon the people for their support. Recognizing this, God specifically enjoined the people to tend to the needs of the priests in their midst. While apportioning the tribal territories, he instructed, “Take care that you do not neglect the Levite as long as you live in your land” (Deuteronomy 12:19). This is further proof that

² It should be noted that even before this arrangement could be put into practice, it had to be modified. Before Moses descended from Mount Sinai, Aaron had allowed the people to construct a golden calf, a false god, and Aaron led them in worshipping it (Exodus 32:1-6). This led to Moses’ requirement of loyalty oaths to Yahweh. The sons of Levi distinguished themselves with their courageous pledge of loyalty and subsequent display of obedience in slaying the disloyal (Exodus 32:26). It was for this act of fealty that the Levites were rewarded by God with the privilege of serving as priests alongside Aaron his descendants (Numbers 18:1-8). Later, the Levites also were given the special duty of carrying the Ark of the Covenant (Deuteronomy 10:8).
God calls his people to provide for the physical well-being and material needs of his leaders.

In the Old Testament, God tied the welfare of all the people of Israel together. God knew that there was a need for certain individuals to be set aside to lead the rest of the people in worship and other activities of faith. An informal priesthood was first recognized in Melchizedek and later formalized among the descendants of Aaron and Levi. Abraham set a precedent of sorts by offering Melchizedek a tithe of the spoils of war. This precedent was established further when God pronounced that priests would be supported from the offerings of the people and not from the fruits of their agricultural pursuits. As practically landless people, priests were totally dependent on the landed tribes’ support. Their provision grew or declined even as the fortunes of the rest of the people waxed and waned. In pre-Christian times, God’s spiritual leaders were specifically enjoined from being financially independent of the people they served. Jane Rubietta suggests that the Christian counterpart to the Jewish priest and Levite would be the local church pastor.³ While no longer offering sacrifices on behalf the people, the local pastor continues to serve as the person called and set apart by the people to lead them in growing closer to God and one another.

In addition to the example of the priesthood in the Old Testament, there are other pre-Christian examples of God’s people caring for a spiritual leader. The account of Moses in the Bible reveals people coming to his aid in a variety of ways. Moses’ story illustrates that God not only calls his people to provide general care for their leaders, he

---
³ Jane Rubietta, How to Keep the Pastor You Love (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2002), 23.
uses his gathered community to intervene in moments of extreme fatigue to help the leader to avoid burn-out and better lead those in his care.

A particular example in point is when the Hebrews battled against the Amalekites. “Whenever Moses held up his hand, Israel prevailed; and whenever he lowered his hand, Amalek prevailed” (Exodus 17:11). Seeing Moses’ fatigue, his companions, Aaron and Hur, provided him a stone to rest upon and held up Moses’ arms (Exodus 17:12). Through such lay-initiated collaboration and cooperation of this kind, the Hebrews defeated the enemy (Exodus 17:13). In this simple act of support, there is precedent for God’s people coming alongside their physically, emotionally, or spiritually weary leaders to “lift them up.” These acts of support are not solely for the sake of the leader; they enable the entire community (and congregation) to “win the battle.”

On at least two other occasions Moses was thoroughly overwhelmed by the burdens and needs of the people, and they stepped up to help him. After their escape from Egypt, the entire population of Hebrews had made it their practice to turn to Moses to settle all disputes among them (Exodus 18:13-26). Very quickly this responsibility consumed much of Moses’ time and energy. His father-in-law, Jethro, saw this and counseled Moses to choose able men from the population to serve as deputy judges to resolve all minor disputes and forward only the most difficult cases to Moses. Moses took the advice. Neither Jethro nor Moses felt that delegating some key ministry responsibilities to other leaders was a sign that Moses sought to shirk his responsibilities; rather, it made Moses more effective in leading God’s people.

Through sharing the burden of leadership with trusted “lay” leaders, Moses found relief and was able to focus on those matters that only he could resolve. At the same time,
the people received judicial guidance much faster. It is quite worthy of note that Moses seemed personally unaware of how ineffective his previous system was and how it was hurting both himself and the Hebrew people. It took someone else—namely Jethro, a man of experience and someone who knew Moses well—to point this out to him and to offer a solution. As anointed as Moses was for his pastoral and leadership role, he was not able to make this shift on his own. Everyone benefitted when Jethro took the initiative in caring for Moses, and the burdens of leadership were shared among the people.

At a later time, Moses was once again at the breaking point. Much like a modern burned-out pastor might do, Moses complained bitterly to God in his desperation (Numbers 11:10-15). “I am not able to carry all this people alone, for they are too heavy for me” (Numbers 11:14). God’s solution was to spread the burdens of caring for the people among seventy specially chosen elders. He explained to Moses, “They shall bear the burden of the people along with you so that you will not bear it all by yourself” (Numbers 11:17). This incident reveals that spiritual leaders cannot bear the entire weight of leadership themselves. When they are all consumed with being faithful to their task as caretakers of God’s people, they are likely to be blind to self-care solutions such as delegating less important responsibilities to other leaders. This incident serves as a precedent for the understanding that the pastor alone is unable to care for all of the physical, emotional, and spiritual needs of the people. The people themselves must share a major portion of this burden for the benefit of the effective function of the entire community.
Another perhaps lesser known example of biblical care of spiritual leaders is the ancient office of “armorbearer.” In Old Testament times, armorbearers carried the weapons and protective armor of their leader (cf. 1 Samuel 14:4-17). According to these traditions, armorbearers also served as their leader’s personal confidante and greatest supporter. In his book, Where Are the Armorbearers?, author Bryan Cutshall defines an armorbearer as “one who lifts up and bears up the leader until the job is completed or finished.” Cutshall cites as an example of this 1 Samuel 14:7, in which Jonathan’s armorbearer encourages Jonathan in battle and says, “Do all that your mind inclines to. I am with you; as your mind is, so is mine.” Armorbearing, then, is a ministry of helping leaders to shoulder or carry their burdens both figuratively and literally.

This ancient practice has given rise to a small movement of modern Christians who have committed themselves to serving as “armorbearers” for their pastors. Armorbearers International has taken this concept to heart and manifests this ancient perspective by “helping leaders and their supporters in the local church.” The duties of modern armorbearers might include taking care of as many minor responsibilities as possible so that the pastor might focus more exclusively on essential ministry matters. These minor responsibilities are not limited to those directly related to the church but also might include caring for the pastor’s family and personal needs.

---


5 Ibid., 43.


A survey of these and other passages from the Old Testament reveals the multiple ways in which God’s people cared for their spiritual leaders before the time of Christ. God designed this close and mutually dependent relationship between spiritual leaders and their people. Leaders were chosen from among the people and were set apart as priests, prophets, and other workers to serve the people. These leaders provided essential services to their people, especially spiritual guidance and atoning sacrifices. In return, the grateful people provided basic support for their leaders and their families. Ancient Hebrews did not expect their spiritual leaders to be self-sufficient. Instead, they came alongside their leaders, literally and metaphorically, and shouldered many responsibilities. In this way, God’s vision was fulfilled and all the people of God benefitted.

**Jesus’ Teachings and Practices with Regard to Caring for Spiritual Leaders**

The system of caring for Jewish spiritual leaders, especially priests, remained in place in one form or another until the destruction of the Second Temple in 70 AD. This system, established by divine decree thousands of years earlier and codified in the Law of Moses formed part of the backdrop against which Jesus worked and instructed his disciples about the proper relationship between the people and their spiritual leaders. Jesus taught that spiritual “laborers” were vital to his work and to God’s ministry and that these spiritual leaders would be rewarded for their service to God. Moreover, even those people who supported the leaders would be rewarded for their service. Beyond this, Jesus graciously received hospitality and support from his own followers and taught that his disciples should expect to be dependent upon people of faith for their support.
With the possible exceptions of turning water into wine and multiplying the loaves and fishes (John 2:1-11; Mark 6:30-44), Jesus did not use his divine powers in order to provide for himself or his disciples. Rather, he depended upon the care and hospitality of his own followers, especially his close friends. Instead of making food, clothing, and shelter to appear miraculous, he freely chose to depend upon the support of others for basic sustenance.

Jesus was a frequent guest in people’s homes. He often visited the home of Mary, Martha, and Lazarus in Bethany (Luke 10:38; John 11:1; 12:1-8) eating with them, receiving their anointing with oil, and sharing their sorrows. On other occasions, Jesus shared a meal with Zacchaeus in Jericho (Luke 19:1-10) and stayed in the home of Simon the Leper in Bethany (Matthew 26:6). While at Simon’s home, an unnamed woman anointed him with expensive ointment (Mathew 26:7). Jesus assured her—and by extension, all people who serve Jesus and his workers—that her act of hospitality would never be forgotten (Matthew 26:13). At least once, Jesus attended a wedding reception (John 2:1-11) where he enjoyed fellowship and food with his disciples and mother. He once also visited in the home of a Pharisee named Simon (Luke 7:36-50). These incidents reveal that Jesus enjoyed the company of his friends and followers, and even the hospitality of his critics such as Simon the Pharisee. He was in no way embarrassed about receiving care and support from them, and even expected such care—not due to his divine status but because hospitality was understood to be due all people in that time in

[8] It should be noted that in this instance, however, Jesus contrasts the distinguished host’s lack of hospitality with the extravagant outpouring of affection showered upon him by a sinful unnamed woman. Jesus rewards the woman with forgiveness for her care and the kindness to him (Luke 7:47, 50). This was Jesus’ way of thanking her for her support and respect.
Israel. In short, Jesus expected to be treated at least as well as anyone else when it came to his basic needs.

In addition to these isolated acts of hospitality toward Jesus, the gospels record the names of several other people who supported Jesus and the disciples in various ongoing ways. Many of these lists occur around the accounts of Jesus’ passion. Luke mentions “Mary, called Magdalene, from whom seven demons had gone out, and Joanna, the wife of Herod’s steward Chuza, and Susanna, and many others, who provided for them out of their resources” (Luke 8:1-3). To this list Mark adds Mary, the mother of James the younger and of Joses, and Salome, saying, “These used to follow him and provided for him when he was in Galilee” (Mark 15:40-41). Matthew also includes the mother of the sons of Zebedee to the group of women who supported Jesus and financed his ministry (Matthew 27:56). In some cases these women traveled with Jesus, stood with him even during his darkest hour on the cross, and went to the tomb to anoint his body. These are all examples of Jesus’ followers ministering to him in significant ongoing ways through providing housing, food, funding, and special honor. Jesus welcomed such care; and at least in the case of Lazarus, Mary, and Martha, he grew closer to his followers as a result of depending upon them for supplying many of his physical and emotional needs (John 11:35-36).

Not only did Jesus receive care from others, he wanted his workers to receive such care from other followers. Jesus understood that human ministers and other Christian laborers had an essential role to play in his work, especially after his

---

9 Kenneth E. Bailey, Jesus through Middle Eastern Eyes: Cultural Studies in the Gospels (Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity Press, 2008), 256.
resurrection and ascension. Even during his lifetime, Jesus taught that the number of people in need of help far exceeded the number of people available to minister to them. He counseled his followers, therefore, that they should pray for God to send more “laborers” to gather “the harvest” (Matthew 9:38). Clearly, Jesus taught the importance of God’s workers to his mission.

This is why Jesus also taught that these workers would be rewarded for their labors and should be provided for by the people they are called to serve. He did not require these laborers to serve without compensation or support. On the contrary, they would be rewarded richly in this life for their work (Mark 10:29-30). God was so concerned with the well-being of his workers that Jesus promised that not only would the workers themselves be rewarded for their service and sacrifices; even the faithful people who supported the workers would be more than compensated for their provision to God’s laborers. For example, Jesus said in Mark’s gospel, “For truly I tell you, whoever gives you a cup of water to drink because you bear the name of Christ will by no means lose the reward” (Mark 9:41; cf. Matthew 10:42). With these words Jesus encouraged his fellow workers and prompted people of faith to support those workers with food, shelter, clothing, and more.

Two of the synoptic gospel writers, Matthew and Luke, each capture a larger exchange between Jesus and the disciples regarding this issue of God’s design for the relationship between God’s workers and the people they serve. This exchange reveals that Jesus intended his disciples—and presumably, subsequent church workers and leaders—to be in a relationship of mutual dependence with the rest of the faithful. In Matthew’s gospel Jesus instructs the first twelve disciples to live simply, so as not to unduly burden anyone they serve. At the same time, Jesus required that the disciples be totally dependent upon
other followers for their support. He specifically prohibited them from bringing on their ministry travels any money, a bag for storage, extra clothes, sandals, or a walking stick—anything that might convey a notion that they were self-sufficient or self-supporting. Jesus wanted them to receive their food (and likely other forms of assistance, such as housing) directly from people of faith (Matthew 10:9-10). Jesus did not insist that his workers be able to provide their own support or care.

Ultimately, Jesus taught that supporting his co-workers in the gospel is a privilege that comes with intrinsic and extrinsic rewards; it is not a burden to be dreaded. Jesus wanted the people and his workers to join together in supporting one another. Jesus also taught that such support of spiritual workers was not simply an optional or charitable act. Rather, it was simply fair pay for the disciples’ work, saying, “Laborers deserve their food” (Matthew 10:10).

Jesus went on to describe the approach the disciples were to use regarding seeking support. Namely, support was to be voluntary and not compulsory. The disciples were not to force people to open their homes and provide hospitality to them but were to welcome it when offered. If such hospitality was lacking, they were instructed to move on to another town (Matthew 10:11-14). The message to the disciples in ancient times and to the Church today is that true Christ-followers will be ready and willing to support Christ’s workers even without first being asked by those servants.

In Luke’s gospel, Jesus sends out seventy additional workers with words similar to those he used in sending out the original twelve disciples (Luke 10:1-16). They were to bring with them no support or supplies of their own and to stay only in host homes, “eating and drinking whatever they provide” (Luke 10:7). This time, however, Jesus
concludes with a more sweeping statement about the right of spiritual leaders to support from the people they serve: “The laborer deserves to be paid” (Luke 10:7). In other words, the seventy rightfully could claim support of all kinds from people of faith. Once again Jesus taught that if such support was not readily forthcoming, those disciples could leave that town without an additional thought. In sending out both groups of laborers (the twelve and the seventy), Jesus stated that these workers should be treated by the people in the same way that they would have treated Jesus himself and that they would be judged accordingly for their hospitality or lack thereof (Matthew 10:40; Luke 10:16).

Jesus taught that his workers should learn to depend upon his followers for support, and he modeled this behavior himself. Jesus willingly received hospitality and care in many forms throughout his life and even in his final hours. During his lifetime, he taught that spiritual workers deserve to be rewarded and that they ultimately would be rewarded by God. He also instructed that those workers should not seek to be independent but rather should depend on God’s followers for their needs. To the extent that modern-day clergy are the “laborers” and “prophets” that Jesus spoke of in Mathew 9:38 and 10:41, those clergy can know that they are valued and that their followers will be rewarded for supporting them. Similarly, along with the disciples and all Christians who seek to follow Jesus’ example of living, clergy can know that it is truly Christ-like to expect and receive care from other people of faith, especially those whom they serve directly.

