

The 13th Episcopal District Learning Academy, 28 June – 1 July 2017

Bishop Jeffrey N. Leath, Presiding Bishop

Dr. Susan J. Leath, M.D., Episcopal Supervisor of Missions

Dr. Roberta H. Hill, Ed.D., Christian Education Director

Rev. Dr. Dave Louis Adams, Sr., D.Min., Presenter

“Healthy Ministers and Healthy Ministries: Practicing Effective Clergy Self-Care”

The Theological Foundation for this presentation is based on three pericopes:

- The need for delegation of authority by those in charge (Exodus 18:13-26).
- The need for a dedicated day of Sabbath for rest and renewal (Exodus 20:9-11).
- The realization and acceptance of the fact that because of all the stress and “storms” in our lives, we as itinerant ministers must take some time away, beyond the Sabbath, to allow ourselves time for rest and rejuvenation (Mark 4:35-41). Even Jesus, the Son of God, realized that He needed to take some “Back of the Boat” time and rest, even in the midst of a storm.

Introduction:

Perhaps no other issue is as important to and, conversely, as neglected by ministers of the A.M.E. Church as clergy self-care. In the words of the Reverend Dr. Calvin H. Sydnor, III, retired editor of *The Christian Recorder*, the issue of clergy self-care “Is among the most ignored issue[s] in the profession of ministry. ...If we are honest, we know that everyone is aware of the issue, but very few people do anything about it. We won’t even spend time dealing with the issue at connectional or episcopal district meetings” (*The Christian Recorder Online*, 22 January 2016).

The A.M.E. Church’s Quadrennial Theme for 2005-2008 was “Living Well.” The focus for 2005 and 2006 was “Living Well” and “Serving Well,” respectively. I believe that the general consensus among the Council of Bishops at the time was that one (both clergy and lay) must necessarily Live Well in order to Serve Well. Living well in all aspects of one’s life is the primary key to being healthy. And being able to Serve Well, as a result of Living Well, is a key element of Healthy Ministries. That, I believe, is the archetype of what clergy self-care is, and it is the reason that I have chosen as a sub-title for this presentation *Healthy Ministers and Healthy Ministries*.

Self-care is not a foreign concept to ministers; however, many of us do not make it a priority. Instead, we permit the needs of everyone else to come before our own, oftentimes to the exclusion of our immediate family’s needs. I have found this to be especially true among many of my colleagues in the itinerant ministry in the A.M.E. Church. One of the reasons for this is that “many pastors equate self-care with selfishness” (*Clergy Health: Who Cares for the Caregivers?*). However, there is nothing selfish about caring for one’s self. We, as ministers – itinerant or otherwise - must take personal responsibility for our own health and well-being if we are to be of any use to anyone else. In the book, *Rest in the Storm*, the author states that “well-doing, devoid of proper self-care is, at best, doing well poorly. Exemplary care for others is

rooted in vigilant self-care” (Jones 8). More succinctly stated in the words of North Memphis District Presiding Elder, the Reverend Dr. C. Robert Finch: “We are no good to anyone else if we are all broke down ourselves.”

In other words, unless we first take proper care of ourselves, we cannot adequately take care of others. A good example of this was given by Jones as he used the analogy of placing an oxygen mask first over one’s own face in the case of an in-flight emergency before attempting to help someone else don theirs. If you do not first take care of yourself, both you and the person you are attempting to help could end up perishing (Jones xii).

An article published in the New York Times in 2010 only confirms what many other studies have already borne out: one of the primary reasons that members of the Clergy suffer from increasing numbers of health issues is that they do not take enough time away “From the Lord’s Work:”

...Members of the clergy now suffer from obesity, hypertension and depression at rates higher than most Americans. In the last decade, their use of antidepressants has risen, while their life expectancy has fallen. Many would change jobs if they could.

Public health experts who have led the studies caution that there is no simple explanation of why so many members of a profession once associated with rosy-cheeked longevity have become so unhealthy and unhappy.

But while research continues, a growing number of health care experts and religious leaders have settled on one simple remedy that has long been a touchy subject with many clerics: taking more time off.

“We had a pastor in our study group who hadn’t taken a vacation in 18 years,” said Rae Jean Proeschold-Bell, an assistant professor of health research at Duke University who directs one of the studies. “These people tend to be driven by a sense of a duty to God to answer every call for help from anybody, and they are virtually called upon all the time, 24/7.”

...The Episcopal, Baptist and Lutheran churches have all undertaken health initiatives that place special emphasis on the need for pastors to take vacations and observe “Sabbath days,” their weekday time off in place of Sundays (Vitello 1).

This article accurately describes many of our A.M.E. Ministers here in the 13th Episcopal District, and I am certain, throughout the Connectional A.M.E. Church. For many ministers who are bi-vocational, the only time they take off from their secular jobs is time spent away at church meetings or conferences. This does not allow any personal time for the minister to spend with family, or for rest, relaxation, and rejuvenation. The frequent result is increased health issues, some serious, which have led to disability or death.

