LITERATURE REVIEW OF CLERGY RESILIENCE AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Andrea M. Sielaff, Kate Rae Davis and J. Derek McNeil

The Seattle School of Theology and Psychology

ABSTRACT

Clergy often experience a call to help others; however, this passion is hard to sustain because of the chronic and traumatic stress that are components of the job. Because of the unique stressors that are part of professional ministry, clergy need targeted support that is systemic as well as individual in order to practice resilience. This review of the research provides insight into what factors most impact clergy well-being; as congregations, supervisors, and denominations learn more about these factors, they can more effectively create environments in which clergy can be resilient. This review of the literature also illuminates what clergy might do for themselves to create a sustainable work life that supports their growth and thriving in the midst of adversity in ministry. In addition to articulating the specific stressors clergy face, this review resources congregations, clergy and supervisors with practical applications of resilience research.

INTRODUCTION

Clergy have long been an important part of community life in North America for their role in cultivating connection and cohesion for people in the Christian church and the broader social ecology. Clergypeople gather and facilitate relationships across different social categories and invite congregants to follow what Jesus names as the greatest commandments: to love God and neighbor. Presently, pastors are facing increased stress due to the rapid pace of cultural change and social fragmentation. It is vital to look at how clergy cope with stress individually and within systems in order to learn how resilience can be cultivated as pastors seek to adapt their roles on behalf of the present and future church.

The resilience of individual pastors is vital to the resilience of their congregations. Burns, Chapman, and Guthrie (2013) as well as Miller (2001) demonstrate that improving the social and emotional health of the pastor has a positive effect on the well-being of the congregation. Conversely, when a clergyperson is struggling, their congregation struggles, and in turn the entire social community struggles. We surveyed the existing literature to understand the challenges clergy face, in order to be able to better equip clergy to practice resilience and thus live into their callings with well-being in ever-shifting contexts.

In seeking understanding of the complexities of the pastoral role, we sought to identify the primary stressors on clergy well-being and the most effective methods of promoting clergy resilience. In defining resilience as it
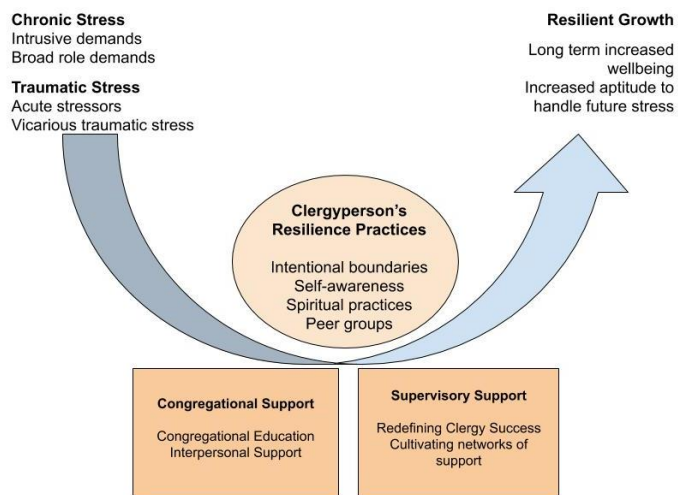

Figure 1 Chronic and traumatic stress exert a negative impact on wellbeing. Resilience practices and systemic support from congregations and supervisors transform that negative impact into resilient growth.

applies to clergy, Christian perspectives on the relationship between suffering and growth must be considered. *Resilience*[1] is a process of growth in the midst of adversity that results in long-term increased well-being (see Figure 1). It is not just surviving stress, but also learning to thrive (Burns et al., 2013). Resilience is a process, not an end-state or a trait, and it requires ongoing practices that foster growth in challenging circumstances (Linley & Joseph, 2004; Pals & McAdams, 2004). It is not merely a bounce-back to a homeostatic former state of functioning, but an increased aptitude for handling future stress that can be fostered through intentional coping practices (Meichenbaum, 2012). Bloom (2019), who has extensively researched clergy well-being, emphasizes this dynamism of resilience: resilience is "our capacity to adapt, change, and respond to life's challenges, and also our capacity to grow, learn, and to develop new capabilities and capacities" (p.2).

Clergy, particularly, need resilience because their work is emotionally demanding and difficult to create boundaries around. Conflict and criticism are common, and jobs frequently require more skills and roles than any one person can realistically provide. Clergy struggles are amplified by social constraint and the intertwining of personal, professional, and spiritual identities. Multiple studies (e.g., Kinman & Rodriguez, 2011; Lee, 1999; Meek et al., 2003) have identified and normalized the chronic and traumatic stress that clergy experience and illuminated the harmful impacts of this stress on health and their ability to sustain their efforts. As Bloom (2019) writes, "Pastoral work is not only tough; it may also be dangerous" (p. xi).