**Caring for Spiritual Leaders in the Early Church: Teachings and Practices**

Biblical descriptions of life in the early Church (through approximately 200 AD) support the argument that it is God’s design for pastor and parishioners to care for each
other in mutually beneficial ways. This is shown especially through the life and teachings of the apostle Paul and his relationships with the various churches with whom he worked. Such care-giving focused primarily on acts of hospitality, including food and shelter.

**New Testament Teachings and Practices**

In the first chapters of the Book of Acts the picture of the Church is of an almost utopian community, characterized by everyone caring for everyone else in the community without distinction. In Acts 2:42-47 Luke writes:

They devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers. Awe came upon everyone, because many wonders and signs were being done by the apostles. All who believed were together and had all things in common; they would sell their possessions and goods and distribute the proceeds to all, as any had need. Day by day, as they spent much time together in the temple, they broke bread at home and ate their food with glad and generous hearts, praising God and having the goodwill of all the people. And day by day the Lord added to their number those who were being saved.

This passage describes a newly formed and vibrant community of faith with an ethic of individual sacrifice for the good of the whole, absolute devotion to Christ, lack of organizational hierarchy, communal ownership of all things, and complete unity (cf. Acts 4:32-35). This picture of the early Christian community functions both descriptively and prescriptively and sets the standard for what life in a church can be. These accounts indicate that from the beginning Christians understood that in their new community of faith every aspect of life—burden, blessing, and joy—was meant to be shared by all in the community.

The New Testament contains several specific references to spiritual leaders being cared for by other Christ-followers as the Church became an established movement. This caring often came in the form of hospitality extended by people who opened their homes
to the apostles. For example, Peter stayed “for some time” with Simon the Tanner while Peter was ministering in Joppa (Acts 9:43). Similarly, while in Corinth Paul stayed for eighteen months with Priscilla and Aquila in their home and worked with them (Acts 18:1-3, 11). He also accepted the hospitality of Lydia in Philippi, after she insisted that Paul and his companions stay with her (Acts 16:14-16).

These acts of hospitality illustrate that it was considered normative in the times of the early Church for followers of Jesus, or “parishioners,” to provide for their leaders. The Scriptures do not include record of any occasion in which the apostles refused to accept this hospitality, nor did they argue that it was improper. Rather, these leaders followed the example of Jesus and welcomed the concrete support provided by others—which included food, shelter, companionship, and more.

In guiding the early Church, Paul frequently enjoined his congregations to support their local leaders in a variety of ways. First, he urged them to appreciate the absolute necessity of those who publicly preach the gospel so that lost people might come to saving faith. In Romans 10:13-15 he asks, “How are they [i.e., the unsaved] to believe in one of whom they have never heard? And how are they to proclaim him unless they are sent?” Preaching and sending are pastoral functions. Paul argues here that God has chosen to accomplish his saving work through pastors. This argument echoes Jesus’ plea that God would raise up laborers for the harvest (Matthew 9:38). The message is that without laborers, such as Christ’s workers, the human harvest of souls will surely rot in the fields—in other words, perish.

Second, Paul challenged members of the congregations not only to appreciate the importance of their leaders but also to show their leaders respect. In his first letter to the
Thessalonians, he said to the people regarding their leaders: “Esteem them very highly” (1 Thessalonians 5:13). In Romans 10:15, he quotes the Old Testament prophet Isaiah, saying, “How beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news!” This speaks of the outstanding spiritual goodness of people who share God’s love (Isaiah 15:7). Additionally, his letter to Timothy counseled that the elders working in their midst were worthy of “double honor” (1 Timothy 5:17). This shows that Paul taught members of these early house churches to provide for the emotional well-being of their pastors. In essence, house churches were to express appreciation to their leaders and build them up emotionally. In these passages he urges his followers to actively respect their leaders, owing to the vital importance of their work for salvation and to the joy that comes when the gospel is spread.

Third, Paul specifically asked these congregations to supply the basic material needs of their spiritual leaders and their families. On two separate occasions, in 1 Corinthians 9:3-15 and 1 Timothy 5:18, Paul goes so far as to say that if an ox is allowed to eat some of the fruit of its labor—quoting Deuteronomy 25:4—spiritual leaders ought to similarly be provided food and more while they engage in ministry among members of the congregation. Paul insisted that receiving support from the congregation was a right and not a mere privilege extended at the discretion of the congregation (1 Corinthians 9:4-5). Like Jesus before him (see Matthew 10:10), Paul states emphatically that “the laborer deserves to be paid” (1 Timothy 5:18). Support for God’s workers then is not, in Paul’s eyes, a mere courtesy or an act of ordinary hospitality extended to a stranger. Instead, it is a matter of justice: people working for God’s people ought to be paid by God’s people.
To support his argument Paul appeals to the congregants’ notions of sharing and fairness. In Galatians 6:6 he says, “Those who are taught the word must share in all good things with their teacher.” Similarly in 1 Corinthians 9:11 Paul asks rhetorically, “If we have sown spiritual good among you, is it too much if we reap your material benefits?” Here Paul once again argues that fairness requires that leaders benefit somehow when their followers grow in faith; to do otherwise would be to deny the importance of the leader to the follower’s success.

Paul expected congregations to support their leaders emotionally and physically as a matter of course. This support was based on the understanding that all in the community should share in the burdens and benefits of ministry, regardless of their role in the community. Ministry leaders were to be included in this family of care.

Paul, however, did not always insist on receiving this benefit himself. In relating to the church at Thessalonica he took no support from them (2 Thessalonians 3:8). He did not assert his claim on the Corinthian church either (1 Corinthians 9:12). These are isolated incidents, which occurred under special circumstances unique to those congregations. In both cases, Paul believed that insisting on his right to support would become an undue burden to the congregation, and he said as much in his letters to them. In light of Paul’s instruction in other areas of the New Testament, it would be wrong to conclude from these examples that Paul did not teach, practice, and preach the message that congregations should support their leaders in every possible way and that those leaders are free to receive that support as their due.

In addition to receiving the general hospitality of several early Christ-followers Paul also received specific help, companionship, and support from other Christians in moments
of duress or difficult ministry. He was not a stereotypical self-made and self-sufficient “Lone Ranger”; rather, he was aided in his development as a leader by others, including Ananias (during his time of call) and Timothy (in his later years). Ananias ministered to him and mentored him in the days when a very fragile and disabled Paul was still reacting to his call experience on the road to Damascus (Acts 9:1). Paul found in Timothy a willing student and a faithful travelling companion. In fact, they became so close that Paul treated him like a son and mentored him in the faith (cf. Acts 16: 1-5ff; 1 Timothy 1:2; 2 Timothy 1:2). Surely Paul enjoyed Timothy’s company and benefitted greatly from this relationship as he watched Timothy mature in faith.

In addition to Ananias and Timothy, there is brief mention in Scripture of other individuals supporting Paul as well. These include Erastus (Acts 19:21-22), Epaphroditus (Philippians 2:25; 4:18), and Onesiphorus (2 Timothy 1:16-18). While little is known about their specific deeds, the fact that they are singled out for mention in Scripture indicates the significance of even simple acts of support to Paul, their spiritual leader.

New Testament Images for the Pastor-Parish Relationship

Paul S. Minear has identified in the New Testament ninety-six different analogies for the Church. Three images, however, are most relevant to this study: the congregation as Christ’s Body, the congregation as a royal priesthood, and the congregation as a family. These images help to illuminate how the early Church understood the relationship between pastor and parishioner and the interrelationships of all Christians with one another.

---

The apostle Paul frequently refers in his letters to the Church as Christ’s Body. For example, in his first letter to the Corinthian Church Paul writes: “Now you are the body of Christ and individually members of it” (1 Corinthians 12:27). This sentence concludes a section (1 Corinthians 12:12-26) in which he presents Christ as the Head of his Body and members of the congregation as members of his Body, such as hands and feet. Paul uses this image to teach that a church must be led by Christ alone. He also uses it to illustrate the necessity and equality of all members and the interdependence of all members upon one another. By extension, in this image church leaders are parts of Christ’s Body just as all others are much in need of care. Minear observes that Paul uses the image of the Church as Christ’s Body in slightly different ways in his various letters, but the notion of the unity of the Body and the mutual dependence of the members is consistent throughout.\footnote{Ibid., 172-173.} Paul reveals this further in other references to Christ’s Body, as found in Romans 12:3-5, 1 Corinthians 12:12-26, Ephesians 1:23, and Colossians 1:17.

Peter, John the Divine (author of Revelation), and the author of the letter to the Hebrews refer to the Church in various ways as a collection of priests. For example, in his first letter Peter writes: “But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God’s own people, in order that you may proclaim the mighty acts of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light” (1 Peter 2:9). In this passage, Peter emphasizes the dignity and honor that comes with relationship to Christ and on the immediate access that all Christians have to God. Due to Christ’s sacrifice, all Christians are priests in the sense that they have direct access to God’s presence. Minear points out that Peter did not intend the Jewish priesthood to become the model for the Church. Rather, Peter saw the
Church as assuming many of the rights and privileges of the ancient priesthood.\(^\text{12}\) A possible implication of this analogy is that spiritual leaders in the Church ought to be provided for in the same manner as were priests in the Jewish tradition. All those who work for God should be honored and have their basic needs met by the people whom they serve, not as a privilege but as a right. There is further concordance in the mention of priests in the Book of Revelation 1:6 and Hebrews 10:19 and 13:15-16.

The third relevant image is that of the Church as the family or “household” of God. Peter, Paul, and the author of the Letter to the Hebrews use this image extensively in communicating with their people. For example, Hebrews 3:6 states, “Christ, however, was faithful over God’s house as a son, and we are his house if we hold firm the confidence and the pride that belong to hope.” The term “house” or “household” in this verse refers not to a building but to a group of people, usually related by blood or employment (slaves and servants), living as a single family unit.\(^\text{13}\) In *Metaphors of Ministry: Biblical Images for Leaders and Followers*, David W. Bennett reminds his readers how central and unique the household unit was in first-century Israel and Asian Minor. He writes: “The basic form of social organization was the household,” and “strong bonds of solidarity and loyalty tied members of a household together.”\(^\text{14}\) To be part of a household was to truly belong to an intimate network of social relationships and mutual obligations. In other words, the author of the letter to the Hebrews is urging the early Church to function as an intimately connected extended family.

---

\(^{12}\) Ibid., 98-99.


\(^{14}\) Ibid.
When Peter and Paul call the Church the household of God, they highlight two types of relationships. First, all Christians are related to God as God’s children; and second, all Christians are related to one another (cf. 1 Peter 4:17, 1 Timothy 3:15, and Ephesians 2:19). This relationship is established by virtue of having the same heavenly Father as parent and Jesus Christ as their brother.\textsuperscript{15} Drawing on Christ’s declaration in Matthew 12:49 that his followers were his brothers, Christians in some traditions—both ancient and modern—refer to one another as brother or sister. Bennett explains that the use of “the word ‘brother’ attests to the new spiritual family connection formed through common faith in Jesus Christ.”\textsuperscript{16} Use of these familial terms communicates the message that, in short, Christians are meant to care for one another in the ways that strong and loving families care for one another.

Since all Christians are related intimately not only to God but to one another, they are to care for one another in ways not necessarily seen in non-Christian communities. This analogy explains why Paul can say to the church at Galatia, “Whenever we have an opportunity, let us work for the good of all, and especially for those of the family of faith” (Galatians 6:10). Paul is not saying that Christians should not care for non-Christians; rather, he emphasizes that as brothers and sisters Christians have a special responsibility to care for one another. Neither Peter nor Paul singles out spiritual leaders as exceptions to this rule. They are part of the family, too, and similarly must be taken care of in the same way by the community.

\textsuperscript{15} Ibid., 84.
\textsuperscript{16} Ibid., 76.
The New Testament contains dozens of additional passages that describe exactly how Christians are to treat one another. These verses are known collectively as “One Another Passages.” What unites them is the common use of this phrase: “one another.” Collectively they describe how Paul, Peter, John and other New Testament writers wanted members of the early Church to treat others in the family of faith. Among these injunctions are the commands that Christians shall love one another (cf. John 13:34-35; 15:12, 17; Romans 12:10; 13:8; 14:13; 1 Thessalonians 3:12; 4:9; 2 Thessalonians 1:3; 1 Peter 1:22; 1 John 3:11, 3:22; 4:7, 11-12; 2 John 1:5), serve one another (Galatians 5:13, 21; Philippians 2:3; 1 Peter 4:9-10; 5:5), accept one another (Romans 15:7, 14), and bear one another’s burdens (Galatians 6:2). A compilation of the most common “One Another” passages is attached as Appendix A. Taken together these passages prescribe a community in which all members care for one another, admonish one another, encourage one another, and submit to one another in love.

Once again, spiritual leaders are not exempted from this community and are expected to be both givers and receivers of support. However, Rubietta notes that many modern congregations rarely apply these passages in any kind of systematic way to their pastor. She observes, “Unfortunately, the application of ‘bear one another’s burdens’ (Gal 6:2) often stops somewhere short of bearing the burdens for the minister and his family.”17 This reality is very far from God’s design for the contemporary congregations and even from the practices of the early Church.

At its best, the early Church was a community of caring in which no person was left out, including spiritual leaders. Peter, Paul, and other early leaders in the Body of

17 Rubietta, How to Keep the Pastor You Love, 19.
Christ welcomed hospitality and support from their people and encouraged their congregations to provide additional support to their local spiritual leaders as a matter of right. Three prevalent images for the Church as Christ’s Body, as priesthood, and as family have helped to shape congregational self-understanding and practices in caring for their leaders. They are images that reinforce the idea that all Christians should depend upon one another and that spiritual leaders deserve basic support from their congregations.

**Conclusion**

The current emphasis on clergy self-care, almost to the exclusion of pro-active congregational care, is not drawn from the biblical witness. On the contrary, the example of Moses, Jesus, and the apostles teaches that spiritual leaders are necessary to God’s work and that they should be held in honor by the people whom they serve. Moreover, the practice of the ancient priesthood, Jesus, and the early Church reveals that God’s design is for his leaders to be supported by the people they serve.

Moreover, Old Testament spiritual leaders, including Melchizedek and Moses and New Testament leaders such as the apostles and Jesus himself freely accepted hospitality and support from their people. They did this without embarrassment or apology as a matter of right rather than privilege. These leaders were seen by their people and by themselves not as outsiders to the community but as essential members of it. Indeed, they were seen as members of one body, one family, and one priesthood created by God. The collective message of biblical teachings and practices is that spiritual leaders are a vital part of the communities they serve, and they deserve to be actively supported by those people.
CHAPTER 5

IMPLICATIONS OF FAMILY SYSTEMS THEORY FOR CLERGY CARE

Insights from family systems theory can enhance traditional approaches to clergy care in a variety of helpful ways. It lodges responsibility for the relationship between pastor and congregation with both parties. It also addresses the root causes of much clergy stress, frustration, and discouragement and not just the symptoms of these phenomena. Moreover, it explains why self-care techniques often are sabotaged, either by the clergyperson or by the congregation. A comprehensive and effective strategy for clergy care incorporates both traditional and family systems approaches to the causes of clergy burn-out and turnover.

