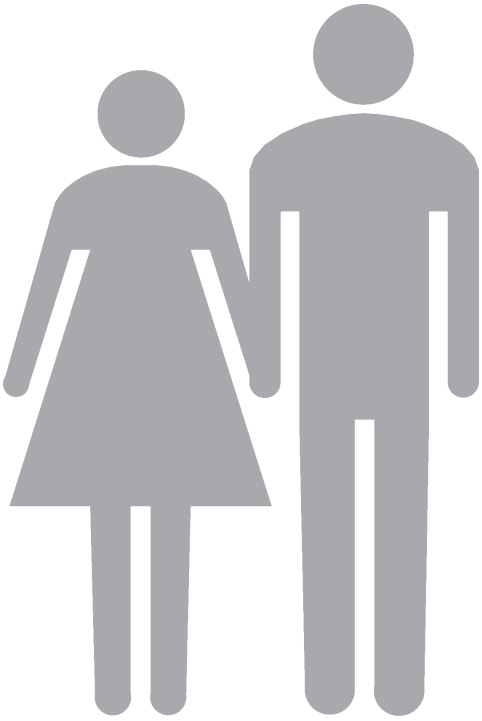
Marriage and Ministry

A strong marriage nurtures effective ministry



Sustaining Pastoral Excellence
in the Christian Reformed Church in N.A.
2850 Kalamazoo Avenue SE
Grand Rapids, MI 49560

Marriage and Ministry © 2008 by the Sustaining Pastoral Excellence project of the Christian Reformed Church in North America, 2850 Kalamazoo Ave. SE, Grand Rapids, MI 49560. Printed in the United States of America on recycled paper.

We welcome your comments. Call us at 1.877.279.9994 X0805 (toll free) or e-mail us at pastoralexcellence@crcna.org

www.crcna.org/pastoralexcellence

Foreword

Seven Christian Reformed Church (CRC) pastors and their spouses collaborated on this training tool to provide pastors and church councils with common grounds for nurturing marriage in the context of pastoral ministry. While this subject has not received a high profile within church culture, these 14 men and women saw the need to provide church councils and pastors with strategies for paying attention to it.

We think this is most timely. In our 50 years of serving the church together, we have come to realize that to be married in ministry has been a gift to us and to those we serve. We have also realized that the difficulties faced by pastor couples are seldom noticed by the people they serve. Elders and deacons routinely pay more attention to visible matters like church finances or building maintenance than to the invisible dynamics of the pastor's marriage and family. Many of the complexities of being married as pastor and spouse are hidden from public view. This training tool provides a wise and accessible way for pastors and church councils to strengthen the great gift that a pastor's marriage can bring to a congregation. It is obvious that good preaching and teaching, faithful visitation, and counsel are important—and there is much encouragement and affirmation to do these things well. This tool places marriage on churches' agendas, too, along with these more public aspects of ministry.

Pastoral work is unremittingly personal and relational. Much of it takes place behind the scenes, yet all of it intersects in one way or another with the pastor's marriage. This tool shows churches and pastors how they can provide the right conditions and understandings to keep marriage, ministry, and congregations on speaking terms.

As church councils assume greater responsibility for the welfare of the pastor and his or her family, we visualize a lot of love being shared. May this training tool give guidance and wisdom in supporting the pastor's marriage in a very human and holy way.

—*Jan and Eugene Peterson, June 2008*

Table of Contents

Foreword 3
How to Use This Training Tool 7
Collaborators 7
Introduction by Ed Gerber 9
Chapter 1: Sabbath Rest by Ed Gerber 11
Chapter 2: Peer Groups by Dick Oberg 13
Chapter 3: Sabbatical by Al Gelder 15
Chapter 4: Relationships by Al and Jan Gelder 19
Chapter 5: Council Retreats by Dick Oberg 23
Chapter 6: Retreats and Seminars by Ken & Diane Prol 25
Chapter 7: Intentional Reflection by Stan Sturing 27
Chapter 8: Pastor-Church Relations Committee by Stan Sturing 29
Chapter 9: Balance by Derek Van Dalen 31
Chapter 10: Boundaries and Expectations by Jim and Alyce Vande Lune 33
Chapter 11: Burnout by Ken Prol 37
Appendix A: A Checklist for Pastors 41
Appendix B: A Checklist for Churches 43
Bibliography 45

How to Use This Training Tool

This training tool was created to explore the importance of nurturing and supporting a pastor's marriage and family in the context of parish ministry. Each chapter explores a different practice, issue, or strategy relating to the topic of marriage and ministry.

This tool was created *by* pastor couples *for* pastor couples and the churches they serve. Each chapter ends with two action plans—one for the pastor/pastor couple and one for the council—which provide practical steps each can take to create conditions in which both marriage and ministry can thrive. *Marriage and Ministry* can be used as a study guide, action planner, and/or discussion starter for:

- pastors or pastor couples
- peer groups of pastors and/or pastors' spouses
- mentors and mentees in parish ministry
- church councils
- pastor-church relations committees

Collaborators

This training tool is a publication of the Sustaining Pastoral Excellence (SPE) initiative of the Christian Reformed Church in North America (CRCNA). The team of pastor couples responsible for putting together this booklet include: Al and Jan Gelder, Valley CRC – Binghamton, NY; Ed and Michelle Gerber, Webster CRC – Webster, NY; Dick and Kathy Oberg, East Palmyra CRC – Palmyra, NY; Ken and Diane Prol, First CRC – Randolph, WI; Stan and Melody Sturing, Goshen CRC – Goshen, NY; Derek and Shirley Van Dalen, Palm Lane CRC – Scottsdale, AZ; & Jim and Alyce Vande Lune, Immanuel CRC – Wappingers Falls, NY.

Introduction

by Ed Gerber

About the Authors

This training tool is a result of the collaborative thoughts, ruminations, and experiences of our Sustaining Pastoral Excellence (SPE) peer learning group which was made up of seven pastors and spouses who are/were serving the Christian Reformed Church (CRC) in upstate New York. Together, we—Al and Jan Gelder, Ed and Michelle Gerber, Dick and Kathy Oberg, Ken and Diane Prol, Stan and Melody Sturing, Derek and Shirley Van Dalen, Jim and Alyce VandeLune—created this tool. It is our prayer that it will provide practical strategies for supporting and nurturing both marriage and ministry.

Acknowledgements

This project was inspired by retreats held at Spruce Lodge on Flathead Lake in Kalispell, Montana (2006-2007) when our peer group was privileged to have spent time with Eugene and Jan Peterson exploring the topic of marriage and ministry. We are indebted to the Petersons for so generously sharing their time, life experiences, and insights with us.

Our peer group is also grateful for the financial support we received for this project from the CRC's SPE project.

Our Motivation

Ministry is hard. Ministry with a strained marriage can be harder still. Armed with that knowledge, our peer group created this training tool. Experience has taught us that healthy marriages contribute to healthy homes and healthy children, and healthy, happy homes support and contribute to healthy and vibrant pastoral ministries. This tool is based on the belief that a pastor with a healthy marriage is better equipped to provide effective leadership for the church.

Meeting together, members of our peer group quickly came to realize that many church councils do not take seriously enough the task of caring for the pastor and the pastor's family. We also concluded that many pastors neglect to care for their marriages and families to the extent that they should. An antidote to neglect, this training tool urges pastors and councils to work together to create conditions conducive to the health of the ministry and the marriage.

Without focused, preventive action, the results for pastors and churches are predictable: pastoral burn-out, frustration, division in the church and home, neglected children, failed marriages, and more. We believe that this tool, if used as a starting point for discussion and intentional action, will help prevent the conditions that often contribute to the breakdown of marriage and ministry.

Chapter 1
Sabbath Rest

by Ed Gerber

What is Sabbath?