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[1] There is a wide body of research on resilience that is not referenced here. In the process of creating this literature review it became clear that the definition of resilience is broad and has not been fully agreed on in the research community. We decided to create a separate article discussing the complexity of defining resilience without confounding or conflating the construct. That choice was made in order to maintain focus in this article on the stressful conditions that pastors face and tangible individual practices and systemic interventions that support resilient responses. However, in pulling that argument out into a separate article, we are asking the reader to extend trust in this definition of resilience, which is influenced by theory and research in the fields of posttraumatic growth and positive mental health.

This literature review is provided in the hope that many current and future pastors might increase their resilience through research-based practices. We also hope that systemic changes can be made to support clergy resilience, as the congregations and denominations that surround clergy have tremendous impact on clergy well-being. These systems have their own expectations and cultures that often exert pressure on clergy to work in ways that are unsustainable. Many congregants and denominations have experienced negative consequences from clergy burnout, with varying levels of awareness of the role they played in the clergy member's struggle. Research (e.g., Bloom, 2013) has provided insight into what factors most impact clergy well-being; as congregations, supervisors, and denominations learn more about these factors, they can more effectively create environments in which clergy can practice resilience.

We have organized the research findings topically, to best cover the broad territory of the clergy resilience literature and for the ease of use for clergy, congregations, and supervisors. First, we examine the reasons clergy need resilience, including chronic and traumatic stress, and provide an overview of the effects of stress. Then, we review the literature on how to support clergy resilience, including equipping clergy to practice resilience with intentional boundaries, self-awareness, spiritual practices, and peer groups; equipping congregations to support their clergy through congregational education and interpersonal support; and equipping supervisors to create cultures that support clergy, including shifting metrics of success and cultivating networks of support. Finally, we draw conclusions from the summation of this literature and present recommendations for future research.

WHY CLERGY NEED RESILIENCE: THE EFFECTS OF CHRONIC AND TRAUMATIC STRESS

Clergy live in a paradox of meaningful work alongside chronic and traumatic stress. Barna Group (*"Most Pastors Feel Energized and Supported,"* 2019) and Smith (2007) found that clergy

experience greater work and/or life satisfaction than people in other occupations. At the same time, other studies point to the prevalence of stress that clergy experience due to the unique demands of a job that interlaces their personal, professional, and spiritual identities (e.g., Kinman & Rodriguez, 2011). Types of chronic stress most common among clergy include intrusive demands and broad role demands. In addition to chronic stress, pastors often experience traumatic stress, including acute stressors and vicarious trauma. All these types of adversity significantly affect the physical and mental health of clergy.

Chronic Stress: Intrusive Demands

One significant source of chronic stress for clergy are intrusive events—demands on time and emotional energy outside of normal work hours. Lee (1999) developed the Ministry Demands Inventory (MDI) to measure the frequency of 17 intrusive events in the lives of clergy, as well as the subjective impact of those events. Lee examined the relationships between clergy scores on the MDI and reported well-being, ministry attitudes, and life satisfaction. The most frequent intrusions were presumption expectations (such as having sleep interrupted or attending to a member's personal crisis) and boundary ambiguity (family and private time interrupted). The study concluded that intrusive demands negatively correlate with clergy well-being and attitudes toward ministry.

Intrusive demands impede on the boundaries pastors set. Hill, Darling, and Raimondi (2003) found that chronic stress around boundaries included "time, mobility, congregational fit, space, isolation, and intrusions" (p. 147). As might be expected, this stress had a negative effect on the quality of life not only for clergy but also for the family systems that support them. In Krejcir's 2016 survey of 8,150 pastors, only 35% of pastors reported that their church was in synch to their family's needs and 24% of clergy reported that their families resented the church's effect

on their family. In addition to intrusive demands, another challenge for the family of clergy is the high number of hours worked: Krejcir found that 54% of pastors worked more than 50 hours a week, with 18% of pastors working 70 hours or more a week.

The intrusions faced by clergy often involve high levels of emotional demand. Meek et al. (2003) noted that because clergy are often the first point of contact for many people in crisis, "the clergy person is, and always will be, the therapist on call" (p. 339). Meek et al. suggested this may result in clergy experiencing even more pressure than psychologists face, due to the number of different roles clergy play in people's lives along with the expectation of constant availability. This finding reflects the reality that most clergy do not have an after-hours triage line or rotating on-call schedule. The relationship between congregant and clergyperson is personal and spiritual as well as professional; accordingly, congregants often expect their pastor to answer the phone at any time of the day or night to attend to crisis. Pastors are affected by that expectation: guilt for not doing more is a common experience and, as Proeschold-Bell et al. (2013) wrote, "The intrinsic demands of feeling guilty about not doing enough for one's congregation significantly predicted both anxiety and depression" (p. 11).

Of the intrusions that Lee (1999) measured, personal criticism had the greatest negative impact on clergy. This result was in line with other findings on the impact of criticism on clergy health (Carroll, 2006; Proeschold-Bell et al., 2013). Criticism from congregants, whether personal or professional, is correlated with lower job satisfaction as well as lower quality of life, increased negative emotions, and physical exhaustion (Carroll, 2006; Krause, Ellison, & Wulff, 1998; Lee, 1999). Personal criticism as well as congregational and staff conflict have been found by Krejcir (2016) to be frequent sources of stress. The clergy in Lee's study reported that, on average, they had experienced criticism from a congregant or church leader four times in the past six months.