Overview of Family Systems Theory

Family systems theory was developed by counseling psychologists in the latter part of the twentieth century as a way to treat pathology in individuals more effectively. Murray Bowen was one of the founders of this school of thought.¹ Later, Edwin H.

---

¹ Murray Bowen, Family Theory in Clinical Practice (Northvale, NJ: Jason Aronson, Inc., 1993); See also Roberta M. Gilbert, The Eight Concepts of Bowen Theory: A New Way of Thinking about the Individual and the Group (Falls Church, VA: Leading Systems Press, 2006).
Friedman applied family systems theory to the lives of congregations and synagogues. In recent years, Peter L. Steinke and Margaret J. Marcuson have applied family systems theory to the work of pastors generally. Lee and Balswick have employed systems theory in studying specifically the relation of the pastor’s family to the local parish. This chapter collectively considers all of this work and explores the implications of family systems theory for clergy care.

Approaching clergy care with a family systems paradigm means changing the way relationships in the congregation are viewed, including the relationship between pastor and congregation. It begins with seeing the local congregation as a family. Lee and Balswick write: “The local congregation should be considered as a family. This is not just a metaphor, because the psychological and social principles that apply to nuclear families apply to church families as well.” Understanding the parish as family is supported not only by the evidence of social science but also by the descriptions of the Church in the Bible. Lee and Balswick note the many times that Christians are referred to as “sons,” “daughters,” “brothers,” and “members of God’s household.” Congregations are essentially large, extended families formed by God.

---


4 Lee and Balswick, Life in a Glass House.

5 Ibid., 8.

6 Ibid., 58.
Only when a church is seen as a family can the various members of the congregation be understood, including the pastor. Lee and Balswick explain, “Humans are social beings and must be understood in terms of their social relationships. A pastor cannot be fully known or understood when considered in isolation.”

Steinke adds, “Systems thinking is basically a way of thinking about life as all of a piece.”

When the church is seen as a family system, the problems with individuals and among individuals suddenly come into focus.

Traditional approaches to understanding groups see groups as collections of individuals, whereas in systems thinking individuals are seen as integral parts of the whole. In traditional thinking one studies individual parts to draw conclusions about the whole; in systems thinking, one studies the whole to understand the individual parts. Traditional, individualistic approaches cannot fully explain how the whole can be greater than the sum of the parts. Family systems theory begins with the assumption that the whole is always greater than the sum of the parts. In other words, things happen in groups that never would happen if the same number of individuals were kept in isolation from one another. In fact, systems theory teaches that the nature of the parts themselves changes when they come into contact with the whole, and studying people in isolation is useless if the group is not examined as well. Systems theory predicts that investments in clergy self-care, without addressing what is going in the larger congregational system—which includes the pastor—will be unproductive in the long term.

---

7 Ibid., 23.
8 Steinke, *Healthy Congregations*, 3.
The essence of systems theory, says Friedman, is the observation that “components do not function according to their ‘nature’ but to their position in the network,”\(^9\) even a human network. The classic example of this is the alcoholic who can maintain sobriety while in rehab but is unable to do so when back with his or her family. The difference in the alcoholic’s behavior only can be explained in terms of a change in role within the family. Systems theory begins with the assumption that responsibility for dis-ease or pathology manifesting in an individual resides not with the individuals themselves but in the ways the system of relationships to which the individual belongs plays out.

Systems theory assumes that there are at least two parts to any relationship and that the addition of new parties affects all the interrelationships in some way. In other words, it takes two to form a relationship; and, both the nature of this relational dance and the dancers themselves are impacted each time someone new comes onto the dance floor. In this model, interpersonal conflict is explained not as a matter of someone being right and someone being wrong but as the system trying to address an imbalance in its internal dynamics, either in ways that are healthy or unhealthy for the people who are part of that system. Systems theory declines to choose sides or blame individuals in the system for any particular pathology in the system, finding assignments of blame to be both simplistic and unhelpful.

In traditional counseling, a therapist generally works only with the person who comes in and asks for help and only with people who identify themselves as ill or needing help. In a systems-based approach, because it looks at the bigger organism to which

\(^{9}\) Friedman, *Generation*, 15.
individuals belong, the counselor can work with any “healthy” member of the group and still see positive results. 10 Changes in one person inevitably lead to changes in others. As Steinke has said, as long as people are in a system, “you can never make only one change. Change here creates change there.” 11 Instead of the focus being on the “sickest” person or the person with the most severe symptoms, the focus in a systems approach to counseling can be on the person who is most likely to effect change in the system. In short, the difference between the two approaches is not primarily in how many people are in the room during counseling; the difference is in “where the focus is placed: in a person or in the system.” 12

Traditional approaches to clergy care tend to treat the pastor in isolation, away from the congregation. However, systems theory understands how a pastor and a congregation are connected and explains why some of the phenomena of clergy burn-out, frustration, and turnover are a matter for everyone to care about. “A problem in the ‘flock’ can show up in the burn-out of its ‘shepherd.’” 13 The reverse is true, too. A problem in the shepherd—for example, the pastor—inevitably can show up in the dysfunction or ill health of the flock or congregation. Systems theory teaches that sick pastors may tend to “infect” their congregations over time and that healthy pastors may tend to “heal” congregations over time due to their positive influence and example.

10 Ibid., 22.

11 Steinke, Congregational Leadership, 79.

12 Friedman, Generation, 22.

13 Ibid., 13.
When clergy “fail” due to burn-out, divorce, or something else, congregations rarely look at themselves and ask, “How did we contribute to this?” or “How could we have helped to prevent this failure, tragedy, or loss?” When these questions are not asked, a new clergyperson likely will face the same challenges that led to the predecessor’s early departure. Systems theory teaches that everyone who cares about effective ministry will look more deeply whenever there is clergy turnover.

In traditional approaches to clergy care, the tendency is to locate all the causes of clergy turnover within the clergyperson; a systems approach, however, is likely to lead to a different set of conclusions. An example from everyday life can help to provide clarity here. When a tire blows prematurely on a car, in rare cases the tire itself is defective; more often, however, something else led to the tire’s premature failure. A good mechanic will check the alignment of the car, search for nails in the blown tire, find out how much air pressure was in the tire, and ask drivers about their driving habits before putting a new tire on and allowing the owner to drive away. Replacing a tire without using a systems approach to investigate the blow-out could well be a waste of time and money in the long run. For example, yet another new tire likely would be needed in a matter of a few miles if the real problem was in the car’s alignment rather than in the tire itself. Congregations who simply replace “defective” pastors without looking at the larger system that burns them out might miss the root causes contributing to the “failure” and waste valuable human ministry resources. Replacing pastors who leave prematurely or are forced to leave is expensive in terms of time, money, and lost ministry opportunities. Practices of good stewardship would dictate that congregations do everything they can to find the true source of difficulty when pastor-parish relationships fail.
Five Fundamental Concepts of Systems Theory

Friedman has identified five particular concepts of systems theory as most relevant for the life of congregations. The first is “identified patient.” This concept refers to the need to be clear about whom or what is the focus of care or analysis. In systems theory, the person who manifests symptoms often is not the source of the problem. Rather, the system as a whole is in need of care. In troubled congregations, the identified patient is often the pastor when the true patient is the congregational system that is making the pastor “sick.” The second concept is “homeostasis.” This concept refers to the understanding that all systems seek balance or homeostasis whenever change is introduced into the system. An infant’s crib mobile is the most commonly used illustration for homeostasis in a system. When one portion of it is moved, other portions of the mobile may move in an opposite direction to maintain equilibrium. Homeostasis can explain why lasting change is so difficult to achieve in a system and why clergy self-care often is resisted.

The third concept is “differentiation.” This concept refers to the observation that people function on a continuum of separation and enmeshment in relationship to the systems to which they belong. In congregations, pastors’ level of differentiation, or separation, determines their ability to react responsibly and thoughtfully rather than reactively and emotionally in stressful situations. The fourth concept is that of “extended family.” This is the observation that the family systems to which pastors belong includes both active living members of their current family as well as previous generations of the

---

14 Ibid.
pastor’s family and even previous generations in the congregational “family.” In other words, there is usually much more to a system than what initially is seen on the surface.

The fifth concept essential to systems theory and relevant to congregational life is that of “emotional triangles.” This refers to the tendency of any two parts of a system, when they become uncomfortable with each other, to enlist a third person or focus on a third person as either the source of or the solution to their problem in hopes of restoring equilibrium or homeostasis to the primary relationship. A classic church-based example of this concept is one parishioner going to another parishioner to complain about the pastor.

**Identified Patient: Implications for Clergy Care**

Traditional approaches to improving poor clergy health identify the pastor as the source of the problem and the solution to the problem. The assumption in this approach is that if the pastor simply knew more self-care techniques or employed them more effectively, burn-out would be avoided. If a pastor is unable to use these techniques to effectively manage stress, that pastor is seen as a failure (at least in this one area of ministry). In a systems approach, however, when the pastor begins to experience stress or burn-out, the whole congregational system is examined. Approaches to medicine can help to explain why this is so. Friedman says, “Trying to ‘cure’ a person in isolation from his or her [system], says family [systems] theory, is as misdirected, and ultimately ineffective, as transplanting a healthy organ into a body whose imbalanced chemistry will destroy the new one as it did the old.” In this same vein, no doctor would “blame” the

---

15 Ibid., 35.
16 Ibid., 20.
original failed organ for its own demise or insist that it should have taken better care of itself. Instead, a wise doctor assumes that a possible combination of factors—some in the organ, and some in the body—were responsible for the failure.

Likewise, in a systems approach, when a pastor burns out the congregation is encouraged to look at its own internal interactions and those with the pastor to find the sources of stress. The assumption of systems theory is that burn-out is largely a symptom of a system of interrelationships that burns people out, despite their best efforts at self-care. Consequently, when a pastor is in crisis, warning alarms should sound throughout the entire congregation. The pastor’s crisis should trigger not simply personal time off for the pastor but a system-wide examination of the stresses and strains the system places on the pastor or those that pastors place on themselves.

As doctors remind people regularly, viruses need hosts. Steinke asserts, “Agents of disease are not causes of disease. By themselves, pathogens are not able to induce sickness. All pathogens need a host cell to arouse the disease process.” Similarly, systems theory teaches that pastors are rarely sick in themselves. The pathology of the systems to which pastors belong finds in them a willing or vulnerable host; pastors are sick largely due to their interactions within a larger system that is itself dysfunctional. Efforts to explain pastoral burn-out by saying that the pastor is simply unable to manage a schedule effectively or to explain church conflict by blaming individual parishioners is scrupulously avoided in systems theory. This is not because it is never true that one

---

17 Steinke, Healthy Congregations, 19.
person is largely responsible for a problem, but because labeling a person as the single source of the problem is not helpful for resolving it.

In labeling a person a victim or the culprit to a conflict, the other parties begin to ignore their responsibility for the dysfunction. In fact, the more focus there is on individual responsibility for the problem the less likely an effective and long-lasting solution will be found. Marcuson suggests avoiding the question of “Why are they doing this to me?” and instead advocates exploring this one: “What might be going on here?”18 This is not to say that in systems theory individuals, including pastors, do not accept personal and individual responsibility for personal stress management or any dysfunction identified within the system or congregation. The individual comes into focus as each person asks, “What is my part in the problem?”19 In systems theory, all parts of the system share responsibility for the problem and for finding the solution.

Scripture provides a helpful metaphor for this particular aspect of systems theory. Paul describes a church as a “body” with all the parts or “members” and says they are intimately interrelated, in that all feel pain together and all rejoice together (1 Corinthians 12). If a part of a body were exhibiting symptoms of sickness, a doctor would not cut off the infected part in order to treat it; rather, the doctor would examine the whole body and seek to identify and treat the causes of the illness, not just the symptoms. Similarly, if a part of the congregation is sick, such as the pastor, the whole church needs to be brought under a special care and not just the person who is experiencing symptoms. By

---

18 Marcuson, Leaders Who Last, 59.

19 Ibid., 3.
identifying the patient as the system, rather than the individual (the pastor), it is much more likely the whole system (the congregation) will get well.

**Homeostasis: Implications for Clergy Care**

The concept of homeostasis is quite helpful for explaining at least two phenomena that traditional approaches to clergy care fail to address: coping and sabotage. The concept of homeostasis says that pathology or dysfunction is the result of imbalance in a system and the system’s consequent attempts to restore equilibrium to the system. When conflict or stress arises in a congregation, the assumption in systems theory is that it has been caused by imbalance; a new, and hopefully healthier, balance for all involved is the desired solution. The concept of homeostasis is based on the ideas that all the parts of a system are interdependent and that changing one part of the system necessarily will lead to changes in other parts of the system. Marcuson writes:

> Natural systems maintain themselves. If you stretch a rubber band, when you let it go, it returns to its original size. . . . Human systems, too, both families and larger groups, achieve a certain balance over time. . . . When one part makes a change, even a positive change, it upsets the balance. The other parts will try to restore the balance. . . . Churches also have their own balance. You never really get away with leadership: when you begin to initiate change, it upsets the balance, which results in a scramble to regain the balance.²⁰

The concept of homeostasis helps to see that symptoms of clergy stress—such as excessive drinking, overwork, or even extramarital affairs—may be attempts by the clergyperson to cope with imbalances in the system. When outer forces (such as the death of a beloved young person in the congregation) impact a system, the pastor often personally assumes much of the stress and anxiety of the congregation, trying to maintain

²⁰Ibid., 12.
balance in the system by taking that burden from others. As a consequence, however, that pastor then looks for ways to off-load that additional stress. Too often those coping outlets are unhealthy. When those outlets are discovered by the congregation, the pastor frequently is labeled as morally weak or unfit to minister; ironically, the would-be rescuer (the pastor) is seen as the source of the congregation’s problems.

When congregations see clergy engaging in unhealthy coping behavior, systems theory cautions them against simply criticizing the behavior. Instead, congregants might ask, “Why is our pastor feeling that such behavior is necessary? Is there an imbalance in our system of ministry the pastor is absorbing or unconsciously trying to correct?” Treating the symptoms without seeking to address the underlying imbalances likely will fail. Either the pastor will leave or the imbalance simply will manifest itself in new ways.

The concept of homeostasis also helps to explain why traditional clergy self-care techniques are often unsuccessful. Frequently, they meet with sabotage from the pastor, from the system, or from both. When pastors begin to assert themselves in healthy ways, such as by taking their fully allotted vacations, the system is impacted. New costs might be associated with hiring substitute clergy. Church leaders might have to wait longer for guidance. The pastor’s absence might be felt more acutely during times of bereavement or illness. As a result, the system itself might conspire to sabotage the pastor’s vacation. Pulpit supply funds suddenly may be scarce; church leaders may insist on emergency meetings in order to get the pastor’s attention; parishioners may call the pastor at home for care, apologizing for the intrusion, but interrupting the vacation nonetheless. In other words, when a pastor starts effective personal care, resistance and sabotage are likely phenomena.
Many times, the sabotage comes from pastors themselves. They volunteer to return a week early from much needed rest in order to preach, to attend a meeting, or to conduct a funeral. So great can be pastoral eagerness to address the imbalance in the system, that they refuse to commit to healthy practices of self-care overall. Steinke explains, “Almost instinctively, we either resist change or reduce its shock by restoring the familiar, making a situation ‘like home.’” Unfortunately, the “home” (or homeostasis) to which otherwise healthy pastors often seek to return is a sick ward. Within this dynamic, any initiatives that clergy take in self-care can be met by resistance or sabotage as the system tries to restore equilibrium.

