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DIVERSE CLERGY IN MUTUALLY SUPPORTIVE FRIENDSHIPS

By

STUART L. KERNS

A DISSERTATION SUBMITTED TO THE
FACULTY OF COVENANT THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY
IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS
FOR THE DEGREE OF DOCTOR OF MINISTRY

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ABSTRACT

The author examined the factors that contribute to supportive friendships among diverse clergy. Data was collected through a written survey of pastors and through interviews with eight pastors involved in the same group. The research demonstrated that they were drawn together by a core unity of belief and similarity of pastoral calling. Their longevity as a group has been primarily through the group size, the nurturing of relationships, a baseline of common belief, and a commonality of job description. The factors contributing to longevity in ministry included: biblical rest, spiritual formation practices, supportive friendships, life-long learning, and hobbies.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to thank my wife Kelli for her patience and understanding through this project, as well as the elders of my congregation who supported me through every stage. I am deeply thankful to Dr. Bob Burns for his prodding, care, and wisdom along the path. Finally, I thank Jesus for allowing me to be in a mutually supportive friendship with eight of the best pastors I know. Their candor and unanimous participation in this project made it possible.

CHAPTER ONE - INTRODUCTION

In late 2003, I happened to meet a pastoral acquaintance named Tom[1] in the grocery store. As we stood in the aisle, he hinted that he had a problem and needed my help. He asked permission to call me, and I assured him that would be fine. Later that week, he came to my office and was obviously very troubled. He was being accused of sexual and financial misconduct by a newly hired staff member, and he knew that the charges could damage him even if they were eventually proved false. This pastor was desperate to save his reputation.

As I listened to his troubled heart, I realized several things: First, I did not know this man very well. Second, he did not know me very well. Third, he must be extremely desperate to seek my help. And finally, he obviously did not have any person or group in his life providing the kind of supportive relationship that this situation requires. One of the reasons he came to me was his awareness that I was part of such a pastors' group. He knew that through me he could connect with a small group of peers who would understand his situation and help guide him through it. The group gathered to encourage Tom and to offer advice on how to proceed. Now, the situation has blown over with few ill effects.

The pastors' group of which I am a member was initiated about thirteen years ago by a few pastors who felt the need for greater encouragement and unity among Lincoln's evangelical churches. Since then, we have grown to nine senior or solo pastors who meet

[1] All of the names used to describe personal situations or subjects in the study in this dissertation will be pseudonyms.

monthly for lunch and some words of encouragement.[2] There is no set agenda. The members of this group have many things in common. For example, none of the churches have fewer than 300 attenders, all have multiple staff members, we are all evangelicals, and we have long tenures. We also have many differences, such as variances in our theology, personal characteristics, and philosophies of ministry. In addition, our churches vary in size and in style. Despite these differences, we have traveled together, visited one another's church services, preached in one another's pulpits, prayed for each other, created an evangelical city prayer retreat, created a community service project together[3] and have even begun planting a community church together. There has not been unanimous participation in each project, but the projects have flowed from the relationships in the group. It is a strong fellowship.

The problem addressed in this study was to understand how mutually supportive pastoral groups develop and are maintained, the factors contributing to and detracting from mutually supportive pastoral friendships, and the overlapping interests of mutually supportive friendships and excellence in pastoral ministry. These are the concerns which directed the course of this study.

Problem and Purpose Statements

The problem of pastors leaving ministry has gained focus in the last decade. Covenant Theological Seminary has been one of several institutions given grant funds by the Lilly Endowment, Inc. to promote excellence in pastoral ministry. Jackson W. Carroll, Director of Pulpit & Pew: Research on Pastoral Leadership summarizes the problem this way:

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[2] Throughout the dissertation I will refer to this specific group of pastors as the "Lincoln group."
[3] www.projectservelincoln.org.

