

Clergy Well-Being
Seeking Wholeness with Integrity

Introduction

This study was commissioned by the Beatty Ryckman Trust and was conducted with the clergy of six major protestant denominations in the Province of Ontario. The denominations in the research were: The United Church of Canada, The Anglican Church of Canada, The Presbyterian Church in Canada, The Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada, The Baptist Convention of Ontario and Quebec and the Pentecostal Assemblies of Canada.

The study began in conversation with ministers and ended with ministers assisting in the interpretation of the data collected during the study. Over fifty clergy participated in focus groups as the study began. These groups assisted in the formation of a broad-based questionnaire.

In June of 2003 a mailing of 1252 questionnaires was sent out to the sample group which represented 30% of the clergy of the six denominations. At the end of the time allotted for completion of the questionnaire 338 responses were received (26.9% response rate). The data from the questionnaire was analyzed following which some 10% of the respondents were directly interviewed to assist with the interpretation of the material. Those interviewed were asked as to their experience of the accuracy of the data and to offer insight from their experience and denominational perspective.

This booklet is the narrative interpretation of the finding of the study. What is found here is the cumulative story of men and women in ministry. Specific identification of persons in the study is not possible through this material and names used are not the actual names of persons in the study.

Appreciation is expressed to the ministers who took part in this study. Their openness, honesty in response and willingness to be self-revealing in order to help us gain a better understanding of the inner struggles of those in ministry are greatly valued. Appreciation is also expressed to Knox College for their support in this research. A special thank you to Dr. Charles Fensham who worked with the researcher in creating the final draft of the questionnaire. It is our hope that all of our efforts will, in some small way, assist the church in its support of those called to minister in the name of Christ.

Listening to the Their Story

Let me introduce you to two of the ministers and allow you the opportunity to hear their stories. These stories may at some points be composites of several persons' journeys, but they are real stories. What they recount is borne out by the cumulative data of the research and so, in many ways, their stories are the accounts of many.

First meet The Reverend Jonathan O'Connor. Rev Jon, or Jon as he is known, has been the minister of St. Bartholomew Church for seven years. He came to this old and distinguished inner city church from an active rural church where he had served for some ten years. Now, after seventeen years in ministry, approaching middle age, and with several children still at home but soon off to university, he reflects on his current charge.

It was not an easy adjustment coming to St Bart's. The promises of a larger church and an urban setting sounded positive, but what seemed like gains shallowed against the complexity of his current life and ministry. Larger meant a larger budget, more fund raising, greater administration, less time for pastoral ministry and a growing sense of being the chief executive officer of an agency trying to maintain a position in the marketplace. Intimacy was replaced with business practice and efficiency was more prevalent than community.

All this brought with it personal cost. There existed within a square kilometre three other churches of the same tradition and numerous of other stripes. The sense of collegiality which should have been a primary source of mutual support, both within church structures and ecumenically, became the basis of competition and jealousy. Behind the civility befitting persons of ministry, envy of the success of others in ministry festered inside like an ulcer as the struggle for survival went on. Busyness to 'do' ministry that would draw support, overshadowed the importance of personal self-care, the need for renewal and time spent in personal spiritual nurture. In fact, an examination of Jon's schedule for the past month indicated that he had only taken one day off in 30, even though his agreement with the church Board was that he would take two days a week off.

Finally, exhausted and tired, and at the demand of his wife who watched his exhaustion affect relationships within the home, he agreed to go on a month long retreat that offered quietness and spiritual renewal. Jon commented,

“The spiritual and emotional dryness, prompted by busyness and the struggle to keep things going in the church took over my life so slowly and subtly that I didn’t realize it until I took time off and was forced to face my empty self. After several weeks of total rest and contemplation my grey world began to reappear in living colour.”

For Jon, out of potential crisis came a renewed approach to ministry. It didn’t happen overnight but slowly he began to see ministry not as his personal responsibility but one owned by the church. His role was to bring spiritual voice and guidance. He recovered his spiritual leadership as both pastoral care giver to individuals and spiritual care giver to the institution, the church. To quote him once again, “On a certain issue I can give spiritual guidance, but then I’m not going to take personally the outcome on the issue. Ultimately, this is Christ’s church. It is the church that needs to decide its action and to be responsible for that action.”

The question remains however: “Can Jon’s well-being be maintained in the system that to some degree fostered the difficulties he faced?” The nature of the ministry, the reality of the competition, the level of administration and the expectations of the church, both in its local expression and as a cultural ethos, have not changed. The interview conducted was only months after the spiritual retreat. Can the change experienced by Jon be maintained without ongoing support?

Meet the Reverend Sharon Stevenson. Sharon is currently serving in year five of her first charge. The church she serves is located in a small town and the average attendance at a Sunday service is around 50-60 people, the majority of whom are seniors. There is within the church a small youth group with which it is a delight to work, but there are no families of Sharon and her husband’s age.