Proeschold-Bell and Byassee (2018) reported on the presence of conflict within congregations, as noted by clergy, in the previous six months. Only 20% of clergy reported no conflict, with 61% reporting minor conflict and 19% reporting major conflict.

Chronic Stress: Broad Role Demands

In addition to intrusive demands, clergy can experience chronic stress that is caused by the overwhelming number of different roles, tasks, and competencies demanded by the job (Proeschold-Bell & Byassee, 2018). A study overseen by DeShon (2012) found that clergy work includes 13 different task clusters which in turn require 64 different areas of skill, knowledge, characteristics and ability.[2] DeShon, an industrial-organizational psychologist, emphasized how formidable the role of pastor can be:

> The breadth of tasks performed by local church clergy coupled with the rapid switching between task clusters and roles that appears prevalent in this position is unique. I have never encountered such a fast-paced job with such varied and impactful responsibilities (DeShon & Quinn, 2007 p. 42).

The stress that clergy experience due to the number of different skills and tasks required by their jobs is amplified by the unpredictability of demands on their time and the resultant task-switching that is required (Kuhne & Donaldson, 1995). In Proeschold-Bell et al.'s 2013 study of Methodist clergy, 62.1% said that they slightly or strongly agreed with the statement that their daily activities are unpredictable from week to week. An unpredictable schedule is an element of life unpredictability, and Proeschold-Bell et al. (2013) found a correlative relationship between

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[2] The task clusters named by DeShon are administration; relationship building; preaching and public worship; care-giving; evangelism; self-development; rituals and sacraments; fellowship; denominational service; facility construction; management; communication; other-development (2012, p. 10). Kuhne and Donaldson's 1995 study found that pastors fill 13 distinct working roles: figurehead, leader, liaison, monitor, disseminator, spokesperson, entrepreneur, disturbance handler, resource allocator, negotiator, mentor, caregiver, and preacher.

life unpredictability and negative mental health— notably in the forms of depression, anxiety, and emotional exhaustion. Task-switching has its costs as well; it has been found to decrease effectiveness and efficiency, and it may increase mental fatigue (Monsell, 2003).

Overall, the combined impact of intrusive demands and broad role demands create chronic stress that impedes the well-being of pastors, sometimes leading them to quit ministry. Kanipe (2016) summed up into three categories the stressors that lead clergy to walk away from ministry: "unrealistic expectations from church members, perceived pressure to produce numerical results from judicatory officials, and ongoing congregational conflict with no support from judicatory officials" (p. 1). Qualitative research reported by Proeschold-Bell and Byassee (2018) cited one clergy member who summed up the cumulative effect of congregational expectations and the multiplicity of clergy roles: "Every person sitting in the pew has a separate job description for our job. And when you put it all together, it's an impossible task" (p. 10).

Traumatic Stress: Acute Stressors

Acute stress is characterized by events that upend the core identity and worldview of an individual while also creating intense emotions—including grief, numbness, and anxiety. Like all people, clergy are impacted by events like death, injury, illness, violence, and disasters. However, these acute personal traumas may have a more deleterious effect for clergy than for laity: clergy may perceive that they lack the kind of social support that many lay people rely on to cope in times of personal trauma, for instance, lacking a spiritual care provider of their own. Often this lack of social support is experienced as social constraint, "a perception that those around you do not welcome your sharing of your thoughts and concerns about your crisis" (Proffitt, Cann, Calhoun, & Tedeschi, 2007, p. 221). Proffitt et al. explored the effect that social constraint had on the ability of clergy to process their personal crises. Their quantitative study found a significant inverse

correlation between clergy well-being and social constraint.

Traumatic Stress: Vicarious Trauma

Vicarious trauma, which includes both secondary and tertiary trauma, is the stress that results when an individual is exposed to the suffering of another or does the emotional labor of responding to the stories of suffering that people tell about themselves and others. Pastors frequently do this emotional work, such as when they comfort the bereaved, respond to community emergencies, or assist parishioners in mental health crises. Several studies found that clergy receive more requests for support in the midst of trauma than do official mental health providers (Chalfant et al.,1990; Wang, Berglund & Kessler, 2003). Hendron, Irving, and Taylor (2014) conducted a qualitative study of the impact of secondary trauma on 16 clergy members in Ireland. This study concluded that clergy significantly experience secondary trauma in ways that impact their emotions, behaviors, and physical well-being. Over time, experiencing vicarious trauma can have a cumulative effect on pastors, including some symptoms not as common in direct trauma, such as guilt, over-responsibility, compassion fatigue, and spiritual depletion (Hendron et al., 2014; Snelgar, Renard, & Shelton, 2017).