Over the past few years serious health problems have been an all too common occurrence among itinerant ministers in the West Tennessee Conference. Based on personal conversations and interviews with some of those ministers, I am confident in saying that many of these problems are directly attributable to a lack of proper self-care. As a result, their ability to effectively pastor and minister to their congregations has been severely compromised.

If a minister is physically unhealthy, their spiritual and emotional health will suffer as well. The result, quite frequently, is a correspondingly unhealthy ministry because the needs of the congregation and the health of ministers are inextricably intertwined; whatever adversely affects one will ultimately affect the other. It is my contention that it is difficult, if not impossible, to have a truly healthy minister or ministry if the congregation is not proportionally healthy as well. An unhealthy (physical, emotional, spiritual, or otherwise) congregation negatively affects the health of the minister and has a deleterious effect on the overall health of the local ministry due to the added demands that it places upon the minister.

In the book, *Clergy Self Care*, the author contends that one's spiritual health is directly related to one's physical health. He further contends that a healthy relationship with God directly affects our "journey towards wholeness" (Oswald x). In other words, a healthy spiritual relationship with God is essential to moving towards a goal of both a healthy soul and a healthy body. Many of us have allowed our own spiritual health to suffer by focusing too much on the spiritual needs of others and too little on our own. Less than 40 percent of the respondents to a self-care survey that I conducted among A.M.E. Clergy in December 2016/January 2017 stated that their spiritual health was either very good or excellent; the rest listed their spiritual health as "good."

When the spirit is unhealthy we are what retired A.M.E. Bishop Cornal Garnett Henning, Sr. describes as "**Looking good but dead**" (Henning, Sr. 14). Bishop Henning, Sr. goes on to state that:

We live in an age where imprecise communication often produces unintended implications. Once I was in a viewing line at the funeral of a friend. As I approached the casket, I heard someone ahead remark, 'She sure looks good,' to which the person before her responded, 'She sure does.' As I continued toward the bier, I thought to myself, 'The mortician has done a really great job when you consider the condition of the person after such a prolonged and debilitating illness.'

Then, as if awakened to a greater truth, I thought to myself, 'Looking good but dead' (Henning, Sr. 14).

Many of our ministers, due to being inattentive to their spiritual care, are in effect looking good physically, but dead spiritually. Consequently, their sermons are dead; their enthusiasm for serving God is dead; and, unfortunately, their ministries are dead as well. Part of the reason for this is that many ministers are so busy trying to be all things to all people in their congregations that they do not allow time for their own spiritual well-being. Daily devotional time is non-existent in many cases; and prayer, meditation, and personal Bible study time suffers as well. One of the first steps in revitalizing the Clergy is engaging in effective self-care practices.

What is Clergy Self-Care, and What Does It Entail?

Self-Care (clergy or otherwise) is taking care of one's self by nurturing and protecting one's body, mind, and spirit; while realizing that one's body has limits. "When we pay attention to our bodies they will tell us the truth about ourselves. By listening and being attentive to them we can detect" when something is wrong with our bodies, including signs of becoming overly-stressed and impending burn-out (Calhoun 71).

"What does good self-care look like?" (Oswald 6). Essentially, "it means striving for the best that we can be given our age...life experiences" and things that are beyond our control (Oswald 6). It means taking care of ourselves to the greatest extent possible, despite the

limitations imposed by the natural progression of age and physical decline. It means that we must constantly work at taking care of ourselves “which means managing our lives in such a way that we consistently maintain our physical, emotional, intellectual, and spiritual well-being” (Oswald 6).

Clergy Self-Care involves more than just the minister; it involves the whole congregation because what affects one will ultimately affect the other. We cannot have truly healthy pastors or ministers if the congregation is not healthy. Conversely, if the pastor or minister is not healthy (physically, spiritually, or emotionally) and leading a healthy lifestyle, it will adversely affect the congregation. Healthy and effective ministries are those that implement those best self-care practices that make for Healthy Ministers and Healthy Ministries.

Why is Self-Care Important?

If we don't take care of ourselves, we not only let ourselves down but we can – and oftentimes will - hurt others as well. It is difficult for us as ministers or Disciples of Christ to be “agents of Good News when we are either stressed out, burned out”, sick or ill due to living an unhealthy lifestyle and not taking proper care of ourselves. “We may say all the right things to others, but through our actions, we are communicating just the opposite of what we teach, and preach” (Oswald 3). Again, in the words of North Memphis District Presiding Elder, the Rev. Dr. C. Robert Finch: “We are no good to anyone else if we are all broke down ourselves.”

Various studies have shown that stress is one of the leading causes of health issues treated by doctors in America today. According to the Mayo Clinic, “Stress can disrupt almost all your body's processes. This puts [people] at increased risk of numerous health problems, including: Anxiety; Depression; Digestive problems; Heart disease; Sleep problems; Weight gain; Memory and concentration impairment. That's why it is so important to learn healthy ways to cope with the stressors in [our] life. ...The payoff for learning to manage stress is peace of mind – and perhaps – a longer, healthier life” (*Healthy Lifestyle: Stress Management*, Mayo Clinic Staff).

