

## **ABSTRACT**

### **CLERGY STRESS, COMPLEX TRAUMA AND SABBATH PRACTICE: HEALING FOR CLERGY SERVING IN STRESSFUL APPOINTMENTS**

by

Randolph Wayne Kanipe

Stress in ministry is a reality for clergy as it is for most professionals that work closely with people. However, in this post modern era, new and unique stressors have come to bear upon clergy that, at first glance, would appear to be generating a disturbingly high attrition rate in the pastorate.

Since 1999, multiple studies continue to reveal a disturbingly high rate of attrition among clergy in all denominations. Similar results have proven true within my own ordination class of 1994 in the North Georgia Conference of the United Methodist Church. Nearly 80% of colleagues ordained in the class of 1994 have since left the ministry. All but one left by their own choice, while one other is deceased.

The stressors that drive clergy to depart full-time ministry seem to revolve around three problematic areas: unrealistic expectations from church members, perceived pressure to produce numerical results from judicatory officials and, ongoing congregational conflict with no support from judicatory officials. Aside from the attrition rate, clergy that remain in ministry often struggle with disillusion, depression, discouragement, or what appears to be very similar effects to that of complex trauma. As bad as these stressors are, they simply cannot be the only factors responsible for what appears to be a mass exodus of clergy from full time ministry.

After much research and following a ten-week group trial on the effects of regular Sabbath practice for clergy serving difficult appointments, I am convinced that the root cause of excessive clergy resignations from ministry stems from a significant absence of self-care. When clergy do not engage in regular practices or disciplines of self-care, the stresses from conflict, unrealistic expectations, and isolation can, in fact, drive clergy to abandon their vows.

My hypothesis is, that if a practice can be developed to help make clergy stronger spiritually, emotionally, and physically, then perhaps the rate of attrition may begin to diminish. An additional benefit would be improving the quality of life for those dedicated to serving God through the church. I am convinced that both can be accomplished through encouraging regular Sabbath practice for all full-time clergy. This project is focused upon examining if some symptoms of complex trauma can be reduced or eliminated through regular Sabbath practice or clergy serving difficult appointments.

A major finding for this study is that for clergy who did engage in at least some Sabbath rest on a regular weekly basis every single one of the participants were able to begin to reduce the symptoms of complex trauma by as much as 30%. The data suggests that regular Sabbath practice does have a positive effect upon reducing the symptoms of complex trauma, and in essence could help reduce attrition rates as clergy learn to take better care of themselves.

DISSERTATION APPROVAL

This is to certify that the dissertation entitled  
CLERGY STRESS, COMPLEX TRAUMA AND SABBATH PRACTICE:  
A STUDY ON SABBATH PRACTICE AS HEALING PROCESS  
FOR CLERGY SERVING IN STRESSFUL APPOINTMENTS

presented by

Randolph Wayne Kanipe

has been accepted towards fulfillment

of the requirements for the

DOCTOR OF MINISTRY degree at

Asbury Theological Seminary

\_\_\_\_\_  
Mentor

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Internal Reader

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Representative, Doctor of Ministry Program

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Dean of the Beeson Center

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

CLERGY STRESS, COMPLEX TRAUMA AND SABBATH PRACTICE:  
A STUDY ON SABBATH PRACTICE AS HEALING PROCESS  
FOR CLERGY SERVING IN STRESSFUL APPOINTMENTS

A Dissertation

Presented to the Faculty of  
Asbury Theological Seminary

In Partial Fulfillment  
Of the Requirements for the Degree  
Doctor of Ministry

by

Rev. Randy Kanipe

May 2016

© 2012

Randolph Wayne Kanipe

ALL RIGHTS RESERVED

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
LIST OF TABLES .....	vii
LIST OF FIGURES .....	viii
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS .....	x
CHAPTER 1 PROBLEM .....	1
Introduction.....	1
Purpose.....	13
Research Questions.....	13
Research Question #1 .....	13
Research Question #2 .....	15
Research Question #3 .....	16
Definition of Terms.....	17
Ministry Intervention .....	25
Context.....	25
Methodology .....	31
Participants.....	33
Expectations for Participants.....	34
Instrumentation .....	38
Variables .....	41
Data Collection .....	41
Data Analysis .....	43
Generalizability.....	45

Theological Foundation .....	48
Overview .....	61
CHAPTER 2 LITERATURE.....	63
Introduction.....	63
Problem.....	68
Purpose.....	69
Theological Framework .....	69
Biblical Foundations.....	70
Sabbath Defined.....	70
Sabbath and Worship in Post/Modern Age.....	71
Sabbath Practice .....	72
Sabbath and Seventh Day Rest .....	78
History of Terminology .....	80
Sabbath and Worship .....	83
Sabbath Rest and Creation.....	86
Pattern of Rest as Foundational .....	87
Significance of Rest .....	90
Science and Sabbath .....	95
Sabbath and Regulation .....	97
Jesus and Sabbath .....	98
Paul and Sabbath.....	102
Wesley and Sabbath.....	103
Sabbath Rest and Theophilus.....	104

Psychological and Emotional Ramifications of Stress and Anxiety.....	106
Stress in America .....	107
Neurotheology, Stress, and Sabbath .....	109
Stress Particular to Clergy Experience as Related to Complex Trauma..	111
Stress Particular to Clergy Experience-Complex Trauma .....	115
Neruoplasticity and the Brain .....	117
Starting at Home .....	120
Clergy Self-Care and the <i>Book of Discipline</i> .....	121
Training and Education in Clergy Self Care.....	125
Sabbath Practice as Potential Aid .....	126
Research Design.....	129
Quasi-Experimental, Pre-Post Evaluative Model .....	131
Summary.....	133
CHAPTER 3 METHODOLOGY .....	136
Problem.....	136
Purpose.....	138
Research Questions and/or Hypotheses .....	139
Research Question #1 .....	139
Research Question #2 .....	140
Research Question #3 .....	145
Population and Participants.....	149
Design of the Study.....	149

Time Frame.....	149
Information Shared .....	150
Reporting/Accountability.....	151
Instrumentation .....	152
Variables .....	152
Reliability and Validity.....	152
Definition of Terms used in Testing.....	153
Data Collection .....	154
Scoring .....	156
Data Analysis .....	163
Ethical Procedures .....	165
CHAPTER 4 FINDINGS.....	167
Problem and Purpose .....	167
Participants.....	167
Research Question #1 .....	171
Research Question #2 .....	183
Research Question #3 .....	200
Summary of Major Findings.....	204
CHAPTER 5 DISCUSSION.....	207
Major Findings.....	207
First Finding.....	207
Clergy in difficult appointments are highly stressed as anticipated.	
Seconding Finding .....	212
Avoiding stress triggers is vital for effective participation in Sabbath disciplines.	

Third Finding.....	217
Support of supervisors is critical to engaging in Sabbath practice.	
Fourth Finding.....	219
Active presence of loving accountability aids in learning spiritual disciplines.	
Observations .....	221
Implications of the Findings .....	225
Disruption of Sabbath.....	226
Limitations of the Study.....	226
Unexpected Observations .....	227
Recommendations.....	234
Postscript.....	236
APPENDIXES	
A. Informed Consent Document.....	237
B. Participant Handbook.....	241
WORKS CITED .....	245
WORKS CONSULTED .....	256

## LIST OF TABLES

	Page
Table 3.1. Direction of Neuro-QOL Scores.....	159
Table 3.2. Pretrial Adult Anxiety Scores .....	159
Table 3.3. Pre-trial Adult Fatigue Scores.....	160
Table 3.4. Adult Neuro-QOL Item Bank Standard Error and Reliability by T-Scores ...	161
Table 3.5. Adult Neuro-QOL Item Bank Calibration Sample T-Score Means, and Standard Deviations, and Distributions by Percentile .....	161
Table 4.1. Study Participant Group Demographic Breakdown .....	172
Table 4.2. Pre trial Anxiety Scores .....	174
5Anxiety Scores Interpretation .....	173
Table 4.4. Pre trial Blood Pressure Scores.....	177
Table 4.5. Pre-trial Fatigue Scores.....	180
Table 4.6. Pre-trial Social Isolation Scores.....	182
Table 4.7. Pre-trial Anxiety and Social Isolation Comparison .....	183
Table 4.8. Post-trial Anxiety Scores .....	186
Table 4.9. Pre-post trial Anxiety Score Comparison .....	186
Table 4.10. Post trial Anxiety and Social Isolation Comparison.....	187
Table 4.11. Post-trial Blood Pressure Scores.....	189
Table 4.12. Pre-post trial Blood Pressure Score Comparison.....	189
Table 4.13. Pre-post trial Blood Pressure Group Average.....	190
Table 4.14. Pre-Post trial Blood Pressure Interpretation .....	191
Table 4.15. Pre-Post trial Social Isolation Comparison.....	193
Table 4.16. Pre-Post trial Fatigue Score Comparison.....	193

Table 4.17. Post-trial Fatigue Score Interpretation.....	194
Table 4.18. Pre-post Trial Social Isolation/Disassociation Comparison.....	198
Table 4.19. Post trial Social Isolation Interpretation.....	199
Table 4.20. Weekly Participation Rates of Sabbath Practice.....	201
Table 4.21. Reported Sabbath Time Engaged vs. Potential Available.....	202

## LIST OF FIGURES

	Page
Figure 2.1. Comparison of typical weekend activities by day .....	76
Figure 2.2. Activities engaged in on average Sunday.....	77
Figure 4.1. Anxiety Pre-trial Scores .....	175
Figure 4.2. Anxiety Scores Pre & post test comparison .....	187
Figure 4.3. Post-trial Fatigue Scores.....	194
Figure 4.4. Pre-post trial Evaluative Comparison.....	195
Figure 4.5. Post trial evaluative social isolation scores comparison.....	198
Figure 4.6. Post trial social isolation scores.....	199
Figure 4.7. Weekly Sabbath practice rate comparison .....	202

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to acknowledge several individuals for their specific help and encouragement in completing this project and dissertation. Without their support, encouragement, prayers, and accountability, I would not have made it.

Beginning with my wife, Marika Kanipe, and our children Rebekah Anne and James Randolph, for their understanding, patience, and ongoing encouragement in my absence from their lives during this process.

Much appreciation goes to Dr. Keisling and Dr. Lowe for their enduring patience and guidance as well as Mr. Wes Taylor and the Honorable Judge Stephen E. Boswell, friends and prayer partners who literally prayed me through this exercise.

In addition, I appreciate my spiritual strength training partner and accountability coach, Rev. Jerry Meredith, for helping me keep a clear perspective as well as the late Dr. G. Lloyd Rediger, for his counsel, friendship, support and endorsement of this project.

I would also like to acknowledge the contributions of U.S. Films and in particular Mr. Steve Sussman, Producer of “BETRAYED: The Clergy Killer’s DNA” for championing the cause of abused clergy around the world and including some of my work in his documentary.

Much appreciation goes to the men and women who willingly gave of themselves in participating in this project as well as to my doctoral journey. I also wish to acknowledge the faithfulness of my Friday prayer partners, Rev. Larry Burton, Rev. Suzanne Cobb, Rev. Charlie Crowe, and life coach Mr. John Ashton.

Last but not least, I am most appreciative for the encouragement, prayers, and support from the two who brought me into faith, my parents, Ann and Wayne Kanipe.

## **CHAPTER 1**

### **PROBLEM**

#### **Introduction**

Christians today live in a time and age dominated by events, economic circumstances, and radical social change that test their faith, challenge their patience and generate stress in their lives. Even in America where people are relatively safe, studies from the American Psychological Association demonstrate that people in America are resorting to unhealthy practices for dealing with stress. Included in this population study are those who are followers of Christ. The choices people are making in managing stress only serves to amplify the condition rather than diminish it. Choices such as: poor diet, overeating, smoking, inactive lifestyle, only contribute to the problem. (Norman B. Anderson p. 9) Christians, while having other avenues for managing stress, are, for the most part, doing what the rest of the country is doing, and that would include pastors.

Being a Christian does not grant individuals immunity to stress or traumatic events, but one thing Christian faith does provide is strength for the trials and nurturing or healing in the aftermath of trials. The same is true for spiritual leaders and pastors. For some reason, Christians seem to be no more at peace inwardly as a segment of the population than the rest of the population as a whole. Christians are as stressed as anyone else in America.

Christian ministry has always been a stressful calling, and spiritual leadership in this post modern era can be especially troubling. A multitude of pressures and stresses that pastors face today simply were not issues on the forefront of daily discussion just one generation ago. From negotiating the potentially explosive issue of homosexuality and

same-sex marriage to managing the multiple demands of a local congregation, to doing battle with overly anxious or dysfunctional members seeking power and control, pastors today are perhaps more stressed than ever. The largest indicator of pastoral stress is the rate of attrition among clergy, and the condition which they are in at any given moment. An article in the New York Times from August 2010 stated: "Members of the clergy now suffer from obesity, hypertension and depression at rates higher than most Americans. In the last decade, their use of antidepressants has risen, while their life expectancy has fallen. Many would change jobs if they could." The same article provided these statistics on clergy as a whole, including men and women in all denominations:

- 13 percent of active pastors are divorced.
- 23 percent have been fired or pressured to resign at least once in their careers.
- 25 percent do not know where to turn when they have a family or personal conflict or issue.
- 25 percent of pastors' wives see their husband's work schedule as a source of conflict.
- 33 percent felt burned out within their first five years of ministry.
- 33 percent say that being in ministry is an outright hazard to their family.
- 40 percent of pastors and 47 percent of spouses are suffering from burnout, frantic schedules, and/or unrealistic expectations.
- 45 percent of pastors' wives say the greatest danger to them and their family is physical, emotional, mental, and spiritual burnout.
- 45 percent of pastors say that they've experienced depression or burnout to the extent that they needed to take a leave of absence from ministry.
- 50 percent feel unable to meet the needs of the job.

- 52 percent of pastors say they and their spouses believe that being in pastoral ministry is hazardous to their family's well-being and health.
- 56 percent of pastors' wives say that they have no close friends.
- 57 percent would leave the pastorate if they had somewhere else to go or some other vocation they could do.
- 70 percent do not have any close friends.
- 75 percent report severe stress causing anguish, worry, bewilderment, anger, depression, fear, and alienation.
- 80 percent of pastors say they have insufficient time with their spouse.
- 80 percent believe that pastoral ministry affects their families negatively.
- 90 percent feel unqualified or poorly prepared for ministry.
- 90 percent work more than 50 hours a week.
- 94 percent feel under pressure to have a perfect family.
- 1,500 pastors leave their ministries each month due to burnout, conflict, or moral failure.

The spouse of a pastor who left the ministry very wounded after just eight years full-time shared... ” *My wife has been in the ministry for over 5 years. During that course of time she has been an associate minister, children's minister and a senior minister. I noticed her starting to tumble after her 1st assignment as an associate minister. It only got worse from there... I am now at home with a wonderful woman who suffers with major depression and anxiety disorder. She was told by her doctor to call it quits! I am saddened by this, and by all those so called, "real Christians" who shoved her into a padded cell.* ” (Pastor Burnout.com 2010 - 2014 Daniel Sherman)

This pastor's story is congruent with thousands upon thousands more. Granted, women in ministry suffer such things at a higher rate than do male clergy but together the rates are still unacceptably high, and a blight upon the collective witness of the Church Universal. Clergy are resigning from full-time ministry at a rate that is troubling and astonishing.

As debilitating as it can sometimes be, stress in ministry cannot be the sole reason for the seemingly high rate of attrition of clergy. Christian spiritual leaders have always had their troubles, even from the age of Paul who bemoaned the thorn in his flesh: "Therefore, in order to keep me from becoming conceited, I was given a thorn in my flesh, a messenger of Satan, to torment me." (2 Cor. 12:7) Clergy have always had some degree of stress and frustration in ministry; therefore, something else must be contributing to a sense of disillusion or provoking clergy to the point that abandoning their call seems to be their only option.

Certainly cultural factors, such as confusion around the growing influence of a new morality, is finding a way into the life of the church. Heated congregational conflicts over changing social norms have driven some congregations and several denominations to split because of an inability to resolve the conflict. Managing those conflicts as a spiritual leader exacts an emotional, physical, and spiritual toll from which some clergy never recover. In addition, "The loss of a transcendent sense of Good and Evil..." (Greenfield, p. 58) when serving as a spiritual leader at a time in history where there seems to be less of a sense of dependence upon God and more confidence in human solutions to societal problems: there is a sense of loss.

These factors can be difficult yet clergy have through the ages managed to lead through all kinds of cultural shifts and even at times when the church is under persecution from hostile governments. The confluence of several shifts in church and culture appear to be undermining the spiritual authority of the church and, likewise, diminishing respect for the office of pastor and for those holding the office.

Where the dividing lines between good and evil have become blurred if not altogether erased, evil seems to have slipped into the equation and taken aim at Christian spiritual leaders and in particular clergy. From the irrational to the irresponsible, increasing demands and expectations thrust upon clergy by laity are making the position of spiritual leader more vulnerable to the least healthy members of the congregation, who often turn out to be clergy killers or antagonists. Congregational antagonists, those individuals that heap abuse upon abuse on the clergy, are growing in number and intensity in their assaults upon clergy, their ministry, their calling, and their integrity, perhaps is the single largest contributing factor to the increasing rate of attrition among pastors across America.

According to Haugk, “Antagonists are individuals who, on the basis of no substantive evidence, go out of their way to make insatiable demands, attacking the person or performance of others. These attacks are selfish in nature, tearing down rather than building up, and are frequently directed against those in a leadership capacity.” (Kenneth Haugk 22) Many authors have written about this modern day malady. G. Lloyd Rediger wrote about this in his books “Clergy Killers” and “Toxic Congregations.” Kenneth Haugk has also written extensively on the matter, and in one particular book addresses the problems that clergy in the post modern era face with church antagonists.

Haugk's book "Antagonists In The Church" has been reprinted many times and most recently comes with a workbook for more in depth congregational study.

The problem of toxic congregational conflict and clergy killers has become so prolific that the issue caught the attention of an investigative news agency, U.S. Films Inc. In their own research and investigation of the topic of church antagonists and clergy killers, U.S. Films associates found so much evidence of this phenomenon that they were able to produce a 90 minute documentary highlighting the scale and scope of the problem. The documentary "Betrayed: The Clergy Killer's DNA" was released to much fanfare in the summer of 2012 and continues to sell today.

Having antagonists or clergy abusers in one's congregation can indeed be stress inducing. When those individuals start an ongoing attack upon the pastor, the experience can be devastating for pastor and congregation. Because of the visibility and intensity of the conflict and sometimes the nature of abuses that occur, this growing phenomenon would appear to be the main catalyst in the rising rate of attrition among clergy.

However, it is my hypothesis that it is not so much the stress brought on by serving difficult congregations or relentless attacks from antagonists against clergy but the lack of intentional self-care through practice of spiritual disciplines, and, specifically, the absence of regular Sabbath practice among clergy that is contributing to this crisis. Ongoing stress and anxiety, without some course of spiritual restoration, stress reduction, or anxiety management can eventually destroy the desire to serve among the most faithful of servants. When abuses seem to follow a pastor from one congregation to the next without any period of time between appointments for them to heal, anxiety and stress begin to take a cumulative toll and eventually pastors end up resigning from ministry.

Multiple factors go into this theory which will be examined in this project. However, if clergy were taking better care of themselves by attending to regular Sabbath once per week, evidence suggests that attrition rates could begin to diminish. This project studies the phenomenon of clergy stress as well as the ancient command to honor the Sabbath each week to see if a group of clergy who focus on weekly Sabbath practice can reduce the detrimental effects of stress in their own lives.

Recent studies conducted by Duke University (Hodge and Wenger, 2005) demonstrate a disturbingly high rate of attrition among clergy serving in all mainline protestant denominations throughout the United States. This trend is also present within the United Methodist Church as well and, in particular, the North Georgia Conference. In the United Methodist Church in North America, attrition rates averaged 52% and ran as high as 65%. (Hodge and Wenger P. 28 ) Due to anger, frustration, and resentment on the part of former Methodist and Presbyterian pastors, the authors of the study admitted that response rates from unhappy clergy were lower than those from clergy who were satisfied; therefore, their figures likely underestimated clergy who left ministry emotionally, spiritually, or psychologically wounded. (P. 32)

This revealing study demonstrated that among clergy who left partly involuntarily or involuntarily, the top three reasons they gave for resigning included “conflict in the congregation,” “conflict with or lack of support from denominational officials,” and “burnout, fatigue, feelings of constraint.” (Kenneth Haugk P. 38) Among clergy in all denominations who left ministry due to congregational conflicts, 85 percent expressed “unrealistic expectations from the congregation” as the leading cause. When polling pastors that had left the ministry, 67 percent of former clergy felt stress because of

criticism of their leadership and/or ministry, and 72 percent expressed feelings of exhaustion or burnout. (P. 78)

A study by Michael Wiese reveals some striking common experiences of clergy who left ministry. Wiese found some common factors that most clergy who resigned their call had experienced. The factors he listed included: “an inability to manage or resolve congregational conflict, dysfunctional congregations being impossible to lead, and pastors who failed to engage in self care and self discipline.” (Michael Wiese P. 113) This affirms the combination of three main factors that seem to be at work in the rising attrition rates: increasing congregational conflict, presence of antagonism and failure to engage in self-care in high stress situations. (Weiss P. 114)

Congregational conflict is not a rare phenomenon that hides among a few isolated congregations. Congregational conflict is, in fact, an historical aspect of the church and, at times, has been helpful when handled correctly. The ministry challenge today seems to be that conflict is more destructive than constructive, and often experienced by pastors in the form of toxic conflict or abusive behavior aimed at them from unhealthy or dysfunctional church members, at least according to Dr. G. Lloyd Rediger. The Pulpit and Pew study affirms such claims many times over that pastors who resigned from ministry due to conflict alone represented 39 percent of all former pastors. (Hodge and Wenger, P. 97). In the absence of self-care, abusive conflict takes a heavier toll much more rapidly than would ordinary conflict upon most any leader assigned to a congregation.

Lack of denominational support in times of crisis or congregational conflict is another significant factor that leads to clergy leaving the ministry, not just a church, but

resigning from ministry completely. In all mainline denominations, 42 percent of clergy reported that such support was of great importance or somewhat important to their ministry. In Methodist circles, that figure ran as high as 54 percent. Sadly, only 9 percent of Methodist clergy reported feeling very satisfied with the level of denominational support they received with 18 percent for all denominations. (Hodge and Wenger P. 100-01)

Feelings of isolation and loneliness run as high as 76 percent among those who experience conflict with their congregations and 71 percent feel stressed due to the unrealistic demands placed upon them by laity. (Hodge and Wenger P. 116) With such a high percentage of clergy reporting these kinds of stressors, the statistics for resignations almost mirror those reporting the causes of stress and could lead to a mistaken interpretation that the stressors themselves are the leading cause of clergy resignations from ministry. If a new factor were to be included in a survey, such as percentage of clergy engaging in regular self-care, the levels of stress could be shown to decrease and resignations thus decrease, where there is an increase in percentage of clergy engaging in regular Sabbath practice or healthy self-care.

Of those clergy experiencing burnout or fatigue, only 12 percent reported feelings that were strong enough to lead to their resignations. However, closely linked to feelings of exhaustion/fatigue/burnout were feelings of loneliness, and inordinate stress over church conflict, unrealistic expectations and less satisfaction in ministry. (Hodge and Wenger P. 129) It would appear, therefore, that the stressors have a cumulative effect, increasing with intensity over time if there is not a reprieve between appointments, rather than highly intense but episodic events every so often. In other words, pastors who serve

one difficult church after another in succession of two or more in a row are far more likely to resign prematurely, than those who serve a difficult church only once in a decade or more.

The combination of lack of denominational support, fatigue, conflict, and unrealistic or unreasonable expectations were always in the top five reasons clergy gave for resigning from full-time ministry. Some ministers went into other ministry related areas, but very few, if any, returned to full-time pulpit ministry. Therefore, resignation from ministry could be seen as a last desperate act of self-preservation.

Without a way of removing the stress in ministry, the clergy person mistakenly perceives the only way to reduce or eliminate the stress is by removing themselves from the ministry completely, whether they feel called to do so or not. Without a doubt, clergy both in full-time ministry to difficult congregations and those who have resigned from such are in a tremendous amount of pain, spiritually and emotionally.

Rediger has claimed that the problem of abusive conflict aimed at pastors from members of their congregations is not an isolated or rare problem but rather is so prolific among congregations nationwide that he considers it to be pandemic. (*Betrayed*) This kind of conflict in the spiritual workplace can be discouraging and is likely a significant factor in the development of symptoms very similar to that of complex trauma in clergy who experience such abuse, thus pushing many clergy over the edge to resignation.

Rapid shifts in cultural, social, and economic changes in ministry have all added to the demanding nature of spiritual leadership in the postmodern age. Of the pastors which enter into ministry fresh from seminary, the outlook for their tenure is not any better than for those currently serving. The study by Hodge and Wenger revealed that 50

percent of students graduating from seminary and going into full-time ministry would not be in ministry five years later.

Pastors that are remaining in ministry are not faring any better spiritually or emotionally. The Barna Research group reports that at any given time, 50 percent of pastors still serving are so discouraged that they would leave the ministry immediately if they had another way of making a living. Their families are also affected by this post modern malady. This same group reports that 84 percent of the pastors' spouses wish their spouse would chose a different profession, and more than 90 percent of pastor's children want nothing to do with church life when they become grown adults—largely because of what they witnessed happening to their parents at the hands of church members.

Fortunately, there are plenty of loving, healthy and productive Christian congregations nationwide. Likewise, there have always have been more than a few that could be considered challenging, dysfunctional, toxic, or simply difficult to serve because of a variety of unresolved internal systemic issues. It would be a mistake, however, to tie the attrition rate of clergy solely to an increase in the number of internally conflicted congregations because the numbers simply do not demonstrate such a connection.

Granted, far too many congregations in the church universal today are conflicted. As prolific as this problem may be, there are not enough of these kinds of congregations in existence to generate such an abnormally high attrition rate among those called and trained to serve. A deeper, more fundamental reason why so many clergy are giving up so quickly on a calling from God must be at work beneath the obvious signs of stress and conflict.

Certainly, accounts of ministers of the gospel being attacked even by their own flocks is as old a problem as reported by Paul himself when he chronicled his own struggles. The problem of congregational conflict is distressing, and is increasing with intensity in levels of conflict and in frequency of the number of reported cases but it is nothing new. I am convinced; therefore, that an underlying cause is making our post-modern clergy more vulnerable to the age old struggle against the powers and principalities of this world, as manifested through antagonists in the local church.

I believe, and am discovering, that for a majority of clergy self-care is perhaps the lowest priority on the list of things to do in ministry. Many clergy are exercising and eating right which is good and an effective tool in the struggle against stress. However, the discipline of engaging in spiritual self care, I believe, is something that rarely gets attention in the lives of most pastors.

Spiritual self-care is a critical factor in the equation of clergy health and strength that most clergy seem to be compromising too often in order to meet the demands placed upon them. Spiritual self-care can encompass a variety of activities, but for the purposes of this study spiritual self-care includes a variety of activities under one banner called Sabbath practice. Certainly clergy, perhaps more than most, would know about the importance of Sabbath, but seems to be a disconnect between what clergy know to be good for them and what they actually do when it comes to Sabbath practice and self-care. There is no benefit in knowing the solution to a problem without having the will or desire to implement the solution to resolve the problem.

The percentage of pastors leaving the ministry far exceeds the likely percentage of congregations which are conflicted, toxic, or unhealthy. Therefore, the attrition rate of

clergy leaving the ministry may have more to do with pastoral lifestyle and personal choices for handling stress than it does congregational conflict. Many pastors reported their reasons for leaving the ministry had much to do with conflict but not much information is available regarding how they may have engaged or not engaged in self care during the conflicts that could have had an impact on their perceptions of the conflict. Therefore, it would be helpful to conduct a study where clergy are serving in stressful situations, have them engage in some healthy spiritual self-care practices for a period of time, and measure the results these practices had on reducing symptoms of stress.

### **Purpose**

The purpose of this research project was to evaluate the changes in physical health, emotional fatigue, and stress levels as the result of a ten week program of intentional Sabbath practice for a group of fifteen full-time clergy serving in difficult congregations within the North Georgia Conference.

### **Research Questions**

#### **Research Question #1**

How did the participants rate in physical health, emotional fatigue, and stress levels prior to the 10 week program of intentional Sabbath practice?

It is important to have some idea of the relative level of health of the clergy at the start of the project so there will be something to compare end results with and the end of the project. Clergy will be given three self scoring instruments from the PROMIS health inventory. One of the instruments measures current levels of stress as revealed specifically in anxiety levels. A second measures levels of fatigue. In addition, a third

instrument helps identify the possible presence of, or movement toward, isolation, known as disassociation or social isolation. Members of the study group will also be measured individually for current blood pressure levels. These four measurements are four of five symptoms related to a syndrome defined as complex trauma.

Testing for stress needs to be very specific, as stress can be brought on by multiple sources which may or may not have anything to do with the challenges of spiritual leadership, ministry, or leading a difficult congregation. Stress in general can be brought on by physiological factors such as prolonged illness or serious illness. Stress can also be brought on by emotional or psychological factors, including but not limited to emotional/behavioral disorders, generalized anxiety disorder, marital or family problems, insomnia, depression, etc. In addition, stress can also be brought on by other factors such as economic uncertainty, financial difficulty, time and work demands etc. In other words, a host of factors exist when it comes to testing for levels of stress.

In order to narrow down and test for specific stress as related to clergy and the possible presence of complex trauma, it will be necessary to test for stress as related to current levels of anxiety in participants. One of the symptoms (and complicating factors) of complex trauma is elevated and sustained levels of anxiety. Therefore, the testing instrument used for stress indicators will be testing specifically for levels of anxiety in participants both at the beginning and the end of the clinical trial.

Complex trauma is an emotional/behavioral disorder with symptoms that have adverse affects upon the physical, emotional, and social well being of victims. The condition is brought on by exposure to elevated levels of high anxiety over an extended period of time with only occasional moments of reprieve from the stress. The disorder

manifests itself in physical, social, emotional, and behavioral symptoms in victims. In extreme cases, it can become debilitating. Complex trauma is related to, but not exactly the same as, post traumatic stress disorder.

The particular group of clergy selected for this study may or may not have such symptoms; all participants are in fact serving congregations that are difficult and come recommended by their superintendent, conference counselor, or self reported. Presence of these symptoms does not necessarily equate to a diagnosis of complex trauma, and, within the limitations of this study, there is not time nor sufficient qualified personnel to test for insomnia or loss of memory. This project will, however, be testing the presence of four of the six symptoms of complex trauma. The relative presence or absence of four symptoms can serve as reliable indicators of the likely presence of the condition. Any initial indications of the presence of these symptoms with higher than average scores is cause for further examination into the degree to which the conditions exist as well as the possibility that complex trauma could be emerging in participant's lives to such a point as to be cause for concern and possible further diagnosis or treatment.

### **Research Question #2**

How did the participants rate in physical health, emotional fatigue, and stress levels following the 10 week program of intentional Sabbath Practice?

If symptoms of complex trauma appeared in any of the pre-test inventories, then I will be looking for the same in the post-trial tests as well. In this part of the study, I will be examining data to determine if there were reductions in any or all of the symptomatic areas which I tested for in the pre-trial instruments. The study time is not sufficient

enough to expect a complete turnaround or elimination of complex trauma symptoms. However, it is a substantial enough period of time to observe if faithfulness to the process produced any discernable differences between pre and post-trial scores. What I will be looking for is not a reversal of symptoms or even an elimination, but rather I will be looking for small trends toward decreases in these four areas.

### **Research Question #3**

What aspects of the 10-week program of intentional Sabbath Practice seemed to have the greatest impact on the observed changes in physical health, emotional fatigue, and stress levels of the participants?

If the process of engaging in regular Sabbath practice proved helpful in reducing symptoms of complex trauma, it will be helpful to determine which aspects of the program proved to be most helpful to clergy in the process. I will not be looking for any specific type of activity such as journaling, prayer, reading, reflecting etc. because each of these are intrinsic and unique to each individual and their personality type. It would be impossible to measure for such a subjective trait as well.

However, what will be helpful to examine is what parts of the practice of Sabbath proved most helpful to clergy in being able to engage freely in their chosen activity. I will therefore be looking for which of four aspects of Sabbath practice seemed to be most conducive to helping them relax and commune with God. These include: Importance of getting off campus and away from triggers and stressors, having several hours of uninterrupted time alone with God, weekly accountability for engaging in their Sabbath practice, and support of the Superintendent and SPR or Board of Deacons.

Comparison of pre and post-trial scores along with collective journal entries and discerning which particular aspect of Sabbath practice proved most helpful to the participants will be key to making recommendations in creating a larger program of possible participation for all clergy in the conference.

### **Definition of Terms**

#### **Antagonist**

A church member who has a history of harassing, intimidating, and/or interfering with the ministry of clergy assigned to lead their church is usually considered to be an antagonist. Dysfunctional or ‘difficult’ congregations tend to have at least one of these types of persons within the congregation or a history of having tolerated such for several pastoral appointments. These individuals have a history of ~~behavior in~~ abusing the staff and/or pastor. They are malevolent, seemingly driven by the spirit of evil and are rarely if ever reprimanded by congregants, clergy, or judicatory officials for their un-Christ like behaviors. They tend to bully or abuse nearly every pastor sent to serve them. (Rediger, Interview)

#### **Toxic Congregations**

Toxic congregations are among the worst to serve and inflict the most damage not only to clergy but to members within the church and the surrounding community. Toxic congregations have “...a dominant pattern of control exercised by a substantial proportion of persons intent upon asserting a prejudiced, divisive, and harmful agenda.” (Rediger P. 12)

**Dysfunctional Congregation**

A dysfunctional congregation is a congregation in which there is “some recognizable religious form, but with counterproductive or diverse agendas. The soul of such a congregation will be contorted and unstable.” (Rediger P. 12) They usually have a history of abusing or bullying their appointed spiritual leaders and are not able to retain their pastors for more than a few short years because of internal dysfunctional and controlling relationships/behaviors.

**Emotional Distress – anxiety**

Emotional distress and/or anxiety in ministry with difficult congregations often comes from ongoing situations where conflict is high, threats against the pastor and his or her ministry are real and present, and risk of negative outcome is high and uncertain. Such ongoing stresses cannot only lead to emotional distress, but a much more serious condition known as “Complex Trauma.” (Eric Scalise p. 28)

**Disassociation**

Disassociation or social isolation is one of the symptoms experienced by persons who have experienced complex trauma. Disassociation is an emotional reaction to Complex Trauma trigger where a person either intentionally or unintentionally isolates themselves from other people, social situations, or gatherings that appear to have similar threats to the trauma experienced at another time and place. The person simply withdraws into themselves, preferring to be alone rather than in the company of other people and this can include family or friends. (Eric Scalise p. 30)

### **Emotional Fatigue**

Emotional exhaustion or fatigue is another symptom of Complex Trauma. It is manifested by ‘physical and emotional indicators and linked with a predisposition to rail, to wear out, or become exhausted by making excessive demands on energy, strength, or resources...’ (DSM V) Emotional exhaustion or fatigue leads to the ‘development of negative, cynical attitudes and feelings...’ mostly aimed at the people pastors serve. Clergy who endure extraordinary stress to the level of it being ongoing and relentless find themselves emotionally and often physically exhausted even though they have not exerted themselves physically in any way. (*Francis, Kaldor, Shevlin, & Lewis. p. 269-270*)

### **Complex Trauma**

According to the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual (V), Post Traumatic Distress Syndrome is closely related to Complex Trauma. PTSD is described as a psychological/emotional reactive condition which results from exposure to a singular but particularly traumatic event. Complex trauma is what a person experiences when traumatic stressors or anxiety generators create extremely high levels of anxiety with elevated levels remaining constant, ongoing, and without reprieve. It is a type of psychological trauma victims come to live with literally 24-7 for weeks or sometimes months on end, and is extremely detrimental to physical, emotional, spiritual, and social health in victims. Examples of conditions which bring about complex trauma are extreme and usually rare. Situations include where people have been incarcerated, emotionally, physically, and relationally abusive domestic situations, or work settings that place a person in constant danger. (*Herman P. 377*) Extreme examples include concentration

camp survivors, domestic abuse survivors, sexual abuse survivors (children), and people who live in severe poverty.

Clergy do not experience the full terror of abuse at the levels described in the DSM V; however, they still experience terrifying moments that seem to extend beyond episodic moment and venture more into the area of chronic or ongoing – never ending moments of elevated anxiety, fear, and sometimes terror. Although spiritual leaders are not highly compensated, clergy do not find themselves in this kind of extreme economic predicament. However, salaries are traditionally quite low and economic or employment security is constantly present with the possibility of sudden and unexpected unemployment.

One of the reasons this could qualify as traumatic for clergy is that unlike other people in the workforce, clergy do not qualify for and are not allowed to participate in unemployment insurance programs. Therefore, when or if they become unexpectedly unemployed, they are with few if any resources or a financial safety net outside of what they may have been able to scrape together in savings or what a spouse may earn working a second job. If they have been living in a church furnished home, they have to vacate that property, and if no other ministry prospects are available, the pastor and his/her family immediately become homeless. Living in the parsonage system adds another layer of anxiety (economic uncertainty) to an already tenuous feeling of obligation.

The only pastors who have a guarantee of employment are those in the United Methodist system. All others operate under a system known as a ‘call.’ Therefore, the majority of clergy who are forced out of ministry face the exact same conditions as do the homeless in our society. With no income safety net, with no unemployment insurance, no

health insurance and literally, no home in which to live, the threat of sudden unemployment if under attack by a congregation creates an incredibly high level of anxiety that remains high as long as the attacks continue. These potential conditions haunt many clergy who come under attack in their congregations, leading many to give up completely rather than expose themselves and their families to such ongoing abuses.

Complex Trauma (CT) is closely related with Post Traumatic Stress Syndrome. However, the main difference between PTSD and Complex Trauma has to do with the duration of the stress. CT generates a hyper-sensitive or hyper-reactive response in individuals that have experienced extended periods of stress, threats, and anxiety and leads to the development of Post Traumatic Stress Syndrome within affected individuals.

### **Abuse**

Abuse, in the context used for this study, would include three types of bullying that are commonly experienced by stressed clergy. These include: Systemic Abuse, Relational Abuse and Emotional Abuse. (Coloroso, P. 75)

**Markers of systemic abuse.** Systemic abuse is not necessarily the intention of an organization or structure to inflict abuse upon members of the system. Systemic abuse is an unintended consequence of design flaws within a system that by virtue of oversight or inattention can bring about feelings of being abused by the system by subordinates in the system. Systemic abuse occurs when a judicatory or judicatory officials are unresponsive (unable or unwilling to respond) to the expressed needs or requests of a pastor that either has or is experiencing abuse within their appointment.

In United Methodist circles, the pastor is part of a system in which he or she has virtually no control over which congregations they are appointed to serve. Granted,

pastors agree to operate by and honor this system of appointment when entering the ministry so it is not an unexpected part of the role of pastor. However, pastors in North Georgia are warned that if they refuse an appointment offered to them, they will be considered in breach of contract and could be forced to surrender their credentials.

Clergy are appointed from year to year and if they are in a difficult appointment and suffering abuses from the congregation, they are expected to endure until another appointment can be found. In addition, sometimes a clergy will be sent back into a dysfunctional congregation against his or her will and are still held accountable for numerical growth of the congregation in spite of a congregation's struggle against growth.

Systemic abuse occurs when the pastor has no say in where they are appointed, what their salary will be, where they will live, or how long they will be compelled to remain in an appointment that is dysfunctional, difficult, or damaging to their emotional, physical, and spiritual well-being.

**Markers of Relational abuse.** Relational abuse is understood as experiencing threatening behaviors or attitudes, through common relationships that cause a someone to fear for their employment. (Barbara Colorso P. 89) It manifests itself in ongoing, relentless, and unjustified criticism (Nitpicking – death by a thousand cuts). Belittling the role of the target – treating them not as a trained and qualified leader, but more as ‘hired hand.’ Relational abuse occurs when members of a congregation become overly focused on, or possessive of a pastor's time. Attempts to micro manage the pastor's priorities and their days are symptoms of relational abuse.

Veiled or vague threats or real threats made to the pastor regarding their ministry, their future, or reports to their superintendents are also signs of relational abuse. Abusers will threaten a pastors' employment directly if decisions made in the congregation do not meet their approval.

Forcing a pastor to fight for or ask for their paycheck and/or proper reimbursements is another form of relational abuse. Often times, this behavior is employed by the treasurer or financial officer of the church and used as a tool or power play over the pastor. Holding their pay in check, micromanaging their reimbursements, or challenging every item reported as expenses is but one example of this that pastors experience. Constantly questioning pastor's personal expenses controlling the money - is exercising a form of control or manipulation over the other person. Basically, relational abuse is any controlling, manipulative, coercive, or otherwise threatening behavior aimed at clergy for the purpose of controlling the clergy.

**Markers of Spiritual Abuse.** Spiritual abuse is misusing things of a spiritual nature to impose guilt, threats, fear etc. to produce conformity within the least functional members of the congregation. This is an old but a well practiced behavior among some of our most stalwart parishioners. Pharisaic attitudes toward pastoral leadership are seen in questioning and challenging every decision a pastor makes. It is an over focus on adherence to the *Book of Discipline* rather than the Gospel of Jesus Christ. It is a double edge dilemma in that such behavior is designed to repress spiritual leadership through constant dissent while at the same time blaming the pastor for the increase in congregational dissent. In clergy circles, it is commonly referred to as blaming the victim.

People who engage in spiritual abuse often resort to the following behaviors in order to inflict harm or damage, either to the pastor, the congregation or both.

- Persistent use of innuendoes
- Public and secret attacks on clergy integrity and competence
- Intimidation and threats through financial matters
- Persistent resistance to programs and ideas
- False reports to denominational officials or consultants
- Extreme opposition to instruction and orders from authorities
- Unwillingness to use civil conflict resolution methods
- Continual use of disrespect
- Violation of moral and spiritual Christian norms

(Rediger, 7-8)

**Markers of Emotional Abuse.** Neglecting the financial needs of the pastor, rejecting their spiritual leadership, holding clergy to unrealistic expectations (Excessive demands on time, talents, etc.) are all examples of emotional abuse of clergy. In addition, matters such as clergy having to contend with relentless and unjustified criticism, lay leaders ignoring, denying or refusing to listen to feelings of the pastor, verbal aggression directed toward the pastor, and emotional blackmail, are common experiences for clergy serving in difficult congregations. The unpredictable nature of this abuse is what connects emotional abuse to complex trauma; a pastor never knowing when, where, or to what degree such abuse will crop up over any given issue within the congregation. In these congregations, most every issue becomes or has the potential to become explosive.

Examples include wild mood changes among leaders, emotional outbursts, etc.

(Coloroso, P. 110)

### **Self-Differentiation**

Self-differentiation is the capacity of a pastor or member of the clergy to project confidence, objectivity, and calm in the presence of a hostile congregation/congregant or anxiety driven situation. (Edwin Freidman, P 27)

### **Sabbath Practice**

As understood, described, and experienced in this particular study, Sabbath practice would be the intentional action of clergy disengaging from pastoral duties at least once a week for a period of at least four to six hours for the purpose of reflection, prayer, rest, study, or meditation through a variety of formats. It is intentionally engaging in self care practices and in so doing, connecting with God in maintaining balance, health, faith, perspective, and self differentiation. This is not to be confused with a day off but is the engaging of intentional spiritual disciplines for a period of time for the express purpose of nurturing and/or caring for their soul. Sabbath practice for clergy as understood for the limits of this project is any theologically responsible, socially acceptable activity, which takes a person out of the fray of congregational life and places them squarely in the presence of the Almighty for a significant period of uninterrupted time together.

As we give ourselves over to regular Sabbath practice, opportunities to reach out to God in our pain can result in restorative relationship, affirmation of our sense of being (which is damaged in Complex Trauma), restore our ability to makes sense of the world, and to trust again.

## Ministry Intervention

### Context

Attrition rates among clergy in the Judeo/Christian traditions are on the increase and have been for at least the past three decades. Within mainline protestant denominations in the USA, clergy attrition rates are as high as 65 percent. (Hodge and Wenger 78) In my own ordination class of 1994, the number of clergy who have since left the pulpit ministry ~~since then~~ is closely approaching this very percentage. In addition, clergy leaving the pulpit-congregational leadership ministry are doing so discouraged, distraught, and at times emotionally and spiritually wounded, if not severely damaged as a consequence of their service to the church. Those remaining in ministry tend not to fare any better with many suffering from depression, addictive disease disorders, marital problems, health problems, and disillusion. This is not the case for some clergy, however, there is a disturbingly high percentage of clergy who do suffer these ills as a result of their service to the church.

