

---

**A CALM IN THE TEMPEST:  
DEVELOPING RESILIENCE IN RELIGIOUS LEADERS**  
DAVID G. FORNEY

**Abstract:** Quoting from Isaiah 49:8, Paul says that now is the acceptable time to be helped by God, and thereby endure the adversities of ministry, because now is the day of salvation (2 Cor. 6:1-10). Paul goes on to witness to resilient leadership, ultimately obtained through the power of the Holy Spirit, even in the midst of afflictions, hardships, and calamities. This article explores the current resilience research—particularly the asset-adversity model—and applies it to the practice of religious leadership. This application first explores three acute adversities clergy face today and then offers four assets that have been found to promote resilience. The intention of this work is to increase the level of resilience in clergy so that they can be more imaginative, creative, and energetic about their call to the gospel of Jesus Christ.

### **Introduction**

A former M.Div. student of mine called the other day to check in and ask if I would serve as a reference for his law-school application. After serving a congregation in Mississippi as the solo pastor, Stephen has had enough. “They’ve just worn me down with conflict,” he said with quiet resignation. “Like the previous four pastors that served here, these two years have been filled with the same angry disputes and, honestly, I can’t do it anymore.”

Tragically, Stephen’s story of his first call is not unique. The research conducted on clergy stress and burnout over the past several decades has well documented in the religious-leadership environment the stressors that create similar scenarios. Conflict in the

*David G. Forney serves as the pastor of First Presbyterian Church, Clarksville, Tennessee.*

church and in the home, role ambiguity and role overload, chronic familial stress stemming from low income and long work hours, and profound loneliness all contribute to overstressed and burned-out clergy. Todd Hall defines clergy burnout as “a process and condition in which chronic stress from interpersonal contact leads to emotional and/or physical exhaustion, decreased productivity, dehumanized treatment of clients, marital conflict, loneliness, psychosomatic illness, and a substantial decrease in enjoyment of interpersonal relationships both inside and outside of work.”<sup>1</sup>

For clergy, burnout appears to be most acute among people who entered their first call with especially high ideals. Their hopes of being able to “make an immediate difference” and “change the world” are dashed when they encounter dysfunctional organizational systems that are entrenched in ritual and tradition, troubled parishioners who are often perceived as unappreciative, and the inability of their denomination to help them. Moreover, the spiral down into burnout is something that debilitates both the clergy person’s and the congregation’s ministry.

Burnout occurs within all helping professions and is recognized as a combination of (a) emotional exhaustion (e.g., feeling drained by work, fatigued in the morning, often frustrated), (b) depersonalization (e.g., have become calloused by job, treat people like objects, feel others blame you for their problems), and (c) reduced personal accomplishment (inefficiency, negative influence on others, lack of empathy).<sup>2</sup> Teachers get fed up with being disciplinarians, nurses get distressed when patients die, and police officers get disheartened having to

---

<sup>1</sup> Todd W. Hall, “The Personal Functioning of Pastors: A Review of Empirical Research with Implications for the Care of Pastors,” *Journal of Psychology and Theology* 25(2) (1997): 245.

<sup>2</sup> C. Maslach and S. E. Jackson, “Burnout in Organizational Settings,” in *Applied Social Psychology Annual*, 5<sup>th</sup> ed., ed. Stuart Oskamp, (Beverly Hills, CA: Sage, 1984), 134.

constantly deal with workplace violence.<sup>3</sup> Burnout, though, is not the only negative consequence of overstressed clergy. Even if a clergy person does not leave pastoral ministry because of adversity, his or her creativity and enthusiasm are dampened, leaving the clergy person to function increasingly in a *maintenance* role rather than as the *bringer* of good news.

One well-developed way to address clergy burnout is to provide better and improved management skills (both in degree programs and in continuing education venues). Clergy have benefited from learning how to better manage conflict, work as effective change agents, supervise personnel, handle finances, and sort out processes for church governance more over the past several decades than ever before. However, these beneficial skills do not directly address the more core issue of resilience. This article, therefore, offers an overview of the current research on resilience (centering on an asset-adversity model), explores three significant areas that contribute to the adversity experienced by today's clergy, and concludes with four assets clergy can develop to increase their resilience and, thus, thrive in the practice of pastoral ministry.

The proposal of increasing the level of resilience to better navigate the adversity of pastoral ministry is not novel. The idea is clearly found in the New Testament. In the middle of Second Corinthians, Paul writes about the "great endurance" required if he and his companions are to thrive as servants of God. He writes:

As we work together with him, we urge you also not to accept the grace of God in vain. For he says, "At an acceptable time I have listened to you, and on a day of salvation I have helped you." See, now is the acceptable time; see, now is the day of salvation! We are putting no obstacle in anyone's way, so that no fault may be found with our

---

<sup>3</sup> Gary Johns and Alan M. Saks, *Organizational Behaviour: Understanding and Managing Life at Work*, 5<sup>th</sup> ed., (Toronto: Addison Wesley Longman, 2001), 432.

ministry, but as servants of God we have commended ourselves in every way: through great endurance, in afflictions, hardships, calamities, beatings, imprisonments, riots, labors, sleepless nights, hunger; by purity, knowledge, patience, kindness, holiness of spirit, genuine love, truthful speech, and the power of God; with the weapons of righteousness for the right hand and for the left; in honor and dishonor, in ill repute and good repute. We are treated as impostors, and yet are true; as unknown, and yet are well known; as dying, and see—we are alive; as punished, and yet not killed; as sorrowful, yet always rejoicing; as poor, yet making many rich; as having nothing, and yet possessing everything (2 Cor. 6:1-10).<sup>4</sup>

When Paul works together with Christ *and* the Corinthians—through the afflictions, hardships, calamities—ministry becomes having nothing and yet possessing everything. Paul believes that the very struggles he endures are opportunities for resilience rather than occasions to judge, find fault, and assign blame. In Greek, Paul uses the word *hypomonē* to express the way he can endure the hardships that accompany ministry. This type of endurance, *hypomonē*, is not submissiveness, where a person simply receives the hardship with resignation. Rather, endurance for a minister of Jesus Christ is the ability to bear all things in such a way that the hardship becomes transformative, even to the point of becoming a blessing.

John Chrysostom (c. 347–407), the archbishop of Constantinople, preached of Paul’s “blizzard of troubles” and referred to *hypomonē* as “the root of all goods, the mother of piety, the fruit that never withers, a fortress that is never taken, a harbor that knows no storms...the queen of virtues, the foundation of right actions, peace in war, calm in tempest, security in plots.”<sup>5</sup> Paul’s capacity

---

<sup>4</sup> All biblical quotes for this article are from the *New Revised Standard Version*.

<sup>5</sup> John Chrysostom, as cited in William Barclay, *The Letters to the Corinthians* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1956), 237.

to know sorrow and yet always rejoice, to be poor yet make many rich, to have nothing yet possess everything comes from the power of God. This is *hypomonē*. Only by the grace of God can Paul, and everyone “justified by faith,” boast in “sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, and endurance produces character, and character produces hope, and hope does not disappoint us, because God’s love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit that has been given to us” (Rom. 5:3-5).