> ...we especially need to find ways of stanching the outflow of those who do feel called to serve as pastors, who have the requisite gifts for doing so, but who, for whatever reason, see leaving the pastorate as their only option.[4]

George Barna saw the pending problems in the American church and wrote about them over ten years ago. Regarding the situation with pastors he wrote:

> The average career span of pastors these days is just half of what was in 1950. In fact, the average tenure of a pastor in Protestant churches has declined to just four years—even though studies consistently show that pastors experience their most productive and influential ministry in years five through fourteen of their pastorate![5]

Now there is a growing amount of literature on clergy burnout, clergy self-care, and maintaining excellence in ministry for the long haul. What is the interplay between these themes of excellence and longevity in ministry, prevention of burnout, self-care, the role of supportive friendships, and the format of a small group? This question led me to a focused study on the impact of supportive friendships. The purpose of this study is to explore how evangelical clergy have formed and sustained safe, trustworthy friendships. Additionally, to discover principles of small group dynamics, pastoral self-care and longevity, and Biblical unity that could be beneficial to the broader Church.

Research Questions

Though I used a wide variety of questions, these are the essential questions that I hoped to answer:

1. How are mutually supportive friendships among evangelical clergy formed?
2. How are mutually supportive friendships among evangelical clergy maintained?

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[4] Dean R. Hoge and Jacqueline E. Wenger, *Pastors in Transition: Why Clergy Leave Local Church Ministry* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2005), x.

[5] George Barna, *The Second Coming of the Church: A Blueprint for Survival* (Nashville: Word Publishing, 1998), 5.

3. What prevents pastors from being involved in mutually supportive friendships?

In order to answer these questions, I identified issues that contribute to or detract significantly from mutually supportive, safe, trustworthy friendships among evangelical clergy. My primary study group was the nine pastors who meet monthly in Lincoln, Nebraska. For purposes of this study, they are called the Lincoln group.

Significance of the Study

I have lived in Lincoln forty-four of my forty six years. In Lincoln, the members of my group of nine senior pastors agree that for the last generation there has been a spirit of competition among the evangelical churches. Their churches number over ten thousand attenders in a county of about two hundred and fifty thousand people—and they have about 225 combined years of pastoral experience, 174 of which have been in Lincoln! They know the city and the evangelical landscape. We have had some interest in changing that landscape, and we are doing some Kingdom-minded work that will not directly benefit any one of our congregations. Is this a mirage, a miracle, or a special act of grace? Or are there principles of small group dynamics, self-care, and effective pastoral leadership that could help the broader Church to experience this type of biblical unity?

In this study, I looked for overlapping patterns of support and pastoral excellence. I also looked for patterns in small group life and self-care that fostered positive results for Biblical unity, pastoral longevity, and pastoral excellence.

Definition of Terms

Several terms will be important to the study. The following is a list of key terms:

Christian Clergy – The body of people ordained by a denomination or congregation for full or part-time Christian service.[6]

Community – Independent people choosing to live in mutually interdependent relationships.[7]

Evangelicals – Those who accept the authority of scripture, the great commission of Jesus, salvation by grace through faith in Christ alone, and the historic fundamentals of the Christian faith.

Ecumenism – The attempt to bring about unity among Christian believers.[8]

Small Group – A group of three to twelve people which meets regularly for some specific or general purpose.

Mutually Supportive Friendship – A relationship among peers whereby each party can both support others and be supported.

Unity – A drawing together of those who are different.

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[6] Adapted from *The American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language,* 1973 ed., s.v. "clergy."
[7] Adapted from Julie A. Gorman, *Community that is Christian* (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1993), 42.
[8] Adapted from Millard J. Erickson, *Concise Dictionary of Christian Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1986), 48.

CHAPTER TWO – LITERATURE REVIEW

The purpose of this study was to explore how evangelical clergy have formed and sustained safe, trustworthy friendships. The focus of this review is to explore the areas of small group dynamics and pastoral self-care and longevity as they pertain to the study purpose.

Small Group Dynamics

The review of literature on small group dynamics uncovered several themes, including: definitions of a small group, drives toward small groups, challenges to small groups, roles within small groups, the effects of the size of the small group, the types of small groups, the longevity of small groups, and the openness of small groups.