Of the practices most emphasized by Jan and Eugene Peterson for healthy marriage and ministry, Sabbath rest was a high priority. What is Sabbath? Sabbath is simply time to rest in God, to resist the nagging voice that compels us to act. It involves stepping back from the rigors of regular routines and roles. It is remembering and resting in God and who we are as God's.

Sabbath is God's gift—for individuals and for couples.
Sabbath strengthens marriages and energizes ministries.

Jan and Eugene Peterson have practiced a weekly Sabbath throughout their years in ministry, and they inspired each of us to make a similar commitment. Every Monday, the Peterson family would take a hike and enjoy a picnic lunch together. For the Petersons, this Sabbath rest was a lifeline. It was hardly ever missed. Sabbath involved quiet reflection, sharing, family time, and prayer.

As we talked with the Petersons, we became convinced that nothing could be as important for us as pastors than taking a Sabbath rest. Sabbath rejuvenates. Sabbath refocuses. Sabbath re-roots pastors, marriages, and family life in Christ. Each of us began to practice a weekly Sabbath, and we soon viewed it as indispensable to both marriage and ministry.

Not Just Another "Day Off"

Prior to our peer group experiences, few of us had practiced a weekly Sabbath—although some of us regularly took time off work. Eugene Peterson was passionate about noting the difference between time off and Sabbath rest. A "day off" is a day without formal work, he said, while Sabbath is a day that involves rest in God, including prayer and meditation of God.

"If we do not regularly quit work for one day a week, we take ourselves far too seriously. The moral sweat pouring off our brows blinds us to the primal action of God in and around us."—Eugene Peterson, *Working the Angles*

How to Implement Sabbath

Here are some steps to take to begin a weekly Sabbath practice:

1. **Make a covenant regarding Sabbath rest.**
   Council and pastor should talk together about why Sabbath rest is important and come to an agreement about when and how it should be taken. Put this agreement in writing.
2. **Set aside a particular day each week and commit to keeping it.**
   Pastors should select one day of each week for Sabbath rest, and councils should keep their pastor accountable for observing the day—releasing him or her from duties.
3. **Educate the congregation.**
   Inform the congregation about the pastor's Sabbath and how to respect it. Explain to them why Sabbath rest is important for the health of the church as well as the pastor's marriage, family, and home. Inform church members about what they can do in the pastor's absence (i.e. who they can call on that day when urgent pastoral needs arise).

Pastor's Action Plan

- Set aside one day of each week for Sabbath rest.
- Determine what you will do on your Sabbath day and what it will look like.
- Commit to keeping the day each week.
- Ensure accountability to your council for taking Sabbath rest by sharing how it benefits you and your ministry.

Council's Action Plan

- Include taking Sabbath rest in the pastor's job description.
- When calling a new pastor, list Sabbath rest as one of your expectations.
- Honor your pastor's Sabbath by releasing your pastor from duties on that day. Communicate the pastor's Sabbath to the congregation, including providing alternatives for contact on that day.
- Keep your pastor accountable for taking Sabbath rest by asking him or her about it regularly and following up if the congregation does not respect it.

Resources

Peterson, Eugene H. *Working the Angles: The Shape of Pastoral Integrity.* Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1990.

Chapter 2
Peer Groups
by Dick Oberg

A Blessing for Ministry and Marriage

Three years ago I was one of seven CRC pastors who set out to establish a peer group in upstate New York. It did not take long for us to understand that our peer group involvement was strengthening not only our ministries but our marriages as well.

Our meetings quickly evolved from sharing on a professional level to a more personal fellowship. We began to open up about our pastoral challenges. Much to our delight our spouses became actively involved in our group—bringing their perspectives to the table. Together as pastor couples, we were able to explore each other's hearts and minds and allow the Holy Spirit to do the same. We shared thoughts and feelings, divulged weaknesses and shortcomings, encouraged growth, offered prayers, and asked for blessings to strengthen our work in the church.

Peer group involvement has the capacity to strengthen both ministry and marriage.

The members of our peer group were diverse in age, experience, and backgrounds, but we shared a common desire to be strengthened in our ministries and in our personal lives. We did not restrict our gatherings to ministry-related subjects but also spent a lot of time talking about issues affecting the health of family and marriage. The high point for our group came when we spent time with Eugene and Jan Peterson discussing marriage and ministry in a retreat setting. Our conversations with the Petersons, and with each other, at Spruce Lodge on Flathead Lake helped form much of the content of this training tool.

A Safe Place to Share

Peer groups come in many different shapes and sizes. Some are theologically-oriented, while others focus on emotional support. Our peer group was intended to build skills for ministry while providing a place for sharing and fellowship. Our peer group experiences exceeded our expectations. The Spirit of God truly worked among us as pastors and spouses to accomplish objectives we could not have envisioned when we began meeting together. We found a safe place to unwind and to share honestly and openly.

Through our experiences, we have come to realize that peer group participation blesses not only pastors but also the pastor's spouse and family. We encourage pastors and/or pastor couples to find a peer group, and we urge churches and councils to support their pastors and pastors' spouses in participating in peer groups.

Pastor's Action Plan

- Talk to your spouse about peer group involvement and its many benefits.
- Commit to joining—or starting—a peer group in your region.
- Investigate the financial support available for peer groups from the CRC's Sustaining Pastoral Excellence project (see the resource list below).
- Discuss your plans with your council.

Council's Action Plan

- Encourage your pastor and/or pastor couple to start or join a peer group.
- Offer concrete support for peer group involvement (i.e. time or financial support).
- Ask your pastor to report on peer group activities at council meetings and to the congregation via a church newsletter.

Resources

Websites

Calvin Institute of Christian Worship: http://www.calving.edu/worship/

Visit the Calvin Institute of Christian Worship website to learn more about peer learning groups for pastors, including an article by Joan Huyser-Honing entitled "Peer Learning Groups: Putting Your Heads Together to Change Hearts." In addition, sample proposals for peer learning can be found on the website at: www.calvin.edu/worship/grants/Sample%20Proposals.pdf

Duke Divinity School – Sustaining Pastoral Excellence: http://www.divinity.duke.edu/programs/spe/

The Duke Divinity School's Sustaining Pastoral Excellence program website features a regular newsletter and other resources to support peer learning.

Sustaining Pastoral Excellence: www.crcna.org/pastoralexcellence

Visit the CRC's Sustaining Pastoral Excellence website to access information about pastor's peer learning groups—including applications for peer group grants. Grants are also available for pastors' spouses' peer groups. This website also features numerous success stories on how peer learning groups have positively contributed to healthy local ministries and the health and well-being of pastors and pastor families.

The Alban Institute: http://www.alban.org/

Access blogs, newsletters, and other pastor resources that support peer learning on this website of The Alban Institute.

Chapter 3
Sabbatical

by Al Gelder

What is a Sabbatical?

Sabbatical: some pastors expect it; others only dream of it. Among the pastors in our peer group, none of us has ever experienced a true sabbatical. Still, we remain convinced that sabbaticals are an important part of nurturing healthy marriage and ministry.

Sabbaticals are an important part of nurturing healthy marraige and ministry.

A sabbatical is not a vacation. For the purposes of this training tool we define sabbatical as *an extended, planned, intentional time away for the purpose of personal renewal and re-energizing*. Based on that definition, we developed the following list of questions and answers to assist pastors and councils in considering how to go about developing a sabbatical plan or policy.

1. **How long should a sabbatical be?**
   Sabbaticals need not be a specific length of time. However, the time needs to be an extended time (i.e. longer than a typical vacation) and sufficient to reach the objectives set out for it. In reviewing policies from several denominations, a general guideline for sabbatical is to provide three months leave after five years of service. However, others advocate for sabbaticals every four years, and still others choose every seven years. Contact the CRC's Office of Pastor-Church Relations for more guidance on this matter.

2. **How does a church make it happen?**
   Developing a sabbatical plan is critical. Planning should begin at least six months—and preferably a year—before the beginning of the leave. This allows councils adequate time to plan for filling the pastoral vacancy during the sabbatical. It is important to involve the pastor's spouse in sabbatical planning.