Today, researchers have just begun to explore why some individuals, like Paul, are transformed by experiences of tremendous adversities rather than declining into hopelessness. For instance, Angela Madsen is a 48-year-old grandmother who was transformed by incredible adversity. Among her post-trauma accomplishments, she has received the Amateur Athletic Foundation’s award “Women Who Inspire Us” and the Leo Reilly, Jr., Award for outstanding spirit and determination. She is a four-time World Championship gold medalist and the first physically challenged woman to row across the Atlantic Ocean. She competed in the 2008 Paralympics in Beijing, China.<sup>6</sup> Remarkably, Madsen achieved these remarkable feats after sustaining a severe injury while serving as a military police officer in the U.S. Marine Corps. The injury was a puncture of the spinal cord that paralyzed her from the waist down. From this injury, she lost her job as a mechanical engineer, gained weight to over 300 pounds, and lost hope. That is, until a doctor’s comment—that she was “a waste of a human life”—stirred her to become more resilient, vowing to do whatever it took to get her life back.<sup>7</sup>

---

<sup>6</sup> From [http://www.lbveteransdayparade.com/HTML\\_2008/angela.php](http://www.lbveteransdayparade.com/HTML_2008/angela.php), accessed January 14, 2009.

<sup>7</sup> Denise Foley, “Resilience Can Get You through Life’s Trials: Survivors of Tough Times Know How To Cope — and You Can Learn Too” (MSNBC, December 4, 2007, found at <http://www.msnbc.msn.com/id/21580558/from/ET>).

Mary Lynn Pulley and Michael Wakefield, from the Center for Creative Leadership, define resilience as follows:

Resilience provides the ability to recover quickly from change, hardship, or misfortune. It's associated with elasticity, buoyancy, and adaptation. Resilient people demonstrate flexibility, durability, an attitude of optimism, and openness to learning. A lack of resilience is signaled by burnout, fatigue, malaise, depression, defensiveness, and cynicism.<sup>8</sup>

This definition of resilience categorizes adversity as change, hardship, and misfortune. These three types of adversity suggest that it comes from anything that disrupts the world around us, be it change (positive or negative), a hardship (induced internally or imposed externally), or just bad luck (determining causation is unattainable). This definition also provides antonyms for resilience, namely, that the lack of resilience leads to burnout, fatigue, malaise, depression, defensiveness, and cynicism. Throughout this article, I incorporate Pulley and Wakefield's definition of resilience with one important qualifier: Resilience for clergy is more than a psychological adjustment of flexibility, durability, optimism, and openness to learn; resilient clergy are those whose ministry comes from God's call and is supported by the gift of *hypomonē*.

### Asset-Adversity Model

The vast majority of research into resilience has been conducted over the past thirty years with children, especially in the area of education.<sup>9</sup> Educational researchers have been keen to learn how to best help children who are in highly adverse contexts to thrive in

---

<sup>8</sup> Mary Lynn Pulley and Michael Wakefield, *Building Resilience: How To Thrive in Times of Change* (Greensboro, NC: Center for Creative Leadership, 2001), 7.

<sup>9</sup> For a historical overview of this research, see Ann S. Masten and Jelena Obradović, "Competence and Resilience in Development," *Annals of the New York Academy of Sciences* (2006): 13-27.

school, and resilience has been recognized as the key ingredient. After reviewing this literature, I believe clergy can gain valuable insights about how they can increase their own levels of resilience from this related research. One preeminent researcher in the field is Ann S. Masten, the Distinguished McKnight University Professor at the University of Minnesota's Institute of Child Development.<sup>10</sup> Professor Masten believes that resilience is not extraordinary, but rather, "is common and that it usually arises from the normative functions of human adaptational systems..."<sup>11</sup> Accordingly, Masten writes that:

The great surprise of resilience research is the ordinariness of the phenomena. Resilience appears to be a common phenomenon that results in most cases from the operation of basic human adaptational systems. If those systems are protected and in good working order, development is robust even in the face of severe adversity; if these major systems are impaired, antecedent or consequent to adversity, then the risk for developmental problems is much greater, particularly if the environmental hazards are prolonged.<sup>12</sup>

The premise of resilience research is that if a person's adaptive systems are in good working order, then his or

---

<sup>10</sup> Professor Masten's research focus is to "study risk and resilience in development, with a focus on the processes leading to positive adaptation and outcomes in young people whose development is threatened by adversity. With many terrific colleagues and students, I have studied adaptation in diverse children, adolescents, and young adults, including children growing up in ordinary situations in the city or on farms, and children who must overcome extreme threats to development, such as war, disaster, and homelessness. The ultimate objectives of this work are to inform basic science and the policies or programs designed to promote positive development and a better future for children whose lives are threatened by adversity." Ann Masten from her faculty page, <http://cehd.umn.edu/ICD/faculty/Masten.html>, accessed January 31, 2009.

<sup>11</sup> Ann S. Masten, "Ordinary Magic: Resilience Processes in Development," *American Psychologist* 56(3) (March 2001): 227.

<sup>12</sup> Masten, "Ordinary Magic," 227.

her resilience will be robust. And, conversely, if a person does not have the assets necessary to develop resilience to meet the level of adversity present, then he or she is at an increased risk for burnout, fatigue, malaise, depression, defensiveness, and cynicism.<sup>13</sup> Good *adaptive systems* in this context are:

- a) Positive interpersonal relationships,
- b) Intelligence and problem-solving skills,
- c) Perceived efficacy and control,
- d) Persistence of achievement motivation,
- e) Self-regulation skills,
- f) Effective stress management, and
- g) Faith, hope, and spirituality.<sup>14</sup>

The finding that resilience is ordinary is good news for clergy, especially for those who believe they need to attain Paul's level of faith before acquiring *hypomonē*. Therefore, the assumption of this paper is that if clergy can develop the assets that increase the health of adaptive systems, that is, resilience, they can thrive even with all the burdens of pastoral ministry.<sup>15</sup>

From the resilience research conducted to date, three important findings emerge. The first finding is that when faced with a new hardship, three potential outcomes are possible (after traversing one of eight pathways). The outcomes are (1) positive transformation with an increase in the level of resilience (net growth in adaptive functioning), (2) response and recovery or resistance (no effective change in adaptive functioning), or (3) breakdown without recovery (negative net effect in adaptive functioning).<sup>16</sup> Therefore, "opportunities and

---

<sup>13</sup> Masten, "Ordinary Magic," 230.

<sup>14</sup> Ann S. Masten, Janette E. Herbers, J. J. Cutuli, Theresa L. Laffavor, "Promoting Competence and Resilience in the School Context," *Professional School Counseling* 12(2) (December 2008).

<sup>15</sup> A *thriving* leader is, at least, one who is imaginative, creative, and energetic about the work he or she is doing.

<sup>16</sup> Ann S. Masten and Jelena Obradović, "Disaster Preparation and Recovery: Lessons from Research on Resilience in Human Development," *Ecology and Society* 13(1) (2008): 9. Figure 1 best illustrates the examples of adaptive and maladaptive patterns in relation to an acute-onset disaster.

choices at crucial junctures play an important role in the life course of resilient individuals.”<sup>17</sup>

Beyond the adversities that most humans experience, the particular crucial junctures for clergy are those initiated by the call to ministry, such as receiving the primary call to ministry, attending an institution of theological education, getting the first call to pastoral ministry, and the acutely adverse experiences encountered in living out the call. The liminality of these transitions through the call process induces stress, and, consequently, clergy often exhibit adaptation or maladaptation during them. Like all adversities, these occasions of transition also provide the opportunity for clergy to improve their level of resilience but can also impact negatively their ability to thrive in difficult situations.

