



THE WESLEYAN CHURCH

**Education & Clergy
Development**

Flourishing in Ministry

2020 Wellbeing Report
on Wesleyan Clergy

Introduction

The Division of Education & Clergy *Development* of The Wesleyan Church has been an active participant in the ongoing research on clergy wellbeing being conducted by Dr. Matthew Bloom and his team at Notre Dame University. The study is called, “Flourishing in Ministry.” It is part of a national longitudinal research initiative funded by The Lilly Endowment. Currently, over 10,000 clergy have participated in the study which provides national norms for clergy wellbeing.

While our study from 2014 gave us some general insights into the wellbeing of Wesleyan clergy, this latest study gives us new levels of first-hand knowledge about the wellbeing of Wesleyan clergy across a broad range of domains. In addition to this general report, In the future, we will also report on research from two other recent studies: the physical wellness of Wesleyan clergy and the wellbeing of retired Wesleyan pastors

In this first report we will introduce the broad nature of the “Flourishing in Ministry” study, followed by a wide-angle snapshot of the wellbeing of clergy over four dimensions: daily wellbeing, resilience, authenticity, thriving. Each of these four dimensions will be briefly explained along with the most significant results (both positive and negative) in each dimension along with broad implications and recommendations. Many of the descriptions and language are either taken or adapted from Dr. Bloom’s book, *Flourishing in Ministry*, which is a summation of the larger findings of his longitudinal research into the wellbeing of clergy.

In 2019 we received our initial results from approximately 700 Wesleyan clergy who participated in the Flourishing in Ministry survey. In 2020 we were able to work with Dr. Bloom, lead researcher, and also Dr. Chris Adams, Center for Vocational Ministry at Azusa Pacific University, to give further interpretive analysis to our results. While the results of this survey are reflective of this discrete sample and do not necessarily represent every group of pastors in The Wesleyan Church, they are valid and reliable. They are helpful in providing key indicators of where Wesleyan clergy are doing well and where we should consider directing resources and initiatives to help all our clergy thrive personally and throughout the lifetime of their ministry.

In addition to providing another comparative point of analysis from our original study of Wesleyan Clergy, this study is another step in the longitudinal research of our clergy that will help us continue to respond to the needs of Wesleyan pastors as well as identify areas of strength and resiliency.

One obvious caveat is related to the impact of the COVID19 crisis. Clearly the COVID crisis has had an impact on clergy like the rest of society. The combination of the disruption of public worship services, which are usually a central point of ministry energy and engagement, coupled with the sharp increase in the need for pastoral care and leadership has taken a unique toll on

pastors and other leaders in service-related professions. While it is too early to truly measure the impact of these realities on clergy well-being, this study will provide a useful baseline for “normal” pastoral wellbeing in The Wesleyan Church. What follows are the initial findings of this research.

Clergy Thrive in an Eco-System of Wellbeing

In the past, it was common to tell pastors that they needed to protect their own wellbeing by practicing “self-care.” Unfortunately, this places *all* the responsibility on the pastor. For example, there is certainly a place for the pastor to take individual responsibility to establish healthy boundaries with others, take times of solitude with God and to take vacations. However, research now tells us “self-care” alone is not enough. Dr. Bloom and his research team have discovered that clergy wellbeing depends upon the positive development of four interrelated dimensions that operate more closely to an ecosystem of “we care” rather than just self-care. Wellbeing relates to other important factors, such as the support clergy receive both inside and outside of their work environment, physical health, financial compensation, support from their districts and denominations as well as other factors.

Clergy wellbeing depends upon the positive development of four interrelated dimensions.

While contextual factors are elements in the wellbeing of all persons, this is the first time there has been significant research into what those factors are for clergy and how they interact with self-care. The four interrelated areas are Daily Wellbeing, Resilience, Authenticity, and Thriving. What follows is a report of the data from our sample of Wesleyan clergy which offers indicators of where we are doing well and where we need to focus attention.