The last five years have been a period of major transition for Sharon. The move from the cloistered community of the seminary to a parish has been a difficult one for her. Leaving close friends physically behind she has moved to a community and a church in which she can identify no one she would consider a personal friend. Shortly after leaving seminary she married. The transition from a single life to marriage was again difficult. A strong commitment to marriage and the wisdom of an excellent marriage counsellor brought resolve. The birth of their first child brought new challenges as they worked out their work schedules in an attempt to be faithful to their new role and Sharon's commitment to ministry. As a newly ordained minister there was a need to succeed. Additionally, as a woman in ministry, Sharon sensed that she had to over-perform even to stay at a level of competence with her male counterparts. To quote another woman in ministry, "Women must work twice as hard to prove their worth in ministry." At every point of transition, from ministry to new relational roles within the family, new experiences brought new challenges.

During this period of time Sharon realized her need for support. The local ecumenical ministerial offered little except to increase her growing sense of failure and despair. She spoke of the one-upmanship inherent within the gathering. One fellow minister constantly bragged about his church's growth and how personally renewed he felt as "God gave growth." Sharon spoke of the one young girl who showed an interest commenting, "I had to live on that small success for a whole year." Discouragement set in as people in the community indicated that they used to go to church, but now with minor hockey and other youth organizations on Sunday there just seemed no time for church. Sharon indicated that she felt that what she had to offer, and indeed matters of faith, were non-existent on many people's priority list. She did find one colleague from whom she felt support and she says that without him being there to help her professionally she might not have made it.

The denomination offered little support in Sharon's estimation because the church was small and insignificant to them. Support groups organized for women in ministry offered little and at times seemed to generate their own sense of competition. With few female role models, each was trying hard to define their own success at being who they were in ministry. Sharon's sense of isolation quickly became defined for her as abandonment. Alone with her constant struggle of those early years she felt abandoned by

colleagues, denomination and often by the church which at times showed little interest in spiritual matters. This person who had left seminary with vibrancy and a dynamic faith began to grow cold and spiritually emaciated. Even God seemed to have disappeared from the scene. To quote her, “It was as though God had dropped her in her parish with a curt ‘See you in forty years.’”

Jon’s and Sharon’s stories are typical of those of so many people in ministry. The majority of those in ministry are deeply committed men and women, called of God, attempting to live out their faith in service with integrity. However, as this study shows, the nature of the system, the changing culture, the increasing demands of the profession and the decreasing status and support of the minister have led to a deep rift between the dreams and aspirations of the minister as he/she entered ministry and the reality of life in ministry. At the very center of the dilemma there arises a tension between who the minister thought and aspired to be and who he/she has become in actuality. It is a deep rooted question of identity.

As a broad based study the research looked at a variety of dynamics in the life of the minister. In the section that follows the well-being of the minister will be examined under these areas. Results will be primarily in narrative form. As indicated in the introduction, statistical data is available for those requiring such material.

Looking at the Data

Physical Overview

In the study the average age of the respondent was 44 years with a ministry experience of 16.5 years. Of the 338 respondents, 99 were from women in ministry.

The results concerning the physical well-being of the clergy appear positive. Close to 70% of the respondents indicated that they were engaged in a regular exercise program. The majority (37%) engaged in daily walking with membership in a fitness club program being the second single form of regular exercise (20%), followed by a regular sporting activity (17%).

Being overweight continues to be an issue with ministers. In a self-assessment of their weight 4% indicated that they were underweight, 39% just right while 52% indicated overweight and 5% classified themselves as greatly overweight.

When asked whether they had suffered physically from stress-induced problems 51% indicated that they had. It is interesting, however, that in the study a list of common stress-induced problems, taken from a study conducted by the British Medical Association,ⁱ produced radically different results. In all of these areas - coronary heart disease, respiratory problems, cancer, asthma and ulcers - ministers were beneath the provincial averages.

Part of this may be due to the fact that ministers were dramatically beneath the provincial average in the areas of smoking and the drinking of alcoholic beverages. Those who smoked were 6% compared to a provincial average of 20% while 45% declared themselves to be non-drinkers compared to 14% in the same education bracket in the general population.

Social and Relational Overview

Researchers such as Alistair McFadyenⁱⁱ remind us that as human beings we come to the fullness of the “self” through social relationships and our interaction within community and the world. It is therefore paramount that relationships and social activity be a central part of our activity and development. This is true to such an extent that this researcher views the well-being of the individual as being dependent on the quality and depth of personal relationships.

Relationships for clergy have always been a matter of great concern. For years professional ethics taught that ministers should not develop personal friendships within the church or community that they served.ⁱⁱⁱ Ministers are surrounded by many people within the congregation and community, but they are often defined by the strong definition of office as opposed to by which they are as persons. The psychiatrist Robert McAllister indicated as early as 1965 that ministers were the one career group who could never step outside their professional definition and identity.^{iv}

This research raised the question of clergy relationships. Many in the study, like Sharon and Jon, lacked personal relationships. When “close friend” is defined as being someone with whom you felt comfortable sharing personal/intimate issues, some 18% indicated that they could identify no one in their current church or community. A further 10% indicated that they could identify one, while 19 % indicated two such persons. From a cumulative perspective, close to 49% identified two or less friends. In the direct interviews this was deemed to be both accurate and a matter of great concern to ministers. Relationally they felt unfulfilled and lonely.

While in the study many indicated that they had close friendships from seminary days, most interviewed indicated that this was in reality an infrequent form of relationship from the past and did not satisfy the needs of the current situation.

