

Alternatives to Donating Your Stomach to the Parish

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I would like to say that it was the call of duty that moved me to write this paper, but it is probably far more accurate to attribute it to the call of nature. You see, during a past pastoral conference I committed the cardinal sin of getting up to go to the bathroom as reports were being given. There lurking in the shadows like a vulture looking for prey was a member of the essay committee who shall remain nameless. This resident of southern Minneapolis with an affinity for Jewish culture and expeditions to the fatherland of Israel zeroed in on me and with lightning quickness whisked me to another room where he began that all-too-common sales pitch that just about every pastor dreads, concluding with those words that strike fear into the bravest man's heart: "The essay committee would like you to do a paper on *Alternatives To Donating Your Stomach To The Parish.*"

For the next minute, the rest of what was said was a blur to me. Immediately my brain clicked into a defense mode categorically listing as many excellent excuses as I could come up with, all preceded by that loud and forceful word, NO! Why, I couldn't do this paper because 1) I had just finished building a new church last year and of course made it sound like I did it single-handedly 2) I would be completing a new parsonage project soon and would be involved in moving my entire household 3) I was far too busy with youth work, speaking engagements, recruitment concerts, instruction classes both at my own church and a sister congregation, not to mention the fact that my wife was undergoing extensive treatment for Lyme's Disease - - why I just couldn't do this paper!

But this nameless member of the essay committee was a master of his craft. The more I resisted, the faster he talked, barely giving me the chance to continuously repeat the word, "NO". He parried my every thrust, accommodating my every difficulty. Why he'd even give me until 1990 to present it. What's more, he needed a volunteer fast because the conference president would be calling on him any minute to give his report. Finally, dazed and weary from the tremendous barrage, I muttered the fateful word, "alright" and stumbled back to my seat vowing never again to go to the bathroom during a conference report and subconsciously praying that the Lord in his infinite grace would deliver me from such a terrible fate by allowing Judgment Day to occur before June 13th or at the very least, issue me a call before that day to another conference or district.

As evidenced by my appearance before you this afternoon, neither panned out.

What followed might describe some of the thoughts and feelings that have gone through some of your minds when you were bestowed with this high privilege and honor. For the rest of the conference all I could think of at first was, "Why me?" I'm no scholar. I can't speak well. They won't listen to me. (Moses would have been proud) Certainly there were others that could and would do a better job. And since I considered myself the busiest of all pastors (cf list of excuses mentioned earlier) certainly there were others that had more time. Why not assign the paper to someone who doesn't have to do everything everyday all the preaching, all the teaching, all the writing, copying, visiting, organizing, counseling, all by himself? Why not give it to one of these churches that has 2 or 3 pastors, a vicar, a staff of up to 10 teachers and called workers that could help shoulder the load? Why not at the very least assign the paper to a pastor that has the luxury of a full-time secretary or even a computer system instead of one with an old typewriter with temperamental keys that don't always work. For quite a while I sat there stewing

with these thoughts running through my mind, even imagining the soft refrain of “Stricken, Smitten, And Afflicted” reechoing in the background.

Yes, I guess I was angry. But most of all I was angry at myself that I gave in again - that as usual I was a whimp. Even though really swamped, I agreed to do something just like I always do. Whether it is serving on a committee; making exhausting music presentations half-way across the country, entertaining a Ladies-Aid from another church, or a host of other things that I really shouldn't and don't have time for, just keep asking because sooner or later Rod will say “yes” to anything.

But as I sat there, angry at myself and stewing over my upcoming fate, I came to understand the reason this paper may have been assigned to me. If anyone could talk about a pastor's tendency to donate his stomach to the parish and overburden himself by volunteering and accepting too much responsibility with the possibility of resulting health problems, family or marriage problems, or even a complete breakdown, it could be me. I could relate from first hand experience how pastors can give until they have nothing more to give - how they can be the worst stewards of their time and talents and pay for it, with burnout, resignation, even early death. I had been doing this to some extent for my entire ministry and only now was beginning to really feel the accumulative effects of so many years of self-abuse.

This paper is going to attempt to chronicle some of the mistakes that I and others in the ministry have made in this regard in the hope of discovering; 1) why we in the ministry have the tendency to give too much of ourselves 2) the terrible results that happen to those who do 3) and most importantly, some alternatives for self-preservation that enable us to run the race our God has set for us and finish it the way He wants us to.

At the outset I must warn you that this will not be some scholarly pork. There are a myriad of excellent books available on the subject, all of which are far more clear, expressive, and articulate than I could ever hope to be in the few minutes of this paper. I have included a list of some of the better ones at the end for your inspection and reference. (Actually when I asked for help from the Seminary library, they sent me a stack of literary works that no mere mortal could ever hope to ingest, digest, much less even lift. I gleaned what I could from them and will leave some of the joy of intellectual harvesting to you.) I will also try to keep this from becoming completely a typical cut-and-paste conference paper presenting a sort of highlight-lowlight picture of everything you ever wanted to know about pastoral burnout. Instead I sincerely hope that this paper retains as its focus an honest examination of the mistakes, traps, and pitfalls that I have stumbled into during my ministry so that you can learn from them. Above all, in portraying this very real problem that I and others have had to confront in the ministry, I hope it prompts each of you to do a self-evaluation today; because if we don't—if we don't learn to recognize the warning signs and possible remedies soon, many more of us will continue unaware on a collision course with collapse and we will lose more and more gifted workers in God's Kingdom. With that long-winded introduction and disclaimer, let us begin.

Up to a year ago I would have been the last one to admit to any major mistakes in my ministry. Why, it seemed that everything had gone so well that I was being treated like some Synodical all-star by colleagues patting me on the back for accomplishments that came by the power and grace of God. It was constantly pointed out to me as evidence of success that communicant membership at my church, Mt. Olive, had more than doubled, increasing by more than 150, despite the fact that the city had not grown by more than a few *hundred* people in the past 10 years and that our church in Shakopee is completely surrounded by 5 other WAS churches, all within an 8-10 minute drive. They reminded me of the high number of adult

confirmands year after year - how average church attendance had increased greatly from the pathetic to the mediocre and finally now close to the acceptable. They'd tell me to quit looking at the things that weren't being accomplished and celebrate those that were. There was a new life and spirit among the members so that they could expand - build a new church and parsonage - something unheard of in Shakopee just a short time ago. As brothers in the ministry and members in the church kept saying, "With nice statistics like that, who needs to talk or worry about mistakes!"

But there were some big mistakes - ones I want to point out now - ones that almost moved me to throw in the towel more than once despite all these so-called successes. You see, when I came to Shakopee, the first thing I discovered was a tremendous need for optimism among the congregation. They were discouraged, despondent, apathetic. No one wanted to do anything because they felt it wouldn't do any good. Nothing could or would change. There was little friendliness and, warmth among the congregation, little enthusiasm for the work, for inviting friends to church. There was no pride but rather embarrassment in being a member of Mt. Olive and the WELS. The few faithful just seemed to be waiting around for the final demise of the church.

I decided that they needed a cheerleader - someone who would be totally optimistic, encouraging, and enthusiastic about the work. They needed to see the love of Christ in action, experience it themselves and be motivated by that love. They needed to take a step in faith and discover how graciously and bountifully God could and would bless a person's and a church's efforts. They really needed a transfusion of spiritual energy!