The Four Dimensions of Flourishing in Ministry

Daily Wellbeing – Daily wellbeing has to do with the emotional dynamics and subjective sense of the quality of our daily lives and how we interpret those experiences. It manifests itself in positive feelings, moods, and emotions (e.g. peacefulness, feeling inspired, optimism, wonder, etc.) and also negative feelings, moods and emotions (e.g. boredom, anxiety, sadness, frustration, etc.). In the spirit of Jesus’ words in Matthew 6:34, we are to rely daily on God’s provision for all areas of our lives.

Resilience – Resilience is our capacity to adapt, change and respond to life’s challenges and to bounce back from setbacks. It also relates to our desire and capacity to grow, learn, and to continue to develop new skills and knowledge so that we keep reaching toward our potential. Resilience also relates to self-awareness, self-reflection, and our ability to regulate our emotions. As we partner with God in ministry, we can discover God’s abiding presence to the

ministry journey, even as God said to Isaiah, “Fear not, for I am with you; be not dismayed, for I am your God; I will strengthen you, I will help you” (Isaiah 41:10).

Authenticity – Authenticity relates to our identity and self-concept including our self-image, self-worth, and other beliefs we hold about ourselves. It is the freedom to “be oneself.” Each pastor has a unique role to play in God’s Kingdom that is in keeping with his or her true self and giftings, even as the Apostle Paul taught in 1 Cor. 12:18, 27: “But in fact God has placed the parts in the body, every one of them, just as he wanted them to be . . . Now you are the body of Christ, and each one of you is a part of it.”

Thriving – Thriving is the experience of finding deeper meaning in life through the overarching canopy of one’s beliefs, values, and virtues that also provide structure and guidance for one’s life. It includes a deep sense of one’s purpose in life. It also includes experiencing strong supportive relationships and a personal connection with God. We thrive when we live according to God’s intended desire for our wellbeing: “That person is like a tree planted by streams of water, which yields its fruit in season and whose leaf does not wither—whatever they do prospers” (Psalm 1:3).

It is important to understand that these four dimensions represent the “building blocks of wellbeing.” This means that clergy wellbeing is a combination of all four dimensions. In this sense, this model is a system; positive growth in one dimension can lead to positive effects in the other dimensions. Likewise, if wellbeing in one dimension is diminished, it can negatively affect the other dimensions as well. For instance, if pastors experience too many days, weeks or months of negative emotion (Daily Wellbeing) it can begin to erode their sense of meaning (Thriving), perhaps eventually resulting in questioning their calling to vocational ministry.