Yet, even if an individual does not have the necessary level of resilience to thrive in one context, he or she can still thrive in future adverse situations. This is the second finding; past experiences are not determinative. Masten observes that “very little evidence has emerged from these studies to indicate that severe adversity has major or lasting effects.”<sup>18</sup> However, there is one important qualifier. If a person’s adaptive systems are compromised “prior to or as a result of the adversity,” then future resilience can be hampered.<sup>19</sup> Again, “when these adaptive systems are available and operating normally, individual resilience is common” and, without them, we function with persistent or unresponsive maladaptive patterns.<sup>20</sup>

The third finding is that maladaptive patterns emerge when adversity is high and competence in resilience is low.<sup>21</sup> In other words, as the level of adversity increases, the difference between the development of assets for

---

<sup>17</sup> Masten, “Ordinary Magic,” 233.

<sup>18</sup> Masten, “Ordinary Magic,” 232.

<sup>19</sup> Masten, “Ordinary Magic,” 232.

<sup>20</sup> Masten and Obradović, 21.

<sup>21</sup> Masten, “Ordinary Magic,” 233.

resilience verses the lack of assets becomes apparent.<sup>22</sup> This understandable relationship is important, especially for leaders to recognize in themselves, because if maladaptive patterns can be recognized (especially early in a crisis), instrumental changes can be made before the adversity impairs their ministry (at the least) or burnout sets in.

Emerging from this research is a model that focuses on the relationship of a person's assets to the level of adversity he or she encounters. This model illustrates the fundamental connection between assets and adversity. For instance, when there is no adversity, everyone has the necessary assets. However, as the level of adversity rises, people's assets become manifest as they play an essential role in how well the turbulent waters will be navigated. Before addressing the assets clergy can develop for increasing their level of resilience, an overview of the adversity clergy regularly experience is presented.

### **Adversity: Research Finding on Clergy**

Clergy in the U.S. culture stand at the forefront of helping people during troubled times. They are frequently called upon to support individuals in personal crises such as death or illness, cultural crises such as school violence and acts of terrorism, and environmental crises such as hurricanes and floods. They often work long hours and place the concerns of their congregation and community before their own personal and familial issues.<sup>23</sup>

This accurate description of clergy standing at the forefront of care and compassion is not new. Being a servant of God has always been fraught with danger, even to the point of martyrdom. Today, though, there are three adverse conditions—(1) *mental health workload*,

---

<sup>22</sup> Masten and Obradović, 19.

<sup>23</sup> C. A. Darling, E. W. Hill and L. M. McWey, "Understanding Stress and Quality of Life for Clergy and Clergy Spouses," *Stress and Health* 20 (2004): 261-2.

*compassion fatigue, and secondary trauma; (2) role ambiguity of clergy; and (3) diffused boundaries between the clergy and their congregations—in ministry that ought to be considered, given their impact on clergy.*

*Mental Health Workload, Compassion Fatigue, and Secondary Trauma*

Studies over the last thirty years have found that clergy are regularly involved in the mental health care of “severely mentally distressed persons”<sup>24</sup> to the level of spending up to 20% of their time performing pastoral counseling.<sup>25</sup> A study in 2004 by Darling, Hill, and McWey found that Jewish and Christian clergy spend “148.2 hours of mental health services annually, which is equivalent to 22,000 mental health specialists delivering services at the rate of 130 hours per week.”<sup>26</sup> The reality of pastoral ministry today is that millions of Americans come to their clergy either first or early in their marital or familial crises because of trust, ease of access, and little or no financial cost.<sup>27</sup> This incredible workload for clergy in the area of pastoral care and mental health services leads to compassion fatigue and/or secondary traumatic stress.

---

<sup>24</sup> A. A. Hohmann and D. B. Larson, “Psychiatric Factors Predicting Use of Clergy,” in *Psychotherapy and Religious Values*, ed. E.L. Worthington Jr. (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1993), 71-84.

<sup>25</sup> A.J. Weaver, “Has There Been a Failure To Prepare and Support Parish-based Clergy in Their Role as Front-line Community Mental Health Workers? A Review,” *The Journal of Pastoral Care* 49 (1995): 129–149.

This 20% time allocation to pastoral counseling does not distinguish between “pastoral care” and “pastoral counseling.” Nevertheless, whether the clergy member is providing pastoral care or pastoral counseling, when empathy is involved in the interaction, compassion fatigue and secondary trauma are operative.

<sup>26</sup> C. A. Darling, E. W. Hill and L. M. McWey, 261-277.

<sup>27</sup> See C. A. Darling, E. W. Hill and L. M. McWey, 261-277; L.W. Abramczyk, “The Counseling Function of Pastors: A Study in Practice and Preparation,” *Journal of Psychology and Theology* 9 (1981): 7–17; D. G. Benner, *Strategic Pastoral Counseling: A Shortterm Structure Model* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1992); and H.P. Chalfant, P. L. Heller, A. Roberts, D. Briones, S. Aguirre-Hochbaum, and W. Farr, “The Clergy as a Resource for Those Encountering Psychological Distress,” *Review of Religious Research* 31 (1990): 305–313.

Charles R. Figley points out that compassion fatigue is “a natural response” to working with individuals or groups of people who are in crisis.<sup>28</sup> Compassion fatigue is a result of the stress produced from engaging empathetically in other individuals’ traumas and can be likened to a physical workout. When muscles are stretched, fatigued, and used to their limits, they ache from the buildup of lactic acid. And athletes understand they have to give these muscles time to recuperate between workouts or they will inevitably experience an injury, such as a pulled muscle or strained ligament.

Jacobson states that as our level of empathy increases, we are “at greater risk for experiencing compassion fatigue.”<sup>29</sup> Therefore, the more we exercise empathy, the more at-risk we are to sustaining an injury to our compassion (such as avoidance, dismissal, or retaliation). Given that compassion fatigue is a natural reaction to working in pastoral ministry, it should be thought of as an “occupational hazard” for clergy.<sup>30</sup> Bob Wright, a trauma and bereavement counselor, believes compassion fatigue “immediately suggests a lot that is talked about in the experience [of burnout]. That is ‘no energy for it anymore,’ ‘emptied, nothing left to give,’ ‘not wanting to go there again,’ ‘feeling depleted in every dimension,’ ‘too many questions and no answers,’ [and] ‘why am I doing this?’”<sup>31</sup> Empathy is at the center of compassion fatigue—

---

<sup>28</sup> Charles R. Figley, “Compassion Fatigue as Secondary Traumatic Stress Disorder: An Overview,” in *Compassion Fatigue: Coping with Secondary Traumatic Stress Disorder in Those Who Treat the Traumatized*, ed. B.H. Stamm (New York: Brunner/Mazel, 1995), 2.

<sup>29</sup> Jodi M. Jacobson, “Compassion Fatigue, Compassion Satisfaction, and Burnout: Reactions Among Employee Assistance Professionals Providing Workplace Crisis Intervention and Disaster Management Services,” *Journal of Workplace Behavioral Health* 21(3/4) (2006): 134.

<sup>30</sup> J. F. Munroe, “Ethical Issues Associated with Secondary Trauma in Therapists,” in *Secondary Traumatic Stress: Self-care Issues for Clinicians, Researchers and Educators*, ed. B. Hudnall Stamm (Lutherville, MD: Sidran Press, 1999), 211-229.

<sup>31</sup> Bob Wright, “Compassion Fatigue: How To Avoid It,” *Palliative Medicine* 18 (2004): 3.

higher levels of empathy increase the prospect for compassion fatigue.