3. **What does a sabbatical plan look like?**
   A sabbatical plan should include:
   - a description of the sabbatical (what the pastor will do, where, why, for how long)
   - indicators of how the sabbatical will benefit the pastor and the congregation
   - an implementation plan for how congregational ministry will continue to be carried out in the pastor's absence
   - a financial plan for how the congregation will fund the sabbatical if it involves hiring another pastor or interim staff person to cover pastoral duties (note: With proper planning, the cost of a sabbatical can be spread out over a period of two to five years.)

4. **Is a part-time sabbatical possible?**
   Based on our research and discussions, we came to the conclusion that a sabbatical cannot be done on a part-time basis. In order for sabbatical to be effective, a pastor must have complete rest from the duties of the congregation.

5. **Does a pastor have to leave home for a sabbatical?**
   It may not be possible for a pastor and/or the pastor's family to leave home during the sabbatical. Many pastors plan profitable full-time sabbaticals while staying at home. However, for that to happen, the congregation must be well informed about how to respect the pastor's sabbatical. One suggestion is for the pastor and his or her family to worship with another congregation during the sabbatical to help maintain healthy boundaries.

6. **Why do pastors need sabbaticals?**
   The concept of sabbatical is related to the need for Sabbath rest we discussed in the Chapter 1. God's word prescribes a weekly Sabbath, based on God's creation pattern (Genesis 2:2). The Bible also presents the concept of an every-seventh-year Sabbath when the land was to be left fallow for renewal (Leviticus 25:3-4). In Old Testament times, the year of jubilee was to be a sabbatical year (Leviticus 25:8-13). It is clear that we have a God-given need for times of rest and renewal. That most certainly is true for pastors, given the unique nature of the stresses and demands placed on them.

7. **How can a sabbatical help prevent burn-out?**
   A sabbatical helps prevent burnout by providing time for renewal of mind and body—including physical renewal (eating properly and getting regular exercise), mental renewal (taking a college or seminary class, either audited or for credit), and spiritual renewal (spending time in solitude, retreat, and reflection). A sabbatical can play a major role in preventing burnout when it helps a pastor balance these physical, mental, and spiritual needs.

8. **How does a sabbatical contribute to the health of a pastor's marriage?**
   A sabbatical contributes to marital renewal by providing extended time for relaxation, renewal, and time away from the center of the church. This supports and nurtures healthy marriage and family relationships, allowing a pastor to return from sabbatical refreshed and re-energized for the work of ministry.

Sabbatical To-Do List – for pastors and councils

- **Develop a policy and put it in the church's next letter of call.**
  If no policy exists for a current pastor, it is not too late to develop one.
- **Plan ahead and develop a budget.**
  The pastor can introduce the idea to the council or the council can begin the process. Have a feasibility study done and get approval to set aside funds over several years.
- **Form a team, and then develop and implement a plan.**
  When the council has accepted the concept of sabbatical, pull together a small team of council members and the pastor and his or her spouse to develop and implement the sabbatical plan.
- **Keep the congregation informed.**
  Avoid surprises. Pastors need to share their plans with the council who, in turn, should keep the congregation informed. Make sure the details of how the pastor's regular tasks will be carried out during the sabbatical are in place. Be clear about the expectations regarding a commitment to continuing ministry after the sabbatical. Then work the plan.
- **Remind everyone of the benefits.**
  After a sabbatical, a pastor's preaching will have renewed vitality and he or she will have new energy for planning ministry opportunities. In rare situations, a sabbatical leads a pastor to conclude that it is time to move on to a different church. This too is better for both pastor and church.

Pastor's Action Plan

- Begin planning a sabbatical when you accept a call.
- Keep sabbatical planning on your council's agenda.
- Regularly discuss the benefits of sabbatical with council.
- Involve your spouse in planning a sabbatical.
- Be faithful to your plan.

Council's Action Plan

- Develop a congregational policy on sabbaticals.
- Include provision for a sabbatical in the letter of call.
- Discuss in council, and with the congregation, the benefits of sabbatical.
- Encourage the pastor to plan a sabbatical.
- Put funds in the budget each year toward sabbatical expenses.

Resources

Books and Video

Bullock, A. Richard and Bruesehoff, Richard J. *Clergy Renewal: The Alban Guide to Sabbatical Planning*. Herndon, Va.: The Alban Institute, 2000.

Dawn, Marva J. *Keeping the Sabbath Wholly: Ceasing, Resting, Embracing, Feasting.* Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1989.

Oswald, Roy. *Clergy Self-Care: Finding a Balance for Effective Ministry.* Herndon, Va.: The Alban Institute, 1991.

Oswald, Roy. Why You Should Give Your Pastor a Sabbatical (Video). Herndon, Va.: The Alban Institute.

Peterson, Eugene H. *The Contemplative Pastor*. Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1989. Peterson, Eugene. *Working the Angles: the Shape of Pastoral Integrity*. Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1990.

Sevier, Melissa Bane. *Journeying toward Renewal: A Spiritual Companion for Pastoral Sabbaticals.* The Alban Institute, 2002.

Websites

Evangelical Lutheran Church in America:
www.elca.org/Growing-In-Faith/Vocation/Rostered-Leadership/Leadership-Support/Sabbatical.aspx
This website provides excellent examples of sabbatical guidelines.

Lilly Endowment Inc.: www.clergyrenewal.org
Lilly's National Clergy Renewal Program awards as many as 120 grants, of up to $45,000 each, directly to Christian congregations (in the U.S. only) for the support of a renewal program for their pastor.

Louisville Institute: www.louisville-institute.org
The Louisville Institute's Sabbatical Grants for Pastoral Leaders Program provides grants for pastor's sabbaticals (in the U.S. only).

Presbyterian Church USA: www.pcusa.org/ministers/ministrydevelopment/sabbatical.htm
This website provides information on sabbatical planning, funding a sabbatical, and a sample of a sabbatical policy.

Reformed Church of America: www.rca.org
Under Leadership Resources, select "Ministry Services" and scroll down to the section entitled "Sabbaticals for the Pastor" to find helpful information on sabbaticals.

Sustaining Pastoral Excellence: www.crcna.org/pastoralexcellence
On this website, navigate to "Resources" and select "Sabbatical" on the drop-down menu to access information about sabbatical policies and more.

Chapter 4
Relationships

by Al and Jan Gelder

Some pastors believe that their call to ministry denies them the opportunity to experience close, personal relationships with individuals other than a spouse. This simply is not true. This chapter explores three types of close, personal relationships that can strengthen a pastor couple in their family life, marriage, and ministry.

God made us social beings and instilled in us a need for friendship. Pastors and their spouses are no exception.

Friendships

God made us social beings and instilled in us a need for friendships. Pastors and their spouses are no exception. It is a simple fact that pastor couples who give and never receive in relationships will eventually experience burnout and isolation.

Pastors spend countless hours listening to, counseling, teaching, and helping others. However, pastors should not confuse these professional relationships with friendships. Being able to clearly distinguish pastoral relationships from friendships is important for the health of a pastor, spouse, and family.

But how and with whom can a pastor couple develop friendships? Some pastor couples find friendships within their own church. Sometimes this works, but it can also present significant challenges. For instance, sharing confidences with a church member can at times lead to hurt, broken trust, and a breakdown of confidentiality within ministry. Perhaps this is why many pastors seek out friendships from the broader community or from other congregations.

Another possible source of friendships for pastor couples may be individuals who have served in ministry in the past or individuals who have lived in a pastor's family. People with a ministry background often have a better understanding of the special challenges pastors and their families face. They are also sensitive to the high level of confidentiality required in ministry.

Still another option is for pastor couples to seek out friendships with other pastor couples, either from the same denomination or a different one.