Once again, Paul’s image of a church as a body is helpful for understanding the concept of homeostasis. The human body is quite adept at maintaining its internal temperature within a degree or so of 98.6. Through sweating and shivering, normal variations in temperature are addressed. When these techniques are insufficient, the body may move toward extreme defense mechanisms such as shutting down entire organs (shock) or ceasing blood flow to limbs (hypothermia). In a like manner, congregations may go to extreme lengths to avoid “heating up” or “cooling off” in ministry. It is a perseveration technique. Congregations might begin to resist new initiatives that lead to rapid growth in member numbers or a new pastoral vision leading to changes in funding priorities. When pastors seek to provide better self-care for themselves, this will change the congregational dynamics in some way. Pastors need to anticipate how the

---


congregational body might react defensively and be ready with a strategy to respond to those reactions.

**Differentiation: Implications for Clergy Care**

Much clergy stress is the result of pastors unnecessarily taking on the stresses of their congregations. They identify so closely with their parishioners or the congregation as a whole that they personally experience what people in their congregation are experiencing. They suffer with members of their flock and rejoice with them as well. This is an integral part of ministry for many pastors. Differentiation refers to a pastor’s ability to minister to a congregation without becoming emotionally enmeshed negatively in the congregation. Far from healthy love for a congregation, enmeshment is a trap for both the pastor and the congregation. When pastors are enmeshed in their congregations their emotional well-being is bound up in that of the congregation and vice versa. To the extent that pastors are enmeshed in the congregational system, they will be unable to influence the system in positive ways.

When it comes to clergy self-care, the need for differentiation might reveal itself when the pastor experiences guilt for taking time off or defensiveness when someone asks when the last time the pastor visited a certain shut-in. The enmeshed pastor rises and falls emotionally with congregational moods, especially anxiety. In contrast, the differentiated pastor is able to minister effectively to anxious people without becoming personally anxious. Friedman refers to the differentiated pastor as being a “non-anxious presence” in the congregation. Christians might say that the goal of differentiation for a pastor is to be “in” the congregation but not “of” it; or, in the words of Marcuson, “the
goal is to “lead without taking on the anxiety of our followers (allowing them to get in our space). . . . we work to be clear on which worries belong to us and which do not.”

Appropriately differentiated pastors have the ability to be close to parishioners without becoming emotionally bound up in their parishioners’ experiences.

There are two reasons for increasing pastors’ levels of differentiation. First, anxious and stressed pastors are not able to decrease the anxiety and stress of their parishioners. Steinke argues that effective “leaders . . . cannot be as anxious as the people they serve.” This is due in part to the fact that enmeshed leaders are unable to think creatively during times of relational stress. When pastors are enmeshed they tend to react emotionally, often defensively, rather than thoughtfully and prayerfully. The second reason for encouraging healthy differentiation among pastors is it tends to reduce the amount of stress that pastors experience. In an enmeshed situation the pastor can become the emotional lightning rod for the congregation, channeling all the emotional energy of the congregation in a personal way. Not surprisingly, the likely result is burn-out.

Empathic pastors or those who have particularly high goals for their congregations can easily become enmeshed emotionally in their congregation. Marcuson explains why in the following:

One of the first survival tips for leaders is to recognize our vulnerability to the super hero myth: “If I don’t rescue this individual. . . . this situation . . . this project, everything will fall apart! . . . This [undifferentiated] way of functioning is the real source of burnout, not overwork. . . . We lurch from crisis to crisis, always reacting, never having the space or time to act with clarity for our most important goals.”

23 Marcuson, Leaders, 116.

24 Steinke, Congregational Leadership, xii.

25 Marcuson, Leaders, 11.
In other words, traditional approaches to clergy self-care are unlikely to be successful if the pastor is enmeshed completely in the congregation; there is simply no way that stress-reduction techniques can “manage” the amount of emotional energy a congregation can generate. It would be like trying to neutralize a lightning bolt with a metal paper clip. The successful solution requires the pastor to step away (emotionally, at least) from the storm. Unless the issue of differentiation is understood and implemented, the pastor will continue to experience deadly levels of stress. Traditional approaches to overwork miss the point if pastors feel personal responsibility for the emotional well-being of their congregation.

Marcuson goes on to say, “Stepping back from over-functioning is not just about delegating more or working as a team. There is a deeper level: letting go of responsibility for other people, and even for the success of the institution . . . leaders who take over for others . . . risk burning themselves out; they also often limit the growth of others.”

Emotionally enmeshed pastors trap themselves and their congregation in destructive and unhealthy patterns of relating. However, emotionally differentiated pastors are able to create enough emotional distance between themselves and their parishioners that they are free to choose their behavior, including behaviors that are healthy for themselves and others.

One way pastors can differentiate is to remember who called them to their role as shepherd in the first place: not the congregation, but God. Consequently, pastors are accountable ultimately not to the congregation but to God. Another way pastors can step back emotionally from their congregations, while continuing to serve them intimately and faithfully, is through prayer. When pastors pray they are reminded that it is God’s

---

26 Ibid., 15-16.

27 Ibid., 4.
responsibility to heal, grow, and care for the congregation; pastors cannot do any of these things on their own power (cf. 2 Corinthians 12:8-9). Marcuson suggests that Reinhold Niebuhr’s “Serenity Prayer” is a good example of the type of prayer a truly differentiated pastor might offer. In its simplest form, it reads: “God, grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change, courage to change the things I can, and wisdom to know the difference.”

These words reflect the healthy understanding that the way to pastoral “serenity” is not through working less or working more; rather, it is through differentiation and letting go. Ultimately, for pastors, this means accepting what they can control and influence and what they cannot.

Extended Family: Implications for Clergy Care

One of the insights of systems theory is that people are strongly influenced by their family of origin. Of particular relevance are factors such as birth order, roles played in the family (such as “black sheep,” “rescuer,” or “golden child”), and familial culture and values. Systems theory states that people tend to continue to play out their family-of-origin dynamics even as they participate in new families and organizations. Events that took place two or more generations earlier in a family (such as a scandalous pregnancy or an untimely death) can continue to influence current events.

System theory goes on to state that groups, especially churches, often function like extended families; and, as such, they are influenced by such factors as the group’s founding story, group history, and the roles typically held by group members (e.g., the patriarch, the critic, the healer). Congregations have family histories that tend to repeat with regard to

---


29 Marcuson, Leaders, 77.
conflict, clergy care, and how dissenters are treated. Making things more complex is the fact that a congregational family is, in reality, a collection of many individual families.

Pastors and congregations are both part of larger extended family systems, including multiple generations. Steinke explains that whether groups or individuals are involved, “we pass the torch of emotional processes from generation to generation.” If this is true, then pastors and congregations never work out their relationship alone. Pastors are part of systems involving their current family, their family of origin, and previous generations. Congregations are part of systems that include the current congregation, previous congregations (from earlier generations), and groups or boards within the congregation. The observation that both clergy and congregations are products of larger extended families that influence their thoughts, actions, and values can help pastors and parishioners to understand each other and the sources of their behavior.

There are many implications regarding this insight for clergy care. Friedman argues that “effecting a change in relationship systems is facilitated more fundamentally by how leaders function within their families than by the quantity of their expertise.” This actually implies that pastors would do well to spend as much time studying their own extended family and those of the congregation as they do studying Greek and Hebrew. For pastors, this means that continuing educational training in conflict management, stress reduction, and assertiveness is not nearly as effective in improving a pastor’s emotional and spiritual health as is guided reflection regarding their own extended families. In essence, the more “self-work” the pastor does, the better.

30 Steinke, How Your Church, 37.
31 Friedman, Generation, 2.
No number of hours spent learning time management will undo years of childhood training that taught the pastor that only over-achievers measure up. “Superkids” will tend to overwork once they become pastors, no matter how many vacation days they are allotted. If the messages pastors were taught as children—for example, the value of work and the value of play—come into conflict with their training in clergy self-care, the family-of-origin messages will trump the training every time. In fact, pastors may sabotage their own self-care efforts in order to continue to be faithful to what they perceive as the demands of their extended family system.

Marcuson adds that much clergy stress is self-imposed and the result of pastors taking on responsibilities that are not theirs. He says this is a behavior learned from the family of origin. For this reason, she advises, “It can be useful for clergy to identify who in their family they were trained to rescue so as not to mistake legitimate professional helping with illegitimate family rescuing.”[^32] It is quite possible that much congregational activity that passes for ministry is really pastor and parishioners mindlessly playing out their family roles. The more that clergy and congregation understand about their extended families and their individual past, the freer they will be to create a new future together. When it comes to family systems, freedom comes with knowledge of how one’s past can quietly dictate one’s future. If “we unconsciously act from our family script,” explains Marcuson, “our choices are limited.”[^33] When a person is able to break from the family script, new possibilities for relationships are created.


[^33]: Ibid., 34.
The cycle can be broken. Marcuson gives hope to pastors, saying, “As you engage in family of origin work over time, you can begin to assess and become more neutral about the dynamics in your family of origin.”\textsuperscript{34} Through this family-of-origin work, pastors can discover for themselves the hidden patterns that account for much of their behavior in the congregation. She goes on to add this:

I have found that understanding the power of the past is both humbling and freeing. I begin to see that I do not have as much power as I think to make things happen the way I would like. And I begin to see I am part of an organic process of being the church through the generations. . . . Others have gone before me and will come after me. I am part of the stream of the life of the church, and of this church, so I am freer to let go and allow the flow to happen. I still need to work hard for my own vision, and pay attention to my relationships. But at the same time, the pressure to produce is less intense when I can take the long view, both looking back and looking forward.\textsuperscript{35}

In this way, through intentional study by pastors of their own extended families, it is possible that much of the stress they experience can be avoided.

\textbf{Emotional Triangles: Implications for Clergy Care}

For many pastors, a major cause of stress is being in the middle of emotional triangles within the congregation or their families. Emotional triangles are created whenever communication occurs indirectly among three or more people. Some triangles are inevitable, as when a parishioner reports to the pastor that church employees are not performing their job properly. Emotional triangles become unhealthy when this form of indirect communication is used to avoid direct communication with all the people involved. The person “in the middle” of the triangle, the one who is not directly involved

\textsuperscript{34} Ibid., 40.

\textsuperscript{35} Ibid., 30-31.
in the situation or conflict, often can feel burdened by the emotional baggage that the other parties have “dumped” on him or her. In fact, Friedman argues that from a family systems point of view, clergy stress is less the result of some quantitative notion such as “overwork” and more the effect of their position in the middle of many congregational triangles. Pastors are often aware of the number of appointments they have on their calendar; but they may well be unaware of the ways that they take on the emotional burdens of parishioners, often when such burden-bearing is unnecessary. Triangles, says Friedman, are the least necessary but most pervasive and insidious form of stress for clergy.

Steinke explains that triangles cannot be avoided and that it is inevitable that the most responsible and visible people in organizations, such as pastors within their congregations, are most likely to become parties to triangles. “Clergy and key lay leaders . . . are potentially a member of every triangle of every family in the congregation.”

The solution, then, is not to attempt to avoid triangles altogether but to become aware of the ones that exist and to function in triangles in healthy ways. In other words, when pastors are feeling overworked they would do better to look at the triangles they are in rather than simply try to manage their time better through prioritization and delegation. The real issue might well be emotional stress caused by triangulation rather than too much work and too little time.

One of the reasons that emotional triangles are so hazardous for clergy is that they can lead pastors to attempt to perform the impossible and try to control the uncontrollable. Consequently, pastors end up experiencing extreme stress. For this

reason, Marcuson suggests that “learning to see triangles is the best stress-management tool around.”\textsuperscript{37} As pastors are better able to recognize the emotional triangles in which they are entrapped, they will become better able to choose to extricate themselves from those triangles and the severe emotional burdens that come with them.

\textbf{Recommendations for Using Systems Theory to Enhance and Improve Clergy Care}

If systems-based approaches were added to traditional approaches to clergy care, both congregations and clergy could benefit greatly. Systems theory addresses many of the issues that cause congregations and pastors great stress. Realizing a reduction in stress would require both pastors and parishioners to receive training in the five fundamental concepts of systems theory and to be willing and able to apply them to their congregation regularly.

Application of the fundamental concepts could change the ways congregations and their pastors relate to each other. A possible impact of application of the “identified patient” concept is that pastors may be less likely to see themselves or be seen by their parishioners as the sole solution to the problem of clergy burn-out. Instead, equipped with such knowledge, the whole congregation could seek help to change the ways in which it contributes to clergy burn-out. As trained pastors come to understand and apply the concepts of “differentiation” and “extended family,” they might feel freer to respond responsibly and thoughtfully to the demands of the current situation rather than to the ghosts of their past. Their congregations also would be in a position to better understand

\textsuperscript{37} Marcuson, \textit{Leaders}, 48.
their pastors’ motivations and style of caring. As congregation and pastor come to understand the concept of “homeostasis,” they may be less likely to blame each other for a lack of substantial changes in congregational culture. They also would be better equipped to address the root causes of much clergy stress and become more aware of the likelihood of sabotage when they attempt to deal with that stress together. Perhaps most importantly, both pastor and parishioner, as they apply the concepts of “differentiation” and “emotional triangles” will avoid much unnecessary stress brought on by assuming emotional turmoil that is not their responsibility.

Systems theory reveals that responsibility for clergy care belongs to both the pastor and the congregation. Each has a unique role to play, and effective clergy care can occur only when each understands that role and takes it seriously. When members of a congregational system play their part responsibly, the result is longer pastorates, more energized ministries, and greater glory for God.
PART THREE

THE CLERGY CARE INITIATIVE
CHAPTER 6

VISION, GOALS, AND STRATEGIES OF THE CLERGY CARE INITIATIVE

When clergy are physically, emotionally, and spiritually unhealthy, the congregations they serve are likely to suffer due to diminished or compromised pastoral leadership. However, when clergy are healthy, the congregations they serve are more likely to thrive as they are inspired by the energy, example, and spiritual enthusiasm of their pastoral leadership. The vision behind the “Clergy Care Initiative” contained within this project is one of healthy pastors leading thriving congregations in the context of long-term, pastor-parish relationships.