Effects of Stress

The effects of stress on clergy are wide-reaching, including negative impacts on physical and mental health. Duke Clergy Health Initiative (DCHI) has extensively explored these impacts, having conducted a seminal study (2008-2012) on the well-being of 1,726 UMC clergy in North Carolina (Proeschold-Bell et al., 2013). This study had a remarkably high response rate, with 95% of all UMC North Carolina clergy participating. Though the results from the study may not be fully generalizable to clergy in other locations or denominations, the large sample size and participation rate make the findings of the study important for clergy stress.

The DCHI found such poor physical health among clergy that they recognized it as a crisis (Proeschold-Bell & Byassee, 2018). The clergy in their study had higher rates of obesity and overweight body mass than the general population. The same study found that clergy had been more frequently diagnosed with several serious illnesses than the general population, including higher rates of asthma, diabetes, high blood pressure, and arthritis.

In terms of mental well-being, Proeschold-Bell et al. (2013) concluded that there is "evidence that serving in the ministry poses an occupational risk to mental health" (p.10). The factors correlated with depression and/or anxiety in this study have a lot of overlap with the stressors discussed above: negative interactions with parishioners; excessive demands from parishioners; life unpredictability; social isolation; guilt, driven by the feeling of not doing enough; doubting call to ministry, and financial stress. A different study conducted by Frenk, Mustillo, Hooten, and Meador (2011) found that higher clergy occupational distress was correlated with higher levels of depressive symptoms. Trihub, McMinn, Buhrow, and Johnson (2010) collected data from 434 pastors in three major denominations to discern clergy mental health needs. Results from this study (Trihub et al., 2010) reflect how deeply clergy well-being is at risk, as clergy indicated that they experience a wide range of mental health issues. Mental health issues that clergy endorsed being moderately or more affected by include job stress (87%), emotional turmoil (73%), burnout (67%), anxiety (46%), and depression (43%).

CREATING CONDITIONS FOR CLERGY RESILIENCE

Though clergy can be deeply impacted by the many stressors in their work, research (e.g., Meek et al., 2003; Prevost, 2016; Proeschold-Bell et al., 2013) has revealed interventions that can increase resilience by mediating risk factors, increasing positive mental health (PMH) and facilitating growth. Below is a review of individual and systemic (both bottom-up from congregations and top-down from supervisors) strategies that have been effective in improving

resilience of clergy members.

Equipping Clergy to Practice Resilience

Longevity in ministry requires that clergy build practices that increase resilience. Below are four recommended practices drawn from the conclusions of the body of literature: (1) intentional practical and emotional boundaries, (2) self-awareness, (3) spiritual practices, and (4) peer groups.

(1) Intentional boundaries

Given the negative impact of intrusive demands, it is unsurprising that setting boundaries with time and schedule is important to clergy resilience. The benefits of a regular Sabbath have been named in several studies (Proeschold-Bell & Byassee, 2018; Reed, 2016), and Kanipe (2016) found that weekly Sabbath rest can even reduce symptoms of complex trauma. Perhaps even more important is for clergy to prioritize increasing their control over their daily schedule, as Proeschold-Bell et al. (2013) found that life unpredictability was a greater factor in clergy well-being than a weekly Sabbath. Congregational education (see section below) can help increase daily control by promoting realistic expectations and reducing intrusions. Proeschold-Bell et al. (2013) recommend setting up an on-call system that provides support for solo clergy. Meek et al.'s 2003 qualitative study found that being intentional about boundaries is key: 46% of the exemplar clergy interviewed "spontaneously mentioned the importance of being intentional about creating balance and maintaining strong, but flexible, boundaries in their lives." Detaching from work at least four days a week is strongly recommended by Bloom (2013), who found that increased levels of relaxation correlated with higher levels of clergy flourishing.

One way that setting boundaries can increase well-being is by protecting time for relationships with family and friends. Prevost (2016) studied long-tenured clergy to articulate

factors that might contribute to the well-being of clergy; of the factors she studied, relationships with friends and fellow church staff had the most significant positive correlation with well-being. The clergy she interviewed (n=169) also named spouses and children as key to their quality of life. Meek et al.'s (2003) study had similar findings, with 62% of the exemplar clergy naming family relationships and 42% naming friendships as key to spiritual and emotional health. Prevost, aware of pastors' tendency to be self-denying, exhorts clergy to consider the bigger picture as they invest time into their relationships: "The leadership and effectiveness implications of quality of life make attention to these areas more than a selfish pursuit" (p. 331).

Emotional boundaries also increase clergy resilience, especially since congregational conflict and criticism have such negative impacts on clergy. Lee's (1999) study of intrusive demands noted that, while decreasing intrusive time demands may increase clergy well-being, helping clergy change their subjective perceptions of criticism may be an equally fruitful intervention. Learning about and practicing differentiation may be a way to change those subjective perceptions and increase resilience. Bledsoe and Setterlund (2015) note that differentiation, a key component of Bowen family systems theory, is a type of self-awareness that can lead clergy to interpret conflict and leadership challenges more positively; it decreased "disillusionment, weariness, frustrations, and made room for faith, patience, and trust" (Steve Crommer, a pastor interviewed by Galindo & Mills, 2016, p. 356). Galindo and Mills provided support for this strategy in their 2016 study, which found that training clergy in Bowen family systems theory was effective in helping long-tenured clergy maintain emotional boundaries.