And fresh out of the Seminary, I decided that I would provide all that spiritual energy myself. I'd be spiritually charged up every minute of every day. I'd lead by example, totally encouraging and optimistic in the Lord. I would do anything and give everything so that all congregational programs would be a success and they could experience first hand the Lord's promised blessings. I'd start new classes and services. I'd make myself totally accessible at any time of the day or night to help or just to talk to. I'd make every sacrifice possible of my time, talents, and treasures, and cater to every whim and wish. We need more room for Sunday School—take my parsonage basement and turn it into classrooms and mimeo rooms. We need a place for Bible Class, midweek classes, counseling—take my living room even at a moment's notice. My family won't mind. We need area for our preschool program and VBS overflow—take my yard, my swingset, anything. My family won't mind living in the remaining area that was now reduced to the size of a glorified closet. We need people to open and close the church, set the heat, water the lawns, weed the flower beds, teach every class and serve at every function. No problem, take my life and of course as the old punchline goes, "take my wife, please."

Yes, my family and I became the cheerleaders in the congregation. I provided the spiritual energy. I did it all. I never even wanted the congregation to get the slightest idea that I was taking a long-overdue nap when they called, or was ever actually enjoying myself. No, I wanted them to feel that I was working round the clock, giving 150%. I wanted them to have the impression that they could call on me day or night and they would never really be bothering me because I was always happily working.

And it brought results. It actually seemed to work. Things turned around a new attitude, energetic spirit, more optimism and trust in the Lord, growth, expansion, a bright outlook! Hooray!

You would think that I'd be happy and in a way I was. But I began to discover that the price I had paid for those results was much too high. I had given so totally of myself that I didn't

have anything more to give; and just like a hungry baby or monster that had been created, all the congregation seemed to want was more. It seemed everyone at all times day or night wanted a piece of me to help, to counsel in problems big and small, to lead, organize, or assist—and there were just no pieces left—nothing more to give. The worst feeling of all was when out of guilt I would even sacrifice the one little piece of myself that I had saved for my family. On that one evening a month that I had set aside for my wife and children (there were *never* any complete days off) invariably an interruption occurred, the phone would ring, and off I'd go, just about crying that I couldn't even have just one evening with my loved ones like normal folk. The real results that I experienced was that I found no joy in the ministry. It became my never-ending job or sentence from which there was no escape. And I treasured getting away from it even for a few minutes. I felt like the circus performer who has all the plates spinning on the ends of sticks at once, but has to run around frantically servicing each one to keep them going, only allowing himself a ten-second break before an applauding crowd before he's off and running again. And to make matters worse, it seemed to be too late to change. After all, what would the church think if I suddenly began to say "No!" My ministry had become as one professor described it like a person in a room of four walls that aren't fastened at the corners. The result was that each in turn would fall in. You would just finish rushing and bracing up one wall, and another one would immediately need your attention. The task was never-ending, and if you weren't rushing holding the four walls up - if you let down your guard even for a second, everything would collapse on you.

I read statistics that show after 5-15 years of this, the guy in the center of the room is ready for a change. He is ready to let one or all of those walls fall as his attitude changes from: "I can do this" to

I'm having trouble doing this.

Why did I want to do this?

I can't do this!

I don't want to do this!

I shouldn't be doing this!!

He's ready to give up and let the world come crashing down on himself.

What another set of statistics is starting to show is that I am by far not the only pastor in our Synod who has experienced this. There are so many that I've talked to in the past half a year who have made the same mistakes I have—who have attempted to keep the walls up, keep all the plates spinning—who have done and given all until their world collapses resulting in resignation, divorce, or death. And we in the Synod are seeing it surface to an alarming extent. Without going into specifics, this past year has presented us with instances of colleagues who literally worked themselves into the ground--who died long before their time with the sad pronouncement of doctors saying in more than one case that their death was actually caused by exhaustion. There were cases of very successful brothers in the ministry who inexplicably one day just bailed out, leaving their church, wife, family, and going off to start over only to discover that our Synodical education system only left them uniquely qualified for the fast food business, being a bus driver, or an insurance salesman.

But what personally began to scare me as I talked with some of them to learn more about the contributing factors and to give them encouragement was that I began to discover that I was on the same collision course. I demonstrated the same signs. I couldn't remember a time when I didn't eat lunch at my desk while working or on the road between appointments. I couldn't recall a day off. I was constantly praying for more time just like the television commercial where

people pull up to the fast-food window frantically asking, “Just give me a minute, will you? Could I have another day or two?” I began to realize how close I was coming by giving my all to the point of giving up.

Perhaps the first question to be asked is: Why do we do it? Why do we give too much of ourselves? Why do we have the tendency of donating our stomachs, our physical and mental health to the ministry? There are several contributing factors found both in the pastor himself as well as in the people he serves. The first ones we want to examine are the unrealistic requirements and expectations of achievement that a pastor internally places upon himself. I’m sure many of you remember the Datsun commercial some time ago that pictured flashy cars and little light trucks airborne over crests of hills and eating up the curves. Right after those exhilarating pictures would come the catchy slogan: We Are Driven!! Now that may be a great slogan for an automaker, but it’s a lousy one and a danger sign for pastors propelled by unrealistic expectations. Unfortunately those words fit too many pastors today. Many ministers are headed toward the mental, physical, and spiritual salvage yard because they expect too much of themselves.

Sometimes what drives them to this self-imposed tragic end is their own view of the nature of the call to the ministry. It’s a call to exemplary conduct as well as unselfish service. It’s a serious call with tremendous responsibilities where souls are at stake. A pastor does not merely have to deal with success and failure, winning or losing on this earth. He doesn’t just have to deal with life and death situations, but his dealings always have spiritual implications. He daily has to wage the battle between spiritual life and eternal death. And no matter how he may try to get around it, he’s in a job where failures and losses can have eternal consequences. When one considers this tremendous responsibility, it is easy to understand the pressure a pastor daily feels and experiences to give his all to his work. Another thing that pressures a pastor to donate his stomach to the parish is the extent and scope of his calling which most people from a human standpoint would have to deem impossible. In his book, *Clergy In The Crossfire*, Donald P. Smith describes the job of the minister:

What is a minister? He is an evangelist. He is a preacher. He is a priest. He is a religious administrator. He is a social reformer. He is a director of worthwhile enterprises for the community. He is a species of amateur psychiatrist. He is an educator. He is an interpreter of life, somewhat in the fashion of a poet. He is the custodian of the values of democratic civilization. He is a man of superior wisdom and virtue whose task each week is to show men and women how to live more wisely and virtuously. Is it any wonder that young ministers, and some not so young, find themselves dragged in a dozen different directions as they try to fulfill the claims of the ministry?

Although many pastors will not admit it, in view of the legitimate and self-imposed demands that they place upon themselves, the bottom line that pastors have drawn for themselves comes pretty close to being divine. Simply put, they do not permit themselves to be human. And that in and of itself is often one of the major factors driving a pastor to give too much of himself. Although every pastor would agree that the call and commission to build up the Kingdom of God to preach the Gospel to every creature has been extended only to pastors but to every Christian, sometimes pastors come away with the mistaken notion that they are to do all the building themselves. Because of a false ego motivation they feel, “It’s my call. I’m the only one that can keep all the plates spinning at once. I’m the only one that can do the job right or get the job

accomplished. I've got to be in control because I'm the only one that's ordained with the special talents and training to reach people, turn them around, and perform every function excellently." Because of that, a pastor will often try to be a parent to the congregation, doing everything for them so that they won't get hurt, make a mistake, or horror of horrors, fail in some endeavor. They'll try to make sure they give fatherly advice and direction in everything because often there is the underlying feeling that the members of the congregation just wouldn't be able to do it by themselves and if a pastor would let them, they'd probably mess it up anyway. So the logical conclusion is reached, "I'll do it all," and pastors continue to pile upon themselves a scope of work that in light of their strength and abilities makes their job an impossible task.