At one time, my husband and I became close friends with another pastor couple of a different denomination. We were there for each other in fun times as well as in times of crisis. Pastor couples understand each other on a deeper level because they share so much in common." —Jan Gelder

Mentoring

Mentoring is another type of relationship that offers many blessings to pastors and pastor couples. The CRC matches new pastors with more experienced ones through a mentoring program. (For more information on the mentoring program and the mentoring manual *Toward Effective Pastoral Ministry*, see the resource list at the end of this chapter.)

Mentoring is important because no matter what route a pastor takes to enter ministry, he or she can not learn everything needed before ministry begins. Mentors can help new pastors answer the questions that were not dealt with in their training. Questions like:

- How do I deal with the unpredictable behavior of a church member?
- How do I handle work-related stress?
- How much should I share with my spouse?
- How can I maintain healthy boundaries between work and home?

Being immersed in ministry, experiencing its ups and downs, and discovering personal weaknesses—and God's abundant grace—teaches pastors many things. That accumulated knowledge and experience can be effectively shared through a mentoring relationship. Churches benefit greatly when a newer pastor is able to tap into the life and ministry experiences of a more seasoned pastor.

Nurturing an effective mentoring relationship takes time, but this is an investment well worth making for both the pastor and the church. Initially, mentor and mentee need to meet together regularly to share, build trust, and pray together. Over time, especially if distance is an issue, more of the mentoring relationship can take place via phone calls and email.

Inviting spouses to participate in meetings or social events can enrich the mentoring relationship. The newly ordained pastor's spouse is likely feeling unprepared for this new role. He or she can benefit from spending time with a more experienced pastor's spouse—someone who can offer practical advice and guidance on such things as the unique family dynamics created by life in ministry.

Spiritual Directors

Eugene and Jan Peterson talked passionately about how spiritual directors can enrich the life of a pastor couple. A qualified spiritual director helps pastors and spouses more clearly see how God is leading them in ministry and contributes to spiritual health and well-being.

According to Spiritual Directors International, spiritual direction is "companionship with another person or group through which the Holy One shines with wisdom, encouragement, and discernment." A spiritual director need not be another pastor. "Spiritual direction takes place any time two people agree to give their full attention to what God is doing in one (or both) of their lives and seek to respond in faith," explains Eugene Peterson in his book *Working the Angles*.

A spiritual director is not a teacher, a mentor, or a friend. A spiritual director is a person who helps individuals see where God is working and leading in their lives. A spiritual director helps people find their own way with God, encouraging them to ask the right (and sometimes difficult) questions and to clear the clutter from their minds and lives so that they can hear what God is saying to them.

Spiritual direction is not a form of marriage or career counseling, and it is not a way to solve problems in the parish or marriage. A spiritual director helps pastor couples discover what God is already doing in their lives. Spiritual Directors International provides links to many spiritual directors (see the resource list at the end of this chapter). However, not all spiritual directors are Christian, and we encourage pastors and spouses to choose a spiritual director with care.

Pastor's Action Plan

- As a pastor couple, discuss your needs for friendship and other close, personal relationships openly.
- Distinguish between relationships that are professional and those that are personal.
- If you lack the support of friends, strategize together about how you might change that (i.e. participate in activities in the community, join an ecumenical pastors' group, form a peer group, etc.).
- Consider being mentored or mentoring someone else.
- Seek out the support of a qualified spiritual director for you and your spouse.

Council's Action Plan

- Check in regularly with your pastor couple, asking whether their relationship needs are being met.
- Support your pastor and spouse in seeking out safe places to establish friendships.
- Support the pastor in mentoring others or being mentored.
- Encourage your pastor/pastor couple to find a spiritual director and to take time to develop spiritually.

Resources

Books

Cloud, Henry and John Townsend. *Boundaries*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2002.

Gilbert, Roberta. *Extraordinary Relationships.* New York: Wiley, 1992.

Pastor-Church Relations. *Toward Effective Pastoral Ministry. 3rd edition.* Grand Rapids: Christian Reformed Church in North America, 2008.

Peterson, Eugene. *The Contemplative Pastor: Returning to the Art of Spiritual Direction*. Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1993.

Peterson, Eugene. *Under the Unpredictable Plant*: *An Exploration in Vocational Holiness.* Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1994.

Peterson, Eugene. *Working the Angles: the Shape of Pastoral Integrity*. Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1990.

Websites

Christian Reformed Church Office of Pastor-Church Relations: www.crcna.org/pages/pastorchurch.cfm

This website includes information about the CRC's mentoring program and how to access the services of a regional pastor—a resource person who can help pastors deal with many of the issues discussed in this chapter.

Spiritual Directors International: www.sdiworld.org

This website provides information about spiritual direction and how to seek/find a spiritual director.

Chapter 5
Council Retreats

by Dick Oberg

Broadcasting the Olympics was one of photo journalism's greatest early challenges. Transporting and accommodating hundreds of staff and heavy equipment halfway around the world took a massive amount of effort, but advances in sports broadcasting did not end there. Broadcasters soon realized that viewers needed to know that the men and women they saw doing such amazing feats also had a personal side. We knew who they were as athletes, but who were they as people? This question led to a new approach. "Up close and personal" stories about athletes became commonplace.

Getting to Know Each Other

Consider a church's leadership. The council members and pastor may know each other well in their ministry roles. Together, they have tended to agendas, developed strategies, implemented plans, attended meetings and made visits. But do these church leaders know each other "up close and personal"?

Jesus repeatedly took advantage of time alone with his disciples. Not only did he dedicate himself to teaching but also to times of fellowship, prayer, and personal sharing. When Jesus left his disciples to go to the cross, he and his disciples knew each other perhaps as well as any group of people could hope to know one another.

Churches should consider planning retreats that allow pastor and council members to get to know each other on a personal level, as Jesus knew his disciples. They should intentionally plan time away for the purpose of getting "up close and personal." Doing so will strengthen a church's leadership.

Benefits Go Beyond Council

Council retreats not only benefit the pastor, council, and church but also the pastor couple. Improved interpersonal relationships and better support in leadership significantly reduces work stress. Fewer stressful council meetings contribute to a healthier and happier pastor, which in turn contributes to a healthier pastor couple.

Council retreats improve a council's unity and effectiveness and nurture an environment of mutual support and caring in the church. This is great comfort for both the pastor and spouse as they serve together in parish ministry.

Planning a Retreat

Your retreat plan should include but not be limited to:

- a written plan outlining how you will spend your time
- an offsite location for overnight accommodations
- time for prayer and sharing of scripture passages
- an opportunity for individuals to be paired with someone they do not know very well
- time for worship and praise
- time for individual reflection, meditation, and prayer
- celebration of the Lord's Supper

Pastor's Action Plan

- Encourage an annual council retreat focused on personal sharing.

Council's Action Plan

- Support your pastor in planning an annual council retreat for personal sharing.
- Commit to attending the event and come with an open mind.

Chapter 6

Retreats and Seminars

by Ken and Diane Prol

Ministry can sometimes feel like a three-way tug of war between pastor, spouse, and church. All is well when the three parties hold their positions, but eventually issues and situations can wear everyone down. Sometimes, just holding onto the rope in this tug of war can be a challenge. Retreats and seminars can help pastors and pastor couples see that rope as a lifeline rather than an anchor.

Retreats have value for pastor, spouse, and church.

Retreats

"In the past, I didn't think that I needed a retreat. But having experienced a few, the value is undeniable. I once tried to shield my spouse from all the struggles that were going on in and around my life as a pastor. Silence and avoiding direct answers to her questions began to wear away at a sacred trust that was promised in our wedding vows. As trials and struggles increased in the church, my heart grew heavier and more tired." -Ken Prol

Pastors and pastor couples live at the center of church life. While they find great reward in serving in this capacity, they also experience a great deal of strain. It is vitally important for pastors and their spouses to occasionally retreat from the hectic pace of church life, to rest and be restored in each other and in God.