(2) Self-Awareness

Increasing self-awareness is another way for a clergyperson to invest in well-being (Reed, 2016). Self-awareness includes a "humble self-appraisal paired with an understanding of God's

grace and forgiveness" (Meek et al., 2003, p. 344) and a related increase in emotional intelligence. Of the exemplars in Meek et al.'s study, 54% spontaneously reported that self-awareness factors were key to their spiritual and emotional health. Self-awareness in the form of higher self-compassion was also related to increased satisfaction in ministry and may be protective against burnout (Barnard & Curry, 2012).

Burns et al. (2013) identified self-awareness as a key component of resilience. Their five-year qualitative study of clergy support groups found that emotional intelligence, including what they called Emotional Intelligence-Self, was one of five pillars of resilience in ministry. (The other pillars of resilience named by Burns et al. are spiritual formation; self-care; marriage and family; and leadership and management.) Bledsoe and Setterlund's (2015) qualitative study of 20 experienced clergy had similar findings: actively seeking to increase self-awareness was a common practice among these clergy. For clergy who want to increase self-awareness, Bledsoe and Setterlund's interviewees noted several helpful pathways to growth, including seeking the input of mentors and working with a professional counselor. Burns et al. recommend learning to accurately identify, accept, and feel one's own emotions; daily reflective journaling; seeking feedback from peers, family and close friends; and exploring the emotional patterns of one's family of origin via genogram. Ruffing, Paine, Devor, and Sandage (2018) suggested that ongoing self-awareness practices may also serve to temper narcissistic tendencies in clergy.[3]

(3) Spiritual practices

Clergy can build resilience by prioritizing spiritual practices. In qualitative studies,

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[3] From Ruffling et al.s' 2018 literature review on clergy humility and narcissism: "Although some may be drawn to clergy roles due to pre-existing narcissism, aspects of the work may promote narcissism regardless of whether clergy entered the role with those tendencies" (p. 537) "Leaders who strive to temper narcissistic tendencies with humility may find themselves less able to do so in the face of the depletion, stress, and fatigue associated with the role" (p. 538).

exemplar clergy often spontaneously mentioned that the health of their spiritual life is essential to their well-being (McKenna, Boyd, & Yost, 2007; Meek et al., 2003; Reed, 2016). Of note is Meek et al.'s study that compared the responses of clergy who had been identified as exemplars with a general group of clergy. Of these exemplar clergy, 66% spoke about spiritual disciplines as a source of their resilience, compared to 33% of the general group who mentioned their spiritual practices. Assuming that clergy who practice resilience are more likely to be identified as exemplars, the findings of this study suggest that one factor that differentiates resilient clergy is their spiritual practices. Similarly, Terry's (2018) study found that spiritual practices have a significant direct effect on the spiritual well-being of clergy. Cultivating those practices means reaping the protective benefits of increased spiritual well-being: Milstein, Hybels, and Proeschold-Bell (2019) found that better spiritual well-being was a protective factor against future depressive symptoms while languishing spiritual well-being predicted depression (p. 1).

Though a variety of different spiritual practices were named in these studies (including solitude, scripture reading, journaling, prayer, and meditation), the impact of the practices was often reported as a unitary effect of the construct "spiritual disciplines." However, Bloom's research (2013) did find support for the specific disciplines of contemplation and meditation; pastors who reported practicing contemplation or meditation almost every day had higher well-being and lower levels of burnout. Bledsoe and Setterlund's 2015 study highlighted that the frequency and context of spiritual practices matter: over half of the experienced pastors that they interviewed mentioned that they engaged in prayer and devotional reading daily, and at least one pastor specified that it was crucial that these spiritual practices were unrelated to sermon preparation. In support of the benefit of frequent spiritual practices, Milstein et al.'s (2019) results suggest that clergy focus on "everyday" spiritual well-being, as it was more important than

ministry spiritual well-being in protecting mental health.

It may be that the effect of spiritual practices on clergy resilience is less reliant on the specific type of discipline (e.g., journaling or fasting) and more dependent on the impact that practice has on a pastor's orientation toward God. This distinction between a spiritual practice and its intermediate impact on orientation to God highlights that for clergy there may be some differences in the pathway to resilience than for lay or non-religious individuals. While general resilience studies have identified self-efficacy and confidence as factors in resilience (Cocklin, 2013), clergy resilience may rely less on the belief in personal power than it does on belief in divine power. As Meek et al. (2003) studied the impact of spiritual disciplines on clergy exemplars, they noted that "Self-efficacy did not appear to be a central goal for these clergy. Rather, they have attempted to reset their identity in the character of God, thus acknowledging their own weakness" (p. 344). It may be that resilient clergy have modified the concepts of self-efficacy and self-confidence into God-efficacy and God-confidence. This perspective may lead to effective adaptation to stress, as failures and conflicts do not have to be personalized if they are seen in the context of the actions of a higher power. "Pastor respondents seem to find great strength in the notion that despite their own failings and apprehensions, God is propelling them forward and will honor His promise to sustain them" (Meek et al., p. 344). Spiritual practices are key in maintaining this sense of God-efficacy.