Self-Care is not just important for clergy health; it is equally important to the health of members of the congregation. Just as it is important for ministers to take proper care of their health needs, it is equally so for the laity. If members of the congregation are suffering from health-related issues due to inadequate or non-existent self-care it can cause undue stress for the pastor and ministerial staff. God wants us to love our neighbors as ourselves and to serve God faithfully. However, that unselfish love and service must not come at the expense of neglecting our health needs and taking proper care of ourselves.

Some Self-Care Practices Include:

- Get regular health screenings and check-ups, including dental. Dental is often neglected, but this was one of the most essential elements of self-care when I served on active duty in the military. We could not deploy out to sea or overseas without proper dental exams and treatment. It is just as important to clergy health.
- Listen to our bodies; if they are telling us through non-verbal signals that something is wrong, we must go see our doctors. And equally importantly, we must follow our doctors' advice, which includes taking medications as prescribed.
- Take vacations. Find time to spend with family to relax away from the demands and responsibilities of the ministry other than time spent at church conferences. Attending Annual Conferences, Mid-Year Conferences, Planning Meetings, etc. is not a vacation. On

the contrary, it can be extremely stressful due to the expense and extra time taken off from work that is often involved for both ministers and laity.

- “Living in a way that honors your body as a living temple for God’s presence.” Avoid abusing alcohol, drugs, foods, and smoking (Calhoun 70).
- Exercising. Even “Jesus had time for physical activity. In fact, “it went with the territory...in his role as an itinerant preacher” (Richardson, Jr. 28).
- Eating right. Eat a healthy, balanced diet that includes fruits, vegetables, whole grains, low fat, and sodium, and minimal amounts of sugars. We must read the labels when we shop so we can be aware of what is in the food we buy.
- Setting and observing appropriate boundaries (we can’t do it all). “Many people who outwardly appear to be happy...are, in reality, living with deep, inner pain” brought on “by trying to be” too many things to too many people” (Jones 1).
- Resting and keeping the Sabbath. “Sabbath is God’s way of saying, ‘Stop. Notice your limits. Don’t burn out.’ It is a day [God] gives us to remember who and what work is for, as well as what matters most. ...Sabbath reality calls us to trust that the Creator can manage all that concerns us in this world as we settle into his rest” (Calhoun 41-42). Our responsibilities on Sundays means that for us it is more a day of work than a day of rest. That is why it is essential that we take another day that is devoted to rest, relaxation, rejuvenation and doing the things that we enjoy and love with people that we enjoy being around and love.
- Sabbath keeping is more than taking a day of rest; it is a way of ordering our lives around a pattern of working six days, and then resting on the seventh day. It is a way of arranging our lives to honor the rhythm of things – work and rest. We must make it a habit to get into this rhythm if we want to maintain good health because this rhythm is essential to our self-care (Barton 134-135 (Kindle)). **Remember:** God heals our bodies, but it is up to us to do all that we can to stay as healthy as possible.
- Giving and receiving love by practicing loving our neighbors as we love ourselves.
- Engaging in Daily Devotional and Prayer Time. A day that does not begin and end with time for God is a day that is unfulfilled of all the possibilities that can come from a close and intimate relationship with God. With all my other responsibilities, including pastoring and personal obligations, I could not have finished my Doctor of Ministry degree if I had not practiced this principle.
- Stay away from things that destroy our health, and relationships. Some of these include gambling, excessive drinking, smoking, illegal drug use, prescription drug abuse, eating unhealthy foods, etc.

Too Much Stress is Not Good for You.

Parish ministry by its very nature is filled with stress and various studies have shown it is one of the leading causes of health issues treated by doctors in America today. This is especially true for Itinerant Ministers in the A.M.E. Church. With its frequent moves, often with little or no notice, to locations that can be hundreds of miles from one’s present assignment, stress levels for

Itinerant A.M.E. Ministers can be much higher than for non-itinerant ministers. These stress levels can - and often do - lead to increased occurrences of stress-related illnesses or health issues. And not only are we affected, but our entire family is oftentimes adversely affected as well; this is an often-overlooked aspect of the stresses and pressures of the itinerant ministry.

To help mitigate the harmful effects of stress we must take a more active role in our own self-care by seeking to find a healthy balance between the demands and responsibilities of our ministry, our health, and our family lives. While this balance is one of the key components of effective clergy self-care, it is difficult to “maintain balance in a job that demands so much of us” (Oswald ix).

While much of the stress in the lives of ministers can be eliminated, reduced, or certainly effectively managed; ministers cannot do it alone. It takes a team effort between the minister and congregation to help eliminate or effectively manage harmful stress. If self-care is to be effective, it must encompass a holistic approach of caring for the mind, body, and spirit in such a way that it will facilitate the elimination of as much harmful stress as possible. Unfortunately, sometimes we as ministers spend so much time and effort trying to minister to the needs of others that we allow our own health to suffer; and not just our physical health, but our spiritual and emotional well-being as well.

Stress and Your Health.