Pastor retreats are a place to let go and regroup; they are essential for marriage and ministry. They provide a place and time away for quiet reflection and praise. Pastors can seek out different kinds of retreats at different times. They are an opportunity to regularly be refreshed spiritually and emotionally. This contributes to healthy relationships between pastor, spouse, and church.

Pastor couple retreats offer wonderful opportunities for encouragement and renewal of marriage and ministry. Retreats allow a pastor and spouse respite from being the center of the church's attention. At a retreat, a pastor couple can share needs, concerns, and joys. Fellowship with other couples during retreats can provide a new perspective on how to deal with challenging situations in the church. For instance, at a retreat pastor couples may learn about how to retain a sense of privacy within the home or how to set boundaries that separate family life from church life. Retreats can help the pastor couple find the proper balance that contributes to better relationships at home.

Retreats are not vacations, as some may be inclined to believe. Retreats are focused on spiritual wellness, emotional completeness, and nurturing healthy marriage relationships. Churches directly benefit when their pastor and/or pastor couple spend time on retreat. Prayer and time to relax help keep a pastor energized to serve.

Many pastors are afraid to ask for the time and funds to attend retreats. Councils should be sensitive to this and encourage their pastor to spend time on retreat. It is a worthwhile investment in the health of the church, the pastor, and the pastor couple. Funding may be available to help defray the costs. (check the list of resources at the end of this chapter)

Seminars

A seminar is an educational forum, a place for study and discussion. Like the tools a tradesperson relies upon, seminars help pastors do important maintenance and upgrades. At seminars, pastors sharpen their ministry skills, expand their ministry horizons, and renew their lives for service in the church. The entire church benefits when a pastor attends seminars that teach, challenge, and equip for service.

While many seminars are geared to the pastor, some are designed for the pastor couple. Since spouses play such an important role in the church's ministry, they should be included in these learning events whenever possible. Understanding the changing nature of ministry dynamics is important not only for the pastor but for the spouse as well.

Sometimes attending seminars can feel like a burden for a pastor because of the backlog of work he or she will face upon return to the church. Therefore, it is wise for a church to provide a Sunday off from preaching if the pastor has been away at a seminar.

Pastor's Action Plan

- Commit to participating in a number of retreats and seminars each year.
- Plan with your spouse at least one couple's retreat each year.
- Research options, costs, and benefits of annual retreat/seminar plans and discuss with council.

Council's Action Plan

- Encourage and provide funding for retreats and seminars for your pastor.
- Include funding each year for at least one couple's retreat for your pastor couple.
- Make ongoing retreats and seminars part of your pastor's job description.
- Ensure accountability by asking your pastor to share what he or she has learned.

Resources

Websites

Calvin Institute of Christian Worship: www.calvin.edu/worship/events/

The Institute offers training and worship events for learning and growth.

Quiet Waters Ministries: www.qwaters.org

Quiet Waters provides a variety of opportunities for retreats and seminars for pastors, spouses, and families.

Sustaining Pastoral Excellence: www.crcna.org/pastoralexcellence

This website lists retreat opportunities and funding sources.

The Center for Excellence in Preaching at Calvin Theological Seminary:
http://cep.calvinseminary.edu/index.php

This website provides a list of seminars and conferences for pastors.

Chapter 7

Intentional Reflection

by Stan Sturing

Family life in ministry often reminds me of the old saying, "The cobbler's family goes without shoes." Like the cobbler, a pastor's family often "goes without" because the pastor is so busy looking after the needs of others. It could be said that neither a pastor nor a pastor's family has a pastor. When the pastor is hurting, who is there to help him or her? When the pastor's spouse or children are experiencing difficulties, who looks after their needs?

Often, a pastor and his or her spouse and family are at serious risk for not having their spiritual, pastoral, and relationship needs met.

What is Intentional Reflection?

Often, a pastor and his or her spouse and family are at serious risk for not having their spiritual, pastoral, and relationship needs met. For this reason, it is important for them to engage in intentional reflection—a habit that involves speaking with others about the important things of life and ministry in a deliberate and planned way. Intentional reflection can be carried out in many different settings, but it is intended to allow the pastor couple to examine their experiences of ministry in light of their goals for learning, growth, and spiritual formation.

Intentional reflection involves a deeper kind of communication than is practiced in typical day-to-day activities. Intentional reflection goes beyond just sharing information or making small talk with others. It involves the sharing of thoughts and feelings, a kind of honest and open communication that exposes personal vulnerabilities.

External Resources

In addition to the practice of intentional reflection between pastor and spouse, a pastor couple should seek out external resources for this purpose. For instance, the pastor couple can meet with a regional pastor, join a peer group, or consult another local pastor from time to time. It is essential that the pastor's spouse take part in these conversations. The pastor and spouse can also seek out support for intentional reflection by attending retreats, seminars, and conferences in which they can gain skills in areas such as maintaining open communication in the family and building healthy marital relationships.

Worshipping Together

Ministry is all about relationships, and intentional reflection involves strengthening the family relationships that support ministry. Worshipping together as a family contributes to the spiritual

well-being of the family unit and therefore it is important for a pastor's family to find opportunities to worship together regularly. For instance, the pastor's family may attend worship services at another church that offers weeknight services, participate in weekend retreats that involve family worship, or use Sundays off to attend worship with the family.

Pastor's Action Plan

- Practice intentional reflection with your spouse and/or children.
- Practice intentional reflection with a regional pastor, a peer group, or another local pastor.
- Worship together with your family regularly.

Council's Action Plan

- Talk to your pastor about intentional reflection and its importance for marriage and ministry.
- Encourage regular meetings between your pastor and a regional pastor.
- Support peer group involvement.
- Help your pastor find ways of worshipping regularly with his or her family.
- Ensure that pastoral care is available for your pastor and his or her family.

Resources

Websites

Christian Reformed Church Office of Pastor-Church Relations:
http://www.crcna.org/pages/pastorchurch.cfm

The ministry of Pastor-Church Relations provides programs of healing and prevention for pastors, staff, councils, and congregations of the CRC.

*Ministering to Ministers (MTM) Foundation, Inc.***:** http://mtmfoundation.org/

The MTM Foundations seeks advocate for pastors and their families, especially those who are experiencing personal or professional crisis. It offers regional wellness retreats that deal with a variety of aspects of a pastor's life: personal, emotional, physical, professional, and spiritual.

Quiet Waters Ministries: http://www.qwaters.org/

Quiet Waters Ministries offers family and marriage retreats and intensive programs to help pastors and spouses deal with relational and organizational conflicts, ministry exhaustion, character and competency issues, transition difficulties, marriage relationship development, spiritual renewal, and personal emotional issues.

The Lombard Mennonite Peace Center (LMPC): http://www.lmpeacecenter.org/

LMPC encourages the nonviolent transformation of conflict and provides programs and resources to help individuals, families, and groups learn to resolve conflicts and build healthier relationships in a variety of settings.

Chapter 8

Pastor-Church Relations Committee

by Stan Sturing

Who cares for the pastor, spouse, and family? Providing pastoral care for the physical, social, and spiritual life of the pastor's family is essential for the pastor's marriage and ministry. Many churches find it helpful to establish a pastor-church relations (PCR) committee for this purpose. This team regularly checks in on and takes care to ensure that the family's physical and spiritual needs are being met.

The PCR committee should have a clear mandate to bring forward the concerns of the pastor's family to council. Ideally, one of the committee members would also serve on the annual compensation review team. When a PCR committee functions well, it can be a great source of support to a pastor, his or her family, and the church.

By meeting regularly and dealing with issues as they arise, a PCR committee helps ensure that the pastor couple is not carrying their burdens alone.

Committee Structure

It is vitally important to choose PCR committee members carefully—and in consultation with the pastor couple. The members of this committee should be individuals or couples who can advocate on behalf of the pastor couple, who are able to maintain confidentiality, are spiritually mature, and respected by the congregation. They should also have the courage to be honest and open and be able to confront or challenge the pastor when needed. A pastor's spouse should always be included in the PCR committee.