(4) Peer Groups

Participating in a peer support group has positive effects in multiple realms of resilience for both pastors and their congregations. They give clergy a sense of belonging and validation among their peers, which Bloom (2013) found to be "one of the most important determinants" of clergy well-being (p. 35). Pastors are also able to learn vicariously through one another's

experience, providing a communal base of wisdom that enhances the effectiveness of the individual pastor (Wind & Wood, 2008). Sharing personal and ministry experiences in a faith-based group can increase agency, positive attributional style, and active problem solving (all important aspects of resilience) as participants are able to link their own experience to the stories of others, receive feedback on their own sharing that provides new perspectives, and reflect on how to make meaning in the midst of hardship (Burns et al., 2013; Burton, 2016; Cocklin, 2013).

Peer groups can also be an effective way to counteract the isolation that many clergy experience (Staley, McMinn, Gathercoal, & Free, 2012). For clergy, receiving support and care requires a lowering of social constraint (Proffitt et al., 2007). Peer groups normalize a pastor's experiences, lowering social constraint as each pastor is given dedicated time to be heard by people who understand the unique challenges of ministry (Burns et al., 2013). As Meek et al. (2003) wrote: "It is immensely comforting for clergy to be able to tell of their struggles and be understood rather than judged" (p. 345). Burns et al. along with Wind & Wood (2008) had similar findings in their program evaluations of clergy peer groups: one of the chief benefits was that clergy felt supported and known.

Maykus and Marler (2010) found that many different modes of peer groups could lead to clergy growth, with quality facilitation and denominational diversity among the predictors of better group outcomes. In their study, they evaluated 31 different pastoral peer groups (with a median group size of 8) around the United States that were a part of the Sustaining Pastoral Excellence initiative of Lilly Endowment Inc. Though different groups had different formats, there were key practices found in most of these groups: sharing personal concerns, enjoying fellowship, getting feedback on ministry, and praying for each other. Almost all participants (90%+) reported that the groups were important in their development as a pastor.

Equipping Congregations to Support Resilience

Congregations have a significant impact on the well-being of clergy (Terry, 2018; Wells, 2013). Some of the most significant negative impacts were mentioned above: demands and criticism from congregants are major sources of chronic stress for clergy. Other studies have identified the positive impacts that congregations can have on clergy well-being (Bloom, 2013; Cloer, 2016; Forney, 2010; Proeschold-Bell et al., 2016; Wells, 2013; Zickar, Aziz, & Balzer, 2008). For example, Zickar et al. (2008) examined the relationship between stress and support in 190 Roman Catholic priests. In this study, priests who indicated that they had high levels of support from their lay staff and congregation had higher levels of job satisfaction and were less likely to be affected by role stress, role overload, role conflict, and role ambiguity. Given that a supportive congregational ecosystem benefits not only the clergyperson but also returns the benefit to congregants (Burns et al., 2013; Miller, 2001), it is wise for congregations to intentionally cultivate a supportive ecosystem. Two suggested methods to cultivate this supportive ecosystem are congregational education and interpersonal support.

(1) Congregational Education

Congregations can support clergy resilience by intentionally reducing identity threats and intrusive demands and by transforming criticism of their pastors into grace and increased volunteerism. To make these kinds of changes in the congregational ecosystem, Bloom (2013) and Jackson-Jordan (2013) recommend congregational education programs. Though congregational education programs could be initiated at the denominational level, lay leaders can take initiative to invite a speaker or trainer to address the wider congregation. Bloom suggests that these programs include "theological and scientific perspectives" on human well-being as well as training in conflict resolution and collaboration (2013, p.49). To address the stress inherent in broad role

demands, trainers could share with the congregation the task clusters and related skills, knowledge, abilities, and characteristics needed in pastoral ministry. The hope in this training would be that congregants both extend more grace to their pastors and step up to fill some of those tasks in a volunteer capacity. We also suggest that church boards be educated about the stresses inherent in the pastoral role and the resulting importance of pastors maintaining intentional boundaries. Board members can then act as advocates for the pastor within the congregation, thus relieving the pastors of some of the pressure of communicating what the boundaries are and why they are needed.

DCHI research also supports prioritizing the congregational ecosystem to promote clergy resilience (Proeschold-Bell & Byassee, 2018). They found that two of the three unique factors that relate to PMH for clergy are reliant on the congregation's actions and attitudes: congregations can increase the PMH of their pastors by (1) supporting the pastor with love and care as a full person (not just as their spiritual leader) and (2) being open to congregational change and engaged with new congregants and the wider community (Proeschold-Bell & Byassee, 2018, p. 154). To address these aspects of clergy well-being, DCHI created a congregational education program for clergy and personnel committees to complete. The six clergy members in their pilot program reported lower levels of stress at the one-year follow-up.