Various studies have shown that stress is one of the leading causes of health issues treated by doctors in America today. Consequently, one of the essential elements of Clergy Self-Care and leading a healthier lifestyle is learning to effectively manage stress. The subversive nature of stress, if left unchecked, can cause one’s enthusiasm and energy for the ministry to pall over time. This leads to the paradoxical question: “If God, gospel, and church are so wondrous, why is it that many involved in ministry today are feeling fatigued and empty?” In far too many cases the answer is too little time for rest, relaxation, and rejuvenation, which leads to “prolonged periods of emotional stress and strain” (Jones xi).

“The call to ministry is” considered by most ministers to be a sacred responsibility. But it is also a challenging and demanding responsibility in which “failure at work is [often perceived] as devastating.” The fear of failure often leads to ministers working more hours and taking less time for themselves and their families. “...This conflicts with the knowledge that they should also take time to care for their physical, mental, and spiritual health” (*Duke Clergy Health Initiative 2*).

It is anachronistic now, and was unrealistic in years past - to say the least - to believe that ministers have an obligation to work unceasingly long hours without taking time away for themselves. This is not healthy for the minister or the ministry, and will only lead to an increase in health problems and eventual clergy burn-out. God does not “call us to overload our bodies and ignore physical symptoms of disease and distress,” but to be good stewards over the one body that God has given us (Calhoun 72).

One of the reasons that occupational stress is so rampant in society today is that “Job stress has almost become a badge of honor” (Sweet 7). I have personally seen some A.M.E. Ministers in the 13th Episcopal District who take a good deal of pride in bragging about the excessive number of hours they work; the many preaching engagements they have lined-up, the fact that they have not taken a vacation or missed a Sunday Worship Service in many years. One minister who I spoke with saw it as a badge of honor that he had not missed a Sunday from his church, even for vacation, in 15 years. I wondered to myself, if his wife felt that sense of pride or did she

feel neglected, like so many of our family members do when we allow the church to constantly take precedence over our family and personal lives.

That is why it is so important for us as ministers, especially itinerant ministers, to engage in effective self-care practices. One of the key things that Sweet points out is that “[Jesus] was a healer” and His teachings are a prescription to healthy living and good health (Sweet 10). However, it is up to us to follow those teachings and to do all that we can to maintain the health and healing which is imparted from Jesus through His divine power and His teachings.

“The longer the stress lasts, the worse it is for both your body and your mind. ...Chronic stress causes wear and tear on your body [as well. Additionally], stress can make existing problems worse” (American Psychological Association 1.) Frequently, underlying medical issues which would not normally cause any problems become major medical issues due to chronic stress.

When stress starts interfering with your ability to live a normal life for an extended period, it becomes even more dangerous. The longer the stress lasts, the worse it is for both your mind and body. ...Stress can make existing problems worse, [and] may also cause disease, either because of changes in your body or the overeating, smoking and other bad habits people use to cope with stress (American Psychological Association 1).

“Reducing stress” can pay both immediate and long-term dividends for our health. It is important to recognize the causes of our stress and then employ effective coping strategies to minimize it as much as possible. Some coping strategies include: “Build strong relationships; Walk away when you’re angry; Rest your mind, and Get help” (American Psychological Association 2).

Stress and Your Mental Health.

Stress can also have an adverse effect on our mental health. According to the *American Psychological Association’s ‘Stress in America’ Report, 2010*:

Researchers at the Society for Neuroscience meeting in New Orleans (Oct 13-17, 2012) presented studies showing how stress, no matter its cause, alters brain circuitry in ways that can have long-term effects on mental health.

Research by Dipesh Chaudhury of the Mount Sinai School of Medicine in New York shows that traumatic events appear to cause depression by derailing the brain’s so-called reward system, which normally causes pleasurable feelings whenever we engage in fun activities like spending time with friends. People who have suffered major stress, such as soldiers returning from combat, often report that they no longer find pleasure in these things.

...Stress also causes the release of chemicals that impair the function of the prefrontal cortex, home of higher level thinking. When we experience acute stress, these chemicals—including cortisol and norepinephrine—heighten our reactive tendencies by muting our reflective tendencies, leading to everything from anxiety to aggression to depression (DiSalvo 1).

Many of the ministers in the 13th Episcopal District of the A.M.E. Church are veterans. Several of them have served in combat or suffered serious traumatic injuries during their time on active duty. I did not serve in combat, but suffered traumatic injuries to my head, right eye, back and shoulder while on active duty. Traumatic events, such as these, are extremely stressful, and affects one physically, emotionally, and mentally long after they initially happened. If we do not take proper care to minimize the amount of stress in our lives, our mental health will suffer. This is especially true for those of us who have suffered previous traumatic or extreme stress events in the past. We must realize that stress can affect our mental health and seek out professional care when necessary. Were it not for the effective mental health care that I received through evaluation and counseling, I could not effectively function as a pastor.

Seeking a Healthy Balance.

The difference between an effective and health-full ministry and a stressed-out, burned-out ministry can be described in one word: balance. Eliminating all stress from our lives is not the goal. Even if we could, we probably wouldn't like a stress-free life anyway. Avoiding all situations that might lead to burnout is not the goal either...What we're looking for is a way to be fully engaged in our ministries while maintaining our balance and our health. Self-care strategies will help us do just that... (Oswald 83).