A PCR committee should meet every other month or at least six times a year. It is helpful for the committee to keep short lists of questions to review at each meeting. By meeting regularly and dealing with issues as they arise, a PCR committee helps ensure that the pastor couple is not carrying their burdens alone.

Tips for PCR Committees

- Prepare a list of questions to be reviewed at each meeting, covering a broad range of topics from parsonage to salary/benefits to challenges within the congregation to family needs.
- Address expectations: those the church has of the pastor and those the pastor has of the church.
- Meet in the home of a committee member to foster a relaxed atmosphere.
- Take time for socializing and refreshments.
- After you have reviewed your list of questions and expectations, ask the pastor and/or spouse if there is anything else they wish to discuss.
- End the meeting in prayer.

Pastor's Action Plan

- Educate your council about the role that a PCR committee can play in a congregation.
- Once a committee is formed; play an active role, share your concerns, and be open to receiving direction and feedback.
- Involve your spouse in PCR committee meetings.

Council's Action Plan

- Form and support a PCR committee if none currently exists.
- Ensure the committee meets as mandated and reports regularly to council.
- Pray for the work of the PCR committee and for your pastor couple.

Resources

Christian Reformed Church Office of Pastor-Church Relations:
http://www.crcna.org/pages/pastorchurch.cfm

The ministry of Pastor-Church Relations (PCR) can provide support and guidance to congregations in setting up a PCR committee at the local church.

Chapter 9

Balance

by Derek Van Dalen

Teeter-totters are great fun for children, but they work best when each child is roughly the same weight. Teeter-totters are much less enjoyable when one child weighs significantly more than the other. Ministry and marriage can be like an unbalanced teeter-totter. The heavier child is often the ministry, while the lighter child is the marriage. How might a better balance be achieved so that ministry does not outweigh a pastor's marriage?

Our peer group uncovered a number of practical ways to create a healthier balance between ministry and marriage, and we encourage pastors and churches to seek them out. Weekly days off, annual vacations, and monthly date nights are all important in helping to achieve a healthy balance between marriage and ministry.

How might a better balance be achieved so that ministry does not outweigh a pastor's marriage?

A Weekly Day Off

"We find ourselves in the midst of an unnamed epidemic. The disease of marginless living is insidious, widespread, and virulent." —Richard A. Swenson

In his book *Margin/The Overload Syndrome: Learning to Live Within Your Limits*, Richard A. Swenson uses the phrase "marginless living" to refer to a lifestyle of constant overload. Often that is what pastoral work becomes: too much to do and not enough time to do it.

A pastor can build margin into his or her life by taking a regular day off. The day off is different from a Sabbath discussed in Chapter 1. The day off is also not a Sunday when the pastor is leading worship services. A day off is another day of the week to spend time with spouse, pay the bills, get the car repaired, work on projects and/or hobbies, work out at the gym, or give attention to personal finances.

While taking a day off seems simple it can be a struggle to implement and maintain for a pastor. Many pastors get into the habit of working on their day off, and it is easy to let church meetings or tasks overflow the boundaries and diminish the margins. Determination and accountability are required.

For this reason, a council should hold a pastor accountable for taking a weekly day off work. As part of an annual evaluation, the council can inquire as to which day the pastor takes off and regularly question whether the day is really observed.

Annual Vacations

Many pastors are blessed with four weeks of vacation each year. While this might seem generous in comparison to some church members, these vacation weeks are important because of the emotionally draining and stressful nature of pastoral work. Annual vacation time is essential for refreshment, recreation, and building relationships.

Pastors need to take their vacations. Then, while on vacation, they need to resist the urge to check in with the church or involve themselves in their work in any way. They need to turn off their cell phones and relax, enjoy God's beautiful world, and revel in the gift of family and friends.

A pastor's vacation is also a gift to the church. During vacation time, church members have an opportunity to use their spiritual gifts—gifts like leadership and pastoral care. The church can feel blessed in knowing that their pastor will return from vacation rested and renewed.

Monthly Date Nights

Date nights, planned at least once a month, provide an opportunity for a pastor couple to strengthen their marriage relationship. Date nights do not need to be fancy; they just need to be intentional and relationship focused. Making date night a regular, monthly routine is important for the health of a pastor's marriage.

A church can support the pastor couple by encouraging them to spend time alone together on a regular basis. Now and then, members of the church can invite a pastor couple to a couples-only event, give the gift of childcare, or suggest couple outings.

Pastor's Action Plan

- Take care of yourself, your spouse, and your marriage.
- Take a regularly scheduled day off each week.
- Take your full vacation each year.
- Plan monthly date nights.
- Strive for a healthy balance between marriage and ministry.
- Share your challenges in achieving balance with your spouse and council.

Council's Action Plan

- Hold your pastor accountable for taking a weekly day off.
- Ensure your pastor takes his or her full yearly vacation.
- Support your pastor couple in making time for each other.

Resources

Friedman, Edwin H. *Generation to Generation: Family Process in Church and Synagogue*. New York: Guilford Press, 1985.

Gilbert, Roberta. *Connecting with Our Children: Guiding Principles for Parents in a Troubled World.* New York: Wiley, 1999.

Richarson, Ronald W. *Becoming a Healthier Pastor: Family Systems Theory and the Pastor's Own Family.* Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2004.

Swenson, Richard A. *Margin/The Overload Syndrome: Learning to Live Within Your Limits.* Colorado Springs: NavPress, 2002.

Chapter 10
Boundaries and Expectations

by Jim and Alyce Vande Lune

Establishing and encouraging clear boundaries between church and home is crucial for the health of marriage and ministry. All too often marriage and family are sacrificed on the altars of commitment and call. Many pastors need some helpful encouragement and guidance in setting and maintaining boundaries and in remaining faithful to their marriage and family commitments. One important part of this encouragement is to hold a pastor accountable for taking full annual vacation and other time off work and to fully release the pastor from duties during these times. A pastor who spends insufficient downtime with his or her spouse and family is likely to experience difficulties at home.

Office Space and Infrastructure

Maintaining office space outside the family home as well separate phone lines for church and home helps establish clear boundaries. It is essential that an inviting, well-equipped, and comfortable office space be available at the church or ministry center and that regular office hours be kept. Although pastors do not work regular 9-5 or 8-4:30 jobs, having regularly posted hours when a pastor is "in the office" is important for good relations at home and at church. A pastor may still wish to have a study in the home, but space there should never take the place of a church office.

Professional Peers

Ensuring that the pastor and pastor couple have professional peers outside of the local church is also important. This level of support can be made available to a pastor by encouraging mentoring relationships or participation in ecumenical pastors' groups, peer learning groups, classical pastor-spouse gatherings, and other formal and informal networks. Wise councils expect and encourage professional peer involvement for their pastors.

Time and Activities

Probably no area of clergy family life comes under more public scrutiny than that of time and activities. Pastors are regularly asked, "How many hours do you work a week?" For pastors, that can be a difficult question to answer since it is hard to quantify much of what they do. Is prayer work? Is drinking coffee work? Sometimes it is. Is reading God's word work? It depends! All of these activities can be part of a pastor's daily ministry.

The ambiguity around what qualifies as a pastor's work makes it all the more important for council, congregation, and pastor to come to a formal agreement regarding time and activity expectations. A *Covenant of Agreement*, discussed more fully at the end of this chapter, should be developed by the council and pastor and renewed annually. Relevant portions of the agreement ought to be shared with the congregation.

Unfair Expectations

Often, churches have unfair expectations of a pastor's family. For instance, a church might expect a new pastor's family to take up where a previous pastor's family left off in terms of gifts, volunteering, or social life. This is not possible. God equips succeeding pastors in different ways. The same is true for the pastor's family.