(2) Interpersonal Support

As noted in the previous section, interpersonal support for the pastor increases PMH (Proeschold-Bell & Byassee, 2018). However, it is complicated to discern what level of parishioner- pastor relationship is healthy. Training in pastoral ethics has traditionally discouraged close pastor-parishioner relationships. Pastor-parishioner friendships can create the ethical conflicts inherent in dual relationships, possibly increasing the negative impacts of pastors having intertwined professional-personal-spiritual identities. In addition, pastor-parishioner friendships

could make it harder for pastors to maintain intentional boundaries. However, recent studies suggest that there are significant benefits to such relationships that deserve consideration when considering potential harm. Bloom (2013) and Forney (2010) concluded from their research that pastors need to have meaningful friendships within the congregation instead of maintaining professional distance. Bloom notes that when close relationships are fostered, the congregation comes to see the pastor as a person, reducing unrealistic identity and time demands, and reducing perceived social constraints for the clergyperson. Conversely, congregations who do not befriend their clergyperson have a negative, not neutral, effect on well-being, and they are more likely to be more demanding and commit micro-aggressions toward the clergyperson (Bloom).

Congregants seeking to offer interpersonal support to pastors can extend warmth and graciousness while creating space for the pastor to be authentic (Bloom, 2013). As with congregational education, the lay leadership board can take initiative. Both Barna's (2017) quantitative study and Cloer's (2016) qualitative study found that positive relationships between pastors and elders were significant factors in the well-being of church and pastor. The pastors in Cloer's study mentioned the significance of spending informal time with elders, engaging together in meals or hobbies such as golfing. These findings suggest that, with discernment, the benefits of some friendships between clergy and congregants may outweigh the potential harm.

Equipping Supervisors to Create Cultures of Resilience

Supervisors and denominational leaders have a significant impact on the resilience of clergy, for better and for worse. Wells (2013) found that denominational support can reduce the impact of stress on a clergyperson, modestly improving physical health and overall well-being. Investing in clergy resilience can also reap dividends in congregational health, including an increase in church involvement among congregants and, at times, even numerical church growth

(Marler et al., 2013). There are several key ways that supervisors can create cultures of resilience for the clergy that they lead. These opportunities include (1) redefining clergy success and (2) cultivating networks of support.

(1) Redefining Clergy Success

A significant source of stress for clergy is the unrealistic expectations placed upon them in their work. Numerical church growth has been a standard benchmark of clergy success, but as much of the Global North moves into a post-Christendom culture, numerical measures of success can be unrealistic and harmful. Meek et al. (2003) found that the expectation of growth was mentioned often by clergy as a way they felt unsupported by their denominations. Instead, denominations can proactively communicate the value of qualitative ministry impact and, perhaps more importantly, the intrinsic value of the pastor as a person made in the image of God. Supervisors can also work to change their perspective about the meaning behind clergy struggles. Campbell (2016) found that many clergy experienced adversity as a confirmation—not a negation—of their calling. Supervisors can be sensitive to the reality that struggle may not be a sign of incompetence; it may be a unique opportunity to grow and reaffirm call.

Meek et al. (2003), Proeschold-Bell et al. (2013), and Terry (2018) concluded that denominations can make an impact by decreasing everyday clergy workloads. For example, Terry found that taking vacations does not significantly help clergy well-being if they return to high job demands. Meek et al. and Proeschold-Bell et al. (2013) suggested that supervisors need to support realistic workloads for clergy by redefining job descriptions, making schedules for pastoral care team members to be on-call, and advocating within the congregation for boundaries. Supervisors can initiate congregational education programs to help members understand the pressures that clergy face, see the clergy member as a person with needs, and respect boundaries (Bloom, 2013;

Jackson-Jordan, 2013; Wells, 2013).

(2) Cultivating Networks of Support

Denominations might consider providing both time and funding for clergy to participate in continuing education focused specifically on personal formation and well-being, in addition to, or instead of, trainings that focus on skills and ministry trends. Ruffing et al. (2018) recommend "formation resources that promote self-awareness, authenticity, secure connections, and relational development" as a means of increasing clergy well-being via humility (p.541). Continuing education programs that are effective for relational outcomes include training in conflict resolution; interpersonal skills and boundaries; peer groups with skilled facilitators; and mentoring (Bloom, 2013; Jackson-Jordan, 2013; Maykus & Markler, 2010; Meek et al., 2003; Wind & Wood, 2008).

The benefits of peer groups are discussed at length above, but mentor relationships are also key for clergy resilience. Bloom (2013) notes the importance of organically formed mentorships: to be effective, the mentee needs to see an "ideal possible self" in the mentor (p. 31). Finding these good-fit mentors requires that clergy have chances to informally interact with a variety of other clergy. Wind and Wood (2008), who studied clergy transitioning into ministry, recommend *in situ* mentoring, wherein mentor and mentee are working in the same context. The benefits of in situ mentoring include ease of access, multiple unplanned interactions, and the ability to debrief shared ministry experiences (Wind & Wood, 2008).