The word empathy derives from the compound Greek word *empathēia*, which joins *en* (translated as *in* or *at*) with *pathos* (translated as “feeling”).<sup>32</sup> To empathize, then, is to place ourselves *in* or *at* another’s *feeling*.<sup>33</sup> If the other person’s situation is traumatic—such as death of a loved one, an experience of violence, homelessness, divorce, etc.—and the clergy person empathizes with the person, then a secondary trauma can occur. A secondary trauma is defined as “the natural, consequent behaviors and emotions resulting from knowledge about a traumatizing event experienced by a significant other. It is the stress resulting from helping or wanting to help a traumatized or suffering person.”<sup>34</sup> This secondary traumatization includes symptoms parallel to the person who directly experienced the trauma, including *intrusive imagery* (the re-living of the other’s traumatic disclosures through illusions, hallucinations, flashbacks), *avoidant responses* (the avoidance of all stimuli associated with the trauma, including the loss of interest or participation in significant activities, detachment or estrangement from others, a restricted range of affect, and a sense of foreshortened future), and *physiological arousal* (such as difficulty falling or staying asleep, irritability or outbursts of anger, difficulty concentrating, hyper-vigilance, or exaggerated startle response).<sup>35</sup> In this way, Figley states that secondary trauma is a syndrome of symptoms

---

<sup>32</sup> Wikipedia, accessed November 19, 2008, <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Empathy>.

<sup>33</sup> It is important to note that the lack of training in counseling does not prohibit empathy and the resulting fatigue.

<sup>34</sup> C. R. Figley, “Compassion Fatigue: Toward a New Understanding of the Costs of Caring,” in *Secondary Traumatic Stress: Self-care Issues for Clinicians, Researchers, and Educators*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., ed. Charles R. Figley (Lutherville, MD: Sidran Press, 1999), 10.

<sup>35</sup> See C. R. Figley, “Compassion Fatigue as Secondary Traumatic Stress Disorder: An Overview,” in *Compassion Fatigue: Coping with Secondary Traumatic Stress Disorder in Those Who Treat the Traumatized*, ed. C. R. Figley (New York: Brunner/Mazel, 1995), 1-20

identical to those of Post Traumatic Stress Disorder, which has the identical characteristic symptoms. As a result, if a clergy person regularly experiences secondary trauma, then the internalization of suffering “can result in psychological and physical distress, as well as impairment of family relationships, interpersonal difficulties, and negative attitudes toward work, life, and other people.”<sup>36</sup> Other documented outcomes include “cognitive, emotional, physical, spiritual, work-related, interpersonal, and behavioral reactions such as decreased level of concern and empathy for clients, decreased positive feelings for clients, physical and emotional exhaustion, increased levels of job dissatisfaction, and feelings of hopelessness related to the job that can overflow into other areas of the professional’s life.”<sup>37</sup> Moreover, traumatic communal experiences—such as the 9/11 attacks—have a cumulative effect for clergy; they first experience the trauma as an individual member of the community and then, secondarily, as they provide care and support for members of the community.<sup>38</sup>

An important finding concerning the effects of compassion fatigue and secondary trauma concerns gender. One study suggests that women might be more likely to experience increased stress, goal loss, role overload because of their “emotional workloads” at home, with friends, and with relatives. These various areas of nurturing and care may compound the effects of compassion fatigue and secondary trauma. Strazdins and Broom observe:

---

<sup>36</sup> D. Prosser, S. Johnson, E. Kupers, G. Szmukler, P. Bebbington, and G. Throncroft, “Mental Health, ‘Burnout’ and Job Satisfaction among Hospital and Community-based Mental Health Staff,” *British Journal of Psychiatry*, 169 (1996): 334–337.

<sup>37</sup> Jodi M. Jacobson, “Compassion Fatigue, Compassion Satisfaction, and Burnout: Reactions Among Employee Assistance Professionals Providing Workplace Crisis Intervention and Disaster Management Services,” *Journal of Workplace Behavioral Health* 21(3/4) (2006): 135.

<sup>38</sup> See G. D. White, “Near Ground Zero: Compassion Fatigue in the Aftermath of September 11,” *Traumatology* 7(44) (2001): 151-154.

Women may be most at risk from emotional workloads because they are more ‘exposed’ to these demands. Women are traditionally viewed as responsible for the emotional wellbeing of family members, are more likely to provide support to friends, workmates and relatives, and also more likely to work in service jobs requiring care and nurturance of others. The requirement to do emotional work as part of the job could add to an already high demand in families, and both contexts are important in understanding its stressfulness and its impact on wellbeing.<sup>39</sup>

If this is the case, female clergy need to especially attend to the ways they can increase the assets that promote resilience.

#### *Role Ambiguity of Clergy and Congregations*

A second significant area that contributes to the stress and burnout of clergy is the increase of ambiguity of the clerical role. Traditionally, the clergy’s role and congregation’s role were better defined, where the church’s ministry fell along a spectrum between the congregation (marked by the role of laity to provide ministry to the congregation, i.e., Stephen Ministry) and the professional clergy person (marked by a centralization of ministry located with the clergy). Movement along this spectrum in the North American context has shifted from congregational members carrying a greater load of the ministry in the 1800s during the western expansion to the clergy in the 1900s. Over the past several decades, though, some churches have begun to move the ministerial emphasis back into the congregation as is seen in the development of equipping-the-saints programs.<sup>40</sup>

---

<sup>39</sup> L. Strazdins and D.H. Broom, “Servicing Emotions at Work and at Home: Implications for Stress and Wellbeing,” *Australian Journal of Psychology* (2003): supplement.

<sup>40</sup> See Susanne C. Monahan, “Role Ambiguity among Protestant Clergy: Consequences of the Activated Laity,” *Review of Religious Research* 41 (1999): 79-94.

These general patterns, though, do not provide a detailed road map for a clergy person and a particular congregation concerning their respective roles because the church does not communicate a unified vision of ministry to clergy or congregations. In addition to the traditional role for clergy, today they are believed to be some nearly unattainable collection of community builder, preacher, personnel director, teacher, change agent, pastoral counselor, marketer, and chief executive officer (some advertisements, though, do state that “walking on water is optional”). This collection seems to be taking Paul’s words to be all things to all people to an unfeasible extreme. Consequently, every congregation with its specific history and current trajectory uniquely practices its roles and has its presumed understanding of the clergy’s roles. Moreover, clergy bring their own understandings of their roles to the congregation they serve. The difference between these understandings is where role ambiguity (or what some researchers refer to as role confusion) initially occurs.

Monahan found that over time role ambiguity lessens in the particular setting because “clergy and lay people negotiate with each other expectations and consequence.”<sup>41</sup> Interestingly, though, Monahan also found that while role ambiguity lessens in the particular context over time, it does not decrease over a clergy person’s time in pastoral ministry. In other words, role clarity is not developed once and for all with the clergy but has to be re-developed with each congregation he or she serves.<sup>42</sup> Regardless of where ministry is centralized (within the congregation or with the clergy), though, the clerical role is unbounded and poorly defined and,

---

<sup>41</sup> Monahan, 91.