Summary of Key Findings

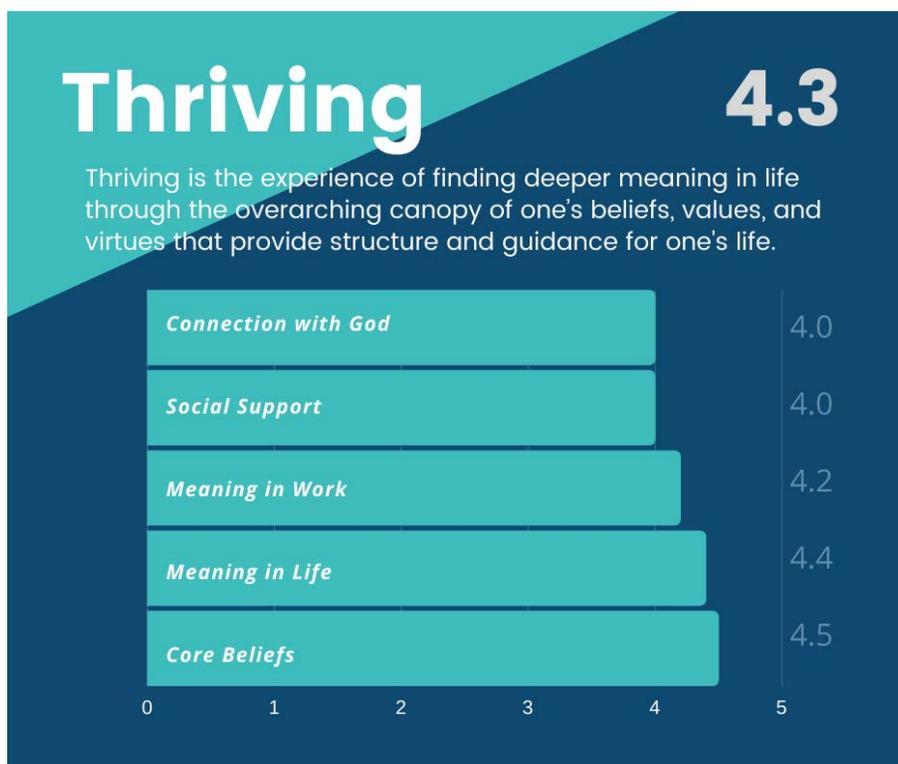
Understanding the Scores

Overall, scores of 4.0 and above are considered the ideal range for wellbeing dimensions. Scores between 3.0-4.0 mean we are in a caution zone and should start thinking about what we can do to improve the wellbeing of pastors in those particular areas. Scores below 3.0 indicate we should

respond as soon as possible with initiatives to come alongside pastors to increase their wellbeing in those areas.

Areas of Strengths for Wesleyan Clergy

In general, scores for Wesleyan clergy are good in the dimensions of Thriving and Authenticity. This is very important since research indicates that these two dimensions are crucial for long-term vitality in ministry). If these two dimensions are not fairly well-established, especially within the 5-7 year range of ministry, chances are more likely the pastor’s wellbeing will decline over time. Overall, the indications are positive for our Wesleyan clergy.



Of the four dimensions of wellbeing, the Wesleyan pastors in our sample scored highest in Thriving with a score of 4.3/5.0. This is very good news. It indicates that Wesleyan pastors are living in sync with their most important values and beliefs and tend to have strong relational connections with others. It does not mean *all* our pastors are thriving. But overall the indications are positive. Here are the most significant findings about how Wesleyan pastors experience Thriving:

- Core beliefs (4.5) and sense of meaning in life (4.4) were the highest of all the sub-dimensions of thriving. Core beliefs are “the things we believe have ultimate value; they

are the things by which we understand what is true, noble, honorable, and good” (Bloom, pg. 58). Sense of meaning “arises from having core life values and beliefs that give direction to our lives . . . it points us toward what is most significant and consequential in life. . .” (Bloom, pg. 44).

- Finding meaning in ministry work (4.2) is in good range. It indicates that our pastors, in general, believe they are fulfilling their higher purposes through their work. They are leaning into their sense of purpose in life.

Wesleyan clergy scored highest in the dimensions of Thriving and Authenticity. These two dimensions are crucial for long-term vitality in ministry.

- Social support (4.0) is in good range but could be higher (especially from denominational leaders). Social support refers to the relational connections our clergy have to key people in their lives. Examples include connections with other clergy (peer support), district leaders, friendships outside of professional ministry, and family members. Having strong social support can help prevent the feeling of isolation, which has proven to be detrimental to wellbeing.
- Connection with God (4.0) is in good range, but not as high as might be expected for pastors. It is at the low end of the healthy range. This means our pastors may be depending upon their own strength and ingenuity somewhat more than upon God in many cases.

Authenticity 4.1

Authenticity relates to our identity and self-concept which includes our self-image, self-worth, and other beliefs we hold about ourselves.