Or along the same lines, a pastor may be moved to donate his stomach to the parish because of another role confusion—that of his trying to be a Savior to the congregation. He may look upon himself as the only one who can right what is wrong, mend the broken and the broken-hearted, solve the problems of this sin-sick world and the troubles that the members of his congregation are experiencing. Once again as he draws a line for himself that is close to divine and confronts a responsibility that he feels is directed solely to him to personally reach out with the Gospel of Jesus Christ to everyone that he comes into contact with, he does not find it difficult or incompatible to pile more work upon himself than is humanly possible for one man because he's been called to be the Savior of this church and God will give him the strength. This Messiah complex is an especially easy trap to fall into early in ones ministry; and I often remember how the sainted Professor Becker from the Seminary tried to warn us young pastors who were going to do it all and change the world when he said to us, "Try to remember that there is only one Savior in the church, and you're not it!"

One other internal contributing factor that moves a pastor to over-extend himself is an erroneous success motivation—the quest to be perfect and successful in his own eyes and the eyes of his peers. Because of the scope and importance of his calling, a pastor will often drive himself to be best in every aspect of the ministry. He doesn't just strive for perfection. He won't settle for anything less. His best is never good enough because it always could have been done better if he had more time. And so he makes the time, even if it means depriving himself of sleep, recreation, vacations, days off, regular meals and a regular life—even if it means depriving his wife and children. He will sacrifice everything and everyone, especially himself, in the never-ending quest for the perfect ministry. (After all, wouldn't a Savior do that for His church?)

The problem that he runs into is that he cannot be perfect to everyone, and that's where in this section of contributing factors we shift from the internal to the external unrealistic requirements and expectations which are imposed upon a pastor either knowingly or unknowingly by the members of his congregation. For example, in order for a pastor to be perfect to a particular member of his church, the only criteria that member will look at is if his or her individual needs are met. Therefore, if you have 300 communicants in your congregation as I do, you will have 300 different standards of perfection. One woman will want you to bury your nose in the study and be an expert expositor. A father will want you to preach "popularly" so as to hold the attention of his teenage rebels. Someone else expects you to spend every afternoon doing evangelism calling while another wants systematic visitation of every member of the church every day. Everyone will assume and expect a pastor to devote full-time to *their* needs and will actually compete for his time and energy. And congregational expectations like that make it impossible for anyone to be a perfect pastor. This fact was underscored by a humorous newspaper article that I recently read:

Results of a computerized survey indicate that the perfect pastor preaches exactly 15 minutes. He condemns sin, but never embarrasses anyone. He works from 8 a.m. until midnight and is also the janitor. He makes \$60 a week, wears good clothes, drives a new car, and gives \$50 a week to the poor. He is 28 years old, has been preaching for 25 years, is wonderfully gentle and handsome, loves to work with teenagers and spends countless hours with senior citizens. He makes 15 calls daily on parish family shut-ins and hospital patients, and is always in his office when needed. If your pastor does not measure up, simply send this letter to six other parishes that are tired of their pastors, too. Then bundle up your pastor and send him to the church at the top of the list. In one week you will receive 1,643 pastors. One of them should be perfect.

The problem of unrealistic requirements and expectations is very real. I would dare say that the majority of our churches and members have the mistaken notion that they have called a pastor to do all the work for them—one kind, unsuspecting man who has been drafted to do the work of hundreds and sometimes thousands. To find out if this is a problem in your congregation, try this idea if you haven't done so already. Ask them to list the duties they expect you to perform. (An adapted copy of a so-called Pastor's Responsibility Awareness Quiz has been included at the end of this paper.) Then have them allot the number of hours a week you should spend on each task. Combine their lists, total the hours, and you will probably find the sum greater than the hours in a week. If you never eat, sleep, relax, or spend time with your family, you will still have insufficient time for everything somebody expects of you. Lucille Lavender, in the preface to her book *They Cry Too* hits upon many of these pressures placed upon a minister:

Ministers are people too, I think. Ministers are made very special by their Maker, who issues them their special call. They come in varied shapes and sizes like anyone else, but according to most people they have a special look. I don't know what it is, but I think this is so because often people exude such surprise: "You don't look like like a minister!"

They have outstanding talents in every conceivable field of endeavor imaginable. Administration, writing, public speaking, diplomacy, psychology, economics, medicine, good bedside manners, building, maintenance, teaching, counseling, comforting, conciliation, coordination, and creating.

Ministers have anatomical characteristics that others don't have. They are built not to wear out as easily as normal creatures. They are more resistant to sleep and relaxation, so they can work a sixteen-hours-a-day, seven-day week. And, if they are wakened in the middle of the night by the telephone and they can't get back to sleep, they work on a Sunday sermon.

There is something unusual about their flesh, too. Their skin is extra thick and tough, so they can be roasted for dinner with a minimum of discomfort. And this helps them withstand possessive, particular, and peeved people.

Under this thick skin is a special cushion of insulation that keeps them immune to feelings other earth people have—like never getting angry, despondent, disgusted, or

discouraged. It also insulates them against needing love, acceptance, praise, encouragement, and raises in salary.

Ministers are also all-knowing, all-wise, all-comforting, all-controlled, all-put-together, and always there.

Do you know any ministers like that? I don't! And I ought to know... I live with one.

Thus, in an attempt to meet all the demands placed upon him, to rise to all expectations, pastors become workaholics. They feel they have to attend every meeting; take part in every decision; and "make it all happen."

That's the pressure that a congregation either knowingly or unknowingly exerts upon a pastor everyday—pressure to give his all and then a little bit more to meet these expectations as unreal as they may be. These are just some of the contributing factors that will drive a pastor, even when fatigue and complete exhaustion have set in, to try to give more energy even though there's nothing left—to donate their stomach to the parish to avoid a guilt trip that someone will sooner or later lay upon this poor man for not doing his job according to their estimation and standard. This is what will often push a pastor to the very brink—the impossible drive to be a success in the estimation of everyone in his church.

And the result we are experiencing in far too many cases is something called pastoral burnout. And it is a very real problem. Pastor Richard Schleicher in his paper entitled, "Clergy Stress And Burnout or All Stressed Up And No Place To Blow" comments:

One of the things that has somewhat bothered me about the topic of clergy stress and burnout is the apparent tendency on the part of some laymen, pastors, and synod officials to try and "pooh pooh" the whole subject of burnout. I think that attitude may be changing, especially as we see more and more pastors and teachers who are resigning "for personal reasons". While we are not always privy to the reasons for these resignations, could it be that some of them are actually cases of burnout? When Roy Oswald, project director of the Alban Institute in Washington, DC, states that one out of six and perhaps as many as one out of four clergymen is suffering from burnout, I think that is a real possibility.

What is burnout? Technically, Webster defines burnout as, "To fail, wear out, or become exhausted by making excessive demands on energy, strength, or resources." It's pictured in many ways such as the candle burning low and sputtering out when its wick has been consumed. D.G. Kehl in his paper, "Burnout: The Risk Of Reaching Too High" pictures it this way:

There's the "poof-pop" of a light bulb burning out and leaving us in the dark. It may be a power tool that emits a shower of sparks and quits running just when we need it most. Or it may be a motor that smokes and grinds to a halt. To burn out mechanically is to wear out or become inoperative as a result of friction, overloading, or overheating. In the aerospace industry, the term denotes the termination of rocket or jet-engine operation because of fuel exhaustion or cut-off. In still another context, "burnout" evokes the image of the charred shell of a building gutted by fire.

Basically when referring to people, burnout is what happens when a person under stress works too hard for too long a period of time and literally shuts down. It can happen to anyone, but it especially strikes those involved in people-helping professions who work closely with troubled human beings over long periods of time with little opportunity to retreat. This makes pastors especially susceptible. When a helper can leave his or her work at the office and return to a stable and relaxing home situation, burnout is less likely to occur. But leaving the work behind is difficult, often impossible for a church leader. The ministry is with a pastor wherever he goes. As a result, burnout is a common though unrecognized condition of pastors who have a tendency of donating their stomach to the parish.