<sup>42</sup> Research on Southern Baptist pastors found that the negotiation between the congregation and pastor becomes problematic “in situations where the congregation is unwilling to follow pastoral initiative” and, subsequently, explored three types of responses: role segregation, abdication, and manipulation. C. Ingram, “Leadership, Democracy, and Religion: Role Ambiguity among Pastors in Southern Baptist Churches,” *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 20(2) (1981): 119-129.

consequently, role ambiguity now permeates ministry (the clergy's and congregations').<sup>43</sup>

This ambiguity increases stress and job dissatisfaction and decreases commitment and performance.<sup>44</sup>

Compared with other human service professionals the results show that pastors have relatively high scores on emotional exhaustion and relatively low scores on depersonalization. Pastors have relatively low scores on personal accomplishment. Those who say they are experiencing severe pressure of work appear to have high scores on the three burnout dimensions. Role ambiguity and lack of social support appear to intensify reported feelings of burnout.<sup>45</sup>

In summary, these various expectations, patterns, and overlapping roles add stress to clergy and congregations every time they negotiate a new call.<sup>46</sup>

### *Diffused Boundaries*

Related to role ambiguity are boundaries issues. While there are well documented cases of clergy infidelities (e.g., sexual, financial, or verbal such as lying), these are not the boundary issues discussed here.<sup>47</sup> The boundary issues that add adversity for clergy are the diffusing of space and time. Early family system theorist, Salvador Minuchin, observed that both boundaries that are too rigid or too loose create difficulties. "The function of

---

<sup>43</sup> See D. R. Hoge, "Sources of Stress Experienced by Catholic Priests," *Review of Religious Research* 35 (1993): 3–18.

<sup>44</sup> Gary Johns and Alan M. Saks, *Organizational Behaviour: Understanding and Managing Life at Work*, 5<sup>th</sup> ed. (Toronto: Addison Wesley Longman, 2001), 215. Johns and Saks define a role as a position in a group that has "a set of expected behaviors attached to them" (213).

<sup>45</sup> Will Evers and Welko Tomic, "Burnout among Dutch Reformed Pastors," *Journal of Psychology and Theology* 31(4) (2003): 329-338.

<sup>46</sup> Monahan states that there are several ways to reduce role ambiguity, such as a formal job description and specialized training (i.e., continuing education or a D.Min. program).

<sup>47</sup> The issue of resilience, though, is connected to issues of infidelity in that the weaker a clergy person's adaptive system, the more likely he or she will be to commit infidelity.

boundaries is to protect the differentiation of the system.”<sup>48</sup> Boundaries that are too rigid block interaction with outsiders and alienate us. Whereas, boundaries that are too diffuse allow outsiders to intrude and meddle in the family or, as Minuchin stated, become enmeshed. This enmeshment is often the case between clergy and their congregations because of blurred boundaries.

Throughout the biblical narrative, ministry takes place both *within* and *beyond* the walls of organized religion. For instance, Elisha heals Naaman at his home (2 Kings 5:1-12), Jesus heals the paralytic at home (Mark 2:1-12) and, throughout Acts, ministry takes place both within the temple and inside homes (e.g., Acts 2:1, 2:46, 5:41, 9:17, 12:12, 16:32, 18:7, 20:20, 21:8). Unlike other modern day professions that have developed clear boundaries between the office and home, clergy are called to move with equal ease between public and private locations. Taking their cue from Paul, clergy follow his desire to be helpful in both locations: “I did not shrink from doing anything helpful, proclaiming the message to you and teaching you publicly and from house to house” (Acts 20:20). House calls are a good and essential part of pastoral ministry, past, present, and future.<sup>49</sup> This dual residency, though, increases stress with its blurring of the boundary between clergy and congregation members.<sup>50</sup> Time is also blurred for clergy, who are *on call* 24/7. “There is never a time when they are not on call to function in their pastoral role. Lack of time is one of the

---

<sup>48</sup> Salvador Minuchin, *Families and Family Therapy* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1974), 53.

<sup>49</sup> One study concerning house calls, though, finds a difference regarding home visitations between men and women clergy. Paul Perl, in “Gender and Mainline Protestant Pastors’ Allocation of Time to Work Tasks,” *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 41(1) (2002): 169, reports that women “spend proportionately less time than men on home and hospital visitation. This seemingly anomalous difference can be explained empirically as a factor of differential childcare responsibilities, which appear to limit women’s but not men’s movement away from home and church.”

<sup>50</sup> For more information concerning stress induced from dual residences, see Johns and Saks, 430-2.

most frequently cited difficulties among pastors along with stress, frustration, loneliness, isolation, spiritual dryness resulting from constant time demands, and diminished marital adjustments.”<sup>51</sup> Being *on call* and regularly making *house calls* significantly adds to two recognized stressors for clergy: congregational intrusiveness and an imbalance of locus of control.

When the boundary between the clergy and congregation is blurred, congregational members regularly intrude with their expectations and critiques upon their clergy. Cameron Lee’s research categorizes congregational intrusiveness into four areas: *personal criticism* (e.g., criticism from a member about style or content of the clergy member’s ministry), *presumptive expectations* (e.g., dealing with a personal crisis of a member or at the church building), *boundary ambiguity* (e.g., unannounced visit, family time interrupted, or privacy invaded), and *family criticism* (e.g., a complaint about a member of the clergy’s family).<sup>52</sup> These four intrusions add stress both to clergy and their families.

Such stressors do not simply impact the pastor as an individual, but have important consequences for family life (Morris and Blanton 1994). Intrusive expectations apply not only to pastors, but to members of their families. Ministers’ children, for example, are often expected to be more well-behaved and spiritually mature than other children in the congregation their age (e.g., Lee 1992), and the wives of male pastors are frequently expected to take on ministry responsibilities as part of a “package deal” that comes with the hiring of the minister (Taylor 1977). In Barna’s (1993) study, nearly half of the respondents agreed that pasturing had been difficult on their families.<sup>53</sup>

---

<sup>51</sup> Hall, 240.

<sup>52</sup> Cameron Lee, “Specifying Intrusive Demands and Their Outcomes in Congregational Ministry: A Report on the Ministry Demands Inventory,” *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 38 (1999): 477–489.

<sup>53</sup> Lee, 478.

Of the four demand categories explored by Lee, personal criticism appeared to be the greatest contributor toward clergy burnout.<sup>54</sup> Lee also, however, points out that “intrusiveness” can be experienced positively, namely, in the form of support and care.

The second recognized stressor for clergy is an imbalance of their *locus of control*. Johns and Saks define locus of control as “a set of beliefs about whether one’s behaviour is controlled mainly by internal or external forces.”<sup>55</sup> People who have a high external control (referred to as externals) behave according to destiny, fate, and/or powerful people.<sup>56</sup> Externals, then, anxiously experience moderate adversity with more stress because the difficult situation is beyond their control; it is something that is being done to them. Conversely, people who have a high internal control (referred to as internals) behave according to their own self initiation and free will. “Evidently, because they perceive themselves as being able to control what happens to them, people who are high on internal control are more satisfied with their jobs...[and] seem to perceive less stress, to cope with stress better, and to engage in more careful career planning.”<sup>57</sup> Research in this area has found that internals exhibit a more useful coping style, greater optimism and hardiness, and less ineffectiveness and internal distrust. They also have greater perceived wellness, less perceived stress, and fewer symptoms of illness. In the work place, they have greater perceptions of work satisfaction,

---

<sup>54</sup> Lee, 488.

<sup>55</sup> Johns and Saks, 41.