When asked how the current need for friendship was fulfilled, most indicated it simply was an unmet dynamic of their life. Reasons of busyness, avoiding creating the perception of favouritism in the congregation, confidentiality, and the transitory nature of ministry were given by those interviewed. Concern was expressed that this lack of personal or depth relationships placed stress upon the marriage relationship as it became the

primary, and at times the sole, basis of support.

Close friendships between persons in ministry, a likely source of relational support, were not evident within this study. There appeared to be considerable levels of distrust between ministers and their colleagues in ministry. This was attributed to the high level of competition between ministers, such as was evident in Jon's story. In the study, 80% of the respondents agreed to varying degrees that they were sometimes jealous of the success of other ministers. When this high level of jealousy was tested in the direct interviews, it was considered accurate and attributed to the high levels of competition between ministers. Meaningful friendships cannot be established or maintained on a foundation of mistrust and competition.

In the relational area there appeared, in this study, to be a high level of satisfaction within marriage or relationships to lifelong partners. The majority of respondents listed all areas of their marriage as above average or higher. The highest level of dissatisfaction was in the area of sexual fulfillment with 23% recording below average or poorer. Thirty percent (30%) indicated that they had sought the care/support of a marriage counselor.

Again, these results were tested in direct interviews with a variety of responses. Many indicated that they believed the reported satisfaction with marriage relationships was high and probably prompted by the sense of wanting to give a socially (Christian) acceptable response. They validated their responses by what they observed in their circle of ministers. Others indicated that the higher level was probably because ministers viewed marriage, by and large, as an area of great importance and had sought, possibly at higher levels than the general public, marriage counseling. Some, such as Sharon, cited personal experience.

Ministers recorded in the study that the majority of their relationships were 'work based' not 'social', and that most 'social' events in their lives centered around church and therefore were in reality work not social. Some 60% indicated that social evenings with friends usually involved 'church talk' and some 55% indicated that sometimes they felt very lonely.

It becomes obvious that ministers have insufficient relationships at the depth

or intimate level and are at risk in their own personal development and in the establishment of authentic identity.

Emotional Overview

The emotional dynamics in the life of the minister seem to be somewhat diverse and at times even contradictory. When asked to rate their experience of emotions on a five point scale ranging from Never to Constantly there appeared a high level of variance.

Respondents rated their sense of personal worth and personal value consistently high. They also rated high their sense of fatigue and frustration and somewhat less high their levels of anxiety and anger. Equally they rated their levels of joy, happiness, contentment and satisfaction as high.

In the general observation section of the questionnaire respondents show considerable contradiction to these high ratings.

The following responses were on a 5 point scale:

- | | |
|---------------------|------------------------|
| 5- Strongly Agree | 2- Moderately Disagree |
| 4- Moderately Agree | 1- Strongly Disagree |
| 3- Agree | |

- 70% moderately or strongly disagreed with the statement, “I feel fulfilled in ministry.”
- 67% agreed to strongly agreed with the statement, “I sometimes project my job frustration on the family.”
- 62% agreed to strongly agreed with the statement, “Sometimes my outward appearance seems happy and content while inside I am emotionally distressed.”
- 75% agreed to strongly agreed with the statement, “I am afraid to let my parishioners know how I really feel.”
- 80% agreed to strongly agreed with the statement, “I feel guilty if people see me taking time off during the week.”
- 50% moderately to strongly disagreed with the statement, “I am consistent between who I am and how I appear to others.”

When these levels of differing responses were tested out in direct interviews, the majority of respondents expressed two primary reasons for what appears to be a conflict in the data. The majority indicated that the responses were probably the product of those answering with a socially (Christian) acceptable response. They seemed to indicate that the levels of dissatisfaction (fatigue, frustration, anxiety and anger) and emotional response found in the general questions were more consistent with what was actually happening among ministers. This is borne out from other data in the study which shows a high level (60%) who indicated that they had at some time considered leaving ministry while 33% had considered leaving their denomination.

The second interpretation indicated that ministry is, by its very nature, emotionally volatile. Working with individuals and groups through what are often crisis periods of time creates emotional swings. Additionally there is an underlying theological assumption that at the very foundation of service to God is an ultimate sense of joy, happiness, contentment and fulfilment. These two interpretations do not appear to be mutually exclusive and may in fact be one and the same. In either case there appear to be emotional issues that need to be addressed with those in ministry.

Probably the area of greatest concern within the emotional overview relates to a high level of depression among clergy. When asked if they had ever been **diagnosed** with an emotional condition, 20% said they had. This is consistent with general population findings published by Health Canada.^v However, when asked to name the diagnosis 16% indicated depression. This is double the Health Canada findings which states that approximately 8% of Canadian adults will experience major depression in their lives.^{vi}

Further breakdown of the levels of diagnosed depression by gender indicated that the level of depression for women was double that of men in ministry, 24.7% to 12.3% respectively. Although the Health Canada study also consistently shows a higher rate of depression among women at a rate of 2:1, the overall levels of depression for both men and women in ministry are double the national findings.