There are, however, certain personality types prone to burnout. In a book entitled, *Type A Behavior And Your Heart*, a description is given of the Type A person prone to burnout with the following characteristics:

1. Tendency to overplan - a chronic sense of time urgency;
2. Multiple thoughts and actions - often involved in more than 1 thought or action at the same time;
3. Need to win - highly competitive, even in social activities;
4. Desire for recognition;
5. Always feeling guilty - usually because of overscheduling and not getting everything done;
6. Impatient with delays and interruptions;
7. Overextend themselves -workaholics.

There are also physical and emotional symptoms that people will begin to demonstrate as burnout approaches. They include:

1. Progressive loss of idealism, energy and purpose (a lot of apathy);
2. Negative work-related attitudes and behaviors (increased feelings of discouragement and pessimism);
3. A decline in self-esteem and motivation (things become a drag and he says, "I'm so stupid!");
4. Frequent irritability (anger turned inward) and tendency to blame others (anger turned outward);
5. Resistance to change, rigidity, and loss of creativity;
6. Anxiety (including an inability to leave "work" at the "office");
7. Chronic fatigue, for which there seems to be no physical basis (always tired);
8. Frequent physical problems - colds, headaches, gastro-intestinal disorders, ulcers, etc.

Burnout follows a similar 4 stage pattern: 1)Challenge 2)Commitment 3)Containment and 4)Collapse. The first two are not dangerous. The last two are. At first, the potential burnout candidate is excited about the possibilities before him. He is full of idealism and eager to attack his work. As time progresses, he subtly enters the second phase. During this time he is still committed, achieving and productive; but life is tending to become a bit routine and less exciting. The third phase, Containment, is the dangerous one. Then the person is no longer pursuing his goal—his goal is pursuing him. He feels driven, unappreciated, over-burdened, indifferent. He develops a martyr complex. And finally one morning something snaps. He determines that the effort is no longer worth it and BOOM, Collapse! He walks out. Quits. Shuts down. A person has to be reached before this occurs, because its effect usually is permanent.

Once a person goes past the alarm and resistance of the containment stage to collapse, most experts agree that there is very little that can be done to help that person regain the attitude and enthusiasm of the first two stages. The difference between the stress of the third stage and the burnout of the fourth stage can be illustrated by a car battery that went dead because of a drain on its power. Although stressed, if given rest and a charge, it can be as good as new. Burnout however is like a battery that will no longer accept a charge. Its effect is permanent. It leaves a permanent change.

The collapse of burnout will occur to anyone struggling to keep his head above water and who instead of receiving a life-preserver is burdened even more and begins to sink. It was this feeling and response that I came dangerously close to as I faced all the work of a new church, new parsonage, a wife with Lyme's Disease, and now a conference assignment. This paper was just about the brick that you threw to a drowning man. All I could think of was, "So many things happening to me, so much to do, and now this!"

But Scripture points out that I am certainly not alone in this reaction. The book of Job gives some classic statements that might well come from one burned out:

Oh that I might have my request, that God would grant what I hope for, that God would be willing to crush me, to let loose his hand and cut me off! Then I would still have this consolation - my joy in unrelenting pain - that I had not denied the words of the Holy One. What strength do I have, that I should still hope? What prospects, that I should be patient? Do I have the strength of stone? Is my flesh bronze? Do I have any power to help myself, now that success has been driven from me? Does not man have hard service on earth? Are not his days like those of a hired man? Like a slave longing for the evening shadows or a hired man waiting eagerly for his wages, so I have been allotted months of futility, and nights of misery have been assigned to me. When I lie down I think 'How long before I get up?' The night drags on, and I toss till dawn. My body is clothed with worms and scabs, my skin is broken and festering. (Job 6:8-13; 7:1-5)

What would cause such a despairing response? Not just stress, because some stress can actually be beneficial for us. The trouble comes when there is a chronic overload of stress and the coping mechanisms of our human system are incapable of handling them. It's like the fuse box in your house. If you overload the wiring, the fuse is going to blow. For some this may mean that his performance is going to be crippled for a time but he will be able to reset the circuit breaker and once again work as usual. For others who have suffered through this stress overload, a complete collapse of the system occurs, too much damage has been done and a crisis develops.

The natural reaction of a pastor is to try to escape the four types of categorical stress that confronts him in his ministry—the time stress of continuous and constant dead-lines, the anticipatory stress and anxiety about an impending event, the situation stress in finding oneself in a threatening situation that is at least partially beyond one's control, and the encounter stress and anxiety about dealing with one or more people whom one finds unpleasant and unpredictable. According to Karl Albrecht, the most popular forms of escape from stress are:

1. Drinking liquor
2. Frequent or heavy eating, especially sweet foods
3. Smoking
4. Drinking coffee, colas, or other high caffeine drinks
5. Using marijuana, heavy drugs, or mind-altering pills

6. Using prescription drugs such as tranquilizers and pain pills
7. Using patent medicines to suppress specific symptoms
8. Using sleeping pills
9. Withdrawing psychologically; robotizing one's behavior; self-destructive behaviors
10. Lashing out at others, displacing anxiety and anger onto other people.

Lest we think that as pastors we don't succumb, look over the list again carefully and look at yourself. Besides the obvious coffee, cola, cigarette, and drinking dangers around us, pastors have been known to seek escape by detaching themselves by language, as when they refer to the people they work with not as John or Mr. Smith, but as "that old trouble maker," that "alligator", that "thorn in my flesh." or even the generalized term, "the congregation." Some pastors detach themselves by means of a gallows-type humor, or in a subconscious but angry attack disguised as "teasing." Other pastors detach themselves by aloofness, cutting down time for visitations, immersing themselves in paper work and making less time for people contact. Finally, some detach themselves by leaving the ministry.

Perhaps one of the best examples in the Bible of burnout escapism was the prophet Elijah in I Kings 19. After the "mountain top" experience of having his sacrifice and altar consumed by the true and living God in front of a standing-room-only crowd produced threats of death from Jezebel who vowed to kill him within 24 hours, a demoralized Elijah tried to detach himself—to escape and get away from it all. Depressed and seemingly defeated, he tried to put distance between himself and the people he reached out to. In his disappointment, he had almost completely lost his drive for the ministry.

It's important to understand how susceptible we as pastors are to burnout, especially because we are in a helping, giving profession. It's interesting to note that the feeling of overwork and burnout has very little to do with the number of hours a minister puts in. It's simply not the volume of work that makes a pastor feel overworked. No, the biggest contributing factor involves the intimate contact with people problems originating from sin. Pastors are to be representatives of love; and whoever is asked to represent love knows how difficult that is. It's hard to be kind and caring all the time. So often the ministry is looked upon as some glamour position. The pastor is up in front, leading the congregation in worship, preaching the sermon, respected and shaking hands as people leave. But many don't realize some of the non-glamorous, frustrating things a pastor must do. Among those whom he serves are not only the loving, the kind and gentle, the helpful, but also the vengeful, the stubborn, the indifferent, the proud and the fallen. It places a heavy burden upon a man and upon his time, talents, patience, even his faith.

It's important to understand though that people don't cause a pastor to feel overworked, but dealing with their hurts can. A pastor just can't yank out the root of the problem—sin. He needs the deft skill of a surgeon to cut it away without damaging the people involved. And it is this increased load of counseling required in today's ministry that makes the present day pastor extremely susceptible to burnout. It's tiring dealing with sin. It siphons off one's energy as a pastor wrestles with the problems of his people. Unlike an hour counseling a couple considering divorce, an hour spent chatting about sports is not emotionally draining. It's the difference between a bucketful of feathers and a bucketful of rocks. The measured amount is the same, but the scales tell a different story, Jack Wald in "The Facts And Feelings Of Overwork" put it this way:

Everyday, pastors deal with life-and-death issues—spiritual salvation, physical death, depression, marital problems. The stakes are high. When the air traffic controllers were on strike, one of their chief complaints was that no one realized the tremendous stress from being responsible for the lives of people. In the spiritual realm, being a shepherd of a flock is an equally heavy load. We are entrusted with the spiritual health of our congregation - an awesome responsibility!