<sup>56</sup> Locus of control raises important theological considerations, such as the sovereignty of God, free will, and sin, but cannot be fully explored here given the scope of this article. For an interesting quantitative article concerning locus of control and religiosity, see Katherine L. Fiori, Edna E. Brown, Kai S. Cortina, and Toni C. Antonucci, “Locus of Control as a Mediator of the Relationship Between Religiosity and Life Satisfaction: Age, Race, and Gender Differences,” *Mental Health, Religion & Culture* 9(3) (June 2006): 239–263.

<sup>57</sup> Johns and Saks, 41. See also Carl R. Anderson, “Locus of Control, Coping Behaviors, and Performance in a Stress Setting - A Longitudinal Study,” *Journal of Applied Psychology* 62(4) (1977): 446.

enhanced communication, quality management, and effective work relationships.<sup>58</sup>

Part of the issue of locus of control for clergy is a sense of participation in God's work to redeem this world. Can I make a difference with ministry? Is my ministry to be self-initiated (invented) or something that is predetermined (discovered)? In what ways am I an instrument of God's work in this world? To a large extent, how a clergy person answers these questions is shaped by where his or her locus of control resides. For instance, a clergy person who believes ministry is invented is an internal, whereas, an external views ministry as prescribed only by God, thus discovered. If clergy solely operate externally, they inevitably land in a highly adverse context and experience hopelessness.<sup>59</sup>

On the other end of the locus-of-control spectrum are clergy who are pure internals.<sup>60</sup> These clergy believe that ministry is solely what people do and that there are no operational externals. Like other internals, these clergy experience higher job satisfaction because they set the parameters of what successful ministry is and then actively work to achieve them. For most Christian traditions, though, a purely internal locus of control is theologically problematic because it is likely grounded in the deistic belief that God does not intervene in creation. Somewhere between these two locus-of-control extremes is an internal/external balance where clergy cooperate with God by inventing *and* discovering redemptive acts. In this balance, clerical initiatives and received ministry are all part of God's salvific history, not least because they are able to engage highly adverse contexts with creative, imaginative, and energetic passion.

---

<sup>58</sup> Christyn L. Dolbier, Mike Soderstrom, and Mary A. Steinhardt, "The Relationships between Self-Leadership and Enhanced Psychological, Health, and Work Outcomes," *The Journal of Psychology* 135(5) (2001): 469.

<sup>59</sup> Note, locus of control functions along a continuum and is not a simplistic dichotomy as this brief presentation might suggest with its labeling of people as either internals or externals.

<sup>60</sup> I use the descriptor "pure" because either end of the continuum is archetypal and not actually to be found in practice.

To summarize adversity, research on clergy stress and burnout documents that ministry exacts a heavy toll by (1) impairing the ability of clergy to provide spiritual and organizational leadership for their congregations, (2) increasing the risk of inappropriate coping behaviors in clergy (e.g., any number of infidelities), and (3) eroding marital relationships and quality of life with diminished emotional support available from spouses and children (leading to further distress).<sup>61</sup> Given these findings, clergy need to continue to develop ways to better function in adversity. Fundamentally, clergy who can increase their level of resilience will be able to navigate the rough waters of ministry energy, imagination, and elasticity. Therefore, the next section focuses on some of the assets known to develop resilience.

### **Assets that Increase Resilience**

Up to this point, we have been exploring the adversity side of the asset-adversity model. The effects of chronic and cumulative adversities on anyone without a sufficient level of resiliency are clear: burnout, fatigue, malaise, depression, defensiveness, and cynicism result. For clergy whose resilience is insufficient to meet the level of adversity their ministry presents, they either leave the ministry or function in a maintenance mode. A maintenance mode of ministry is going through the motions with little energy, imagination, and elasticity when bringing the good news of the gospel to a hungry and thirsty world. One well-developed approach to helping overwhelmed clergy is skill-based. This approach equips clergy with valuable skills, such as how to better manage conflict, work as change agents, supervise personnel, handle stewardship campaigns and finances, and organize programs and projects. Learning these skills has helped address various gaps that could increase stress

---

<sup>61</sup> N. Krause, C. G. Ellison, and K.M. Wulff, "Church-based Emotional Support, Negative Interaction, and Psychological Well-being: Findings from a National Sample of Presbyterians," *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 37 (1998): 725–741.

in religious leaders, but these skills do not directly address clergy's underlying need for developing resilience.

A resilient leader is one who is able to recover, if not grow, from change, hardship, and misfortune with flexibility and durability. Or, in the words of Paul, "through great endurance, [resilient leaders thrive] in afflictions, hardships, calamities, beatings, imprisonments, riots, labors, sleepless nights, hunger; by purity, knowledge, patience, kindness, holiness of spirit, genuine love, truthful speech, and the power of God" (2 Cor. 6:5-7). Notice that, for Paul, resilient leaders are more than just survivors, by the power of God, they have *hypomonē*—someone who "having nothing, and yet possessing everything" (v. 10). To develop this resilience, clergy can cultivate four basic assets: (1) a persistency in working to change the world toward and in anticipation of God's reign, (2) a balance of internal and external loci of control as needed by the context, (3) an understanding and use of pain as a means of growth and demonstration of God's grace, and (4) a constant building of relationships with God, self, and neighbor.

### *Persistency in Changing the World*

In leading up to *hypomonē* in 2 Corinthians 6, Paul likens our work to that of *ambassadors*, specifically "ambassadors for Christ, since God is making his appeal through us" (2 Cor. 5:20). As such, clergy (in fact, I would contend, all who embrace their justification by Christ) are called to serve as God's official representatives of reconciliation in this foreign land. And this work of reconciliation is not passive but active because God's appeal is not static but dynamic. So in his letter to the Philippians, Paul writes that he is "forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead" (Phil. 3:13). Clergy who serve as ambassadors of Christ and strain toward what lies ahead exhibit this asset; it is a persistency in changing the world toward and in anticipation of God's reign. Resilience research affirms this persistency—referring to it as efficacy and

competence—showing that a lack of efficacy and competence corresponds with exhaustion and cynicism.<sup>62</sup>

Early in this article, eleven characteristics of adaptive systems were presented. Five of these characteristics contribute to this asset, namely, intelligence, problem solving skills, perceived efficacy, control, and persistence of achievement motivation.<sup>63</sup> Some of these characteristics are beyond our control, like intelligence, while others are skills that can be acquired, like problem-solving. The overall trajectory of this asset, though, centers on the belief that what one is doing makes a difference, is worthwhile or, for religious leaders, that they are valuable ambassadors for Christ.

**What can you do?** Live into the call to which you have been given, claiming the promise given in 2 Peter 1:10: “be all the more eager to confirm your call and election, for if you do this, you will never stumble.” To illustrate people claiming their call in a highly adverse situation, an excellent example comes from the tragic 1995 Oklahoma City bombing. Firefighters involved in the rescue and recovery following the explosion had significant exposure to severe injury and death. This exposure included:

physical contact with human remains and body fluids, participation in body excavation and removal activities, and work in unpleasant and perilous areas. Far more upsetting than all of these experiences, however, was contact with children’s remains and effects.<sup>64</sup>

Surprisingly, though, this incredibly intense adversity “did not translate into significantly elevated rates of [Post

---

<sup>62</sup> See Norman Garnezy, Ann S. Masten, and Auke Tellegen, “The Study of Stress and Competence in Children: A Building Block for Developmental Psychopathology,” *Child Development* 55 (1984): 97-111.

<sup>63</sup> Ann S. Masten, Janette E. Herbers, J. J. Cutuli, Theresa L. Laffavor, “Promoting Competence and Resilience in the School Context,” *Professional School Counseling* 12(2) (December 2008).