Expectations regarding a pastor's spouse can also create challenges for marriage and ministry. For example, churches may assume that the spouse of a pastor will find his or her identity primarily in the role of being a pastor's spouse. This is often not the case. Other roles (i.e. family or career) may take precedence. In addition, a pastor's spouse should have the same freedom to choose how to serve in the church as other church members do. Remember, the pastor—not the spouse—is the person employed by the church.

Pastor's Children

It is often said that a pastor's family lives in a glass house. The pastor's children often feel as though they are on display—and sometimes they are. The mere fact they are the children of a pastor couple makes them easy to stereotype and easy to isolate. Unless churches—and the pastor couple—recognize how easy it is for the pastor's children to be singled out, some will continue to be painfully marginalized, even if unintentionally.

Churches need to allow the pastor's children the freedom to become who God wants them to be. Not all children raised in a pastor's home will become spiritual leaders. Some are quiet and prefer a supportive, behind-the-scenes role. Pastor's children need encouragement in finding their own way in life and in the church. Ongoing support to help the pastor's children settle into, and thrive, in church and in the community is an important part of nurturing healthy marriage and ministry.

A Covenant of Agreement

Essential to the health of a pastor's marriage and ministry is a *Covenant of Agreement* regarding expectations. Such an agreement, developed by council in consultation with the pastor, takes into consideration the pastor's work, spouse, and family and should help establish clear boundaries between church and home. Without clearly defined expectations and boundaries for the pastor, there is more likely to be tension in the council room, in the church, and in the home.

A Covenant of Agreement (COA): What Should be Included?

1. **Hours of work**
   The COA between clergy and council should specify reasonable hours for the pastor to be in the office and should explain what "in the office" entails.
2. **Time off and annual vacation**
   The COA should specify annual leave and other types of regular time off for the pastor. Included in the COA should be a statement about the value and intent of vacation. The COA should also clearly state what compensation is given when a pastor's vacation or time off is interrupted by an emergency.
3. **Sabbatical**
   The COA should include terms for a sabbatical, with clearly stated provisions and expectations.
4. **Professional development, retreats, and seminars**
   A COA should clearly define expectations and funding provided for a pastor's professional development, retreats, and seminars.
5. **Compensation**
   The COA should include an annual compensation review, carried out by a committee of two or three people, to ensure accountability and fairness. This committee can also offer guidance to the church in ensuring payroll, taxation, and other legal requirements related to employment are followed.

Pastor's Action Plan

- Establish clear boundaries between home and church.
- Seek support from professional peers outside the church.
- Take care of your marriage and your children.
- Take full vacations and other days off as agreed upon with your church.
- Commit to a monthly date night with your spouse.
- Insist that your church develop a *Covenant of Agreement* to clearly define expectations.

Council's Action Plan

- Provide a church office for your pastor outside of the home.
- Ensure separate church and home phone lines.
- Encourage your pastor couple to seek support from professional peers outside the church.
- Be fair in your expectations of your pastor's family.
- Develop a *Covenant of Agreement* with your pastor to clearly define expectations.

Resources

Wilson, Michael Todd and Brad Hoffmand. *Preventing Ministry Failure: A ShepherdCare Guide for Pastors, Minister and Other Caregivers.* Downers Grove, Ill.: IVP Books, 2007.

Chapter 11

Burnout

by Ken Prol

What is Burnout?

One way of describing burnout is a decreased level of motivation to do tasks that were once very fulfilling. This condition exists not only for a time but persists over extended periods. Preaching, teaching, and caring for the flock become a burden. Prayer, study, and reading habits are diminished. One pastor put it this way: "Burnout is being so overwhelmed at all the work you must do that you are immobilized and waste big chunks of time." In burnout, good work ethics are replaced by poor work habits, lack of study, and a defeated attitude.

> **"When I look back at that dark time, I see some things that were not healthy in me. I see some things that the Lord needed to burn out of me, and it was painful. For one, I had identified with the church too strongly. I was like a parent who was living their life through the success or failure of the child. If the church was doing well, I was happy. If it was slipping on life support, I was sad. If it succeeded I was a success; if it failed, I was a failure." a CRC pastor**

Contributing Factors

Unrealistic Expectations

Some pastors have unrealistic expectations of their skills, work habits, and responsibilities. They work unrelentingly, demanding so much of themselves that they eventually reach a breaking point. Their work life constantly overflows into their personal life, their marriages, and their homes. They identify too closely with the church and their happiness is closely tied to the church's successes or failures.

Other times, it is the congregation that has unrealistic expectations of their pastor. Churches often demand too much of pastors, having unreasonable expectations around time, level of skills, and activities. This contributes to burnout. Add to those expectations a heavy emphasis on numbers and church growth in many congregations, and it is not surprising that many pastors succumb to burnout.

Failing to Overcome Obstacles

Pastors can also experience burnout as a result of facing the same obstacles repeatedly without overcoming them. These obstacles could be caused by interpersonal conflict in the church, the

council, or the home. Pastors and/or churches need to identify when and why this is happening and work together to find solutions.

Failing to Seek Needed Assistance
Sometimes pastors are afraid to seek assistance with projects that are beyond the scope of their skills, and councils often neglect to offer this assistance. This, too, can contribute to burnout. For instance, unless a pastor has specialized training in transitional ministry, they should not attempt to lead or manage significant change in a congregation. In this case, pastors and councils should consider seeking specialized training for the pastor or council members or to seek external expertise.

Symptoms of Burnout

Pastors suffering from burnout often experience:
- A sense of helplessness and a loss of direction;
- A relinquishing of important aspects of life, ministry, and marriage;
- Procrastination in getting normal work done;
- Disillusionment with self and/or congregation;
- A sense of spinning wheels, i.e. putting out a lot of effort without going anywhere;
- A blurring of boundary lines between self and church.

Burnout: Pastors' Perspectives
The following quotes are from CRC pastors.

"Many pastors, I think, wrestle with boundary issues, but eventually find an appropriate separation of personal identity from the church. Those that don't will eventually crash, one way or another. One of those ways is burnout."

"When we no longer have a clear sense of where we end and the church begins, we are open to a world of hurt. If the church is struggling, we have failed. If it is thriving, we become proud. We forget how to say 'no' to the needy member and 'yes' to our spouses and families."

"Burnout comes when a pastor (or anyone) tries to replace the Savior and become saviors of ourselves, our church or our world. Members of our churches also want us to see ourselves this way often for their own unhealthy reasons. It is deadly. We idolatrously imagine that we are anything beyond witnesses and messengers to a salvation already accomplished."

Healthy Habits

Habits that help prevent burnout and contribute to healthy marriage and ministry include:
- accountability in one's work and personal relationships
- repeatedly letting go and letting God lead
- structured prayer time
- a healthy sense of self
- good time-management skills
- regular participation in retreats, seminars, and peer groups
- clearly defined expectations

How to Respond

Churches should support pastors who are experiencing burnout or those who are experiencing high levels of stress that may lead to burnout. Churches can help best by reaching out with love, support, and encouragement. Random acts of kindness can help restore a pastor's hope and vision. For instance, members of the church can offer to take care of the children and send the pastor couple out to dinner or to some other event.

I recall a particularly stressful time in my own ministry when someone packed a picnic basket and sent my wife and I on an outing for the day. That small act, and others like it, made me feel like I was truly part of the church family. Vacations, couple retreats, sabbaticals, and many of the other options explored in this training tool can rejuvenate and encourage the pastor during times of high stress or burnout.

A key ingredient in preventing burnout is to build up the things that make for a happy and healthy marriage. A pastor with a positive and nurturing marriage and family life will have greater vitality for ministry. Churches also need to ensure that a pastor has enough time to spend with his or her children. If the demands of the church leave little or no time for family needs, burnout is on the horizon.

Pastor's Action Plan

- Become aware of the symptoms of burnout.
- Have realistic expectations of your skills and time.
- Ask for help when needed.
- Develop healthy work habits.

