



WORLDWIDE  
CHURCH OF GOD

*Living and Sharing the Gospel*

# GC2 equipper

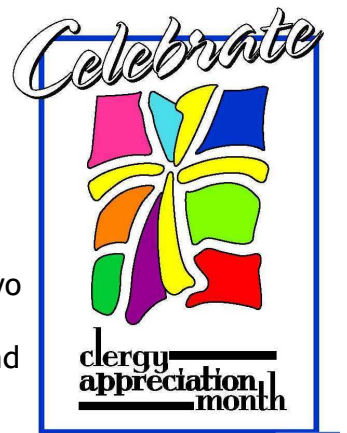
[www.wcg.org/mindev/](http://www.wcg.org/mindev/)

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The monthly ministry development newsletter of WCG-USA Church Administration and Development.  
*Equipping for active sharing with Jesus in his Great Commandment – Great Commission ministry.*

Dear fellow servant with Jesus,

October is clergy appreciation month (see [www.christianitytoday.com/holidays/clergy/](http://www.christianitytoday.com/holidays/clergy/)). To all pastors, we say thank you for your loving service. It is very much appreciated.



RANDY BLOOM

As a service to pastors, this and one or two future issues of *GC2 equipper* will address two related questions: What is pastoral burnout? And how is it managed? We pray that you find this information helpful as you share with Jesus in the Father's mission in our world.

If you are struggling with pastoral burnout, you are not alone. Surveys show that over 40% who leave the pastorate cite burnout as the primary reason. A pastor's work is often difficult. Many struggle with an arduous workload; many bear financial burdens. Pastors and their spouses are often unable to draw upon traditional sources of emotional and spiritual support, such as family and friends. This can lead to isolation and loneliness. These factors add up to high levels of stress that, unchecked, can lead to burnout.

Your friends and associates in CAD love you, are deeply concerned for your well-being and pray always for you. If you are struggling with pastoral burnout, we urge you to get counsel. Do not hesitate to contact your district pastoral leader or the CAD office—we are all here to help you.

If you would like to host a workshop on *pastoral burnout* in your area, please contact your district pastoral leader or the ministry developer nearest you (see [www.wcg.org/MinDev/events.htm#Contacts](http://www.wcg.org/MinDev/events.htm#Contacts)).

In Christ's service,

Randy Bloom (CAD ministry developer and director of WCG Church Multiplication Ministries)

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## Defining pastoral burnout

*Burnout.* It is a word that describes the way many pastors feel from time to time. It is an umbrella term that is often applied to a number of attitudes and feelings. But what is it? And what causes it?

### What is burnout?

Burnout is physical, emotional and mental exhaustion characterized by fatigue and feelings of helplessness or hopelessness. It may include feelings of being trapped and negative attitudes toward one's self, work or family. Burnout victims often feel an overpowering sense of inadequacy, incompetence and apathy.

Burnout may also include loss of faith and hope—the feeling that God does not care (see Psalm 88). Those experiencing burnout often find it difficult to fellowship with God in prayer, worship, Bible study or other spiritual disciplines. They may also have difficulty experiencing a sense of satisfaction or accomplishment in ministry.

Burnout is a malady that typically affects those who are conscientious and hard-working. It is born of good intentions, busy schedules and goal-oriented living.

Scriptural and other accounts are replete with examples of great leaders who experienced burnout. So if any of the above descriptions apply to you, do not despair. You are not strange, you are not alone and there is hope. There are ways to manage your experience of burnout. It begins with understanding its causes.

### What causes burnout?

Stress and frustration certainly contribute to burnout. Additional contributors include:

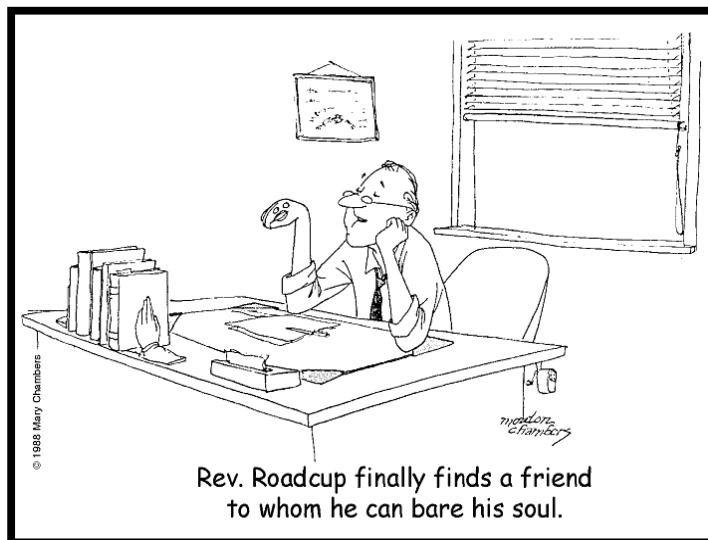
- **Unrealized hopes** (see Proverbs 13:12). Great hope often accompanies spiritual renewal. Our denomination has experienced an unprecedented move of the Spirit and many of us have held (and still hold) high hopes for continuing spiritual renewal and growth in our congregation(s). However, many people have not responded as we had hoped, and now, despite our best efforts, growth is not occurring in the manner we had hoped.
- **Unrealistic expectations.** Church members often have unrealistic and unwarranted expectations for their pastors. Pastors often have similar unrealistic expectations for themselves. The pressure of these expectations can be enormous.
- **Increasing demands.** Pastors are often expected to be involved in an endless array of activities: preaching, teaching, counseling, evangelizing, planning, Bible studies, social events, printing bulletins, attending community affairs, etc. Many pastors' lives are so hectic that they are unable to take adequate care of themselves or their families.
- **Misaligned priorities.** Due to increasing demands and expectations, we often lose sight of our priorities as spouses, parents and pastors. Key priorities for pastoral ministry are often replaced by less essential concerns.