Definitions of a Small Group

Most of the literature included some kind of definition of a small group, including what they considered to be unique features of a small group. Jeffery Arnold's *The Big Book on Small Groups* also talks about the variety of small groups being offered in many churches today. He reviews the dynamics of group formation and analyzes how 'community' is created in various kinds of small groups (such as prayer groups, study groups, or mission-oriented groups). Arnold defines a small group as "an intentional gathering of three to twelve people who commit themselves to work together to become better disciples of Jesus Christ."[9] Three words summarize his vision of how small groups work: Discipleship (the goal), Leadership (the foundation), and Community (the

[9] Jeffery Arnold and Stephanie Black, *The Big Book on Small Groups* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1992), 9.

structure). Arnold goes on to define a disciple as "a committed follower of Jesus Christ who seeks to live a life marked by continued growth in understanding and obedience."[10] However, the bulk of the book expounds on the principles of building community. There are a wide variety of 'communities' or types of small groups. Arnold identifies the five fundamental tasks of the Christian community as study, worship, prayer, evangelism, and mission. He also emphasizes some essential elements of creating community:

> There are two key essential elements to community building. The first is that people make a *commitment* to be in relationship together, almost like a husband and wife do when they are married ("for better or worse"). Knowing that a commitment has been made enables the various people in a group to experience the freedom of testing, growing, disagreeing and challenging within a safe framework....The other element in healthy community is *communication.* By this is meant a two-way, interactive sharing of ideas so that mutual growth occurs... [community building] frees people to know that they have committed friends who love them, and to learn by experiencing and understanding life through the lens of other peoples' beliefs and experiences.[11]

Arnold's practical discussion of group dynamics synthesizes academic research into user-friendly bullet-points. An ordinary group goes through four basic stages of community building: exploration, transition, action, and termination.[12] Community is defined by Bill Donahue's *Leading Life-Changing Small Groups* as "the body of Christ expressing the life and message of Christ to build up one another and redeem the world for God's glory."[13]

Neal McBride, in *How to Build a Small Group,* defines a church small group as a "voluntary, intentional gathering of from three to twelve people regularly meeting together with the shared goal of mutual Christian edification and fellowship."[14] In his

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[10] Arnold and Black, 10.
[11] Ibid., 42-43.
[12] Ibid., 105-109.
[13] Bill Donahue, *Leading Life-Changing Small Groups* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996), 27.
[14] Neal McBride, *How to Build a Small Groups Ministry* (Colorado Springs, CO: Navpress, 1995), 73.

discussion of group size, McBride cites consensus among small group experts that three to fifteen people constitute a small group, but he cites his own experiences to "recommend twelve members as the maximum ideal group size."[15] Williams says the size for a "small group" can range from three to twelve.[16] He explains:

> Three is the lower limit because two people are not a group. They can only have a conversation. Contrary to what some think, the magic number twelve for the upper limit does not come from the number of apostles Jesus chose. Instead, it is a rough guideline that correlates with other natural limits imposed on a group. These limitations fall into the categories of meeting purpose, meeting space, and meeting time.[17]

The literature defines a small group as three to twelve people. Within the church it is a group of Christians gathered for a particular purpose that correlates to the Christian experience. Generally, small groups provide growth and support for the individual and often include some kind of outward focus.

Drives toward Small Groups

There are a variety of reasons people are drawn toward small groups. The literature referenced internal and external drives toward small groups. In her book *Community that is Christian: A Handbook on Small Groups*, Julie Gorman offers instruction on a variety of issues related to effective small group formation and maintenance. Gorman, an Assistant Professor at Fuller Seminary, lays out the principles of community-building and group development. She synthesizes the biblical data and the practical questions involved in community building.

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[15] McBride, 81.
[16] Arnold, Gorman, and McBride also use this range of size for a small group.
[17] Williams, 51.