I interviewed some clergy who left the ministry during the research phase of this project, gathering comments from many and collecting a few for inclusion in this project. The statements they made in tone and description reveal the result of abuses most experienced while pastor. Their comments reveal deep wounds, sadness, and disillusion. These were randomly selected clergy who agreed to be interviewed on condition of anonymity, having served a variety of years as full-time pastors. Regardless of how long the pastors had been away from ministry, wounds remained fresh years after their departure. The names of those quoted have been changed to protect their identity. The common thread of disillusion, disgust, regret, and anger are evident as clergy shared the

following in response to the question: “*Prior to resigning your credentials, what one thing did you come to realize, that convinced you it was time to leave the ministry?*”

Their responses reveal the presence of pain, disappointment and disillusion.

- “I was called to be a pastor, but I was never appointed to a place where the people wanted to be in ministry.” Mark
- “I was called to preach, to teach, and to serve. I still am. It’s just a shame that the only way to do that and preserve my very soul is to leave the ordained ministry.” Linda
- “It was when I finally came to realize that I was called to ministry, not misery.” Julie
- “I came to admit that I was stuck in an abusive system. Who in their right mind, would remain in a system that punishes faithfulness? That dismisses your best efforts? That is abusive, non-repentant and evil? Yes, I said evil, for there is not much of God left in the church these days – at least the ones I was sent to. So I left before they destroyed what was left of my own soul. Thank God.” Alex
- “I went into the ministry because God called me, and because I liked helping people. But after ten years of living in hell working as a pastor, I came to realize that I didn’t even *like* people anymore.” John

Perhaps most revealing of all is the quote from Ron:

- “I was not blessed by ministry. Instead, I was abused to the point that I became discouraged by ministry and disillusioned with traditional mainline denominational structure. The people of God in each church I

served, assaulted every one of my attempts to fulfill a call. The antagonistic and apathetic church members came closer to destroying my faith than any group of agnostics or atheists ever have. Thus, for the sake of my family, my sanity, my emotional and physical well being and for the sake of what was left of my soul, I withdrew my membership as an elder in the United Methodist church.”

A ~~quote from~~ a pastor who initially agreed to participate in the Sabbath practice study, currently serving in his third difficult congregation in a row, had this to say:

“I’m over 58 years old. I’m too old to train to do anything else. There is nothing I can do outside of ministry because ministry is such a narrowly defined area of specialty. I’m too old to start over, so I’m trapped. The only choice I have right now is to stay low, keep my mouth shut, do not rock the boat and just try to survive until I can get the hell out of this damned crazy business.” Gary

Obviously this is not the case for all clergy. There remain plenty of clergy who feel fulfilled and blessed in their calling and enjoying serving the church to which they are assigned. Many more are serving in difficult appointments but are finding ways to cope. However, the fact remains that there is a disturbingly high percentage of clergy who do suffer from stress, complex trauma, burnout, and a host of other ills as a consequence of their service to the church.

The factors which come to bear on a clergy member’s decision to leave ministry are vast: unrealistic expectations on the part of laity, excessive time away from family, low pay, demanding or abusive church members, non-responsive or unsupportive

judicatory officials, pressures to produce results, or lack of time away or uninterrupted time with family. (Hodge and Wenger P. 110)

Our seminaries are doing little to address this reality in training clergy for service in the church. The regular practice of Sabbath as a spiritual discipline or courses teaching the disciplines of critical self care are virtually absent from a majority of the 13 United Methodist Seminary curricula. A few offer courses in conflict management and all offer courses on polity, but courses on the importance of self care, Sabbath practice, or other spiritual disciplines were not offered when the survey was conducted. (On line course survey of all United Methodist Seminaries – 2013)

Most disturbing of all is the fact that clergy self care as well as encouragement of regular Sabbath practice for clergy is all but missing in our own Book of Discipline, yet the expectations and duties of a pastor are numerous, arduous, and clearly spelled out in that same volume, making it abundantly clear that clergy self care and regular Sabbath practice take a back seat to congregational care, church administration, teaching, production of numerical growth, and fund raising.

With such heavy emphasis on duty to the institution (either congregation or denomination) and little if any attention given to ongoing spiritual formation or self care – coupled with the reality of serving conflicted congregations - it is becoming evident that the precursor to stress driven terminations of ministry have more to do with lack of self care than last acts of desperation.

If a trend toward improvement (less stress, less anxiety, clearer perspective, etc.) can be established through regular and intentional Sabbath practice or if it can be demonstrated that there are emerging trends toward a reduction in any of these four

stressors listed as symptoms of Complex Trauma, then it is reasonable to assume that these practices could be easily translated to larger populations of clergy through judicatory offices, thus, hopefully, (eventually) diminishing the rate of attrition among Clergy.

This ministry project took place in two geographical areas of the North Georgia Conference of the United Methodist Church. The project initially involved seventeen United Methodist Clergy from the North Georgia Conference, serving full time and assigned as pastor in charge of a congregation that has typically been difficult to serve. Two participants dropped as the study began, and two dropped out during the study for an ending total of fifteen clergy who started and thirteen who completed the ministry intervention. The group also included one Clergy from the Southern Baptist denomination who was serving a dying congregation in Atlanta Ga.

The clergy that dropped out as the study began cited several factors preventing them from participating. The factors included: overwhelming schedule would not allow the time required for Sabbath practice and ~~two~~, fears of church members creating an issue out of their time away from the office. The two who started the ministry intervention and dropped out two to three weeks later cited the same reasons for their decision.

The group met for an orientation where initial testing was done in four areas for each individual. Tests were self scoring and measured for levels of anxiety, fatigue, and social isolation. The fourth data set included blood pressure measurements for each participant. The group also did some work in identifying their particular spiritual personality type and were encouraged to engage in spiritual disciplines that complimented their identified type.

Participants were asked to engage in an exercise of participating in regular Sabbath practice once per week for a period of 4-6 hours for a ten week session. At the end of that ten week session, clergy were gathered back for a second retreat where they were given the exact same tests as in the beginning, measuring blood pressure, levels of anxiety, fatigue, and social isolation. Clergy shared their experiences, challenges, insights, and progress during the ten week period and offered commentary as well.

Test results from initial and final testing were compared and contrasted to determine if there were any discernable trends toward a reduction in symptoms of complex trauma as a result of participating in the ten weeks of intentional Sabbath practice. Results proved positive.

### **Methodology**

The methodology chosen for this study was a quasi-experimental design coupled with pre-post testing with a group of fifteen clergy serving full time. The clergy group represented a diverse population. It included men, women, young clergy, elderly clergy, seasoned veterans, and brand new Ordinands. The group also represented three distinctly different areas of the North Georgia Conference, including the Northwest district covering all of northwest Georgia: the Athens-Elberton district covering northeastern Georgia, and one clergy serving in the city of Decatur – a bedroom community of metropolitan Atlanta.

Congregations they served were widely represented from those serving very small and dying congregations to those serving long standing, large membership congregations. Many of the congregations were known to be difficult to serve either through self

reporting, reputation of the congregation, or particular dynamics at work beyond the congregation's ability to control. (Dying congregation)

All participants were given self-scoring instruments for measuring stress levels, ~~and~~ emotional fatigue, and comfort with social interaction as well as having their current blood pressure levels recorded by a registered nurse. The self scoring instruments used were from PROMIS (Patient Related Outcome Measuring Instrument Systems) which provides self scoring inventories for the purpose of evaluating quality of life, stress disorders, anxiety disorders, and emotional, behavioral, physical disorders. In addition, every participant agreed to answer a short survey at the end of each week, recording their level of participation in Sabbath practice for that particular week. If they were not able to take the Sabbath time, the survey gives options for answering why it was difficult for them to do so.

At the end of the study, participants were gathered for a final half day retreat, during which time instruments for measurement were again administered for stress, emotional fatigue, social interaction, and blood pressure measurements. A debriefing took place for all participants to share their experiences during the trial period.

It may be interesting to compare which specific Sabbath practices were most effective in reducing stress; however, such a comparison would be futile as a general practice as it is quite subjective and vulnerable to individual preference. In other words, comparing whether or not fly fishing vs. prayer was more effective would prove futile as there is much in the practice of fly fishing that can be prayerful. The key factor is not so much in comparison of what practices work best but rather how well clergy are able to

stick to a discipline (or practice) when that practice best matches their own personality type.

It is the question of what positive changes are beginning to emerge in the life of the clergy and what may have ‘taken root’ or is growing in their ability to do more in the area of spiritual self care. There is no certain way to predict what will be the very best discipline for any individual in a short ten week period, however, it is a long enough period that by observing what *is emerging* in the life of the pastor as a result of applying particular discipline, such can be an accurate predictor of which spiritual discipline has a stronger chance of becoming permanent in the life of the pastor. Key follow up questions would be ‘*What is beginning to change for you as a result of regular Sabbath practice?*’ “*In what ways have your perspectives on ministry challenges changed as a result of regular Sabbath practice?*” “*In what ways has your perspective on spiritual leadership, conflict, and congregational dynamics changed?*” “*As a result of Sabbath practice, how has your ability to approach conflict changed?*” This ministry intervention project was a quasi-experimental, pre-post evaluative research model using a group of self identified volunteers, testing to see what effects, if any, regular Sabbath practice had on reducing anxiety, fatigue, social isolation, and blood pressure.

### **Participants**

Among this group of fifteen clergy is one pastor of a Southern Baptist congregation where the congregation is dying. This particular congregation is undergoing the process of liquidating properties, closing down ministries, and bringing their ministry heritage of more than 100 years to a complete close. The current pastor sought me out in order to participate in this study.

The other participants came from three sources:

**Self identified:** Those clergy who know they are stressed, who know they are serving a difficult congregation, and who would like to participate in a program of study that could possibly help them.

**Identified by District Superintendent:** The District Superintendent of the three closest districts to my own was asked to recommend clergy to participate in this study based upon their knowledge of the clergy and the setting in which they serve.

**Recommended by Emory Clergy Care Director:** At the encouraging of the director of Emory Clergy Care, a counselor who was working with stressed clergy and recommended to several of his clients that they consider participation in this ministry study.

**Recruited by Project Director:** Knowing many clergy in the conference and the conditions under which they were serving, I invited several pastors to participate in the project.

The group included men, women, black, white, and if possible, Hispanic pastors. The group contained a variety of backgrounds, tenure within the conference, experience, and educational levels as well as a diverse age range.

In a one day seminar, participants were introduced to some basic Sabbath practices and/or spiritual disciplines then asked to engage in such on a regular basis once a week for a period of ten weeks. The once weekly engagements were pre-determined to be either four or six hours of uninterrupted time for regular Sabbath practice. The fact that some of the participants were not able to put in their regular Sabbath time (four to six

hours once a week) was a tangible possibility and was included as a question in the weekly surveys that were sent to participants.

### **Expectations for Participants**

Participants were encouraged to select a specific day and time frame during each week when they would agree to engage in Sabbath practice. Using a self-scoring inventory, participants discovered what their spiritual personality type is (Johnson, *Your Personality And The Spiritual Life*) and were encouraged to engage in at least one or two practices which actually serve to nurture their souls.

When it comes to a particular activity, discipline, or practice, the choice of activity is critical. Certainly one would want to honor the intent and rule of Sabbath in that it is a time for worship as well as contemplation and reflection. To that end, there are many activities that could be considered as acceptable Sabbath practice for clergy. According to the Biblical interpretations of Sabbath as I am employing it for this study, it would be a cessation of any or all activity that brings about physical exhaustion, spiritual distraction, emotional distress, or some degree or combination of all three. (Logos Bible Study Software) For purposes of this study, Sabbath Practice was understood as a two fold process. First, disconnecting from the church (demands on time) or the source of stress or exhaustion and second, finding a way, means, or discipline that nurtured their own soul and helped them connect with God for an undisturbed, uninterrupted specific period of time each week. This meant that participants had to agree to be away from their own church campus during their entire Sabbath time. This did not mean they could not ~~however~~, go to another church to sit, pray, reflect, or meditate.

This is not something a pastor can do in their own office with the door shut. The office of the church by its very nature is work or production focused. The potential for interruption, distraction, or stress triggers are constantly present so it is critical that all participants agreed to be away from their charges for this period of time.

Secondly, they agreed to engage, to the best of their ability, in a spiritual discipline that best helped them to 'reconnect' with God. This can include but is not limited to contemplation, meditation, prayer, journaling, or reflection. There are a variety of activities that help us to do this.

To disconnect: a pastor must be off campus, cell phone off, texting off, and literally 'out of touch' or 'unable to be reached' for the specified period of time as chosen as appropriate or 'doable' by the participant. Aside from leaving the church campus, the location for Sabbath practice can be anywhere that leaves one utterly alone with God and your thoughts. It is also helpful to remove one's wristwatch if at all possible.

To reconnect: (With God) a pastor must consider engaging in at least one of the spiritual disciplines which appeal most to their spiritual personality type. (Johnson, *Your Personality and the Spiritual Life*) The essence of a spiritual discipline/activity is that it is slow paced, non-rushed, non-production oriented (no sermon preparation), and unhurried. These would include: meditation, prayer, reflection, spiritual reading (*Lectio Divina*), journaling, sketching, drawing, painting or sculpting, fly fishing, canoeing, hiking, walking (not jogging), gardening, reading, and time spent with a spiritual director. The main theme was for them to engage in activities that were not physically, emotionally, or spiritually taxing or exhausting but rather replenishing, restoring, or inspiring. (There was some question by one clergy who used running as their stress management tool. It was

explained that this project was not about stress management but spiritual renewal. The endorphins generated from rigorous exercise have proven beneficial to physical and emotional health; however, such an activity is not in keeping with the traditional understanding of Sabbath where energy (physical or otherwise) is not to be expended but rather restored.

Clergy were also encouraged to avoid swapping their day off for their Sabbath day. In other words, the two days (Sabbath day and day off) have completely different foci and should not be confused or mixed together. Participants were encouraged to take their regular day off as they normally would and to *include* in their regular work week a few hours for self care or Sabbath Practice.

At the end of the specified period of practice, participants were called together for the post-evaluation. Each participant took the exact same surveys they did in the beginning and results were recorded. As in the first gathering, an RN and MD were on hand to record each individual's blood pressure. Journal entries from participants were also collected for comparison with the overall data retrieved from the entire project.

Participants received weekly prompting from me during the study period to complete a short, two question survey on how much Sabbath time they were able to get as well as what, if anything, may have prevented them from taking their Sabbath time. Participants were encouraged to recruit an accountability partner for the ten week period who would gently and lovingly remind them of their commitment to Sabbath practice and encourage them to take advantage of such each week.

The weekly data from Sabbath participation was collected each week using Survey Monkey (an online survey creation and response tool for researchers) which

allowed me to keep up with their weekly practice and to record any and all distractions or failures to engage in the process that may have occurred. Stressors that cause a clergy to compromise their Sabbath time can provide critical information to the overall project in the sense of 'expectations' that clergy place upon themselves OR the expectations that congregations placed upon them.

Compromising a set Sabbath day for a funeral or a life/death emergency is understandable, but one can always re-schedule that time to be made up shortly after the emergency. However, missing a set Sabbath day to attend to congregational conflicts, fires, routine activities, or what would otherwise qualify as important but not critical work (busy work) etc. ~~serve demonstrate~~ a clergy's already elevated stress levels.

Finding out what it takes for a clergy to give up, cancel, or miss a day set apart that has been endorsed by superintendent and by their SPR will be helpful information in the data collection process.

### **Instrumentation**

The clergy in this group were asked to take three self-scoring inventories at the beginning and end of the trial period: one measuring relative levels of anxiety, another measuring relative levels of emotional exhaustion and a third measuring for levels of social isolation or disassociation. In addition, a registered nurse was on hand to record blood pressure for each participant.

These measurements were taken at the beginning of the ten week period and again at the end. During the ten week trial period, a short two question survey was sent out via email each week to each participant, inquiring about the amount of Sabbath time they were able to get and what, if anything, might have prevented them from doing so.

Participants were also asked to keep a personal journal during their Sabbath time to record any significant insights, ideas, or other reflections they found helpful to their investment in Sabbath practice. Participants were asked to share a summary of experiences from their journals to go along with the data collected from pre-and post testing measurements.

All scores for each individual were coded so that complete anonymity was maintained regarding all subjects. In addition all data from tests, surveys, and individual input were kept in a sealed confidential file.

At the end of the ten week period, the group was gathered together for a second half day seminar, and took the same self-scoring tests again along with blood pressure measurements. A debriefing was held where participants discussed their experiences and the difficulties in establishing a Sabbath routing as well as the benefits of such. They shared from their journals and answered some basic follow up questions. It is from this data that this project was evaluated and finally put together.

The types of measuring instruments used include three standardized, self-scoring inventories designed to measure relative levels of anxiety, fatigue, and social avoidance. These instruments came from the group PROMIS. PROMIS® stands for Patient Reported Outcomes Measurement Information System. As described by the authors of the test, these instruments are available for a wide variety of study trials.

“...is a system of highly reliable, precise measures of patient-reported health status for physical, mental, and social well-being. PROMIS® tools measure what patients are able to do and how they feel by asking questions. PROMIS measures can be used as primary or secondary endpoints in clinical studies of the effectiveness of treatment, and PROMIS® tools can be used across a wide variety of chronic diseases and conditions and in the general population. The data collected in PROMIS® provide clinicians and researchers with important patient-reported information about the effect of therapy that cannot be

found in traditional clinical measures.” (from website: [www.PROMISE.org](http://www.PROMISE.org) )

Results and comparisons between scores at the beginning of the project and at the end of the project were then compared and contrasted with the amount of time spent in actual Sabbath practice to determine relative increases or decreases in levels of anxiety, fatigue, social isolation (Dis-association), and blood pressure. PROMISE instruments were used for the first three criteria, and Registered Nurses and Medical Doctors provided data for the blood pressure measurements for each individual. Blood pressure was measured twice at each interval and an average was taken for beginning and ending blood pressures. It should be noted that one participant discovered an unhealthy high blood pressure level as a result of their participation and immediately took action to get prescription medication to manage and lower their blood pressure.

Data was reviewed to determine if in fact Sabbath practice, (regardless of amount of time spent) made a discernable difference in any of the symptoms related to complex trauma. It was anticipated that results would demonstrate an emerging pattern of health through a variety of disciplines employed by subjects. Information regarding the amount of time spent in each one was most practical and most helpful in order to begin to see emerging patterns of health during the study period.

### **Timing Of The Project**

The selection of months, August through October, for this trial period was critical in that these particular months tend to be some of the most demanding seasons on clergy. It is a period where most clergy would be most tempted to abandon self-care disciplines in favor of taking care of more pressing demands of ministry such as preparing for fall ministry activities, required district meetings, charge conference preparation, etc.

Therefore, any positive results from intentional Sabbath practice during this season are likely to be far more noticeable than other times of the year (post-Easter, summer etc.) that may not be as demanding on Clergy time.

As an incentive for clergy to participate, I provided them with several books on spiritual formation, Sabbath practice, and clergy stress. In addition, I will be hosting a free retreat for all who participated in the full study. The retreat will be focused on spiritual strength training through Sabbath practice. All lodging and expenses for those who attend the retreat will be covered by myself.

An aid to participants was the book “Your Personality and the Spiritual Life” by Dr. Reg. Johnson. This book is a resource for a personality inventory geared toward helping the participant identify their particular ‘spiritual personality profile.’ Those profiles were matched with known spiritual disciplines, which have proven to be appealing to each personality type.

All tests were kept on file for later study and comparison. However, with the spiritual personality profile, I will use this as a teaching tool in the first retreat to help participants discover what they are drawn to most strongly when it comes to the spiritual disciplines. This book was provided free of charge and part of the incentive for participation.

### **Variables**

The independent variable in this study was the ten week program of intentional Sabbath practice for fifteen clergy who serve challenging or difficult congregations in the North Georgia Conference of the United Methodist Church. It also included one pastor serving a dying Southern Baptist congregation within a rapidly changing urban

setting. The dependent variables are the changes measured before and after the study in participant's physical health, anxiety, emotional exhaustion, and social isolation.

### **Data Collection**

This project will include several instruments for measuring trends in physical and emotional health among participants both before and after their experience of intentional Sabbath practice. Data collected from this study included self-reporting scores on three instruments: one measuring levels of fatigue, another measuring anxiety, and a third measuring for social isolation or disassociation. These all came from the PROMIS institute (Patient Reported Outcome Measurement Information Systems) and are self scoring with scoring tables taking into account raw scores, T-scores, and standard deviation. A fourth set of data included blood pressure measurements as taken and recorded by a registered nurse for each participant. All of these measurements were taken twice – one at the very beginning of the study and then again at the end of the study.

The other data collected included results from weekly surveys that were responded to by participants each week. The surveys were always the same, consisting of only two questions: one inquiring about how much Sabbath time participants were able to get and what, if any, distractions or disruptions may have prevented them from engaging in such. This data was collected through a weekly on line survey designed by me and implemented through Survey Monkey.

Lastly, personal reflections from each of the participants about their experiences during the ten week trial period was gathered from their own sharing from journals they were given for the project. It was in this fourth data set that I looked specifically for how long it took each participant to disengage from stressors and how long they were able to

enjoy reconnection with God. Again, this was a self reporting data set that was explained at the beginning of the trial period.

All test results were gathered at the beginning and the end of the project as well as data collected during weekly surveys sent to each participant. Journal entries were also collected at the end as well as final questions regarding (RQ3) which practice seemed to be of most help to participants.

The general timeline for this project is a 10-week period between the months of August and November of 2015. It also included a beginning one-day preparation retreat (where the first data set was collected) as well as a one-day debriefing retreat after the project is complete for the purpose of collecting the second data set and personal reflections from participants. All instruments and data used were kept confidential and coded for anonymity. No names of individuals or congregations being served were taken. The history of clergy tenure with the congregation and the conference ~~however~~, were also kept confidential.

Each participant's test results were kept in their individual file and from there I began to compile the data. Data for each group was kept separate and used for comparison purposes for discerning the relative overall effect of Sabbath practice on symptoms of complex trauma. Data from each group was kept separate from the other group data at all times in order to avoid cross over in analyzing data.

### **Data Analysis**

Data that was available for analysis comes from six sources. They include: pre and post scores measuring for current levels of: anxiety, fatigue, social isolation, and blood pressure (4) as well as data compiled in summary form from weekly surveys sent

to each participant on their engagement (time spent) in Sabbath practice each week, and finally (5 & 6) input from personal insights from journals kept during the ten week trial period.

The first set of data comparison was to compare and contrast the first four testing markers (anxiety, fatigue, social isolation, and blood pressure) to determine if there were any trends toward decreases in any of the areas noted as symptoms of complex trauma. Test results from the group as a whole was compared first then test results from each individual was compared second. Any differences (increases or decreases) in the tested areas was noted for further interpretation as compared with weekly Sabbath practice reports as well as personal journal entries. I was looking for not only 'when' changes began to occur but also ~~seek~~ what specifically worked for the participant in discovering Sabbath practice. Factors such as the amount of time spent time spent away from the church (or source of stress) are critical for a successful trial. Just as important are the activities participants engaged in that they found to be restorative, redemptive, or refreshing. Indeed, it could be a combination of factors that made the difference for participants.

The second set of data, which comes from Survey Monkey, was reviewed and examined for patterns revealing how participants engaged (and how much) in Sabbath practice each week. I was looking for increases in participation rates as well as increases in participation levels. If there are one or both, this indicates that the participants are getting something positive from the experience and are seeking more of the same.

I was also looking closely for what factors served to be the most common reasons clergy had for missing, compromising, or diminishing their 'planned' Sabbath time each

week. The survey provides choices that are common themes pastors regularly share as well as a place for unexpected interruptions – listed as ‘other.’

I was looking for trends in this area as well from levels of participation in the beginning as compared with levels of participation in the end. In other words, how did clergy compare with time spent in Sabbath practice in the beginning of the study as with time spent near the end of the project? My hypothesis is that beginning such a discipline will prove difficult for all, but given some time and regular participation, I expect this to show a gradual increase in engagement and time spent each week as well as a reduction in ‘zero time spent’ because of interruptions. If there is a decrease in ‘zero time spent,’ this indicated a more intentional effort is being engaged to get some Sabbath time in each week. Increases in time spent as well as decreases in disruptions from Sabbath ~~could~~ indicated the effectiveness of the practice as being worthy of investing their time.

The last data set is ~~the~~ subjective, which are the personal recordings of participants and their reflections on experiences or insights gained each week as a result of regular Sabbath practice.

I was looking for emerging trends toward gradual reductions in stress markers rather than definitive radical departures from the norm as ten weeks is not long enough to produce radical changes in lifestyle, anxiety, fatigue, social isolation, or blood pressure. These four areas are all included as symptoms of the presence of complex trauma in those having experienced it, and the elimination of these symptoms takes months if not years to overcome. However, if it can be demonstrated that a trend toward decreases in these areas has become evident through regular Sabbath practice, then this should be sufficient evidence to warrant at least a more in depth study of the same. Extrapolation of the trends

could also be done to speculate that if regular Sabbath practice were to continue, benefits from such would be tremendous to those clergy who may be near the point of exasperation or resignation.

### **Generalizability**

This study is hopefully effective and revealing yet there are limitations to this study that by their very nature serve to govern what can be learned from the information gathered. First is the size of the study group – fourteen clergy serving full time in congregations that either are or have been in the past considered difficult to serve because of internal conflict. This is an admittedly small sampling of clergy. However, it is a group with enough diversity sample, with all clergy meeting the required criteria, that data from the study could, at the minimum, serve as justification for a further in depth study with a larger group over a longer period of time.

The second is the time frame. Ten weeks is not nearly long enough to see definitive transformative results from the practice. It is not long enough to see the reversal of effects caused by Complex Trauma. Such reversals or healing takes many months to years to accomplish, but what can be gleaned within this time frame is to see if there are emerging trends toward a healthier lifestyle for clergy under duress.

Clergy in the study who initially tested high in the areas of anxiety, fatigue, or social isolation are not likely to see a complete reversal or elimination of these symptoms (complex trauma) in such a short time frame. It would take months if not years of regular Sabbath practice to eliminate or reverse these symptoms as they result from deeply emotional and spiritual wounds.

What can be determined is that if Sabbath practice is being attended to on a regular or intentional basis, emerging trends toward reductions in these areas may begin to appear. In other words, this study cannot look for vast swings or complete elimination of any one or more symptoms of complex trauma but it can demonstrate the beginnings of such as they may emerge in slight decreases in these areas.

Another limitation is that while the group itself is quite diverse, outside of one participant from the Baptist church, it is limited to clergy serving in the United Methodist denomination. The group is quite diverse in terms of gender, race, age, tenure and size of congregation served – especially for such a small sampling. A far larger group studied over an extended period of time would provide much more data that could be far more revealing. In-an ideal situation with perhaps a year to research with a larger group, it would be beneficial to have data on how each participant ~~measures in how they~~ handles stress and conflict. Some of this comes to bear in significant ways but would be more beneficial in a longer period of research time and with a larger group.

The high ~~rate of~~ attrition rate among clergy was my initial concern, and finding ways to possibly diminish that rate was the original inspiration for this project. This study is limited because all we can determine from the clergy present in the study is that they are or tested positive for symptoms of having experienced complex trauma to some degree. Elevated levels of anxiety, fatigue, social isolation, and blood pressure showed up in majority of the pastors that participated. The only factor that is a symptom of complex trauma that could not be measured was that of loss of memory.

The group was made up of clergy that tested high in symptoms of complex trauma and were self reporting as stressed or anxious. From this data alone it could not be

determined how close they may (or may not) be (individually) to the point of resignation. One clergy that was going to participate originally became so angry because of the abuses he suffered in one congregation only to be reappointed to another abusive congregation dropped out of the study just after it started. He remains wounded and ~~is in fact~~, according to his own words, *“I’ve had it with the damn church! I’m not doing any more church crap other than preaching on Sunday from now on. I’m done!”*

Potential weaknesses in the study could include the short time frame of only ten weeks, the small sample group, the fact that the sample group is 99 percent United Methodist, and all come from just two geographic areas of North Georgia. Ten weeks is certainly not an ideal time for an in depth study but two and a half months is long enough for participants to develop a habit or rhythm of engaging in Sabbath practice on a regular basis to the point that such engagement could begin to reveal trends toward reductions in complex trauma symptoms.

In addition, a study sample including clergy from a wide variety of mainline denominations would be ideal. Eventually, I may be able to conduct such a study in the future and would like to do so as an extension of this initial study however limited funding resources combined with a ‘guarded demeanor’ among clergy in our conference proved challenging in garnering a wider sampling. By guarded demeanor I mean that clergy were interested in the study but reluctant to participate for fear of being perceived as ‘weak,’ or ‘in trouble’ with the conference. The highly competitive atmosphere in this conference perhaps contributes to reluctance to participate on the part of many clergy.

In spite of these limitations, I did manage to gather a very diverse group of men, women, white, black, young, old, tenured and new to ministry participants – all within a

sampling of 15 persons. If, within this small sampling, trends toward diminishing the effects of complex trauma begin to emerge, then it is reasonable to expect that expanding this same model to a larger population over a longer period of time would only enhance the findings that this study reveals.

### **Theological Foundation**

Part of the guiding theological framework for this project comes from the question “Why rest?” Why Sabbath? God went to an extraordinary effort to create an entire day, separate and different from all the other days of creation, and then set it aside alone as Holy for the purpose of rest. There has to be a reason for such an emphasis which likely runs far deeper in creation than just a 24 hour period.

If anything, God is consistent. Creating or rather setting aside a period of time in the entire space/time continuum that is dedicated to nothing but rest is entirely consistent with all of God’s creation beginning from the very first day. In fact, it would be inconsistent for God *not* to have created and set aside a day of rest, considering how all of creation works, the laws of physics and thermodynamics, and the rest of God’s Word.

Sabbath was created for a purpose – to serve humankind. When first established, God originally gave no directives for the Sabbath other than to observe it and by observing, “...keep it Holy.” (Exod. 20:8) Sacred. It was a day that was to be set apart from the other days. As such, it was to be a decidedly and noticeably different span of time than the other days. That this period or day is so important that God dedicated it for a specific purpose is where we begin to see why Sabbath is here.

It is evident throughout God’s Word that human beings were made to be in relationship with the creator. All of the Bible reveals God’s continuing desire to reach us

in relationship. There is no better way to build relationship than to have uninterrupted time together with the one(s) we love on a regular basis. Without a definitive period for engaging, listening for, communicating with, reflecting upon, and reconnecting with God, we tend to grow apart. This is as true of human relationships as it is with the God/human relationship.

Human beings are created and 'made' by God and yet we are so much more. Humankind was brought into being as God breathed God's very breath of life into us. God did not do this for any other creature in creation. Thus having the breath of God in us makes us more than mere objects, but rather sentient beings with life, purpose, and personality, sharing in the life of the Divine. "Then the Lord God formed a man from the dust of the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living being." (Gen. 2:7)

With a human tendency toward expending our energy on self serving pursuits, it is critical that a period of time be set aside to reconnect with our creator. So rest – Sabbath – is intended for connection and relationship in a time/space that is guarded or set aside for just such a purpose. It is rest from the work that we must do but it is rest with a purpose far deeper than just physical restoration.

Rest, or a period where there is a cessation from work, is evident not just in God's creation of the Sabbath day itself but is implicitly intentional from the very first day of creation. There is a noticeable pattern in the creation event that insinuates a regular cessation of activity and thus a division in the work done on creation from day to day. From nothing, something was made. God saw what God had created and said it was good and then there was evening.

Evening is what separates one day of activity from another and nothing is recorded as having taken place during any of the evenings of creation. This implies that evening is, from the beginning, a period of rest where there was a cessation of the activity of creating. Nothing is reported as having been created until the next day so evening is also a demarcation point or point of separation of days being created and work done therein. “And there was evening, and there was morning-the first day.” (Gen. 1:7) So the pattern of ‘rest’ or cessation from work can be at least implied as woven into the very fabric of creation from the very first day. The pattern of creation appears: Action – Reflection – Rest. (God said...God saw that it was good...And there was evening) (Genesis 1)

The first mention of Sabbath as a day named for such is in The Ten Commandments – “Remember the Sabbath Day, to keep it Holy.” (Exod. 20:8). As followers of Christ, we are set free from the law, and there are spiritual advantages to the regular practice OF the law, especially when it comes to observing Sabbath. For example, while Christ never mandated that we observe a regular fast, He did give us guidance when fasting. (Foster, P. 57) Since we have been set free from the laws of fasting, we can fast any day we wish. Likewise, as Christians with Sabbath, we are free to practice Sabbath any time we so need or desire. Sabbath is something that we can carry with us wherever we might be. It is ‘portable’ so to speak.

With a broadened understanding of Sabbath practice (beyond the Levitical laws), it would be generally understood that Sabbath practice is any time that is intentionally set aside to: 1 – disengage from the daily rigors of life and work and 2 – during that period of cessation of work to employ that time in intentionally engaging in disciplines and/or

practices that enhance our connection or relationship with God. It is a time to again breathe in the life giving/sustaining breath of God.

Traditionally, any activity associated with creating was considered forbidden since God rested from the process of creation. Therefore, the ‘creation’ of a fire was considered to be laborious and thus to be avoided, yet creativity can also be a restorative practice as well. For some people, this could include one activity of a creative nature that includes but goes beyond worship like journaling, painting, sculpting, while for others it may involve prayer, study, reflection, meditation, fasting, or re-creation (hiking, biking, canoeing, fishing, etc.) Sabbath practice for clergy (as understood in this project) needs to be any theologically faithful and spiritually restorative activity which takes a spiritual leader out of the stresses and demands of congregational life and places them squarely in the presence of the Almighty for a significant period of time.

If examined closely, and as mentioned previously, a pattern for Sabbath practice seems to be evident from the very first day of creation. That is, a pattern of living every day consisting of measured actions which can be seen in three specific things God did in every day of creation. These three movements could be considered “action” (God said...), ‘Reflection’ (God saw that it was good), and rest (the first, second third, day and so on.) In other words, God did not create all of the heavens and the earth in one single day. God did not work until God dropped of exhaustion neither did God try to do all things at once.

What God did do was to establish an order to each day of creation. Action, reflection, and rest. In other words, there was work enough for one day and that was enough for the day. God left more work for the second day and so on so at the end of

each day there was a cessation of work for a period of time until the next day was created. That cessation of work in the Bible is understood as ‘Sabbath.’

It was after a period of six consecutive days of creative work that God set aside an entire day as a formal period of rest. “And on the seventh day God rested. He made the seventh day Holy, and set it aside...” (Gen. 2: 2-3) Setting aside the Sabbath day was the last thing God did, but the first thing God seems to have possibly done in setting all of creation in motion was to integrate the Sabbath pattern (action, reflection, rest) into every single aspect of creation.

This pattern is actually reflected in the physical laws of nature as observed in the first and second laws of thermodynamics which govern all of creation. The first law of thermodynamics is ‘the law of conservation’ (Rifkin, p. 34-60) which states that there is a fixed amount of energy within the universe. What God created and set in motion cannot be added to or taken away from, only changed. In other words, matter and energy (that which composes everything in the universe) are finite. They cannot be created or destroyed, only changed or “transformed from one form to another.” (Rifkin 40) We simply cannot create something from nothing any more than we can create energy or free energy.

All human beings can do is transform energy into another form: either light, heat, motion, or some other substance or effect. This is why it is impossible to create a perpetual motion machine. A perpetual motion machine is the concept of a machine that runs eternally from the energy produced by its own motion. Not only do the laws of nature prevent such a machine from operating indefinitely, the machine would need an influence outside itself in order to set it in motion. The laws of thermodynamics and

entropy guarantee that there was an exchange of energy and matter and an eventual depletion of exchange resulting in the eventual cessation of all motion.

The second law of thermodynamics is closely related to the first in that once energy is transformed from one state into another, it cannot be reversed. In other words, when it is spent – it is spent. There are no ‘do overs.’ There is no going back to catch up or make up for what might have been spent in the wrong way. This is called ‘entropy,’ (Rifkin p. 35) and governs all of creation just as does the first law. According to Dr. Nicholaus Georgeshu, “the Entropy Law is something that needs to be felt as much as understood.” (Rifkin P. 39)

In the same way, within the bounds of all creation there is a fixed and limited amount of energy. This applies as well in the creation of each human life. Our bodies are sentient beings but are also mechanical, chemical, electrical, and organic by nature. There is a limit to our mechanical ability and-a limit to how many years this mechanical ability will serve us. Likewise with the other aspects of our physical being, there is a limit to each – either in volume, supply, ability, or function. We cannot add to these abilities or rather extend beyond what was given us at the beginning. There is in fact, in this physical realm, a limit to the number of our days. “Our end was near, our days were numbered, for our end had come.” (Lam. 4:18)

God created and set in motion all of creation; it is therefore impossible to ‘add to’ what God has done or to take away from it by simply remixing what is already present. But we can ‘exchange’ energy from one form to another and thus in the process, one form becomes spent. The second law of thermodynamics states that entropy is what

guides the physical laws - that all matter goes from order to disorder or is constantly in the process of decaying, wearing out, or breaking down. (Hugh Ross, P 78)

The same is true of our physical being. We simply are not perpetual motion machines, running endlessly until the end of time. Our lives are ultimately a 'winding down' from the moment of our creation, which cannot be stopped.

In other words, we cannot create new days any more than we can from nothing create matter that did not exist prior to our action, but we can expend that which is here (time, days, energy) and deplete it prematurely – or we can extend the quality of the days we have by careful preservation. Adopting a rhythm to life each day and each week through Sabbath rest is a significant way of doing just that. It does not extend our days but rather adds to the quality of our days by the renewal of our hearts, minds, souls, and spirits through interaction with God in an undisturbed period of restorative time.

(Sabbath)

Sabbath is that one day a week that is set aside for us to diminish the rate of physical depletion (spiritual, physical, etc.) and exchange that for replenishment so as to enhance the quality of the life we have been given and have remaining. God set the example by resting on the Sabbath from the work of creation and then mandated the same for humanity to observe as well solely for our benefit. The Sabbath is for building, keeping, maintaining, sustaining, and enjoying an ongoing (hopefully progressing) relationship with God. If we burn or spend our Sabbath energy on something other than sustaining our relationship with God, we pay a heavy price spiritually, emotionally, and sometimes physically. The body as well as the mind and soul needs periods of rest and each will in fact suffer consequences if denied such for significant periods of time. In

fact, the physical body will actually shut down involuntarily if denied significant periods without sleep. (Durmer & Dinges)

One of the other unique aspects of creation is that of ‘time.’ In as much as everything was brought into being by God at the instant God said “Let there be...” (Genesis 1), the dimension of time also came into being in that instant. It has been progressing forward in a linear fashion ever since and, because of the laws of relativity, cannot be increased, decreased, or reversed. It can be expended and observed and even measured. In that measurement, activities are allocated to certain measurements (seconds, minutes, hours, days, weeks, months, seasons, years, centuries, millennia, eons etc.) but time (the fourth dimension – space-time) cannot be altered. The physical laws of the universe govern this strictly as Einstein demonstrated with his famous theory on relativity.

Time as connected with a particular activity (Sabbath) came into being on the last day of creation. Time began the instant God said “Let there be...” and during the period of creation, it could be said that time began to separate one day from the next. But time as connected with any specific named period, or being associated with any specific period, did not come into being until the creation of that period of the seventh day where God rested from God’s work of creation.

Time is something like a fog: easy to see, measure, identify, and observe – but hard to pin down. Time exists apart from the human ability to observe and measure it, but this was only discovered in the past century with the emergence of the CMBR map. (*Cosmic Microwave Background Radiation*) (Gonzalez and Richards P.188) This experiment mapped the echo of creation throughout the heavens to reveal that there is in

fact a uniformity in every direction throughout the universe and that what is applicable millions of light years from Earth is also applicable on Earth as well. How we mark it is a human construct but time apart from our marking ~~it~~ marches on regardless.

Thus the universality of time and within that, the other physical laws that govern movement, decay or depletion, and finality all come together in our observation of creation itself. Namely, that God instilled within creation a specific time or extended period of rest for all beings made by God. This is observed in the circadian rhythms that govern all living things on planet Earth. Everything from the changing seasons to the tilt of the earth in her orbit to the movements of the moon, sun, and stars, ~~all~~ serve to reflect and echo Sabbath rest. So it could be stated with some degree of certainty that the timing of and pattern for Sabbath rest was not only recognized by God but was woven into the very fabric of creation from the very first day.

From inanimate flora and fauna to insects, to reptiles, to mammals, and human beings, regular periods of rest are required for the survival of living things. (Ward and Brownlee, 52) This pattern is even present in the inanimate objects of God's creation. The planets, by virtue of their orbits and rotations, also create 'seasons' in the year's long orbit about the Sun. It is the very rotation cycle of planet Earth that makes life possible. There is an equal period of daylight and nighttime which reinforces the circadian rhythm and was set in place the first day of creation: the creation of light and the separation of light from darkness. Flowers open and bloom in the day, close and shelter in the night. Animals (for the most part) live, hunt, breed, eat, and thrive in the daylight. This would include animals that are nocturnal, as they have a period of rest, just during the day.

In addition, because of the regularly changing angle of our rotation within orbit, the earth experiences ‘seasons,’ or periods of growth and periods of rest – or where no growth takes place. Thus the four seasons we delight in on a regular, seasonal, and annual basis. If the Earth’s rotation were any different from what it is, the critical cycle of the seasons (and the days) simply would not be conducive to life.

There is another observation about the Sabbath that God seems to have demonstrated in the actual process of creation. The Sabbath pattern was established even from the very first day although it is not specifically stated but the presence of such is implied. In other words, in God stepping back for reflection and stating ‘it is good...’ (Gen. 1) could also be inferred that God was saying ‘that is good enough for one day. We can do more tomorrow.’ In other words, God honored the circadian rhythm himself from the very first day, leaving the other aspects of creation to be completed the following day. Even Ecclesiastes 3, while poetic, also recalls and reminds the reader of the rhythm of life through events which we face. (“There is a time for everything”)

Another physical law as created by God in the beginning which governs all of creation throughout the Universe is the law of entropy. The law of entropy states that there is a fixed amount of energy in the universe. Energy cannot be created or destroyed, only exchanged for another form. In other words, the universe is winding down because of the law of entropy. The more that the available energy we do have is expended, the faster entropy grows (the increase of unusable energy).

In other words, life is finite and our energy levels are finite. If we are to protect and preserve or extend life, there must be a period of ‘down time’ or a period of rest whereby energy is preserved or not spent. The term ‘burnout’ is closely related to this

second law when it comes to the un-natural increase of entropy – the law, which states that as energy is expended, unusable energy increases. In other words, when we pace our work life at a rate faster than we can replenish our energy, burnout begins to take root. (Ross and Rifkin p. 78)

Likewise, there is a physical, spiritual, and emotional limit that exists for every single human being. Observation of Sabbath helps preserve this limited amount of energy. Not only does it help preserve that energy, this time with God helps us evaluate if we are expending our life energy for the right reasons and on the right projects. The Prophet Elijah learned this lesson in the caves of Mt. Horeb.

Elijah the Prophet was being hounded by one of his very own, ‘that woman’ Jezebel. He had fled for his life, run far away, and abandoned or released his servant into the wilderness for forty days. He had, in his own words, “Had enough...” and begged God to take his life. (1 Kings 9:4) During this time he remained safe and angels attended to him yet he remained anxious and fearful. It is in the respite of the cave that Elijah likely becomes still enough to hear God, who essentially asks: “What are you doing here Elijah?” In other words, “Elijah, how is it you find yourself in this condition?” (1<sup>st</sup> Kings 19:9) The condition he was in was that of fear, terrible anxiety, and having forgotten all of God’s protection and providence and even abandoned his calling. Even to the point that he asked God to release him from that calling by death. What an incredible foreshadowing of the experience of clergy in the post-modern era!

Many clergy have felt this kind of desperation, and like Christ, perhaps themselves cried out “My God, why have you forsaken me?” (Mk. 15:34) Those feelings and wailings are quite real, but more often than not, it is our running and scurrying about

trying to tend to our own salvation (or preservation of our job) that prevents us from being still enough to hear God's whisper to our hearts; 'How is it you find your ministry, yourself, in this condition?' Speculation could claim that had Elijah been keeping regular Sabbath, he would not have felt so vulnerable to the threats of Jezebel.

The New Testament also offers plenty of instances where Jesus himself observed the Sabbath and kept faithful to the practice. However more than that, we see him demonstrating the principles behind Sabbath in his ministry. The gospels record many times where Jesus went off by himself to pray as well as inviting His disciples to take leave of their responsibilities for a period of time in order to reflect and to pray. Other times he took the disciples with him for prayer and reflection.