A natural progression of being under an inordinate amount of work-related stress for ministers is burn-out. Parish ministry is often a two-edged sword which can have serious health-related consequences for ministers if we are not attentive to our self-care needs. Oftentimes, pastors who are hurting and on the edge of burn-out come to the realization that "what got them rewarded in their ministries was also the very thing that was wrecking their personal, spiritual, and family lives;" the heretofore mentioned two-edged sword. In other words, when ministers try to do too much to help everyone else they will very likely end up suffering from the painful consequences of clergy burn-out, and find themselves both unhealthy and ineffective (Lehr 3-4).

To prevent burn-out it is important to set and adhere to boundaries. Sometimes, as I had to do, this means making lifestyle changes. One of my stewards always reminds me that I am not Iron Man. This is her way of letting me know that even though we are called by God, we are not God. There are limits to what we can do for others and we must learn to operate within those limits.

In order to find a healthy balance in our lives as ministers, we must seek to order our lives around a "Sacred Pace," (Jones 49). Otherwise, we will find ourselves working at two diametrically opposed paces; one beneficial, and the other unhealthy. "When faced with" such a situation, "...you really have only two health options[:] ...remain on the job and responsibly satisfy institutional expectations...[or] seek other employment" (Jones 57). For most of us, seeking other employment is not an option that we are willing to entertain, so our only viable option is to attempt to modify our behavior.

Take a Break; Observe a Weekly Sabbath. *(Scripture Reference Exodus 20:9-11).*

One of the essential elements of a healthy balance between one's personal life and ministry is resting and practicing Sabbath. "Sabbath is God's way of saying, 'Stop. Notice your limits. Don't burn out.' It is a day he gives us to remember who and what work is for, as well as what matters most. ...Sabbath reality calls us to trust that the Creator can manage all that concerns us in this world as we settle into his rest" (Calhoun 41-42).

As Kirk Byron Jones points out, for many of us Sundays are more work than rest and relaxation. That is why it is essential that we take another day that is devoted to rest, relaxation, and doing the things that we enjoy and love, with people that we enjoy being around and love. How much time we decide to take is a personal decision; the important thing is to relax and have fun. “Having a good time is one of the central gift-goals of sabbath” (Jones 44-45). My own personal day is Monday and I do not allow anything other than emergencies to interfere with my personal time on my alternative Sabbath.

“One of the greatest gifts we have next to Jesus is our own selves...His Spirit lives in us” (Calhoun 71). Sadly, many of us do not provide Him a good home because we do not take adequate care of our bodies. We frequently put everything and everyone else before ourselves. We do not get enough exercise; we do not eat right; we do not take enough time for ourselves; we do not spend enough time with family, and we do not get enough rest. But serving the Lord and being Good Shepherds over our flocks does not “call us to overload our bodies and ignore physical symptoms of disease and distress” (Calhoun 72). If we are to adequately take care of others, we must first take care of ourselves; we must practice what we preach.

One of the most difficult things that I had to learn as I started in pastoral ministry was that I could not do everything for everyone. When ministers try to do it all they will find that “It is very difficult for [them] to be agents of good news when [they] are either stressed out or burned out” (Oswald 4). Kirk Byron Jones puts it this way: “Many people who outwardly appear to be happy and successful are, in reality, living with deep, inner pain” brought on “by trying to be all things to all people” (Jones 1).

According to Jones, when ministers attempt to do too much for too many they will find themselves in the midst of a storm. It is not so much that there is no rest in the midst of the storm; the problem is that too many ministers either do not fully understand how to avail themselves of that rest, or refuse to do so in the mistaken belief that they must be ever-present in the lives of their congregations. But as Jones states, “We have the right, and sometimes even the obligation, to say ‘No thank you,’ if we want to be whole and healthy ourselves” (Jones 41).

Therefore, we as ministers must take personal responsibility for our health and well-being by seeking to find a healthy balance between caring for the needs of our congregations and being attentive to our self-care. By so doing, we can be healthier and more effective ministers and pastors.

In the 2005 edition of *The Anvil, Annual Resource Guide*, which focuses on the 2005 A.M.E. Quadrennial Theme of “Living Well,” Bishop Adam Richardson, Jr. states: “As Christians, it is within our capacity to live well in every phase of our lives. Only some debilitating or congenital malady [can]” prevent this in some way. “...Living well is as much a physical matter as it is spiritual for the health of our souls and bodies. With discipline, we can have both” (Richardson, Jr. 25, 29).

For Your Health’s Sake, Learn to Delegate. (*Scripture Reference Exodus 18:13-26*)

In the A.M.E. Church, the pastor is the head of all boards within the church. This includes the choir, the steward board, and the trustee board. No one person or small group of people in any organization can do everything by themselves. This is especially true in the ministry. Some of our pastors, however, run into serious problems by taking on too many responsibilities rather than delegating some duties to members of the congregation. Effective clergy self-care involves realizing that the pastor cannot do it all. This mentality is one of the primary contributors to

unhealthy stress and clergy burn-out. Ministers end up overworked and overstressed and officers and members have no incentive to take initiative to help in the governance of the church.