<sup>64</sup> Carol S. North, et al., “Coping, Functioning, and Adjustment of Rescue Workers After the Oklahoma City Bombing,” *Journal of Traumatic Stress* 15(3) (June 2002): 174.

Traumatic Stress Disorder] or impairment in functioning.”<sup>65</sup> One interpretation of this unexpected outcome is that the firefighters were resilient because they were living into their calling. “The bombing allowed the firefighters to do the work they were selected and trained to do.”<sup>66</sup> This asset states that when we are actively engaged in our calling, especially when it serves the greater good, we exhibit greater resilience than if we passively let events unfold. This active/passive observation leads us to the second asset, locus of control.

### *Balance of Loci of Control*

As was discussed earlier, a clergy person’s locus of control needs to be a balance between internal and external. Clergy who exemplify this balance paradoxically believe they are able to control what happens to them, while utterly relying on the truth that God is sovereign. An example of this balance is Paul’s missionary work as described in the sixteenth chapter of Acts. Remember, people with a high internal locus of control experience less stress in adversity and engage in more careful planning.<sup>67</sup> Paul was the pre-eminent strategic planner, beginning with his methodic persecution program of Christians (see Acts 7:58ff) and ending with his plan to appear before the Emperor in Rome (see Acts 25:1ff). In Acts 16, Paul’s strategic plan is to travel to Asia (v. 6) and Bithynia (v. 7), but this journey is vetoed by God. In God’s sovereignty, Paul learns that his ministry is to go to Macedonia, after dreaming of “a man of Macedonia pleading with him and saying, ‘Come over to Macedonia and help us’” (v. 9). This 180° change in direction brings Paul to Europe and its first believer. Now Paul’s new plan, as he understands from his dream, is to bring the gospel to “a man of Macedonia,” but, as the sovereignty of God would have it, Paul’s first convert is “a woman named Lydia...a dealer in purple cloth” (v. 14). Paul’s

---

<sup>65</sup> North et al., 174.

<sup>66</sup> North et al., 175.

<sup>67</sup> Johns and Saks, 41; Anderson, 446.

ministry is this balance of internal and external control, where the internal control gives him the ability to thrive in the highly adverse situations of his missionary work (he never understands himself as the victim), while constantly being open to what God is doing.

**What can you do?** Live in the dance between facing struggles directly (seeing them as challenges that you can influence), while daily offering your ministry to God. Robert Brooks, an assistant clinical professor of psychology at Harvard Medical School and coauthor of *The Power of Resilience*, is helpful here, stating that “resilient people focus on what they can influence and don’t spend time on things they can’t.”<sup>68</sup> The balance of the loci of control is not precise but contextually driven. What is clear from the research is that in order to flourish in highly adverse situations, leaders need to incorporate both internal and external control.

An example for both internal and external control comes from the Holocaust. Internally, “I once heard that in German concentration camps, there were a few men who always gave away their last morsel of food to other people,” says Brooks. “That illustrates that you have the freedom to choose your attitude in any given set of circumstances, to control the only thing you can control in life – you.” In this way, retaining a measure of control is essential. Similarly, Baron and her team state that “even though an internal locus of control may prove beneficial in the ‘normal’ world, a belief that one could control one’s environment during the Holocaust would certainly have proved itself false; thus, survivors may have developed an external locus of control.”<sup>69</sup> This observation about external control points to the reality that there is a tipping point where the level of adversity

---

<sup>68</sup> Robert Brooks as quoted by Denise Foley, “Resilience Can Get You through Life’s Trials: Survivors of Tough Times Know How To Cope — and You Can Learn Too” (MSNBC, December 4, 2007, found at <http://www.msnbc.msn.com/id/21580558/from/ET>).

<sup>69</sup> Lisa Baron, et al., “Stress Resilience, Locus of Control, and Religion in Children of Holocaust Victims,” *The Journal of Psychology* 130(5) (Sept. 2002): 515.

can overwhelm a person's internal locus of control and turning to the external becomes essential. Therefore, functionally and theologically, clergy need to balance internal and external control.

### *Understanding and Using Pain*

Deep in Paul's thought is the connection between our struggles and Christ's suffering on the cross; we suffer with Christ so that we may also be gloried with him (Rom. 8:17). Again, Paul best delineates what happens to us when we suffer with Christ in Romans 5:3-5, with his advice that suffering can lead to endurance, character, and ultimately hope, which, through God's love, does not disappoint.

One of the best twentieth-century examples of this movement from suffering to endurance to character is found in the children who survived the Holocaust. Understandably, many predicted that these children would have an increase in drug and alcohol use, be poor parents, and exhibit many other maladaptive characteristics given the extensive and prolonged trauma they experienced from the Holocaust. However, quite unexpectedly, empirical research did not confirm these dire expectations. "Children of survivors have shown no pattern of maladjustment or psychopathology in most research."<sup>70</sup> In fact, a significant number of Holocaust survivors "have a quality of stubborn durability. They keep hoping, they keep trying to make the best of their lives."<sup>71</sup> Al Siebert, who interviewed hundreds of survivors for his book *The Resilience Advantage*, states: "After overcoming a challenge, you develop a deep self-confidence and sense of optimism: 'I've been here, done that, and I'll survive.'"<sup>72</sup> In a remarkable way, the suffering and endurance of children in the Holocaust

---

<sup>70</sup> Baron et al., 514.

<sup>71</sup> Sarah Moskowitz, *Love Despite Hate: Child Survivors of the Holocaust and Their Adult Lives* (New York: Schocken Books, 1983), 231.

<sup>72</sup> Foley, <http://www.msnbc.msn.com/id/21580558/from/ET>.

produced an extraordinary character in these survivors throughout their adulthood.

**What can you do?** Live with and through the pain of the current situation, knowing that the current situation can be of benefit too by the work of the Holy Spirit. Throughout the Bible, we read stories of men and women enduring trials and tribulations and are encouraged ourselves to endure with Christ. “Let us then go to him outside the camp and bear the abuse [Christ] endured. For here we have no lasting city, but we are looking for the city that is to come” (Heb. 13:13).

Endurance, then, is not escapism (e.g., through alcohol, constantly changing positions, or other means) but, rather, a disposition that pain is real and informative. With this approach, religious leaders can mimic prisoners of war who come out on the other side with a large measure of wellbeing. Those POWs who best survived captivity had a healthy and continuing sense of humor, the sublimation of opportunities for personal comfort in the service of a greater cause (similar to the men who shared their food in concentration camps), the ability to anticipate and tolerate extremes of stress in order to maintain a sense of self-esteem and integrity, and an awareness of continuing service to their country.<sup>73</sup>

### *Constant Relationship Building*

This asset points to the necessity of having genuine friendships in a clergy member’s life. While some people strongly discourage clergy making friends within their congregations, without friends (inside or outside the congregation), clergy simply are not as resilient. Certainly, Paul relied on his friends. For example, Paul’s ministry is sustained by the friendship he receives from the Philippians. Paul fondly writes at the opening of his letter:

I thank my God every time I remember you,  
constantly praying with joy in every one of my

---

<sup>73</sup> George E. Vaillant, “Theoretical Hierarchy of Adaptive Ego Mechanisms,” *Archives of General Psychiatry* 24 (1971): 107-118.

prayers for all of you, because of your sharing in the gospel from the first day until now. I am confident of this, that the one who began a good work among you will bring it to completion by the day of Jesus Christ. It is right for me to think this way about all of you, because you hold me in your heart, for all of you share in God's grace with me, both in my imprisonment and in the defense and confirmation of the gospel (1:3-7).