Gorman asserts that the call to New Testament community—and small groups—is summed up in Jesus' command to his disciples to "Love one another."[18] This commandment can only be expressed in community:

> Biblically as described earlier, we need community to fulfill our pull in the direction of reflecting the image of God. This awareness of and interdependency with others is part of our creation format. We will never be whole apart from giving ourselves away to others and receiving from them their uniqueness. For believers, to be in Christ is to be in relationship with others in His body.[19]

She cites three basic drives which small groups "seem to satisfy." First, she discusses Inclusion, which she describes as the desire "to be part of a group and accepted by others." Second, she writes about Influence, both the desire to influence others and to be influenced by others. Finally, she discusses Affection, which she describes as the desire to be liked by others.[20]

In Thom Corrigan's book *101 Great Ideas to Create a Caring Group,* he structures his 101 ideas around principles of practicing care. While the book spells out practical ways to express care, he reminds the reader that relational care goes beyond the meeting schedule of the group. Care is expressed 1) within the group meeting, 2) within the individuals of the group meeting, 3) within the individuals outside the group meeting, and 4) as a group outside the meeting. All of these avenues for caring supply the relational material that goes into a successful small group.

Christians are called into small groups for the basic purpose of loving one another according Christ's command. Within the small group basic needs of inclusion, influence, affection, and caring for others are expressed.

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[18] John 14:34.
[19] Julie Gorman, *Community That Is Christian: A Handbook on Small Groups* (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1993), 107.
[20] Ibid., 107.

Challenges to Small Groups

Every kind of small group will have its own unique challenges, but Christian small groups have two particular tests, those of life in community and Biblical unity.

Life in Community

On the broader topics of Christian community, the devotional life, and ministry, Dietrich Bonhoeffer's *Life Together* gives a pastor's perspective. After quoting Psalm 133 on the pleasantness of brothers dwelling together in unity, he reminds us that 'life together' will have great challenges because is it not meant to be lived "in the seclusion of a cloistered life but in the thick of foes." Bonhoeffer then quotes Martin Luther to establish the point:

> The Kingdom is to be in the midst of your enemies. And he who will not suffer this does not want to be of the Kingdom of Christ; he wants to be among friends, to sit among roses and lilies, not with the bad people but the devout people. O you blasphemers and betrayers of Christ! If Christ had done what you are doing who would ever have been spared?[21]

It is the unity of believers in Christ that gives the Christian peace while living out his faith in an unbelieving world. Of course the problem is that the conflicts are not just with the unbelieving world, but within the community of Christian faith. We will eventually be disillusioned "with others, with Christians in general, and, if we are fortunate, with ourselves."[22] This 'disillusionment' is used by God to sober us, bring humility, and promote realistic community, for "The sooner this shock of disillusionment comes to an individual and to a community the better for both…He who loves his dream

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[21] Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Life Together* (New York: Harper & Row, 1954), 17-18.
[22] Ibid., 27.

of a community more than the Christian community itself becomes a destroyer of the latter..."[23]

Bonhoeffer addresses the strengthening principles of communal devotion in chapter two and principles of private devotion in chapter three. These are a collection of pastoral exhortations regarding the ministry of the word, prayer, and communion. In chapter four, he warns against a "dangerous enemy" that can destroy life together: self-justification and the judging of others:

> ...from the first moment when a man meets another person he is looking for a strategic position he can assume and hold over against that person...All this can occur in the most polite or even pious environment...It is the struggle of the natural man for self-justification. He finds it only in comparing himself with others, in condemning and judging others.[24]

Bonhoeffer pastorally commends several 'ministries' designed to combat this spirit of self-justification: holding one's tongue, meekness, listening, helpfulness, bearing one another's burdens, proclamation of the word to each other, and 'authority' (demonstrated through a heart of humble service).[25]

Biblical Unity

Unity in belief and direction can be a challenge in any community, especially a small group. Robert Wuthnow notes that more than half the Americans involved in small groups do so as part of the regular life of a church or synagogue.[26] Wuthnow says "Congregations help ensure the success of small groups because people feel they have something in common with other members and can feel safe and secure enough to open

