

FCNs advocate for the health of their faith community members as well as the health of their clergy.

We know that it is important for our physical, spiritual and emotional well-being to take time for ourselves and to create **Sabbath time** all year long. But our hectic busy schedules too often dominate our lives. With no major religious holidays, summer is a time when many faith leaders can take time away for personal renewal and to spend time with family and friends. The *Mental Health Ministries e-Spotlight Summer 2017* issue includes some resources to help support the mental health of clergy.

Rev. Susan Gregg-Schroeder, Coordinator of Mental Health Ministries, www.MentalHealthMinistries.net, shares the following thoughts:

“Our faith leaders need to be intentional about taking Sabbath time. Clergy burnout is a major problem. With more duties, many clergy report being overwhelmed with more work and responsibilities. The workload and lack of support can lead to feelings of isolation, burnout and depression. Because of the stigma surrounding mental illness, clergy often self-medicate instead of reaching out for help when feeling anxious, over-whelmed or stressed out.

Reasons for Burnout

1. The 24/7 mentality. Many pastors can't "turn off" work in their mind. Even on their days off, they are waiting for that next telephone call or next crisis. Thus, they never relax.
2. Conflict. Conflict is not the problem but how conflict is handled. If congregational conflict and criticisms are ongoing, pastors wear down. They eventually burn out.
3. Expectations. No pastor can meet all the expectations of church members. But many try and they burn out as a result.
4. Unwillingness to let go. Many clergy are reluctant to ask others to help.
5. No friends. Many pastors fail to develop meaningful friendships, people with whom they can "let their hair down." Without such outlets, burnout is more likely.
6. Not suited for some tasks. This issue is similar to trying to meet everyone's expectations. First, such attempts are physically impossible. Second, pastors are not equipped to do everything well. But many try and many fail.
7. No life outside the church. A large number of pastors have no meaningful hobbies or recreational activities outside the church.

What Clergy Can Do

- One of the most difficult challenges facing clergy is setting healthy boundaries. Each of the reasons for burnout listed above relate in some way to clergy burnout. It is important to be aware of the contributing factors that affect one's own spiritual, emotional, mental, and physical wellbeing.
- Join a clergy group to get feedback when dealing with a stressful situation and to find support.

- Exercise and a healthy diet are often neglected especially because of time constraints and the potlucks or food readily available at congregational events.
- Develop relationships for yourself, your spouse and your family independent of the congregation.
- Take Sabbath time to stay grounded in your spiritual life. Create a sacred space in your office and/or home.
- Clergy can be affected when dealing with the trauma of others. Self-awareness of vulnerabilities can help with the impact of secondary trauma.
- It is important to seek help to process post-traumatic stress syndrome (PTSD) symptoms and address addictions or other means of self-medication.

What Congregations Can Do: Feeling overwhelmed by stress takes a toll on the body leading to a number of physical and emotional symptoms. Congregational leaders need to be alert to the warning signs of stress. Share your concerns with others.

- Make sure your clergyperson is taking time off for Sabbath and vacation.
- Don't schedule meetings every night of the week.
- Give pastors time to spend with their families.
- Many pastoral changes occur during the summer months. Find ways to welcome new pastors and their families.
- Be an emotional support for your faith leaders instead of just expecting it from them.
- Handle conflicts in a loving, caring manner.
- Encourage pastors to foster friendships outside the faith community
- Respect the privacy of the clergy family.

Mental Health Ministries has a brochure, ***Clergy Self-Care: How Clergy and Congregations Can Prevent Burnout and Support Healthy Living***. This brochure highlights these issues regarding clergy burnout. It offers some ideas on what clergy can do and how congregations can be supportive of their faith leaders. It is available on the Mental Health Ministries website as a brochure under *Resources*. “