And a pastor is required to do more and more of this counseling than ever before. This was perhaps the most obvious finding of my research and survey of pastors. A minister's counseling load may have increased by as much as 20 times that of a pastor 30 years ago. I surveyed pastors who could recall less than half a dozen marriage counseling problems in *their entire ministry*. There were many who commented that one such case a year was the maximum amount that they ever had to face. I sometimes feel fortunate if it is only one marriage counseling case *per day*; and especially blessed if it is only *one per week*! And that doesn't even include the increased load of counseling that a pastor faces today that one 30 years ago seldom if ever confronted and encountered: homosexuality, abortion, sexually transmitted diseases like AIDS, Satanism, sexual and ritual abuse of children, added to the growing popularity and prevalence of living together before marriage and illegitimate children. Any pastor can easily get swamped with the problems of his own people, much less the unchurched around him. And so instead of having one person knock on your door begging for help once in a blue moon, the present pastor usually has a line-up of people at his office door everyday—a line that sometimes stretches around the block.

Why do people turn to pastors for counseling more today than perhaps 30 years ago? Maybe it's because their therapy is free. They are non-threatening and easily accessible. But above all, maybe this occurs because we live in such a desensitized society in which sinful acts do not shame, are not hidden in the closet, but rather are glorified and promoted. As a result, a pastor can expect to be called upon more and more to give of himself as he faces the shattered existences and the ever-increasing affects of sin in the lives of his people. That's why in a recent Northwestern Lutheran (May 1, 1989) Victor Prange in an editorial comment tries to sound the alarm that pastors are doing too much counseling that they are ill-prepared and have little time for, and rather should try to distance themselves in some way lest they be overwhelmed with people desiring this service. And yet the dilemma a minister faces today is this: Pastors who put distance between themselves and their people can't be effective. They have to be involved; and being involved means they become more susceptible to emotional and spiritual stress—of giving away all their energy in counseling until they have none left.

There are other factors that make pastor's susceptible to overwork. The job of the minister is never finished. There are Sunday services each week, counseling sessions, funerals, weddings, crises, classes to teach, programs to plan, organize, and undertake, sick and shut-ins to visit, evangelism calls to make, even religious holidays that just mean more work for the pastor. Seldom can the minister stand back and say, "There, now my work is finished!" As a result, the pastor is never really free of his job. Peoples' needs don't operate on a timetable. You can't punch a time card at 5 p.m. and feel that's all to be done today. There is always a feeling that the job is endless; and this can lead to exhaustion. I often think of the anonymous piece entitled, "What Does A Pastor Do?"

The pastor teaches, though he must solicit his own classes. He heals, though without pills or knife. He is sometimes a lawyer, often a social worker, something of an editor, a bit of philosopher and entertainer, a salesman, a decorative piece for public functions, and he is supposed to be a scholar. He visits the sick, marries people, buries the dead, labors to console those who sorrow, and to admonish those who sin, and tries to stay sweet when chided for not doing his duty. He plans programs, appoints committees when he can get them; spends considerable time in keeping people out of each other's hair; between times he prepares a sermon and preaches it on Sunday to those who don't happen to have any other engagement. Then on Monday he smiles when some jovial chap roars, "What a job—one day a week!"

In addition to this, the work of the minister is repetitive. Not only is the work never finished, but it continually repeats itself. The various church seasons come and go every year; and every year a pastor is faced with the challenge to be original and refreshing. It's the same with all the programs, all the classes, and all the sermons—an endless repetitive cycle until Judgment Day!

Also posing a problem is the fact that this work of the ministry which keeps on coming is constantly being interrupted. I think you all know how irritating interruptions can be. They give you the feeling that you're not getting anything done. Well, the ministry is one interruption after another. Now, some can't be helped. As inopportune as some are, I don't think any of us will read the riot act to a family that interrupts our schedule to perform a funeral, or to attend to a *real* emergency. However, most of the interruptions a pastor must face do not really fall into this category. For example, I did have a funeral in late May when I was frantically trying to piece this paper together and that didn't bother me. But right after the funeral I asked my wife to stay home from work just to answer the phone so I could get something done. She was only to interrupt me for pressing needs that warranted immediate attention. In a two-day span, she answered 34 phone calls, took messages, and did not have to interrupt me once. And amazingly the world of the church did not come to an end and I actually had some time to get things done.

Perhaps most frustrating and disheartening, the minister cannot always tell if his work is having any results. You can work for months or years and not be sure you're accomplishing anything because the work is spiritual in nature. And work without measurable achievement becomes a discouraging job. Imagine the physical and emotional weariness of a mountain climber when, after 4 hours of climbing, he finds himself back at his starting point. If this happens a second time, he's going to start questioning his reason for climbing.

It's no wonder that pastors become preoccupied with numbers because they provide visible results. When we can't measure spiritual growth, we count warm bodies in the sanctuary. When we can't see the effects of our preaching, we check out the figures to see if giving has increased. I often think of the cartoon which has the pastor saying from the pulpit: "This is my 4th sermon on the transforming power of the Gospel. Why do you look like the same old bunch?"

When we can't see results we become preoccupied with numbers. That's why the most widely read book in our circles is the Statistical Report of the Synod; and a basic drive of so many pastors is to have good stats and keep them up. Well, speaking as one who has done that—who has had the good stats—I need to remind myself and you that numbers are not and should not be the measure of a man's ministry. We can't be caught up in a numbers mentality because it can be deceiving. Perhaps a church has grown by a few communicants because of transfers with very little effort on a pastor's part; or maybe there was modest or small increases in spite of the

fact that the area a church is located in is booming and doubled in size. Those stats hardly signal greatness on a pastor's part. In the same vein, perhaps a church has gotten smaller because it started a daughter congregation. It may not seem to be a statistical success on paper, but it is certainly a cause for celebrating and great joy. We dare not judge a person's faithfulness with numbers. But it is such an easy trap for a pastor to fall into. When people don't change, or progress is slow, or the number aren't there, it is so easy for even the most faithful pastor to feel, "If I only were working harder and longer, perhaps I'd see results." So even though fatigue is setting in, he works longer and harder. He figures if only he denies himself a little more—denies his family, his health—maybe, just maybe he could give more and get results. And the only results that occur is that he continues to donate too much of himself to the parish.

There are various solutions to this—alternatives to donating your stomach to the parish. The books I read proposed many of them from a 3 step process like AIM (aware, implant, and manage) or RED (relax, exercise, and diet) to solutions that involved up to fifteen steps. But the problem that concerned me is that they constantly assumed and stated that just as the pastor is supposedly the primary agent of change in other peoples' lives—one who uses the Word of God and then himself affects beneficial changes for their good—so the pastor himself has to be the agent of change in his own life to make things better for himself. In a way they are still placing the pastor in a position that contributes to overwork and burnout in the first place—the position of the pastor doing the job of the Holy Spirit—of taking the Word and being the facilitator of change in peoples lives—of doing all the building, saving, fixing, problem solving himself with his own power. It's no wonder that pastors overwork and breakdown when they feel the pressure to assume the responsibility that God himself alone can handle whether it comes to success or failure in the ministry all the way down to their own recovery from stress and burnout. In remedy after remedy, they are presented with a "Physician, Heal Thyself" philosophy.