The Wesleyan pastors in our sample scored in a healthy range overall in the dimension of Authenticity (4.1). This is also good news. It indicates that in general our clergy have a good sense of who they are and are ministering in roles and churches that are in sync with their own core values and beliefs, and have a deeper underlying sense of God’s calling in their lives. Among the most relevant findings are the following:

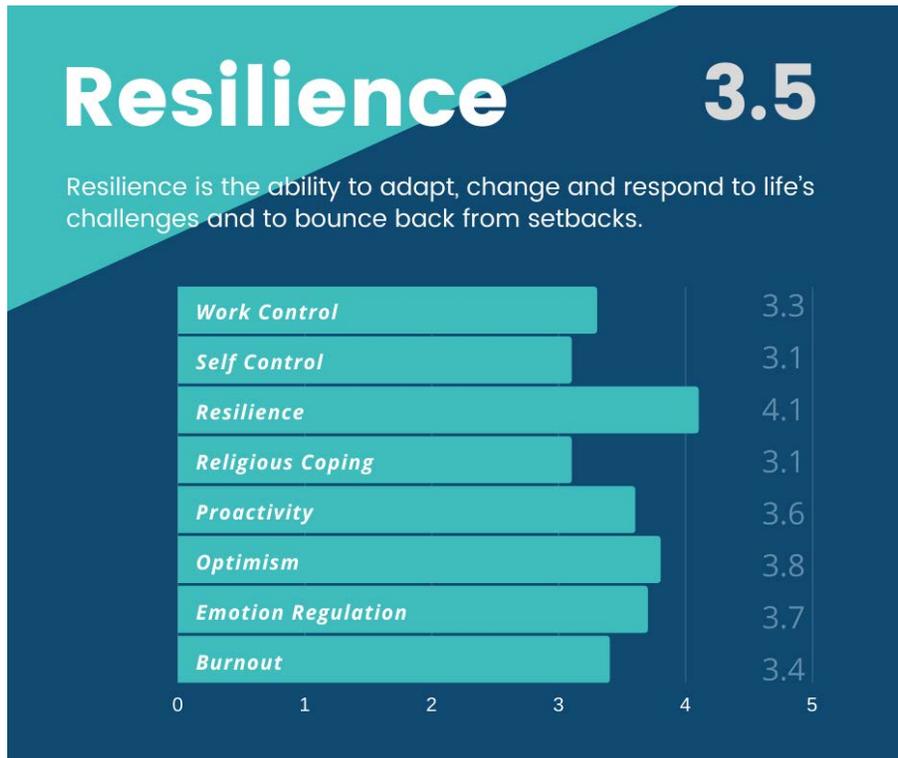
- Wesleyan clergy are likely experiencing a healthy, positive sense of personal growth through their ministry work (Growth, 4.5). This is also important for resilience which in turn helps ensure wellbeing for long-term ministry.
- Wesleyan clergy experience their ministry work as a true calling (Work as Calling, 4.3). Having a deep sense of God’s calling in their lives helps hold clergy steady during turbulent times of ministry.
- Wesleyan clergy tend to experience authenticity at their workplace (Authenticity at Work, 4.2) and they sense their ministry role is a good fit for them (Fit, 4.2). In general, this means they are able to “be themselves” (and not pretend to be something they are not) and find that their ministry role and local ministry context are in alignment with their gifts and aspirations.

- Interestingly, our female pastors in the sample feel a stronger sense of authenticity in their work than male pastors. Research indicates that women are able to separate their identity from their job more easily than men which contributes to a stronger sense of authenticity.

Wesleyan clergy are ministering in roles and churches that are in sync with their own core values and beliefs.

Areas of Needed Growth for Wesleyan Clergy

In general Wesleyan clergy scored lower in the two dimensions of Daily Wellbeing and Resilience. It is important to remember that clergy need all four dimensions to be in the healthy range in order to flourish in life and ministry. When one or more dimensions are less than optimal, there is the likelihood that our clergy will be increasingly prone to such maladies as burnout, eroding sense of call, physical, emotional, and relational stress. We need to pay attention to these two dimensions in particular, finding ways to come alongside our clergy to increase their sense of daily wellbeing and resilience. In addition, while the general scores for Thriving and Authenticity are in a healthy range, there are a couple of areas that need attention.