If the church is to be successful in its mission and no one person becomes overly-stressed or burned-out, the work of the local ministry must be a shared responsibility. To help relieve some of the stress for the clergy, the pastor must be willing to delegate and officers and members must be willing and prepared to assist in the day-to-day functions of the church. This is an area where perhaps the presiding elder can be a “Jethro” for ministers during quarterly conferences.

Every issue that arises in the church does not necessarily have to be addressed to the pastor. Many of the issues that arise that are routinely handled by many pastors can be resolved at lower levels of leadership, such as the Class Leader, Steward Pro Tem, Trustee Pro Tem, or some other church officer. Those who are appointed to leadership positions in the church must be dependable, accountable, and properly trained to do their jobs. And as pastors we must allow them to do their jobs and hold them accountable when they do not.

Caring for the Body.

Jesus practiced three habits that serve as examples for healthy living for today’s ministers. **“First**, Jesus had downtime. He took time for relaxation” (Richardson, Jr. 27). Jesus attended weddings, feasts and other activities that served as an opportunity for leisure and relaxation away from the daily pressures of the ministry. Indeed, Jesus’ first recorded miracle was at a wedding in Cana (John 2:1). Other times, He just got away from everything and everybody to pray and rejuvenate.

“Historically, one way Christians persevered...was to regularly retreat...and spend solitary time with God. [This time] of retreat brought perspective to the mind while strengthening and nourishing the soul” which is essential for both spiritual and emotional health (Calhoun 67). In order for it to be beneficial, this time of retreat must not be used as a time to get more work done away from the confines of the church, but as a time to “pull back from the battle and rest” (Calhoun 67).

“Second, Jesus had time for physical activity...It came with the territory...in his role as an itinerant preacher...He walked and by walking he engaged in cardiovascular exercise. ...His was not a sedentary life” (Richardson, Jr. 27-28). Both of these are sentiments mirrored by Leonard Sweet in *The Jesus Prescription for a Healthy Life*. Chapter One is entitled “Laugh a Lot,” and Chapter Four, “Walk a Daily Dose of LSD (Long, Slow Distances).

Ironically, at one of our District Conferences in 2015 our children and youth were asked what issues they had with us as pastors and ministers and they said that we were always too serious and did not smile or laugh enough. I have found in my ministry that laughter and having fun with my members and others has been an easy and positive way to relieve much of the stress and tension that I encounter in my work. I have also found that laughter oftentimes takes away the physical pain that I am feeling, and lifts my spirits when I am feeling down or depressed. Indeed, one of my favorite Scriptures, which I quote frequently to my congregation is one that was listed by the author: “Rejoice evermore” (1 Thess. 5:6 KJV) (Sweet 18).

Jesus obviously had a sense of humor. One can’t help but laugh when one reads some of the exchanges between Jesus, His Disciples, and the Scribes and the Pharisees in the Gospels. Sweet also focused on the need for physical activity by pointing out the fact that “Jesus was a walker” (Sweet 69).

As a Navy Veteran of over 20 years I spent a lot of time both walking and running when I served on active duty and my health benefitted from it. After my retirement in 2003, I changed

from running to daily walking and my health continued to benefit. However, after a while, I relegated walking to something that I engaged in only when necessary to get from one place to another. And my health suffered as a result. The result was weight gain, aches and pains, and high blood pressure to name a few. I have since returned to daily walking at least 2.5 miles and my health has correspondingly improved. I have come to realize that physical activity is not an option but an essential part of a healthy routine.

The third habit for healthy living is to eat sensibly. While there is no way to know for sure exactly what Jesus ate, we can be fairly certain that He “ate sensibly...and that His diet would have consisted of foods [which included] fruits, vegetables, nuts, grains, olives” and other wholesome and healthy foods. And being “a devout Jew,” pork was not part of His diet (Richardson, Jr. 28). Self-care necessarily involves eating a healthy, well-balanced diet that includes fruits, vegetables, whole grains, low fat and sodium, and minimal amounts of sugars. It involves not only healthy eating, but also careful eating by being aware of what is in the food we buy, which means that we must carefully read the nutrition labels as we shop. I have always taken a cursory look at labels when I shop, usually looking for the number of calories, but after reading and doing research for this project, I now have a whole new appreciation for the information that is contained on the labels.

Clergy self-care involves not only loving God and neighbor, which takes care of the spiritual aspect of wholeness, but also loving ourselves which means taking care of our bodies by getting proper amounts of rest, sleep, and adequate amounts of daily or weekly exercise. And it involves educating ourselves about our family’s health history so that we are not only aware of our genetic predisposition to certain illnesses or diseases, but so that we can modify our life styles, if necessary, to help guard against falling victim to some of those health concerns that caused health problems for previous generations of our families.

Mental and Emotional Health.

An often-over-looked aspect of Clergy Self-Care is mental and emotional health and well-being. Perhaps this is so because of the stigma that is still attached to mental illness, especially among many of us in the Black community and in the ministry at large. Unfortunately, when many ministers find themselves suffering from mental health issues they are reluctant to seek the necessary care. Part of the reason for this is the fear that they will be labeled as suffering from mental illness and are therefore seen as unstable and unfit to continue to serve in the ministry.