When congregations embrace the responsibility and privilege that they have in caring for their pastors, pastors will receive more of the support they need to maintain their well-being. As a result, it is more likely that pastors will feel permission and encouragement to engage in self-care. Over time, the trends toward clergy obesity, divorce, burn-out, and turnover can be slowed or reversed. With stable leadership, congregations will be able grow stronger; and more importantly, the PC(USA) will have

---

1 See Chapter 1 of this discussion for details.
the opportunity to become a more vibrant witness for Jesus Christ. Through the Clergy Care Initiative, participating congregations and pastors will behave in a much more biblical fashion; in doing so, they will create together something much more like God’s vision of the Church.²

**Goals**

The Clergy Care Initiative is grounded in this biblical and Reformed theological understanding: although pastors and parishioners are part of one body or family, pastors are called to particular functions within the congregation. In carrying out their calling they do not cease to be members of the body, and they retain all of their human needs for support and encouragement. In short, pastors are people, too. Family systems theory explains much of the difficulty pastors have in caring for themselves, especially the resistance that they encounter from within themselves or from their congregations. Systems theory also provides a model for thinking about ways the congregation and pastor can partner in creating a culture of health within the parish. The Clergy Care Initiative will enable God’s servants and those served to work together in long-lasting, healthy, and highly effective ways.

**Goal #1: Healthy Pastors**

The first goal of the Clergy Care Initiative is the improvement of pastors’ sense of physical, emotional, and spiritual well-being. When pastors are healthy in each of these dimensions, they are better equipped to serve as an excellent role model for the

² For details, see the discussion in Chapter 4 of this paper.
congregation and have the energy and vision required for leading a congregation effectively over the long term. A physically, emotionally, and spiritually healthy pastor can be truly present and available to his or her congregation, family and friends, and God.

A physically healthy pastor can be described as one who is physically able to carry out the tasks that contemporary pastors are likely to be called on to perform on a regular basis. This representative task list varies widely from congregation to congregation. It might include everything from the stamina required to stand and preach to a congregation one more times on Sunday to the flexibility required to sit on the floor and teach toddlers a Bible story several times a day. Measures of physical health include physical strength, freedom from illness (especially illnesses typically related to lifestyle choices), appropriate ratio of height to weight as determined by medical professionals, and the practice of daily vigorous exercise. The key measure of pastoral physical health is energy. Pastors need to have the energy reserves required to lead their congregations on a daily basis over the course of many years, including those work days that are twelve or more hours long. Physically healthy pastors are able to meet all of the leadership challenges of the day without becoming so drained or strained that they are unable to tend to their personal responsibilities or return to the ministry field the next day with equal vigor.

The emotionally healthy pastor is one who is able to experience the full range of human emotions and act on them appropriately within the ministry context and at home. An emotionally healthy pastor does not use congregational relationships to act out personal emotional issues. The pastor is balanced and does not engage in unhealthy or inappropriate stress-relieving activities (such as excessive alcohol consumption, binge-eating, or pornography). The pastor has robust friendships and happy family connections
outside the congregation in addition to any that might exist within the church. In times of 
congregational crisis or conflict, the pastor is able to lead without becoming caught up in 
personal anxieties or the anxieties of others. Healthy pastors are able to see the 
congregation as it really is and not simply through their family of origin. In short, the 
emotionally healthy pastor is able to engage in emotionally healthy relationships with the 
congregation and with others on a day-to-day basis.

Congregations need and deserve spiritually healthy pastors as well. These pastors 
know that they, too, are on a spiritual journey along with their parishioners and they 
recognize that they are still discovering the vast expanses of God’s grace. They are 
engaged in regular spiritual practices such as worship and prayer in ways and settings that 
allow them to be a participant in the experience as well as a leader. They are not afraid to 
explore the mysteries of faith and are able to lead people into deep spiritual waters, 
because they themselves have tested those waters. Spiritually healthy pastors routinely 
examine their sense of call and reflect regularly on how their call to ministry can be lived 
out in their current context.

As the senior pastor of Second Church, I see firsthand how optimal health is 
required in each of the areas described above. Twenty years of continuous ministry has 
left me weary and desiring to re-connect with God in profound and lasting ways in order 
to achieve the well-rounded goal of physical, emotional, and spiritual health as mentioned 
above. The Clergy Care Initiative is designed to provide opportunities for all pastors and 
the congregation of Second Church, as well as those of other Carlisle Presbytery 
churches, to address these health concerns together in a timely and effective manner.
Goal #2: Healthy Congregations

When pastors are physically, emotionally, and spiritually healthy, the congregations they serve are likely to reap significant benefits as the entire “family system” is impacted by a pastor’s transformation. For this reason, improved congregational health is the second goal of the Clergy Care Initiative. Congregational health can be described as a function of individual members’ health as well as the interactions of parishioners among one another. In healthy congregations, members work toward personal health and wholeness and have excellent role models to follow in their pastor and other church leaders. Each member is likewise engaged in ministry, using his or her gifts and talents, without feeling overly burdened. In healthy congregations, no person’s well-being is sacrificed for the good of the whole. All members share in the taking of responsibility for congregational life; they do not see it as the pastor’s responsibility alone.

In healthy congregations, all members have the sense that they are working together toward a common goal (Ephesians 4:16). Challenges are faced with confidence and resolve. Conflicts are resolved directly and intentionally. Such congregations are characterized by people caring for one another in ways that are generally consistent with the Bible’s “One-Another” passages (see the list in Appendix A). As Awasum has observed, “The health of the church is self-evident in this one truth, that the members should have the same care for one another.”³ Healthy congregations tend to grow over time in depth of commitment, in number of people served or reached, or in both of these

³ Awasum, Ministering to Your Pastor, xvi.
areas. In short, healthy congregations are strong enough and confident enough that they are willing to risk giving themselves away for the sake of the gospel.

Second Church is already a healthy congregation in many ways. Changes occurring within the congregation (as the congregation ages) and in the community and society (such as the secularization of young people) will make ministry increasingly challenging in the coming years. While the congregation cannot control these changes, it can prepare for them by seeking to become stronger in each area of congregational health, especially that of working with the pastor to strengthen the current culture of caring and create an improved culture of health within the congregation.

Goal #3: Healthy Long-Term Relationships between Pastor and Parish

The third goal of the Clergy Care Initiative is the support of healthy long-term relationships between clergy and their congregation. As discussed in Chapter 1, clergy turnover is generally detrimental to congregational health and well-being. Mutual understanding and trust between pastor and parish most often is developed over time as both experience the joys and challenges of ministry together. Healthy long-term pastor-parish relationships can be described as ones that are mutually beneficial and long enough in duration that seeds of faith can be planted, nurtured, and harvested in individuals’ lives. This often takes many years. In such healthy long-term relationships, pastor and parish recognize their mutual need for each other as well as their mutual responsibilities. Disputes between the pastor and parish are resolved without resorting to threats of leaving or suggestions of dismissal. Instead, they are dealt with in a faithful manner with a view to the good of all parties concerned. In short, sustained and sustainable ministry relationships
are characterized by mutual support between pastor and congregation such that pastors can imagine themselves ministering in such a setting for years to come and parishioners can look forward to such a relationship. In these healthy ministry settings, the pastor-parish relationship is seen as something to be treasured and invested in by all parties.

Second Church has enjoyed several long-term pastorates in the past hundred years. In order for the congregation to continue to enjoy the fruits of such relationships, it will need to look proactively at the long-term needs of its pastors and the ability of the congregation to meet those needs, especially in the area of clergy compensation. The Clergy Care Initiative provides the framework within which such conversations about the needs of pastors can occur now, thus paving the way for the long-term future.

**Overview of the Strategies Employed in the Initiative**

The strategies employed by the Clergy Care Initiative are rooted in insights gained from the Bible, Reformed theology, and family systems theory. These systems-based and non-directive strategies include equipping through workshops, sharing in small group conversations, and covenanting between pastor and congregation. Another important aspect of the Clergy Care Initiative is the involvement of Presbytery as a trusted outside facilitator at several key points in the process.

The Clergy Care Initiative employs systems-based strategies in recognition that a pastors’ poor health is often reflective of the poor health of their congregation. As has been demonstrated, pastors are part of a system and culture. If only one part of the system is working toward clergy health it will be very hard for the pastor to become healthy and remain there. If much of the system, however, is focused on clergy health, then the chance
of success is much greater. By working with both parties together, a positive change in congregational health and culture is likely to occur. By focusing on the health of the pastor, the congregation concentrates its efforts on one person who is uniquely strategic when it comes to influencing the rest of the congregational system. By treating one key part of the system, this strategy likely will benefit the whole system over time.

The Clergy Care Initiative strategies are meant to supplement and encourage clergy self-care, not replace it. It recognizes the inherent limitations of relying on clergy to care for themselves. Family systems theory teaches that some pastors, due to no fault of the congregation, tend to sabotage their own self-care efforts. Likewise, some congregations tend to sabotage a pastor’s best efforts at self-care. By raising the value of clergy health, and engaging the congregation directly in caring for the pastor, much of this sabotage is likely to be circumvented.

Another intentional strategy of the Clergy Care Initiative is to be non-directive. Congregations and pastor are supplied with information and options rather than pre-packaged prescriptions and answers. While it might be quicker to supply congregations with a clergy care “to do” list, it would be less effective. Care-giving must be tailored according to individual need; what one pastor needs may be very different from what another needs. Every congregation is not capable of the same acts of caring. In addition, care-giving needs to be self-motivated for the care receiver to experience it as genuine concern and compassion over the long term. By giving congregations and pastor space to draw their own conclusions and to develop their own unique action plans, it is more likely that the clergy care that results will be heartfelt and experienced as such by the pastor.

---

4 The pastor does this through role-modeling, preaching, and other leadership activities.
**Presbytery Workshops: Equipping Pastors and Congregations**

The equipping strategy is based on the assumption that many congregations have not been taught their responsibilities for clergy care and are unaware of the ways in which they can support their pastors. Pastors, too, may be unaware of the extent to which a Reformed and biblical heritage envisions pastors and congregations bearing the burden of leadership together. The working hypothesis of the workshop portion of the Clergy Care Initiative is that if church leaders knew what their biblical and theological responsibilities were, how they and their congregations stand to benefit from improved clergy health, and how to carry out those responsibilities to their pastor, they would be more likely to do so.

The Presbytery of Carlisle plays a key role in the Clergy Care Initiative. One reason for this is how Presbytery is uniquely able to gather together pastors and key representatives from their congregations for training opportunities. Another reason for Presbytery involvement is that, as has been shown, pastors do not like to do anything in their congregations that might be perceived as self-serving or needy. Conversations leading to more effective clergy care by the congregation are more likely to occur and action is more likely to be taken if Presbytery takes the initiative in offering training to church leaders and supplying trained facilitators to guide discussions. A third reason for involving Presbytery in the Clergy Care Initiative is that in the PC(USA) presbyteries are part of the “family system” to which PC(USA) clergy belong. Indeed, presbyteries have an official responsibility to care for pastors.\(^5\)

---

Presbytery, however, cannot effectively be the primary means of clergy care-giving. In many cases, Presbytery lacks the time, staff, volunteers, or geographic proximity to local pastors to go beyond cursory attempts at caring. Beyond this, Presbytery simply does not have the same intensity of motivation to provide clergy care as congregations or the pastors themselves do; they do not have nearly as much at stake. The biblical and Reformed picture of the relationship between pastor and parish is one of mutual caring and responsibility within the local congregation. It is not a picture of the pastor caring for the congregation, while a larger organization assumes total care for the pastor. The strategy of the Clergy Care Initiative is to engage Presbytery in what it does best: supporting and equipping local leaders and their congregations.

**The Clergy Care Team**

The Clergy Care Initiative also includes the strategy of creating a standing committee of the local Session, called the “Clergy Care Team” (hereafter referred to as the Care Team). This Care Team will meet regularly with the pastor in confidential sessions to engage in structured conversations with the focus on improving and supporting the pastor’s health and wellness. The membership and mission of the Care Team is separate and distinct from that of the Personnel Committee. The Personnel Committee is in charge of pastoral duties and evaluation, whereas the Clergy Care Team helps to ensure pastoral health and retention for the overall effective function of ministry. This separation of functions serves to increase the pastor’s trust in the Care Team and ensures a greater level of confidentiality for the Care Team’s conversations.
In the PC(USA), when tasks are assigned to specific committees the tasks themselves are elevated in status and they tend to get done. The Care Team’s routine of quarterly meetings makes it more likely that the Team will feel accountable to both the pastor and to the congregation. A potential danger of this Care Team strategy is that the congregation may think that clergy care is the responsibility of the Care Team alone. To prevent this from happening, the Care Team is also responsible for educating the larger congregation about the biblical responsibilities of all parishioners to their pastor.

**Structured Pastor-Parish Conversations**

The Clergy Care Initiative employs a great deal of direct verbal sharing between the pastor and a select small group of people in the congregation. The Care Team could simply read experts’ books on the general needs of pastors, but this is not as helpful as hearing directly from their own pastor. When pastors become emotionally vulnerable and assertively share their feelings and needs with trusted congregational confidants, they create deep connections with their parishioners. Direct communication between pastor and parish also limits the possible creation of unhealthy emotional triangles within the congregation.

For this reason, the Clergy Care Initiative includes guidelines for several structured conversations with suggested questions and exercises. Many pastors are reluctant to do anything that might lead to the perception that they are advocating for themselves. By supplying the congregation with suggested questions and exercises, from which the pastor can choose specific examples, the pastor is empowered and the

---

6 See Appendix B for details.

7 Such was the experience of Larson, when he served as associate pastor of Second Church, mentioned in Chapter 2.
Care Team is given permission to ask about areas of clergy care that are particularly pertinent to the pastor’s situation and context.

Structured and confidential dialogue enables the pastor to guide the caring process. The questions and suggested exercises are designed to help pastors and parishioners come to a greater awareness of the pastor’s specific needs and how the congregation can help to meet them. When such an approach is employed, pastors are likely to feel less self-serving and more willing to share their needs directly with parishioners. Through this flexible strategy, all conversation is contextualized to the unique needs of the pastor-parish relationship.

These conversations will educate the lay people about the unique needs of the pastor as he or she serves in that particular parish. They also will decrease the pastors’ feelings of isolation. Some pastors will be comforted simply by knowing that at least a few people in their congregation seek to understand their unique stresses. The conversations also will motivate lay leaders in the congregation to take specific action steps in caring for their pastor. Finally, they will leave the pastor feeling affirmed and cared for. These conversations are designed to be distinctly “pastor-centered.” The well-being of the pastor and the pastor-parish relationship is primary.

**Clergy Care Covenant**

As part of the Clergy Care Initiative, clergy and congregations will be encouraged to make regular covenants regarding concrete action steps they will take to improve clergy health. The covenanting strategy is employed, because good intentions and vague
expectations have not improved clergy health in the past.\textsuperscript{8} Pastors and congregations are much more likely to follow through on their intentions when there is a system for mutual accountability in place.

The more specific the covenant, the more likely the action items agreed to will be pursued. By educating the congregation, institutionalizing the means of supporting clergy (through the Care Team), and covenan ting for action, the Clergy Care Initiative employs strategies that are likely to work in a variety of ministry settings. This is especially true for Second Church, which is quite motivated to care for its pastors but needs practical guidance in how to do so effectively.

**The Clergy Care Initiative and Second Presbyterian Church**

The Clergy Care Initiative is uniquely suited to the peculiarities, culture, and demographics of Second Church. “Care” is a powerful word for Second Church. By putting “care” at the heart of the initiative’s name the congregation likely will take notice, because it perceives itself as a place where all people are cared for; the congregation takes caring very seriously.