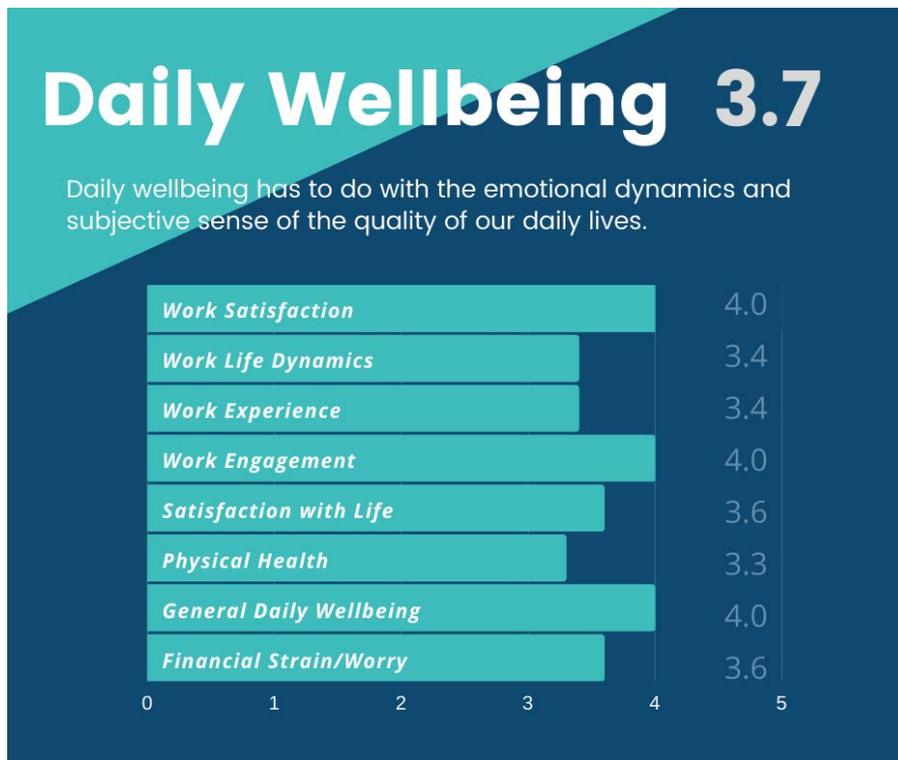
The scores for resilience were the lowest of the four dimensions (3.5). Resilience has to do with capacities such as the ability to bounce back from adversity and to adjust to change. It is also associated with how motivated one is to continue striving to develop and improve one's potential (i.e. self-efficacy), among other qualities. Of concern is that low resilience is linked to increased rates of burnout.

- Burnout is an area of concern with 39% of the sample feeling emotionally exhausted by ministry work. This is in line with the national average for clergy burnout, which is not good news (nationally, 35% of women clergy and 38% of male clergy experience burnout). Burnout is the opposite of resilience. Pastors new to ministry and long-term ministry are most prone to burnout. Other insights include:
 - Female pastors in the sample have a slightly lower rate of burnout symptoms.
 - 35% usually feel physically exhausted by ministry work.
 - 8% of pastors have frequently considered leaving the ministry in the last year.
- Work Control is low (3.3). When work control is low it means pastors doubt their ability to make things happen in their ministry leadership. It also relates to the feeling that they are not in control of their career:
 - 26% report doubting their own competence.
 - 25% report not feeling in control of their own career.
- Religious Coping is low (3.1). This means that when decisions need to be made or there is a crisis, our pastors tend to first work within their own strength and resources, rather than relying on God. Practically speaking, our pastors may tend toward shouldering all their responsibilities themselves, instead of believing that God is involved in their ministry and they are simply partnering with what God is doing in the world. This lack of faith and sense that God is involved in their ministry creates a significant burden on pastors. Of particular note is the following:
 - 52% of the sample attempts to “make sense of the situation and decide what to do without relying on God’ at least some of the time.”
 - Female pastors give greater importance to spiritual disciplines than do male pastors.

Burnout is an area of concern with 39% of the sample feeling emotionally exhausted by ministry work.