Paul was resilient because of the support he received for more than a decade from the members of his Philippi congregation during both his imprisonment and confirmation of the gospel.

Now Paul does not use friendship (*philia*) and friend (*philos*) in his epistles; yet, some biblical scholars believe that the ideals of friendship are to be found. For instance, friendship is fundamental for Paul's conceptualization of God's reconciling work. "Indeed, one of the primary meanings of 'reconciliation' is 'the restoration of friendship.'"<sup>74</sup> In Barclay's translation of 2 Corinthians 5:18-20 (which Fitzgerald strongly advocates), this important connection between friendship and reconciliation is clearly seen.

The fact is that God was acting in Christ to turn the world's enmity to himself into friendship, that he was not holding men's sins against them, and that he placed upon us the privilege of taking to men who are hostile to him the offer of his friendship. We are therefore Christ's ambassadors. It is as if God was making his appeal to you through us. As the representatives of Christ we appeal to you to accept the offer of friendship that God is making to you.<sup>75</sup>

---

<sup>74</sup> John Fitzgerald, "Christian Friendship: John, Paul, and the Philippians," *Interpretation: A Journal of Bible & Theology* 61(3) (July 2007): 289.

<sup>75</sup> William Barclay, *The New Testament: A New Translation* (London: Collins, 1968-69), vol. 2, 72. See also Barclay's *New Testament Words* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1974), 164-68.

When this offer is accepted, we begin to recognize and value genuine friendship. Christ's friendship first provides the very basis for life, through the relationship's reconciling work; or, in Paul's words, our former enmity becomes friendship. This reconciling work not only creates friendship between God and humanity, but it also extends to our friendships with one another (e.g., the call to be an ambassador is one of friendship). Christ's friendship models for us the ways in which we are called to mutually sustain one another with love, particularly in times of trial and tribulation.

Many examples of this kind of loving friendship come from stories of abused children, and researchers find that children who are resilient as adults had at least one person who stood by them throughout their adversities.<sup>76</sup> This person could be a parent, teacher, mentor, or clergy person. The commonality is that they are involved in the child's life to the level of friendship modeled by Christ. Because when someone genuinely believes in us, even when we do not believe in ourselves, we are able to use their strength to weather our storms. So it is not surprising that studies in adults have found a clear correlation between the number of quality relationships a person has formed (such as family, friends, other church members, or coworkers) and his or her life expectancy (quality relationships bring life).<sup>77</sup> Unfortunately, Americans over the past two decades have decreased the number of people with whom they discuss important matters. "The number of people saying there is no one with whom they discuss important matters nearly tripled."<sup>78</sup>

---

<sup>76</sup> Robert Brooks as quoted Foley,

<http://www.msnbc.msn.com/id/21580558/from/ET>.

<sup>77</sup> Foley, <http://www.msnbc.msn.com/id/21580558/from/ET>.

<sup>78</sup> Miller McPherson, Lynn Smith-Lovin, and Matthew E. Brashears, "Social Isolation in America: Changes in Core Discussion Networks over Two Decades," *American Sociological Review* 71(3) (June 2006): 353.

The study also found that more Americans today confide exclusively in relatives, especially spouses, as opposed to people from social organizations or work. If this finding is true for clergy, then the impact of family intrusion,

One story of profound friendship is that of Alice Goldberger, who following World War II received children who survived the German concentration camps. Alice herself was a refugee from Germany and was now living in England, and she had a profound commitment to helping children who had endured massive trauma. The British government brought one thousand of these children, ranging in ages from three to eleven, to live in England. In the late 1970s, Sarah Moskowitz interviewed Alice and twenty-four of these survivors to find out what became of these children.<sup>79</sup> Reading the interviews, the burdens of loss and the feelings of being outsiders are apparent. Surprising, though, you also learn that not one of these Holocaust survivors gave up but rather affirmed life and had a tenacity of hope. Moskowitz found that:

In spite of the anxiety and fear, the tortuous detours often used to deflect them, a most striking quality about this diverse group of people is their affirmation of life. They have a quality of stubborn durability. They keep hoping, they keep trying to make the best of their lives. Given all they have endured, this in itself is a kind of heroism; no one has given up....Their hardiness of spirit and their quiet dignity are part of this persistent endurance. And enduring is, after all, most fundamental. This can indeed be regarded as a tribute...to the strength of the survivors themselves.<sup>80</sup>

One of the reasons for this remarkable conclusion is the relationship Alice had with these children. Even given the horrific circumstances of the Holocaust, what could be considered the worst of adversities, these twenty-four children acquired the great endurance that Paul describes and did so primarily because of Alice Goldberger.

---

especially familial critique by congregations, might be twice as strong in increasing their adversity.

<sup>79</sup> When Moskowitz conducted this research, she was a professor of human development and counseling in the Department of Educational Psychology at the California State University, Northridge.

<sup>80</sup> Moskowitz, 231.

Like an life-sustaining river, Alice courses through these lives, here a fundamental source, powerful and wide, there a narrow contributor stream deep underground, a constant presence through which to strengthen or against which to define oneself. And, at eighty-four, she is still there, through letters, phone calls, and visits. Still available for a bit of advice, a loan, news about someone.<sup>81</sup>

This is genuine friendship; this is the quality of reconciliation that restores that which has been so disfigured. So despite the severest trauma in early childhood, “these people are neither living a greedy, me-first style of life, nor are they seeking gain at the expense of others. None express the idea that the world owes them a living for all they have suffered. On the contrary, most of their lives are marked by an active compassion for others.”<sup>82</sup>

**What can you do?** Seek out and develop within and beyond your congregation genuine friendships that are restorative. Call clergy of other denominations in your area, take the time needed to develop mutual friendships that bring reconciliation to your work. The energy and time spent developing such relationships is an investment in restoration that pays throughout your personal and professional life.

## Conclusion

As the biblical narrative testifies again and again, serving God is a life-giving, meaningful journey that often involves painful trials. Both experientially and theologically, Paul understood that suffering is a part of the Christian life because of our baptism. “Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? Therefore we have been buried with him by baptism into death, so that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, so we too might walk in newness of life” (Rom.

---

<sup>81</sup> Moskovitz, 223.

<sup>82</sup> Moskovitz, 233.

6:3-4). Some Christians, particularly those of the early church, faced the suffering of martyrdom. Today, though, while most clergy do not face martyrdom, they do experience adversity at a level significant enough that their resilience assets are not enough to help them thrive with imagination, creativity, and energy. Therefore, this paper lifted up the asset-adversity model for resilience with the intent that clergy might find themselves living into Paul's words in 2 Corinthians, as servants of God who have commended themselves in every way:

through great endurance, in afflictions, hardships, calamities, beatings, imprisonments, riots, labors, sleepless nights, hunger; by purity, knowledge, patience, kindness, holiness of spirit, genuine love, truthful speech, and the power of God; with the weapons of righteousness for the right hand and for the left; in honor and dishonor, in ill repute and good repute. We are treated as impostors, and yet are true; as unknown, and yet are well known; as dying, and see—we are alive; as punished, and yet not killed; as sorrowful, yet always rejoicing; as poor, yet making many rich; as having nothing, and yet possessing everything (6:4-10).