There exists a need for ongoing investigation in this area. These high levels of depression were generally deemed accurate by those interviewed and in

fact were seen as possibly low by some. There still appears, and this is confirmed by the Health Canada 2002 report, a strong stigma connected to the reporting of mental illness, especially among males. It is interesting to note that in the study 38% had sought the care of a clinical counselor, 21% a psychologist, 15% a psychiatrist and 45% the advice of the family doctor in stress/anxiety issues. We will come back to this area of the study later as we discuss the overall findings.

Vocational Overview

Several things became evident in the study and were borne out in direct interviews; ministers take little time off and work long hours.

It was interesting to note, and of surprise to some interviewed, that 49% of the respondents indicated that according to contract, they were to take two days off each week with the remaining group permitted one day off in the same time period. This is a change from the stereotype of the 'minister's one day off'. Many ministers, however, did not utilize the time off.

When asked how many actual days (with no work activities) they had taken off in the 30 days prior to completing the questionnaire we discovered the following:

Actual Days Off:	0 in 30 = 5%
	1 in 30 = 5%
	2 in 30 = 13%
	3 in 30 = 15.8%

If their contracts allowed only 1 day off each week, or a minimum of 4 in 30 days (a month) 38.9% of ministers actually took only 3 or less days off within the previous month.

Within the study the average work week for the participants was 50 hours. We also discovered that over 25% of the respondents worked in excess of 55 hours a week. The majority of those in the study indicated that this was an average week.

When these work habits were raised with those in the direct interviews there appeared little surprise. Some indicated that the problem of over work was not only in these areas but also related to difficulty or reluctance to take prescribed vacation time.

When asked the reason for these findings, the majority indicated that the scheduling of ministry was difficult because of the nature of the work. Death, illness and crisis among parishioners can create havoc with the weekly schedule. It was also pointed out that it was not always possible to simply “take another day off” when a funeral or emergency interfered with scheduled time off. Often scheduling of other events, weeks in advance, means a wait until the next scheduled time off comes around. Some, such as Sharon and Jon, indicated that to get a full day off, one normally has to leave home and community. Although this may sound workable, it does mean that there is little time to be off at home, doing the things that need to be done there.

There was another compelling interpretation given by those directly interviewed. Many described it as an issue relating to the minister’s sense of self-worth and personal value. Some felt that it had to do with a feeling of indispensability or the sense that the church would fail without their presence. Others related this to the high levels of competition among clergy and the feeling that to take time off may risk giving an edge to the competitor. There was also indication that because of their own sense of insecurity, ministers felt that to be constantly busy (or so to appear) and to show an appointment book full of activity, demonstrated self-worth and that they were an essential part of the church and community. There was indication that ‘not having time off’ was viewed by some as an indicator of their value and worth and actually became, for some, a point of boasting.

The area of greatest concern in the vocational overview is one of the very nature of ministry itself. The majority (83%) saw ministry as a calling of God and the church. This was a very traditional understanding interpreting Call as the action of God in the individual’s life, confirmed by the community of faith. Again the majority (77%) saw this calling as the basis of their authority/power within the church.

Actual practice showed a somewhat different understanding and experience

of ministry. On the same scale given above the following responses were given:

5- Strongly Agree

4- Moderately Agree

3- Agree

2- Moderately Disagree

1- Strongly Disagree

- 77% strongly agreed to agreed with the statement, “I feel more like a CEO than a pastor.”
- 83% agreed with the statement, “My church wants a CEO rather than a pastor.”
- 91% agreed with the statement, “Being ‘minister’ is more like a job than a calling.”
- 70% disagreed or strongly disagreed with the statement, “I feel fulfilled in ministry.”
- 60% indicated that they had considered at some time leaving ministry.
- 78% strongly agreed to agreed with the statement, “I feel my position as a minister demands perfection.”

When asked to interpret these findings those interviewed indicated that the findings were, in their estimation, accurate. The apparent contradiction in the responses, Call versus job, appears to be indicative of a level of idealism in relationship to the reality of ministry. Most felt that ministers entered ministry as a response to the Call and with the expectations of what that meant to be in the church as spiritual mentor/leader. Reality sets in, however, as persons in the church seem more concerned about the survival of the church and its fiscal operation. The measures of success become those things that are measurable; budget size, bottom line and membership size. This again ties into the sense of competition that exists between ministers.

Several other issues became evident here. Some of those interviewed expressed a visible sense of achievement in the administrative side of ministry. Indication was given that by doing the administrative tasks, they could see progression, accomplishment and closure to what they were doing. This gave a sense of accomplishment compared to the more immeasurable dynamic of a spiritual presence or growth.

There also appeared to be a considerable amount of grief because the Calling

of ministry had become, in many cases, the task of administration. Most of those interviewed indicated that this was the task they were least equipped to do. They indicated that their training was as ministers of Word and Sacrament, but that the church valued more and expected more from them as administrators, or chief executive officers within the church. There was evident a real sense of loss as matters of spirituality seemed secondary to survival. As Sharon discovered — spiritual matters were not high on people's priority list, even within the church.

Spiritual Overview

The expectation is that ministers are called to nurture persons within the church in their spiritual life, to provide opportunity for worship and to provide spiritual guidance to those within the community of faith who seek such guidance. In order to fulfil this task the personal spiritual nurture of the minister is crucial. The attempt in this part of the study was to determine the level and the source of such support.