Since the Clergy Care Initiative also employs much training and discussion—a typically white-collar, well-educated approach to problem solving—and the assumption is that given enough information the congregation will freely do the right thing, this systems-based approach fits nicely with the congregation’s self-understanding and ongoing function as a “Second Family.” The congregation sees its members as bound to

\textsuperscript{8} See Part One of this project for details.
one another in long-term relationships. By using a systems approach, these relationships and connections can be leveraged for positive benefit.

Second Church sees pastors in many ways as belonging to the congregation like other members. This means that church leaders are likely to be especially receptive to hearing about pastors’ health needs and feel eager to meet them. Owing to the large numbers of aging parishioners with a military or government service background, the congregation is likely to follow what it perceives to be the lead of the Presbytery in terms of clergy care practices. Since duty and loyalty—often without question—are highly valued at Second Church, Second Church lay leaders are comfortable in trusting and deferring to what they perceive as higher authorities. Similarly, parishioners’ backgrounds in various not-for-profit employment settings means that they are more motivated by a sense of fairness and compassion in caring for the pastor than by appeals to practical concerns (such as giving strategic financial bonuses). Second Church values the Bible and the Reformed tradition as guides for ministry and likely will respond well to the Clergy Care Initiative’s emphasis on using these authorities as models for caring.

The fifty-one other congregations in the Presbytery of Carlisle are similar to Second Church, despite differences in size and location. The churches of the Presbytery are situated within a variety of rural, suburban, and urban settings in a relatively compact geographic region (when compared with surrounding Presbyteries). Median church membership of all congregations in Carlisle Presbytery is 177.⁹ Much like Second Church, these congregations are racially and economically homogeneous. They also deal

with many of the same issues as Second Church, such as aging parishioners and the
desire to maintain long-term relationships with their pastor. Owing to their relatively
small median size (smaller than the national church average of 191 members,\textsuperscript{10} these
congregations also tend to value caring quite highly. Due to this dynamic, and based on
the preliminary feedback received from eight other Carlisle pastors, it can be anticipated
that these congregations not only will desire to participate in the training but can benefit
from such training alongside Second Church.

\textsuperscript{10} General Assembly Mission Council, “Membership, Worship Attendance, and Christian
CHAPTER 7

THE CLERGY CARE INITIATIVE: IMPLEMENTATION AND ASSESSMENT

The Clergy Care Initiative’s three main components are Presbytery-sponsored workshops and training for local church leaders, the creation of Clergy Care Teams in the local congregation, and a series of structured conversations between the pastor and trusted members of the local congregation for the purpose of engaging in an ongoing covenantal relationship. The components are interrelated and build upon one another. Each successive component requires more risk-taking and effort on the part of the congregation and pastor. The rewards in improved clergy health and well-being are likely to be correspondingly greater as each component of the plan is adopted and implemented.

Presbytery training will be beneficial even if the additional components are not pursued in the local congregation. Creation of a Clergy Care Team at the congregational level will be most helpful, only if the members have received appropriate Presbytery training. The establishment of the Clergy Care Team may well be useful, even if the suggested structured conversations do not occur. The structured conversations likely will take place only within the context of the larger Clergy Care Initiative; however, church leaders might find the suggested discussion questions and exercises to be helpful in
supporting their pastor through informal means. Ultimately, when all three components are pursued, the Clergy Care Initiative has the greatest likelihood of achieving improved clergy and congregational health over the long run.

**Timeline and Stages for Launching the Clergy Care Initiative**

Preparing for the first component of the Clergy Care Initiative will require five months. This includes two months for the summer break and three months to seek support from the Presbytery and to promote the initiative Presbytery-wide. It also includes the time required for recruiting workshop leaders and scheduling the event on church leaders’ personal calendars. The initial trial of the full Clergy Care Initiative, including all three components described above, will be concluded by the end of Fall 2014. In short, the Clergy Care Initiative is a 2.5-year process that already has begun.

Upon completion of initial training in Fall 2013, Clergy Care Teams will be formed. This will require a minimum of one month for preparation of the Session, getting the item on the Session agenda, and for identification of potential members of the Care Team. Following this, structured conversations between the pastor and Clergy Care Team will begin. They will continue on a quarterly basis for as long as the participants find it helpful. If this plan proves useful, Presbytery training will be scheduled at least once every three years to ensure that new church leaders are being trained at least once during a typical three-year term. The Clergy Care Initiative will be implemented in a series of steps and stages.

**Stage 1: Laying the Groundwork**

The first step in this stage already has occurred. It was to determine how receptive other pastors might be to an invitation to participate in the Clergy Care Initiative. In
November 2011, I solicited feedback from eight members of the Presbytery of Carlisle’s clergy support and accountability group who were gathered at Second Church for their monthly meeting. These pastors lead congregations that, despite varying in size, are remarkably similar to Second Church and to the rest of the Presbytery in demographics and socioeconomic status. For this reason, they are representative of the vast majority of pastors in Presbytery.

These pastors were shown an early draft of the Clergy Care Initiative. They provided helpful feedback regarding the proposed timeframe and the procedures to be followed in forming the Clergy Care Teams. These pastors also suggested the use of an outside facilitator, possibly from the Presbytery of Carlisle, not only for the initial training workshops but also for the ongoing structured conversations between the pastor and the Clergy Care Team. They observed that pastors are very reluctant to begin or to openly direct the clergy care conversations with their own congregations. By engaging an outside facilitator to start the first step of structured dialogue, and even to guide the subsequent conversations, some of the pressure of initiating and managing the interaction is taken from the shoulders of the pastor.

In the second step of this stage during May 2012, which is the next time the Presbytery of Carlisle meets, I will approach the Presbytery of Carlisle’s Committee on Ministry, specifically its Strengthening Our Congregations (SOC) Sub-Committee to seek support in scheduling the first major component of the Clergy Care Initiative—the Presbytery-sponsored workshops—sometime in Fall 2013. I already have spoken with Englund-Krieger, the executive presbyter of the Presbytery of Carlisle, about the Clergy Care Initiative and have received his strong encouragement to move forward. Once a date
has been set, the training event will be publicized throughout the Carlisle Presbytery by email and through direct contact with pastors currently serving its congregations. I will engage members of SOC and members of my clergy group in this concentrated effort of publicity and direct recruitment. I also will book a retreat location for this one-day event using SOC funds for a deposit on the retreat center.

**Stage 2: Presbytery-Sponsored Training Workshops**

Presbytery-sponsored training will occur in a one-day retreat format in Fall 2013. This intense format will create the energy and intensity required to inspire a variety of actions steps which ultimately can lead to a change in the congregation’s culture of health. The foundation of the retreat experience is a series of Presbytery-sponsored workshops for local church leaders and their pastors. Each workshop will last sixty to ninety minutes, with short breaks to allow participants to assimilate the information presented. Presenters will cover topics that inform and inspire good clergy care practices by congregations. All local church leaders, especially officers and members of personnel committees, will be encouraged by Presbytery to attend; the more people who receive the training, the more likely it will be that positive action will result at a local level. In the first year, the Committee on Ministry will underwrite the cost of the event (including food and retreat location fee), but in subsequent years the participating congregations most likely will need to fund it.

The workshop component of the Clergy Care Initiative will equip church leaders with information that they can use to enhance their current congregational approaches to clergy care. The workshops also will initiate helpful conversations between pastors and
their congregations about the need for clergy care. Finally, the workshops seek to inspire church leaders and their pastors to take concrete action steps upon returning to their congregational setting.

At this early stage in the learning process, pastors and parishioners must be able to speak freely without fear of being judged. Consequently, pastors will not participate in the workshops at the same time as their own parishioners; this separation will allow both pastor and parishioners to speak a bit more candidly. This approach still permits the pastor to “overhear” representative ideas and concerns of typical parishioners. This approach still permits pastors to hear ideas and concerns from lay people which are likely to be quite similar to those of their own members. Confidentiality will be encouraged by the presenters within the workshops; presenters will instruct participants not to share specific stories and personal details of discussions outside the workshop setting.

Recruiting presenters from Presbytery to lead the workshops will not be difficult. Pastors are unlikely to teach their own congregations about these issues; but they are likely to be willing to share with other congregations what they have learned and experienced, especially if they see how sharing this information benefits everyone. Once they are introduced to the possible benefits to pastors, pastors’ families, and congregations, pastors—both active and retired—will want to serve as presenters. This introduction will be made by me as the author of this study and take the form of sharing an abridged form of this paper with potential presenters and personally discussing it with them in detail. Presbytery sponsorship takes the burden of presenting off the local pastor, establishes Presbytery as an entity that is concerned for both pastors and congregations,
and helps Presbytery to meet its clergy care-giving obligations assigned in the *Book of Order*.\(^1\)

The suggested workshops are described below. They can be experienced in any order. Using this approach, the Presbytery training day will last approximately eight hours. Eight hours of training and worship are substantial. In the course of the day, the themes of the workshops in a variety of ways will keep reinforcing the basic message that clergy care is every member’s responsibility. A rotation model will be employed, using six presenters, with the participants cycling through each of the workshops in small groups. The workshop for pastors will be offered over lunch while parishioners are eating on their own. An opening time of worship and a closing time of worship, mutual affirmation, and covenanting also will be included to make the experience especially powerful and more likely to lead to prompt follow-up actions. Covenants for action agreed to by congregations and their pastors will be as specific as outlines for next steps or as broad as the pastor agreeing to be pro-active in making his or her needs known and church leaders agreeing to be receptive to such disclosures.

For the Presbytery of Carlisle and Second Church, the Stillwaters Retreat Center in Carlisle is an ideal location for the workshops to be held. If that location is unavailable, any relaxed meeting setting will suffice for the workshops. The more removed both pastors and parishioners are from their typical environments, however, the more open they likely will be to the adoption of new paradigms and the consideration of new practices in their church.

---

Workshop #1: “Clergy Compensation and Benefits”

The first workshop is on clergy compensation and benefits and introduces parishioners to relevant biblical passages regarding the compensation of pastors and the reasons why pastors are often reluctant to advocate for themselves in this area. Comparisons will be made between the average compensation of clergy and the average compensation of persons in fields that require similar levels of training and time and entail similar levels of responsibility. These might include counselors, school principals, and lawyers.

Compensation standards and practices in the PC(USA) and the local presbytery will be reviewed. Insights will be offered in how to design clergy compensation packages for the greatest impact on the pastor and his or her family with the least cost to the congregation. Participants will walk away with a better understanding of why and how clergy are compensated and how they can structure their own pastor’s compensation in a way that is most beneficial for all parties.

Workshop #2: “Cost-Free Ways to Care for Pastors”

The second workshop is on cost-free ways congregations can care for their pastor. It is based on the assumption that many congregations would like to support their pastors in significant and tangible ways but lack the financial resources in their budget to go beyond current compensation levels. In this workshop, participants will brainstorm in groups the typical personal needs and expenses that pastors and their families might have and ways that parishioners might address those needs if encouraged to do so by the congregation’s leadership.
Several examples will be offered. For instance, most pastors have personal needs for affirmation from the congregation. Suggestions such as a congregational card shower on the anniversary of a pastor’s installation at that church might make a great impact on the pastor. Most pastors’ families have needs for rest and relaxation away from the town in which the pastor serves. A parishioner might be encouraged to loan the pastor a vacation home for a weekend or a week. All pastors have a need for the prayers of the congregation. A pastoral prayer support team might be started.

In this workshop parishioners also will be introduced to the concept of “love languages,” a phrase popularized by Gary D. Chapman and Paul White. These authors argue that each employee is motivated by different types of caring, such as affirmation, time, acts of service, tangible gifts, and physical touch. When supervisors learn their employees’ “love language,” the acts of caring that most motivate the employee, they can concentrate their efforts on the most impactful forms of caring. Parishioners in this workshop will seek to determine their own pastor’s “love language,” then consider the different ways the congregation can care for that pastor and why some attempts at care are likely to be more effective than others.

Finally, this workshop will conclude with suggesting the formation of a Clergy Care Team in each congregation. These Care Teams will continue the work of brainstorming ways to care for the pastor after the training event is over. Participants will walk away with many practical and effective ideas for supporting their pastor with no impact on the church budget.

---

Workshop #3: “Understanding the Unique Stresses Clergy and Their Families Face”

The third workshop is an introduction to the unique stresses that clergy and clergy families frequently face. Parishioners often have difficulty understanding the personal challenges that come with parish ministry. This workshop begins with a discussion of the stresses that are unique to various occupations (such as police officer, doctor, counselor, and teacher) and then moves toward a discussion of the stresses that the participants feel in their own roles and occupations (such as carpenter, mother, volunteer, or salesperson).

With this groundwork laid, the participants will brainstorm the stresses that their particular clergy might face, including those endured by clergy spouses and children, financial pressures, privacy issues, dating difficulties (for single pastors), time shortages, emotional and spiritual fatigue, and lack of role clarity. Participants will be read anonymous testimonies from pastors concerning the stresses they feel in ministry, and they will go through an exercise that reveals the challenges that pastors might face in a typical day, month, and year. The potential cumulative impact on the pastor’s health will be examined, along with warning signs of declining pastoral fitness (physical, emotional, and spiritual). Suggestions for interceding to support pastors will be offered.

The workshop will close with a discussion of pastors’ sense of call and why they continue to serve willingly and happily despite the stresses of ministry. Participants will walk away with a much better understanding of the kinds of stresses that clergy face. They also will be better equipped to fathom how those stresses can negatively impact pastors and their families, if not addressed in healthy ways.
Workshop #4: “Understanding Your Church as a Family”

In the fourth workshop participants will be introduced to family systems theory and the specific ways that it applies to local congregations. Key concepts such as seeing the congregation as a system (rather than a collection of individuals), and recognizing the impact of one part of the system (e.g., the pastor) on the whole, will be discussed. Terms such as “homeostasis” and “sabotage” will be introduced to help participants see why clergy self-care is often ineffective at improving clergy healthy when self-care is pursued on its own.

Participants then will look at their own congregations. They will examine the ways in which their system promotes the health and well-being of the pastor and of parishioners and the ways in which their system inhibits such well-being. Finally, suggestions for influencing the system and creating a healthier congregational culture will be discussed. Participants will walk away with a better understanding of why pastors have difficulty in caring for themselves in a congregational setting and how such difficulties can be overcome in such a way that everyone in the congregation benefits.

Workshop #5: “How Caring for Your Pastor Benefits the Congregation”

The fifth workshop will provide participants with an understanding of why caring for clergy benefits the congregation and why it is not simply the pastor’s responsibility. First, the poor state of clergy’s mental, emotional, and spiritual health will be presented. Second, the relationship between poor clergy health and poor congregational health will be introduced. Participants then will examine the biblical mandate for care of clergy by
congregations and look at examples of such care in the Bible. A brief overview of the theological mandate for clergy care in the Reformed tradition also will be offered.

The pastor’s responsibility for self-care will be discussed within the larger context of personal stewardship. It will be suggested that pastors bear no greater and no less responsibility for self-care than do other members of the Body of Christ. Finally, the benefits of improved health to the pastor, pastor’s family (if applicable), congregation, PC(USA), and kingdom of God will be discussed. Participants will walk away from this workshop understanding that care of clergy by congregations is not just a good idea for all concerned. It is God’s vision for the Church.