On other occasions, he sensed the weariness of the disciples and invited them to 'come away with me to a quiet place for a while...' (Mk. 6:31) In addition, he offered words of challenge and reflection when it comes to stress anxiety and worry by asking 'who among you, can add one hour to your life by worrying?' (*Matthew 6:27*)

Jesus also challenged traditional interpretations or notions of Sabbath with the locals and the chief priests. (*Matthew 12:1, 8, 28:1 – Mark 3:4, 3:5, - Luke 4:16, 6:1, 13:4 – John 5:10, 5:18*) God's original intent of Sabbath was simple. It was a period of time for all humankind to stop regular activity which is energy draining and engage in an activity that is spiritually replenishing. It was a time to reorient our lives as lived with God as Lord. Anything beyond this basic principle only serves to confuse or complicate a beautifully simple and divine concept. In a genuinely sincere attempt to honor the Sabbath, human beings needed guidance in exactly what was meant by or expected of them in keeping the Sabbath Holy, so the Sabbath laws over the ages came into being and

eventually became an end in themselves. From the beginning, the only directive given by God for Sabbath practice is that it be a day set aside as Holy. In that Holiness, that it be observed as restful or restorative. This was spelled out further by God when giving the Ten Commandments to Moses.

“Remember the Sabbath day by keeping it holy. Six days you shall labor and do all your work, but the seventh day is a sabbath to the Lord your God. On it you shall not do any work, neither you, nor your son or daughter, nor your male or female servant, nor your animals, nor any foreigner residing in your towns. For in six days the Lord made the heavens and the earth, the sea, and all that is in them, but he rested on the seventh day. Therefore the Lord blessed the Sabbath day and made it holy. (Exodus 20:8-11)

The main restriction being reinforced here by God is the notion that ‘keeping’ the Sabbath Holy is done by the cessation of all work by all people and the justification for such. (vs. 11 the Sabbath was blessed IN and BECAUSE of God’s resting in that day. It was God’s action of rest that made the day Holy) It was from this that the Jewish people developed guidelines that eventually became laws (39) and from those laws emerged dozens more traditions, rules, etc. giving guidance to Sabbath practice. These were faithful attempts to direct people toward the simple goal of rest. By the time Jesus began to preach and teach, the rules had become focused more on the restrictive rather than the freeing nature of the day, and the rules of keeping Sabbath became an end in themselves with the people having missed the larger point of Sabbath rest.

It should be a given that Sabbath practice is healthy for clergy and all people of faith, however, not all clergy or laity are living out this reality. Given the emphasis on the importance of Sabbath practice in the Bible, it would seem prudent that Sabbath practice should be investigated in a post-modern context as a potentially effective practice for clergy to employ for longevity in ministry and personal enjoyment of the ministry

journey. For it is in Sabbath that our perspective changes, our hearts change, our spirits are encouraged, our souls are healed and our Divine purpose in life renewed and/or strengthened. In Sabbath practice, as it was intended, we walk with God, listen for God, talk with God, and/or delight in God's creation. We contemplate God, our purpose in this life, and most of all we are alone with God where we can "...be still, and know that I am God."(Psalm 49:10)

### **Overview**

Chapter two of this study will review literature concerning the effects of religious traditions and religious practices (the spiritual disciplines) have on the reduction of stress in the lives of practitioners. We will also examine relationships between worship, prayer, health and well being, and in particular, the effects of stress, anxiety, and complex trauma as they relate to clergy serving difficult congregations.

The literature surrounding religious practice and well being is far reaching, and literature documenting clergy stress and burnout is voluminous; however, there is very little literature (thus far) that I have found which directly addresses the singular benefits of Sabbath practice as being effective in reducing clergy stress, anxiety, or most important reducing the effects of complex trauma.

Chapter three will cover methodology and context of the study and chapter 4 will provide data from the study and all results of the program. Chapter 5 will assess whether or not the regular practice of Sabbath rest or spiritual disciplines has any measurable or tangible effects upon clergy to the extent that they are stronger, healthier, and more capable of engagement in the ever increasing demands placed upon Clergy in this post-modern era.

## **CHAPTER 2**

### **LITERATURE**

#### **Introduction**

A majority of mainline denominations in the United States are experiencing a high attrition rate among pastors serving their congregations. According to research conducted by the Pew Study in 2005 by Duke University, attrition rates average as high as 65 percent in mainline denominations. Other studies found that 50 percent of seminary graduates going into full time pulpit ministry will not remain in ministry long enough to reach their eleventh anniversary. (Paper)

Researchers continue to write of warnings of clergy shortages to come in just a few decades due partly to the number of clergy resigning coupled with the greatly reduced number of people entering pulpit ministry full-time. In some denominations, it was a genuine crisis of absence of spiritual leadership. For example, in the Lutheran Church Missouri Synod, this denomination saw a total loss of 1,305 clergy. This included only a few who retired. However; what is most disturbing is the rate of those that resigned from the ministry. This number totaled 1,775. The rate of resignations from ministry is outpacing the rate of natural attrition by retirement. (Carroll, p. 1)

As Carroll stated, “It is still possible to describe ordained ministry as troubled or perplexed.” George Barna of the Barna group reported in 1993 “clergy...are one of the most frustrated occupational groups in our country.” (Barna p.1) In the same 1993 study by Barna, it was discovered that “...almost 50 percent believed that being a pastor has had a negative effect on their families. And half of the remaining 40 percent were in what the report called “advanced stages of burnout.”” (Carroll p. 5)

Statistics regarding clergy attrition rates are difficult to nail down to specifics through an array of surveys, due to the wide ranging definitions of ministry clergy, and termination or resignation. Regarding the issue of clergy attrition, Jackson Carroll notes “in recent years, there have been a substantial number of clergy who have been fired by their congregations, sometimes leading to the clergy’s leaving ordained ministry altogether. Without time series data, it is difficult to say that clergy firings and removals have increased, but anecdotal evidence suggests that this is the case.”

A good indicator that clergy are resigning in frustration and leaving the ministry are the comments they leave when surveyed about their experiences in ministry. Harsh criticism of the church in general and the treatment they received in specific are quite common. For example, “The joy is gone. I can’t take the crap anymore,” “I cannot encourage others into this,” “Young people see this and say, “No way!” are typical. Among the severest critics of ordained ministry in the Lutheran Church Missouri Synod study were the spouses of current and former pastors (Klaas and Klass 1999).” (Carroll, p9)

Several factors cited for contributing to this high rate ~~that~~ are common among all denominations. Low rates of pay, lack of free time, conflicted congregations, and unresponsive judicatory officials nearly always are included as common factors in clergy retention surveys. However, among the top two reasons discovered by the Pew survey were listed:

A. Unrealistic expectations thrust upon them by congregations and denominational officials and

B. Ongoing congregational conflict aimed at the pastor and family. (Hodge and Wenger, P. 68)

These same two dynamics tend to be repeated in other studies on clergy attrition as well with the difference being mainly in order of importance rather than inclusion or exclusion.

Another factor, but not as significant, that leads to shorter tenures of clergy is the fact that a majority of clergy are now second career, often entering seminary in their mid to late 40's. This means that they do not have as many years to serve in a pulpit as they would had they gone into the ministry in their 20's as ministers often did prior to the 1960's. Today, the shortened tenure combined with the early and high attrition rates are creating a dire shortage of spiritual leadership for all denominations that are being felt now and will only amplify in the future.

A rapid shift in cultural, social, and economic changes in ministry has added to the already demanding nature of spiritual leadership. In the postmodern age of instant communication coupled with perceived pressures to produce as well as competition among peers for larger congregations, ministry and personal spiritual formation seem to have taken a back seat in the lives of most clergy. Some role confusion also clouds the waters for people who prepare to be pastors are often placed in positions of being CEO or administrators of a church. This mixed bag of expectations and gifts creates a great deal of confusion and stress.

Of the pastors that enter into ministry fresh from seminary, the outlook for their tenure is not any better than for those currently serving. The Pew study revealed that 55 percent of students graduating from seminary and going into full time ministry as pastor

would not be in ministry five years later. Of the pastors who are now serving that are under the age of thirty five, 70 percent of them will not remain in ministry long enough to reach the age of retirement. (Hodge and Wenger, 2005) Pastors that are remaining in ministry are not faring any better spiritually or emotionally.

For those pastors, the Barna Research group reports that at any given time 50 percent of pastors still serving are so discouraged that they would leave the ministry immediately if they had another way of making a living. Their families are also affected by this post-modern malady. Barna Research Group also reports that 84 percent of pastor's spouses wish their spouse would chose a different profession, and more than 90 percent of pastor's children want nothing to do with church life when they become grown adults—largely because of what they witnessed happening to their parents at the hands of church members.

These dismal statistics are not the result of any singular negative influence on clergy but emerge from a variety of factors that converge to create a hostile and/or discouraging environment for doing ministry. These factors, though many, have a few things in common.

Perhaps the greatest common denominator among stressed clergy is the lack of time for self care, family time, study, or personal spiritual formation. The types of stresses that come to bear because self care is neglected or compromised are often amplified and can become significant enough to compel clergy to resign before completing their calling. (Rediger)

Among the most common stress generators for a majority of clergy, many report;

- Unrealistic expectations put upon them by parishioners, judicatory officials and sometimes themselves.
- A general sense of chronic anxiety among the membership.
- A perceived sense of loss of control and influence among individuals.
- Displaced anger and aggression aimed at the spiritual leader, and
- Repeated efforts to undermine or remove the pastor. (Rediger, Haugk)

All of this serves to create a growing number of hostile, toxic, dysfunctional, or otherwise ‘difficult’ congregations for pastors to serve. In these settings, it becomes critical that clergy engage in self care more than ever, but, ironically, that is often the last thing we will do.

Clergy today receive little if any training in seminary about coping with or leading difficult congregations. Very little attention is given to training in conflict management and congregational dynamics and virtually nothing seems to be offered to help clergy deal with the effects of those realities in congregational life. Even healthy, preventative measures such as spiritual strength training, which includes regular Sabbath practice, accountability partners, and ongoing Sabbath practice is largely absent from the curriculum of most prominent seminaries. (*On line survey of 13 major United Methodist Seminaries – Boston, Candler, Clermont, Drew, Duke, Garrett, Gammon, Iliff, MTS, Perkins, St. Paul, United and Wesley*)

Most relevant to this particular study was the fact that in the Pew study, the three main reasons clergy cited for leaving the ministry included: ‘unrealistic expectations of congregations and judicatories placed upon clergy: ‘unhealthy demands upon their time,’

and ‘ongoing conflict within the congregation as aimed at the pastor and his/her family.’ (Hodge and Wenger, 68) It is the last set of findings (ongoing conflict within the congregation) that were most compelling. For without regular and intentional self care, it is often the ongoing nature of conflict that seems to push clergy out of ministry as an attempt to end their suffering more-so than seeking a different direction in life.

### **Problem**

Unknown to, or unheard of by most Christians in the church universal today, a serious and growing problem of clergy attrition is emerging in the Judeo/Christian world. The rate at which clergy (called by God, equipped, trained, and ordained to the full time service of God in and through the church) are leaving the ministry far outweighs the number of clergy entering the full time ministry. Nationally, the average rate of clergy attrition for all mainline denominations runs as high 60 percent In a report by M. Tanner, A. Zvonkovic and C. Adams, studies show that as late as 2011 “28% of ministers among thirty nine denominations experienced a forced termination while 42% seriously considered leaving the ministry of their own accord.” (Tanner, P. 4 ) Quoting a study by London and Wiseman in 2003, this journal reports that “every year at least 20,000 ministers in America leave the ministry” permanently.

At the same time, clergy tenure is shrinking with the rising average age of people entering the ministry – now between ages 48 and 54. Coupled with forced and self imposed attrition rates, those remaining in ministry are serving shorter terms and thus congregations receiving less leadership. In some United Methodist conferences, there is an oversupply of clergy. The far greater problem in Methodism ~~however~~ is in a majority of conferences where a severe shortage of clergy is forcing judicatories to combine

congregations, close others, and rely on non ordained but licensed local pastors to fill pulpits.

Nearly half of all newly ordained (seminary graduate) clergy will serve in a pulpit for only five years before resigning from their call entirely. (Alban Institute, Meek – 2003 P. 340) So not only are clergy leaving the ministry in record numbers, they are doing so sooner and sooner. Leaving the church with a shortage not just of clergy but of seasoned and experienced clergy able to lead congregations into the future.

Many factors lead to clergy attrition (namely unrealistic expectations, lack of denominational support, and ongoing conflict) and it seems that the more serious problem underlying or leading to excessive clergy attrition rates is the fact that clergy as a whole are not engaging in adequate, intentional, or significant times of self care. I include in that absence the regular practice of Sabbath as a time for personal spiritual formation and restoration.

Not only is there a dearth of formal training or education in the area of clergy self care but such is virtually absent as a professional expectation of clergy in any part of our (United Methodist) denominational structure. However, the expectations of what a pastor should be doing in the form of production or service oriented activities is clearly spelled out in our Book of Discipline.

### **Purpose**

The purpose of this research project was to evaluate the changes in physical health, emotional fatigue, social disassociation, and anxiety levels as the result of a 10-week program of intentional Sabbath Practice for a group of 15 full-time clergy serving in difficult congregations within the North Georgia Conference.

## **Theological Framework**

The purpose of this section is to briefly examine the history of “Sabbath” and “Sabbath Practice” as presented in the Bible and compare that history with what we have today in post-modern American Christianity. Enough evidence exists to be able to present a compelling case that as Christians in a post-modern era, the spiritual disciplines of Sabbath practice as God intended can prove to be life changing and likely far more available to Christians than many would imagine.

### **Sabbath defined**

Sabbath, or Shabbat, is a word known by many who claim the Judeo/Christian faith traditions as their spiritual foundation. Biblically, and in Jesus’ day as is still the case in Judaism, the Sabbath is celebrated from sunset to sunset Friday evening through Saturday evening. A twenty-four hour period of rest for the faithful and in fact, all of humanity.

Likewise, in the Christian tradition the Sabbath is a time observed for the same purposes and based upon the same ordinances of God as outlined in Genesis and Exodus. However, Christians have the Sabbath on Sunday to commemorate the resurrection of Christ. In ages past, the Christian Sabbath was also a twenty four hour period of rest but it was observed in slightly different ways than the Jewish tradition – primarily in the fact that we do not adhere to the thirty nine laws of Sabbath practice. This is because as Christians, we believe Christ came to fulfill the law and, in that fulfillment, set us free from the law in the sense that it was ‘earned’ salvation. Now, adherence to God’s laws is for guidance and spiritual formation as well as living together as the human race.

In the post-modern age, whether our Sabbath is Friday sundown through Saturday sundown or Sunday morning worship through Sunday evening worship, Sabbath is a word generally understood in the Judeo/Christian traditions to mean a day of rest, and a time for worship. As Christians, we left behind the concept of twenty four hour observance ages ago. (Presbyterian Survey on American Worship Attendance) Studies have shown that for a majority of modern American Christians, most treat Sabbath as more of a day recreation, shopping, doing chores as well as working, coupled with about one hour of worship on an occasional basis. No longer is it a 24 hour period of worship and devotion but more like one hour of worship in the midst of activities we engage in most any other day of the week. (Presbyterian study)

### **Sabbath and Worship in the Post Modern Age**

Research polls and studies have shown that not every Christian attends worship every single Sunday of the year. Nationally, the average worship attendance of a majority of congregations involves only about one third of their total membership, or about 17 percent of the total US population. A study published in 2005 (*The Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* by Hadaway and Marler) demonstrated that as a population *total* (not membership average) the actual number of people attending worship in America each week is close to 18 percent (17.7) At the same time however, the Barna group (George Barna) published a report which stated just the opposite.

The *Barna group* reported church attendance as a part of the total population was actually *increasing*. This group found that a national average of 37 percent of the population attended worship on any given Sunday in 1996 and this had increased to nearly 47 percent by the year 2006. Ironically, ~~in yet~~ another study (Leadership) found

that people who are polled about worship participation tend to exaggerate their time spent in worship. The issue, however, is not so much how many are attending worship as it is how many are attending to Sabbath. Obviously, worship – which is but one part of Sabbath – is present, but the far more important aspects of Sabbath seem to have been lost. This would include clergy as well.

At first glance, it would appear that we are missing the main point; A wide gap between attending worship and attending to Sabbath practice exists in the reality of how many Christians spend the Sabbath day. In fact, it was difficult to find any studies that examined ‘Sabbath practice,’ but there were plenty of studies on worship attendance. Sabbath practice includes worship but is about far more than just one hour of worship. It is time reflecting upon God’s grace. It is intentional prayer. It is meditation upon God’s Word using *Lectio Divina*. It is a heartfelt, ongoing, lengthy conversation with God or with others about God. It is intentional engagement in spiritual disciplines with the goal of drawing closer to God, more aware of self, and more in tune with the Holy Spirit. It is these things and much more that are largely if not completely missing from the ‘regular Sabbath day’ for most Christians and a tremendous number of clergy.

### **Sabbath Practice**

The word Sabbath is a Hebrew word meaning to cease activity or to rest. It is also descriptive of something far more critical to the ongoing growth of all living things, including mankind. We learn from history and ancient texts about how Sabbath came to be, yet, thankfully, it is not something that requires a struggle to understand. However, because of the many distractions and demands of life in a post-modern age, it does seem to be a struggle for us to honor or observe Sabbath day rest as it was intended by our

Creator. As Karl Barth has claimed, when it comes to putting into daily practice the basic mandates of the Bible, “*our struggle is in implementing that which we know instinctively is good for us.*” (Jasper, p 101) Sabbath practice – Sabbath rest is but one of those mandates.

Sabbath or Sunday, at least in America, seems to have become perceived as more of an end of a two day weekend for the 40 hour work week than it is twenty four hour period for spiritual renewal, reflection, worship, and rest. The meaning of the day seems to be lost upon many in our culture and the only spiritual connection to this day has become an occasional visit in worship. In other words, Sabbath is no longer a day which we orient our lives around – instead, it is more of a day that is seen as a break from the work week for some but a regular work day for many others.

Religious leaders in both the Christian and Jewish traditions tried in the past to encourage Sabbath practice (worship, refrain from regular work) in the larger population; they did meet resistance. In fact, from the late 1800’s until the early 1970’s there were state regulations (blue laws) which prohibited a majority of retailers from doing business on Sunday.

Beginning in the late 70’s, retailers began to petition for the right to conduct business as usual on Sunday, while religious leaders fought against ‘business as usual’ (commerce) on the Sabbath. (American Labor Studies Institute) Today, retail establishments are now open (a majority) seven days a week and some for twenty four hours a day. For the most part, Christians in America and our culture in general have come to accept that Sunday is a day of rest or at least a day off from work, yet we seem to have diverged from the other intent of Sabbath and that is reconnecting with God.

The history of how this came to be accepted as a cultural norm is not the object of this paper. It is interesting to note, however, that in America the typical work week especially in government offices, schools (both private and public as well as Colleges and Universities), and most corporate offices runs from Monday through Friday. This is due mostly to union activism which began in Brittan in the 19<sup>th</sup> century and carried through the 20<sup>th</sup> century, calling for an eight hour work day (fourty hour work week), allowing for time of rest and recreation. (American Labor Studies Institute: A History of Religion and Labor Movement in 19<sup>th</sup> C.) The inherent need for human rest (Sabbath) was a large part of the union's arguments for such a week so that today Saturday and Sunday are considered the 'weekend' days with Sunday being honored as the day set aside for worship in the Christian tradition. Ironically, according to a Gallup survey conducted in 2013 regarding average worship attendance by Christians, (Frank Newport), Sunday is the day when we are least likely to be at our best. With less than 40 percent of Christians reporting attending worship regularly that means about 60 percent are away doing something else, most likely not spiritually related.

Regardless of the culture or dominant faith of a culture, the calendars of every country in the world are based on a seven day week, which harkens back to the account of creation in the book of Genesis. Even Muslims, while not worshiping our God, do observe a seven day week. Friday noon is considered their obligatory time of public worship, yet they do not seem to have an entire day set aside for physical and/or spiritual nurture/restoration. Numerous cultures or non-Christian religious traditions do not observe or celebrate the Christian or Jewish Sabbath. However, these same cultures do follow a seven day week during which at least one day or a portion of one day is

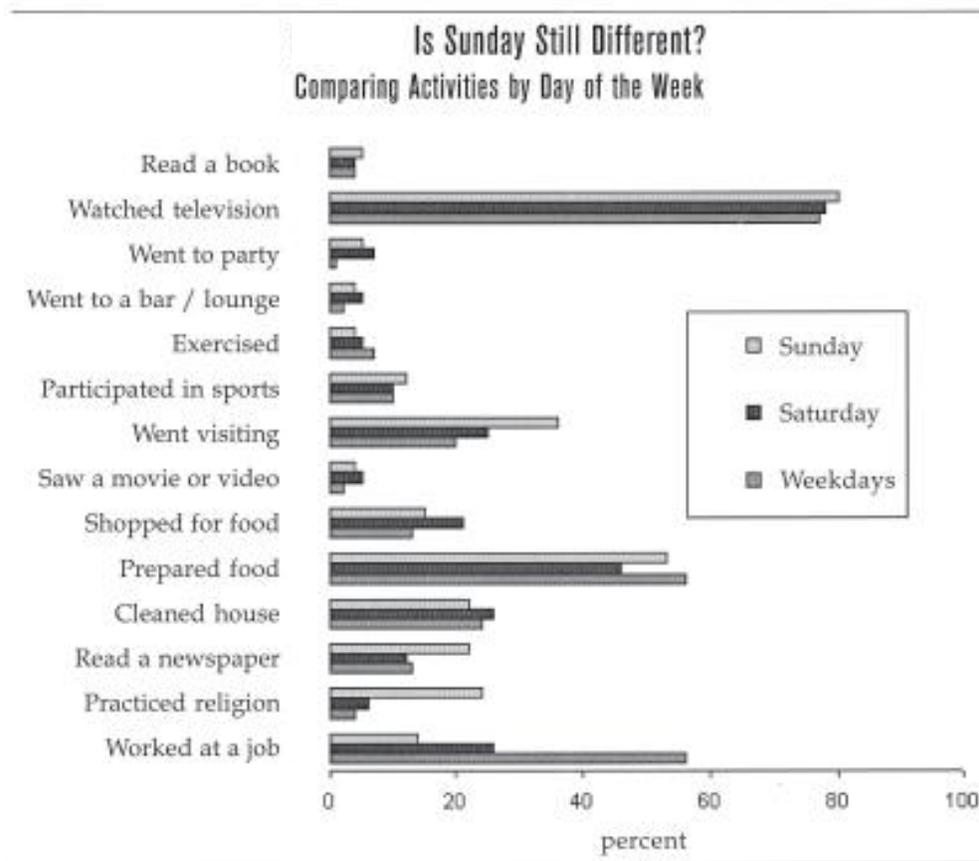
acknowledged as a time of rest. (Buddhism has no deity, and every moment is considered sacred. However, in countries where Buddhism is practiced, a seven day calendar is followed.)

In the Christian tradition; however, at least as researched in America, the day which we celebrate as Sabbath (Sunday) does not appear to be lived differently than any other day of the week (See Presbyterian survey) aside from two main features: of those who have a day off from work, only about 17 percent attend worship services. As for engaging in other activities which serve to further connect us with God...(contemplative prayer, scripture reading, reflection, etc.) is lacking. As for going without television, internet, movies, ball games, household chores, traveling, etc., this is as much a part of any given Sunday as would be any other day.

At least in America, Sunday has lost much of what used to distinguish that day from any other day of the week. A survey conducted in the 1990's by the Presbyterian Church discovered that most who claim the Christian faith do not spend their Sabbath day any differently than they do the rest of the week. Outside of some brief "Sabbath worship time," their activities on the Sabbath varied little from any other day of the week. (see Figure 1, "Is Sunday Still Different?").

Sunday is a day where an increasing number of the population is working. People of the Christian tradition attend worship on Sunday but that percentage remains relatively low compared to total membership – about 17 percent We attend worship but not at a rate that would say our faith (and Sabbath) is critical to our everyday existence. According to the survey, the average Christian spends their time on Sunday like most any other day of the week, except for the 'pace' of the day being a bit different. Our Sabbath day likely starts with worship, but we quickly resume ordinary activities other than

Sabbath practice as soon as worship is over. Worship, therefore is not the beginning of a Sabbath but more like the entire Sabbath for many. It is doubtful that one hour in worship is what God intended when God set aside a twenty four hour period for rest. The other twenty three hours apparently are similar to how we might spend any other day of the week.

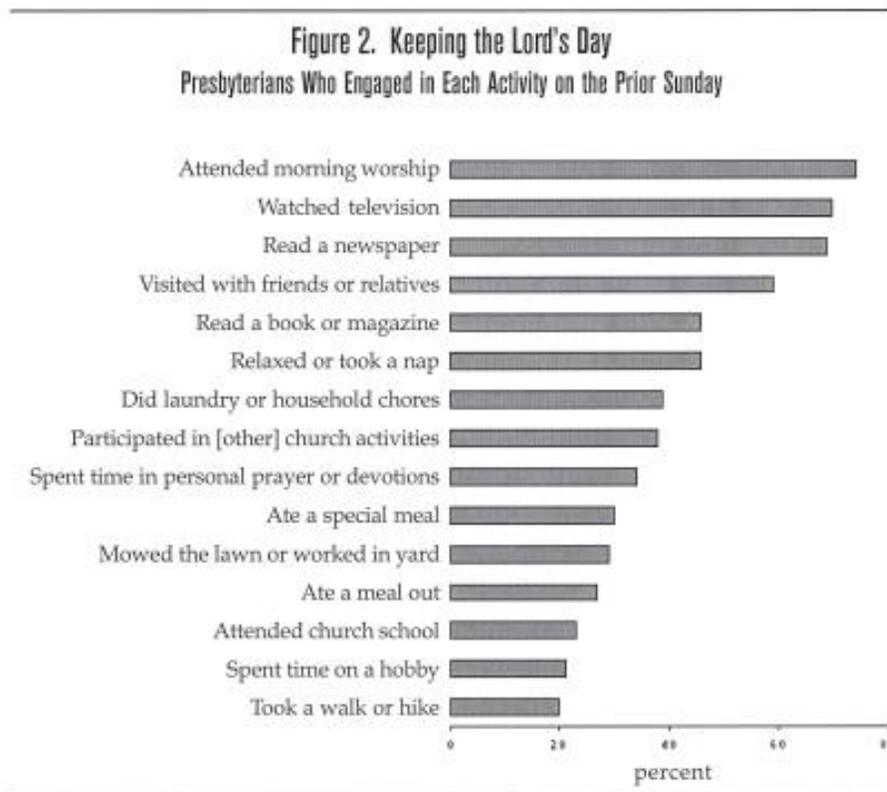


Study conducted by Presbyterian Church USA, 1994

**Figure 2.1. Comparison of typical weekend activities by day**

Looking at figure 2.2 (below) from the same study, these figures confirm that Sunday, while involving worship, is not centered largely around activities which draw us closer to God or to one another. We watch television on Sunday at about the same rate as

we do during the week, an average of 7.7 hours per day. (Leading Index of Cultural Indicators, Bennett, P. 102) Ironically, as many people report attending worship as they do watching television or reading the newspaper. Granted, some may be watching worship on television but that is hardly the same experience as participating in corporate worship in person. The activities which could be considered beneficial to Sabbath practice (hiking, walking, attending church school, personal prayer, devotions, etc.) are the activities we participate in the least. (See fig. 2.2 below)



**Figure 2.2. Keeping The Lord's Day**

In our post-modern Christian tradition, we are doing anything but resting, reflecting, and/or worshipping on this day —at least it would seem, in the way God

originally intended. A small but significant number of Americans report attending worship on any given Sunday, but Sabbath, at least as it was intended by God in the beginning, is meant to be more than one hour in public worship; more than just a religious tradition and more than just a day off. Even in the Christian context, looking at how we typically spend a Sabbath, we too are missing the mark of what was intended by God in the creation and sanctification of this day. The mandate from God still exists that we are to set this day aside as holy – unlike any other – to live our lives in a different way for this one day of each week. Ignoring this basic human need for regular rest and reconnection with our Creator does in fact have an impact on us as individuals and perhaps as a society.

According to a study conducted by the *American Psychological Association* (2012), general levels of anxiety in our culture as a whole have increased. ...”*Stress levels continue to surpass what Americans define as a healthy level of stress (3.6 on a 10-point scale). And for many Americans, stress is on the rise — 35 % of Americans say their stress increased this past year.*” (APA Journal Article: “Stress in America; Missing The Health Care Connection” Page 3) It is interesting to consider the possibilities of a connection between the overall decrease in observance of Sabbath and the increase of stress within the general population. If nothing else, this remains a compelling comparison especially when considering the other aspects of Sabbath that I will highlight shortly. For now, let’s begin in the beginning where Sabbath was established and set aside as something Holy.

### **Sabbath and Seventh Day Rest**

“By the seventh day God had finished the work he had been doing; so on the seventh day he rested from all his work. Then God blessed the seventh day and made it holy, because on it he rested from all the work of creating that he had done.” (Gen. 2:2)

The seventh day of creation as noted in Genesis 2 is the day God created specifically as a day of rest from the work of creation. It is a day in which God ceased the activity of creation and, instead, rested; It was in the Divine act of resting that the seventh day was blessed. Rest is indeed a blessing. A day of rest as created by God and designated as such is in fact something that is ‘set apart’ from the rest of the days in creation and for all who labor; a period of rest from labor is a restorative grace or blessing.

Sabbath is a day God set aside as Holy for two specific purposes: ~~Resting and in that~~ resting from distractions of labor and demands upon us and opening up the opportunity for reconnecting with our Creator. Resting from our regular labor is the first part of the blessing and in that rest having the opportunity to breathe in the breath of life from our Creator is the second part.

As stated earlier, Sabbath practice (the act of ‘rest’ or a period of rest amidst periods of activity) can actually be seen as something intrinsic in all of creation, present from the very first day and is among the first things that came into being in all of creation. Taking the text as it appears before the reader, there are some things we can know and other things we can infer about how Sabbath (seventh day rest) is present in the very fabric of everything God made.

First, it is obvious through scripture that seventh day rest is made by God for all of creation. “On it you shall not do any work, neither you, nor your son or daughter, nor

your male or female servant, nor your animals, nor any foreigner residing in your towns.”  
(Exod. 20: 9)

In the beginning, there were no religious distinctions between human beings. There was no Israel, no Jew or Gentile. There was simply humankind. This seventh day of rest is set aside and made Holy by God, therefore, for all of humankind and all of creation, including the animals that serve us. The seventh day as designated for all creation becomes evident as one observes the patterns evident in plants and animals. Most animals are active during the day and rest at night but even those that are nocturnal will find rest during the day. Some animals rest not only daily but for an entire season through hibernation. Plants also have seasons of growth and seasons where growth does not take place but rather rest from the task of growing. (Winter P\_) However, the creation is not ordered to observe the Sabbath day but humans who are responsible for creatures of creation helping them in their work are mentioned as being under Sabbath Holy law and humankind is mandated to give them rest.

### **History of Terminology**

In Hebrew, ‘Sabbath’ means ‘rest,’ or ‘to cease from regular activity.’ (Logos) In this sense, the word is not capitalized. It is a verb, describing an action. By the second book of the Bible, Exodus, ‘shabbat’ comes to be known as “Sabbath” and is referred to as such in the Ten Commandments. When reading Genesis 2, it is interesting to note that ‘Sabbath’ שַׁבָּת is not mentioned by name either by God or by the author of Genesis. In fact, Sabbath or *šabbāt* does not appear anywhere in the book of Genesis as a name for the seventh day. It is noted that the seventh day was set aside by God *for* ‘Sabbath.’

However, by the 16<sup>th</sup> chapter of Exodus, (Exod. 16:23) ‘sabbath’ as practice becomes “Sabbath” as noun and becomes *associated with* the seventh day in a formal way.

Today we understand or perceive the word as a noun, ascribing the word ‘Sabbath’ to the seventh day. The original use was descriptive of an action or intention. Over time, the word Sabbath, meaning ‘rest,’ has become synonymous with the name of the seventh day. For Christians, that day has become Sunday – the day in which we celebrate the resurrection of Christ. ~~But~~ Sabbath has now come to mean both the name for the seventh day as well as practice observed on the seventh day.

The context for the formal appearance of the word “Sabbath” is when the Israelites have fled Egypt and are in the wilderness, scouring the dessert each morning collecting Manna sent by God which formed overnight as dew on the plants and the ground. Manna of course was a gift from God and was used by the Israelites to make bread for the day. It is here where we see the community being fed by God with Manna from heaven and it is here that we can also infer that the practice of Sabbath was something that had been in place or become an expectation for the community for quite some time. The beauty of Sabbath is that it is portable and can be taken with us anywhere we are. In this case, Sabbath was being observed in the wilderness.

Obviously the word ‘Sabbath’ had been used within the community and people knew what it meant because while in exile, the Israelites were told on the sixth day to gather twice as much Manna as they needed for that day in preparation for...the Sabbath. “On the sixth day they are to prepare what they bring in, and that is to be twice as much as they gather on the other days.” (Exod. 16:5) That was because the Sabbath was Holy to

God, and they were told they would not find any Manna in the dessert the next day as they found on previous days.

In providing twice the amount needed on the day before Sabbath, God was setting the example of intending to rest from the activity of providing manna from heaven on the Sabbath. Therefore, by example of twice the amount needed before Sabbath and none provided on the Sabbath, God was providing a vivid example of the importance of keeping Sabbath by observing it. Even in the wilderness, some degree of work must be done if for no other reason than daily survival.

Another interesting observation that affirms Sabbath practice is that just a few verses after the instruction to gather twice as much Manna in preparation for the Sabbath, the people are warned to prepare only what they need for the day and not to keep any overnight. Each day they were to eat their daily fill, not saving any additional for the next day. To do so would have been a sign of lack of faith in God's provision, yet, there were those who disobeyed and hid some extra.

Those who violated that directive found the next morning that the Manna they had kept illegally had soured overnight and was filled with maggots. "However, some of them paid no attention to Moses; they kept part of it until morning, but it was full of maggots and began to smell." (Exod. 16:20;) Gathering twice as much on the *sixth* day was preparation for the day to follow, (Sabbath) and the gathering of *this* Manna did not spoil or sour overnight.

It is in this context that we first see the word 'Sabbath' used in connection with the sixth day (preparation for) *and* the seventh day (observance of) rest. "He {Moses} said to them, "This is what the Lord commanded: 'Tomorrow is to be a day of sabbath

rest, a holy sabbath to the Lord. So bake what you want to bake and boil what you want to boil. Save whatever is left and keep it until morning.” (Exod. 16:23)

Here it is obvious that Sabbath practice is already a part of community and is a word the people are familiar with for the Hebrew meaning of ‘rest’ or ‘cease’ is Sabbath. And It is evident that some stipulations regarding even the making or preparing of food (~~as work~~) is to be avoided on the Sabbath as the people are instructed to prepare food ahead of time.

It is interesting to note that Sabbath is a human term. In other words, God is never observed or recorded as having given a name to the seventh day. God made the day and blessed it, made it Holy, but God never gave it a formal name. It is humanity (human language) that gives the seventh day a name, and yet God honors that name later in Exodus by using the term *Sabbath* in the Ten Commandments. “Remember the Sabbath day, and keep it holy. Six days you shall labor and do all your work. But the seventh day is a Sabbath to the LORD your God; you shall not do any work—you, your son or your daughter, your male or female slave, your livestock, or the alien resident in your towns. For in six days the LORD made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that is in them, but rested the seventh day; therefore the LORD blessed the sabbath day and consecrated it. (Exod. 20:8-11;) It is interesting to note that in Biblical references the word ‘Sabbath,’ is not capitalized, yet today we spell the word with a capital “S” as an expressive proper noun.

### **Sabbath and Worship**

Worship of God is first mentioned in Genesis 4 where Cain and Abel, the first sons of the first man and woman in creation, were presenting an offering to God. Such an

act is a form or part of worship, but we do not know here whether this worship is taking place on the Sabbath day of rest or not. Likewise in Genesis 22 where Abraham takes his son Issac to the place of worship and sacrifice, ~~again~~, the *practice* of worship and offering sacrifices to God is well understood. No mention is made of such happening on the Sabbath day.

The formal worship of God is indeed portable as Sabbath is portable. The children of Israel took Sabbath with them wherever they went, as it is a practice that can be engaged wherever they may be. Worship on the Sabbath can be seen as the first recorded act of worship as part of the new creation when Noah builds an Altar to the Lord and offers animal sacrifices. Noah (Gen. 8:20) This is after the great flood of Genesis where all of humankind and creation were destroyed. Although Noah and his family were on the Ark for more than forty days, no record can be found of them observing Sabbath during that time. ~~However~~ Noah, without command from God to do so, built an altar to God as one of his first actions upon exiting the Ark. Building the altar was the very first thing he did and, in that place he offered sacrifices to God. Therefore, we can infer that even at this early stage of creation, there was an awareness of ~~and~~ a need for the worship of God in a special setting.

It was the faith of Noah that distinguished him from the rest of humanity which had by then turned 'wicked;' Scripture claims that Noah was a 'Righteous man.' Righteous in this meaning, is understood as keeping a right relationship with God. Noah may not have been without sin as it is known he was fond of drinking, However, Noah did kept an open and forthright relationship with God and honored God when all others had abandoned God. Therefore, it is likely or can be inferred by an understanding of

Sabbath that Noah and his family must have been observing some form of Sabbath practice (remaining connected with God) while the rest of humanity had abandoned God and Sabbath for self-serving purposes. “The LORD saw that the wickedness of humankind was great in the earth, and that every inclination of the thoughts of their hearts was only evil continually. And the LORD was sorry that he had made humankind on the earth, and it grieved him to his heart.” (Gen. 6:5)

In contrast to this picture, the Bible states that God found favor with Noah and that Noah walked with God. “...Noah was a righteous man, blameless in his generation; Noah walked with God.” (Gen. 6:8-10) So one could infer that walking with God is something that takes time and intentionality. Noah must have been a man of some spiritual discipline if he was doing such a thing; if disciplined enough to walk with God, then certainly disciplined enough to honor God’s mandate of Sabbath rest. “Walking with God” could be interpreted literally as actually walking and talking with God; figuratively, it could be interpreted as being in an intentional, non-distracted, heartfelt conversation with God, or spiritually, it could be interpreted to be more like a metaphor for someone who observes God’s presence daily with a worshipful, faithful approach to everything they do. It is this second interpretation which lends a strong claim that Noah very likely observed Sabbath practice.

The practice of Sabbath is at least one spiritual discipline that distinguishes the faithful from the unfaithful or the wicked. Again, this is an inference and not recorded in the chapter, but, given the context, one can be fairly certain that worship of God was of primary importance to Noah, as was ongoing, heartfelt conversation with God.

It is evident from early readings and inference in the first two books of the Bible that Sabbath rest or Sabbath practice is something that was meant for humankind and all of creation but was particularly embraced by the children of Israel early in their history. Before looking further in the Bible for how Sabbath came to be treated, it is important to go just a bit deeper and look at Sabbath from yet another perspective - perspective that is both inclusive of the Bible as well as current knowledge we have about the nature of creation. Through a brief touching upon the discipline of 'Midrash' which Jasper speaks of, we will wrestle with some concepts that appear to be affirming the importance of Sabbath, observed from a different perspective, as a pattern that is seen in all of creation. This is what I spoke of earlier as Sabbath being woven into the very DNA of humanity and all of creation.

### **Sabbath, Rest, and Creation**

If, as Ellen Davis encourages us to do, we are teaching the Bible from a confessional standpoint in the post-modern Christian church, (Davis P. 10) we are going to have to incorporate both integrity, imagination, and faithfulness all at the same time. People today do not accept something as 'true' as easily without some other corroborating evidence, personal experience, or demonstrated theory which they can understand or that would appear to augment such truth. In other words, we are teaching to skeptics. Therefore, we need to be especially creative in searching out texts which not only back up but clarify, amplify, and give life to the concepts we are teaching.

In our fast paced modern society, there are many that follow the saying of burning the candle at both ends – extinguishing their energy on work at twice the rate expected. Sadly, such is lauded in our society. It would seem to be a formidable task, therefore, to

teach the Biblical principle of Sabbath rest to such dedicated skeptics – to people who are rewarded for burning the candle at both ends.

Reaching those who are in the midst of burning out is a challenge, however doing so does not require as much imagination as it does digging in a wider context when studying and teaching the Bible. As Davis states, the aim of the Bible is to “...*first of all, tell us about the nature and will of God, to instruct us in the manifold and often hidden ways in which God is present and active in our world;*” (Davis, 11) In teaching Sabbath history and practice to a skeptical new generation, it will help to include other fields of study which serve to affirm the truths being taught from the Bible. Granted, this is not to say the Bible has no authority without modern affirmation from other disciplines, but rather, the commentary or affirmation from other disciplines serves to highlight what has been true since before the modern spiritual disciplines were discovered or even studied.

Resting in God, Godly ‘rest’ or cessation from work, and in particular Sabbath rest is of such keen importance that God intentionally set aside one day a week for this specific purpose. So critical to our very life is the practice of Sabbath rest that God included it as one of the Ten Commandments. It was a special day, created and set apart all for one specific purpose and that is the purpose of rest, restoration, reflection, replenishment, and/or walking with God.

God is eternal and does not need rest yet Genesis makes note of the fact that God indeed ‘rested’ from His labor of creation or the process of creation. In doing so, God was setting an example for all of creation and in my opinion affirming what had been ordered or set in motion from the very first day by *blessing* the practice of regular rest. It

is this concept of ‘rest’ that is seen in a repeated pattern or implied as being set in motion in all of creation from the very first day.

### **Pattern of Rest As Foundational in Creation**

Taking a close look at the first chapter of Genesis, we note:

“In the beginning when God created the heavens and the earth, the earth was a formless void and darkness covered the face of the deep, while a wind from God swept over the face of the waters. Then God said, “Let there be light”; and there was light. And God saw that the light was good; and God separated the light from the darkness. God called the light Day, and the darkness he called Night. And there was evening and there was morning, the first day.” (Gen. 1:1-5)

When read through carefully, one notes a pattern that is set. This pattern repeats itself in each account of each day of creation. The pattern is simple yet at the same time it could be said to foreshadow a pattern for Sabbath if not all of creation itself. The pattern that I observed is: ACTION – REFLECTION – REST.

In other words, God is acting through the process of creation: “God said....”

Reflection is where God is observing (reflecting upon) what God had created and making comment on the finished product... “And God saw that the light was good;” God ‘saw’ (reflection) that the light was good and ‘was good’ being a declaratory judgment on what had been seen or reflected upon.

From there came more days and more of creation following that exact pattern each day. At the end of each day, creation activities come to an end. There is reflection on the activity of the day followed by an implied period of rest. Though not specifically mentioned as such by the text, there is implied in the writing of the text a gap between days of creation. In other words, all acts of creativity come to a halt or are recorded as such with a period between the days. “There was evening and there was morning, a

second day.” (Gen. 1) What happens between the end of one day and the start of another day is of course speculation. From the pattern established, we know that period is what separated evening from morning, and from observing the rest of creation, we can infer that what took place between the evening and morning was a period of rest.

Granted, Genesis does not state that God ‘rested’ at the end of the first day or between any of the days of creation. However, by virtue of the pattern, (action, reflection, no activity – new day) we can see that God for whatever reasons concluded ‘That is enough for today...’ leaving the rest of creation to unfold on subsequent days. During that gap between days ceased the activity of creation. God only did so much creative activity in one segmented period of time, then God ceased that activity. The cessation of activity is called Sabbath.

God, being the Divine creator, could have conceivably created the entire universe in one day with a single utterance of His mighty Word. As John 1:1 witnesses: “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.” (John 1:1) With God being Omnipotent, all of creation coming into being with the declaration of a single word is a distinct possibility. However, according to record, God chose to create in specific and clearly ordered steps, doing only so much over one period of time to create order out of the chaos. Certainly, we are reminded that Jesus calmed a violent storm with just two words; “Be still!” and it was so. (Mk. 4:39)

In creating through ordered steps and those steps being separated by the passing of one day and the creation of yet another brand new day, God set in motion the nature of time. (Note, it is not the *arrival of* another day when God begins God’s work but rather

God's *creation* of an entirely *new day* along with what is created during that day that sets time in motion.)

In following this pattern, God creates the physical aspect of 'time.' (creation of time and ordering of such into specific periods (Days) which serve to mark the passing of time.) Evidence for the creation of linear time can be inferred by a phrase that is repeated at the end of each period of creation; "And there was evening and there was morning, the first {second...third...etc.} day." (Genesis 1:5) In doing this, God instilled a pattern in all of creation, and that pattern is affirmed in each day of creation: action, (morning) reflection, (afternoon) and rest (evening). God said....God saw.....then God ceased creative activity for that day. In the cessation of creative activity, it can be inferred that a period of rest awaits at the end of the day where no activity is recorded as having taken place.

Certainly some could argue that such a statement may be reading 'into' the text something which is literally not there, at least in word. ~~But~~I would disagree – the words which demonstrate a pattern are in fact there. More importantly, it is not a pattern that God *followed* but rather a pattern that God *set in motion* which *we* follow to this day. Granted, if taken literally word for word, one could not make such a claim. However, I believe that Jasper would argue in return that if using hermeneutics and taking into consideration each verse in context with the next, then a pattern in fact does emerge that is observable. It could also be argued that the pattern which is observed is intentional while not being literal. Otherwise, the creation account might read quite differently than it does.