Perhaps the first alternative to donating your stomach to the parish is to realize that it is the Holy Spirit who actually does the building in the church—that the results depend on Him and not necessarily on the pastor himself. We have a God who says, "Unless the Lord builds the church, they labor in vain that build it" or to paraphrase tries to impress upon pastors, "I'm the one who works faith through my Word. I'm the one who makes changes in peoples' lives. As they hear who their God is and what I've done for them in sending a Savior, I fill their hearts with love and move them to lovingly respond everyday,"

It is time we pastors understand that this is not something we do. As a matter of fact, when we're really forced to look at ourselves—our strength and power—it really amounts to nothing. We have to admit with Paul in II Cor. 4 that we are nothing more than weak, earthen vessels—jars of clay that are fragile, unattractive, and temporary, here today and gone tomorrow. Truly the power to build the church has to come from God and not from us.

But the comfort that He wants to give us is that in spite of our inadequacies, faults, and failures, He will continue to use our sometimes feeble preaching and efforts to reach others. When we face obstacles in our ministries and difficulties in our call to build, we have a God who tells us not to be discouraged but rather to keep preaching the Word—to be loudspeakers and mouthpieces in the best way we know how and trust Him to bring about the results.

When we daily have to confront a job that truly goes beyond one person's single abilities and strength, we have the same comfort that Paul and all the apostles had - the comfort of a God who assures us that when we can't, He can and will. He reminds us: "My Word will not return to me empty, but it will accomplish what I desire and achieve the purpose for which I sent it. (Isaiah 55:11) "And it will do that through My power. Don't lose heart because you can't do it

all, because I'll do it for you." We must realize that success or failure is impossible *for us* in the Lord's church since He is the head and the one holding the responsibility. We are not facilitators of "change" but proclaimers of "grace" with the responsibility for results in God's lap. God will accomplish his purpose whether we serve Him or not, but He gives us the privilege and uses us just the way we are, faults and all, to get the job done.

Only when a pastor has this in mind can he undertake some of the following suggestions of self-help. First, a pastor must get in touch with his own expectations. Take some time to list them on a sheet of paper in all the areas of your life such as:

In my relationship with my wife, I expect...

As a father, I expect myself to...

As a pastor, I won't be satisfied with my performance unless I...

My most important personal goals are...

It was Paul who gave the encouragement, "Think of yourself with sober judgment." (Rom. 12:3) For a pastor that means taking a self-inventory and coming to an understanding about yourself. What can you do? With what do you struggle? What are your strengths? Your weaknesses? What spiritual gift do you have or lack? What do you really enjoy or dislike? It is so important that every pastor come to grips with his internal expectations and set realistic goals for himself, always keeping in mind his own limitations as well as the helping hand of his God.

Equally important is that external expectations are clarified with all the parties involved. The common attitude of congregation members is, "Oh, we all know what the pastor's job should be," and as we've stated earlier, that usually means, "We each have our own private expectations, which when added together would leave in doubt whether Jesus Himself could satisfy them!" A clear *written* job description forces the church and its pastor to wrestle with the fact that no one can do everything well. Both parties can then realistically set mutually agreeable pastoral priorities not only realizing what a pastor is supposed to do, but especially what the pastor is not supposed to do! A pastor should also periodically request a written performance review to give him concrete help in identifying strengths as well as areas needing improvement in his ministry according to the congregation's estimation. In doing so, he can avoid problems before they mushroom.

It's been said that conflicting expectations are like a tight shoe. They begin to pinch, but if left unattended, they soon become painfully tender to the slightest touch. It is so vital to have clear communication of expectations so that layers of good will are not rubbed away of that unreal expectations drive a pastor into the ground.

In light of a clarified job description as well as clarified internal and external expectations, it is important if a pastor does not want to donate his stomach to the parish to then set priorities, stick with them, and as required, practice the fine art and survival technique of consecrated negligence. Now, I'm not against hard work for the Lord. I really believe that I have and will continue to demonstrate that point in my ministry. But if a pastor is going to avoid breakdown, burnout, or premature burial, he has to work within the limits that he discovered in his inventory. As a pastor, no matter how much I love the Lord—no matter how much I love His church and the work of His Kingdom, I have to realize I am limited. My time is limited. My abilities are limited. My understanding is limited. My empathy, sympathy, capacity for work and love are all limited. My commitment to Christ and His Gospel are to be *unlimited* because of His mercy, but the work I do for him is bound by my limitations. In order to work with these limitations, a pastor will have to prioritize what he considers the most important aspects and

tasks of his ministry and put on the back burner, maybe for an indefinite period of time, those that aren't. Those that fail to set priorities and learn the fine art of consecrated negligence either squirm in continual guilt or languish in chronic exhaustion.

James Berkley makes this comment:

Once we have set our priorities with wisdom and spiritual insight, we must stick with them and pursue them with all our energies. If that means missing a committee meeting to call in the hospital, or teaching with less preparation to preach with more, then so be it. I have chosen where I will be negligent, and I can live with it. Consecrated negligence tells me not to run in every race if I intend to finish the race I consider most important.

Basically that means to borrow yet another phrase, "just saying 'NO'" at times. I know of one pastor who refused to learn how to run the mimeo and the copier machine because his time was far too valuable to be wasted in that way. And I'm finally learning that in my ministry. Up to recently, I was the one contacted and expected to water the church lawn and move the sprinklers, to rush to church and unlock it at any time of the day or night when someone wanted to borrow or return tables and chairs, to do everything from opening and closing the sanctuary windows, fixing the organ, to changing burned out light bulbs. I was getting calls even in the middle of the night asking for phone numbers of other members, because it was much easier getting the information from me than looking it up in the telephone book or the church directory that they had probably lost.

But I finally got tired and had no time to be the answer man, the fix-it man, the cleaning and gardening man of the church. After looking at my time and setting my priorities, I've learned to very respectfully and kindly say "no" without a guilty conscience, because the Lord truly has more important things for-me to do.

And one of those important things that I've learned the Lord wants me to do is rest. During His ministry, our Savior gave us a good example—He went away from the crowds to rest frequently. And there were many times that He encouraged His disciples to do the same. After sending His disciples out two by two to minister to the needs of people, even when they were in a desert region and not all the needs of the people there had been fully met, Jesus called them away and said, "You need rest!" He recognized that they couldn't continue without interruption, even in that glorious Gospel ministry, without coming apart.

Our Savior says the same words today to every pastor. It's vital to take a day off (or better yet, two days off) and to keep it sacred with none of the usual tasks performed so that one can be renewed and rested. If the day is broken by some official task, you haven't taken a day off! A few hours here and there do not renew us sufficiently because we are not separated from our work long enough to relax.

Unfortunately, I'm still not very good at it. I still do not have an official day off. I believe a luxury like that is far easier for a church that has two or more worker/called workers because someone then can always cover for you. When you're the only pastor/called worker, you are always on call; and it has been my experience that an attempted day off has *always* been interrupted by official business unless you leave town or draw the shades, disconnect the phone, and hide in your house like a hermit refusing to answer the doorbell. I'm still trying to sneak rest a few hours at a time. And I can state categorically that those few hours provide very little relaxation. A pastor really needs to take a day completely off to get away from work. Peter and the other disciples often went fishing. Whatever your diversion is, take a *complete day off*

regularly and enjoy it. Remember God in the fifth commandment tells us to take care of our body which is the temple of the Holy Spirit. We do that with proper rest, relaxation, exercise, and diet,

In connection with this, a word should be spoken concerning vacations. Because pastors do not get weekends or often any day off, can seldom if ever get away from their parishes, and because most of our called workers unlike the laity have been far removed from any family because of their jobs, most vacations for a pastor are consumed with trips to the relatives. Now I consider this neither relaxing nor a true vacation, especially when because of the cost of airfares, a pastor and his family are usually forced to drive across country and it may take as much as a week of their two week vacation just to travel back and forth. Perhaps because pastors never get a weekend off like a “normal” person, we could consider giving pastors longer vacations, various floating weekends, or mid-week vacations that they could use to recharge their spiritual batteries. One doctor has recommended that vacation time match a person’s age: with 3 weeks in the 30’s; 4 weeks in the 40’s; 5 weeks in the 50’s; 6 weeks in the 60’s. This may not work in every case, but surely we could do something for a pastor who usually emerges from those quickie car vacations to the relatives more weary and worn than when he first left.