## Managing pastoral burnout

Stress is unavoidable. However, stress itself is not the primary factor in burnout. Rather, burnout arises from our *response* to stress. So what can be done to develop healthier stress responses, and thus avoid (or minimize) burnout? We need a **burnout management plan** that involves the following key elements:

1. Clarifying theology
2. Clarifying priorities
3. Clarifying expectations
4. Maintaining perspective
5. Evaluating and adjusting workload and schedule
6. Scheduling diversions
7. Establishing boundaries
8. Developing accountability systems
9. Education and training



In this issue, we examine the first four elements. We'll cover the others in future issues of *GC2 equipper*.

### 1. Clarifying theology

As Dan Rogers noted in his presentation at the 2008 regional conferences, bad theology is a primary cause of pastoral burnout. A biblically accurate view of God and of the inclusion of all people in God's triune love and life, is essential for spiritual, mental, emotional and physical well-being. It will be helpful to review what Dan presented, comparing it with one's current theological viewpoint. The true gospel sets us free, while other views contribute to feelings of guilt, shame, inadequacy and separation from God. These other views often yield unrealistic (and thus unrealized) ministry goals and aspirations. We all benefit from the input of others in examining our theology and identifying aspects that need realignment to conform with the truth that is in Christ.

### 2. Clarifying priorities

Each of us needs occasionally to step back, take stock of our priorities and determine whether our activities reflect healthy priorities. Most Christians recognize a hierarchy like the following list of descending priorities:

- God
- Spouse and family
- Self (yes, taking care of yourself!)
- Vocation (for bi-vocational pastors)
- Ministry



None of these priorities exists in isolation—they are interrelated as aspects of our one life lived in union with God. Burnout occurs when any of these priorities are neglected. By establishing (or *re*-establishing) priorities and rearranging our lives accordingly, we minimize the danger of burnout. Remember, however, that no one lives out these priorities in perfect balance. Needs and circumstances often dictate that priorities be shifted. Emergencies happen. But having clearly established priorities helps to focus our efforts and thus to minimize stress in the midst of changing circumstances.

### 3. Clarifying expectations

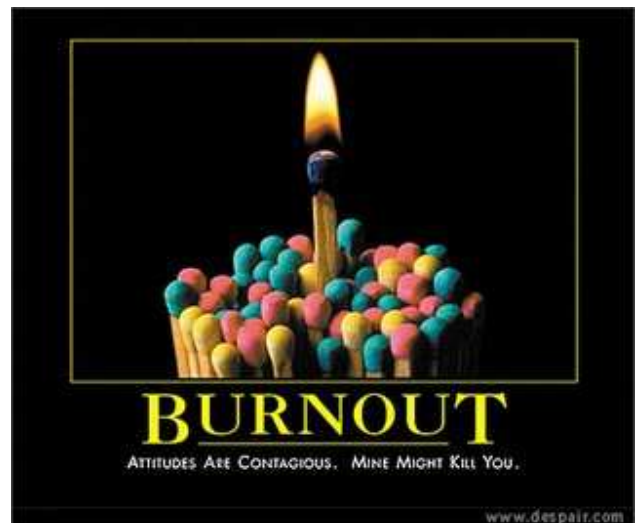
We all need a clear understanding of the expectations of our pastoral ministry roles. Unclear or unrealistic expectations produce stress and frustration. Chapter 6 of the *WCG-USA Church Administration Manual* outlines the roles and expectations of congregational pastoral leaders (CPLs). These expectations are based upon scripture as applied through relevant WCG policy. Understanding and communicating concerning these expectations will help minimize the development of unrealistic or unwarranted expectations.



### 4. Maintaining perspective

Expectations set forth for senior pastors in the *WCG Church Administration Manual* cover a wide range of responsibilities. However, pastors should seek to develop a realistic perspective regarding these expectations. No one is fully competent in all areas—hence, the imperative of team-based ministry. We avoid burnout when we work in accordance with our strengths and seek help in other areas. Remember, personal identity and self-worth are not based on our works, they are grounded in our identity in Christ.

We maintain perspective by remembering that the role of a pastor does not necessarily include developing a large church. Rather, our role is to share faithfully and actively in Jesus' ministry in order to help people embrace the good news that God includes all people in his love and forgiveness through Jesus Christ. We also maintain perspective as we remember that we cannot control the response of individuals to this wonderful good news.



## Resources

We recommend the following books as helpful in managing pastoral burnout:

- *It Only Hurts on Monday*, Gary L. McIntosh & Robert L. Edmondson
- *How to Thrive as a Small-Church Pastor*, Steve R. Bierly
- *Deepening Your Conversation With God*, Ben Patterson
- *Turnaround Strategies for the Small Church*, Ron Crandall
- *Pastors at Risk*, H. B. London