In denominations that appoint clergy, a key moment for leaders to increase their supervisees' resilience is in the parish assigning process. Supervisors would do best to consider the individual needs and giftings of each clergyperson and communicate the depth of that consideration given during the assignment process; trusting one's supervisor in this process is

correlated with greater work satisfaction and overall well-being (Proeschold-Bell et al., 2016). Unsurprisingly, poor clergy-congregation fit is associated with decreased job satisfaction (Mueller & McDuff, 2004).

Trihub et al.'s 2010 data from 434 pastors in three major denominations studied which services denominations do and could provide to support clergy mental health. Clergy rated which services are most valuable to them; sabbaticals and prayer/support groups were rated as the most valued. Other services that were rated as valued were individual counseling, referrals for counseling, clergy retreats, family counseling, and educational mental health seminars. Trihub et al., while highlighting that denominations had increased services available to clergy, also made specific recommendations for improvement based on clergy comments. Recommendations included more 1-on-1 visits between supervisors and pastors, increased communication about services available, congregational education on the mental health needs of pastors, and greater funding to access the resources that have been offered.

Finally, denominations can learn from and partner with existing programs that focus on different aspects of clergy resilience. For example, Duke's Spirited Life program improved the physical health of clergy at a statistically significant level (Proeschold-Bell et al., 2017). The Pastors Summit, a peer group program, has developed a best-practices reference (Burns et al., 2013). The Wellbeing at Work research team, led by Matt Bloom of Notre Dame, created an app, WorkWell, that helps pastors incorporate well-being practices into their everyday lives. The Sustaining Pastoral Excellence initiative (of which the Pastors Summit was a part) produced a guide with multiple models of peer support groups (Marler et al., 2013). Another program, Resiliency-Based Spiritual Support: A Preventative Approach, was rated by CPE students at Duke as helping form frameworks of and skills for resilience (Gross, 2015). The Resilient Leaders

Project provides year-long learning cohorts focused on increasing social support, well-being practices, and personal purpose. Retreats and other resources for Christian leaders are offered by Transforming Center, whose focus is resilience through soul care.

CONCLUSIONS

Resilience is a process of growth in the midst of adversity that results in long-term increased well-being. Given the amount of adversity clergy experience in their roles and the impact of chronic and traumatic stress on clergy well-being, clergy, congregations, and supervisors need to prioritize increasing clergy resilience through individual and systemic efforts. There are a number of studies that have identified effective ways to help clergy practice resilience. Clergy can practice resilience by enforcing boundaries around their daily schedule and emotional lives; increasing self-awareness; prioritizing personal spiritual practices: and participating in peer groups.

The systems that clergy work within—both congregations and denominations—can do more to intentionally create conditions that foster clergy resilience. Congregations can work to transform cultures of critique and unrealistic demands into supportive ecosystems through pursuing congregational education and offering interpersonal support. Congregants can actively extend friendship and care to their clergy members, reducing the social constraint that isolates clergy when they need help. Denominational supervisors can more particularly and carefully define pastoral success, reducing the emphasis on numeric growth and increasing emphasis on qualitative growth of the congregation's spiritual life and health. Supervisors can also keep their primary focus on the pastor as a full person and child of God in addition to looking at congregational well-being. Additionally, supervisors can encourage clergy to seek relationally supportive environments both inside and outside their congregation and denomination. Key factors

in that support are to provide time and funds for clergy participation in continuing education that is focused on relationship skills and pastoral formation, perhaps in partnership with existing clergy resilience programs. In denominations that appoint clergy to parishes, supervisors can consider clergy needs and communicate that consideration during the appointing process.

Working together, clergy, congregants, and denominational leaders can create a dynamic environment that promotes clergy growth and thriving. When clergy and congregations practice resilience, communities reap the benefits of generative spiritual leadership and connective care.

Recommendations for Future Research

Overall, not enough is known about what pastors need not just to survive but to flourish; this literature review summarizes what is known and suggests further research topics. The focus of this review is on research specific to clergy; additional insights could be gained through the application of the resilience research on broader populations. In addition, knowledge about clergy resilience is limited by a lack of research on challenges and strengths specific to women, people of color, and younger clergy working within present-day cultural realities. Most of the research on clergy well-being has focused on evangelical and mainline men in the United States who are of European descent. To truly understand the stress clergy experience and what helps them practice resilience, future research should focus on the challenges and assets specific to women and people of color.

Also of note is that many research subjects are older clergy, as there is notable value in listening to the wisdom of exemplars whose resilience is evident through their many years of ministry. However, the Christian cultural context in which these older clergy worked is no longer widespread in North America. Clergy working in post-Christendom contexts may need different resources and strategies to practice well-being. Thus, further research is recommended on

populations of younger clergy working within changing cultural realities to identify both the unique stressors of ministry today and the tools, practices, and mindsets that cultivate flourishing for clergy in service to their communities.

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