Council's Action Plan

- Become aware of the symptoms of burnout.
- Have realistic expectations of your pastor and his or her skills and time availability.
- Ensure a reasonable workload for your pastor.
- Seek external assistance for projects that are beyond the scope of your pastor's time or skills.
- If your pastor is experiencing burnout, provide support and offer the help that is needed.
- Ensure that your pastor has sufficient time for spouse and children.

Resources

Dawn, Marva J. and Eugene Peterson. *The Unnecessary Pastor: Rediscovering the Call*. Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 2000.

Hughes, Barbara and R. Kent Hughes. *Liberating Ministry from the Success Syndrome*. Crossway Books, 2008.

APPENDIX A

Marriage and Ministry: A Checklist for Pastors

☐ Practice a weekly Sabbath.
☐ Join a peer group or start one of your own. Involve your spouse.
☐ Make sabbatical planning a priority in your ministry.
☐ Develop a sabbatical plan. Involve your spouse.
☐ Distinguish between professional and personal relationships.
☐ Seek out friendships.
☐ Mentor or be mentored. Involve your spouse.
☐ Find a spiritual director.
☐ Encourage your council to hold an annual retreat for personal sharing.
☐ Participate regularly in retreats and seminars and attend at least one pastor-couple retreat annually.
☐ Practice intentional reflection with spouse and family and externally with a regional pastor or peer group.
☐ Introduce your council to the concept of a pastor-church relations committee, if none currently exists.
☐ Establish clear boundaries between home and church.
☐ Seek support from professional peers outside the church.
☐ Take care of your marriage and your children.
☐ Take full vacations and other days off as agreed upon with your church.
☐ Commit to a monthly date night with your spouse.
☐ Insist that your church develop a *Covenant of Agreement* to clearly define expectations.
☐ Become aware of the symptoms of burnout.
☐ Have realistic expectations of your skills and time.
☐ Ask for help when needed.
☐ Develop healthy work habits.

APPENDIX B

Marriage and Ministry: A Checklist for Churches

☐ Make weekly Sabbath and a weekly day off part of your pastor's job description.
☐ Support your pastor in joining or forming a peer group.
☐ Develop a sabbatical policy and support your pastor in taking sabbatical.
☐ Encourage your pastor/pastor couple to seek out friendships.
☐ Support your pastor in mentoring or being mentored.
☐ Encourage your pastor/pastor couple to find a spiritual director.
☐ Encourage healthy pastor-council relationships by holding an annual retreat for personal sharing.
☐ Provide funding and time for your pastor to attend retreats and seminars and at least one pastor-couple retreat annually.
☐ Encourage your pastor to practice intentional reflection with spouse and family and externally with a regional pastor or peer group.
☐ Form a pastor-church relations committee, if none currently exists.
☐ Hold your pastor accountable for full vacation and other days off as agreed upon with your church.
☐ Encourage your pastor couple to take a monthly date night.
☐ Provide a church office for your pastor outside of his or her home.
☐ Ensure separate church and home phone lines.
☐ Be fair in your expectations of your pastor's family.
☐ Encourage your pastor couple to seek support from professional peers outside the church.
☐ Develop a *Covenant of Agreement* with your pastor to clearly define expectations.
☐ Become aware of the symptoms of burnout.
☐ Have realistic expectations of your pastor and his or her skills and time availability.
☐ Ensure a reasonable workload for your pastor.
☐ Seek external assistance for projects that are beyond the scope of your pastor's time or skills.
☐ If your pastor is experiencing burnout, provide support and offer the help that is needed.
☐ Ensure that your pastor has sufficient time for spouse and children.

Bibliography

Books

Bullock, A. Richard and Bruesehoff, Richard J. *Clergy Renewal: The Alban Guide to Sabbatical Planning*. Herndon, Va.: The Alban Institute, 2000.

Cloud, Henry and John Townsend. *Boundaries*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2002.

Dawn, Marva J. *Keeping the Sabbath Wholly: Ceasing, Resting, Embracing, Feasting.* Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1989.

Dawn, Marva J. and Eugene Peterson. *The Unnecessary Pastor: Rediscovering the Call*. Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 2000.

Friedman, Edwin H. *Generation to Generation: Family Process in Church and Synagogue*. New York: Guilford Press, 1985.

Gilbert, Roberta. *Connecting with Our Children: Guiding Principles for Parents in a Troubled World.* New York: Wiley, 1999.

Gilbert, Roberta. *Extraordinary Relationships.* New York: Wiley, 1992.

Hughes, Barbara and R. Kent Hughes. *Liberating Ministry from the Success Syndrome*. Crossway Books, 2008.

Oswald, Roy. *Clergy Self-Care: Finding a Balance for Effective Ministry.* Herndon, Va.: The Alban Institute, 1991.

Pastor-Church Relations. *Toward Effective Pastoral Ministry. 3rd edition.* Grand Rapids: Christian Reformed Church in North America, 2008.

Peterson, Eugene H. *The Contemplative Pastor.* Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1989.

Peterson, Eugene. *Under the Unpredictable Plant*: *An Exploration in Vocational Holiness.* Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1994.

Peterson, Eugene. *Working the Angles: the Shape of Pastoral Integrity*. Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1990.

Richarson, Ronald W. *Becoming a Healthier Pastor: Family Systems Theory and the Pastor's Own Family.* Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2004.

Sevier, Melissa Bane. *Journeying toward Renewal: A Spiritual Companion for Pastoral Sabbaticals*. The Alban Institute, 2002.

Swenson, Richard A. *Margin/The Overload Syndrome: Learning to Live Within Your Limits.* Colorado Springs: NavPress, 2002.

Wilson, Michael Todd and Brad Hoffmand. *Preventing Ministry Failure: A ShepherdCare Guide for Pastors, Minister and Other Caregivers.* Downers Grove, Ill.: IVP Books, 2007.

Video

Oswald, Roy. Why You Should Give Your Pastor a Sabbatical. Herndon, Va.: The Alban Institute.

Websites (all sites were operational in August 2008)

Calvin Institute of Christian Worship: www.calvin.edu/worship/events/
- training/worship events; peer learning

Christian Reformed Church Office of Pastor-Church Relations: www.crcna.org/pages/pastorchurch.cfm
- mentoring; pastor-church relations committees

Duke Divinity School – Sustaining Pastoral Excellence: http://www.divinity.duke.edu/programs/spe
- peer learning.

Evangelical Lutheran Church in America: www.elca.org/Growing-In-Faith/Vocation/Rostered-Leadership/Leadership-Support/Sabbatical.aspx
- sabbatical

Lilly Endowment Inc.: www.clergyrenewal.org
- sabbatical

Louisville Institute: www.louisville-institute.org
- sabbatical

Ministering to Ministers (MTM) Foundation, Inc.: http://mtmfoundation.org
- retreats

Presbyterian Church USA: www.pcusa.org/ministers/ministrydevelopment/sabbatical.htm
- sabbatical

Quiet Waters Ministries: www.qwaters.org
- retreats/seminars; variety of programs for pastors, their spouses and families

Reformed Church of America: www.rca.org/NETCOMMUNITY/Page..aspx?pid=1903&srcoa=2025
- sabbatical

Spiritual Directors International: www.sdiworld.org
- spiritual directors

Sustaining Pastoral Excellence: www.crcna.org/pages/spe_peerprogram.cfm
- pastor peer groups

Sustaining Pastoral Excellence: www.crcna.org/pages/spe_spouses_peer.cfm
- pastors' spouses' peer groups

Sustaining Pastoral Excellence: www.crcna.org/pages/spe_sabbaticals.cfm
- sabbatical/retreats

The Alban Institute: http://www.alban.org/
- peer learning groups

The Center for Excellence in Preaching at Calvin Theological Seminary: http://cep.calvinseminary.edu/index.php
- seminars/conferences

The Lombard Mennonite Peace Center (LMPC): http://www.lmpeacecenter.org
- relationships