- Self-Control (healthy habits) is low overall (3.1). Self-control is the ability to respond well to what we are experiencing internally and externally, to change things in ourselves and our environment. It also includes the ability to be aware of our emotions in the moment (Emotional Regulation, 3.7). Examples of self-control include the ability to break bad habits, control impulses, and learn to adapt to change. It also relates to proactivity (3.6), which has to do, for example, with the ability to set goals and persist in achieving them.

- 34% of the sample reported having difficulty breaking bad habits
- 65% of the sample reported wishing for more self-discipline, which is less than optimal, but not unusual for clergy in general.
- Female pastors in the sample have a stronger sense of “self-efficacy” than male pastors, meaning they have greater confidence in their ability to strive toward reaching their potential.



The scores for Daily Wellbeing were second lowest of the four dimensions (3.7). As summarized above, Daily Wellbeing relates to what we think and feel about the quality of our everyday lives. It manifests itself in the positive and negative feelings, moods, and emotions that we experience on a daily basis. The state of our physical health is also a critical factor in how we feel about and experience the quality of our daily lives. The beneficial effects of our good days and the detrimental effects of our bad days accumulate over time. Unfortunately, the negative effects of bad days linger longer than the positive effects of good days. Consequently, we need more positive days than negative days to experience overall daily wellbeing (a 3:1 ratio of good days to bad days). *It is highly significant that low scores in daily wellbeing have serious potential to drag down the other four dimensions of wellbeing.*

- General Daily Wellbeing is good at 4.0. This is a subjective measure of the degree to which one feels they are an upbeat, positive person in relation to others. Wesleyan pastors are in a healthy range, but at the low end, where they perceive themselves to be generally as happy as other people.
- Work Satisfaction and Work Engagement are also at the low end of the healthy range with scores of 4.0. These scales measure, respectfully, the level to which pastors experience a positive, fulfilling state of mind and overall level of satisfaction with their work life. Also measured is the extent to which they feel energized and motivated by their work.

There are several areas of concern, however. The following areas of Daily Wellbeing are less than optimal and should be addressed so that they are strengthened:

- Life Satisfaction (3.6) relates to the extent to which our pastors feel their lives overall are going well. There are a number of factors that can go into explaining why this score is lower, including, perhaps, the factors listed below.
- Work Experiences (3.4) is a measure of the amount of stress pastors experience in their work. This is at the lower end of the “caution zone” and correlates to factors in the work environment—or the work itself—that create stress for pastors. 27% of entire sample reported a high degree of ministry-related stress. Factors such as conflict between staff or church members can contribute to work stress, as one example.

Low scores in daily wellbeing have serious potential to drag down the other four dimensions of wellbeing.

- Work/Life Dynamics (3.4) relates to the interplay of the demands of the pastor’s work life and the demands outside of ministry such as family life. It is vital for resilience and longevity to be able to have healthy experiences in one’s ministry life and life outside ministry, to be able to integrate both. This is an area where we need to help provide more guidance for our clergy.
- Physical Health (3.3) is reported as quite low with 21% of the entire sample reporting none or very little satisfaction with their health; 27% of the sample reported very little satisfaction with their physical energy level. Poor physical wellbeing can affect in negative ways a pastor’s sense of daily wellbeing. This is a significant area of concern for our clergy. It is imperative that pastors be physically healthy in order to support the daily demands of ministry life.
- Financial Strain/Worry is moderately low (3.6). There are some alarming indications for our clergy in relation to their finances:
 - 30% of the entire sample often worry about finances.
 - 20% feel they cannot financially provide for their families.
 - 66% cannot make it financially on ministry income alone (they rely on their spouse’s income or a second job).