A minority of ministers (40%) indicated that they had someone who was their personal pastor while only 16% indicated that they had a spiritual director.

The majority (81%) indicated that they had, in the past five years, experienced a situation in which they required personal pastoral care. A lesser percentage of this group (71%) indicated that they had sought and received such care. Care in these situations was received from persons in the following order; another minister, spouse/life partner, lay friend, a family (other than partner) member, a person of another profession. It is interesting to note from whom help, in the majority of cases, was not received. They include: anonymous support groups provided by denominations, local church congregations, ministerial and denominational staff.

Ministers were asked to rate specific areas in their lives that were important for their spiritual nurture. The following were selected as the top areas of major importance:

- Scripture reading
- Spiritual empowerment of others

- Meditation
- Contemplative prayer

When asked to list their top three sources of Spiritual Renewal beginning with the most important the following were listed as the top four:

- Prayer
- Scripture
- Reading
- Retreats (personal, group and silent)

It would appear from the responses that the traditional forms of spiritual nurture continue to play an important role in the lives of ministers. The answers given are what would be hoped for and consistent with the importance of these disciplines within the teaching of the church. However, there again appears to be some discrepancy between these answers and those relating to actual practice. Again, using the five point scale, respondents were asked to rate their agreement with given statements. The following were some of the responses:

As a reminder the following was the 5 point scale utilized:

- | | |
|---------------------|------------------------|
| 5- Strongly Agree | 2- Moderately Disagree |
| 4- Moderately Agree | 1- Strongly Disagree |
| 3- Agree | |

- 94% strongly agreed to agreed with the statement, “I read scripture in sermon preparation but it rarely speaks to me personally.”
- 86% strongly agreed to agreed with the statement, “I pray with others but rarely have time for personal prayer.”
- 71 % moderately disagreed to strongly disagreed with the statement, “I feel spiritually affected when I am leading worship.”
- 89% strongly agreed to agreed with the statement, “At times when conducting worship I feel like I am simply going through a ritual.”
- 70% of respondents felt unfulfilled in ministry.

Those interviewed were asked once again if these findings were accurate with their experience of ministry or what they were observing in the lives of colleagues. There appeared to be little disagreement with the results of the study.

When asked why this was occurring there was a variety of responses. Some spoke of the busyness of ministry leaving the minister too exhausted to enter into meaningful spiritual discipline. These activities, scripture reading, prayer and meditation were often a means to an end, namely doing the task of ministry. Several spoke of the rigour of studying scripture for sermon preparation and how this became a task based activity which dampened the spiritual value of the activity. One person interviewed stated, “Sermon preparation ruined scripture for me. I look at scripture as the material for a sermon and if I have not found it by Tuesday then scripture becomes the source of anxiety in my life.” There is a sense here that professionalism interferes with the effectiveness of the very source of spiritual nurture in the life of the minister.

This professionalization of ministry has become evident in other areas of the study. The high level of competition, the lack of trust between ministers, and the large number (80%) who indicated jealousy at the success of other clergy are all indicative of the way in which ministry has moved from a spiritual entity to one which is professional and corporate in nature.

What has developed is a dichotomy between who the minister is as person and who she/he is as professional. This loss of integration brings with it a critical crisis of identity.

Discussion of Data

Our conversation partners as we discuss the data are Jon and Sharon whom we met briefly at the beginning of this report. In their journeys, the composite journeys of many, we find deeply profound insights that help in the understanding of the crises many in ministry face today.

A Crisis of Identity

For both Jon and Sharon, each at different points in their lives, there developed what can best be called a crisis of identity. Fundamental to the

formation of identity is the response of the social environment and relationships within life that affirm and mould the individual as a complete person.^{vii} These responses continue throughout life so that the formation of identity is a process, not a stage of maturation at which the individual arrives.

Jon had moved from an active rural church setting where the concept of community was well established and church was seen as an important part of daily life. In that setting he was seen as spiritual leader and pastor to both the church and the broader community. Now in the 'new' larger urban setting the expectations, from his perspective, had changed. He was now expected to be the chief executive officer of the church in a very competitive marketplace. Now questions were not of issues of faith or 'spiritual' in nature but were financial, fund raising, administrative and searching for ways to advance the societal image of the church. No longer did he walk with people in their daily lives, but rather met them as they left church after worship and occasionally was invited to be present and perform a sacred role around rites of passage and crisis in parishioners' lives. Nothing seemed personal or relational in this setting and he questioned who he was, and what he was doing, living out in this setting what he envisioned as a far different Calling to ministry. "Doing" had replaced "being" and the busyness of keeping up with the "doing" consumed much of Jon's time, leaving him exhausted and empty so much of the time.

Sharon with youthful enthusiasm had looked forward to her first church where she would be 'The Minister.' For her it wasn't a question of power or position, but the opportunity to live and work with people as together they all lived out their spiritual journeys. She had dreamed of deep spiritual dialogue, personal moments of epiphany and the joys of leading others in a growing reality of their faith. This is that to which she had been called, for which she had studied six long years and that to which she had committed her life.