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[23] Ibid., 27.
[24] Ibid., 90-91.
[25] Ibid., 108. "'Whosoever will be great among you, shall be your minister' (Mark 10:43). Jesus made authority in the fellowship dependent upon brotherly service."
[26] Robert Wuthnow, *Sharing the Journey: Support Groups and America's New Quest for Community* (New York: The Free Press, 1994), 92.

up their hearts to them."[27] In my initial literature search, I tried to locate literature on ecumenism. Most of the American mainline denominational articles reviewed were very positive of what J. Marcellus Kik calls "organizational unity."[28] Organizational unity relates to titles, buildings, ministries, and structures.

In *A History of the Ecumenical Movement, Volume 2, 1948-1968* Harold E. Fey briefly summarizes three periods of the ecumenical movement. While the first twentieth-century efforts were aimed at cooperative missionary efforts the second (pre World War II) and third (post World War II) waves of the ecumenical movement were aimed at working out "a specific programme of common action."[29] One of the results of the second wave was the conceptual approval of the World Council of Churches (W.C.C.) in 1937-38. The third wave begins with the actual first assembly of the W.C.C. in the Netherlands after World War II in 1948. Fey writes that founders of the W.C.C. wanted "to ensure the ecumenical movement should really become ecumenical" and therefore "should develop adequate structures."[30] This is what Kik refers to as "organizational unity."[31]

Fey addresses the evangelical critique of ecumenism as an ecclesiological question about the nature of true unity:

> Is the unity of which the New Testament speaks to be conceived as a "spiritual" and "invisible" unity or as a unity which must also find concrete structural expression in the life of the Church?[32]

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[27] Ibid., 105.
[28] J. Marcellus Kik, *Ecumenism and the Evangelical* (Philadelphia: Presbyterian & Reformed Publishing Company, 1958), 43.
[29] Harold E. Fey, *A History of the Ecumenical Movement, Volume 2, 1948-1968* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1970), 3.
[30] Ibid., 4.
[31] Kik, 43.
[32] Fey, 18.

He goes on to admit that the evangelical fear of "theological relativism or even syncretism…is not wholly unfounded since there are a certain number of [W.C.C.members] whose 'ecumenism' takes the form of theological indifferentism or of a general embracing of all religions."[33]

Into this environment, with these kinds of questions about the nature of biblical unity, two works were thoughtfully, cautiously, and biblically positive about spiritual unity (but not organizational unity): Kik's *Ecumenism and the Evangelical* and Martin Lloyd-Jones's *The Basis of Christian Unity.* Jones lays out the terms of biblical unity through his exposition of John 17 and Ephesians 4:

> What are these truths [that unite true Christians]? That man is lost and helpless and hopeless because of sin and the Fall. That the Lord Jesus Christ, who is the Son of God, saves us by his perfect life of obedience to the law and by His death, which was the result of His bearing our guilt and the punishment meted out upon it by the law of God. That salvation becomes ours by faith alone; it is apart from any works or merit in ourselves, and solely as the result of God calling us effectively by His Holy Spirit.[34]

According to Lloyd-Jones, unity is destroyed by personality factions, false teaching, legalism, and self-exaltation (rather than exaltation of Christ).[35] Unity is primarily spiritual and "must never start with the visible church or with an institution, but rather with the truth, which alone creates unity."[36]

Kik and Lloyd-Jones agree that there is a unity that all true Christians share. But the debate Lloyd-Jones and Kik are responding to regards the even more fundamental question of how to define a true Christian. Kik approaches the topic by defining "evangelical" in his preface this way:

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[33] Ibid., 19.
[34] Martin Lloyd-Jones, *The Basis of Christian Unity* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1967), 51.
[35] Ibid., 55-58.
[36] Ibid., 71.