## Significance of Rest

A period of rest on a regular basis helps protect and preserve that which God has brought into being. Sabbath does not extend our days, but it does help protect us from squandering our energy and spiritual strength needlessly, letting life fly by un-noticed. When observing all of creation from the physical laws of the universe to the life cycle of plants and animals, a pattern of ‘Action, and Rest’ is evident and in all living things. Therefore, it could be argued the very essence of regular rest and reflection (for humanity) is a critical aspect of life itself, most especially the discipline of rest or cessation from activity.

This claim can be endorsed by merely observing the whole of creation as ‘made.’ The creation of time and a separation of time into segments of light and dark, day and night is the first act. The general purpose of having a period of light known as ‘day’ was for activity, growth, movement, etc. and the purpose for night was cessation from such activity – or rest. It is specifically the act of ‘rest’ that is necessary for and intrinsic to all living things.

Regarding the importance of regular rest, researchers at the National Institutes of Health have found that circadian rhythms are evident even within our very own DNA:

*“Researchers have already identified genes that direct circadian rhythms in people, fruit flies, mice, fungi and several other model organisms used for studying genetics.”*

*(National Institute of Health report, 2005)* Bears hibernate in the winter months. Trees go into a ‘sleep mode’ at the same time. Insects burrow or cocoon and wait out the winter months. Plants and crops do the same thing. Seasons of growth and activity exist for animals and plants, and there is a season where such activity comes to a stop. For the

plant world it is known as winter. In the animal world, it can either be hibernation, rest over a long period of time, or it can be daily rest – sleeping or resting when the sun sets for the day and darkness fills the night sky.

Whether seasonal or daily, mammals must have a period of rest from their daily activity. This circadian rhythm follows for the most part the ordering of the days. Sabbath is but one day of rest per week, however, it is woven into the very fabric of creation from the very first day of creation.

The Israelites knew that even inanimate objects such as the land needed rest so a tradition/practice was started that every field that was used to grow crops would be given one year of rest from crop production once every seven years. This is no accident of culture but a very intentional practice put into place by observing the importance of a weekly Sabbath for human beings. It was known as a ‘Sabbath year,’ (Lange, Vol. 2 P. 24) and we can see evidence of such in Exodus 23: “For six years you are to sow your fields and harvest the crops, but during the seventh year let the land lie unplowed and unused. Then the poor among your people may get food from it, and the wild animals may eat what is left. Do the same with your vineyard and your olive grove.” (Exod. 23:10-11)

Again, repeated in Leviticus,

“The LORD said to Moses at Mount Sinai, “Speak to the Israelites and say to them: ‘When you enter the land I am going to give you, the land itself must observe a sabbath to the LORD. For six years sow your fields, and for six years prune your vineyards and gather their crops. But in the seventh year the land is to have a year of sabbath rest, a sabbath to the LORD. Do not sow your fields or

prune your vineyards. Do not reap what grows of itself or harvest the grapes of your untended vines. The land is to have a year of rest.” (Lev. 25:1-5)

Those who grow crops know that this concept of rotating the land is beneficial for the soil because it keeps the land from becoming barren by using up too many nutrients. If no reprieve from crop production is observed and crops are grown year after year without pause, eventually the nutrients in the soil become depleted (used up, burnt out, etc.) and the land becomes incapable of sustaining growth of any kind. The land becomes barren. Farmers have known this since the dawn of planting the first fields. This reality reflects the physical laws of the universe which also support or affirm the presence of a Sabbath reality in how the universe functions.

Because of the laws that govern the universe, we know that matter and energy cannot be created by humankind nor by accident of nature. Matter and energy can only be changed, exchanged, altered, or stored. Human beings cannot ‘add to’ what is already in existence, neither can we eliminate it. We can only change its properties. Because of the laws of physics, which were set in motion at the creation moment, we are bound by these laws, and we either honor them or we violate them at our own peril.

As the law of entropy states, all that happens in life is the expenditure of energy and that energy is exchanged into another form normally heat or ‘work.’ The decrease of one involves the decrease of the other: this is known as symmetry or ‘balance.’ For every bit of action that takes place, symmetry requires a balance of that action. One form of that action is in the form of rest. If we expend all the energy available in a ‘thing,’ then once that energy is expended movement ceases. Only when additional energy becomes available does action or motion begin again. Because of the physical laws of the universe,

it would be virtually impossible to get more of one than of the other. If we could, we would be in the creation business and not the exchange business.

The magnificence of this creation and the One who set it all in motion is also revealed in Job 38 where God challenges Job to consider the vast realm of creation – and God’s hand in it. While not copying the entire passage here, it could be said that the context of that passage certainly points toward an affirmation of this first law as affirmed or reaffirmed by God in His chastising of Job’s lamentations. Creation and all that is in it is something only God could have done and only God can do. Human beings cannot manipulate or violate the laws which govern all of creation. “Can you bind the chains<sup>l</sup>of the Pleiades? Can you loosen Orion’s belt? Can you bring forth the constellations in their seasons or lead out the Bear with its cubs? Do you know the laws of the heavens?” (Job 38:1-41)

Inasmuch as a beginning exists for the universe and everything within it as a consequence of there being a starting point in time, there will be an epoch or an era when all winds down, when all has been expended, when all that has been or ever will be will comes to an end. As stated in the second law of thermodynamics, entropy increases over time and never decreases or reverses. Entropy can be temporarily slowed but never completely stopped. Amazingly, such a process is mentioned in the Bible as well as the Apocrypha, most notably in *Sirach*; “The works of all are before him, and nothing can be hidden from his eyes. From the beginning to the end of time he can see everything, and nothing is too marvelous for him. No one can say, ‘What is this?’ or ‘Why is that?’ for everything has been created for its own purpose.” (Sirach 39:19-21)

The second law of thermodynamics states that energy cannot be ‘created’ or destroyed. It can only be transferred or exchanged from one state to another as all of the universe winds down to zero. The book of Ecclesiastes speaks of this in a beautifully poetic way, but the truth behind the poetry is significant and can be closely related to both these fundamental laws of physics. “There is indeed a time and a season for every activity under heaven...” (Ecc. 3:1) but this time is not limitless. An end to all time is coming. The same Old Testament author also states: “I have seen the business that God has given to everyone to be busy with. He has made everything suitable for its time; moreover he has put a sense of past and future into their minds, yet they cannot find out what God has done from the beginning to the end. I know that there is nothing better for them than to be happy and enjoy themselves as long as they live;” (Ecc. 3:10-12)

### **Science and Sabbath**

The first two laws of thermodynamics, the most basic laws of physics that govern the entire universe, also relate to Sabbath. Therefore, it cannot be said that engaging in Sabbath practice extends the number of our days. ~~Not likely.~~ What Sabbath practice clearly does, however, is prevent us from expending the days we do have prematurely. With a period of rest each week, Sabbath can help us gain new perspective through rest, reflection, prayer and worship on the whole of creation, our place in it, and improves the quality of the days we *do* have. It can also help us decide what is worthy of our work (expenditure of energy) and what is not.

Rest, both daily and weekly rests provides the balance that is required by the laws of nature, the laws of physics, and the laws of God, which allow us to continue living.

You can certainly be said to be 'alive' without living as those who are in a coma or catatonic state are alive, but certainly are not living life as they or God would intend. Human beings cannot live without dying, but human beings can die without ever having lived. Sabbath practice is what helps make life worth living.

Numerous sleep studies have demonstrated consistently that those who get little or no rest eventually succumb to side effects of irritability, depression, and ill health. The need for a period of rest in the midst of life, activity, or growth in all living things is woven into the very fabric of creation can be seen in virtually all aspects of creation; from physical laws that govern the universe, to the flora and fauna that cover the earth, to mammals, reptiles, and insects.

The need for Divine rest is evident in our need to walk with God, to reconnect with our Creator, and to cease all regular activity so that we can focus on this life sustaining practice. From seasons, to circadian rhythms, to traditions, Sabbath practice (a specific period of rest for every living or created thing) seems to be woven into the very essence of being in all of creation – and true to scripture the repeated or blatant violation of this natural (God ordained state) results ultimately in death. If not death, we can expend or deplete energy to the extent that cessation of activity (life) comes to halt thus ending that which was previously active or thriving.

This is as true of physical exhaustion as it is of spiritual depletion, burnout, or psychological lockdown. A good example of this kind of physical and emotional exhaustion from the horrors of battle came to be known as the thousand yard stare. The thousand yard stare is a phrase that was coined by soldiers in the Viet Nam war. The term described the look on faces of soldiers so drained and traumatized by the horrors of war,

that they became essentially unresponsive to any kind of stimuli. While not quite in a coma, the soldiers were described as nearly catatonic – alive, awake but numb and unresponsive. (Grossman: P. 72)

Human beings are not designed to be perpetual motion machines. We need or require a certain amount of rest each day and at regular intervals during the week. It is a known fact that human beings cannot go beyond 200 hours without suffering significant and/or debilitating consequences. Given enough physical and mental activity without rest, eventually (like a machine) the human body becomes spent and automatically shuts down and becomes unconscious until sufficient rest is obtained. According to a 2005 study conducted by the Emory University Neurology Department, “specific neurocognitive domains including executive attention, working memory, and divergent higher cognitive functions are particularly vulnerable to sleep loss.” (Emory University Sleep deprivation study, 2005 P. 117) Thus Jesus even says to us about our need for rest in Matthew: “Come to me, all you that are weary and are carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest.<sup>29</sup> Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me; for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls.<sup>30</sup> For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.” (Matt. 11:28)

### **Sabbath and Regulations**

Eventually worship and Sabbath came together as one. Just as there were expectations, guidelines traditions, and stipulations for worship (practices, traditions, etc. which held meaning), so too were stipulations created for the edification of the Sabbath for all practicing Jews. In other words, they wanted to get it right.

In order to avoid profaning the Sabbath, people had a sincere desire to know what was meant by resting and to know what activities qualified as work. Is the day God set aside for rest merely the cessation of work or is there a larger reason for the cessation of work? These and many more are questions which the 39 Sabbath laws sought to delineate, define, and regulate.

Obviously, a deeper reason for rest from work exists and that is that human beings will not be so distracted by or detained by work that it would interfere in our desire to reconnect with God through worship, reflection, and rest. So God rested from the labor of creation and set that day for our rest from work as well; therefore, work is considered forbidden or a distraction from our rest as well as a violation of God's law. Defining what is intended by work was the challenge that befell the religious leaders. Whether such was defined as walking anywhere or a limit to how far one could walk was critical. Whether or not to cook (requiring the creation of a fire) and how to rest were all issues which needed clarification. All this led to the development of Sabbath laws, and this is when Sabbath practice began to become highly regulated and often strictly enforced even with the penalty of death for violation of Sabbath law.

Eventually as many as 39 categories of regulations came to be related to Sabbath practice and specifically, to any type of activity which might be considered 'creative.' (God rested from the work of creation, so we should do the same) Thirty nine categories of rules, regulations, stipulations, and caveats is overwhelming for anyone simply seeking to rest! The laws had to do with forbidding the acts of 'creating' such as cooking, making a fire to cook with, going farther than a certain distance when walking was to 'create' a journey, etc. etc. It would be a great deal of work to keep the laws, which keep us from

working on the Sabbath! So much so that such laws came to bind the people rather than free the people. By the time Jesus came on the scene, Sabbath laws had become so restrictive that they had become binding rather than freeing.

### **Jesus and Sabbath**

It is interesting to note that Jesus' instruction on Sabbath practice is very limited as compared with references to the same in the Old Testament. Of course, Jesus observed the Sabbath and honored the day as many occasions find Him in the Temple either worshiping, teaching, or proclaiming. (sometimes healing on the Sabbath as well!) Yet what seems to be most significant in the Gospels are the encounters He had with people who accused him and his Disciples of breaking Sabbath – either by picking grain or by Jesus healing people who were ill and afflicted with disease.

He pointed out the hypocrisy of His critics with piercing questions of reality (things they knew they had done themselves in violating Sabbath.) as in Luke 13:15 “But the Lord answered him and said, “You hypocrites! Does not each of you on the sabbath untie his ox or his donkey from the manger, and lead it away to give it water?”

True to Jesus' claim that He came not to abolish the law (this would include the 4<sup>th</sup> commandment) but to fulfill the law, Jesus told his critics: “The Sabbath was made for mankind, and not mankind for the Sabbath; so the Son of Man is Lord even of the Sabbath.” (Mark 2:27-28) It would not make sense if Jesus were to abolish God's law on Sabbath but it does make sense that He came to ‘re-orient’ humankind to the true meaning and purpose of such: rest and reconnection with God.

It is of interest to note the scene in the Gospel of where the disciples and Jesus are sailing to another shore when they encounter a terrific storm. The storm was quite violent

according to the Gospel account, with waves breaking over the sides of the boat. This meant that the boat would have been rocking and pitching at the same time with loose items rolling about in the hold and companionway. Not only that, but the sounds of lightning and thunder with strong winds and the shouts of the disciples in their panic created a scene where fear of demise is imminent. However, the Gospel records Jesus being asleep in the stern of the boat. So soundly was he sleeping that the Disciples had to awaken him to the impending tragedy about to befall them.

The kind of sleep that Jesus was in was obviously one of deep, deep rest, for the surrounding noises, wind and water, not to awaken him. In relaying this story to the pastors at the beginning of the study, I asked them when the last time was that they could remember that they had slept that soundly. Many confessed that they could not remember any such rest, ~~and~~ especially since entering their current appointment.

Whether or not Jesus' state of rest was supernaturally invoked or rather was a result of him being able to relax completely due to his regular practice of Sabbath, spiritual disciplines could be an interesting extension to this study. From modern sleep studies conducted by physicians, we know that this type of rest (without being induced through medication) is indeed a rare state for most of the population in general and specifically rare for those under any degree of stress.

Hebrews 4:9-11 speaks of entering God's rest:

“There remains, then, a Sabbath-rest for the people of God; for anyone who enters God's rest also rests from their works, just as God did from his. Let us, therefore, make every effort to enter that rest, so that no one will perish by following their example of disobedience.” The ‘their example’ which the text refers, are the people who were offered, but refused to accept the grace offered them and in disobedience went their own way. As such, as the author states, they will never enter ‘God's rest.’ “They shall never enter my rest.” (Hebrews 4:5)

This is emphasized when we read of the Disciples aboard a sailboat in the middle of a fierce storm. Jesus was with them but he was asleep in the back of the sailboat (stern). He was able to rest so deeply because He was abiding in God's rest. God's rest is a different kind of rest than that which we would ordinarily associate with 'rest.' God's rest (and resting in Christ) is the type of rest that comes through abiding faith, complete trust, surrender of will, and surrender of our lives completely to God's direction.

Though we may not be able to render that perfect, complete sacrifice of will as Christ did, we can do our best to model His example and, in so doing, begin to find deeper rest in Christ as we engage in a practice that will allow us more intimate time with Christ, uninterrupted by the demands and worries of this world. The depth of Jesus' sleep in the stern of a boat being tossed about in a tempest of a storm is quite revealing in what it means to find rest in God, or God's rest. It is that kind of rest that renews and sustains strength and surely as the Bible states, those who do not get that kind of rest indeed eventually perish. Medical studies have demonstrated that stress (acute) activates hormones and chemicals in our bodies that invoke a 'fight or flight' response. It is a survival mechanism built into our very DNA and is not something we can control, but it is something we can learn to manage.

When we encounter stress, chemicals such as cortisol, cortisone, adrenaline and noradrenaline are released into the body. This is an autonomic process in response to a perceived threat and quickly sends powerful chemicals to various parts of the body to prepare us for a 'fight or flight' situation. Either require bursts of energy, strength or speed. If we respond physically, these chemicals are absorbed through our muscles and other organs and remain harmless. If ~~however~~, no immediate physical response is

forthcoming (running, fighting, physical exertion of any kind) when the body secretes these chemicals, then the chemicals our bodies produce begin to do severe damage to muscles and organs.

As Dr. Hart has stated, “In short bursts, elevated adrenaline is not damaging or dangerous. But when sustained at high levels of a period of time, it can be very harmful.” (Hart, P. 27) The harm comes in damage done to muscles in the heart, (heart failure) thus eventually affecting oxygen to the brain, (stroke) messages to the digestive system, (ulcers) and decreases the body’s ability to rid itself of these chemicals. There are other contributing factors and anxiety induced stress continues to be one of the suspected contributing factors of heart disease. Operating at continued high levels of anxiety (stress) without any respite from such does in fact do damage to us physically as well as emotionally and spiritually. When the author speaks of those not entering God’s rest eventually perishing, this could very well be a direct link to an interpretation of that text.

If there was ever a soul that walked this earth that had reason to be under constant stress, it was Jesus of Nazareth. Between the attacks of the religious authorities and the constant threat of political authorities threatened by his following, Jesus had plenty of reason to be paranoid if not constantly stressed. Certainly, He experienced physical symptoms of stress as noted in the Gospels on the night before His crucifixion.

In Luke 22:44 we note: “And being in anguish, he prayed more earnestly, and his sweat was like drops of blood falling to the ground.” So Jesus did indeed feel the effects of extreme stress. He was not immune to it. Yet the effects of stress, as profound as they are, are never recorded as having any detrimental effects upon Him. Jesus being fully Human and fully Divine did not likely have ‘super-human powers’ which made Him

immune to the effects of stress but rather the more likely explanation is that His faithful attendance to Sabbath practice (God's rest) is what helped sustain and strengthen Him in spite of the tremendous stress He experienced. It would not be a stretch in theology or in logic to assert that His attention to regular Sabbath practice as an act of faith was also what helped sustain Him for the arduous task of the weight of His ministry to the world.

### **Paul and Sabbath**

The Apostle Paul was keenly aware of the importance of Sabbath and instructed his people to observe Sabbath but to keep God and relationship with Christ as the main purpose for doing so. As the Bible reads, Paul himself observed the Sabbath but seemed to use that day as an opportunity to preach and teach, to try to convince the people of Jesus' Messianic role.

How much 'rest' Paul got on the Sabbath is a mystery, but, with his zeal for Christ and his apparent urgent need to spread the Gospel, it could be inferred that perhaps he rested in God on other days while using the day (Sabbath) when people gathered for God to do God's work of evangelism. Even though many times he was rejected, he continued to argue and debate the Jews and did so in the Temple ~~and~~ on the Sabbath. So while we find little record of any other activity Paul engaged in on the Sabbath other than healing, teaching, etc., it could be inferred that he found Sabbath rest on other days in other places. For, surely, one could not keep the pace he kept without such life sustaining practices as Sabbath.

He (Paul) never instructed anyone to ignore the Sabbath, but it simply is not completely clear as to whether or not he was finding himself in "God's rest" on that day in any town, city, or place he visited. Paul's experience is similar to what clergy

experience today in that clergy are leading in worship and often doing teaching on the Sabbath day. The Sabbath is a day of worship; however, it is hardly a day of worshipful rest for clergy because many find it impossible to both lead and engage in worship at the same time. Leading in worship can be exhausting. Leading in worship is usually followed up by hospital and shut in visitation and on occasion, church meetings, all on a Sunday.

With the many demands of teaching, luncheons, meetings, and training sessions, Sunday is perhaps one of the busiest and most demanding days of the week for clergy. Regular worship, daily prayer, and weekly study help lay people in many ways; however, no similar benefit to the same degree exists for clergy who teach or lead in these activities. Clergy must find rest in God elsewhere and on other days or other opportunities.

### **Wesley and Sabbath**

By any standard, many today would say that Rev. John Wesley was a man ‘driven.’ Whether driven by an obsessive/compulsive need to live out the life of his brother who preceded him in death (this sometimes happens to younger siblings) or driven by the spirit - I’m not sure. We do know from history and legend that he was known to ride at least 4,000 mile a year on horseback. He wrote prolifically, taught constantly, preached fervently, and seemed at times inexhaustible. How might ~~have~~ such a driven man have observed the Sabbath himself? One cannot help but wonder if he ever slowed down enough to just relax. Or if, in his travels, he took the time to take in the beauty of God’s creation around him.

In “*A Word to a Sabbath-Breaker*” (John Wesley’s Conception and Use of Scripture S. Jones P ), Wesley’s main concern was to use the day (meaning the entire day

not just the morning worship hour) to worship, praise, and honor God and to study scripture. For Wesley, Sabbath is a rest from our usual pursuits not a rest in the strict sense although what he suggests could be restful compared to our ordinary schedules today! He is quite serious about violations of the Sabbath (doing restful but entertaining things having nothing to do with the sacred) as being a violation of self and an insult to God. *“It is a base mis-spending of your talent, and a barefaced contempt of God and his authority.”* (Lane, *The Works of Wesley*, P. 353) Much admonition from Wesley comes in the form of warnings to not profane the Sabbath but to keep it holy. Wesley had much to say about Sabbath, but one cannot help but wonder how he could have kept such a hectic pace of traveling, reading, writing, creating hymns, teaching, and starting societies that would have left any significant time for Sabbath rest on his part.

### **Sabbath Rest and Theophilus**

Theophilus translated means “Student of God.” (Luke 1:1) According to Luke, he addresses his Gospel to anyone who would be studying God’s Word thus he gives them the name ‘Theophilus,’ meaning we are all ‘Students of God.’ The title of this section literally means “Sabbath Rest and You.” This is ultimately what it comes down to.

An old Hebrew word, “Timshel” or sometimes spelled “Timshol” which translated basically means: “Thou mayest, thou mayest not,” is especially relevant to clergy in the struggle to find time for Sabbath. All human beings have been given free will in determining how we will live our lives. Timshel reminds us that we have a choice in this life. We have the freedom to decide for ourselves what we shall be, what we shall do, how we shall live, etc. etc. Included in that freedom is the freedom to give ourselves

over to God's law, which contrary to man's law gives freedom. In restriction, freedom abounds to seek out and become all that God has made us to be and called us to be.

We have the freedom to observe and practice Sabbath, and we have the freedom to ignore, dismiss, or squander Sabbath, but we do so at our own peril, physically, emotionally and spiritually. We have seen how Sabbath practice is woven into all of creation from the very first day. Science has demonstrated that through the discovery of physical laws governing the universe that these laws cannot be broken – or at least not without consequence for those that can be broken. Nature demonstrates Sabbath right before our very eyes, and even our very eyes can attest to the intrinsic need for Sabbath if we try to keep them open beyond reason. Our eyes will close on their own, sending us to rest.

The new Sabbath, in perspective with the resurrection of Christ, is now celebrated on a different day (Sunday). That does not diminish the importance of the regular practice of such. As I mentioned earlier, one of the beautiful aspects of the Sabbath is its portability. The children of Israel took Sabbath practice with them into the wilderness and even kept Sabbath while in exile. Ironically, it was Victor Frankl in his book "*Man's Search For Meaning*," that he mentions the fact that those who survived the ordeal of the Nazi concentration camps were able to do so because they kept Sabbath no matter what their conditions. It was Sabbath (and the portability of such) that gave them hope, and the ability to endure. So Sabbath practice, wherever it is observed and whenever it is kept, is a gift from God for the people of God for the benefit of our hearts, minds and souls.

If anything, the Sabbath demands or requires a response. Ignoring Sabbath comes at a tremendous cost to anyone and everyone who would dismiss it as merely an outdated

or antiquated religious tradition. As Paul claims in his letter to the Hebrews (4:44) that “...those who ignore God’s rest surely perish.” As Richard Hays so eloquently states about our reading of the Bible:

“...we read it as a story about the power of the God who gives life to the dead and calls into existence the things that do not exist. It is not a story about self-help, not a story about human wisdom, not a story about shaping our own identity. It is a story about God—a God who has revealed himself definitively through a mighty act beyond all human capacity, raising Jesus from the dead and transforming the cosmos.” (Hayes, P. 232)

It is the wisest student of God who comes to see this truth and the life sustaining and spirit transforming potential of keeping Sabbath for self and for family.

### **Psychological and Emotional Ramifications of Stress and Anxiety**

Psychologists, medical doctors, counselors, and practitioners in the medical field continue to warn that unhealthy levels of stress and anxiety can become toxic to the human body. Likewise, as individuals are members of a larger system in society, it stands to reason that if enough people are adversely affected by stress or anxiety that condition is going to have a negative impact upon society as a whole.

### **Stress and Anxiety in America**

As mentioned early on in this chapter, our society is one that has become overly stressed and anxious as a whole. We are also a society where our culture regarding Sabbath has changed drastically over the past 40 years. At one time, there were ‘Blue Laws’ in many states which prohibited businesses from opening or engaging in commerce on Sunday considered the Christian Sabbath. We have never been a ‘Christian nation; we are for the most part a nation populated largely by those who claim the Christian faith and, as such, Sunday was seen as the general ‘Sabbath’ day. Even though there are plenty of Jewish citizens who still observe the Sabbath on the Friday-Saturday

tradition, the majority of people of faith in our nation have traditionally observed Sunday as Sabbath day.

Today the blue laws have faded away, stores are open seven days a week, and a growing number are open 24 hours a day. At the same time, our nation is reportedly more stressed than at any time in our collective history. Whether or not a direct connection exists is unclear, but certainly enough evidence exists for consideration of a connection if nothing else. A growing number of people in America and in many countries, including people who are Christians, now work on Sundays. At the same time, traditional Christian holidays are gradually being relegated to the area of obscurity.

In this post-modern age, studies have shown that among those who claim the Christian faith, we simply are not engaging in regular Sabbath practices on our given Sabbath day. In fact, outside of one hour spent in worship, Christians (in America) today spend their Sabbath day in about the same way as they would any other day of the week; working, preparing for work, shopping, engaged in sporting events or venues, watching television, going to the movies, or just about anything but reflection, contemplation, prayer, or meditation.

If this is what is happening among laity, then as spiritual leaders we must be, as a majority, following similar patterns of behavior. The Chicago study demonstrated that worship has tangible benefits for those who participate in worship. However, the same cannot be said for those who lead in worship. It is the rare pastor indeed who can both lead and engage in worship at the same time. For most clergy, leading in worship is not a worshipful activity but rather a perfunctory duty where we are focused on keeping the service moving, engaging, meaningful, and 'on time.' The number of occasions when

clergy get time or make time for Sabbath is rare – if at all. Without the ritual of Sabbath practice, clergy are likely to begin experiencing compounding stress and it is my estimation that given enough stress over a continuous period of time clergy quite naturally seek a relief from such by removing themselves from the source of the stress. Many times it would appear that means a departure from the full time ministry.

The sources of stress that come to bear upon clergy are numerous and varied in intensity and duration. It is the combination of intensity and duration of stressors that have the potential to create adverse conditions of stress in the lives of clergy. Given high enough stress levels, threats to well being, relational abuses, and such, sometimes a member of the clergy could be trying to thrive in what would be considered a hostile work environment. According to Dr. Rediger, these types of congregations do exist and are in fact on the rise at least in America.

### **Neurobiology, Anxiety, and Sabbath**

Whenever we engage God, those moments of closeness with the Divine nearly always leaves an impression, or has a powerful impact on us, leading many times to a point of critical decision regarding the things that trouble us. There is a growing field of scientific study known as neuropathology which involves both the scientific as well as the spiritual, in discovering how the brain functions when it comes to stress and regular religious practices, or spiritual disciplines. As powerful and as tangible as the religious/spiritual experience is, the objectivity of scientific observation in the study of neurology and neurotheology can tell us much about the effects Sabbath practice might have on those who suffer from complex trauma, and and who engage with God on a regular basis.

The growing number of congregations that heap toxic or abusive conflict upon their spiritual pastors is increasing. The trauma they experience is every bit as real as the trauma experienced by those whose professions thrust them into life threatening positions. The practice of ministry itself is not necessarily life threatening, but it can become ~~to be~~ perceived as such when one's life calling, occupation, reputation, and ministry are under full assault and the potential elimination (firing) of that position can generate the same autonomic responses as those experienced by law enforcement officers and soldiers. (Interview – Rev. Chris Carlton, Dr. Fred Smoot – Emory Clergy Care.) Pastors can in fact end up with symptoms of Post Traumatic Stress Syndrome or more commonly “Complex Trauma.”

The difference between what clergy experience and what soldiers or law enforcement officers experience is vastly different because much of the time clergy can end up having far many more ongoing traumatic experiences rather than horrific but episodic experiences. PTSD is limited to episodic events. Complex trauma involves highly elevated levels of anxiety (fight or flight response) over extended periods of time, including traumatic experiences that last for days, weeks or perhaps months on end.

In other words, a firefight, an explosion, or a bombing certainly produces traumatic memories. Along with the memories come neurological ‘triggers’ which have the potential to create stress responses in the people who live through traumatic events if they encounter a situation that has similarities. Sometimes smells can trigger a PTSD event, sometimes a sound, other times scenery or a combination of such things – all have the capacity to trigger a Post Traumatic Stress response – fight or flight. However, as traumatic as any one of these events can be, they are specific, time limited, unique, and

only happen once. In other words, on average, law enforcement officers do not experience a firefight every time they go on patrol. Most law enforcement officers will not experience a firefight once a month or every time they encounter a suspicious character. Most soldiers on the front line might experience a firefight every few days, but, even then, there comes a point where they are rotated off the front line and the threats eventually come to an end when rotated home.

The residual effects on those individuals though traumatic events are what produce the Post Traumatic (after stressor) Stress Syndrome, meaning that situations or sensory input that might seem familiar to the situation that caused the trauma can elicit similar traumatic reactions where in reality no threat exists at all. For example, a soldier can be in conversation with a friend and both hear a car or truck backfire. The friend might flinch whereas the soldier would hit the ground in an almost autonomic response of preserving his life. Such situations can be embarrassing but are treatable and recovery from PTSD is possible with therapy and medication.

Complex trauma on the other hand is quite different. Complex trauma is defined as an emotional/behavioral condition which is the result of "...prolonged, repeated trauma." "In contrast to a single traumatic event, prolonged, repeated trauma can occur only where the victim is in a state of captivity, under the control of the perpetrator. The psychological impact of subordination to coercive control has many common features, whether it occurs within the public sphere of politics or within the private sphere of sexual and domestic relations." (Complex PTSD: syndrome in survivors...Judith L. Herman, P. 377) [Also as described in the DSM IV]

Pastors can experience the similar traumas of a ‘firefight’ (defending one’s integrity against false accusations, attacks, surprise attacks, petition drives, efforts to remove the pastor, having to constantly think in strategic terms to preserve their employment, etc. They can experience this sometimes on a daily basis for months on end or nearly every week or every month at board meetings or even before or after worship with a disgruntled member.

### **Stress particular to clergy and relationship to Complex Trauma**

Examples that Herman gives of common causes of complex trauma include those who experience conditions in ‘prisons, concentration camps and slave labor camps.’ (Herman, ) Granted, one might find it a bit of a stretch to compare the role of spiritual leader to the experience of someone in an abusive relationship, a prisoner, concentration camp survivor, or slave labor camp prisoner. At first appearance, such a comparison would seem ludicrous. However, when taking a deeper look at what clergy experience in hostile, dysfunctional, or otherwise ‘difficult’ appointments, there are some striking similarities, especially for those serving in the United Methodist tradition.

Ministers are not and never have been physical prisoners of congregations. However, like being held in a prison, UM pastors have very little, if any, authority over where they will serve. Granted, that is a condition to which pastors agree to honor upon ordination, but the reality for UM clergy is that someone else decides where a pastor will work, what he or she will earn, where he or she will live, where their children will go to school, and what conditions they will work in (hostile, friendly, toxic, etc.) ~~ete~~. In addition, the same authority figures (bishop, cabinet and congregational officials) determine how long a pastor will serve in such a situation.

Raising objections to serving in an appointed or assigned congregation that is known to be hostile, dysfunctional, or difficult, at least in North Georgia, is treated as a chargeable offense (refusing to go where sent) and can potentially result in the revocation of a pastor's ordination credentials. The revocation of clergy credential would render any pastor not only instantly unemployed, but their families would be instantly homeless at the same time because the majority of pastors live in a church owned parsonage. Therefore, in essence, while pastors are not prisoners per se, those serving in difficult or dysfunctional situations actually have very little control over their own lives. The only control pastors really have is how they respond to the events that happen to them.

UM pastors are essentially 'kept' in a system in which they do agree to serve. Obviously, a vast difference exists between the conditions of a concentration camp and a congregation, but sometimes there can be striking and troubling parallels between the operative dynamics of the two situations. The uncertainty of Auschwitz with prisoners not knowing how a guard would react to them at any given time created untold amounts of terror in the prisoners. The wrong look, not moving fast enough, not standing straight enough, or coughing when told to be silent could trigger an enraged reaction from a guard who would beat a prisoner mercilessly – sometimes to the point of death.

Likewise, a pastor not knowing how or when a particularly troubling member of a congregation may explode, go hostile, start a petition drive for their removal, or spread malicious and career ending gossip is quite similar. Not knowing from one moment to the next how an unpredictable or unstable personality in the congregation will react to proposed or suggested changes leaves pastors constantly on guard with elevated levels of anxiety. Not knowing exactly what to expect but expecting an unjustified attack upon

one's character, one's ministry, one's integrity, or one's family could easily be invoked by the least of perceived offenses on the part of the pastor. Not knowing which movement, word, decision, or action could trigger such responses from an antagonist keeps pastors on edge, constantly having to strategize a ~~response to~~ survival response lest they be caught off guard.

The operative factor for clergy is largely a sense of loss of control over one's own fate or future or that one's reputation is being tarnished in the eyes of superiors by the least functional or most toxic of individuals within the congregation. The constant tension experienced in board meetings trying to outmaneuver self serving individuals is exhausting. The constant threats to a pastor's ministry, reputation, or career by caustic, problematic, or toxic individuals within the congregation is very real. Petition drives to remove a pastor are nothing new and cries for "crucify him!" are as old as Golgotha.

A majority of pastors may not experience the trauma of sexual abuse; however, they certainly can experience the trauma of an abusive and powerful person in a congregation that is trying to manipulate, intimidate, or otherwise control them for self-serving purposes. Coercive attempts to control the pastor through verbal attacks or threats to employment can certainly make a pastor feel like a victim, whether that coercion emerges within a powerful person in the congregation or if it comes from those in spiritual authority over them with the power to make their appointments.

UM clergy are regularly threatened with punitive appointments by superiors if the congregation they lead does not pay their apportionments. This puts pastors in a situation where they are accountable for the behavior of others, but have no ability to control others. Pastors have virtually no control over what people give to the church, or where

they designate their giving. However, pastors in our system are held accountable for a congregation's lack of giving to apportionments. This alone generates an inordinate amount of anxiety among UM pastors.

Pastors in the UMC can certainly feel a sense of 'captivity' in the sense that all are highly trained and educated but with an education that is of no use in other occupations. Essentially, UM pastors have nowhere else to go outside of pastoral ministry without exposing themselves and their families to great financial risk. UM pastors are captive in the sense that they dedicate their lives to one specific purpose and that is serving the church. Clergy training is highly focused and particularly specific to that particular endeavor. If driven or tossed out of the ministry, pastors have little option but to take minimum wage jobs even with Masters level of education. With the threat of expulsion from a congregation or forced relocation, pastors often fear for their reputation with the Bishop and cabinet.

Therefore, clergy serving in difficult, toxic, dysfunctional, or sometimes even moderately challenging situations can relate to the feelings or experiences of victims of captivity, controlling personalities, coercive control, and prolonged stress from repeated traumatic events such as toxic conflict. Unable to flee from the stress – as clergy have a duty to remain where appointed no matter the circumstances, it is easy to see where pastors could easily manifest the symptoms of someone who is experiencing complex trauma.

### **Stress specific to clergy and complex trauma**

In an article published by Christian Counseling Today, (*Christian counseling Today, Vol. 20 No. 3, p 29*) author Eric Scalise states that CT generally refers to

“...multiple traumatic stressors that involve direct harm and are interpersonal – premeditated, planned and caused by other humans.” That the events due to deliberate actions on the part of other people “...cause more severe reactions in the victim than trauma that is impersonal...” Victimization “...may be repetitive and chronic...where the effects are compounded, prolonged and cumulative over time because perpetrators become increasingly emboldened and compulsive.” In addition, a sense of rage builds within the victim because they are not allowed to express anger at their tormentor – for to do so ‘would jeopardize their survival.’ (Herman, p. 382) Likewise, most clergy are compelled to keep their suffering at the hands of manipulative, abusive, or coercive parishioners quiet. Socially, we are the ‘leader’ and are not permitted to vent as others are because of our position in the congregational system. Most clergy I know would shout a definitive “AMEN” to that statement, and, certainly, Dr. Lloyd Rediger (author of “Clergy Killers”) would agree that toxic individuals in congregations are certainly capable of filling those behavior patterns and more.

Herman also describes ‘pathological changes in relationship’ that are often experienced by clergy in hostile, dysfunctional, or difficult congregations. That is when ‘the perpetrator becomes the most powerful person in the life of the victim...’ This happens when our every moment is dominated by thoughts or worries about what our tormentor or antagonist may be plotting against us in our absence. As Dr. Rediger states “These people do not stop their torment, until there is a death. Either physical or metaphorical; the end of their ministry.” (Chapter 4, *Betrayed: The Clergy Killer’s DNA Documentary*, 2012)

Deprivation also plays a role in the development of CT. Clergy certainly are not starving, but there are more than enough clergy who could use a substantial boost in pay. Not only financial deprivation, but we can also be deprived of sleep (because of stress), exercise (because of demands on our time), Sabbath rest (because of false expectations that such is excessive time off), and privacy (our lives are lived in a fishbowl – everyone knows our salary, our schedule, and more about us than many are comfortable with.) We are, in fact, quite exposed. One of the methods of control that antagonists will often use on clergy is the threat of decrease or refusal to increase the salary of clergy. “Deprivation of food, sleep, ...exercise....or privacy are common practices” of an antagonist’s method of intimidation or gaining control (Herman, p. 383) by creating the situations which cause a pastor to lose sleep, compromise family, prayer, and exercise time in order to put out fires (often started by the antagonist) and loss of privacy.

Ironically, the victim of such abuses reaches a point where they ‘no longer think of ways to escape, but rather of how to stay alive, or how to make captivity more bearable.’ (Herman, p. 384) All this serves to destabilize a victim and certainly pastors of troubled, dysfunctional, difficult, or toxic congregations have experienced every bit of this and more. So much so that victims can often develop their own behavioral personality disorders that serve to undermine their ability to grow beyond or heal from the traumatic events of their past.

People who are diagnosed with or experience CTPTSD have been described as those who suffer inside abusive relationships such as ongoing physical, relational, or emotional abuse. It is also seen in spouses of people with addictive disease disorders (drugs and alcohol), children who are raised in abusive (emotionally, relationally or

psychologically) situations, and people who live in poverty, never knowing where their next meal is coming from. Counselors, for the most part, have not listed clergy yet as among those who have been diagnosed with CT. However, certainly by virtue of the definition of CT, one can see that pastors serving in toxic, difficult, or dysfunctional appointments can experience much the same symptoms. Dr. Chris Carlton, in an interview with him, confirmed the same in that one does not have to be physically assaulted in order to have a traumatic experience.

The side effects of CT include “impaired memory function, dissociative disorder, hypersensitivity or anxiety, ongoing feelings of guilt or shame, reduced capacity of intimacy leading to social isolation, increases in blood pressure and fatigue.” (Trauma and Traumatic Relationships, E. Scalise *Christian Counseling Today*, Vol. 2 No. 3 pp. 30-31) In addition, sometimes when encountering a triggering mechanism (someone new who looks, acts, speaks like, or in any way reminds the victim of their abuser) happens to a person with CT, they can become ‘frozen,’ or unable to plan, think objectively through a situation, and their judgment can be significantly impaired. (Eric Scalise pp.32)

### **Neuroplasticity and the Brain**

The good news is that through the growing field of neurobiological research, researchers are discovering the amazing ability of the brain to recover from traumatic exposure. Neuroplasticity of the brain, is the study of the brain’s ability to heal itself, or rather, the ability of the brain to eventually ‘rewire’ itself. Dr. David Black and Dr. Jon Kabat-Zin are two pioneers in this area of research and are discovering that the practice of ‘mindfulness’ or in the Christian tradition, prayer, and meditation, are key players in our ability to diminish trigger mechanisms, decrease anxiety, and reduce stress, and serve

to help reframe traumatic events, thus ‘rewiring’ the brain where damage was previously done.

Our ability to sense being in the presence of God, and ‘enhancing our ability to be still and calm in His presence’ (pp. 65) greatly accelerates the capacity of the brain to reprogram itself and re-orient the mind to a healthier perspective of the world. Instead of the world being seen as a dangerous place, the mind changes up this perception to the more accurate description of ‘there are dangerous places in the world.’ This reframing of previous traumatic events is an essential re-wiring of the neurological activity of the brain.

Dr. Andrew Newberg, M.D. has done groundbreaking research in the area of neurobiology and neurotheology. By using magnetic resonance accelerator machines that map the activity of the brain while it is functioning, Newberg and associates have conducted numerous studies which demonstrate the positive impact that spiritual disciplines have on the brain or the changes in the neurological functioning of such. In an article in *Leadership Journal*, Newberg was asked specifically how the spiritual disciplines affect the brain. Newberg claims: “as you grow spiritually, as you change your beliefs, as you enhance your sense of compassion, for instance, this affects the brain. If you practice prayer a lot, for example, the data show that these practices actually change your brain over time.” (*Leadership Journal*, summer 2014 p. 28)

In his book “Why God Won’t Go Away; Brain science and the biology of belief” Newberg shares that the biology of the brain, how we are made, and, specifically, the cerebral cortex is what separates human beings from the animals. It is the portion of the brain which performs all of our conscious, rational, or irrational thought processes. It is

also what gives us an orientation between self and the rest of the world, processes input, and channels such into other areas of the brain for further processing.

The first level of sensory processing Newberg claims: ‘occurs in the primary receptive areas dedicated to each of the five sensory systems.’ These are called the ‘association areas.’ There are four basic association areas of the brain which serve to orient us or help us distinguish between self and the rest of the world. It is this area of the brain that is damaged by complex trauma, but that can also be healed through the practice of spiritual disciplines. (Newberg, 25-30)

Our perceptions of the world, and whether we see the world is a dangerous place or whether we see the world as a place where some danger can exist are all formed, reformed and built in these four areas of the brain. Exposure to complex trauma can in effect create the same type of damage in neurological receptors as a physical injury to the brain. (The Mind, Faith and Interpersonal neurobiology, C. Thompson Christian counseling today, pp. 68)

Through the rituals and practices of rituals such as prayer, meditation, and reflection, the ‘amygdala’ (the sensory part of the brain dedicated to sensing, looking for and alerting to danger) can be desensitized to a level that no longer creates hyper-vigilant responses to otherwise non-threatening triggers. As Newberg found with religious ritual and healing, the practice of the spiritual disciplines can reverse or heal damage done by exposure to complex trauma by restoring our connection to our creator in relationship through prayer and meditation. “Restoring this original union between individuals and their spiritual source is the promise of virtually every known system of belief, from the primal myths of early hunting cultures to all the great religions that flourish today.”

In Christian theology, Jesus provides the pathway to God. It is through Sabbath practice that the pathway is the least obstructed and most direct contact with God. The reassurance that comes to us from such disciplines helps reassure us and provides a safe space in which we can heal from traumatic experiences. “The neurobiology of ritual, however, turns these ideas into felt experiences, into mind-body, sensory and cognitive events that ‘prove’ their reality. By giving us a taste of God’s presence, rituals provide us with satisfying proof that the scriptural assurances are real.” (Newberg, pp. 90-91)

As stress begins with neurological perceptions and awareness and responses to threats, ending in adverse psychological, behavioral, or physiological responses, religious rituals (like Sabbath) have the capacity to bring eventual peace to the mind and soul through regular observance of such on a sustained basis. Without regular Sabbath practice, manifestations of stress only amplify to the point where victims of CT eventually withdraw emotionally (disassociation) or physically (resignation) from the source of the stress or threats. In other words, Sabbath practice can, in fact, have the potential to bring about healing effects for those who engage in such on a regular basis. The question is can Sabbath practice help diminish or reverse the symptoms of complex trauma, which many clergy face?

### **Starting at Home**

Leading or being responsible for any group of people can be an anxiety producing endeavor. Wise leaders, therefore, realize the importance of regular and intentional self care. Spiritual leadership can be anxiety producing largely because of the number and variety of demands and expectations that are placed upon leaders. Moses experienced the same in the wilderness and was eventually helped by breaking the task of leadership into

manageable segments with others helping or assisting. The expectations and demands of people are nothing new and are a natural part of what it means to be a leader – whether spiritual or otherwise.

People who follow leaders often take their emotional response cues from them as well as direction. However, if leaders get caught in the cycle of taking care of everyone else's needs first and tending to their own needs last, they end up weary, spent, or unable to withstand the ordinary pressures of leadership. That seems to be what is happening in the lives of post-modern clergy.