Now she had arrived. The high of ordination and installation as minister of the church were still fresh in her mind and still generated a sense of awe and wonderment. Then, reality set in. Outside of attending worship on a Sunday morning there seemed to be little interest in the church from the majority of members. There was an interest in meeting the budget and keeping the

church open but opportunities for Bible study, spiritual growth and reaching out to others in the community seemed unimportant to the majority. People in the community who had once come to church indicated that now Sunday was the day of involving children in organized sports and there seemed little time for church. All of this Sharon saw as a personal affront on what she did and on what she deemed important in life.

There was little support from other ministers. When she attended ministerial gatherings she was confronted with the bragging of others as to how God was blessing them and with that grew a feeling of inadequacy and failure. Denominational meetings proved to be similar and the focus of these was normally for the big church. In fact, Sharon got the feeling that the denomination thought that if ministers just worked harder their churches would be full. She had heard this concept from a judicatory officer.

Sharon also faced the issue of being a woman in ministry. She was one of two women in the local ministerial and the other had long since ceased to attend because of the 'old boy' nature of the gathering. Sharon never really felt part of the 'group' except for one senior minister who went out of his way to invite Sharon and her husband to specific events at his church.

There were women's groups established within the denomination to provide support to women in ministry. Sharon and others who attended such groups spoke of the competition that existed between women in ministry. There was a sense that women felt they had to be twice as good in order to measure up to the expectations set for them. Therefore there was little support evident and a lot of grumbling about the system and the men who controlled the system.

For Sharon, transition came in multiple forms. She moved not only into her first ministry, but also from being single to marriage and within several years to parenthood. All of these transitions presented their own unique challenges. In marriage the irregularity of scheduling in ministry presented problems. Marriage difficulties forced Sharon and her husband to seek counselling and only their strong commitment to one another saw them through some rough times. With the arrival of a child, scheduling became even more difficult. To be both a good parent and a good minister was difficult and often created a sense of guilt within Sharon. Again, only a deep

sense of commitment to her Calling and to God saw her through these times of physical and emotional difficulties. Because of the models of personal and professional competence Sharon encountered in other ministers she felt internally like a failure and unable to expose her needs to others. There was no sensitivity to her needs on the part of the local ministerial or the denomination. Isolated, she endured alone.

Of great concern to Sharon was what was happening to her spiritually. The idealism, established in seminary, of the joys of being a spiritual leader soon faded. Few, if any, were interested. Peer encounters, although giving lip service to being spiritual, were primarily opportunities for the 'successful' to brag and the 'unsuccessful' to remain quiet. For Sharon, the eagerness with which she began this phase of her spiritual journey began to fade. It became harder to concentrate on her personal devotions. Conflicts within her personal life began to absorb her energy. Prayer life began to decrease especially as answers to personal problems, let alone those related to the ministry to which God had called her, didn't seem evident. Isolated from others, especially colleagues and denomination, she now began to feel in isolation from God. Slowly anger began to spread to those who failed to provide human support. Her abandonment by them soon developed into a sense of being deserted by God and eventually, at times, even an anger towards God. To quote Sharon, "Why if He had called me to ministry, would He desert me when I need Him? Who am I now that all that I expected to happen has not?"

The question is a question of identity. This is especially true for Jon and Sharon who sense a deep Calling of God to ministry and then find themselves disillusioned by the expectations of the denomination and the local church. The system rewards those who produce measurable outcomes; budget, memberships, attendance and other quantitative indices. The local church measures these and the performance level of the sermon, attendance at activities of the church and visible busyness. This gives rise to what this study has identified as the high level of competition between ministers and the level of jealousy experienced when others appear to succeed. It is by making these measures of success obvious while hiding the areas of personal need and failure that the appearance of accomplishment is created. It is interesting that the concept of pastoral care, which often takes long hours with little numeric success, is no longer deemed by many as being a valid

part of ministry and indeed in some seminaries, courses in pastoral care are optional while courses in evangelism and church growth are mandatory.

What the denomination and the local church neither measures nor seems interested in, is the spiritual growth of the minister. Jon said during the interview, “They can ask if the sermon is ready or the statistics sheet is complete but no one will ever come into my office and ask, ‘Pastor how long have you prayed today?’ or ‘Have you read Holy Scripture today?’” These are the unmeasured and unrewarded factors in ministry.

The statistics indicate many ministers feel that rather than spiritual leaders and pastors, they are administrative officers. That for which they trained seems underused and the new configuration of ministry requires training they never had. Disillusioned and spiritually dry, they preach and teach a spirituality in which they themselves do not participate. For some, the church to which they were called is no longer a viable concept, but the alternatives are limited and often disrupt personal security.

Ministers, for the most part, are dedicated men and women who are deeply committed to the faith and who have a genuine care for people. Most of those interviewed in this study attest to this reality. However, the institutionalized nature of the church, for reasons beyond the scope of this study, requires more. In the North American context especially, the role of the minister has become that of an activist busy with such matters as budgets, buildings, membership size and growth. These are the measures of success imposed by the culture. The spiritual nature of the profession, that which fosters meditation, contemplation, contemplative prayer and those things which nurture the inner being, although espoused in theory, is rarely rewarded in practice.^{viii}

Bolstered by the sense of Call, students often arrive at seminary with an idealistic view of the nature of ministry. Although seminaries are strongly based on a model that rewards activity as opposed to the spiritual (completion of papers, courses, thesis prepared, books read, etc), students often manage, with the strong peer support present, to hold on to a sense of that which nurtures their inner being.^{ix} However, once out of the cloistered environment of the seminary and away from the supervisory nature of field placement or internship, they discover the demands of ministry too great to

cope with while maintaining a healthy spiritual discipline.^x It would appear that part of the discrepancy in the data in the areas of Calling and spiritual well-being was a flashback to the idealism and spiritual reality of seminary days. Many appeared to be running on the fumes of yesterday's reality.