Some studies have found that “religion or spiritual” beliefs influence one’s emotional state, which in turn affects a person’s physical and mental well-being. Additionally, religion has proven to be an effective coping mechanism that reaches across cultural, ethnic, and socio-economic boundaries. This is not based solely on one’s personal faith, but in the support derived from one’s faith community (Koenig 37, 54-57).

Other studies have shown that religious beliefs can also have a positive impact on one’s mental health, especially as it relates to depression, a leading cause of physical disability around the globe. Religion and spirituality have also been shown to have the same positive influence on suicidal behavior and suicide itself, one of “the leading cause[s] of death” among some age groups. Additionally, studies have shown that those who use religion as a coping mechanism “have lower rates of depression and faster recovery from depression” (Koenig 150-53). One interesting point is that the positive effects of religion in overcoming health issues appears to be greater among minority groups, especially African Americans. The apparent reason for this is that studies have shown that African Americans are more inclined to make whatever effort is

necessary to attend religious services because the church has traditionally been the place where they have found “their support and hope” (Koenig 150-151).

Summary.

The overall health of ministers, especially pastors, is one of the single-most important elements of healthy ministries, in my opinion. A pastor who is physically and emotionally drained, and on the verge of burn-out due to stress or other issues, is neither physically, emotionally, or spiritually healthy. Eventually, this will have a negative effect on the congregation because an unhealthy pastor or ministerial staff cannot adequately take care of the needs of the congregation. If the A.M.E. Church, and the Christian Church in general, is to be effective in its mission, first and foremost we as pastors and ministers must take care of ourselves so that we can better serve the people of our congregations.

Secondly, for the health and well-being of all involved (the clergy, the congregation, and the church), clergy and laity must work together as a team. Everyone - from the ministers, to the stewards and stewardesses; to the trustees, ushers, choir members, missionaries, and even to the Young People’s Division - have an important role to play in ensuring the ministry of the church is healthy.

It is hard to gain commitment from others if they do not see some evidence of teamwork in our church or organization. The best way to get others to want to become involved with something, I believe, is if they feel they will play a useful role, that their talents will be utilized, and their interests addressed.

One of the things that I do at the beginning of each Church Conference Year is to give a written survey to each of my church members. In the survey, I ask for the interests, talents, and skills of each person. Additionally, I ask where would they like to serve, what would they like to see changed, and what additions they would like to see made to the ministry of the church. The church leadership uses these forms as we plan our ministry focus for the new year.

Additionally, I have found these surveys help me obey the Iron Rule of Community Organizing: “Do not do for anyone anything that they can do themselves.” Many of the talents and skills possessed by members of the congregation have proven to be useful. I have found this to be especially useful as it relates to the administrative needs of the church. The 13th Episcopal District is one of the leading districts in the A.M.E. Church in moving to electronic communication in all forms, including the submission of quarterly and annual reports. Additionally, each Annual Conference Year brings even more administrative requirements from the Episcopal District. Many of our churches do not have computers. Many of our pastors are limited in their computer literacy or in the use of spreadsheets, Power Point, or Word. This all leads to additional stress which can have an adverse effect on our health. But much of this stress can be minimized by using the available personnel resources available in our congregations.

Again, it is my contention that the needs of the congregation and the well-being of the clergy are inextricably intertwined; whatever adversely affects one will ultimately have a negative impact on the other. Therefore, we must work together for the mutual benefit of all involved. As I said in my final presentation to the Laity of the West Tennessee Annual Conference in February 2017: Clergy and Laity are in this thing together; we must work together for Healthy Ministers and Healthy Ministries.

Conclusion.

It is my hope and desire that this presentation will cause the ministers of the 13th Episcopal District of the A.M.E. Church to engage in a kind of self-care frenzy that the French literary critic Rene' Girard refers to as Mimetic Desire. A situation where based on the actions of one person or a small group of people, everyone gets in on the action. Even those who would not normally do so. I believe this project can be the catalyst for that to happen.

Let me get up-close and personal with you: Clergy Self-Care is an issue that has been too long neglected among our ministers. We had one minister who stood up at a session on Clergy Self-Care and shared that he had been pastoring for over 30 years and during that time he had endured stress and physical and mental health issues, but did not seek the proper care because of the perceived belief that this would somehow make him look weak in the eyes of his parishioners. This suffering in silence is a common malady among us.

As a young pastor, I constantly heard whispers about not letting anyone know if you are sick or ill because of the perceived negative ramifications. One of my best friends suffered a stroke and was hospitalized but did not want anyone to know, especially his fellow A.M.E. Ministers. He was afraid of perhaps losing his current appointment. I had one of my kidneys removed in June 2009 due to malignant kidney cancer. I was told by my doctor to take at least a six-week break from ministry activities but found myself back at church in three weeks because I felt that my church needed my presence. Other ministers have suffered serious illnesses that were made worse because they did not take the time to allow themselves to recover.