One other suggestion given by David McKenna in his article, “Recycling Pastors” encourages ministers to take something called a five-minute vacation. When he has an hour between the end of an office day and an evening appointment, he has conditioned himself to utilize that time for rest. He can fall asleep almost instantly and awake five minutes later with a surge of energy which can take him through another 4 or 5 hours of work. When I was in the Seminary, I used to do this regularly, quickly taking a 20 minute nap immediately after class so that I could work a 7½ hour shift at a nearby factory. It is an excellent use of a short period of time to get needed rest.

Another way that the congregation can help their pastor get that vital rest is to give him and his family the privacy that they desperately need. It is hard to get any rest when a pastor lives in a “fish bowl” atmosphere. At the office this is unavoidable. But a pastor and his family definitely need a safe haven that they can escape to in order to get away from the maddening crowd and get some rest. They should be able to find this in the privacy of their own home, but very often the parsonage, especially if it is located right next to the church, is anything but a private domain and haven. Because it is church owned and unfortunately often used for some church activity because of lack of space, the parsonage is usually busier than Grand Central Station just about every day of the week. Because the man they need (see answer man, fix-it man, etc. above) is located there, they feel no qualms of stopping in or calling at any time of the day or night. Hence, no privacy. I can relate to you an instance that occurred in my ministry highlighting this. My wife and I were in the bedroom of the parsonage late at night getting ready for bed when someone knocked on our *bedroom door* looking for me! This member felt no qualms at all about coming in the back door, walking through the darkened house, and knocking on the bedroom door because he saw the light on and wanted to see me. And what was so important that needed my immediate attention. Well, he just wanted to drop off a registration form and some money for his daughter to attend a Youth Group event. My goodness people, give your pastor and his family a little privacy - at least the amount of privacy that you desire for yourself!

That brings me to one of the last areas of self-help that I would like to address for a pastor—time management skills. Being a better organized steward of ministry time can certainly free up more personal time for rest and recreation. By using a time management book and

blocking off the hours of your day, a pastor will be less prone to spin his wheels, overextend counseling sessions that lose their effectiveness after one hour, or function on a crisis management schedule. He may actually become more productive in less time. However, I personally believe that time management skills are somewhat limited in their usefulness; because even if you've attended every seminar on the subject, interruptions are still going to wreak havoc in a neatly organized day. This fact should not cause a minister to abandon scheduling altogether. The key to scheduling comes in making time exceptions only for urgent or important interruptions and working far enough ahead so that if interruptions do occur, they will not throw a pastor into a deadline panic.

These are some of the alternatives that a pastor can do to avoid donating his stomach to the parish. But if this problem of pastoral burnout is to be solved, it will also require congregational and Synodical help. Perhaps the first step will be for the laity to conserve their pastors and for the Synod to recycle them. For some reason, if a pastor dies, breaks down, drops out, or burns out, the parishioner's grief is short because people assume that God always has others waiting in the wings. The prevalent misconception is the same as during the gasoline crisis of 1977—that there is really no shortage that pastoral leadership is an unlimited commodity that can be used up and thrown away. A critic of the church once said, "It is the only army that shoots its wounded." Broken-down, burned-out, and cast-off former pastors sit on the sidelines in our churches, sell like insurance or real estate for a living; and serve as guidance counselors in the public schools. If they could be renewed rather than rejected, there would be no shortage of pastors.

It is time for the members of our Synod to correct this wasteful attitude and careless stewardship regarding the office of the ministry. Good pastors are hard to find, and we cannot afford to lose one of them. They are a scarce and precious resource to be conserved, preserved, renewed, and expanded. The first step for our churches to take is to make provision for the care of their minister.

One of the ways they can do this is physically by volunteering their time and their talents to help their pastor and work together with him in the commission that our Savior gives to every member to reach out with the Gospel to every creature: In order to avoid burnout, pastors are constantly encouraged to delegate responsibility and portions of the work to the laity. They're encouraged to educate and train their lay people and survive by following something called Jethro's Law. James Berkley explains:

Consider the story of Moses' father-in-law, Jethro in Exodus 18. This wise man observes Moses doing his day's work. "Moses," he says (pardon my paraphrasing), "what are you doing? Why are you making all these nice people waste a whole day waiting for you to mediate their disputes?"

"Because they are there," Moses replies perceptively.

Then Jethro hands Moses some sound fatherly advice: "What you are doing is not good. You and these people are only wearing yourselves out. You can't do all this alone. Select capable men, appoint them as judges, and let them handle the simpler cases."

There are few things I do that someone else cannot do as well. According to Paul in II Timothy 2:2, we are to pass along our skills and understand to others, who will do the

same. Jethro's Law is not only an effective way to work, it is the right way. Jesus operated that way, eventually leaving His work to a bunch of amateurs—who changed the course of the world.

Jethro concludes, “If you do this and God so commands, you will be able to stand the strain, and all these people will go home satisfied.” Any idea that eases my strain *and* satisfies the people is one I want to heed. I intend not to run alone when I can find co-runners. We can help each other finish the race.

We can push lay ministry to help with everything from youth work to shut-in calls. We can encourage lay evangelism until we are out of breath. But if congregation members don't volunteer their time and talents—if they aren't willing to be trained—to accept some of the responsibility and shoulder some of the work of their church, then these wonderful ideas will remain on the drawing board and pastors will continue to overburden themselves until there are none left and none willing to take their place. I'm convinced that in the majority of cases, the problem does not lie with a minister unwilling to share the work, but with congregation members who have the misconception that they've called someone to do the work in their place and thus for the most part are unwilling or afraid to help. If a pastor becomes discouraged or burned-out, another pastor will be called under the same conditions and the discouraging cycle continues ad infinitum. Congregations need to preserve and conserve the precious resource of their pastor; and the best way that they can is by assisting him with their time and talents.

Another way that churches can help a minister from donating his stomach to the parish is to provide for the care and feeding of their pastor financially. The topic of money is one that most ministers don't care to talk about—at least in an honest way. But although all will agree that ministers are not to be lovers of money, one cannot get around the fact that it is a major source of ministerial stress. It has been estimated that 95% of clergy are grossly underpaid—that many of our church members still go by the old adage, “Lord, you keep him humble and we'll keep him poor.” In a pamphlet prepared by the U.S. Department of Labor, of the 432 occupations listed, clergy rank with the lowest paid occupations and are listed on the same wage level with unskilled labor like waiters and cooks, even though they rank with the top 10 earning occupations educationally—with lawyers, doctors, judges, scientists, engineers. And even more disconcerting, when 40 denominations were recently surveyed, pastors in our Synod were again way down the list.

Shoring appreciation for a called servant with the educational background of a lawyer or doctor does not mean that a congregation has to pay a pastor a corresponding salary as these occupations. But it also should not mean that a pastor should be at the bottom of the financial totem pole either. “The worker deserves his wages” (I Tim 5:18).