Conclusions and Recommendations

Wesleyan pastors should continue practices that are leading to high levels of Thriving and Authenticity:

1. Continue to improve on intentional developmental models of ordination. This will help further Wesleyan pastors' confirmation of divine calling and identification of personal gifts and graces for ministry. The Wesleyan Called Journey relies on a strong sense of personal calling for pastors coupled with a developmental process under the guidance and mentoring of Districts.
2. Continue to develop strong social support systems for pastors. This includes the vital role of relational connections between the pastor, the district, denominational leaders and local church congregations for the wellbeing of pastors; it is not up to the pastor alone. Strong social support in both the public aspects of ministry and pastors' personal lives is necessary for clergy wellbeing.
3. Continue to provide opportunities for clergy to create strong formation of pastoral identity through the credentialing process (DBMD) and through ongoing mentoring in the early years of ministry development.
4. Districts should continue to place high priority on making sure pastoral placements are intentional in aligning the gifts and core values of pastors (job fit) with the culture, vision and values of the local congregation.
5. Local churches and pastors should provide very clear, mutually agreed upon job descriptions and expectations based on the identified strengths of the pastor in alignment with the needs of the ministry context.
6. Local church congregations and lay leadership should provide tangible support to pastors in ways that align with the needs of pastors; this will help ensure pastors have the resources and sense of personal support needed for long-term successful ministry.

Areas of Special Focus for Growth (in order of highest to lowest priority):

1. Continue to promote engagement in the Thrive Financial Initiative to help alleviate the financial challenges our clergy face. The vast majority of Wesleyan clergy report high levels of financial need. To promote the financial wellbeing of Wesleyan clergy will take advocacy by denominational, district and local church leadership. It also calls for emphasis on financial literacy for both clergy and local church leadership. Local church leaders need to become more aware of the financial needs of clergy. Increased attention to pastoral compensation may be needed as well.
2. Clergy need to be encouraged by their local churches, districts and denominational leadership to engage in healthy work/life balance. This can be accomplished through active engagement with activities totally outside ministry responsibilities. Pastors need

regular opportunities to “detach” completely from ministry in ways that totally absorb them so they are not thinking about ministry duties. Clergy also need to be encouraged to establish healthy boundaries that will help protect quality time with their spouses, families and key people in their lives. Finally, clergy need to establish regular rhythms of Sabbath practice, take all their vacation time as well as regular days off, and take advantage of the denomination’s encouragement of sabbaticals every seven years.

3. The physical health of clergy needs to be given greater attention. This can be done by providing education and resources for nutrition, regular exercise, sufficient sleep patterns and wellness coaching.
4. The denomination and district leadership should encourage a strong Wesleyan theology of ministry as participating with God’s work in the world. Indications are that our clergy tend to rely on their own strength and ingenuity for decision-making and ministry, often leaving God out of the equation. This creates a sense of “it’s all up to me,” which leads to undue stress. Reaffirming our biblical and theological understanding of the part pastors play in God’s mission in the world (they are simply co-laborers with what God is doing) and cultivating a greater sense of the presence of God in their lives can help increase the sense and belief that God is working through our clergy and that they are not alone in the work of ministry.
5. Engage in Peter Scazzero’s resources of “Emotionally Healthy Spirituality for Leaders.” Scazzero’s work addresses components of discipleship that are often missing from cognitive approaches of bible study and rooted in a more direct encounter with God in relationship. There is a need for clergy to engage spiritual practices that result in greater emotional and relational wellbeing, i.e. approaching spiritual disciplines from a slower and deeper engagement with God that is more contemplative in nature and apart from pragmatic concerns for ministry. Clergy need to encounter the love of God for themselves as individuals apart from what they do.
6. Make available to clergy educational and counseling resources with an emphasis on burnout, depression, anxiety, and treatment for “process addiction,” (behaviors we sometimes refer to as “bad habits,” e.g. over eating, pornography, excessive entertainment and social media use, etc.)
7. Provide targeted support for ministry transitions such as mentoring/coaching, and other resources for pastors who are experiencing career, ministry assignment, and/or life transitions.
8. Provide targeted support for solos, bi-vocational and part-time clergy.
9. Provide strength-based leadership training/coaching regarding adaptive leadership in times of change, conflict resolution, and training in self-compassion.

For further information about clergy wellbeing, see Bloom, Matthew. *Flourishing in Ministry: How to Cultivate Clergy Wellbeing*. Lanham, MD:Rowman & Littlefield, 2019.

Acknowledgements

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