Certainly, in this post-modern age, clergy are aware of the importance of self-care. However, for this same group there seems to be a large disconnect between knowledge of what is healthy and beneficial and making efforts to engage in such on a regular basis. It is the dearth of self-care that seems to haunt so many clergy. The lack of self-care makes clergy more vulnerable to stress and anxiety so while they strive to meet needs that can never be realistically fulfilled, they end up spinning their spiritual wheels in hyper-activity in hopes of doing more will spare them torment. One of the common concerns of clergy is the unrealistic expectations others heap upon them in their role as spiritual leaders. These expectations can become overwhelming to the point of abandonment of self care.

### **Clergy Self-care in the *Book of Discipline***

Self care and exercising personal spiritual disciplines, in particular regular Sabbath practice for clergy, is largely absent from denominational expectations of clergy. Among the 36 mandates listed within our Book of Discipline under 'Duties Of A Pastor,' "Clergy Self Care" or 'Regular Sabbath Practice' is not listed. Everything else takes

priority; care for the church, care for the conference, the congregation, and the community are all enumerated quite clearly. However, not one reference to the importance of self care for those in positions of spiritual leadership can be found. Neither are there any references to the laity encouraging their pastors to engage in regular self care. [‘Responsibilities and Duties of Elders...’ (PP 340 – P. 250, B.O.D.) ] On the other hand we see in the Gospels where Jesus regularly removed himself from the demands of the present and often went away by himself to pray. (Matt. 14:23, 26:42, Mk. 1:35, 6:46)

Among the 36 expectations in the *Book of Discipline*, there is only one that stipulates that the Pastor ‘model and promote’ a particular spiritual discipline for church members. That discipline is not regular Sabbath practice but rather is in the area of faithful financial stewardship. In fact, this is the *only* item listed in the duties of a pastor as a ‘spiritual discipline’ which is tied to a Biblical principle. Nowhere among the mandates is there mention of clergy demonstrating the regular practice of Sabbath or modeling such as a discipline for their congregations. ~~Yet~~, ‘Remember the Sabbath Day, to keep it Holy’ is one of the oldest spiritual disciplines or mandates given to us in the Bible. Keeping Sabbath predates stewardship by millennia.

Granted, the church gathers each Sunday for worship and Sunday is considered the Sabbath for Christians. Studies have demonstrated that apart from one hour in worship on Sunday, modern Christians do not spend their time any differently on the Sabbath, than they do on any other day of the week. This would include clergy. In addition, studies have demonstrated that while participation in worship is beneficial for congregants, none of those same benefits carry over to those who lead in worship. (Ellison)

Most revealing of all perhaps is the fact that, despite my best efforts, I was not able to locate the word “Sabbath” or “Sabbath practice” anywhere among the more than 856 pages of our denominational *Book of Discipline*. Why such an important Biblical mandate has been overlooked the guidelines of how we are to be the Body of Christ could be a factor in why Sabbath practice is not more commonly practiced among clergy. If our spiritual leaders are not replenishing themselves through regular Sabbath practice, it is logical to see where this absence of discipline could be contributing to clergy attrition.

To be fair, the only section in our Book of Discipline that comes close to endorsing the importance of regular Sabbath practice for laity and clergy is found in PP 101, p 48 under **Doctrine and Discipline in the Christian Life**. Listed in relation to evidence for desire of salvation, the three rules of Methodism are listed:

“First: By doing no harm, avoiding evil of every kind...

“Secondly: By ....doing good of every possible sort, and, as far as possible, to all...”

“Thirdly: By attending upon all the ordinances of God.”

Sabbath practice is not listed as a mandate or a discipline but can be implied as perhaps one of the ordinances of God.

As to the importance of the Sabbath day in the Book of Discipline, this is given one short paragraph on page 70, PP103 Article XIV in reference to the “**Confession of Faith of the Evangelical United Brethren Church.**” It reads as follows:

#### Article XIV The Lord’s Day

“We believe the Lord’s Day is divinely ordained for private and public worship, for rest from unnecessary work, and should be devoted to spiritual improvement, Christian fellowship and service. It is commemorative of our Lord’s resurrection and is an emblem of our

eternal rest. It is essential to the permanence and growth of the Christian Church, and important to the welfare of the civil community.”

One small, short, three sentence paragraph (from a different denomination with whom we merged in 1968) out of the 857 pages of directives, mandates, rules, regulations, stipulations, guidelines, and the rest is there any mention of the Lord’s Day. With such a cursory mention, Sabbath practice is absent and obviously not nearly as important as other matters that are firmly and clearly spelled out and broken down into sections, sub-sections, clauses, and standards.

One other mention of Sabbath comes in the section further detailing the three rules of the church (P 103, pgh 73); there is a long list of activities or behaviors we are to avoid that are known to do harm to others. Of the seventeen behaviors listed that do harm, ironically, listed second in order is “The profaning the day of the Lord, either by doing ordinary work therein or by buying or selling.” As has been shown, however, outside of one hour spent in worship – 86 percent of Americans do not do anything differently on the Sabbath than they do any other day of the week. (Barna: Leading Index of Cultural Indicators, P. 87)

At the same time, the mandate on avoiding ‘*Uncharitable conversation, particularly speaking evil of magistrates or of ministers,*’ is routinely ignored or if mentioned, dismissed in congregations that have become dysfunctional or toxic. The discipline of regular Sabbath practice is absent in our *Book of Discipline*; therefore, it is of little surprise that regular Sabbath practice, as a personal or corporate spiritual discipline, has become lost among all the other mandates, rules, regulations, stipulations, caveats, and expectations that we consider critical to being a United Methodist denomination.

### **Training and Education in Clergy Self-care**

Clergy today receive little, if any, formal training in seminary about coping with or leading difficult congregations or in balancing their lives through the implementation of spiritual disciplines. In an on line review of required courses for the M.Div. degree, I found that of the 13 major United Methodist Seminaries, not one single curriculum offered courses, certification, or training in dealing with the realities of conflict in congregational life. Practicum courses in conflict management, mediation, or dealing with antagonists is virtually non-existent in a majority of M.Div. curricula. In fairness, several seminaries do present courses in conflict but only from a very general perspective and most often within the context of conflict being a social justice issue. Asbury Theological Seminary seems to be one of the rare UM institutions focusing on, teaching, and encouraging spiritual formation training and practice for their students.

I am therefore convinced that it is a combination of factors, being the increasing levels of anxiety and stress among clergy coupled with a lack of personal Sabbath practice, that may be contributing the high attrition rates among clergy. Antagonists can be mean spirited, but given a pastor in good emotional, spiritual, and physical health, he or she can easily rebuff even the most pointed of attacks a clergy killer could generate. Not so if the clergy person is weak, weary, anxious, fatigued, and isolated. Serving dysfunctional, difficult, or toxic congregations can be daunting and discouraging, and clergy who do survive those situations are often left with the residual effects of complex trauma.

There are clergy who manage to serve such congregations and do not eventually leave the ministry. They may have experienced verbal, relational, vocational, or personal

abuse, but they are not traumatized, and they do not resign. There seems to be a missing component in the attrition equation that may be a stronger contributing factor than the mere presence of toxicity or conflict within congregations. I am convinced it is the lack of self-care through the abandonment of regular Sabbath practice among full-time clergy that makes clergy more vulnerable to the post-modern stresses of ministry.

It would be a fool's errand if one could by decree or demonstration of a need, completely change the religious bureaucratic environment of the church or the politics of denominational structures. Neither can anyone eliminate evil, emotional sickness, or the other maladies that drive people to be caustic. What can be done to stem the tide of clergy exiting ministry is to find ways to help make clergy stronger. The church can find and encourage ways to help clergy endure, survive, and even thrive in the midst of hostile and sometimes toxic environments. The answer could be as simple as conscientiously honoring God's command to keep the Sabbath Holy.

### **Sabbath Practice as Potential Aid**

Intentional Sabbath practice, as I have experienced and practiced it, is the deliberate 'disengagement from the church' for a period of 6 hours, once a week, for the express purpose of re-connecting or 'remaining connected' with God. The disengagement was not considered a 'day off' as some have misinterpreted it. It is removing one from the location of the most anxiety triggers and, instead, surrounding oneself with reminders of the glory of God's creation. The overall effect of Sabbath practice has been to provide me with a healthier perspective on myself, my calling, and the problems in the local church and my ministry.

Intentional Sabbath practice proved to be a place of relief from stress, an anxiety reducer, and an activity that engaged me with God on a regular basis that I would have not gotten otherwise had I not been intentional about doing so. This project is easily repeatable and I am confident that similar findings could be discovered in other denominational and ministry structures. Without a doubt, the development of intentional Sabbath practice, as endorsed by judicatory officials as a discipline for all clergy to follow, could make a significant difference in every pastor's ability to maintain balance, preserve health, strengthen faith, and persevere in ministry. The only way to know is to begin providing opportunities for this to take place in the lives of our clergy.

That is what this study hopes to demonstrate through a quasi-experimental, pre-post evaluative study with a control group to demonstrate the tangible benefits of engaging in regular Sabbath practice for clergy serving difficult congregations. In addition, and if proven helpful, such a program would be easy to implement throughout all United Methodist conferences in an effort to help clergy and to stem the increasing tide of clergy leaving the ministry discouraged, disillusioned, or emotionally and spiritually damaged.

Mainline Christian denominations are experiencing a devastating loss of clergy through resignations and many of them before their tenth anniversary in ministry. Ministers consistently rank higher than law enforcement today in rates of depression, suicide, hypertension, and addictive disease disorders. Ministry today is stressful regardless of the age but there are certain dynamics of the modern age that some clergy are facing that others in the past have not. The clergy killer, the antagonist, and the

dysfunctional or toxic congregation are among those things that are perhaps a symptom of our post-modern age.

The spiritual disciplines, and in particular, regular Sabbath practice is virtually absent from our lexicon in seminary education as well as denominational expectations of clergy in the performance of their pastoral duties. That clergy are not likely engaging in this on a regular basis could be, and I believe to be, one of the most significant underlying factors which are leading to a disturbingly high rate of attrition among clergy. Clergy can be traumatized in particular ways that result in symptoms developed from complex trauma. The residual effects of such can be debilitating, life changing, and sometimes career ending. However, as real and as devastating as complex trauma is on victims of such, the miracle of the human brain as made by God is capable of repairing if not 'rewiring' itself if given enough time and distance away from the source of the stress and in the presence of God. This is best done, in my opinion, through regular Sabbath practice.

Working harder, working more, working faster or longer is never going to appease the antagonist bent on our destruction. As Rediger says, 'they do not stop until there is a death.' We cannot change that. Neither can we change the flaccid response of judicatory officials to the abuses heaped upon our clergy at the hands of some parishioners or congregations.

What we can do is try to make the clergy stronger and more capable of pushing back against the stressors by engaging in regular Sabbath practice. The creation account in Genesis is not written as rhetoric meant to convince as much as it is literature meant to shape, form, and inform the faith of people who believe in a Divine reason

(intentionality) for all of creation. Ironically, both the Bible and science still leave plenty of room for faith because both still contain plenty of ‘mystery’ or things that we just do not know. One thing we can know is that rest, Sabbath rest, is vital to all of creation and in particular for the overall wellbeing of all of mankind. Those who would ignore, dismiss, compromise, or otherwise abandon this Holy practice do so quite literally at their own peril.

### **Research Design**

Because complex trauma can occur within the realm or context of doing ministry, it is critical that any research design include clergy who are actively serving in difficult appointments and who are able and willing to engage in the research model proposed for the time frame specified. In order to take this concept beyond theory and into the realm of practical application, it is important to design a model that is as close to reality as possible; a model where participants are affected by anxiety as well as helped by the proposed solution. Therefore, the research design I’ve chosen for this project is a quasi-experimental, pre-post evaluative model.

I chose this method because some of the data that would be collected must be considered subjective – data such as journal entries of participants and interpretations of those entries. However, the pre-post evaluations themselves were objective and assessable in that there were measurements of physical health, current levels of stress, social isolation, and emotional exhaustion both at the beginning and the end of the trial period.

This design did not require a control group and did not use random sampling, but, rather, divided participants/subjects into two distinct groups with each group practicing

the same level of engagement in the experiment. The only difference between the two groups was in their location. The first was located in the northeast area of Georgia, the other in the northwest area.

All participants were serving in and had in the past served difficult or challenging appointments in the North Georgia Conference. Each participant was asked to faithfully engage in regular Sabbath practice once a week for a period of at least four hours to as much as six hours per session, or as much time as they could reasonably obtain for Sabbath practice given the demands on their time from week to week.

Using this model in a pre-post evaluative context allowed me to compare and contrast the benefits of regular Sabbath practice as well as compare varying levels of Sabbath engagement. The exact same treatment (Sabbath practice) on all subjects could have decidedly different effects upon different individuals in the group based upon personality, relative pressures for each subject, how each subject tends to handle stress, and where they might be on the anxiety scales when testing in the beginning. Whether or not regular Sabbath practice or occasional but in depth Sabbath practice would prove to be more beneficial had yet to be determined. It was hypothesized, however, that any significant attempts to engage in Sabbath practice would produce at least some trends toward better health and a slight reduction in complex trauma symptoms.

What I was ~~be~~ looking for more than any significant decreases or reverses in complex trauma symptoms or stress levels was for trends. Ten weeks is not enough time to generate a reversal or elimination of symptoms but ten weeks was enough time to begin to see a gradual trend toward such if participants followed the protocol closely.

There were specifics that can be measured such as increases or decreases in blood pressure, stress levels and exhaustion levels, and the additional input of journal entries was helpful in comparing and contrasting the data. Therefore, the flexibility and relative adaptability of a 'quasi-experimental' pre-post evaluative model was best suited to this particular study.

The limitations of such a study were that it cannot control for extraneous variables that may or may not influence findings. This was not thought to be a substantial factor in that all other factors that generate reliability far outweigh the possible influence of random factors if the project design employs tangible aids that meet situational needs.

### **Quasi-Experimental, Pre-Post Evaluative Model**

A strong record of reliability has accompanied many quasi-experimental designs when conducting research, especially in the psycho-social and medical fields. (P. 24, Thyer) Quoting Rubin and Babbie in a 2008 project, they wrote; "despite the lack of random assignment, a well designed quasi-experimental project can have a high degree of internal validity." (P. 255)

Quasi-experimental and pre-post evaluative research models are used quite often in medical research methods. My project is not strictly a medical project, however, it does involve some medical data and feedback as stress is known to have many detrimental effects upon individuals including behavioral, psychological, spiritual, physical, and emotional. Therefore, this is not strictly a medical study but rather is employing an often used research method in the medical fields which may prove most helpful in making connections between the benefits of a spiritual discipline and the physical and emotional impact such would have on participants experiencing complex

trauma. For example, in a review of research methods used in the medical field, one study stated: “In medical informatics, the quasi-experimental, sometimes called the pre-post intervention, design often is used to evaluate the benefits of specific interventions.” (Journal of American Medical Informatics Assoc. 2006 Jan-Feb; 13(1): 16–23. PMID: PMC1380192 The Use and Interpretation of Quasi-Experimental Studies in Medical Informatics. Anthony D. Harris, MD, MPH, Jessina C. McGregor, PhD, Eli N. Perencevich, MD, MS, Jon P. Furuno, PhD, Jingkun Zhu, MS, Dan E. Peterson, MD, MPH, and Joseph Finkelstein, MD) The specific ‘intervention’ in my case would be the implementation of intentional Sabbath practice for clergy serving in stressful appointments.

In addition, if looking for long lasting positive effects from participation in a quasi-experimental research project, such as introducing and participating in regular Sabbath practice to alleviate anxiety related disorders, other research projects have found that as much as two years after the project was complete subjects were still demonstrating success. In a research project called “Project Success,” which sought to instill academic and behavioral disciplines in students who were failing academically and socially, the quasi-experimental design proved to be helpful in identifying areas where students needed extra help as well as improving overall academic performance. One author reported: “*Using a quasi-experimental design that compared students exposed to the program to those not exposed in five schools, we examined the effects of Project Success on grades, absenteeism, and disciplinary problems. ... we found that Project Success had a positive impact on both grades and absenteeism for two years following*

*exposure.*” (The effects of Project SUCCESS on student academic performance: a quasi-experimental study. [Shamblen SR](#)<sup>1</sup>, [Ringwalt C.](#) 2008)

Helping clergy who serve in high stress appointments learn new and healthy ways of engaging in physical, emotional, and spiritual self care could be a long lasting benefit of the study. I believe this project can produce similar, long lasting, positive results for participants.

### **Summary**

In summary, medical journals, psychology journals, counseling and behavioral science journals as well as spiritual formation journals consistently reveal direct links between ongoing stress (complex trauma) and resulting physical, emotional, and spiritual deterioration. Studies conducted by respected medical schools, as in the Duke University Pew study and the Barna research group, reveal the detrimental toll such ongoing stress in ministry is having upon the ranks of our spiritual leaders. Attrition rates among clergy in all mainline denominations are at an all time high, and morale among clergy still serving is at an all time low. The common factor in all of this is increased job stress brought on by dysfunctional congregations or complex trauma experienced by clergy through abusive pastor/parish relationships. The condition is amplified when clergy serving these congregations fail to engage in regular self-care practices.

There are plenty of studies on the effects of medication on persons in high stress situations. There are also studies on the physical, emotional, and spiritual benefits of Sabbath practice. However, the majority of those studies were conducted on parishioners engaging in spiritual disciplines, not clergy. I found no studies relating the benefits of

regular Sabbath practice to helping reduce symptoms of complex trauma in clergy serving in high stress appointments.

There are direct links to complex trauma as often experienced by clergy and resulting symptoms of Post Traumatic Stress Syndrome. The physical, emotional, and psychological effects of exposure to long term and ongoing stress (complex trauma) are significant and can be debilitating if not sometimes deadly. Clergy as a group have high rates of depression, anxiety disorders, addictive disease disorders, cardio vascular problems, and suicide. Everything from heart failure to decreased immune system function to depression to suicide are all linked to ongoing high stress situations where little to no relief from such is present and clergy are as vulnerable to this reality as are any other professional service groups.

Perhaps the most ancient source for the benefits of regular Sabbath practice is the Scriptures themselves. Sabbath, having been woven into the very fabric of creation from the dawn of the age, is revealed in the first book of the Bible (Genesis) and carried forward through to the very end. (Revelation) Sabbath is treated as critical and a life-sustaining practice throughout scripture, and the emotional/behavioral branches of science seem to confirm such. Things wear out. People age. Living things are born and eventually die. Sabbath rest, therefore, does not extend our days as much as it adds to the quality of the days we have.

Dr. Ross (Astrophysicist and Christian) claims that “we still need to nourish and maintain our body and soul. Our human bodies keep us subject to the laws of thermodynamics...we need food, rest, exercise, work, relationships and recreation.” (Ross P. 124) Those laws, thermodynamics one and two, were set in motion from the

instant God said ‘let there be...’ These same laws continue to govern the universe today and Sabbath is still directly related to both laws as it was in the beginning. The passage of time has not eroded, erased, or otherwise diminished the effect of these two foundational laws of physics, which have a direct affect upon the spiritual lives of human beings.

Theologians have affirmed the benefits of Sabbath practice for generations and ~~in~~ ~~fact~~, until recently, most societies regularly observed a cessation of work on the Sabbath. In the United States, these were known as ‘blue laws’ and were on the books and enforced until a few decades ago. Without a doubt, ministry today exposes clergy to more stress than at any time in recent history. Especially clergy that are serving in difficult congregations where systemic anxiety is high and relative levels of self-differentiation are low. Some clergy experience such stress that they decide to leave the ministry while others ‘endure’ and merely survive, not living life to it’s fullest as God has designed. A study researching the direct benefits of intentional Sabbath practice can not only be beneficial to clergy currently serving the church. However if decisive and positive results are revealed, the generalizability of the project could be easily implemented or endorsed as a regular mandate for all clergy serving in mainline denominational structures.

## **CHAPTER 3**

### **METHODOLOGY**

#### **Problem**

All mainline denominations in the United States are experiencing a high attrition rate of pastors. According to research conducted by the Pew Study in 2005 by Duke University, attrition rates average as high as 65 percent in mainline denominations. In fact, seminary graduates going into full time pulpit ministry will not remain in ministry long enough to reach their sixth anniversary. Nationwide, it is reported that as many as 1,500 clergy per month are either forcibly terminated from their charges or are leaving the ministry of their own volition. (Barna Group research)

There are several factors contributing to this high rate such as low pay, lack of personal time, and congregational conflict. However, the top three reasons reported by clergy and recorded by the Pew survey listed unrealistic expectations thrust upon clergy by congregations and denominational officials, ongoing congregational conflict aimed at the pastor and family, and lack of supervisory or judicatory support when facing congregational problems.

Pastors that are remaining in ministry are not faring any better spiritually or emotionally. The Barna Research group reports that at any given time, 50 percent of pastors still serving are so discouraged that they would leave the ministry immediately if they had another way of making a living. Their families are also affected by this post-modern malady. Barna Research Group reports that 84 percent of pastor's spouses wish their spouse would chose a different profession, and slightly more than 90 percent of pastors' children want nothing to do with church life when they become adults largely

because of what they witnessed happening to their parents at the hands of church members.

These dismal statistics are not the result of any singular negative influence on clergy but emerge from a variety of factors that converge to create a hostile and/or discouraging environment for doing ministry. These factors, though many, have a few things in common. The types of stresses that are significant enough to compel clergy to resign before completing their calling are often generated by members of their own congregation and amplified by a lack of support either socially or from judicatory officials. (*Work related predictors of physical symptomatology and emotional well-being among clergy and spouses*” Priscilla w. Blanton and M. Lane Morris, *U. of Tennessee, Review of Religious Research, Vol. 40, no. 4 June 1999, P. 331, 332*) The most common dynamics at work in most difficult congregations include, unrealistic expectations of clergy, a general sense of chronic anxiety among the membership, a perceived sense of loss of control and influence among individuals, displaced anger and aggression aimed at the spiritual leader, and repeated efforts to undermine or remove the pastor. (Blanton and Morris, P. 332) Nearly every resource regarding this issue recounts these dynamics in the same way. All of this serves to create a growing number of hostile, toxic, dysfunctional, or otherwise ‘difficult’ congregations for pastors to serve.

Clergy today receive little if any training in seminary about coping with or leading difficult congregations. Even healthy preventative measures such as spiritual strength training, which includes regular Sabbath practice, accountability partners, and ongoing personal spiritual formation is largely absent from the curriculum of most prominent seminaries.

Most relevant to this particular study was the fact that in the Pew study, the three main reasons clergy cited for leaving the ministry included, ‘unrealistic expectations of congregations and judicatories placed upon clergy, ‘unhealthy demands upon their time,’ ‘ongoing conflict within the congregation as aimed at the pastor and his/her family’ and “lack of judicatory support.” (Hodge and Wenger, 2005) It is the second set of findings (ongoing conflict within the congregation) that were most compelling for this particular study.

It is difficult to nearly impossible to change an unhealthy environment in a church to healthy without a great deal of personal and corporate expense. It is equally as impossible to think that we can alter or change the nature of human politics within denominational structures. What can be done, however, is to find ways to help make clergy stronger, to help them discover resources for spiritual, emotional, and physical strength, and to encourage them to take full advantage of such. We can find ways to help clergy endure, survive, and even thrive in the midst of hostile and sometimes toxic environments. I am convinced the answer could be intentional Sabbath practice as modeled by Jesus in his ministry with the Disciples.

### **Purpose**

The purpose of this research project was to evaluate the changes in physical health, emotional fatigue, and stress levels as the result of a ten-week program of intentional Sabbath Practice for a group of fifteen full-time clergy known to be serving in stressful appointments within the North Georgia Conference.

## Research Questions and/or Hypotheses

### Research Question #1

How did the participants rate in preliminary measures of physical health, emotional fatigue, and stress levels prior to the ten week program of intentional Sabbath Practice?

Instruments used to determine current levels of physical health, emotional fatigue, and stress levels in participants, included a pre-trial blood pressure screening (RQ1), along with three self scoring instruments measuring for levels of levels of anxiety (RQ1), fatigue (RQ1) and social isolation. Rationale for using these instruments is because pastors serving in difficult congregations are most likely to be experiencing complex trauma and these are four of the six symptoms of the presence of the condition.

Symptoms of complex trauma include: loss of memory, insomnia, disassociation, increased blood pressure, increase in anxiety levels, and increased fatigue. The three criteria I selected were chosen because of specific links to symptoms of complex trauma and were easily measured for in a ten week study by measuring at least these three criteria (RQ1 - physical, emotional, and anxiety). Pastors having experienced or are experiencing complex trauma should return test results indicating high levels of anxiety, emotional exhaustion, social isolation, and possibly high or higher than normal blood pressure.

The effects of exposure to complex trauma for any significant period of time (more than ten days) include, but are not limited to, increased blood pressure (hypertension) and heightened anxiety and stress levels, (hyper-reactivity) which are

short term, and emotional exhaustion or depletion resulting disassociation ~~emerge~~ from longer term exposure. These are the top four criteria which can be measured in a pre-post, quasi experimental research project that is limited to a ten-week study.

The results from these measurements will serve as a baseline by which to compare results from the exact same tests at the end of the study period. A second rationale for these four measurements is that any one, two, three, or four areas may or may not be affected in part or in whole by participation in Sabbath practice. In addition, there is the possibility that one area may be affected more than other areas. Whether or not stress and anxiety are reduced because of intentional Sabbath is only part of the equation. Sabbath practice involves both a disconnection from the source of stress as well as a reconnection with God. Ideally, participants will do both, but it is possible that stress can be reduced by simply removing oneself from the source of stress for a significant period of time. However, that act alone is not what is understood as Sabbath practice – that is just time away or time off.

It will be helpful to determine if through complete practice of Sabbath, meaning removal from stressors and reconnection with God, a sense of peace comes from this complete practice. Knowing which practice aided more in reduction of stress will be helpful if there are inconsistencies reported among participants. It is my hypothesis that the majority of clergy who faithfully engage in the process outlined in the study will demonstrate a degree of decrease in at least one if not possibly all elevated symptoms of stress, emotional exhaustion, and possibly blood pressure, as well as registering a significant reduction in a few.

**Research Question #2**

How did the participants rate in measurements of physical health, emotional fatigue, and stress levels following the 10 week program of intentional Sabbath Practice?

At the end of the ten-week study, all participants will again be measured for their blood pressure levels and take for a second time the exact same self scoring instrument they took in RQ1. If Sabbath Practice is followed faithfully and engaged in as prescribed by this study, my hypothesis is that in a matter of just ten weeks clergy who demonstrated high stress levels of anxiety (RQ1) fatigue, emotional exhaustion (RQ1), and blood pressure (RQ1) at the beginning of the study (RQ1) will show the beginnings of a decrease – although slight – in at least three measureable areas. (RQ2) Granted, the decrease is not likely to be such that it could be claimed to be life changing. If it can be demonstrated that a trend toward lower stress and anxiety levels is beginning to take shape within just ten weeks, then it can be presumed that an extension of participation in the study would result in further decreases in stress and anxiety indicators. This would indicate a trend toward better physical, emotional, and spiritual health. Therefore, pastors that are healthier in these areas may be less likely to give up on ministry as quickly as they are doing at this time.

A secondary (subjective) intangible benefit to such decreases, however small, could be an indication of the gradual emergence of a particular type of personality trait that is mostly immune to systemic pressures. Known as the ‘Well differentiated personality.’ (RQ2a) As Murray, Bowen, and Edwin have demonstrated, congregations are closely linked often in deeply enmeshed emotional systems where the causes and effects of anxiety are often bounced around between leaders and parishioners. This

results in triangulation, projection, hyper-sensitivity, and loss of individuality. Leaders who are well differentiated; however, tend to be more immune to these symbiotic stresses and are able to remain connected with the congregation without becoming enmeshed as an unwitting participant in, or victim of, the conflicts. Developing such immunity does not occur naturally but is a byproduct of intentional spiritual formation and emerging emotional maturity. Unless one is actively pursuing such through an intentional discipline, self-differentiation is not as likely to develop within the leader.

A well-differentiated personality or leadership style cannot be developed in a mere ten-week period. It is more of a lifelong pursuit. However, the factors that help develop such a leadership personality can be measured through other factors if observed. This study could prove helpful in Sabbath Practice being one of several disciplines that could possibly help foster a well-differentiated personality.

More often than not, because of a variety of factors including perceived job security, pressure to perform, unrealistic and unclear expectations on the part of judicatory officials and congregants, spiritual leaders in this post modern age have become quite vulnerable to becoming enmeshed in the emotional and anxiety driven responses of a difficult congregation. If parishioners demand, the pastor must produce or risk being removed for failure to meet those demands regardless of whether or not the demands are reasonable, healthy, or within the scope of Christian ministry.

Sometimes an anxious spiritual leader inadvertently projects their own anxiety onto a congregation, thus amplifying an already heightened situation. A stressed out leader can many times amplify the level of anxiety within a troubled congregation without realizing they are doing so. If a highly anxious leader responds to anxiety driven

situations with knee jerk and anxious responses, his or her actions actually fan the flames of systemic anxiety and make the situation far worse than it would be otherwise. In other words, the response of a leader to stress or anxiety within a congregation has a discernable impact upon the response of the congregation and how they handle their own stress and that within the congregation. A good metaphor for this would be if the pilot of a commercial airliner lost an engine and, in response to his own anxiety, spread panic and fear over the cabin intercom by demonstrating uncertainty in his own ability to handle the situation, panic will ensue among the passengers. If however, as trained to do, the pilot first focuses on flying the airplane, addressing the problem, and then informing the passengers that a solution is already underway, such an announcement instills confidence in the passengers and reduces anxiety not only in the cabin but on the flight deck as well (with the other crew).

The work of Edwin Freidman and Murray Bowen in Systems theory validates the theory that a non-anxious leader can help instill relative calm within a system (or congregation.) Likewise, a highly anxious leader will inadvertently generate or amplify displaced anxiety within a system or congregation even if unintentionally so. Studies have demonstrated (Freidman et. al) that clergy who are able to maintain a non-anxious presence in anxiety driven situations are better able to navigate the potentially treacherous waters of congregational conflict than those who are reactionary, paranoid, or anxious. Freidman speaks of this to the greatest length in his post-mortem published book, *"A Failure Of Nerve."* It is a collection of his last essays and highlights the need for leadership to move beyond catering to the unrealistic demands of the most needy (immature) and calling all to a healthier, adult way of interacting with one another.

Conversely, clergy who remain anxious or stressed tend to be more reactive rather than responsive to anxiety driven situations. Given enough stress and anxiety, clergy can become hyper-reactive and such reactions by leaders can in fact amplify the anxiety levels within a congregation. Certainly clergy who have experienced abuse in one congregation tend to be vulnerable to post traumatic stress syndrome and often carry the nightmares and gut reactions (or emotional triggers) from one congregation that was anxious into another congregation that may not be anxious at all. Ironically, an anxious spiritual leader can actually lead to the development of anxiety within a congregation where it was not present previously and, in turn, the situation becomes a self-fulfilling problem generated by a faithful but severely wounded pastor.

Having experienced trauma in a previous appointment, the hyper-reactive clergy tends to be on the lookout for any situations that seem similar to their former appointment and can actually generate anxiety where there was none previously simply by how they respond to natural levels of congregational anxiety. In essence, they go looking for monsters that do not exist and, in their searching, eventually create a monster out of shadows that were previously harmless. Helping clergy find ways to manage and reduce anxiety and stress can help stop the escalating cycle of action/reaction in an anxious system.

Clergy under extreme stress or anxiety tend to make less wise decisions personally and collectively and tend to seek easy or quick answers to dilemmas that may actually require longer time to resolve. However, it can be demonstrated that clergy who are less anxious, less stressed, and less worried tend to make wiser choices, tend to avoid systemic triangulation, and are able to function at healthier levels of functioning than

those who are overly wrought with worry. If measurements taken at the end of the study demonstrate decreases in hypertension, anxiety, disassociation, and fatigue, AND, if residual input from journals kept during this time illustrate an increasing level of confidence, self differentiation, or expanding perspective on self and setting, then it could be argued that regular Sabbath practice is not only something clergy should engage in, but for those serving difficult congregations, it would be a life and ministry saving requirement.

### **Research Question #3**

What aspects of the 10-week program of intentional Sabbath Practice seemed to have the greatest impact on the observed changes in physical health, emotional fatigue, and stress levels of the participants?

Clergy in this study were asked to keep a journal of their experiences, containing reflections on their moods and insights gained during their time in Sabbath practice. (RQ 3) At the end of this study, there should be emerging evidence of an increasing level of hope, confidence, peace, or re-emergence of joy in ministry as reflected in their journals. (RQ 3) Journal entries are an intangible set of data that cannot be measured but is helpful and can be reviewed and compared with the data (RQ 2) which emerges in test comparisons from beginning to the end of the process. This also should help determine which specific practices were most helpful to them in reducing stress and anxiety.

One additional instrument that was used at the end of the study was an online survey highlighting which practices each one engaged in the most and, in their assessment which practices helped reduce stress and anxiety. (RQ 3a) For example:

Sabbath Practice includes two basic activities. The first is the process of disconnecting from stressors by removing oneself from the source of stress and second, is (RQ 3a) reconnecting or connecting deeper with God (RQ 3b) through one of a variety of spiritual disciplines. It is nearly impossible to effectively reconnect with God while being bombarded with demands, projects, complaints, and deadlines such as sermon preparation, conflict mediation, and daily administration.

If clergy merely disconnect from the sources of stress, that alone might be of some help. If nothing of strength or reassurance from God emerges during the disconnection period, the result is that nothing more than a 'time out' has taken place. It is critical; therefore that both disconnection from the stressors and connection with God occur so that inspiration, assurance, rest, and peace from God can infiltrate the time away from distractions, helping build spiritual strength and stamina in the clergy.

Data could also reveal that disengagement from the source of stress alone is enough to bring about healthy change, but it is doubtful it would be long lasting change as the second half, which is the restorative, is missing. This was determined from the data gathered. It was interesting to see which helped more – disengagement from the stress or reconnection with God. Concerning reconnecting, or connecting deeper with God, it helped to know which particular spiritual discipline of those suggested to participants, appeared to be of most value to the participants. (RQ 3c)

What clergy choose to do to engage them or connect them with God during the disconnection period is of particular interest in this part of the research. What seems to connect one person with God may have no effect upon another. There are likely some common activities where a majority of the participants found reconnection to be the

strongest. This information is most likely to come out of reflection in their journals and feedback on the study at the end of the ten-week trial period.

In addition, clergy may show signs of high stress levels in the beginning and at the end of the study period but claim incredible progress as a result of participating in the study. Journal entries that run contrary to individual results may help illuminate such dichotomies of experience vs. reality.

This will also help determine specifically which Sabbath practices (RQ 3c) led to the greatest overall benefits for participants. The Sabbath practices that were included in the instruction manual for participants include activities that are restorative, creative, contemplative, reflective in nature, or that allow a participant to engage in such while participating in the activity. Participants were asked to select their favorite activity for such purposes and remain with those activities for the remainder of the study. These practices include;

- (RQ 3c) Walking, hiking, camping, outdoors activities
- Gardening, painting, drawing, sculpting, for personal pleasure
- Journaling, reading, praying, relaxing
- Fishing, sailing, canoeing,
- Knitting, sewing, crafting, creative writing, Quilting
- Wood carving, woodworking, wood sculpting
- Photography, photo-journaling
- Others as suggested by participants.

Qualifiers for such activities are that the activity be of such a nature as to avoid physical exhaustion or depletion. Exercise is good, but it is not Sabbath. Activities which are

competitive (even against self) are also discouraged. Jogging may be an acceptable activity, if not training for a marathon, for conditioning, weight loss, or production.

The Sabbath practices that should be engaged are the types of activities that encourage or generate rest, contemplation, reflection, relaxation, renewal, or regeneration. It is my hypothesis that these practices, among other practices such as worship and prayer, are the kinds of activities that serve to help clergy disconnect from the stresses they endure and open the mind, heart, and spirit to the voice of God through regenerative activity. These are the types of activities that have led to positive results in other studies.

The spiritual disciplines are both corporate and private, but if one never engages the disciplines on a private level, no amount of leadership in the corporate disciplines is going to have any benefit for the leader.

It is hypothesized that the data gathered from participants will demonstrate a trend toward better health. The project is just ten weeks long which means it is not long enough to determine if these changes could be life/ministry saving practices. However, if the data suggest a significant trend – even small – in the direction of better health in all three measurable areas, this could indicate that further engagement would only serve to amplify the increases in health and decreases in stress and exhaustion. Therefore, looking for trends in data (RQ 4) was most helpful in determining to what extent the regular practice of Sabbath may or may not have on individuals experiencing complex trauma.

If, as I propose and as other studies have shown, regular Sabbath practice is effective in helping diminish the negative effects of stress, then this information could be most helpful in encouraging all clergy to adopt such practices in order to stem the tide of

increasing clergy attrition rates due to exhaustion and burnout. If we manage to do nothing more than disconnect from the source of our stress, that alone can bring about some degree of decrease in anxiety – even if on a temporary level. If Sabbath is lived as was intended by God, then disconnecting from the stressors makes it easier for us to more deeply re-connect with the true source of our hope, energy, spirit, and life and that is God. The combination of the two practices (disconnecting from sources of stress and reconnecting with source of peace, life, energy etc.), if this is done on a regular basis for a significant amount of time, it is quite possible that signs of a growing sense of inner peace may begin to emerge in the life of the pastor. If signs of a sense of inner peace are not prevalent, certainly signs of a reduction in stress will emerge.

### **Population and Participants**

Participants selected for this study came from three primary sources: self reporting, recommended for participation through a District superintendent and/or invitation to participate extended by director of Emory Clergy Care, Atlanta Ga. The basic criteria for participants included the need to be ordained clergy serving in full time appointments and doing so in what is understood to be a ‘difficult’ congregation to serve. (see context for congregational qualifiers) Participants ranged in diversity according to age, gender, race, and tenure within the ministry.

### **Design of the Study**

The research design is a quasi-experimental, pre-post evaluative study which will involve fifteen clergy from the North Georgia Conference of the United Methodist Church. I selected this design primarily because it is used mostly in medical and psychological studies to help determine if intervening treatments for a particular disorder

have discernable effects upon the subjects. Such a design also lends itself well to the evaluative process in comparing and contrasting the preliminary testing results with the post-project test results to determine effectiveness of proposed treatment.

### **Time Frame**

If approved, this project would run for a period of at least ten weeks. Ideally, the time frame would be from the last week in August 2015 through the second week of November 2015. This amount of time would be critical for the purpose of demonstrating the minimal effectiveness of the project. Studies continue to affirm that in order to set or break any habit of regularity, the normal human being requires at least thirty days in order for a sustained change to take effect. Given a time span of sixty days, this ensures that not only has the new discipline been engaged but, hopefully, rooted in new patterns of spiritual discipline such that the subjects would continue on this path beyond the study stage. Having seventy days, I believe, will give more reliable data as to overall effects of the project.

In addition, Fall is typically one of the busiest seasons for clergy in that new ministries are starting up, school is back in session, worship attendance increases, charge conferences take place, and preparations for Thanksgiving and Christmas are on the front burner of things to be accomplished. This is the time of year most clergy would be tempted to compromise their Sabbath time but is also precisely the season of year when they could benefit most from such a practice. The time is ideal considering the potential benefits as well as the potential distractions which participants will have to contend with on a weekly basis.

**Information Shared**

Information on results was shared with all participants at the end of the study. This data became a part of the overall project, but participants' identities remain anonymous at all times. If anything from this study is shared with the North Georgia conference, it would only be the research and numerical results from pre-post trial data.

**Reporting and Accountability**

Each participant recorded their personal experiences through a journal. In addition, I will send out an email reminder to each participant every week, reminding them of their approaching chosen Sabbath time. I also called their offices during their selected time frame to see if they were at work or out of the office. This was critical for obvious reasons, however, given the reality of the demands of ministry, there must remain some degree of flexibility built in (with make up times) for those who have pastoral emergencies that interfere with their ability to fully participate in Sabbath that week.

Worst case scenario would have been that one or two participants found it difficult to impossible to attend to such practices on a regular basis due to ministry demands. Such a revelation would have been self affirming if nothing else regarding the over-arching demands placed upon clergy such that they could not even participate in a sixty day trial study of Sabbath. This was the case with three participants: two who dropped out before the study began then two who dropped out after the study began.

If there were measurably high levels of stress that clergy live with, (in the beginning instruments – RQ 1) what I hoped to be able to demonstrate is how regular Sabbath practice can help alleviate some of the symptoms associated with complex

trauma and stress. (RQ 2, 3 & 4) My hypothesis was that at least one, if not most, of the clergy in the study would demonstrate decreases in symptoms of complex trauma during the study as a result of their engaging in regular Sabbath practice. At the same time, due to the nature and demands of ministry, I expected a small number of participants would drop out – hopefully no more than four. This was reflected in the post trial surveys taken at the end.

The study group as a whole would hopefully begin to show a gradual rate of decline in daily stressors or their perception of such as they continued to engage in regular Sabbath practice over the duration of the trial period.

### **Instrumentation**

The types of measuring instruments used include three standardized, self-scoring inventories designed to measure relative levels of anxiety, fatigue, and comfort levels in social settings. Both groups took the same tests at the beginning and at the end of the project. Results and comparisons between scores at the beginning of the project and at the end of the project were then compared and contrasted with the amount of time spent in actual Sabbath practice to determine what effects and to what degree, different spiritual disciplines had on participants.

### **Variables**

The independent variable in this study was the ten week program of intentional Sabbath practice for 14 clergy who are serving difficult congregations in the North Georgia Conference of the United Methodist Church. The dependent variables were the changes measured before and after the study, in participant's physical health, fatigue, social isolation, and anxiety levels.

## **Reliability and Validity**

The reliability and validity on each of the scoring instruments were cataloged in the preface to each study. To quote the study:

“Neuro-QOL is a set of self-report measures that assess the health-related quality of life (HRQOL) of adults and children with neurological disorders. Neuro-QOL instruments were developed through a collaborative, multisite NINDS sponsored research initiative, David Cella, Principal Investigator, to construct a psychometrically-sound and clinically-relevant health-related quality of life measurement tools for individuals with neurological conditions. Neuro-QOL is comprised of item banks and scales that evaluate symptoms, concerns, and issues that are relevant across disorders along with instruments that assess areas most relevant for specific patient populations.”

### **Definitions for terms used in measuring instruments:**

**Fatigue.** Fatigue includes a variety of sensations ranging from basic tiredness to an overwhelming, and sometimes debilitating sense of exhaustion, that decreases one’s capacity for physical activity, spiritual engagement, social involvement or mental activities.

**Anxiety.** Anxiety is related to unpleasant thoughts or feelings mostly associated with a sense of fear (e.g. fearfulness, feelings of panic). This includes feelings of helplessness, worry and hyper-arousal or hyper-vigilance (e.g., tension, nervousness, restlessness, overly concerned about insignificant sounds, etc.).

**Social Comfort.** Feeling socially comfortable involves aspects of a persons life that relate to a sense of feeling at ease, without anxiety or fear in a wide variety of social settings. This could be anything from being the new person in a group of well connected friends to feeling comfortable in a social situation that one is mostly unfamiliar with, such as dining in a five star restaurant.

**Response Options.** (From the study manual)

“The term response options refers to the set of answers a respondent can choose from when responding to a question or statement. “All Neuro-QOL items employ five response options (1= Not at all, 2=A little bit, 3=Somewhat, 4=Quite a bit, 5=Very much.) To the extent possible, the wording of response categories was kept consistent within banks and a limited degree of variation in response options was used across banks. This was done to ease patient burden. Some flexibility in response choices within banks was considered important; however, to capture the range of patient experience in a domain (intensity, frequency, duration). Therefore, most banks employed a common set of response options for intensity (i.e. “Not at all” to “Very much”) and frequency (i.e., “Never” to “Always”)”

This information comes from the manual which accompanies the self scoring inventories, as an explanation to the participant of how their responses are weighed or gauged.

**Data Collection**

This project involved fifteen clergy serving difficult congregations within the North Georgia Conference of the United Methodist Church plus one pastor serving a Southern Baptist congregation in Atlanta Ga.. The clergy participated in a ten week study involving regular Sabbath practice once a week for periods of either four hours or six hours at least once per week. Participants took four standard self scoring tests in the beginning, measuring blood pressure, levels of anxiety, fatigue, and social isolation.

During the trial period, participants engaged in Sabbath rest or practice on a weekly basis and keep a journal of insights, questions, and observations that arose during that time. At the end of the trial period, they took the same four measuring tests again: (blood pressure, current anxiety level, social isolation and fatigue levels)

Data from both series of tests were compared and evaluated along with journal entries of each individual. This was to determine if the regular practice of Sabbath rest for these clergy served to reduce (minimally or substantially) any of the symptoms normally

associated with complex trauma. What I was looking for more than anything else was a trend, ever so slight but nevertheless a trend, toward healthier adaptation

The research project involved at least eight phases. The first phase involved gathering all participants in one location at one time. During this phase, I gave an overview of Sabbath practice and described to the participants what I was asking each of them to do on a weekly basis.