Workshop #6: “For Pastors Only”

The sixth workshop is designed exclusively for pastors. It will increase their comfort level with the process of enlisting the congregation in clergy care. By reserving this time for pastors only, they are more likely to open up about fears or concerns they have about the process. In this workshop, participants will review biblical and theological rationales for self-care as well as congregational care of pastors within the church community.

Pastors will be invited to assess their own physical, emotional, and spiritual well-being and reflect on changes that they would like to see in each area. Participants also will discuss the ways in which they and their congregations undermine efforts at clergy care and ways in which they enhance those efforts. The many ways that improved clergy health benefit the congregation will be examined along with the reasons that pastors are sometimes reluctant to advocate for themselves despite the proven benefits to pastors, their families, the congregation, the denomination, and the kingdom of God. Participants
ultimately will be encouraged to design a process for helping their congregations to become engaged in clergy care through the Clergy Care Initiative.

**Stage 3: Establishing a Session-Level Clergy Care Team**

Presbytery-sponsored training will encourage church leaders to begin conversations about clergy care in their congregations and equip them with ideas for starting their own programs for intentional clergy care. Aiding in this effort will be the decision to establish a small Session-level team of parishioners whose mission is to lead and coordinate the congregation’s efforts at clergy care. This team will exist to enlist the congregation in partnering with the pastor to promote the pastor’s physical, spiritual, and emotional health.

Responsibilities of the Clergy Care Team will vary from congregation to congregation and might include everything from encouraging congregational recognition of pastoral milestones (such as the twentieth anniversary of pastor’s ordination) to creating a healthier environment for all people in the congregation. For example, this might take the form of encouraging Sabbath months with no meetings, healthy foods at church suppers, congregational exercise, family enrichment events, and the like. Additionally, the Clergy Care Team will coordinate care for the pastor (and his or her family) in the event of the pastor’s personal need (e.g., severe family illness) or in times of congregational crisis (e.g., conflict, fire). Subject to the approval of the pastor, the Care Team also might encourage the Personnel Committee (if any) to review the appropriateness of the pastor’s compensation and to ask the pastor about the adequacy of the compensation for the needs of his or her family.
The Clergy Care Team also will explore ways to educate the broader congregation about the needs of pastors and pastors’ families, how the congregation can help to support pastors and their families, and why such support is in the congregation’s best interest. Team members who attended the training workshops will be able to draw on that knowledge as they teach the congregation. Presbytery also may choose to make additional training resources available to congregations throughout the year as part of its plan for continuing education for elders.

The Care Team also will be responsible for cultivating non-budgetary forms of pastoral support, such as prayer and affirmation from the congregation. Finally, and with the consent of the pastor, this body will be responsible for engaging in a series of regularly structured conversations with the pastor regarding his or her health and to explore ways for needed support. Appendix B contains concrete suggestions for conducting such structured conversations between pastor and parish in a safe and fruitful manner.

**Clergy Care Team Membership and Dynamics**

Members of the Clergy Care Team will be active members of the congregation selected by the pastor to serve for designated three-year terms and up to two consecutive terms. The reason for allowing pastors to select the members is to ensure that they are comfortable with the people on the Care Team. The reason for term-limits is to ensure that the Care Team does not come to be perceived by the congregation at large as a permanent and elite group of pastoral favorites. A small team of about three to five people, in addition to the pastor, is recommended to allow for greater intimacy and confidentiality. In the event that the pastor loses confidence in a Care Team member or
Care Team members are unable to carry out their responsibilities for any reason, the pastor will replace that member upon notification of the Session. One member of the team will be a current elder, to ensure access to the Session and the ability to implement ideas with the Session. The elder likely will chair the team, but this is not essential. What matters most is the pastor’s confidence in those who serve on this Care Team and in their ability to take active measures toward clergy care.

Some members of the Care Team hopefully will have received Presbytery-sponsored training at the retreat. They also will receive specific training in confidentiality and other key matters as part of the ongoing educational efforts of SOC. In order to prevent members from experiencing a conflict of interest, no member of the Personnel Committee will serve on the Care Team. In this way, Care Team members will not be in a position of disciplining clergy, evaluating the pastor’s job performance, or adjusting financial compensation. To ensure accountability of funds and broad participation in caring activities, the Care Team will not be in a position to fund recognitions of the pastor or other caring activities; this will require an act of the Session.

The Care Team will meet at least quarterly. In these meetings they will outline congregational training, brainstorm ways to support the pastor, and plan ways to enlist the congregation in greater support of the pastor. An additional agenda item will be a structured conversation following the suggested questions and exercises described in Appendix B. It is essential that the chairperson take responsibility for calling meetings and encouraging follow-up; pastors are unlikely to take this initiative for fear of appearing to be self-serving. This team will not replace the caring of the Presbytery or the
congregation as a whole. Rather, it will supplement, encourage, and help to coordinate care from other sources.

**Stage 4: Implementing Structured Conversations between Pastor and Parish**

Presbytery training of church leaders and the establishment of a formal Clergy Care Team are two significant steps that congregations will take toward creating a caring environment for their pastors. The most powerful step, however, is likely to be quarterly face-to-face conversations between the pastor and trusted members of their parish. It is in the context of these regularly scheduled confidential conversations that the pastor’s specific needs will become known, parishioners will discuss possible strategies of care with their pastor, and pastor and parish will make focused covenants regarding the promotion of clergy and congregational health.

When pursued in the course of the Clergy Care Initiative, these discussions will involve the local pastor and the Care Team. Especially in the early meetings of the committee, as trust is developing, discussions ideally will be facilitated by a trusted and trained outside person (such as one of the presenters from the Presbytery-sponsored workshops, another pastor from Presbytery, a local counselor, or a Presbytery staff person). This facilitator will be invited by the pastor with the consent of the Care Team. The facilitator’s primary role will be to start the conversations between the pastor and Care Team members and to summarize learning and commitments for action, such as covenants. Once the Care Team is functioning smoothly, the pastor may elect to forego the outside facilitator with the Care Team’s consent. The guidelines for discussion will
include confidentiality by all participants (subject to mutual agreement about sharing certain information with the Session or congregation).

These conversations will occur off-site in “neutral” territory, at a time and place where distractions and interruptions are unlikely. For example, they can occur in someone’s home or at a retreat center of some kind whenever possible. Discussions will last about ninety minutes; if possible, a light shared meal will precede or follow the discussion to build fellowship. The suggested agenda is as follows: meal, opening prayer, response to any particular concerns of the pastor, discussion of one or more suggested questions or exercises (see list in Appendix B), summarizing of learning points, covenancing for next steps, and closing prayer.

Toward the end of each structured conversation, the pastor and parish will covenant regarding next steps. A suggested format for such a covenant is for the pastor to complete the following statement: “These are the specific steps I will seek to take to improve my health and well-being in the coming quarter/semester/year (circle one) . . .” The Care Team will be encouraged to complete a similar statement: “These are the specific ways the Clergy Care Team will seek to help you obtain the care and support you need in the coming quarter/semester/year in order to improve your health and well-being and that of the congregation as well . . .” Covenants will be used to help the pastor and parish to stay on task. These confidential care covenants, including the specific steps that the pastor will take toward health and that the congregation will take toward improving the pastor’s health, are not a contract. They are expressions of best intentions and will be used at later dates to celebrate progress toward mutually agreed upon goals.
The suggested questions and exercises are offered for illustration purposes. The pastor and Care Team will develop their own questions and adapt the ones offered here based on their needs. Likewise, the pastor and Care Team will choose only those questions and exercises that everyone feels comfortable with and that prove the most helpful for edifying discussion and sharing. In order to enhance the pastor’s comfort level, he or she will discuss possible questions and exercises with the chairperson ahead of time and always will have the option to pass on a question or exercise. For this process to work, pastors have to feel as comfortable as possible with sharing as much or as little as they want. The bottom line for every structured conversation with the pastor will be gently obtaining answers to two questions: “What needs do you have?” and “How can we help?” A list of suggested questions and exercises for use by pastors and their Care Team is included in Appendix B.

**Stage 5: Evaluating the Impact of the Clergy Care Initiative**

At the initial Presbytery event, in the sixth workshop entitled “For Pastors Only,” pastors will be asked to assess their health in several areas through the use of a paper survey. Specific items of concern will be covered on the survey, such as time management, pastoral energy levels, and forms of affirmation received from the congregation in the past year. Participating congregations also will be asked (through their representatives at the Presbytery event) about their pastor’s health and about the overall health of the pastor-parish relationship. They will be invited to complete a similar paper survey in the final workshop that they attend that day. The survey will cover the parishioners’ perceptions of
the pastor’s energy levels, support for the pastor within the congregation, projected duration of the pastor-parish relationship, and other matters.

If pastors and congregations consent, these sheets will be confidentially retained for comparison purposes one year later and in subsequent years by me, as the author of this study. In subsequent annual surveys, administered by me, the pastors who have participated in the Clergy Care Initiative will be asked questions designed to discover how the Clergy Care Initiative has helped them to improve their physical, emotional, and spiritual health. Similar annual surveys will be given to participating congregations in an effort to elicit helpful feedback on the overall effectiveness of the Clergy Care Initiative at improving clergy fitness and extending pastoral tenure in congregations. Over the course of many years, Presbytery also will be able to monitor the average length of tenure of participants. This will be another measure of the impact of the Clergy Care Initiative.
SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

Statistics on the physical, emotional, and spiritual health of clergy in the United States are alarming and cause for concern for all people who love God and the Church that bears Christ’s name. Instead of being role models for healthy living many pastors are like the walking wounded, casualties of systems of ministry that routinely push these pastors beyond what any of them were called to do by God. Feeling pressure to perform from too many areas, pastors sacrifice their own physical, emotional, and spiritual health and sometimes the well-being of their families, too. Over time they become less energetic and enthusiastic, marriages become strained, children are neglected, and the joy pastors once found in serving is long lost. Pastors simply cannot lead as effectively when their physical health is compromised, their key relationships are falling apart, and they are uncertain of their call from God. Eventually, the congregation begins to suffer. Preaching becomes stale. The pastor is physically present but emotionally distant. His or her vision for the church becomes clouded. Long before outward symptoms become apparent, the pastor has begun to mentally withdraw from leadership. Such congregations are left with pastors who either wish to minister somewhere else or desire to gently coast into retirement while the congregation slowly goes downhill with them.

This is not God’s vision for the Church. When pastors struggle, congregations can struggle. When congregations struggle, denominations can struggle. When denominations struggle, the kingdom of God loses some of the crucial infrastructure that keeps Christ’s witnesses shining brightly around the world.
The traditional prescription for poor clergy health is better clergy self-care. The experience of the past forty years indicates that despite pastors and denominations’ best efforts to encourage self-care, clergy well-being is not improving. There are several problems with almost exclusive reliance on self-care as an approach to clergy care.

First, such exclusive reliance on self-care is not Reformed. In Reformed theology, congregations are communities of care in which all members of that community are expected to give and receive care from each other. We would never say to hurting parishioners, “You need to take better care of yourself,” and then leave them alone. Rather, we would also ask, “How can we help you to get through this difficult time?” In Reformed ecclesiology pastors are indeed set apart for special service; at no point, however, does God exempt such individuals from basic human needs for support, encouragement, affirmation, and companionship. The way in which clergy and their families are cared for by congregations necessarily will differ from that of others in the community, due to the unique needs of pastors, but pastors do need to be cared for by their congregation if that congregation is to remain strong over the long run of ministry.

Second, self-care approaches to clergy care are not biblical. Self-reliance is not a biblical value; rather, reliance on God and the community of faith are biblical values. This is not to say that people, including pastors, should not take good care of themselves; they should. God’s design for humanity, however, is not collections of self-reliant individuals but groups of people coming together, relying upon one another, using their strengths and weaknesses as reasons for growing closer to each other. The Bible illustrates multiple examples of Godly leaders accepting, and sometimes requesting, help from others. If pastors are to truly model a biblical lifestyle, then they need to have
opportunities to both give and receive care within their own congregational setting. God made us to depend on one another and to supply one another’s needs within a local community. The suggestion that pastors should not receive care from their own congregations and that it should come only from professionals or the Presbytery is simply not supported in Scripture.

The third problem with focusing exclusively on self-care is that not only has this approach not worked in the past, it is doomed to fail in the future. Simply pouring more money, time, and effort into getting pastors to take better care of themselves is misguided. The systems within which pastors function make self-care difficult at best, and impossible at worst. Until the system is changed, pastors will not feel the permission and motivation to change.

Family systems theory teaches that we cannot put all the responsibility for clergy health and well-being on the pastor alone. He or she is part of a larger system that deeply influences behavior. If only a few pastors were reporting poor health (such as obesity, divorce, spiritual burn-out) then one might conclude that the problem is isolated to those individuals and that they simply need to take better care of themselves. However, clergy health in the United States is declining across the PC(USA) and across denominations. This dynamic points to a problem not with the individual pastors but with the ministry systems of which they are a part.

We might think of it this way. If football players were repeatedly reporting severe head injuries after games we could say to them, “You have got to take better care of yourself out there. We’ll teach you how to block more safely.” However, if the player is part of a system that encourages dangerous play and discourages the use of safety
measures and equipment that might compromise on-field performance, then career-ending head injuries are going to continue to occur. Eventually, if the number of causalities mounts and teams no longer can find healthy players, league officials might be motivated enough to re-write the rules, require better safety equipment, and change the system that rewards players who cause the most harm to themselves or others. In other words, a systemic approach to player safety would be used.

Similarly, it is time that thoughtful Christians stopped putting the blame for poor clergy health primarily at the feet of individual pastors or even individual congregations. Such a system rewards excessive labor and ignores the damaging toll that full-time parish ministry takes on pastors and their families, causing concern over why congregations are struggling. Congregations have far too much at stake to be only passively engaged in care of their clergy. Almost every aspect of church life suffers when pastors operate at less than their peak fitness or when they leave prematurely. When pastors thrive their congregations tend to thrive, too. The Clergy Care Initiative addresses the clergy health crisis by engaging congregations in actively caring for their pastors. When local church leaders are informed of the costs and benefits of clergy wellness and when they are equipped to promote the health of their pastors, they will be willing and able to take the necessary steps to support pastors in their quest for health.

The theological, biblical, and psychological foundations of this study will be applicable to a wide variety of ministry contexts. The specific components of the Clergy Care Initiative were written, however, with the unique characteristics of Second Church in mind. For this reason, the Clergy Care Initiative may need to be adapted for use in other settings, especially areas with different educational and professional experiences.
Likewise, the components of the Clergy Care Initiative were designed to work well for pastors in solo ministry or in a position as head of staff. When there is more than one pastor in a congregation, church leaders will want to take care that the pastors are treated similarly or that there are clear rationales for treating the pastors differently. It is also possible that the Clergy Care Initiative might need to be adapted to meet the needs of female pastors as opposed to male pastors. For example, in working with a female pastor the structured conversations might include a discussion of sexism in the congregation and how it can be addressed. Similarly, additional discussion questions might need to be developed for associate pastors, co-pastors, or commissioned lay pastors.