Relationships

One of the most common themes in the church today is the concept of community, which implies relationships and a sense of being. The gospel itself is rooted in relationships and the call to a reconciliation of relationships between God and created beings, self and others.

Yet for ministers, personal relationships are incredibly few and weak. The teaching of the church was often that ministers should not have personal friendships within the church and it often discouraged them within community.^{xi} The relocation of ministers from community to community has discouraged some from establishing meaningful relationships which will be painful to change. For many, the reality is that they have been hurt by relationships and therefore they have built walls of protection around themselves to prevent further pain. This experience often occurred early in ministry when ministers misjudged the level of acceptance in their first church. Fresh from seminary they believed that the early 'honeymoon' period in the church was a true level of their acceptance. When controversy occurred, however, they discovered that they were in reality outsiders and those relationships that they believed were deep friendships, and in which they had invested trust, suddenly were part of the group that appeared to be turning against them. In subsequent ministries, relationships are more guarded and deep trust relationships do not often occur.

The operative word here appears to be the word 'trust'. For reasons of theology, appearance of favouritism or past experience, ministers form few, if any, trust relationships within the context of the church or community. Jealousy and competition, as we have seen, limit ministers' trust of their colleagues, both denominationally and ecumenically. Relationships within the denomination, and especially with denominational staff, are fraught with difficulty. Few (4%) went to denomination staff for support in a crisis. These are those who have, even within systems that speak of a Call system, have

power in issues of future placement and career. Trust with issues of personal needs is limited in these relationships. Seminary colleagues, who many indicated as their source of friendship, are often scattered and distant in time. The study showed a decreased level of trust among seminary colleagues over time and the interviews indicated that relational support here was only occasional. Trust relationships appear often to exist only between the minister and his/her marriage partner. This places incredible strain on any relationship that is the sole source of support and often this fact causes some issues to be internalized within the person.^{xii}

It may be, and this was confirmed by some of those interviewed, that what appears to be an increased utilization of persons in the mental health profession (clinical counselors, psychiatrists, psychologists, marriage counselors) is becoming the new 'safe' area for ministers to seek personal and depth dialogue. These professions are governed by strict confidentiality regulations and are seen by some ministers as easily accessible means of personal support. Although providing support, these interactions cannot be seen as a substitute for healthy depth relationships. These are simply professional interventions in which the minister is receiving help. As such they do not provide either the equality or the interactive dynamic evident in true depth interactions.

There are few relationships that respond to the inner needs of the minister. This is especially true around areas of personal need, life's crises, marital issues and matters of personal dilemma. This creates an issue for the formation of personal identity, as mentioned above. Identity is established in and through social relationships. The deeper the relationship the greater the effect on personal identity. It is at the depth level that openness is experienced, comments of others are most accepted, trust is most highly operative. When ministers fail to or cannot establish these levels of relationship then personal identity is distorted or lacks fullness of development.

While this certainly applies to human relationships it is critical in the individual's relationship to God. When Sharon felt abandoned by even God, even if only for a passing moment, levels of trust became destroyed and one's value as an individual and a person of worth to God was diminished. Even the fact that God seemed to be blessing others (who bragged about it)

but not her, seemed to raise a question of her worth to God. Self-worth and self-esteem become distorted and sometimes destroyed when relationships of trust, both human and divine, appear violated.

The Place of Pastoral Psychology

This research began in part to raise the question of the role and place of pastoral psychology in the training and lives of those in ministry. It was anticipated that those who had experienced pastoral psychology in seminary days would cope better in ministry. It was thought by the researcher that people so trained would have better relationships, deeper spiritual lives, a clearer sense of who they were in ministry and fewer problems in life. This was not evident in the data drawn from the questionnaire. In all areas, those who had pastoral psychology, including those who had multiple courses in the area, reported comparable levels to other respondents.

However, in the initial focus groups and in direct interviews, participants often expressed the value of training in these areas. Many raised the fact that they felt that they had personally benefited from this area of study and that they believed that it was an important part of theological training. Some expressed dismay at the fact that many seminaries no longer required this area of study within theological training.

A number of those interviewed stated that their experience of pastoral psychology, and especially the small group component, had been extremely valuable in helping them to cope in ministry. Appreciation was expressed for the opportunity to work out their own ‘difficulties’ before being placed in a leadership position within the church.

Of particular interest to the researcher was a series of responses from ministers who had as students attended the same seminar and spoke of the “groups” in which all students were required to participate. These “groups” consistently came up in discussion as a source of personal development and self-awareness, spiritual growth and integration of faith and life. One minister, now in middle age, expressed the experience this way:

“Groups were the most authentic practice of what it meant to

be church. Individuals struggling together to be whole people before God. No political agenda, simply struggling together with issues of faith and life.”