Perhaps one of the major problems is that the vast majority of the laity are unaware of the problem. They don't understand that unique tax situation that pastors find themselves in—that whereas they have an employer who pays maybe half of their Social Security, ministers are required to foot the entire bill themselves on top of their state and federal tax. Many congregations follow a spartan pay scale established by the Synod as the *minimum* a called worker should be paid called Mission Code and they won't waver from it. Somewhere the mentality has evolved that this is the divinely inspired and ordained *maximum* that a pastor should ever receive and to pay him more would be some sort of sin or maybe lead him into pride, vanity, and covetousness. I am still amazed at how many of our established churches will

continue to follow and offer Mission Code when in some cases that pay scale has actually qualified some of our pastors and called workers for food stamps and government assistance programs! Pastor Oliver Lindholm gives congregations some suggestions for ways of making improvements in this area:

1. Each Circuit Pastor should take special note of a pastor's salary when conducting a call meeting. I would venture to say that in most cases the congregation's suggested salary figure is too low. This is an excellent time to suggest an improved salary.
2. Encourage each congregation to establish a Salary Review Committee, which will meet with the pastor annually to discuss his needs and will make recommendations to the Church Council and Voters Assembly.
3. Conduct a survey similar to the one that was taken a few years ago out of St. Louis. Only this survey should include not only what the men in our district are being paid, but also what other Lutheran pastors in a similar environment (City or country) or of similar size are being paid.
4. Make congregations fully aware of tax savings that are available to pastors. Many are ignorant of this.
5. Conduct seminars on this topic at Church Councilman's Workshops, *Delegate Conferences*, and the like. Somehow our church leaders have to be made aware of the problems in this area.

In connection with this, a word should be spoken about our pension plan. There are many older pastors who are forced to continue in the ministry far beyond normal retirement age because a meager Social Security and Synod Pension Plan will not be enough for them to barely survive. There are colleagues of ours who are forced to hang on in the ministry so they won't lose the parsonage that a congregation will provide only as long as they are active in the ministry. Because of their lifetime salary they can't afford to buy or rent a home of their own so they are faced with no other choice than to continue working and give their entire life to the ministry. Much of the difficulty is often directed toward a pension plan that still needs shoring up—that in some cases that have been shared with me by colleagues who have retired is about half that offered by other Lutheran Synods—that is some cases consigns a person to work until he drops because he can't afford to retire. It may be shocking to hear out loud what has been quietly whispered by many in the ministry for some time now. It is encouraging that in the past years some strides and attempts to improve our pension plan have been made. But as much as financial planning on the part of the pastor is necessary and should be encouraged, perhaps an improved Synod and/or congregation retirement plan would show appreciation for such faithful service and allow pastors to retire without facing poverty or a struggle to make ends meet.

One final and most important alternative to donating your stomach to the parish is to seek and obtain spiritual help from the Lord in prayer and through an active devotional life; because reading God's Word and spending time in prayer is not only the way that we as pastors are strengthened for our tasks but also daily reminded that the final responsibility for the work lies not with us but with God. Just like Peter walking on the water, as long as our eyes are on Jesus, we're fine. But the minute we take them off and become slack in our devotional life, we begin to be swamped by the needs and problems of people and sink. Still another pastor expressed this thought by comparing himself to a warehouseman and not a warehouse, handling each burden long enough to unload it in the Warehouse, namely God. He realized that pastors who hold on to

everything will soon find their knees buckling and will be crushed by the load. The only way to avoid this is to unload the burden on the Lord through prayer - a God who says, "Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened: and I will give you rest." (Matt. 11:28) It is vital that pastors who want to avoid burnout and breakdown take time to commune with their Lord for the strength, support, and comfort only He can give. I was impressed with the way one pastor put this to his congregation:

Folks, Tuesday is my day with God. I have to spend some time with my boss to keep this job and He has called me into conference on Tuesday. He takes a dim view of me answering the phones and appearing at social occasions on conference day. Your boss wouldn't like it if you're running out of the room when he was trying to talk to you. Mine doesn't either.

In conclusion to this rather long-winded paper (a fact that will probably insure that I will not be asked to produce another one), I would like to re-emphasize that there is a very real problem out there—a problem that is driving too many of our called servants into resignation—a problem that is destroying the health, the drive, and the determination of too many people who are sincerely committed to the work that Christ has given them to do. All of us can help prevent pastoral burnout and the all-too-prevalent syndrome of one committed individual driving himself into the ground. As lay people we can help by volunteering some of our time, talents, and treasures to help shoulder some of the tremendous burden and work load that a pastor must carry. We can help by making lay ministry a blessed reality in our churches instead of just some glorious wish and pipe dream. As pastors, we can help ourselves by turning more to our God and His Word instead of ourselves and our own strength. We can help ourselves by being good stewards of the glorious life our Lord has given us—using our gifts and talents wisely. We can do more to pace ourselves like a long-distance runner, not burning up all of our energy in a sprint at the beginning or during any part of the race, but rather pacing ourselves for the long haul so that we can hold out and finish the race our God has given us to run. That's what Paul stated as his goal as he departed from the elders at Ephesus:

However, I consider my life worth nothing to me, if only I may finish the race and complete the task the Lord Jesus has given me - the task of testifying to the Gospel of God's grace. Acts 20:24

As pastors, we have the most blessed privilege of shining forth the glory of Jesus Christ to a sin-darkened world. Let's make sure we do that in the best way for as long as our God might possibly allow us. Let's turn to our Lord for strength, for personal renewal, for the promise of *dynamos*—"power from the Spirit that he assures us of in Acts 1:8. But as we take comfort in that promised *dynamos* from which we get such power-packed words like dynamite and dynamo, let's realize that the need in Christendom today is not for *dynamite* that goes off with a big bang and then is all burned out, but rather for *dynamos* that continue steadily to produce, day in and day out. May we learn to balance our ministries, to pace our work load as well as ourselves so that the oil of gladness and joy in Christ may continue to burn brightly in our hearts and lives throughout our ministries instead of our ministries themselves being the very things that burn us out.

TEST YOUR P.R.A.Q.
(Pastor's Responsibility Awareness Quiz)

The following are some of the demands upon your pastor's time for a normal month. Please indicate the number of hours per week that you think your pastor should devote to these activities. Break down the hour into smaller segments if you feel it necessary. Commuting from place to place should be taken into consideration.

No. of Hours Per Week

Studying for personal, spiritual and intellectual growth
Preparing sermons
Preparing Sunday morning worship services; selecting Scripture, hymns, prayers, order of worship etc.
Preparing new members for baptism or church membership
Working with church Sunday School Leaders
Visiting inactive members
Visiting the sick in hospitals and in their homes
Evangelistic visits on prospective new members
Visiting the bereaved at the time of death or tragedy
Visiting the bereaved sometime after the death
Visiting active families of the church
Counseling church members with practical and emotional problems
Visiting time to soothe "hurt feelings" and members involved in relating to each other
Attending church committee and board meetings
Attending church social functions, parties, women's meetings, etc.
Counseling couples for marriage
Conducting weddings
Conducting funerals
Serving on boards and committees of church related groups, such as LWMS, Circuit Pastor, Institutes and High School Associations etc.
Attend pastoral conferences and study clubs
Directing the administration of the entire church program
Promoting the entire church program
Writing letters and correspondence on behalf of the church
Writing personal letters to the sick and discouraged
Answering and returning telephone calls
Checking on the work of the church boards and committees
Planning and helping to organize special church projects
Enlisting lay help to teach and serve in various church tasks
Writing articles for the monthly new letter
Writing articles for denominational publications when asked to do so
Producing Sunday morning bulletins
Filing Synod reports and surveys
Reading books and periodicals to keep up with current events and the latest developments in church and theological affairs

Planning and promoting the Vacation Bible School, training teachers, and assisting in the program

How much time for sleep and rest?

How much time with his wife and family for their fun and social events

How much time for work around the parsonage-home

TOTAL (One week is 168 hours)

Please answer the following questions:

I feel the pastor should be on call 24 hours a day, seven days a week.

Yes

No

Should I feel free to call on the pastor at any hour of the day or night in case of extreme emergency?

Yes

No

I feel the pastor should take time off regularly.

Yes

No

If yes, how much?

As a regularly employed lay person I have _____ days off per week.

Total days per year apart from vacation:

I have _____ vacation time.

How many days off should my pastor have per week?

How much vacation time?

Taken from a paper by Pastor Richard H. Schleicher April 16-17, 1985

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