Everyone benefits when pastors are physically, emotionally, and spiritually healthy. Pastors find more joy in serving, have more energy for the activities and people they love, enjoy longer lives, and grow closer to God. Pastors’ families (if applicable) benefit from better relationships with the pastor and feel closer to the congregation that the pastor serves. Congregations benefit as pastors stay in ministry and in local congregations for longer periods of time. This allows deeper relationships to form, and more visionary ministries to be developed. When pastors are healthy, they have more energy and their work is less likely to be seriously interrupted by illness or family difficulty. Healthy pastors are also better Christian role models. Presbyteries benefit from healthier pastors, too. Presbyteries are ill equipped to handle situations when clergy fail morally or pulpits suddenly become vacant. Such situations require enormous amounts of time from Presbytery volunteers and staff. Instead of spending so much effort putting out fires, through the Clergy Care Initiative Presbytery can fan the flame of equipping congregations to care for their pastors with the goal of preventing some of these crises
from occurring. Healthy pastors require less attention from Presbytery and create many more opportunities for the broader organization. Healthy pastors will lead healthier congregations, which makes for stronger presbyteries. The denomination benefits from healthier pastors, too. Healthy pastors are more likely to inspire young parishioners to enter the ministry. They are also likely to stay in ministry longer and require less health care over time, which saves the denomination money. Clergy care by congregations is good stewardship of precious human and financial resources.

When pastors are healthy, the kingdom of God can benefit. Whenever even one person lives a more biblical and faithful life, the kingdom grows. When that one person is a pastor, he or she is in a position to influence many more people in a positive direction. Ultimately, the kingdom of God will grow when the well-being of pastors becomes cause for both congregational concern and celebration.
APPENDIX A

THE “ONE ANOTHER” PASSAGES

- Love one another: John 13:34-35; 15:12, 17; Romans 12:10; 13:8; 14:13; 1 Thessalonians 3:12; 4:9; 2 Thessalonians 1:3; 1 Peter 1:22; 1 John 3:11, 3:22; 4:8; 23; 4:7, 11-12; 2 John 1:5
- Serve one another: Galatians 5:13, 21; Philippians 2:3; 1 Peter 4:9; 5:5
- Accept one another: Romans 15:7, 14
- Strengthen one another: Romans 14:19
- Help one another: Hebrews 3:13; 10:24
- Encourage one another: Romans 14:19; 15:14; Colossians 3:16; 1 Thessalonians 5:11; Hebrews 3:13; 10:24-25
- Care for one another: Galatians 6:2
- Forgive one another: Ephesians 4:32; Colossians 3:13
- Submit to one another: Ephesians 5:21; 1 Peter 5:5
- Commit to one another: 1 John 3:16
- Build trust with one another: 1 John 1:7
- Be devoted to one another: Romans 12:10
- Be patient with one another: Ephesians 4:2; Colossians 3:13
- Be interested in one another: Philippians 2:4
- Be accountable to one another: Ephesians 5:21
- Confess to one another: James 5:16
- Live in harmony with one another: Romans 12:16
- Do not be conceited to one another: Romans 13:8
- Do not pass judgment to one another: Romans 14:13; 15:7
- Do not slander one another: James 4:11
- Instruct one another: Romans 16:16
- Greet one another: Romans 16:16; 1 Corinthians 1:10; 2 Corinthians 13:12
- Admonish one another: Romans 5:14; Colossians 3:16
- Spur one another on toward love and good deeds: Hebrews 10:24
- Meet with one another: Hebrews 10:25
- Agree with one another: 1 Corinthians 16:20
- Be concerned for one another: Hebrews 10:24
- Be humble to one another in love: Ephesians 4:2
- Be compassionate to one another: Ephesians 4:32
- Do not be consumed by one another Galatians 5:14-15
- Do not anger one another: Galatians 5:26
- Do not lie to one another: Colossians 3:9
- Do not grumble to one another: James 5:9
- Give preference to one another: Romans 12:10
- Be at peace with one another: Romans 12:18
- Be of the same mind to one another: Romans 12:16; 15:5
- Comfort one another: 1 Thessalonians 4:18; 5:11
- Be kind to one another: Ephesians 4:32
- Live in peace with one another: 1 Thessalonians 5:13
- Bear one another's burdens: Galatians 6:2

APPENDIX B

SUGGESTED QUESTIONS AND EXERCISES FOR STRUCTURED CONVERSATIONS

*Questions are addressed to the pastor unless otherwise noted.*

1. Tell us about your call to ministry. How has it changed over the years?
2. Share your journey of faith. Others on the team might also share their faith journeys, too.
3. What kinds of issues are you dealing with spiritually right now?
4. When do you worship? How do you worship? How is your personal worship experience impacted by being a worship leader? How does being a worship leader change the worship experience for your family (if applicable)? How can we make worship an even better experience for your family (if applicable)?
5. What does shared leadership in the Reformed tradition mean to you? (The previous question could be asked of all participants) In what places are you likely to “over-function” [i.e., take on responsibilities that are not properly yours; see Margaret J. Marcuson, *Leaders Who Last: Sustaining Yourself and Your Ministry*, Seabury Books, 2009, pp. 13-16] as a pastor and in what areas are you likely to “under-function”? [i.e. neglect responsibilities that are properly yours] In what ways does the congregation (especially the Session and other church officers) tend to “over-function” and “under-function”? What are some steps we can take together to adjust any imbalances? The previous two questions could be asked of all participants.
6. No person has all the spiritual gifts and talents required for ministry [see, e.g., 1 Corinthians 12]. What do you think are your spiritual gifts? What other things are you really good at? Does your job description allow you to use those gifts and talents regularly? If not, how can we adjust things? Our weaker areas are by God’s design, too. What are areas of ministry that are most difficult or stressful for you? How can we bring people alongside you to help?
7. What helps you to grow spiritually? How can we support you in your spiritual growth? What are the greatest threats or challenges to your spiritual growth?
8. How would you rate your spiritual health or describe your spiritual life? What do you do maintain it? How can we help?
9. What are your greatest stresses in ministry? What types of pastoral activities or care situations are the hardest for you personally? How can we help lighten this load?
10. What seasons of ministry are hardest for you? Why do you think this is so? How can we help lighten your load during these times?
11. What are your greatest joys in ministry? How can we help you to spend more time ministering in the areas that give you greatest joy?
12. How would you rate your physical health? How would your doctor rate your physical health? What practices are you following right now to maintain and improve your physical health? When was the last time you had a comprehensive annual physical (these are free for clergy under our health insurance)? What kind of support, encouragement, or accountability do you need to take steps toward better physical health? Make sure the pastor is familiar with all Board of Pensions programs for improving physical health.
13. How would you rate your interpersonal relationships (marriage, friendships, parenting, etc.)? What would your spouse, friends, kids, dog, etc. say about the quality of your relationships with them? What do you need to do right now to build your relationships (and personal support system)? How can we help?
14. Keep a daily work log for 30-90 days, showing as many of your activities as you can. Discuss with the group what the log reveals. How many evenings did you spend away from home? How many meals did you eat away from family? How many off-hour emergencies (such as hospital calls, emergencies) did you have? How many off-hour non-emergencies (such as Friday night retreats, calls on your day off, etc.) did you attend to? How many true “days off” did you have, i.e., days when you did no church-related work whatsoever? How many scheduled days off were compromised by a church commitment such as a funeral, retreat, etc.)? How many holidays did you work for some reason? How many hours did you work per week, on average? Is this a typical schedule for you? In what ways do you like your routine and what would you change about it? Are their congregational patterns that make good self-care hard (e.g., scheduling meetings on days off, heavy pot-luck suppers, calling you at home)? When a day-off is interrupted for some reason, how is this time “made up”?

15. Did you use all of your vacation this past year? If not, why not? If so, were you able to truly relax? If not, why not? If so, what helps you feel that you can truly “leave” the congregation and rest for a time? When you do take vacation or continuing education time, what are some of the challenges involved in taking time away? (e.g., difficulty in finding pastoral coverage, not enough funds available, difficulty in vacationing at home). Do you feel pressure from any portion of the congregation to not take all your vacation? How can we help?

16. Talk together about the costs and benefits of a sabbatical (if a sabbatical policy in your congregation does not already exist). What would be your hopes and fears regarding the establishment of a sabbatical program? What might the congregation’s hopes and fears be? Should we take steps toward creating a sabbatical policy? These questions are appropriate for all on the Team.

17. All people on the team should be invited individually to make lists of “typical” pastoral responsibilities and duties within their own understanding of ministry. Rank your responsibilities and duties in the order of what you think is most important. Then rank the activities in the order that you think the congregation values most. Compare your two lists with each other. Then compare your lists with those of other members of the Team. Discuss differing priorities and how priorities can be clarified. Discuss how competing priorities or lack of clarity about priorities can lead to clergy stress and congregational conflict. In what ways does the pastor’s job description accurately reflect the congregation’s priorities? Where does the job description need amending? How does the pastor’s schedule for the past 90 days reflect the congregation’s priorities? What would need to change to bring these two in line? These questions might be lead to conversations with the Personnel Committee, if any.

18. How would you rate or describe your emotional health? What do you do to maintain it? How can we help? Make the sure the pastor is familiar with all Board of Pension resources for clergy emotional and mental health.

19. What one activity would best promote your health in each area: physical, emotional, spiritual? What help do you need to do this one activity for each area?

20. Did you use all of your continuing education time and funds this year? If so, how? How was it beneficial to you? If not, why not? How do you choose experiences?

21. Did you use your four spiritual renewal days? If not, why not? If so, how was it beneficial to you?

22. Review together the congregation’s history of caring for its pastors. What form has care taken in the past? Did previous pastors experience poor personal health in any area? How was this addressed by the congregation? How did this impact the congregation? Given the congregation’s unique history and culture, what forms of clergy care do you think the congregation would be most open to in the future? What is the congregation’s history with regard to clergy compensation, especially with previous pastors?
23. Discuss the adequacy of the pastor’s compensation vis a vis the pastor’s personal needs and desires. Do you feel you are being compensated fairly, given your experience and education and the practices of neighboring PC (USA) congregations? Do you feel that you are being compensated adequately, given your needs? Do you feel that the congregation is doing everything within its means to compensate you fairly? Do you feel that you are being compensated fairly when compared with the lifestyles of the majority in the congregation? These questions could lead to discussion with the Personnel Committee, if any.

24. Do you have unreimbursed out-of-pocket ministry expenses? Are there other ways in which you are making sacrifices that go unnoticed? How can we help?

25. Are you personally able to give to God’s work in the way that you would like? Do you feel like you have opportunities to “volunteer” your time, too? In what ways does being a pastor make it harder for you to practice typical spiritual disciplines like giving, serving, and worshipping?

26. What are three things you wish the congregation knew about what it is like to be a pastor? Determine together if this is information that you would like to share with the congregation in some way (and how to share this).

27. What are the best words of encouragement from a parishioner that you’ve heard recently? What remark hurt you recently?

28. How would you complete this phrase: “I wish my congregation’s leaders knew more about the challenges of this aspect of my work in ________(i.e. preaching, stewardship, worship preparations). It would make my job easier.” Determine together if this is information that you would like to share with the congregation in some way (and how to share this).

29. What might keeping the Sabbath look like for a pastor? For a congregation? What does it look like for you?

30. What acts of care and kindness from this congregation (or from other parishioners at different times) have meant the most to you?

31. What and when is the best way for people to give you feedback? When are the worst times for it?

32. Take a personality type indicator or a strengths assessment tool together as a Team. Discuss the different personalities or strengths within the Clergy Care Team (including the pastor). Readily accessible and easy to use tools can be found in David Keirsey, Please Understand Me II: Temperament, Character, Intelligence, Prometheus Nemesis Book Co., 1998 and Marcus Buckingham and Donald O. Clifton, Now Discover your Strengths, Free Press, 2001.

33. In what ways does our congregational culture promote poor health (e.g., snacks at every meeting, sedentary meetings, emphasis on doing more all the time, few people have full vacations, etc.)? How can we create an environment together that will be healthier for our pastor and our parishioners?

34. Have you had issues with parishioners not honoring boundaries, currently or in the past (e.g., calling too early or late at home, asking you to do inappropriate things, making inappropriate comments on attire, children, or marital status)? How does the breaking of boundaries impact you (and your family, if applicable)? How can we help?

35. In what areas do you think your self-expectations exceed those of the congregation for you? In what ways do you think those self-expectations are unreasonable, unbiblical, or unfaithful? In what ways does the congregation seem to have expectations that are unreasonably and unfaithfully high?

36. The following question might be adapted for use in other congregation settings: If we are a Second Family, where do pastors and pastors’ families fit into this family? What responsibilities as “Family” members do they have to the congregation? What responsibilities does the congregation have to them? In what ways might the pastor and his or her family need to be treated differently than other people in the congregation?
37. How can we as a congregation show our respect for the pastoral office and ordination itself? This question could be discussed by all on the Team.

38. What are our current systems for caring for the pastor (and his or family, if applicable)? Whose responsibility is such care? Is it being done? What kinds of care are we currently providing? What kinds of care could we provide additionally?

39. If you could have one or more “armorbearers” [See Bryan Cutshall, Where Are the Armor Bearers and Toby Awasum, Ministering to Your Pastor: How to Serve God’s Servants of the Harvest.] in our congregation, how might they help you in your ministry or in your family life, if applicable?

40. Describe an experience of a pastor leaving under difficult circumstances (health, divorce, malfeasance, etc.). How did this impact the congregation? How did this impact the pastor? What can be done to help prevent that from happening here with this pastor? These questions could be discussed by all.

41. What attitudes or situations tend to keep the congregation from actively caring for and expressing support for the pastor in the way that the Bible and our Reformed tradition call for? Does ignorance of the pastors’ needs and the congregation’s responsibilities play a part? Is the congregation aware of how poor clergy health might impact them? How can we change these attitudes and remove these situations? The preceding questions are for the Care Team, with additional input from the pastor.

42. What attitudes or situations do you think keep you from proactively expressing your needs for care and support and even welcoming that support as the Bible and the Reformed tradition call for? How can we change these attitudes and remove these situations?

43. Discuss the ways in which pastoral over-functioning harms a congregation in the long-run. What personal attitudes and needs might motivate a pastor to over-function on a consistent basis? How can we limit over-functioning here? These questions are for all Team members.

44. Systems theory teaches us to look at systems rather than individuals. Look back at the congregation’s history of pastorates. Is there a pattern of long pastorates with healthy pastors? Is there a pattern of ministries cut short for one reason or another? Is it possible that the circumstances are related? In other words, does our congregation have a history of caring well for our pastors and attracting retaining healthy pastors or does our congregation have a history of difficulty in attracting and retaining healthy pastors? In what ways might we be repeating helpful or unhelpful patterns even now? These questions are for all people on the Team.

45. How would you describe what it means for a pastor to be physically, emotionally, and spiritually fit? Be as specific as you can. In what ways does our congregation promote physical, emotional, and spiritual health among all its members? What practices, customs, or traditions do we have that might inhibit the health of our members? These questions are for all on the Team.


Church Secretary. *Retreat Minutes*. Carlisle, PA: Second Presbyterian Church, March 5, 2011.