Phase two involved administering preliminary test instruments. Each participant submitted to individual blood pressure measurements by a certified registered nurse and Medical Doctor who recorded measurements in their individual files. Each participant was then given three instruments which were self scoring: one measuring for presence of fatigue, one measuring for levels of anxiety, and another measuring for levels of disassociation or social isolation. In addition, each individual selected the one day of the week and a regular time frame they intend to use for their Sabbath practice time.

Phase three involved the individual implementation of the project. Each participant would agree to engage in this practice on their own but with weekly accountability reminders from me either by email or survey or both. The weekly accountability reminders were phase four.

Phase five was the one follow up session where all participants gathered together again on a pre-determined date. During this gathering, I lead them through a debriefing and general discussion about their experiences during the trial period. Participants shared highlights from journal entries but did not want them included in their individual file. They did agree to allow me to write down summary quotes. In addition, all participants again submitted to blood pressure measurements as well as took the exact same

instruments measuring for emotional exhaustion and stress levels as they did during the first phase.

Phase six involved collection and review of all data, including review of journal entries and taking note of significant moments demonstrating progression or increased levels of health. Phase seven involved a free two day spiritual formation retreat for all participants, focusing again upon the benefits of regular Sabbath practice for clergy serving difficult congregations. Data from the survey was shared and discussed. Phase 8 was the final write up of results, data, and data analysis.

### **Scoring**

The instruments I used were a subset of measuring instruments from an organization named “PROMIS.” PROMIS stands for Patient Related Outcome Measuring Instrument Systems. They provide free self scoring (PDF) tests or computerized tests for clinical research and practice. PROMIS has many instruments available for use with adults and children as well as for people undergoing severe illness. Instruments measure concepts such as pain, fatigue, anxiety, and well being, among other criteria. They provided short forms with 4 to 10 items per concept or computerized adaptive tests (CAT).

The self-scoring instruments I used all came from the Neuro-QOL (Quality of Life) sections as these appear to be most closely related to the symptoms of those suffering from complex trauma. Neruo-QOL is also a set of self reporting measures that “assess the health-related quality of life of adults and children with neurological

disorders.” (PROMIS Facilitator Guidelines, P. 2) Since complex trauma is considered a neurological disorder, these tests will work well with the findings I hoped to achieve. According to the provider, ‘Some or all items can be administered with the sum or the total raw score used in analyses.’ (PROMIS Facilitator Guidelines, P. 3)

Again, from the manual: “T-score distributions rescale raw scores into standardized scores with a mean of 50 and a standard deviation of 10. Thus, a person who has a T-score of 60 is one SD above the average of the referenced populations, either the US general population or clinical populations. A T-score of 60 is one SD worse than the averaged reference population.” (PROMIS Facilitator Guidelines, P. 7)

**Table 3.1. Direction of Neuro-QOL Scores**

Direction	Domains
High scores indicate <u>worse</u> (undesirable) self-reported health	Anxiety, Depression, Anger, Fatigue, Emotional and Behavioral Dyscontrol, Sleep Disturbance, Stigma, Pain

**Table 3.2. Pre trial Adult Anxiety Scores**

Anxiety 8-item Short Form					
Raw Score	T-Score	SE	Raw Score	T-Score	SE
8	36.4	5.2	25	59.3	1.8
9	42.1	2.9	26	60.1	1.8
10	44.3	2.4	27	60.9	1.8
11	45.9	2.1	28	61.8	1.8
12	47.3	2.0	29	62.6	1.7
13	48.4	1.9	30	63.4	1.7
14	49.5	1.9	31	64.2	1.7
15	50.5	1.8	32	65.1	1.8
16	51.4	1.8	33	65.9	1.8
17	52.3	1.8	34	66.8	1.8
18	53.3	1.8	35	67.8	1.9
19	54.2	1.8	36	68.9	2.0
20	55.0	1.8	37	70.0	2.1
21	55.9	1.8	38	71.5	2.3
22	56.8	1.8	39	73.3	2.7
23	57.6	1.8	40	76.8	3.8
24	58.4	1.8			

**Table 3.3. Pre trial Adult Fatigue Scores**

<b>Fatigue 8-item Short Form</b>					
<b>Raw Score</b>	<b>T-Score</b>	<b>SE</b>	<b>Raw Score</b>	<b>T-Score</b>	<b>SE</b>
8	29.5	4.4	25	52.3	1.7
9	34.1	2.7	26	53.3	1.7
10	36.5	2.2	27	54.4	1.7
11	38.2	2.0	28	55.4	1.7
12	39.5	1.9	29	56.5	1.8
13	40.7	1.8	30	57.6	1.8
14	41.8	1.7	31	58.8	1.8
15	42.8	1.7	32	59.9	1.8
16	43.8	1.7	33	61.1	1.8
17	44.7	1.7	34	62.3	1.8
18	45.6	1.7	35	63.5	1.8
19	46.5	1.7	36	64.8	1.9
20	47.4	1.7	37	66.2	2.0
21	48.4	1.7	38	67.9	2.2
22	49.3	1.7	39	70.1	2.7
23	50.3	1.7	40	74.1	4.0
24	51.3	1.8			

**Table 3.4. Adult Neuro-QOL Item Bank Standard Error and Reliability by T-scores**

Item Bank	N		T-Scores								
			10	20	30	40	50	60	70	80	90
Anxiety	513	SE	9.7	8.8	5.9	2.4	1.4	1.3	1.5	3.4	6.9
		Reliability	0.06	0.23	0.65	0.94	0.98	0.98	0.98	0.88	0.53
Fatigue	511	SE	9.9	8.90	3.6	1.4	1.3	1.3	1.6	4.2	8.5
		Reliability	0.02	0.22	0.87	0.98	0.98	0.98	0.98	0.83	0.28
Social Isolation	513	SE	9.5	5.60	1.6	1.0	1.0	1.1	3.4	8.7	9.9
		Reliability	0.10	0.69	0.98	0.99	0.99	0.99	0.88	0.24	0.01

**Table 3.5. Adult Neuro-QOL Item Bank Calibration Sample T-Score Means and Standard Deviations, and Distributions by Percentile**

Item Bank	# Items	N	Mean	SD	P5	P10	P25	P50	P75	P90	P95
Anxiety	21	513	48.93	9.48	30.98	36.01	42.22	48.93	56.11	60.94	63.16
Fatigue	19	511	49.76	9.93	32.88	36.45	42.82	50.01	56.95	61.55	65.64
Social Isolation	23	513	51.28	9.82	36.03	38.78	45.69	51.80	57.67	63.17	68.32

This project included several instruments for measuring trends in physical and emotional health among participants both before and after their experience of intentional Sabbath practice. Data collected from this study included self-reporting scores on three instruments: one measuring levels of fatigue, another measuring anxiety, and a third measuring current sense of well being. A fourth set of data included blood pressure measurements as taken and recorded by a registered nurse and Medical Doctor for each participant. All four of these measurements were taken twice – once at the very beginning of the study and then again at the end of the study.

The other data collected included summations of personal reflections from each of the participants about their experiences during the ten week trial period as gathered from

the journals they were asked to keep. It was in this fourth data set that I looked specifically for how long it took each participant to disengage from stressors and how long they were able to enjoy reconnection with God. Again, this was a self reporting data set that was explained at the beginning of the trial period.

A total of fifteen volunteers (all clergy serving full time, difficult appointments in the N. Ga. Conference) were broken into two groups (A & B). Groups A and B were asked to practice Sabbath once a week for a period of four to six hours. This was to allow for flexibility in participation and ensure compliance as much as possible. Participants in group A were from the northeastern part of Georgia and participants in group B were from the northwestern part of Georgia.

Whether their participation was four or six hours, what was also helpful was input from the participants on how long participants perceived it took them to adapt to the Sabbath time as a vital part of their regular work week. Again, a complete reduction of stress is not likely to take shape in just ten weeks. What I hoped the data would show would be trends toward an overall reduction in stress, anxiety, fatigue, and blood pressure coupled with a healthier and more well balanced state of being while in the midst of an anxious situation. If Sabbath practice helps clergy to relax and reduces stress, my hypothesis was the reconnection with God would prove strong enough to begin a healing process for those suffering from CT and a strength building process for those that are simply overly focused on work rather than spiritual formation.

The general timeline for this project was a ten-week period between the months of August and November of 2015. It also included a beginning one-day preparation retreat where data sets were collected as well as a one-day 'debriefing retreat' held after the

project was complete. It was also a time for collecting the second data set and personal reflections from participants regarding their experiences during the trial phase. All instruments and data used were confidential – no names of individuals or congregations were revealed in the study. Names attached to quotes were imaginary names used to protect the identity of the participant.

During my time with both groups, I introduced them to the program study, gave out their materials, and gave instruction on what was understood as Sabbath practice for purposes of this study. Each participant was given a personal journal along with a copy of “**Your Personality And The Spiritual Life**” by Reg. Johnson, and each agreed to take four tests at the beginning and end of the trial.

Other materials they were given included a list of Sabbath activities, divided into categories based on general personality types: introvert, extrovert, creative, reflective, etc. From this list, participants choose their Sabbath activity or activities for the duration of the project. Participants could select more than one activity but were asked to engage in only those activities selected during the project. Just plain ‘resting’ was also one of the choices available to them.

After orientation and introduction of the project, participants submit to taking four measuring instruments, three of which were self scoring. The first measurement was a recording of each participant’s blood pressure. We actually took two measurements each in order to get a solid average. That average was recorded in their individual files. Next, participants were given a written, self scoring instrument measuring current levels of fatigue, anxiety, and social isolation. These were short tests, taking only a few minutes each to complete. The second will be a self scoring test for Fatigue and the third will be

measuring for social isolation. These were produced by PROMIS group and focuses on Quality of Life issues for men, women, and children undergoing unusual stress in life either through work, illness, or other challenges. These particular tests are geared specifically for adult men and women. Upon completion of each instrument, they were marked 'beginning of trial,' and placed in each individual's personal file. The same tests were administered to them again after 10 weeks of Sabbath practice. The tests were the same, but they were marked to identify each one as pre or post test data.

I asked participants in both groups (A & B) to keep a journal of personal insights during their trial period and encouraged them to enter both positive and negative feelings during the project. In particular, I asked for a summary of journal entries from each participant on regarding their Sabbath engagement which were coded according to the measures stipulated previously.

The preliminary tests were all kept in each individual's sealed file until the completion of the project. Upon completion of the project, I gathered both groups again as I did in the beginning at separate times. During this time, I gathered their journal summaries and they again submitted to the same testing instruments as they did in the beginning. When each participant had completed their testing, ending test results were marked as 'end of project' and stored in their file. Although I had hoped to keep each individual's personal journal summaries, the group asked that I merely record highlights and return originals to them. Their personal journals were returned to them after significant comments/reflections had noted.

Each participant's test results were kept in an individual file. It was from there I compiled the data. Data for each group was kept separate and used for comparison

purposes for discerning the relative effectiveness of regular Sabbath practice. Data from each group was kept separate from the other group data at all times in order to avoid cross over in analyzing data.

### **Data Analysis**

The first step in analyzing data was gathering scores from the pre tests, the T scores, and the mean and standard deviation for the pre tests and the post tests for each group of participants. Loading all this data to a spread sheet gave raw scores and T scores for each individual and the groups as a whole. From there, a numerical comparison between the national average scores and individual T scores was noted.

Pre-trial scores for each area tested, blood pressure, anxiety levels, isolation levels, and fatigue levels, were compared with national averages. Average figures for the group as a whole were also noted and compared with aggregate national averages.

The same process was used for analyzing the post-trial data scores. Notations were made where there were significant numbers above average in all areas tested and for the group as a whole. Observations were made looking for any possible trends in the two data sets that would indicate the beginning of decreases in stress levels, fatigue levels, social isolation, anxiety, or adverse physical symptoms.

Radical shifts in numerical values or significant decreases in areas tested were not expected. Instead, it was anticipated that with just ten weeks the most that would possibly appear would be slight decreases in one or two areas for each individual. From those slight decreases, a projection could then be made considering an extension of the project as to how long it would take to see any data that registered as unhealthy or above average to begin to register below average. Again, radical shifts, reversals, or marked

decreases in stress symptoms were not anticipated but rather small trends in one or more areas were the expected. Ten weeks was not a long enough time frame to eliminate the effects of complex trauma. Therefore, looking for trends or patterns in the data that were emerging was the anticipated outcome.

Analysis was done using pre and post-trial data sets to determine if regular Sabbath practice had a discernable impact on participants and, if so, how much of an impact and over what period of time did the impact(s) emerge. If participants showed no trend toward a decrease in symptoms, that would not necessarily mean Sabbath practice had no effect. It could have simply meant that not enough time was given to the study to begin to notice differences. This is where journal entries would be of great help. Again, I am expecting only slight movements of one to perhaps four percentage points in reduction of symptoms. Healing from complex trauma is a long process often involving a combination of counseling, stress reduction exercises, medication, or a combination of all three. This trial study did not include counseling, medication, or any input from either.

Analyzing the data for trends showing decreases in stress, exhaustion, etc. as well as (weekly) increasing levels of engagement in Sabbath revealed the potential long term positive effects for clergy who engage in regular Sabbath practice. This is where the weekly surveys from each participant were helpful. The information from the two question surveys helped determine if participants were able to get Sabbath time in and how much time they were actually able to give to Sabbath practice each week. The weekly surveys helped reveal an increasing pattern of Sabbath time spent during the ten week period. Each week brought ups and downs, but, over the entire ten week time frame, data showed that individuals and the group as a whole were getting in increasing

levels of Sabbath time each week. This affirmed that the process was having a positive affect most likely because practices that are not perceived as helpful in reducing stress are rarely followed through to completion.

Therefore the data in this trial included:

- Blood pressure readings for each participant, beginning and end.
- Weekly Sabbath engagement time for groups A & B. (Weekly survey)
- Self-scoring anxiety level indicator
- Self-scoring social isolation indicator
- Self-scoring emotional fatigue indicator
- Journal entry summaries of significance (insights, indications of reduced or increased stressors) for any that are submitted

### **Ethical Procedures**

Each participant gave their informed consent to participate in the research project. All scores from testing instruments and data provided by such for each participant were treated with complete confidentiality. The clergy were divided into geographic groups (A & B) and assigned a unique identifying coded number within each group. For example: Fred Jones was participant A-001, Kathleen Adams was participant B-003, etc. No names of participants or the congregations in which they served were revealed in any part of the study.

Copies of signed orders of informed consent were kept on file along with contact information for each participant in a separate file in locked filing cabinet accessible only to the project director. Ensuring anonymity was key to receiving the most accurate data possible. Participants were all from the North Georgia Conference but did not know one

another or know one another well enough to know where each were serving. In addition, the two groups met separately in the eastern and the northwest areas of the conference. The physical distance between participants likely discouraged causal ‘cross talk,’ and the relative large size of the conference (1150 clergy) ensured that the likelihood of clergy knowing one another extremely well ~~will~~ was only slight.

## **CHAPTER 4**

### **FINDINGS**

#### **Problem and Purpose**

It is my hypothesis that it is not so much the challenge of pastoring in unhealthy or dysfunctional congregations that is contributing to the high attrition rate of clergy in America, but, rather, it is the lack of intentional self-care that makes clergy more vulnerable to stress and anxiety. It is in a state of weakened desperation that clergy likely resign from the ministry rather than strength of conviction to another calling. It is the absence of regular Sabbath practice that makes clergy more vulnerable to stress, thus compelling them to give up in difficult situations rather than pressing through.

There are certainly multiple factors that go into this theory which will be examined in this project. Simply put, if clergy were taking better care of themselves by attending to regular Sabbath once per week, it is very likely that such regular practices would be helpful to clergy in reducing the symptoms associated with complex trauma and, in turn, give them greater perspective and spiritual strength to face the challenges of ministry in the post modern era.

The purpose of this research project was to evaluate the changes in physical health, emotional fatigue, isolation, and anxiety levels, as the result of a 10-week program of intentional Sabbath Practice for a group of 14 full-time clergy known to be serving difficult congregations within the North Georgia Conference.

#### **Participants**

Initial participants included fifteen ordained United Methodist Clergy and one Ordained Southern Baptist Clergy serving congregations as a pastor on a full time basis.

The Methodists of course were serving under appointment within the North Georgia Conference. One participant was a Baptist pastor who was serving a dying congregation on the outskirts of Atlanta and asked to participate in the study on his own. He found out about the study through a workshop I led a few months earlier on clergy health and spiritual strength training and asked if he would qualify as a participant. Given the circumstances of his appointment, he qualified.

Participants were serving in congregations which they described as being difficult – and fit the criteria – due to the presence of several factors at work in their churches. These included the presence of ongoing congregational infighting, (power struggles) conflicts with the pastor or other leaders in the church, (expectations) pressure to produce in a dying area, (congregational anxiety) unrealistic expectations of the pastor, or membership resistance to growth.

In addition to diversity between denomination, tenure, age, and gender, the one common characteristic that each participant shared with all other participants to a greater or lesser degree is each was serving in either a difficult or demanding congregation.

Participants were selected in one of three ways:

- Participants self identified as serving a difficult congregation and expressed interest in being a part of the study, or...

- Participants came via recommendation by their district superintendents, knowing the difficulty of the appointment they were serving or...

- By invitation via Emory Clergy Care through the former director Rev. Chris Carlton who works directly with stressed clergy.

Candidates for the study were included not based on ability but based on the known challenges each faced in the appointments they were currently serving.

A breakdown of the demographics of the group follows:

**Table 4.1. Participant Demographic Breakdown**

Study #	Age	Male	Female	Ethnic	Mar	Single	Div	Ch Home	Ch. Out	Ttl yrs in Min	Ttl current	Mbr
A001	59	1		W	M					30	5	225
A002	57		1	B	M			0		23	3	125
A003	58	1		W	M			0		33	8	75
A004	57		1	B	M					15		
A005	62	1		W	M			0	2	26	3	258
B006	38	1		W	M			1	0	8	2	532
B007	63		1	W	M			0	3	4	4	1600
B008	54	1		W	M			3	0	20	1	330
B009			1	W	M			0	1	21	2	187
B010	45	1		W			1	3	0	10	1.5	155
B011	57	1		W	M			0	3	33	5	350
B012	45	1		W	M			0	3	20	1	850
B013	55		1	W	M			2	0	10	1	300
B014	60	1		W	M			0	3	30	2	1680
B015	51	1		W	M			1	2	3	1.5	1000
Avg	49.62	9	3	13	11		1	1	1	20.1	2.9	620.2

This group was smaller than originally hoped for (20) but still strong and varied enough that I have a reasonable cross section representing many in ministry today. Five of the fifteen were women; two of the fifteen were African American; average age of the group was 49.62 years old with an average of 20 years in ministry, and nearly three years in their current appointment. The range of congregation sizes varied from small (75) to large (1000) members. All were married, some with children still at home while others had children away from home. They came from three areas: Metropolitan Atlanta, Northeast Georgia (Athens area) and Northwest Georgia (Dalton area). All but one was United Methodist. All are Ordained Elders and serving full time in their current appointments.

## Research Question #1

### Research Question #1

How did the participants rate in physical health, emotional fatigue, and stress levels prior to the 10 week program of intentional Sabbath practice?

As anticipated, all subjects scored higher than average in all three testing areas for physical health, stress, (anxiety) and fatigue. In addition, participants were also demonstrating varying but high levels of movement toward greater isolation or, as described through complex trauma, disassociation. Blood pressure measurements were varied but many were high as well with one being dangerously high.

Findings for levels of anxiety in participants revealed that every single participant was experiencing higher than normal levels of anxiety. One in particular scored dangerously high, close to ninety points on a 100 point scale. This is significant as complex trauma results from not one or two isolated incidents which bring on anxiety but rather the ongoing presence of anxiety driven circumstances.

Situations that help generate anxiety include the inability to express anger, feelings of having no escape from the situation, having little to no support in dealing with anxiety generators (problematic members), and the overall ‘unpredictability’ of when or where conflict is likely to arise or over which particular issue. In complex trauma, the victim lives with a daily or weekly uncertainty with where an emotionally charged situation might arise, how they feel they must handle it, and their being held responsible by judicatory officials in the outcome of such conflicts. In essence, being forced to bite their tongue or accept conditions that are unacceptable in order to remain gainfully

employed with the church or the conference. The combination of these kinds of daily stressors leads to the onset of the presence of anxiety and, in the case of my research participants, proved to be accurate.

**Table 4.2. Pre trial Anxiety Scores:**

SE	participant	t-Score	Natl Avg
3.00	A-003	73	50
3.00	A-005	72	50
4.00	B-006	88	50
3.00	B-007	58	50
3.00	B-008	79	50
3.00	B-009	82	50
3.00	B-010	82	50
3.00	B-011	72	50
3.00	B-012	69	50
3.00	B-013	62	50
3.00	B-014	69	50
3.00	B-015	64	50
3.00	A - 002	76	50

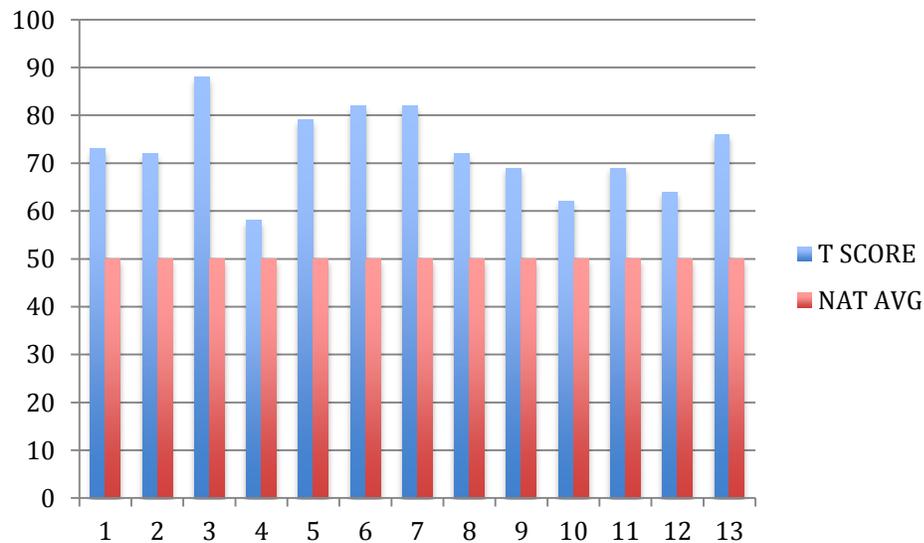
In the pre-trial testing, all participants scored significantly or substantially above the national average for levels of anxiety present at the time of testing. One was not included as she dropped out before testing, and a second, while starting the trail, never finished; therefore, participant B-009 showed a significantly high level of anxiety in the beginning and a 0 at the end. This is reflective of the participant dropping out and not a complete reduction in stress. Interestingly, not one single participant demonstrated 'average' or 'below average' levels of stress. Standard deviations ran from 3 to 4 points but, even given this, scores were substantially high.

One of the signs of the presence of complex trauma is an increased level of anxiety. Therefore, these results are a good indicator that the members of this research group are in fact serving in appointments where stress levels and anxiety levels are running high. In addition, comments among the participants in the orientation and testing phase indicated the presence of high levels of anxiety. Comments included:

- “I’m so stressed right now, my scores may throw off your study!”
- “I can’t remember a time when I was NOT stressed or anxious about my ministry.”

- **Table 4.3. Anxiety Score Interpretation (N=13)**

Anxiety	n	%
Dangerously higher than avg.	3	23.0
Substantially higher than avg.	5	38.0
Significantly higher than avg.	2	38.5
Average or below average	0	Nil



- 
- 80+ is dangerously high  
70 + is substantially high

- 60+ is significantly high
- 50-60 is higher than average

**Figure 4.1. Anxiety Pre trial Scores.**

### **Blood Pressure**

Another factor of complex trauma is increased blood pressure. I had two registered nurses to measure and record initial phase blood pressure testing. They were Mrs. Mary L. Tracy, RN, MN, Ph.D. and Mrs Linda W. White, RN, MSN, NP Results for blood pressure readings are found in Table 4.4.

The standard accepted measurement for ‘normal’ or ‘average’ blood pressure is 120/80. Granted, age, weight, and dietary factors come into play with this figure and blood pressure readings fluctuate repeatedly during the day. Given that reality, I had the nurses take two measurements for each participant. For scoring, I averaged the two scores, which is standard practice in the medical field. An average for the group as a whole was calculated as well.

**Table 4.4. Pre trial Blood Pressure Scores**

<b>Prtcp#</b>	<b>Syst</b>	<b>Dia</b>	<b>Ttl</b>	<b>Syst</b>	<b>Dia</b>	<b>Ttl 2</b>	<b>Std</b>	<b>Avg</b>	<b>Ptcp</b>
A-001									
A-002	165	90	165/90	160	85	160/85	120-80	162.5/87.5	Stage 2
A-003	141	84	141/84	114	90	114/90	120-80	127.5/87	Prehypertension
A-004	121	86	121/86	120	84	120/84	120-80	120/80	Normal
A-005	115	82	115/82	130	86	115/82	120-80	122.5/84	Prehypertension
B-006	126	74	126/74	110	78	110/78	120-80	118/76	Normal
B-007	120	90	120/90	132	80	120/90	120-80	126/85	Prehypertension
B-008	108	80	180/80	106	70	106/70	120-80	107/75	Normal
B-009	122	66	122/66	96	66	96/66	120-80	109/66	Normal
B-010	136	92	136/92	150	96	136/92	120-80	143/94	Stage 1
B-011	138	90	138/90	120	80	120/80	120-80	129/85	Prehypertension
B-012	116	74	116/74	108	70	108/70	120-80	112/72	Normal
B-013	118	80	118/80	90	66	90/66	120-80	104/73	Normal
B-014	136	90	136/90	140	90	136/90	120-80	138/90	Prehypertension
B-015	144	90	144/90	122	90	122/90	120-80	133/90	Stage 1
Avg	130	90	130/90	121	80	121/80		125/85	Prehypertension

Syst= Systolic, Dia = Diastolic, Ttl = first measurement, Ttl2 = second measurement

Std = average blood pressure, Ptcp = participant's blood pressure average

According to statistics obtained from the American Heart Association, normal blood pressures are considered to be those with Systolic readings of less than 120 and Diastolic readings less than 80. Prehypertension includes Systolic ranges of 120-139 and Diastolic ranges from 80-89. High blood pressure or Hypertension stage 1 is when Systolic measures 140-159 and Diastolic measures 90-99. Stage two Hypertension, which is extremely serious, includes Systolic of 160 or higher and Diastolic of 100 or higher. Any measurement above 180 Systolic and 110 Diastolic is cause for immediate emergency medical care or intervention.

The blood pressure scores from study participants demonstrated a variety of ranges with eight of the thirteen participants scoring in ranges that would place them in prehypertension stages or worse. One participant's blood pressure reading was so high that she immediately sought a doctor's care for stage 2 hypertension. She was unaware that her pressure was that high as she reported feeling no symptoms. She did share, however, that she was under extreme stress in her appointment due to a small cadre of members seeking her removal from the church.

Admittedly, there has never been a conclusive study which links stress as a source or cause of heart disease. Stress and anxiety, however, has been linked to issues of increases in blood pressure. Other factors such as heredity, weight, diet, and cholesterol are what prevent stress alone from being classified as a singular source of increases in blood pressure. However, it is a complicating factor that is unhealthy and does not contribute toward better health overall.

All totaled, nearly 62 percent of respondents showed initial blood pressures levels being in the prehypertension stage or beyond and thus in the range of needing attention, reductions in stress, diet change, medication, emergency treatment, or a combination in order to bring their pressures back to a healthier level of functioning. The group as a whole scored an average of 125.5/82.11, placing the group as a whole in the prehypertension category – a valid reason for caution and possible treatment. Three of the fifteen participants were in stage one hypertension and one was in stage two hypertension which usually requires immediate medical attention. Six members of the group began the trial with normal blood pressure levels. Therefore, as a group, and as a majority within the group, measurements of high blood pressure proved to be present.

## **Fatigue**

The third factor or symptom in complex trauma is elevated levels of fatigue. Again, using a self scoring instrument from PROMIS, I had participants fill out the tests which I scored following the gathering. This instrument revealed signs of physical fatigue rather than emotional exhaustion, and questions were as before, responding to how they felt in general in the past seven days not at the moment.

Interestingly, while all symptoms of CT are interrelated and each influences the other, the two symptoms of anxiety and fatigue are closely related. Constant levels of increased or high anxiety eventually produce signs of fatigue in the individual. It is not burnout, as a symptom of burnout is cynicism. Fatigue, however, is when the individual has little to no energy to engage in practices that they normally would enjoy.

Closely related to one of the symptoms of depression, this particular fatigue syndrome sets itself apart from depression in that the individual is as emotionally exhausted as they are physically. It is a sense of feeling drained or empty. There is not necessarily a presence of sadness but rather noticeable absence of energy. It is not the kind of fatigue that can be restored with just one nap as if one did not get a good night's sleep. It is a more persistent and ongoing feeling. It is the absence of a desire to be replenished, as loss of hope is lurking around the edges of fatigue. It is perhaps where a sense of desire to give up first appears, where the victim is unable to imagine going on or continuing another day in the situation as it exists.

Findings for levels of fatigue in participants revealed that all participants were experiencing higher than normal levels of fatigue. Pastors can feel as emotionally fatigued as they can physically fatigued, as the demands of ministry are as exacting

emotionally as they are physically. Working hours averaging from fifty to as much as eighty hours per week on a regular basis can bring on one type of fatigue, just as much as dealing daily with anxiety driven and emotionally draining situations.

The results are as follows:

**Table 4.5. Pre trial Fatigue Scores**

<b>Participant</b>	<b>T score</b>	<b>National average</b>
A-003	55.6	<b>50</b>
A-005	58.5	<b>50</b>
B-006	51.5	<b>50</b>
B-007	54.6	<b>50</b>
B-008	52.5	<b>50</b>
B-009	57.5	<b>50</b>
B-010	61.3	<b>50</b>
B-011	62.3	<b>50</b>
B-012	51.5	<b>50</b>
B-013	59.4	<b>50</b>
B-014	50.4	<b>50</b>
B-015	50.4	<b>50</b>
A - 002	61.3	<b>50</b>
Average	55.9	<b>50</b>

The group as a whole scored higher than average on this scale as well. With the national average being fifty, every participant scored higher than average with only two participants scoring close to, but still slightly higher than, average for increased levels of fatigue. The fatigue scores were not as high as the anxiety scores; however, they remained significantly to substantially higher than the norm. This indicates that the third factor or symptom of complex trauma is emerging in this group of clergy.

**Social Isolation**

Lastly, the group was measured for relative levels of social isolation or ‘disassociation.’ Disassociation is one of the effects of complex trauma. Disassociation is an emotional/behavioral response to stress triggers. It is a basic transition from being extroverted and social to being introverted and preferring to be alone even among family. It is withdrawing from social functions and group activities.

This is a natural defense mechanism and with counseling can be managed, reversed, or eliminated over time. Most participants in this study tended to vary by degree of isolation rather than complete reversal. In other words, I anticipated that few would experience a complete change from extrovert to introvert in the short time span of the trial. However, given enough time, it is possible to reduce, if not eliminate and reverse, the symptoms of this condition.

Results for the pre-trial scores showed that 54 percent of the members in this group are, in fact, beginning to demonstrate or lean toward greater social isolation than is the norm for the population.

**Table 4.6. Pre trial Social Isolation Scores**

<b>participant</b>	<b>T score</b>	<b>National average</b>
A-003	53.1	50
A-005	48.9	50
B-006	64.5	50
B-007	39.1	50
B-008	50	50
B-009	58.6	50
B-010	55.3	50
B-011	50	50
B-012	53.1	50
B-013	50	50
B-014	51.1	50
B-015	33.9	50
A - 002	63.6	50
Average	51.6	50

In scoring for general levels or feelings of disassociation, tested here as social isolation, 23 percent of the group demonstrated average levels and 23 percent demonstrated lower than average levels of social isolation. As a group, more than half the participants were beginning to show signs of disassociation or an emerging preference for being alone rather than being with other people.

In summary, the group as a whole scored higher than average in nearly all measurable symptoms of complex trauma. This is not to say that all are suffering from this malady, but there remains a strong enough point from the data, to at least begin a conversation about what could be causing these elevated stress indicators. Due to limitations of the study, I was not able to test for the other two symptoms of CT which

include insomnia and loss of memory. Both of those symptoms require much more in depth testing, sleep studies, and memory retention studies which I am not qualified to administer or interpret. In addition, the short length of time of this study would not likely demonstrate any discernable changes in these two symptoms as they are ones that require a different kind of intervention than was available through this study.

It is interesting to compare and contrast pre and post-trial scores of related symptoms. Since each symptom is closely tied to the other, each likely has an affect upon the other. Interpretations of what influenced what are beyond the scale and scope of this study; however, it is interesting to note and compare some of these scores side by side.

For example:

**Table 4.7. Pre-trial Anxiety and Social Isolation Comparison**

Anxiety Scores			Social Isolation Scores		
Participant	T score	Natnl Avg	Participant	T-score	Natnl Avg
A-003	73	50	A-003	53.1	50
A-005	72	50	A-005	48.9	50
B-006	88	50	B-006	64.5	50
B-007	58	50	B-007	39.1	50
B-008	79	50	B-008	50	50
B-009	82	50	B-009	58.6	50
B-010	82	50	B-010	55.3	50
B-011	72	50	B-011	50	50
B-012	69	50	B-012	53.1	50
B-013	62	50	B-013	50	50
B-014	69	50	B-014	51.1	50
B-015	64	50	B-015	33.9	50
A – 002	76	50	A-002	63.6	50

Complex trauma and signs of fatigue incorporates both, but, in this instance, the fatigue is as emotional as it is physical. A person can be in reasonably good health, but they can also experience physical fatigue from the onset of high levels of daily anxiety. So pastors can feel drained, spent, weary, or worn out without energy to cope with more conflicts or anxiety driven situations or energy to get out and exercise from the emotional fatigue.

Situations that help generate fatigue include the pent up emotions, having to constantly be on guard, anticipating and planning through potentially toxic conflict, having to remain 'on' for hours at a time in highly anxious situations such as contentious committee meetings, and working excessively long hours trying to manage the conflicts or anxiety driven situations. Like anxiety, the unpredictability of when or where conflict is likely to arise or over which particular issue can also be emotionally and physically draining; it is constantly having to be 'on guard' or hyper-aware of potential conflict. Such a state of awareness is not paranoia but rather, hyper-vigilance for the purpose of self protection.

In complex trauma, the victim lives with a daily or weekly uncertainty with where an emotionally charged situation might arise, how they feel they must handle it, and their being held responsible by judicatory officials in the outcome of such conflicts. Therefore, they are on guard essentially from the time they wake up until the time they retire in the evening. Being fatigued does not guarantee a restful night's sleep and can, in some cases, create a restlessness in victims. They awake easily in the middle of the night and are

unable to go back to sleep because of the nearly instantaneous awaking of the brain to begin strategizing and reviewing former or potential situations that have occurred.

All but two participants scored higher or significantly higher than average for possible presence of this symptom.

### **Research Question #2**

How did the participants rate in physical health, emotional fatigue, and stress levels following the 10 week program of intentional Sabbath Practice?

Remarkably, all participants but one showed decreases in every measurable area of blood pressure, anxiety, fatigue, and disassociation. Incredibly, I was originally looking for small differences in decreases that would demonstrate a trend toward a greater reduction. The reductions were not slight in degree but ~~they~~ were substantial. All participants still registered above normal in levels of anxiety and fatigue; there was a significant reduction in the levels reported at the end of the 10 week trial vs. the beginning.

**Table 4.8. Post-trial Anxiety Scores**

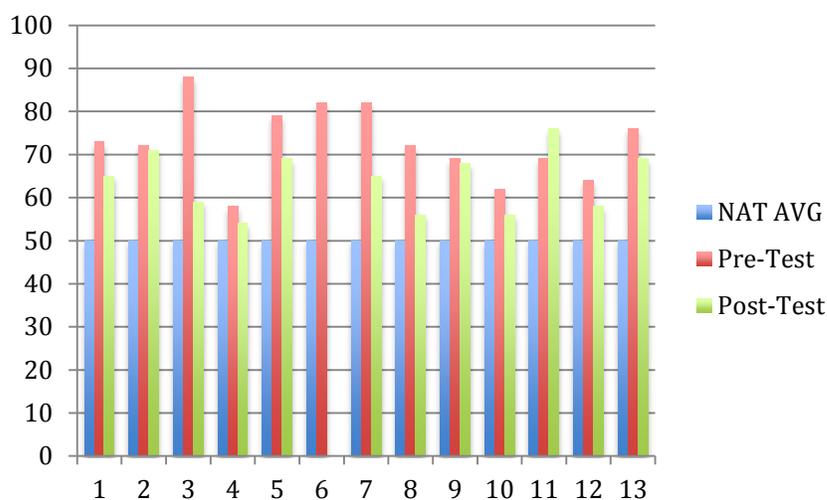
<b>Anxiety Scores</b>		
<b>Participant</b>	<b>T score</b>	<b>Natnl Avg</b>
A-003	65	50
A-005	71	50
B-006	59	50
B-007	54	50
B-008	69	50
B-009	0	50
B-010	65	50
B-011	56	50
B-012	68	50
B-013	56	50
B-014	76	50
B-015	58	50
A - 002	69	50

**Table 4.9. Pre-Post trial Anxiety Score Comparison**

<b>Nat Avg</b>	<b>Pre-Test</b>	<b>Post-Test</b>	<b>Participant</b>
50	73	65	A-003
50	72	71	A-005
50	88	59	B-006
50	58	54	B-007
50	79	69	B-008
50	82	0	B-009
50	82	65	B-010
50	72	56	B-011
50	69	68	B-012
50	62	56	B-013
50	69	76	B-014
50	64	58	B-015
50	76	69	A - 002

**Table 4.10. Post-trial Anxiety and Social Isolation Comparison**

Anxiety Scores			Social Isolation Scores		
Participant	T score	Natnl Avg	Participant	T-score	Natnl Avg
A-003	65	50	A-003	43.1	50
A-005	71	50	A-005	50.0	50
B-006	59	50	B-006	46.8	50
B-007	54	50	B-007	33.9	50
B-008	69	50	B-008	47.9	50
B-009	0	50	B-009	0	50
B-010	65	50	B-010	58.6	50
B-011	56	50	B-011	45.7	50
B-012	68	50	B-012	51.0	50
B-013	56	50	B-013	52.0	50
B-014	76	50	B-014	55.3	50
B-015	58	50	B-015	33.9	50
A - 002	69	50	A-002	59.6	50



**Figure 4.2. Anxiety scores pre-trial and post-trial comparison.**

One participant demonstrated a substantial decrease in anxiety levels, while one demonstrated a slight increase in anxiety levels. This particular participant reported,

however, that his score might be high due to his having a potentially contentious charge conference later that evening. He told me this upon turning in his testing instruments.

Many of the comments from participants in the debriefing and follow up time indicated that the group as a whole was feeling decidedly better; a difference they felt not only on that particular day but many expressed how in the past 4-5 weeks they had noticed a decrease in tension, anger, and other stress related feelings. Results from the post trial self-scoring test for fatigue levels also demonstrated much the same. There were significant reductions in levels of physical fatigue in all participants.

So not only were participants generally feeling better, they also reported their energy levels were somewhat higher and fatigue level scores were lower. Scores marked in red in pre-trial indicate an above average score. Scores marked in red on post-trial indicate an increase in fatigue scores. In the pre-trial, all participants measured higher than average for levels of fatigue. In the post-trial score, all but three participants experienced a decrease in feelings of fatigue after spending ten weeks in regular Sabbath practice. Similar to the anxiety scores, the group as a whole still demonstrated levels of fatigue that were above or significantly above average levels for the population. However, there were more who scored far closer to the average level than in the first test. This is a significant sign of reduction in fatigue levels.

### **Blood Pressure**

After ten weeks of regular Sabbath practice, with the group averaging 3+- hours per week, a remarkable reduction in blood pressure scores was noted. Although many remained in the prehypertension stage, their blood pressures had been reduced

significantly. Several others who were in stage one or two had their pressure levels reduced to prehypertension levels, which is significant. It demonstrates a trend toward decreases, eventually leading to an elimination of this symptom if carried out long enough.

**Table 4.11. Post trial Blood Pressure Scores**

<b>Prtcp#</b>	<b>Syst</b>	<b>Dia</b>	<b>Ttl</b>	<b>Syst</b>	<b>Dia</b>	<b>Ttl 2</b>	<b>Std</b>	<b>Avg</b>	<b>Ptcp</b>
A-001									
A-002	130	80	165/90	124	78	124/78	120-80	127/79	Prehypertension
A-003	141	84	141/84	114	90	114/90	120-80	127/87	Prehypertension
A-004							120-80	120/80	Normal
A-005	140	90	140/90	130	86	130/86	120-80	135/88	Prehypertension
B-006	130	80	130/80	110	80	110/80	120-80	120/80	Normal
B-007	135	70	135/70	120	80	120/80	120-80	127/75	Prehypertension
B-008	100	70	100/70	100	70	100/70	120-80	100/70	Normal
B-009	122	66	122/66	96	66	96/66	120-80	109/66	Normal
B-010	135	85	135/85	150	96	120/85	120-80	127/85	Prehypertension
B-011	120	80	120/80	120	80	130/80	120-80	125/80	Prehypertension
B-012	135	85	135/85	108	70	110/80	120-80	122/82	Normal
B-013	90	60	90/60	90	66	110/70	120-80	95/65	Normal
B-014	140	82	140/82	140	90	134/85	120-80	137/83	Prehypertension
B-015	110	82	110/82	122	90	105/80	120-80	107/80	Normal
Avg	116	72	130/90	121	80	106/73		111/73	Normal

A comparison of pre-trial and post-trial scores is noted here:

**Table 4.12. Pre-Post trial Evaluative Blood Pressure Comparison**

<b>Participant</b>	<b>Avg</b>	<b>Pretest</b>	<b>Posttest</b>	<b>Difference</b>
A-001	1.5	Nil	Nil	0.00
A-002	1.5	1.83	1.59	0.24**
A-003	1.5	1.27	1.27	0.00
A-004	1.5	Nil	Nil	0.00
A-005	1.5	1.40	1.51	-0.11*
B-006	1.5	1.51	1.38	0.13**

B-007	1.5	1.33	1.50	-0.17*
B-008	1.5	1.51	1.43	0.08**
B-009	1.5	1.45	Nil	
B-010	1.5	1.48	1.41	0.07**
B-011	1.5	1.50	1.50	0.00
B-012	1.5	1.54	1.38	0.16**
B-013	1.5	1.36	1.50	-0.14*
B-014	1.5	1.58	1.58	0.00
B-015	1.5	1.36	1.31	0.05**

Pre-trial	Avg	125/85	Prehypertension
Post trial	Avg	111/73	Normal

**Table 4.13. Pre-post Trial Blood Pressure Group Average**

In post trial testing for blood pressure in participants, a decrease in blood pressure was noted for 85 percent of participants. (11 of 13) Interestingly, eleven of thirteen participants’ overall diagnostic levels remained the same at the end of the study as it was in the beginning; (prehypertension) however, their overall blood pressures had decreased.

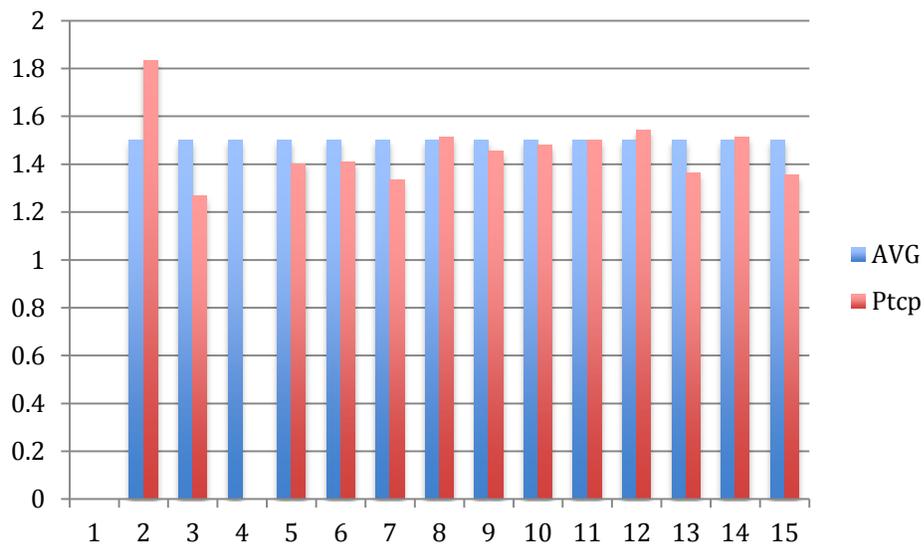
Six participants experienced a substantial decrease in their blood pressure and only one showed a slight increase but remained in the same prehypertension stage as in the pre-test. Overall, the group as a whole demonstrated decreases in blood pressure measurements.