Some of these actions are out of a fear of being moved to a lesser charge; some of it is because the church may refuse to pay the minister unless they are at church each Sunday; but all of it is detrimental to the health of the minister and the ministry. While none of the reasons influenced my decision to return to Church early, the results were just as impactful, in a negative way for me. When I returned to church three weeks following major surgery to have my kidney removed I was not as effective as I would have been if I had taken the proper time to completely recover. And because of my actions, I suffer today from pain and discomfort at times.

It is my hope that through this project I can bring about a new awareness of the urgent need for Clergy Self-Care among our ministers. It is also my hope that the leadership will continue to support me in this effort because I feel that their support is the most critical element in moving self-care from the shadows and into the light. Hopefully this project will propel Clergy Self-Care into a full-blown outbreak of Mimetic Desire throughout the 13th Episcopal District of the A.M.E. Church and beyond.

Works Cited and Recommended Readings:

- Bullock, A. Richard, and Richard J. Bruesehoff. *Clergy Renewal: The Alban Guide to Sabbatical Planning*. Lanham, MD:Rowman and Littlefield, the Alban Institute, 2000.
- Calhoun, Adele A. *Spiritual Disciples Handbook. Practices That Transform Us*. Downers Grove, IL:InterVarsity Press, 2005.
- "Clergy Health: Who Cares for the Caregivers?" Duke Today. 9 July 2015. <<http://today.duke.edu/2012/06/clergyhealth>>.
- Davis, Sarah F. "Changing Our Lifestyles." *Living Well Everyday! The Anvil, Annual Resource Guide, Quadrennial Theme, 2005*. Nashville:AME Publishing House, 2005.
- Healthy Lifestyle: Stress Management." Mayo Clinic. 31 Aug 2015. <<http://www.mayoclinic.org/healthy-lifestyle/sress-management/in-depth/stress/art-200460...>>.
- Henning, Sr., Cornal G. "You Look Good, But Are You Well?" *Living Well Everyday! The Anvil, Annual Resource Guide, Quadrennial Theme, 2005*. Nashville:AME Publishing House, 2005.
- "How Stress Affects Your Health." *American Psychological Association*. 31 Aug. 2015. <<http://www.apa.org/print-this.aspx>>.
- Job, Rueben P. *Three Simple Rules: A Wesleyan Way of Living*. Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2007.
- Jones, Kirk B. *Rest in the Storm: Self-Care Strategies for Clergy and Other Caregivers*. Valley Forge, PA:Judson Press, 2001.
- Koenig, Harold G., M.D. *Medicine, Religion, and Health: Where Science and Spirituality Meet*. West Conshohocken, PA:Templeton Press, 2008.
- Lehr, Fred. *Clergy Burnout. Recovering from the 70-Hour Work Week... and Other Self-Defeating Practices*. Minneapolis:Angsburg Fortress, 2006.
- Oswald, Roy M. *Clergy Self-Care. Finding a Balance for Effective Ministry*. Washington, DC:The Alban Institute, 1991.
- Richardson, Jr., Adams J. "Living Well." *Living Well Everyday! The Anvil, Annual Resource Guide, Quadrennial Theme, 2005*. Nashville:AME Publishing House, 2005.
- Sweet, Leonard. *The Jesus Prescription for a Healthy Life*. Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1996.
- Salvatierra, Alexia, and Peter Heltzel. *Faith-Rooted Organizing: Mobilizing the Church in the Service to the World*. Downers Grove, IL:InterVarsity Press, 2014.
- Stout, Jeffrey. *Blessed Are the Organized: Grassroots Democracy in America*. Princeton, NJ:Princeton University Press, 2013.
- Swartley, Willard M. *Health, Healing, and the Church's Mission: Biblical Perspectives and Moral Priorities*. Downers Grove, IL:InterVarsity Press, 2012.

Sydnor, Calvin H., III. "Ten Things Pastors Need to Remember." *The Christian Recorder Online*. 11 September 2015. <<https://mail.aol.com/webmail-std/en-us/PrintMessage>>.

Sydnor, Calvin H., III. "A Weighty Subject." *The Christian Recorder*. 22 January 2016.

Taylor, Robert Joseph, Linda M. Chatters, and Jeff Levin. *Religion in the Lives of African Americans: Social, Psychological, and Health Perspectives*. Thousand Oaks, CA:Sage Publications, 2004.

"The Clergy Health Initiative." Duke Divinity School. 9 July 2015. <<https://divinity.duke.edu/initiatives-centers/clergy-health-initiative>>.

The Council of Bishops, African Methodist Episcopal Church. *An Incredible Call to Serve! An Incredible Influence. The Anvil, Annual Resource Guide, 2008-2009*. Nashville:AME Publishing House, 2008.

Vitello, Paul. "Taking a Break from the Lord's Work." New York Times 1 Aug. 2010. 31 Aug 2015. <http://www.nytimes.com/2010/08/02/nyregion/02burnout.html?_r=0>.

Williams, II, Preston W. "Introduction: Serving Well." *Serving Well. The Anvil, Annual Resource Guide, Quadrennial Theme, 2006-2007*. Nashville:AME Publishing House, 2006.