What these ministers seemed to appreciate about their experience of these pastoral psychology groups was the opportunity for self-discovery in a setting that allowed them to be vulnerable, yet protected their personhood and was sensitive to developmental needs. This particular seminary engaged external professionals in the area of pastoral psychology to serve as leaders within the groups. The experience of those within the group caused them to see this type of training as essential to the formation of ministers.

In the focus groups and direct interviews the majority of those who had studied pastoral psychology, especially in small inter-personal relationship groups, referred to their value, unprompted by the interviewer. The question needs to be asked as to why this did not give rise to a difference in overall results within the questionnaire between those who had this component in their training and those who did not. Several observations drawn from the research may assist with our understanding.

It was noted that the training in this area often was not well connected or integrated into the overall programme of theological education. It was therefore often a ‘stand alone’ subject which did not engage other areas of theological study. When it did interact with such areas as pastoral care it was usually within the context of an institution such as a hospital, prison or special needs unit. Although it is valid to assume that theory learned is transferable, the transition between short-term interaction within the institution, and the continuing community ministry of the pastorate is a major change. The question must be raised as to the care with which seminaries assist students in this transition and in establishing an integrated understanding of the personhood.

The question must also be raised as to whether the student at the point of entering seminary is ready, or has the maturity to deal with, the issue of self-awareness and their personal/pastoral identity. A number

of respondents indicated that training of this nature was of value to them because it occurred at an opportune time and at a point at which they were ready for such intense personal enquiry. It may be beneficial to give consideration to a model of education, in this specific area, where introduction to the subject in seminary is followed by opportunities in continuing education for the development of self-awareness and matters of identity. Such programmes, especially during the initial five years of ministry, would allow for personal integration to occur during a period of rapid professional maturation and experience.

Conclusion

At the very core of the crisis among clergy is the question of identity. “Who am I – as a person — as a minister — as a religious leader in a culture in transition?” This is a question that must be an ongoing area of enquiry for the minister. As the individual matures and experience deepens, the reality of difficult and sometimes hurtful situations affect the conscious and unconscious source of our being, the question must be readdressed and the answer reinterpreted in the light of the present. The response to the question, “Who am I?” established in seminary training or early ministry is not sufficient for the current context of ministry. The research has demonstrated that the idealism of seminary days and early ministry becomes a source of disillusionment as the culture and often the church shows little interest in the realm of the spiritual. The often rigid biblical and theological perspective of those early years risks coming into conflict in ministry as the hard questions of life are raised in a world that is not black and white, but multiple shades of grey. The response to the question “Who am I?”, if not constantly revised through the process of a growing self-awareness and personal reassessment may itself become the source of conflict. The neatly defined person of the early days of ministry may now seem

a seething bed of conflicting ideologies causing the person to raise questions of one's own integrity and belief.

It is evident from the outcome of this research that at the very core of any approach for the support and care of clergy there exists the need to provide opportunity for clergy to struggle with the issue of identity. The spiritual dynamic which embraces every aspect of this question must be central to this enquiry. The identity of the person in relationship to the Divine becomes foundational to how one understands the self within the totality of being. From a healthy, forming identity comes emotional strength which welcomes and seeks supportive relationships, nurtures the Call, contributes to fulfilment and satisfaction in vocation and fosters community which becomes the basis for true communion.

Endnotes

- i. British Medical Association (1992) *Stress and the Medical Profession*. London: BMA
- ii. McFadyen, Alistair, (1990) *The Call to Personhood*. Cambridge, UK Cambridge University Press
- iii. There is indication that this is still being taught in some programmes of ministry training.
- iv. McAllister, R (1965) "The Emotional Health of the Clergy". *Journal of Religion and Health.*, vol 4.
- v. *A Report on Mental Health in Canada*. Health Canada, Population and Public Health Branch, Ottawa Ontario 2002-10-03
- vi. Ibid Chapter 2 of the report on Mood Disorders. Major depression is defined in the report as "2 weeks of depressed mood or loss of interest accompanied by at least four other symptoms of depression i.e. loss of appetite, loss of sexual interest, fatigue, senses of worthlessness, hopelessness, etc. In the study the levels of depression were sufficiently high so as to be medically diagnosed.
- vii. McFadyen is helpful in seeing the importance of both interaction within social structure and the interpersonal nature of one to one relationships in the creation of personal identity.

viii. In the Church of Scotland study conducted by this researcher the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator was utilized. It was interesting to note that the majority of Scottish ministers were by nature introverts while the predominant type for ministers in North America is extrovert.

ix. It is interesting how many students speak to me about the need to be performance-based in seminary and that the heavy work load required both by the school and often the church (in Field Placement) causes them to experience a decrease in their own spiritual self-care and nurture.

x. It is interesting that this was strongly affirmed in the interviews by ministers of all ages and from all denominations. A few seemed to have developed methods of providing personal spiritual self-care but the majority expressed difficulty with maintaining a balance between their 'doing' and their 'being'.

xi. Although this teaching has changed somewhat it is still evident within some parts of the church and still taught by some within seminaries.

xii. There is a sense that the partner often has the same limitations of relationships experienced by the minister. Often it appears that both partners withhold or internalize issues in order to protect the other person.