The average for the group in pre-trial testing was 126/85. The average for the group in post-trial testing was 106/73, representing a drop of twenty points Systolic and twelve points Diastolic. The highest drop in pressure in an individual was from 163/88 to 124/78, very likely a life saving decrease that was brought about by awareness, likely medication, and perhaps ten weeks of Sabbath practice. One participant experienced a

slight increase from 123/84 to 130/86, however, this is not a substantial enough increase that would be cause for concern but most likely was due to a temporary situation rather than radical increases stress. The reason for low concern is because this same individual tested lower in the other three measurement areas.

**Table 4.14 Post trial Blood Pressure Interpretation**

Blood Pressure	n	%
Dangerously higher than avg.	1	7.6
Somewhat higher	2	23.0
Average	2	23.0
Below Average	4	46.4



**Figure 4.14. Pre-Post trial Evaluative Comparison - Blood pressure readings.**

Clearly, the overwhelming majority of blood pressure scores indicate a substantial move toward improvement including an average for the group as a whole. I interpret this to mean that if the project had been extended an additional five to six weeks or more,

scores demonstrating reversals or elimination of complex trauma symptoms would possibly begin to appear. These findings are significant.

### **Fatigue**

After ten weeks of regular Sabbath practice, engaging an average of 3+- hours per week, a majority of participants (62percent) demonstrated a decrease in feelings of fatigue. A decrease in feelings of fatigue does not necessarily mean they felt they had more energy. Increased energy was not tested for ~~as again~~, that sensation could be caused by a host of influences. A decrease in feelings of fatigue would, however, indicate emerging feelings of hope. This most likely comes from a change in perspective regarding their current and future situation.

Whether or not participants took up an exercise regimen as a result of their Sabbath practice is not known. Increases in physical activity would have an impact on these scores but such was not tested for and is not known. Scores could indicate that some physical activity must have been present, however, if participants engaged in hiking, walking, etc. as a discipline of Sabbath practice. Again, all this study tested for was to see if levels of fatigue increased, decreased, or remained the same. In this instance, a majority of participants experienced a decrease in feelings of fatigue. This is a positive result for the study.

See tables that follow for comparisons:

**Table 4.15. Post trial Fatigue Scores**

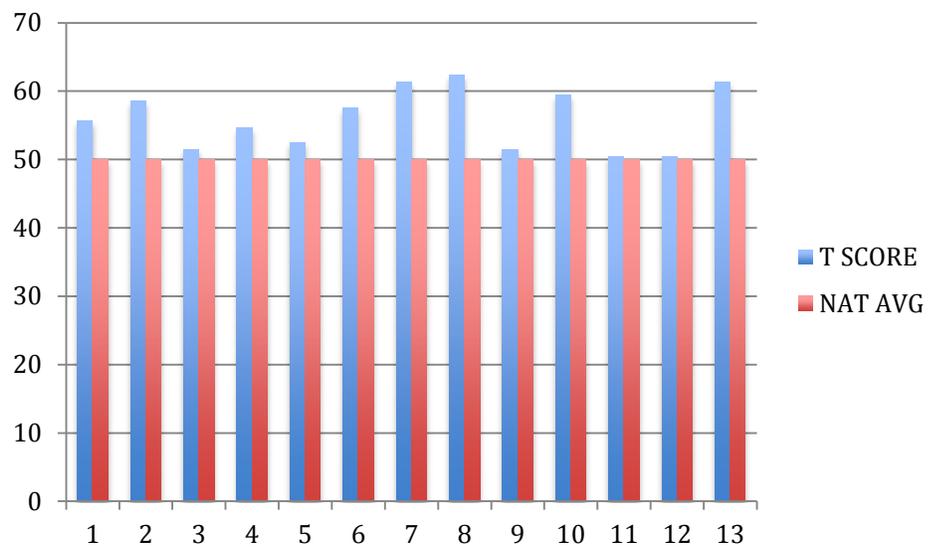
<b>Participant</b>	<b>NAT AVG</b>	<b>T SCORE</b>
A-003	50	49.2
A-005	50	68
B-006	50	51.5
B-007	50	45.6
B-008	50	48.1
B-009	50	Nil
B-010	50	53.6
B-011	50	45.6
B-012	50	53.6
B-013	50	57.5
B-014	50	53.6
B-015	50	42.8
A - 002	50	53.6

**Table 4.16. Pre-test post-test fatigue score comparison**

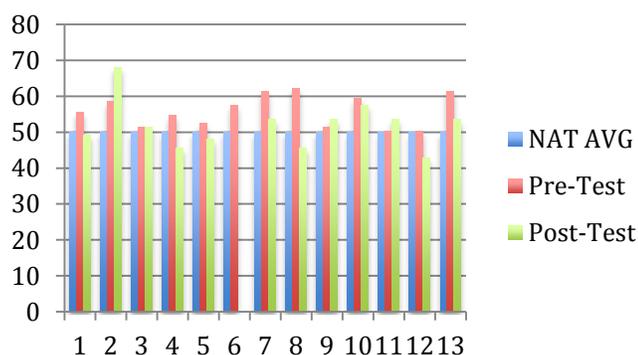
<b>NAT AVG</b>	<b>Pre-Test</b>	<b>Post-Test</b>	<b>Participant</b>
50	55.6	49.2	A-003
50	58.5	68	A-005
50	51.5	51.5	B-006
50	54.6	45.6	B-007
50	52.5	48.1	B-008
50	57.5	Nil	B-009
50	61.3	53.6	B-010
50	62.3	45.6	B-011
50	51.5	53.6	B-012
50	59.4	57.5	B-013
50	50.4	53.6	B-014
50	50.4	42.8	B-015
50	61.3	53.6	A - 002

**Table 4.17. Post trial Fatigue Interpretation (N=13)**

Fatigue	n	%	PROMIS Scale
Dangerously higher than avg.	0	0.0	
Substantially higher than avg.	0	0.0	
Significantly higher than avg.	2	23.5	
Higher than average	11	61.5	



**Figure 4.3. Post trial fatigue scores**



**Figure 4.4. Pre-post trial evaluative comparison**

### **Disassociation**

One of the common responses pastors have to stress from congregational issues, especially in the United Methodist church, is unintentional but increasing isolation. According to Dr. James Powell, (United Methodist Minister and Clinical Psychologist) pastors under extreme duress, stress, or anxiety tend to gradually isolate themselves from other colleagues. Sometimes this is due to embarrassment, other times due to misplaced feelings of guilt. The isolation begins first with colleagues, progresses to friends (both in and outside the congregation), and, in the worst stages, from family and other possible sources of help. Rev. Dr. Chris Carlton has also affirmed this response as he has observed it in his work with stressed clergy through Emory Clergy Care.

Isolation can take many forms, however, when considering the effects of complex trauma, social isolation is given a formal diagnosis called ‘disassociation.’ The symptoms of disassociation are nearly identical to the symptoms demonstrated by clergy under duress who isolate themselves. It is a behavioral manifestation driven by an underlying anxiety. Isolation, while somewhat subjective, can in fact be quantified to the degree to

which people generally feel more or less like being with others, including family, friends, and/or colleagues.

Disassociation or social isolation is the condition where victims of complex trauma subconsciously begin to back away from regular social situations, even those that are normally enjoyable, demonstrating a growing preference for being alone. This is often not noticed by the victim but does become noticeable to family, friends, colleagues and church members. A person with CT does not necessarily intentionally choose to avoid social situations as much as they quietly prefer the safety of being alone. It is defense mechanism of the brain in an attempt to remove the self from what appears to be sources of anxiety, fatigue, or trauma. It is more of a loss of preference for social gatherings than it is an intentional attempt to avoid any gathering.

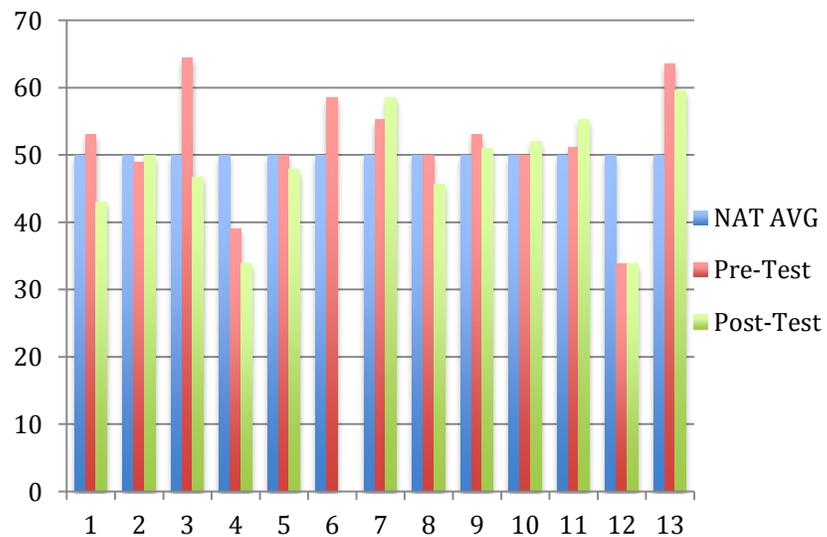
In pre-trial measurements, eight participants demonstrated signs of progression toward disassociation or social isolation with scores above average on the PROMIS scale. In the post-trial test, only five demonstrated higher than average trends toward social isolation. Seven participants experienced decreases in this area while three reported an increase in feelings of disassociation. Disassociation is one of the symptoms of complex trauma and usually takes longer to show signs of the presence of this symptom than the other three symptoms. It is also a variable that is tied closely to personality type, so while this is a good indicator of the possible presence of or trending toward this symptom, it is a bit more fluid than the other three in terms of measuring perceptions. Regardless, the good news is that there were reductions in this area as well.

This group of participants in early testing demonstrated perhaps the onset of complex trauma given the results from this social isolation test. Seven of thirteen

participants showed higher than average levels of social isolation, while three showed average levels and three showed lower than average levels of social isolation.

**Table 4.18. Pre-post trial Social Isolation or Disassociation Comparison**

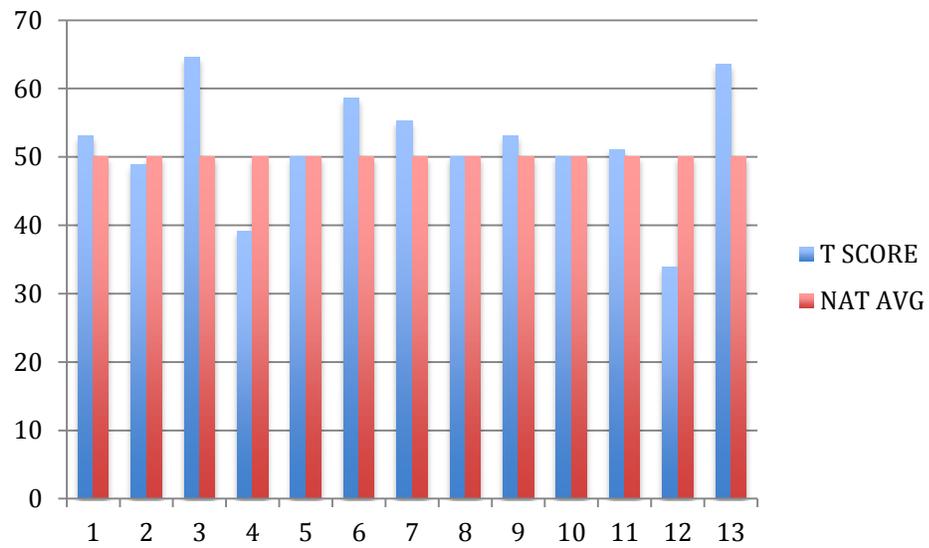
	Nat Avg	Pretest	Posttest	Participant
	50	53.1	43.1	A-003
	50	48.9	50	A-005
	50	64.5	46.8	B-006
	50	39.1	33.9	B-007
	50	50	47.9	B-008
	50	58.6	0	B-009
	50	55.3	58.6	B-010
	50	50	45.7	B-011
	50	53.1	51	B-012
	50	50	52	B-013
	50	51.1	55.3	B-014
	50	33.9	33.9	B-015
50	63.6	59.6		A-002



**Figure 4.5. Pre-post evaluative social isolation comparison**

**Table 4.19. Post trial Social Isolation Interpretation**

Disassociation	n	%
Lower than avg.	2	23.0
higher than avg.	2	23.0
Significantly higher than avg.	1	15.3
Substantially higher than avg.	2	23.0



**Figure 4.6. Post trial social isolation Scores**

Testing in all areas is proving to be consistent in that participants demonstrated decreases in all areas tested but not enough of a decrease that would put them below the national average. Levels of anxiety, fatigue, disassociation and blood pressure were all considered still above normal. However, there were significant decreases in these measurements by the end of the survey, indicating that a substantial downward trend had been established, and if the practice were extended another five to ten weeks, symptoms could be close to being erased or reversed. I attribute the failure to reduce symptoms completely to the comparatively short length of time of the study rather than effectiveness of the intervention. The intervention did, by these measurements, make a difference in symptoms of CT for all participants.

### **Weekly Participation Rates in Sabbath Practice**

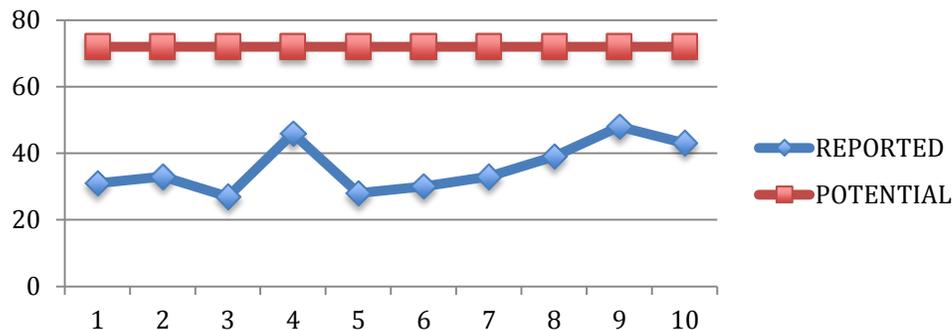
Weekly data obtained from the online surveys revealed that in the beginning of the research period, few, if any, were making time for Sabbath, but into the third and fourth weeks, the numbers began to change. As more participants got more Sabbath time in, they seemed to benefit from the practice, and thus Sabbath practice engaged and time spent increased among all participants – except those two who dropped out in the first two weeks of the program.

Following are figures from weekly participation reports:

**Table 4.20. Weekly participation rates of Sabbath practice**

<b>Hours Spent</b>										
<b>6</b>			2	3	1	2	2	2	3	2
<b>5</b>								1	1	1
<b>4</b>	4	7	3	5	3	2	2	3	3	2
<b>3</b>	3			2	1	2	3	1	3	5
<b>2</b>	2	2		1	3	2	2	3	1	1
<b>1</b>	2	1			1			1	1	1
<b>0</b>	2	3	8	1	2	3	3			
	<b>Week 1</b>	<b>Week 2</b>	<b>Week 3</b>	<b>Week 4</b>	<b>Week 5</b>	<b>Week 6</b>	<b>Week 7</b>	<b>Week 8</b>	<b>Week 9</b>	<b>Week 10</b>
<b>Responded</b>	13	13	13	12	11	11	12	11	12	12

What was observed was a gradual increase in time spent in Sabbath over the ten week trial period with, of course, variations in-between. Variations were due to many factors which will be listed in the next table. What is significant to note, however, is the overall increase of time spent in Sabbath and the rate of participation overall. Of the thirteen remaining participants reporting, all but two were faithful in reporting their Sabbath time spent. The gradual increase in time could indicate several things, but primarily I believe it demonstrates that participants were sensing some benefit from the practice overall, otherwise we would see a flat line or a decrease in time spent in Sabbath.



**Figure 4.7. Weekly Sabbath Participation Rate Comparison**

The potential line indicates if every participant were able to carve out 6 hours each, once each week. What these numbers represent is a cumulative total of the group as a whole from each week reported. For example: in the first reporting week, 13 people reported a total of 31 hours spent in Sabbath practice, but at the end of the trial period, this same group was reporting a total of 43 hours spent in Sabbath practice. This is an increase of interesting proportions which indicates to me that participants perceived benefit from engaging once per week and thus increased their rate of participation.

**Table 4.21. Reported Sabbath Time Engaged vs. Potential Available**

<b>Reported</b>	<b>31</b>	<b>33</b>	<b>27</b>	<b>46</b>	<b>28</b>	<b>30</b>	<b>33</b>	<b>39</b>	<b>48</b>	<b>43</b>
<b>Potential</b>	72	72	72	72	72	72	72	72	72	72

The average amount of time for the group as a whole for Sabbath practice each week was 3.2 hours. This increased from the beginning significantly to where more people were spending 3 to 6 hours near the end of the trial period.

### Research Question #3

What aspects of the 10-week program of intentional Sabbath Practice seemed to have the greatest impact on the observed changes in physical health, emotional fatigue, and stress levels of the participants?

The aspects of this study that helped clergy gain the most benefit from Sabbath practice included faithfully engaging the spiritual discipline of their choice, which some claimed they had not done in quite some time.

One journal entry (A 006) remarked:

- “It was a few weeks into the study that I’ve realized I am totally unaware of how far I have actually drifted away from God.”

Another (B012) noted:

- “I never thought this study would amount to anything of significance, or more than a justified day off. Boy was I wrong! I am feeling better than I have in a long time. I’m going to keep doing this after the study is over.”

Other journal entries were similar in the beginning of the study, many noting how difficult it was to start the practice.

(A004) commented:

- “This is ridiculous. I have way too much to be doing to even try to get away. I am going to have to leave the study for now. Maybe next spring it will be different.” Participant A-004 left the study in the first two weeks.

Participant (B014) wrote:

- “Starting this discipline was hard to do. Didn’t think I could do it. May still quit, but for now, this seems to be helping. If nothing else, getting

away from the dang office and having the DS support that is a good thing.”

Given the opportunity to re-engage these disciplines helped all participants to gain perspective, to pace themselves a bit differently, and to look more objectively upon the stressful situations they faced each week. These factors are, I believe, what helped begin the process of reducing overall stress, fatigue, and feelings of isolation. One participant noted:

- “This is actually a good idea. I’ve always known about doing this and have wanted to but something else always gets in the way. Really enjoying this time alone with God.”

What helped participants get to the point where they could re-engage the disciplines, proved to be critical factors in the success of the trial and that is basically support from superiors and congregational leaders, accountability, and permission. All participants reported this aspect of the program is absolutely critical. Several noted:

(A-002)

- “I would NOT have done this without the DS supporting me. I hope he will continue to after this is over, because I intend to keep it going if I can.” Incidentally, participant A-002 scored the highest in terms of anxiety levels.

Weekly prompting from me in the form of a survey on time spent in Sabbath was the accountability factor that prompted them to be intentional about observing Sabbath time. This, coupled with permission given to participate in the study which came from

their Superintendents (Pastoral supervisors) and support for them while doing so, did much to give them the freedom and the impetus to carry through as planned.

The number of people who tend to watch over a pastor's shoulder and monitor their every move is what often hinders clergy from taking Sabbath time, as their fear is that such will be misinterpreted as time off by nosy personalities. Those misinterpretations can and often do turn into accusations of sloth or inattention to the duties of ministry by the less than healthy or least functional members of a congregation. Clergy can ill afford for this kind of gossip to take hold and, because of this, will often compromise such time away if they do not perceive they have full support from lay leaders or superiors for doing so.

Spending time away from the source or triggers of their stress (with support and affirmation from superiors) proved invaluable to their being able to get some 'guilt-free' time of rest. Finally, being off campus and 'unavailable' for several hours once each week served to limit the number of interruptions that would have come their way otherwise.

It is interesting to note that being given permission from a superior to participate, and having that person affirm such permission to their congregations and lay leadership proved to be the most helpful aspect of all. This is interesting because nearly every participant stated that had the superintendent not been a part of the equation, they most likely would not have participated in the study.

The fear of being perceived as lazy, goofing off, or not attending to critical matters of ministry – even though many are not likely as critical as we make them out to be – quite literally paralyzes pastors when it comes to engaging in disciplines that our

Lord did Himself. Incurring the wrath of the SPR, Superintendent, or other members of the church if ‘caught’ engaging in an activity that is restorative for them but perceived as frivolous to others is a fear that is quite real among our clergy. The prospect of having to ‘justify themselves’ if found engaging in such an activity was perceived to be a greater risk than not engaging in the activity at all. For all the activity in which clergy engage, none of it is serving to diminish levels of stress, anxiety, fatigue, or isolation. It is as if clergy feel they are hamsters on a never ending spinning wheel of the church, which they have to keep going under their own effort lest they pause and the church stop working.

### **Summary of Major Findings**

Major findings from this study affirmed and revealed several significant factors regarding the challenges of spiritual leadership in the post modern era. Affirmed in the initial testing is the fact that ~~indeed~~, clergy who serve difficult congregations as well as many who serve ordinary congregations are for the most part living with higher than normal levels of anxiety, fatigue, and a growing sense of social isolation. In addition, many wrestle with issues of high blood pressure as indicated by the symptoms of complex trauma.

According to all participants in the study, none were actively engaged in or practicing ‘regular Sabbath practice’ prior to this ten week study. However, at the end of the study, all who participated expressed their desire to continue with the weekly practice as it was introduced to them. Every participant who completed the trial period found the new discipline to be helpful and revealing.

In post-study testing, it was revealed that in just ten short weeks significant and substantial changes in clergy health were observed. Of all participants, 92 percent

experienced decreases in anxiety while 64 percent experienced decreased feelings of fatigue. There were also decreases reported in feelings of social isolation and, of course, blood pressure of the group as a whole decreased. This ~~of course~~ was not attributable to any single factor regarding Sabbath practice but, instead, was attributed to four major findings as shared by participants in the post-testing and debriefing time. The four things that combined together to help generate better health among stressed or anxious clergy were: time away from stressors, time spent in communion with God, permission given from supervisors, and accountability through a weekly survey.

- **Clergy in difficult appointments are highly stressed.**

Clergy who serve difficult congregations are manifesting symptoms of the possible presence of complex trauma as seen in significantly elevated levels of stress, fatigue, isolation, and blood pressure.

- **Avoiding stress triggers is vital for effective participation in Sabbath disciplines.**

Spending time off campus away from the stressors and triggers was reported as extremely helpful.

- **Support of Supervisors is critical to engaging Sabbath practice.**

Having the support of superiors (Superintendent and Board of Deacons) proved to be critical in helping research participants feel at ease participating in the discipline. Participants shared that without such supervisory affirmation they likely would not have participated in the study. Therefore, having support of supervisors in the form of affirmation for time spent in Sabbath does much to help clergy participate freely in the discipline.

- **Active presence of loving accountability aids in learning discipline.**

Weekly prompting of each participant in the form of a survey asking how much time they were able to spend in Sabbath practice each week and what if any issues prevented them from gaining Sabbath time proved beneficial in keeping participants faithful to the discipline. This helped hold them accountable to the project and was reported as very helpful. Participants did note that in starting a new spiritual discipline such as Sabbath practice, it is important to have someone who will hold them lovingly accountable for participation. Once the habit is learned, accountability is still helpful but not needed as often.

## CHAPTER 5

### DISCUSSION

#### Major Findings

The purpose of this research project was to evaluate the changes in physical health, stress levels, emotional fatigue, and social isolation as the result of a ten-week program of intentional Sabbath Practice for a group of fifteen full-time clergy known to be serving difficult congregations within the North Georgia Conference. The goal was to determine if regular Sabbath practice had any affect upon ministers who took regular time away from their duties each week to honor Sabbath, to rest, and to connect with God. The project proved to be successful in terms of a reduction in stress indicators, a reduction in stress in the form of reductions in anxiety levels, fatigue levels, and blood pressure levels within the study group and possibly diminish the effects of creeping social isolation or disassociation. Four major findings included:

- **Clergy in difficult appointments are highly stressed.**

Clergy serving difficult congregations do tend to exhibit high levels of stress, blood pressure, fatigue, and isolation. Among the major findings in this study was the fact that even if engaging in a minimal effort toward better self care, doing so makes a tremendous difference in the emotional, behavioral, and physical health of clergy. Engaging in regular Sabbath practice does appear to have some impact in helping mitigate, if not reduce, the symptoms of complex trauma in those who are the most to the least stressed in the field.

Although clearly experiencing high levels of stress, anxiety, fatigue, blood pressure, and isolation, how close these particular subjects were to the point of resignation is unclear. This, however, was not a factor that was considered important in the overall goals of this particular project. It is interesting to note, however, that the issues which drive clergy to the point of exasperation or resignation proved to be largely present within members of the study group.

As Dr. Jackson Carroll stated and as proved significant in the pre trial test results, “It is still possible to describe ordained ministry as troubled or perplexed.” Without a doubt, participants in this study were troubled at best and at worst, at least advancing toward the advanced stages of burnout. Hesitation on the part of clergy to participate in this trial and the actual process in the beginning, due largely to unspoken but very clear response to unrealistic expectations, was clearly seen in their tepid response to full participation. Each participant had the full endorsement of their superintendent; however, it took nearly three weeks for them to be able to begin to trust in this to the extent that they could more fully engage the Sabbath process. The onset of unrealistic expectations is one of the significant factors attributed to clergy resignations found in the Pew clergy survey of 2005. Participant’s clearly demonstrated a proclivity toward trying to meet these expectations, whatever they may have been, by initially compromising free time given to them without penalty.

One surprising factor that was revealed which conflicted with some of the data in the literature review was that, according to participants, only 5 percent of the time was their Sabbath time interrupted or compromised due to having to deal with church conflict. This was quite surprising and at the same time, given the rest of the data, understandable.

Congregational conflict, while indeed troubling and anxiety producing, is episodic in nature, meaning that the occurrence of these factors is not rare but is certainly not a daily occurrence. The anticipation of conflict however, coupled with the anxiety related heated conflict or confrontation, are in fact longer lasting and quite intense. Perhaps the combination of intensity along with anticipation of conflict as well as ruminating or worrying about the conflict long after it is over, gives a false impression that conflict is more present than reality would suggest that it is.

In other words, congregational conflict is anxiety producing for pastors but the anticipation of such and the ruminating on such without relief from the reminders that may give clergy the impression that congregational conflict is more intense or more regular than it really is. Therefore, the onset of complex trauma may have far more to do with a lack of self care than the perceived amplification of congregational conflict. Conflict is traumatic and anxiety producing: and can be a regular staple in a monthly diet of a pastor serving a difficult church. However, conflicts tend to emerge more often during meetings where decisions are being made rather than a daily response to a pastor's ministry.

Complex trauma could be related to the advanced stages of burnout but clearly, on its own merit, complex trauma is much more serious and has longer lasting and more devastating effects than does burnout. Regular Sabbath practice proved to be significant in reducing at least four of the symptoms of complex trauma and, in that reduction, it could be implied that similar reductions in stages of burnout would likely result in the same outcome.

True to the data revealing the lack of Sabbath practice on the part of a majority of Christians in the modern age, none of the clergy in this study were participating in any form of regular Sabbath practice (outside of one hour in worship on Sunday morning) prior to their participation in this study. Far more attention was given to church administration, membership generation, income production, and general administrative duties associated with denominational structure. Clergy were keenly attentive to many of the expectations of the congregation and conference but were admittedly neglectful when it came to their own personal spiritual, emotional, and physical care. It was Karl Barth who stated it so well that human beings tend to neglect that which we instinctively know is good for us. This proved to be especially true among this group of clergy by their own admission at the beginning of the study. (Barth)

Although aware of the potential benefits of regular rest and devotional time, clergy in this study were routinely compromising such prior to this study in order to attend to a never ending list of other priorities. Participating in this study at first tested their ability to trust; to trust not only in the process but to trust in the potential outcome. As outlined in the Old Testament, which this group was familiar with, Sabbath was for them a day where they in fact led in worship but were not able to worship as participants themselves due to the nature of their position as spiritual leaders.

Leading in worship, in fact, does not produce the same benefits as does participating in worship, as demonstrated by the fact that all pastors were leading in worship on a weekly basis in their congregations but all still tested very high for levels of anxiety, fatigue, isolation, and blood pressure. If leading worship were as beneficial as participating in worship, it could be inferred that lower scores in complex trauma

symptoms would have been present at the beginning of the trial study. In addition, one participant shared at the end of the study, “engaging in Sabbath practice helped me realize just how far away I had grown from God.” This revelation did not come through leading others in worship but rather after having spent intentional time in private worship on his own for several weeks.

The revelation of the Sabbath pattern at the beginning of the study was something new to all participants. None had ever heard of such or considered such, but, in reflecting on the possibility of this, was encouraging to participants. As one participant shared, “learning to be still, completely still, is one of the hardest things I’ve ever done. Yet it was the one thing that has begun to help me know that He is God.”

Sabbath practice proved to be restorative and replenishing as claimed in Biblical texts and as experienced by participants in the study. As mentioned previously, one participant noted how the discipline helped him grow closer to God. Whether or not it was closeness to God or time spent in rest with God that brought about feelings of restoration remains unclear. Each is a related influence upon the other. It could be stated, however, that it was the presence of both (restoration and rest) that prompted increased participation in the practice as the weeks progressed.

As this practice informs ministry, or rather a healthier approach to the practice of ministry, it is clear that clergy would do well to revisit the Sabbath and perhaps begin a collective journey together, holding one another lovingly accountable for participation in such. We would do well to rely less on performance reviews, production opportunities, and congregational expectations and instead focus more on our own personal spiritual

formation as our first priority in ministry. Doing so demonstrates a growing trust in God, in God's design for life, and God's priorities for living for all of God's children. If clergy can demonstrate this through active participation, it could likely have a tremendous impact upon their congregations, including those that are, in fact, difficult to serve.

- **Avoiding Stress triggers is vital for effective participation in Sabbath disciplines.**

Complex trauma is a condition where sensory input that is similar to the original source of stress or increased anxiety can trigger identical emotional/behavioral responses in victims. Sights, sounds, smells, surroundings, and similar words or phrases are all sensory triggers that can initiate a heightened fight or flight response in individuals with complex trauma when a real threat may or may not exist.

Participants in the study shared that the requirement to be away from their office and/or their appointed church (off campus), at first, seemed like an imposition or an inconvenience. Pastors soon discovered, however, the benefits of being away held more implications than just avoiding interruptions.

The triggers which bring back feelings of anxiety along with physiological responses (increased blood pressure, etc.) can be most anywhere for someone suffering from complex trauma. Triggers that are directly related to anxiety producing responses, however, are nearly always present at or in the location where the original traumatic event or events have taken place. Therefore, removing oneself from any possible reminders or triggers by removing oneself from the source (the church, church office, etc.) is critical in the overall effectiveness of Sabbath practice.

Avoiding interruptions was helpful, but because of the potential sensory distractions of familiar surroundings and potential triggers, (chance encounters with problem members or locations where conflict occurred) being away from stress triggers helped pastors remain free from the daily things that brought about stress or anxiety without their being consciously aware of it. In other words, in being off campus, they were away from the presence of reminders and instead, in the presence of God, which was reassuring, comforting and relaxing.

Those who tried Sabbath practice on campus did report it was nearly impossible to do due to interruptions either from phone calls, visits, meetings, or visible reminders. All this made it difficult for them to fully engage the process. As one participant reported: “unless you get away from every possible interruption, you are only inviting more stress.” And another “I did not realize how much time I was spending at the church and on church stuff, until I carved out just three hours to go some place else. Getting off campus put things in a very different perspective for me.”

Some participants who tried staying on campus to do Sabbath reported that engaging in Sabbath was impossible while at their church because of the guilt factor that would emerge. The guilt factor was an additional source of stress or anxiety for them. This was especially true in one participant’s case, who asked in the beginning if as their Sabbath practice, if they could just unwind and ‘do nothing, but do that in my office?’ He soon realized that ~~doing~~ remaining on campus actually increased feelings of stress and anxiety for him as he was concerned about how he would answer for his resting in a place where he is expected to be working. He quickly realized the futility of this self-imposed dilemma and within two weeks decided to spend the remainder off campus. It was while

off campus that he reported being able to let go and actually rest without worry or anxiety.

Even though the church is God's house, and it is in God's house that we celebrate Sabbath each week, being on campus meant being surrounded by reminders of what pastors could be doing, were expected to be doing, felt they should be doing, or needed to get done. Therefore, for pastors, being in a church for Sabbath practice could be helpful for growing closer to God but only if that church were one different from the one he or she is currently serving.

Being a spiritual leader and doing nothing while in a place of work created cognitive dissonance for them and was, therefore, counterproductive to reducing stress as well as getting work accomplished. All participants indicated being off campus was perhaps one of two of the most helpful activities that allowed them to envelop the fullness of the Sabbath experience.

Related to being off campus, participants reported the discipline of spending time in personal reflection, devotion, prayer, and contemplation – *without interruption* – was also significantly helpful. For participants, being away from campus made it far easier to engage in personal reflection, contemplation, prayer, journaling, or listening. Their choice of location eliminated all possibilities of interruptions if they were faithful in turning off their cell phones. The distractions of conflict and the devices of the modern age (cell phones, email, etc.) are what keep clergy from being able to 'be still,' even when quiet time is available to them.

The absence of visible stressors coupled with a sheltered time allowed the participants to relax even in the middle of their work-week. Having three hours or four

hours of pure relaxation, many reported that such gave them a feeling of being re-energized. This was both a physical response and an emotional response.

Being that pastors are required to be ‘on’ so much of the time, this made sense. By being ‘on,’ it is understood that one is never in a position where they are not a pastor or THE pastor. This means constant observation of other people of personal and professional life, which can be exhausting. Having a place, a time, and permission to relax, feel free to be yourself, and commune with God, was according to one participant: “more revealing than I imagined it would be.” When pressed about what was revealing, he said: “I did not realize until mid way through this process, of just how far away I had grown from God – all the while, working my rear end off for God.”

The ability to fully relax with whatever time participants were able to carve out helped them keep pending matters, pressing matters, and anxiety laden matters in a very different perspective. Having distance from the stressors and time with God gave them the ability to formulate a perspective on their own situations, perhaps from God’s perspective, which gave them greater hope, creative options, and many possibilities in dealing with issues that awaited them upon their return. The majority emerged from their weekly Sabbath times refreshed, restored, and renewed.

Having more time than just a few or even thirty minutes of reflection time gave participants ample space and venue for engaging in deeper reflection, devotional, or Biblical reading. Participants were encouraged to use the discipline of *Lectio Davina* for a portion of their Sabbath practice as this practice requires significant periods of reflection and contemplation from short readings of scripture. Seven clergy reported that having the time to be able to focus and become engaged in the moment allowed them the

ability to read and perceive scripture at a deeper and more personal level. Doing so was difficult for them at first as the habit of Scripture reading often led to the autonomic process of making notes for a sermon. Breaking the habit of reading the Bible for sermon preparation was reported as a struggle for all participants.

I had the ability to make personal observations of the group in the beginning and at the end; however, my only contact with the group during the ten week period was through the weekly survey. During the ten week process, I had no direct indication of whether or not the process was working or to what degree participants were benefiting from the discipline of Sabbath practice.

The only indication I had that something may be working positively for the group was the gradual increase of time spent in Sabbath practice each week. I could only presume that this was due to participants receiving some benefit from it. It is possible that this segment of time of in depth reading, reflection, rest, and contemplation without interruptions was beneficial and thus responsible for them setting aside more time each week for this practice.

As noted in the Biblical study, in the beginning of creation God set aside twenty four hours, an entire day, for humanity to observe and practice Sabbath rest. Humanity was directed to set that day apart as Holy and to observe it by refraining from ordinary daily work. In the post modern pastoral rush to take care of too many expectations or in the attempt to win favor of humanity (supervisors and congregants), pastors have been neglecting Sabbath practice to their own detriment. Giving cursory treatment to occasional devotional readings or even regular time in morning prayer is not the same as

devoting a significant segment of one day (if not an entire day) to the practice of reflection, contemplation, rest, and worship.

This practice is so powerful, however, that an average of just three hours per pastor per week proved to be significant enough to reduce four of the symptoms of complex trauma. This is significant. One can only image what pastors (and congregants) would experience if we were able to devote an entire twenty four hour period to the practices as outlined in this study. Again, Sabbath practice is not the same as a day off from work even though it is a cessation from work. The defining characteristic being the time away from work and being devoted to the spiritual disciplines, is what sets Sabbath apart from mere rest. That is the difference between rest and restoration. While both results are physical in nature, only one is spiritual.

- **Support of Supervisors is critical to engaging Sabbath practice.**

Obtaining the written support of superiors (Superintendent and Board of Deacons) proved extremely helpful in making research participants feel at ease while participating in the practice. Written support, affirmation, and approval of their engaging in this process did much to eliminate any possible stressors as related to guilt, anxiety, and worries of being labeled as lazy or neglecting their duties. This was reported as a critical factor from every participant in the study.

Having the support of supervisors was perhaps as vitally an important as being off campus. Having the written affirmation of superiors to engage this process gave them the permission they needed to fully relax, to reflect, to get away, and to refresh their souls. Many commented that without such affirmation and support from their Superintendent

and Deacon board, they would not have tried this in the first place. In other words, had this provision not been included as part of the trial study, the study would have failed for lack of participants; it was that critical. This reveals a great deal about what judicatories can and likely should consider doing in support of clergy.

One participant did have a problem church member call her superintendent to complain about her pastor's participation in a project which she considered to be a waste of time. The participant reported that her DS informed her – that he stood by her, supported her, and told the problem church member that she was to “back off on her complaints about the pastor being away,” that “the pastor was doing something of critical importance to the ministry as a whole.” She reported that such an affirmation allowed her the ability to relax completely and erase any feelings of guilt associated with the practice.

The perceived lack of support from supervisors or judicatory officials, as evidenced in the Pew survey of 2005, as a factor in clergy resignations was affirmed but from the opposite end. Receiving support from supervisors during times of congregational conflict is critical if pastors are expected to remain effective spiritual leaders in their assigned congregations. Support from supervisors, however, can also take a different, pro-active approach for clergy in difficult appointment.

The perceived pressure to perform is so strong that clergy in this study reported that their superintendent's support was critical to their ability to participate fully in Sabbath practice. This would seem counter-intuitive at first, since clergy are the ones we would expect to be modeling Sabbath practice for their congregations. Having to receive written or supervisory support for doing so, rather than relying on the mandate stipulated

by God in Scripture to do so, reveals much about the compromises clergy often make in order to remain in ministry.

In other words, clergy apparently felt that possibly having to answer the accusations of a problem member accusing them of frittering time away was a bigger threat to them than perhaps having to answer to God. This could be pastors relying on God's grace for violation of Sabbath, but, in reality, having a spiritual supervisor endorse and support their efforts did allow them to participate more fully. Learning to trust in God's approval rather than the approval of mere mortals is a challenge for nearly every human being but especially so for clergy serving difficult congregations.

- **Active presence of loving accountability aids in learning discipline.**

Weekly prompting from in the form of an online survey asking how much Sabbath time participants were able to get and what if any issues prevented them from gaining Sabbath time was helpful to participants. This helped hold pastors accountable to the project and was reported as very helpful.

The response rate to this weekly survey was very strong, and participants took this faithfully. One participant in particular reported on several occasions (weeks) she had not had an opportunity to get in her Sabbath time but would not answer the survey with false information. She confessed that she would put off answering the survey until she got her Sabbath time in so she could report honestly and accurately. Several others affirmed the same. This explains why responses to a Friday survey often came in on Saturdays and Mondays or as late as Tuesday or Wednesday the following week.

Participants were unanimous in reporting that if they did not have such a regular accountability, they would likely fade away from the practice little by little each week. However, having to answer the survey and knowing the survey was coming each week, coupled with the permission to participate, helped them engage fully in the study.

In the days when Israel was wandering in the wilderness, even though they had no Temple, they still observed Sabbath practice. God's mandate to Israel to gather only Manna needed for one day but twice that amount on the day before the Sabbath, lest the excess spoil, could be seen as an ancient accountability factor. Just as there were consequences in ancient times for ignoring, compromising, or otherwise dismissing Sabbath, likewise in modernity we see similar consequences.

Manna was a gift from God that sustained God's people in the wilderness, until they eventually came to the promised land. Gathering more than was needed in order to avoid gathering at a different time as directed by God resulted in the spoilage of the excess of our own efforts. In other words, the excess activity spent trying to do things our way was futile and proved to be a waste of time, energy, and spirit.

Likewise, God still provides daily and weekly gifts which sustain God's people in the wilderness of the in-between time. Clergy and congregations no longer gather manna and we are no longer in the desert wilderness. Like the people of Israel, when we rely on doubling our own efforts in order to secure more of a blessing, we end up with a spoiled blessing or a blessing that is of no use, and the time spent scurrying about trying to obtain it is time ultimately wasted. This is closely related to the lack of trust or complete trust in God's providence for living, as well as for ministry, and can be seen in pastors trying to

attend to every temporal need or demand the church can muster while compromising the mandate from God for regular rest and restoration in God's presence.

Our post modern attempts toward self preservation or salvation by works at the expense of Sabbath observation could easily be related to spoiled blessings as being witnessed in the increased rate of attrition of pastors leaving full time ministry. Significant moments in ministry in the lives of others are potentially lost, if pastors give up on ministry. Time given to each pastor by God, to be spent with God, with family, and enjoying the delights of creation are seen in the spoils of increased rates of divorce, depression, addictive disease disorders, and a host of other physical, emotional, and behavioral maladies increasing in the lives of many clergy today.

Perhaps coming to see the symptoms of complex trauma as well as the many other manifestations of stress, anxiety, burnout, and worry can be seen as evidence of spoiled blessings. The implications are that if clergy, including those in supervisory roles, can come to see clinical symptoms of stress related disorders as signs of spoiled blessings, changes toward healthier practices of ministry may begin to take shape. Certainly, the clergy participating in this study came to realize the futility of their increased efforts to meet expectations and opted, instead, to continue the practice they had learned and come to appreciate in a ten week trial study – regular Sabbath practice.

## **Observations**

### **Observations of participants prior to study**

As anticipated, clergy serving in difficult appointments were demonstrating elevated levels of stress, fatigue, isolation, and blood pressure. While this is not definitive

proof of the presence of complex trauma in clergy serving difficult congregations, it is evidence which suggests that the possibility such a disorder could be developing or emerging. An official diagnosis by a licensed and certified Physician or Psychologist would be needed in order to determine if these symptoms were indicative of the presence of complex trauma. Two other studies as well as in depth interviews would be required before definitive diagnosis could be made. However, observations of these findings do follow closely enough with information found in the literature review that follow up visits could prove helpful.

Participants were initially worried about participating in the survey, expressing concerns about possible ramifications from problem church members. Many expressed doubts about their ability to find an extra four to six hours each week for something which to them, at the time, seemed frivolous. In fact, at the beginning of the trial study, weekly participation rates in both numbers of participants engaging in Sabbath practice as well as total time spent were very low.

The most often reported factor that disrupted Sabbath time for participants was the fact they felt there were too many demands on their time for them to take time away for personal reflection. Having never done this type of thing before, participants could not envision the benefits they would receive from full and regular Sabbath practice, so many opted to take care of business as usual and compromise much if not all of the Sabbath time allotted to them. This began to change significantly during the process of the ten week period. Pastors eventually began to trust the practice, their supervisors, and the process and gradually increased their participation levels. This was anticipated, which is why weekly accountability was critical to effective participation.

**During the study**

In the beginning, little time was spent in regular Sabbath practice. As weeks went by and participants began to trust in the process and to discover the particular type of discipline that helped them to relax, time spent in Sabbath practice as well as numbers of participants engaging in the practice began to increase. By the end of the study, time spent in Sabbath practice had increased for all participants. In addition, stress level indicators had all decreased.

It seemed that pastors had to first trust in the process in order to participate. They also had to experience personal benefits in doing so in order to engage the practice again each week, otherwise, participation figures would have decreased, remained flat, or failure to engage would have been evident.

It took about three weeks for pastors to begin to trust the process and to discover the benefits of the practice. The benefits of the discipline for those who engaged became so helpful that participants with staff encouraged their staff members to take up the practice on their own. Pastors with supervisory responsibility were making plans to make this discipline part of their job description for the year to come in 2016.

Data from additional persons participating with their senior pastors were not included in this study, however, comments from participants at the end of the study demonstrated that the discovery of Sabbath disciplines helped staff members who were not full time or clergy. In other words, Sabbath practice was engaged by youth directors, children's ministry directors, choir directors, and program ministry coordinators. Reports coming from senior pastor participants regarding their experiences were consistent in that

staff members shared equally encouraging news of feeling less stressed, more relaxed, and having a bit more energy.

