



EQUIPPER

The monthly e-magazine from the Church Administration and Development team of Grace Communion International

October 2013

Volume 8, Issue 10

MinDev.gci.org

Dear Pastor,

Recently in *Equipper*, we've addressed the topic of stewardship—first related to finances and then related to spiritual gifts. This time we address pastors concerning stewardship of their own spiritual health—what some refer to as “stewardship of our hearts.”

As you know, shepherding a church is a high calling. However, it is also demanding; even draining. So before I continue, let me say how much we in Church Administration and Development appreciate you and the sacrifices you make to serve as a pastor. As you know, October is clergy appreciation month. And so we want to say “thanks” and let you know that our constant prayer is that God bless and keep you and your family, and that with and through you, he make known to many his glorious grace in Christ.

Because we care deeply about you, your family and your congregants, we want to ask that you give special attention to the stewardship of your heart. We know from our own experience that it is easy to get so focused on caring for others that you neglect yourself.

Research suggests that many pastors struggle when it comes to their own spiritual care. One of the reasons is that some do not find their own congregations to be a source of spiritual nurturance. Perhaps this is because they get so focused on feeding their congregants that they don't have the “space” needed within their own church to be fed themselves. If this is true for you (and you need not apologize if it is), please find other ways to receive the spiritual nurturance that you need.

There is no single way to do this—we each have our own “wiring” and emotional/spiritual needs and tastes. Of course, we all need to practice spiritual disciplines like Bible study and prayer. But many need more. Some pastors find it helpful to occasionally attend another church (perhaps for a mid-week service) where they can be worshippers rather than preachers. Others find participation in a pastor's prayer group helpful. Some like to take occasional spiritual retreats. Find what works for you. And non-pastors reading this please arrange for your congregation to help your pastor to take such steps. Perhaps the congregation could cover the expense for its pastor to go on a spiritual retreat.

On page two of this issue, we've reproduced an article related to this important topic. We pray that you will find it helpful.

In Christ's service:

Ted Johnston, *Equipper* editor and regional pastor



INSIDE THIS ISSUE

1 Stewardship of our hearts

2 Soul Care and the Roots of Clergy Burnout

Soul Care and the Roots of Clergy Burnout

by Anne Dilenschneider (excerpted from Huff Post, 11/9/2013)

My research on...the spiritual life of pastors, as well as 12 years of consulting in the field, show that burnout and poor health are symptoms of a far deeper "dis-ease" of soul... [Though] pastors who... get things done are considered "successful"...numerous studies... reveal that this approach is, literally, killing clergy and, by extension, churches and denominations.... The current emphasis on clergy effectiveness is due to a change in the role of pastors that occurred in the 1920s concomitant with the development of the assembly line and... production efficiency. At that time... clergy became "pastoral directors" who focused on the administrative tasks of managing and maintaining churches for the benefit of the denomination.... By the 1960s, pastors were being evaluated on their "competency, acquired skills, and professional status."

Now we hear that burnout needs to be solved so that clergy can be effective. At the same time, the solutions that are being recommended... have not been enough. To move towards true health, it is essential to get to the root cause by considering the role of clergy before the 1920s.

Until the 1920s, the pastor... cared for souls by helping people locate themselves in God's greater story. The first step in this work was the pastor's own attention to her or his soul-care through an intentional focus on her or his personal relationship with the Holy. Yet [today]... seminaries focus on academics and do not train Protestant clergy in spirituality or spiritual formation.... The rationale for this omission is the assumption... that clergy receive spiritual formation in their home congregations. However, as Ezra Earl Jones, who headed the United Methodist General Board of Discipleship for 12 years, points out, churches are "places for programs" and because of this, pastors themselves "haven't known the church to be a place of spiritual formation." As a result of their own poverty in spiritual formation and relationship with God, pastors are not prepared to help people build [their own] relationships with God.



As Jones told me: "My data... confirms your learnings that our pastors...do not practice the historic spiritual disciplines and therefore it is impossible for them to help those of us who look to them for guidance in the church to be praying people seeking God and love of neighbor." Daily time and space for this inner work are essential for the health of clergy and congregations. As Norman Shawchuck and Roger Heuser wrote in *Leading the Congregation: Caring for Yourself While Serving Others*, a congregation "will not journey beyond the pastor; the congregation will not venture where the pastor is not leading. This is a hard saying. It would be more comfortable to work like the traffic cop—to give a map or a few verbal instructions—but spiritual formation is a case where only those who have eyes to see can lead" (p. 126).

The witness of spiritual directors over the centuries is that the leader's need to "make a difference"... [their] need to find personal significance through effectiveness must be set aside in order to be "made different"... [to] discover one's renewed identity through relationship with God.

[In a letter] to a pastor 250 years ago... [John] Wesley [one of the founders of the Methodist movement] clearly stated the importance of soul care for pastors: "[This is] what has exceedingly hurt you in times past, nay, and I fear, to this day... Whether you like it or no, read and pray daily. It is for your life; there is no other way... Do justice to your own soul; give it time and means to grow. Do not starve yourself any longer."

Note from editor: for a related paper by Dan Rogers that addresses a pastor's calling to lead his or her congregation in spiritual formation, go to <http://www.gci.org/spiritual/formation> and for a helpful blog post from Thom Rainer on why some pastors burn out go to <http://thomrainer.com/2013/09/28/seven-reasons-pastors-burn-out/>