### **After the study**

Post trial test results demonstrated that participants experienced radical decreases in all symptoms of complex trauma. Test results did show that in areas of anxiety and fatigue, pastors were still registering above average, but the reductions from pre-trial tests were so significant, that had the trial continued for another few weeks, stress level indicators would likely have dropped to levels below average for individuals and the group as a whole. In other words, ten weeks of Sabbath practice was long enough to start and begin to engage in the discipline on a regular basis. It was also a long enough time to see a reduction in complex trauma symptoms. Ten weeks, however, was not long enough to reduce symptoms to below average or eliminate them completely.

This discovery was not discouraging but encouraging. This revealed that a pattern of healthier functioning was beginning to emerge in each of the participants. Some experienced radical decreases in anxiety while most experienced a moderate decrease. Only one demonstrated an increase in anxiety during the period. Further interviews of the one who experienced increased anxiety revealed several contributing factors which may or may not have had a direct effect on his condition the day of the post trial tests. One factor that may have kept his stress levels the same was that he was not able to participate at the level he had hoped to due most often to intense church conflict and demands on his time in handling such.

Reductions in levels of fatigue overall were significant but came at different

levels for each participant. Overall reductions in blood pressure could be attributed to regular Sabbath practice since only one participant started taking medication after the study began. The revelation of the dangerously high blood pressure level in this participant, however, prompted quick reaction on his/her part and thus was a move in a healthy direction rather than denial, which would have been unhealthy.

Social isolation or disassociation was also, as a group, reduced. Individually, there was a great deal of variety in this symptom, but, overall, participants were reporting feeling better about social gatherings and more willing to participate together in an accountability group that they would put together on their own. All participants reported their desire to continue Sabbath practice as well as their intention to bring others along with them because of the benefits they received in participating.

### **Implications of the Findings**

Sabbath is nothing new. I believe, however, that what I have managed to highlight is to examine the benefits of intentionally engaging in regular Sabbath practice and have been able to attach tangible, measureable results which clearly demonstrate the benefits of such. It should be self evident that Sabbath is good for us as God indeed says and reaffirms as much in His Word. Sadly, in this fast paced, production oriented, and quota driven post-modern church we serve, giving careful attention to Sabbath practice and setting aside a day or time and keeping it Holy is pretty much the last thing on the average clergy list of priorities.

If this study can at least bring attention to the matter, and, in turn, include 'Regular Sabbath Practice' as an expectation of clergy that will be lovingly encouraged and supported, then this project will have indeed made an impact. If nothing else, the

findings from this study could be replicated on a large scale with more clergy over a longer period of time to give even greater clarity of detail to the findings I have discovered. Doing so could be instrumental in bringing this issue to the attention of health care providers (insurance carriers) and ways found to encourage Sabbath practice if at least for the financial benefits to the conference and judicatory.

Regular Sabbath practice is, indeed, built into the very fabric of creation and the need for it into our own DNA. It can be safe to say that in ignoring or giving cursory attention to this most Holy of practices has given us the dim attrition rates we are seeing today. While problematic congregations are certainly a large part of the stress equation, they by no means are the sole drivers of clergy leaving the ministry. If clergy were taking care of themselves through Sabbath practice on a regular basis, I am confident that the attrition rates in all denominations would be substantially lower – and, in addition, the rates of clergy abuse much lower as well.

### **Limitations of the Study**

The largest limitation of this study was the sampling size and the time frame to which it was limited. The model, however, can be easily replicated with a larger sample group and over a longer period of time without having to change anything else about the study. A second reality that could be considered a limitation is that the study group was largely United Methodist from one area of north Georgia. Only participant from another denomination took part in the study. Having clergy from multiple faith traditions would likely be very helpful in a study with a longer time frame. However, it is my guess that the end results will be similar to within a few percentage points from this study. That is

because the dynamics at work are experienced by nearly all who serve God's people in the church. However, it would provide much more data for ever further observation.

### **Unexpected Observations**

Much to my surprise, church conflict, church problems, and problem people were the least of this group's reason for disruption of Sabbath time. Of all the possible issues that could have interfered with their Sabbath practice, 'Putting out church fires-dealing with gossip and church conflict' was among the lowest number of incidents reported for interruption of Sabbath. I expected this to be the highest reason for compromising Sabbath time.

In terms of stress inducers, this factor is among the highest for clergy: dealing with, confronting, rebuking, or having to strategize with other leaders in dealing with an antagonistic member or heated church conflict can be spiritually and emotionally draining. For the period of time of this study, however, the rates at which these issues occurred were nearly negligible. Perhaps such anxiety driven situations have the appearance and perception of being more frequent than they really are because of the intensity of the anxiety generated because of them. The anxiety and stress associated with church conflict or having to contend with the occasional antagonist is destructive and the wounds clergy bear are long lasting. Therefore, it is likely the amplitude of such encounters, rather than the frequency, is what drives the stress numbers so high in clergy who resign from ministry.

### **Disruption of Sabbath**

A typical pastor's day is filled with interruptions, unplanned emergencies, and on call adjustments to their schedules. Life is messy, and when working as spiritual leader to hundreds if not thousands of people, life gets even messier and more unpredictable. Pastors reported, in the beginning of this study, that their time, even though often well planned, ended up being 'catch as catch can' because of interruptions, emergencies, and issues. When they were able to get several hours free from such intrusions each week, this allowed them to relax (with assurances from the DS) and to engage the process at ever deeper levels.

Not much in my literature discussed the problems of constant interruptions in the daily life of a pastor. However, this was revealed through the study in the debriefing. The elimination of such even for a few hours each week became a significant factor in helping them to engage weekly in Sabbath practice.

I am reminded of the woman who continued to pester and beg Jesus for help to the point that he responded to her in what appears to be an angry outburst. Jesus, as well as the disciples, had plenty of interruptions to deal with, but when it came to Sabbath time, we do not find any examples where Jesus allowed this time to be compromised. Nor did he compromise this time due to an unfolding crisis or pressure to respond.

In John 11:1-11, Jesus is called upon by the family of Lazarus. He takes his time in going to the home. Pastors today however, tend to rush to respond to such calls, pushing aside everything from our own children's birthday parties, to interrupting family vacations to abandoning our spouses on a date night, in order to respond as quickly as possible to the call. If pastors don't respond with expedience, many claim that antagonists will twist a delayed response into an accusation of not caring about their flock. Clergy

today are almost trained to jump as soon as a call comes in rather than taking the call in stride and placing the emergency in proper perspective. After all, what good is it to hurry over if the person has already passed?

The very real possibility of a negative response from church members if we are perceived as responding too slowly to what they determine to be a crisis is quite real, especially if the congregation is one that is troubled. Therefore, many clergy find themselves compromising those things which sustain them (family, sabbath) in order to attend to the things which drain them such as emergency demands.

For those who did not get Sabbath time in each week, I listed ten possible factors that tend to be common factors among clergy for missing out on personal time. Those who missed Sabbath time during the week were asked to list the top three reasons or single largest reason for the disruption. These possible factors were:

- Unexpected church member issue (putting out fires, handling conflict)
- Unavoidable church business – required district or conference meeting
- Unexpected congregational emergency – conflict, funeral, hospital, death
- Too many projects coming due at once
- Too many demands on time
- Charge conference preparation
- Family illness
- Personal illness
- Other – specify

The top three disrupting factors listed among participants included:

- Unavoidable Church Business

- Too many projects coming due at once
- Too many demands on my time

Among the 'Other' category, most included holiday, family trip, or personal visits to physicians, etc.

I found it quite interesting that only 6 percent of the time pastors were denied their Sabbath due to having to contend with church gossip, putting out fires, or church conflict. According to the attrition rates of clergy and their reasons for leaving, my original impressions would have placed church conflict as the number one reason for missing Sabbath. However, church conflict was among the lowest three reasons for participant missing Sabbath time. The reality, therefore, seems to be that dealing with problematic church members is indeed a rare factor, however, it can be a situation that produces an abnormally high rate of anxiety thus giving the perception that dysfunctional behavior is a large part of the life of the church and perhaps one reason why clergy leave the ministry. This study at least challenges that notion substantially.

Overall, in nearly every measurable area as related to stress and complex trauma, the group as a whole and a majority of individuals scored high in the beginning and much lower in the end. There were no reversals or total elimination of stress symptoms, and, at the end of the survey period, clergy still registered above the normal range in all CT symptoms. However, there was a decrease in each of the symptomatic areas and the decrease was substantially larger than I had anticipated.

With just an average of three hours per week spent in Sabbath practice, the regular practice made a remarkable difference in participant's perspective and thus resulting in lower rates of fatigue, anxiety, social isolation, and blood pressure.

In the debriefing session, a majority of the clergy reported that they generally felt much more calm at the end of the study than they did at the beginning. While their Sabbath practice did not change the reality of what they face in the church, what it did do was to help them relax and approach anxiety driven situations from a position of strength rather than anxious exhaustion. This is a remarkable change and worthy of a longer follow up study with a much larger group size. My hypothesis is that just such a study would prove to be every bit as surprising as this study was.

My personal observations of the participants in the beginning of the project were that they seemed quite anxious and uncertain about participating in the program. They were unsure that the time (4 to 6 hours once a week) would make any difference at all in their personal anxiety, fatigue, and/or ministry. Participants had good questions, some of which were quite revealing about the amount of guilt that has come to be associated with any time clergy spend in self care.

For example, One participant asked if he could just do nothing.

Participant:

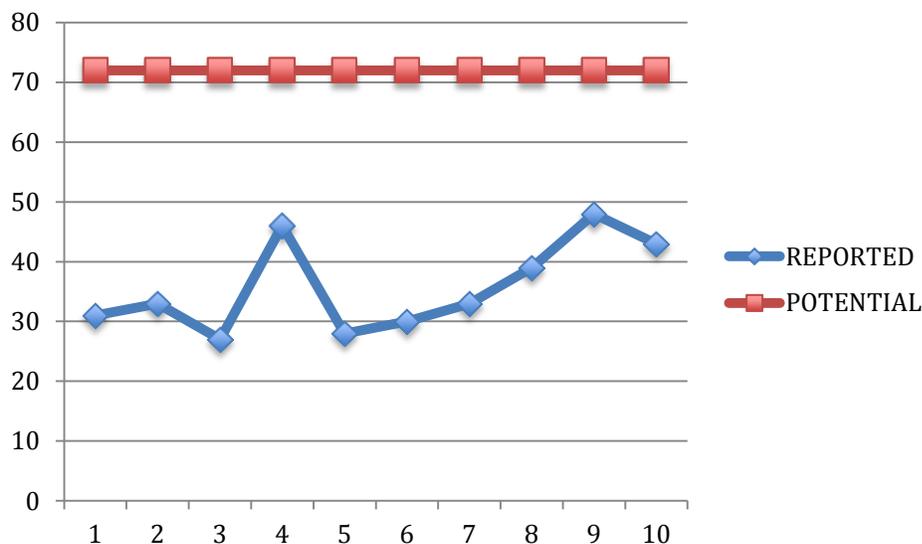
- “I am too worn out and weary to add anything else to my schedule. Can I spend this time just doing nothing, and resting?”

My response was “absolutely! In fact, that is the original design of Sabbath!” But feelings of guilt surrounding simply resting and doing nothing, or having to justify their Sabbath practice, were strong. Guilt, or fear of being perceived as less than energetic as a minister, because they make time to rest or do nothing outside of their day off, was a difficult and frightening concept for them to grasp.

As the project got underway, I noticed in the beginning it was hard for participants to get traction or get engaged in their regular weekly practice. I kept a weekly survey active in which participants reported their time spent (or missed and why) in Sabbath practice each week. The majority reporting ~~in~~ during the first two weeks revealed that very little time, if any, was spent in Sabbath. However, by week three they began to trust the process and engage. Interestingly enough, as participants engaged the practice more, they seemed to benefit from the time spent. I eventually began to see increases in time spent more each week. Not only in numbers of participants engaging but in time spent as gradually increasing.

There were ups and downs in the amount of time spent by each individual every week. It was not a steady, regular three to six hour period. What is significant ~~however,~~ and indicates a success in the study, is that over the entire ten week period there was a gradual increase in time spent overall.

One strange factor appeared in the data among all participants in that there was a significant decrease in participation about week seven to eight among all participants. I found this odd since participants were serving in two different areas. When I inquired about this at the debriefing, their answers made sense. They were all ~~were~~ on fall break during that time; therefore, even if pastors did not have children at home, many took the opportunity for some family vacation time during that period. Immediately following that sharp dip, the gradual increase in time spent in Sabbath practice returned.



**Figure 5.1. Potential Sabbath time available vs. actual time spent.**

Most notably, at the end of the research period, the participants seemed much more engaging, far less anxious, more outgoing, gregarious, and eager to share their experiences. No one had a bad experience. In fact, all had such a good experience that they asked if they could continue the practice, and asked me to give them a weekly prompt for doing so! In addition, four of the participants put their staff members on to the practice and have them doing the same thing. However, these persons were not included in the figures reported here.

All participants reported feeling much less anxious, far more rested, more at peace, and deeply closer to God. They reported the experience being much more engaging than merely time off but enriching, inspiring and revealing. The participants who invited their staff to engage in the same also reported results nearly identical to their own experience.

The literature review would support the findings from this study. Complex trauma, while normally considered limited to those who have experienced severe bouts of physical abuse, imprisonment or other long term traumatizing experiences by virtue of

the descriptive of CT, clergy serving difficult appointments in the United Methodist system certainly would find parallels to the experiences of such victims.

### **Recommendations**

It is my recommendation that a further study be commissioned, using a far larger sampling of a wider denominational representation and for a longer period of time.

Again, I think the findings will be the same if not similar to those found in this project.

However, the additional data gleaned from such a project could prove incredibly useful in helping direct judicatory officials in creating guidelines, policies, and procedures for endorsing regular Sabbath practice for clergy. Such could also prove helpful with the industries that insure our clergy for emotional/behavioral/physical health.

### **Postscript**

This project has been an amazing journey into the miracles of creation, the very human need for rest, intimacy with God, and the consequences of ignoring, dismissing, or otherwise neglecting to attend to both those innate needs. This rings especially true in ministry. During these seven years of study, I've managed to address and confront the reality of the dysfunctional congregation through a feature length documentary produced by US Films. The widespread reach of this negative influence on our clergy and congregations was brought to light through four years of filming, interviews, research, and writing. Bringing attention to one aspect of the problem of clergy resignations and church conflict left me searching for an answer to one question; what can be done about it?

As stated in the beginning of this project, the problem driving clergy away from the ministry is tangible and must be addressed. It is a fool's journey to think that in an attempt to correct this problem we can simply root out evil or eliminate difficult or problematic church members. Neither can any one person or group do much to change the inherent bureaucratic nature of judicatory policies and procedures that keep this problem in the closet by refusing to address it. In other words, we are not capable of stopping evil and we cannot change the nature of what has become the Church. Neither can we flippantly dismiss people who are antagonistic, problematic, or non-responsive to the Gospel. Congregations that have remained dysfunctional or unhealthy over many generations are not going to be made healthy by winning power struggles or fighting internal multi-generational family feuds.

What we can do, however, is to find ways to help make our clergy stronger, and to help them become stronger physically, emotionally, relationally, and spiritually. Such a task is achievable through a program that another clergy and I are developing called "Spiritual Strength Training." If we can help make our clergy stronger with the ongoing support of their superintendents and the encouragement of their congregations, then, with stronger spiritual leadership, other far larger changes in the denominational structure can be accomplished for the good of the whole. It is my belief that it can only begin, and must begin, with a return to Sabbath practice for all Christians but especially for those who are called to full time Christian service. My prayer is that this project will be the inspiration or the seed for just such new growth to begin to take place.

I am encouraged by the hope that Sabbath brings in helping clergy reclaim both the joy of their salvation and the excitement of their calling. Sabbath observation prevents

the spoilage of God's blessings, which are life sustaining and which await us in ministry.

For as Jesus said: "My yoke is easy, and my burden is light." (Matt 11:30)

---

---

**APPENDIX A****TITLE****Informed Consent Document****The purpose of this study**

The purpose of this research project is to evaluate the changes in physical health, emotional fatigue, and stress levels, as the result of a 10 week program of intentional Sabbath Practice, for a group of 14 full time clergy known to be serving difficult congregations in the North Georgia Conference of the United Methodist Church.

**Foreseeable risks/discomforts to the individual**

The only possible risk to participation in this project could possibly come in the form of complaints from church members regarding your participation. Such complaints often lack full understanding of such a study, or in difficult congregations such complaints emerge out of a misguided expectation of how the pastor spends his or her time. While not very likely to occur, it is a possibility in a congregation where some members may have unrealistic expectations of the clergy, or lack of understanding of the role of clergy as Spiritual Leader of the congregation.

Therefore to prepare for the possibility of such, the District Superintendent of each participant has agreed to support the pastors in their districts who participate in this study. This way the participant is protected from any possible attempts to damage their ministry through complaints to the DS.

Regarding any physical discomfort to the individual, this study will not involve anything that would generate such.

**Potential benefits to the individual**

Participants who actively engage the research project will very likely discover a new spiritual discipline that enhances their ministry, reduces their overall stress levels, improves their health and revitalizes their perspective on their current assignment.

**Confidentiality protections for the individual**

I have broken the study into two separate groups from two different districts within the conference. While some clergy may know one another personally, they will only know of the participants in their particular group. *In addition, all personal information on self scoring tests will be kept strictly confidential and coded only with participant's assigned identification number with active group. (A or B) All information and data pertaining to participants will remain in the control of the project supervisor (Rev. Kanipe) and will be destroyed once the project is complete and written up for review.*

**Compensation**

There will be no financial compensation for participation, except for travel expense reimbursements for travel to initial gathering and final gathering of both groups. However, all participants will receive a free copy of "Your Personality And The Spiritual Life" by Reg. Johnson and each will be invited to participate in a final spiritual formation two day retreat some two months after project completion.

Important contact information on each participant will be kept on file with the project supervisor.

**Conditions for participation include:**

Candidates must:

Be an ordained Elder in the UMC (or other denomination)

Serving a full time appointment

Appointment has been deemed 'difficult to serve' by either Superintendent or self identified by participant and affirmed as such by project supervisor. (through congregational assessment form given prior to commitment)

**YOU ARE AGREEING TO:**

Agree to commit to engage in four hour to six hour Sabbath practice once per week, for period of ten weeks. Day of participation left to participant.

Agree to submit to self scoring pre and post evaluations

Agree to keep a simple journal, making notes of insights, highlights or significant moments of growth during trial period. Share highlights (Anonymously) from your journal with study director.

Participants may drop out of the project at any time without penalty and will still receive the book and invitation to spiritual formation weekend.

I have read and agree to participate in this trial study of Intentional Sabbath Practice for Clergy

Signature \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

Participant information

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Email \_\_\_\_\_ @ \_\_\_\_\_

Cell Phone Contact \_\_\_\_\_

Gender: \_\_\_\_\_ Ethnic Identity \_\_\_\_\_

Married \_\_\_ Single \_\_\_ Widowed \_\_\_ Divorced \_\_\_

Children at home \_\_\_\_\_ Ages \_\_\_\_\_

Children out of the home \_\_\_\_\_ Ages \_\_\_\_\_

Age \_\_\_\_\_ Total number of years in full time ministry \_\_\_\_\_

Church Assignment \_\_\_\_\_

Number of years/months in present position \_\_\_\_\_

Size of congregation (Membership) \_\_\_\_\_

Average Worship \_\_\_\_\_

# Participant Handbook

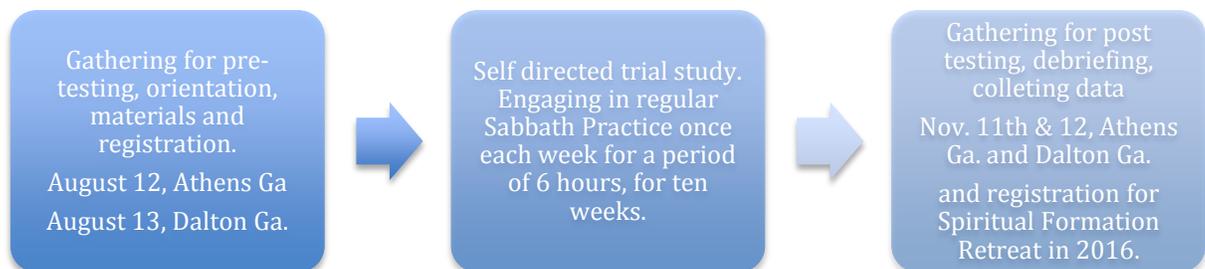
Ten Week Study on Intentional Sabbath  
Practice

August 12, 2015 – November 11, 2015

## INTENTIONAL SABBATH PRACTICE FOR CLERGY

God's call into full time ministry is a blessing. However in this post-modern era, doing ministry is fraught with challenges, demands, expectations and stresses that simply were not as intense in the past as they are today. So much so, that unfortunately, we are seeing attrition rates for clergy climbing as high as 85% within the first five years of service. Burnout, disillusion, discouragement and distress are all byproducts of overly demanding schedules – and if you are like a majority of other clergy, you are much better at taking care of others than you are at taking care of yourself.

This trial study is designed to see if time spent disengaging from 'church' and re-connecting with God on a regular and intentional basis, will reveal decreases in stress indicators, especially those related to Complex Trauma. Your faithful participation in this research may well prove helpful in creating models for healthier ways of doing ministry and being the Pastor, for those who follow the call as you have done.

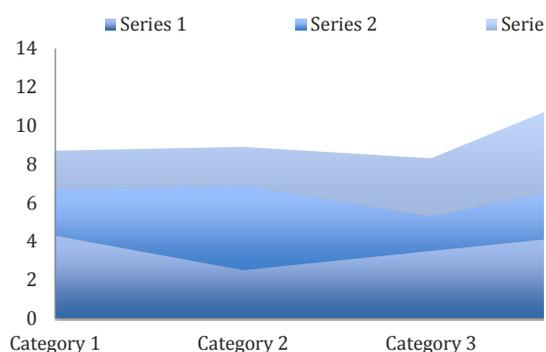


The process we will ask you to engage in is simple. We will gather all participants for a half day registration/orientation and testing on August 12<sup>th</sup> (Athens participants) and August 13<sup>th</sup> (Dalton area participants). Participants will be given standard self scoring instruments measuring for current levels of anxiety, fatigue and disassociation or social isolation. Participants will also have their blood pressures taken and recorded.

During the ten week trial period, participants will be asked to keep brief journal notations on their experiences of Sabbath practice (and when they were not able to engage as planned). They will also complete a brief on line two question survey each week related to their time spent in Sabbath practice.

At the end of the ten week session, all participants will gather again on October 28<sup>th</sup> (Athens participants) and 29<sup>th</sup> (Dalton area participants) for completing the same self scoring testing instruments, blood pressure recordings and debriefing. Participants will also be given their invitation to a spiritual formation retreat to take place in early 2016, as a 'thank you' for participating faithfully in this study, and as a way to perhaps extend what gains may have emerged for participants during the trial period.

### Data collected from anonymous testing instruments



All testing scores and results will remain completely anonymous, according to Institutional Review Board standards. Once compiled and data registered, all information on participants will be destroyed by shredder. No record of your name will appear on any data, reports, charts or records. Any information gathered for the purposes of this study will be destroyed before the publication of final dissertation. Therefore, your full participation is guarded as well as results from all testing.

Sample

### Information on August 12 Gathering:

Athens area participants will gather at **Young Harris UMC** on Wednesday August 12<sup>th</sup> at 9:30 for registration and orientation. Participants will receive their complimentary book "Your Personality And The Spiritual Life" by Reg. Johnson, be given private blood pressure recording and self scoring inventories. Data will be collected and participants will be taken through a brief orientation to Sabbath Practice as it is understood for this trial study. A brief question and answer session will complete our time together and a light lunch will be served for all, at no cost to you.

**Young Harris UMC is located at 973 Prince Avenue, Athens, GA**

Phone number 706.543.2612

On Thursday August 13<sup>th</sup>, participants from the Dalton area will gather at **Dalton First UMC**, located at

**500 S. Thornton Ave Dalton Ga. 30520.** We will gather at 9:30 for registration and orientation. Participants will receive their complimentary book “Your Personality And The Spiritual Life” by Reg. Johnson, be given private blood pressure recording and self scoring inventories. Data will be collected and participants will be taken through a brief orientation to Sabbath Practice as it is understood for this trial study. A brief question and answer session will complete our time together and a light lunch will be served for all, at no cost to you.

Participants will begin their weekly Sabbath practice the following week, and continue such for a period of ten weeks. Once each week a two question e-survey will be sent to you via email regarding the time you spent in Sabbath practice that week. In addition, participants are asked to keep a brief journal of experiences, highlights or insights gained during the ten week period...and to share those insights (anonymously) with the director at the end of the study. Again, no names will be attached with any comments from journals.

At the end of the ten week period we will gather again at the same locations. For the Athens area participants we will gather at Young Harris UMC on Wednesday November 11<sup>th</sup> . For the Dalton area participants we will gather at Dalton First UMC on Thursday November 12<sup>th</sup> . Again, blood pressure will be recorded and the same self-scoring inventories will be administered to each participant. A debriefing will follow the testing and complimentary lunch will follow our time together. In addition, those present will receive their invitation to participate in a complimentary two day spiritual formation retreat to be held in early 2016.

You will have access to the project director at all times via telephone, personal visits, email and text. Your faithful participation will prove helpful in identifying some of the best practices/disciplines for clergy who are experiencing stress, complex trauma or PTSD as a result of serving full time in a difficult or challenging appointment.

## WORKS CITED

- Alper, Matthew “The God Part Of The Brain: A Scientific Interpretation of Human Spirituality and God.” Sourcebooks, Inc. Naperville Illinois 2008
- Amen, David. “Nerurobiology 101: The Science of the Brain.”  
*Christian Counseling Today* 20.3 (2014): 22-28.
- Anderson, Norman B., Ph.D. “Stress in America: Paying With Our Health”  
*American Psychological Association* 2015 P 9
- Anderson, William D. and Cliff H. “Summers Neuroendocrine Mechanisms, Stress Coping Strategies, and Social Dominancy: Comparative Lessons about Leadership Potential.” (Nov. 2007) *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, Vol. 614, The Biology of Political Behavior. Sage Publications, Inc.
- Barkan, Steven E. and Greenwood, Susan F. “Religious Attendance and Subjective Well-Being among Older Americans: Evidence from the General Social Survey.”  
*Review of Religious Research*, Vol. 45, No. 2 (Dec. 2003) pp. 116-129.
- Barrett, Mark. “‘Like Dynamite Going Off in My Ears’: Using Autobiographical Accounts of Autism with Teaching Professionals.” *Educational Psychology in Practice* 22.2 (2006): 95-110. *PsycINFO*. Web. 6 May 2010.
- Barry, William A. & Connolly, William J.. *The Practice of Spiritual Direction*. New York, NY: HarperCollins, 2009.
- Roy F. Baumeister. *Evil: inside human cruelty and violence*. - Barnes & Noble - 2001

Bennett, William J. *The Index Of Leading Cultural Indicators*. New York, Published by Simon & Schuster, 1994

Blanton, Priscilla W. and Morris, M. Lane. Work-Related Predictors of Physical Symptomatology and Emotional Well-Being among Clergy and Spouses. *Review of Religious Research*, Vol. 40, No. 4 (June 1999) pp. 331-348

Bradford, Judith Ph.D., Biler, Brenda M.Div., A.B.D., Honnold, Julie A. Ph.D. Study of Clergy in the Virginia Annual Conference. *Survey and Evaluation Research Laboratory Center for Public Policy, Virginia Commonwealth University*. February 1999

Brother Lawrence. *The Practice Of The Presence Of God*. Double day Books, Random House Inc. New York, NY. 1977.

Brouwer, Mark. "The Friendless Pastor; How to address our perennial problem." *Christianity Today/Leadership Journal*, 2014

Brunette-Hill, Sandi. A Time For Every Purpose: Updating and Extending Blizzard's Survey on Clergy Time Allocation. *Review of Religious Research*, 1999, Vol. 41. Pp. 47-63

Coloroso, Barbara. *The Bully, The Bullied and Bystander*.

William Morrow Publishing 2009 P 75

Chodoff, Paul: "The Holocaust and Its Effects on Survivors: An Overview." *Political Psychology*, Vol. 18, No.1 (Mar. 1997) pp. 147-157

Department of Neurology, Emory University School of Medicine Emory University,

"Neurocognitive consequences of sleep deprivation." 2005:

Diddams, Margaret; Lisa Klein Surdyk and Denise Daniels. "Rediscovering Models of Sabbath Keeping: Implications for Psychological Well-Being" *Journal of Psychology and Theology*, 2004. Vol. 32, No. 1, 3-11

Dittes, James E. *Re-Calling Ministry* Chalice Press, St. Louis Missouri 1999

Durmer JS, Dinges DF. Behavioral and Physiological Consequences of Sleep Restriction *Journal of Clinical Sleep Medicine*. National Institutes of Health and General Medical Sciences: 2007 Aug 15; 3(5): 519–528.

Ellison, Christopher G., Jason D. Boardman, David R. Williams and James S. Jackson "Religious Involvement, Stress, and Mental Health: Findings from the 1995 Detroit Area Study" *Oxford University Press, Social Forces*, Vol. 80, No 1 September 2001, pp. 215-249

Freidman, Edwin. *A Failure of Nerve: Leadership in the Age of the Quick Fix*. Church Publishing Inc. New York NY 1999 Print

Freidman, Edwin. *Generation to Generation: Family Process in Church and Synagogue*. The Guilford Press New York London 1985 P. 27 Print

Estep R. James. *Christian Formation: Integrating Theology & Human Development*. Nashville Tennessee: B&H Academic, 2010.

Gonzalez, Guillermo J. and Richards, John Wesley. *The Privileged Planet: How Our Place in the Cosmos is Designed for Discovery*. Eagle Publishing, Washington DC 2004 Print.

Herman, Judith Lewis "Complex PTSD: A Syndrome in Survivors of Prolonged and Repeated Trauma". *Journal of Traumatic Stress*, Vol. 5, No. 3, 1992 P. 37

- Kenneth F. Ferraro & Cynthia M. Albrecht-Jensen “Does Religion Influence Adult Health?” by **Journal for The Scientific Study of Religion**, 1991, Vol. 30 No. 2 pp. 193-202
- Fichter, Joseph H. “The Myth of Clergy Burnout.” *Sociological Analysis*, (Vol. 45): n 4. pag. 373-382 Print.
- Joseph H. Fichter, “The Myth of Clergy Burnout.” *Sociological Analysis*, Vol. 45. No. 4 Winter 1984, pp. 373-382
- Fiorito, Basil., Kathleen Ryan. “Spirituality and Psychological Well-Being: A Mediator-Moderator Study” *Review of Religious Research*, Vol. 48, No. 4 June 2007, pp. 341-368
- Francis, Leslie J. “Assessing-Emotional Exhaustion Among the Australian Clergy: Internal Reliability and Construct Validity of the Scale of Emotional Exhaustion in Ministry.” *Review of Religious Research* 45(3):269 · Feb. 2004 45.3 (2004): 269-277.
- Francis, Leslie J., Village, Andrew, Robbins, Mandy and Wulff, Keith. (2011) Work-related psychological health among clergy serving in the Presbyterian Church (USA) : testing the idea of balanced affect. *Review of Religious Research*, Vol.53 (No.1). pp. 9-22.
- Friedman, Edwin H. *Generation to Generation: Family Process in Church and Synagogue*. New York: Guildford, 1985.
- Friedman, Edwin H. *A Failure Of Nerve: Leadership in the age of the quick fix*. Seabury Co., New York: 2007

Greenfield, Guy Ph.D. *The Wounded Minister: Healing From and preventing Personal Attack*. Baker Books, Grand Rapids, Michigan 1989 P 58

Markum, Jack. *Changing Sunday Practices. The Center for Christian Ethics at Baylor University: Associate for Survey Research at Research Services, The Presbyterian Church (USA)*, Louisville, Kentucky.

Margaret Guenther. *Holy Listening- The Art of Spiritual Direction*. Boston Mass. Cowley Publications, 1999

Margaret Guenther. *Holy Listening- The Art of Spiritual Direction*. Boston Mass. Cowley Publications, 1999

Kirk, Hadaway and Penny Long Marler “How Many Americans Attend Worship Each Week?” *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* Volume 44, Issue 3, September 2005, Pages: 307–322, C.

Hall, Todd. “Created To Connect: How God Designed You to Thrive.” *Christian Counseling Today* 20.3 (2014): 35-42.

Hart, Archibald D. *Coping With Depression In The Ministry And Other Helping Professions*. W. Publishing Group 1984 Print

Hays, Richard B and Davis, Ellen F. *The Art of Reading Scripture*. Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company 2003 Print

Headley, Anthony J. *Achieving Balance in Ministry*. Beacon Hill Press, Kansas City, MO: 1999. Print

Hess, Lisa Maguire. “Sabbath Renewal: Recovering Play in Pastoral Ministry” by Ministry Issues, from *The Clergy Journal* October 2004 (2004): n. pag.15-25

Hoge, Dean R., Jacqueline E. Wenger. *Transitions In Ministry: Why Clergy Leave Local Church Ministry*. William B. Eerdmans Pub. Co. 2005 Print

Hoge, Dean R., Wenger, Jacqueline E., Catholic University of America presented to the Religious Research Association, Norfolk Va. "Transitions In Ministry: Experiences of Protestant Ministers Who Left Local Church Ministry." *Pulpit and Pew* (2003): n. pag. 1-28 Print

Jasper, David. A. *A Short Introduction to Hermeneutics*.

Westminster John Knox Press Louisville\* London, 2004 Print

Johnson, Reginald. *Your Personality And The Spiritual Life*.

Center for Applications of Psychological Type, Inc. Gainesville Fla: 1999. Print

Kayler, Claude J. "Clergy Stress: A Study of Stressors and Stress-relieving Practices among United Methodist Clergy across Three Districts of the Western North Carolina Conference." Dissertation. Asbury Theological Seminary, 2011. Print.

Klass, Alan C. and Ms. Cheryl D. Klass. "Clergy Shortage Study."

*Mission Growth Studies for the Board of Higher Education of The Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod*. November 1999

Koenig, Harold. "The Influence of faith on Mental Health and Well-Being"

*Christian Counseling Today* Vol. 20, No. 3 2014 pp 48-54

Lange, John Peter, Philip Schaff, and Mead, Charles M. *A Commentary on the Holy Scriptures: Exodus*. Bellingham, WA: Logos Bible Software, . Volume 2 P 94  
2008. Print

- Lehr, Fred. *Clergy Burnout: Recovering From the 70-hour Work Week and other self-defeating practices*. Augsburg Fortress. Minneapolis. 2006 Print
- Levin, Jeff. "God, Love, and Health: Findings from a Clinical Study." *Religious Research Association, Inc.* 42.3 (2001): 277-93
- Lutz, Robert R. and Taylor, Bruce T. *Surviving In Ministry: Navigating the Pitfalls, Experiencing The Renewals* Paulist Press, New York. 1990 Print
- T. Mason and G. Lane *The Works of Reverend John Wesley Vol VI.*  
*New York: 1839 Print*
- MacDonald, Jeffrey. "Congregations Gone Wild"  
*New York Times* AUG. 7, 2010
- McLemore, Mark M. "Revaluing "Self-Care" as a Practice of Ministry." *Journal of Religious Leadership* 10.1 (2011): n. pag. 109-133
- McMillan, Becky R. "What Do Clergy Do All Week?" *Pulpt & Pew* (2002)
- Meisenhelder, Janice B., Chandler, Emily N. "Frequency of Prayer and Functional Health in Presbyterian Pastors." *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* (Vol 40. No. 2 Jun., 2001.): n. pag. 323-329
- Mark Miller-McLemore. "Revaluing "Self-Care" As a Practice of Ministry"  
*Journal of Religious Leadership*, Vol. 10.1 Vanderbilt Divinity School. ATLAS  
Serials Collection pp. 197-244
- Miner, Maureen, Sam Sterland, and Martin Dowson. "Coping with Ministry: Development of a Multidimensional Measure of Internal Orientation to the Demands of Ministry." *Review of Religious Research* 48.2 (Dec 2006): 212-30.
- Monahan, Susanne C. "Role Ambiguity among Protestant Clergy: Consequences of the Activated Laity." *Religious Research Association, Inc.* 41.1 (Autum 1999): 80-95.

Moore, Thomas. *The Care Of The Soul: A guide for cultivating depth and sacredness in everyday life*. Harper Perennial, Harper Collins Publishers 1992 Print

Mark Myers. "Mindfulness and the Brain: How to Change Your Life"

Christian Counseling Today Vol. 20, No. 3 pp. 62-65 2014

Newberg, Andrew, M.D., D'aquili Eugene., Rause, Vince *Why God Won't Go*

*Away: Brain Science & The Biology Of Belief* Ballantine Books, New York 2001  
Print

Oates, Wayne E. *Behind the Masks: Personality Disorders in Religious Behavior*.

Louisville: Westminster, 1987. Print

Pargament, Kenneth I., Nalini Tarakeshwar, Christopher G. Ellison, and Keith M. Wulff.

"Religious Coping Among the Religious: The Relationships Between Religious Coping and Well-Being in a National Sample of Presbyterian Clergy, Elders, and Members." *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 40.3 (2001): 497-513.

Proeschold-Bell, Rae J., Sara LeGrand, John James, Amanda Wallace, Christopher

Adams, and David Toole. "A Theoretical Model of the Holistic Health of United Methodist Clergy." *Journal of Religious Health* 50.6 (2011): 700-20. Web.

Rae ,Jean Proeschold-Bell, LeGrand, Sara James, John Wallace, Christopher, Amanda

Toole, David. "A Theoretical Model of the Holistic Health of United Methodist Clergy" *Journal of Religion & Health* 2011. 50:700-720

Rediger, G. Lloyd. *Clergy Killers: Guidance for Pastors and Congregations Under*

*Attack*. John Knox Press, Louisville Ky. 1997. Print

Rediger, G. Lloyd. *The Toxic Congregation: How to heal the soul of Your Church.*

Abingdon Press, Nashville. 2007. Print

Rifkin, Jeremy *Entropy: A New World View.* Viking Press, NY 1980 Pp 34-40 Print

Ross, Michael. "Hundreds of Pastors Leave Their Ministry Each Month." Charisma

Online News Service. 26 Feb. 2001.

Ruckhaus, Keith. *What Do You Do When God Stops Working? A Biblical Reflection on*

*Sabbath Rest* Whipf and Stock Publishers, Eugene OR, 2002 Print

Scalise, Eric. "The Neurobiology of Trauma and Traumatic Relationships" by pp. 28-34

*Christian Counseling Today* Vol. 20, No. 3 2014

Schaefer, Arthur Gross; Jacobsen, Steve. "Surviving Clergy Burnout."

Journal: *Encounter* 70.1 (2009): pp37-66.

Schaefer, Arthur Gross & Steve Jacobsen *Surviving Clergy Burnout.* by ATLAS Serials

Collection

Schieman, Scott, Tetyana Pudrovska, Leonard I. Pearlin, and Christopher G. Ellison.

"The Sense of Divine Control and Psychological Distress: Variations Across Race and Socioeconomic Status." *Society for the Scientific Study of Religion*

45.4 (Dec 2006): 529-49.

Scott Schieman, Tetyana Pudrovska, Leonard I. Pearlin and Christopher G. Ellison "The

Sense of Divine Control and Psychological Distress: Variations Across Race and Socioeconomic Status" *Journal for The Scientific Study of Religion*, Vol. 45. No.

4 Dec. 2006, pp. 529-549

Schnittker, Jason. "When Is Faith Enough? The Effects of Religious Involvement on

Depression." *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 40.3 (Sep. 2001): 393-

411.

Servan, Schreiber. *Anti-Cancer: A new way of life.*

Penguin Books, Great Britan, 2008 Print

Sheffield, B. *Forced Terminations.* Lifeway Christian Resources of the Southern Baptist Convention. 1999

Sherman, Daniel “Watching My Wife Fall Before My Eyes.” *Pastorburnout.com* 2010

Sibey, Gary. “Executive Functions and Spiritual Growth.” *Christian Counseling Today* 20.3 (2014): 42-48

Stewart, Kristin. “Keeping Your Pastor: An Emerging Challenge.” *Journal for the Liberal Arts and Sciences* 13.3 (Summer 2009): 12-47

Tanner, Marcus N., Anisa M. Zvonkovic, and Charlie Adams. “Forced Termination of American Clergy: Its Effects and Connection to Negative Well-Being.” *Religious Research Association, Inc.* 54.1 (2011): 1-17

Thompson, Curt. “The Mind, Faith and Interpersonal Neurobiology.” *Christian Counseling Today* 20.3 (2014): 66-80.

Turner, C. “More than 1,300 staff dismissed in 2005: Relationship issues again take first five spots.” Web article: [www.lifeway.com](http://www.lifeway.com) 2006

Victor, Frankl. *Man’s Search for Meaning* Beacon Press. Kindle Edition, (2006-06-0

Grossman, Dave *On Killing: the psychological cost of learning to kill in war and society* Little, Brown and Co. – 2009 Print

Wells, Bob. “Which Way to Clergy Health?” *Divinity, the alumni magazine of Duke Divinity School.* Online Fall 2002

London, H.B. *London Clergy Burnout.* 2003/Issue 1. *Christian Counseling Connection* a publication of the American Association of Christian Counselors

Philip G. Zimbardo – “The Lucifer Effect: Understanding how Good People turn Evil.”

Random House - 2007 Print

## WORKS CONSULTED

- Blaine Allen - *Before you quit: when ministry is not what you thought* Kregel Publications - 2001
- Capps, Donald., James E. Dittes - *Re-calling ministry* - Chalice Press - 1999
- Kenneth J. Collins - *Soul care: deliverance and renewal through the Christian life* Victor Books – 1995
- Donald E. Demaray - *Watch out for burnout: a look at its signs, prevention, and cure* Baker Book House - 1983
- Enroth, Ronald. *Recovering From Churches That Abuse.*
- Greenfield, Guy. *The Wounded Minister: Healing from and preventing personal attacks.* N.p.: Baker Books, 2001.
- Haugk, Kenneth C. *Antagonists in the Church.*
- Ben Campbell Johnson - *Listening for God: spiritual directives for searching Christians* Paulist Press – 1997
- Langford, Daniel L. *The Pastor's Family: The Challenges of Family Life and Pastoral Responsibilities.*
- J. Fred Lehr - *Clergy burnout: recovering from the 70-hour work week-- and other self-defeating practices* Fortress Press - 2006
- McBurney, Louis. *Every Pastor Needs A Pastor.* Word books, 1977
- McIntosh, Gary L. and Robert L. Edmondson. It Only Hurts on Monday: Why Pastors Quit and What You Can Do About It. Church Smart Resources, 1998
- Moore, Filbert L., Jr. *Pastor-Care The National Clergy Support Network 6 (Summer 2000):*

- Moore, Thomas - Care of the soul: a guide for cultivating depth and sacredness in everyday life. HarperCollins - 1992
- Nouwen, Henri J. M.. Spiritual Formation. New York, NY. HarperCollins, 2010
- Oates, Wayne. E. ed. The Minister's Own Mental Health. Channel Press, Great Neck, NY (1961)
- Pastor X. How To Murder A Minister. Fleming H Revell Publishers; First Edition edition (1970)
- Peck, M. Scott - People of the lie: the hope for healing human evil. Simon and Schuster - 1983
- Preston, Gary D. Pastors in pain: how to grow in times of conflict - Baker Books - 2005
- Rassieur, Charles L. Stress Management for Ministers: Practical Help for clergy who deny themselves the care they give to others. Philadelphia: Westminster Press, c1982.
- Reiland, Dan. Shoulder to Shoulder: Strengthening Your Church by Supporting Your Pastor Thomas Nelson Publishers 1997
- Ryan, Dale - Juanita Ryan - Soul repair: rebuilding your spiritual life. Jeffrey VanVonderen - IVP Books - 2008
- Simon, George K. The Judas syndrome: why good people do awful things - 2013
- Steinke, Peter L. How Your Church Family Works. Rowman & Littlefield Publishers 2006
- Stevens, R. Paul The other six days: vocation, work, and ministry in biblical perspective. W.B. Eerdmans - 1999

Taylor, Bruce T. Surviving in ministry: navigating the pitfalls, experiencing the renewals.

Robert R.Lutz - - Paulist Press - 1990

Teykl, Terry. Preyed On Or Prayed For: Hedging Your Pastors In Prayer.

Walker, Daniel D. The Human Problems of the Minister. Harper & Brothers, New York

1960

Walmsley, Roberta Chapin, and Adair T. Lummis. Healthy Clergy, Wounded Healers:

Their Families and Their Ministries. Church Pub Inc. 1997

Wiesel, Elie- Night. Bantam Books - 1982