> Historically, evangelical designates one who holds to the absolute supremacy of Scriptures as a rule of faith and practice, and to justification by free grace through the faith. An evangelical may be recognized by the fact that he holds firmly to the *sola scriptura* and *sola gratia* of the Reformation.[37]

Kik says the scriptures call God's people to oneness in basic doctrine, oneness in purpose, and oneness in love.[38] This is what reflects a "true organic unity—a spiritual unity which may disappoint those who feel that visible organizational unity is the high goal of ecumenity. The New Testament, however, emphasizes the spiritual Headship of Christ and the spiritual unity of believers."[39] This tension between spiritual unity and organizational unity is heightened by competing interpretations over what Jesus meant in John 17. Kik outlines the tension created by doctrinal disunity and attempted organizational unity:

> Many deprecate the doctrine of verbal inspiration with such descriptive words as Biblicism, obscurantism, and literalism. However, when it comes to one sentence in the seventeenth chapter of the Gospel of St. John even the most radical and liberal ecumenist becomes guilty of a literalistic interpretation of which no evangelical has been guilty.[40]

Kik is referring to Christ's high priestly prayer that "they all may be one, as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee."[41] He says the liberal ecumenist primarily seeks a visible organizational unity, and the evangelicals are so protective of organizational unity that they often ignore Christ's call to spiritual unity.

> The evangelical more than any other understands the nature and quality of spiritual unity. He sees the fallacy and shallowness of an ecumenity that would achieve unity through a central organization. This increases his responsibility and rebukes him for the lack of spiritual unity evidenced by those who hold to

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[37] Kik, preface.
[38] Ibid., 42-43.
[39] Ibid., 46.
[40] Ibid., 41.
[41] John 17:21.

> evangelical Christianity...[the evangelical] must admonish false ecumenity not only with his lips but by a display of true unity among the brethren.[42]

Calling evangelicals to account for their lack of spiritual unity, Kik says that while we should lead the way, "alas, no segment within the visible church has a greater reputation for disunity than the evangelicals."[43] He believes future spiritual unity could be promoted through emphasizing the evangelical belief in the authority of scripture, and more open evangelical discussion on the issues of baptism, the Lord's Supper, God's sovereignty, and eschatology.[44]

Structure

David P. Seemuth develops the theme of structures in *How Dynamic is Your Small Group?* In chapter six he reminds that "as important as it is to have a specifically stated purpose or goal for a group, it is useless if it is not linked with an appropriate structure."[45] Another challenge to small groups is the tension between the need for formal structure and the freedom of informality in relationships. Wuthnow refers to this as the "small-groups paradox."[46] He explains it this way:

> [small group] structure involves a relatively high degree of formal organization—leaders, goals, and agendas n most groups...It also involves a relatively high degree of informality—warmth encouragement, acceptance, and the privilege of talking openly about one's personal problems and interests. The paradox, moveover, is genuine: the informality of small groups depends on having formal structure, and the formal structure is tolerated only because of the informality in encourages.[47]

Wuthnow goes on to say the 'structures' may be as elemental as knowing when to meet or having a place to meet. He says the "formal structures create a space...for people to

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[42] Kik, 53.
[43] Ibid., 132.
[44] Ibid., 137-140.
[45] David P. Seemuth, *How Dynamic is Your Small Group?: 7 Keys to Improving Your Small Group Dynamics* (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1991), 80.
[46] Wuthnow, 158.
[47] Ibid.

get to know each other."[48] And according to Wuthnow, getting to know other people is the primary draw toward small groups. The contemporary small group's "fundamental reason for existence is quite often to provide deep, intimate interpersonal support—period."[49]

Christian small groups are tested by the acknowledged challenges of life in community and Christ's call to Biblical unity. The pursuit of unity will require the humility and servant's heart that Bonhoeffer commends and the clarity of purpose and calling that Kik commends. According to Wuthnow small groups will also need to solve the paradox of needing formal structure, while craving informality.

Roles within Small Groups

Several of the authors addressed the wide variety of roles that are present in all small groups and the dynamics those roles create.

Within each group, Arnold says, there can be a variety of personality types that give each group its unique character. He divides these 'roles' that people play in a small group into Me-Centered, Other-Centered, and Group-Centered roles.

Me-Centered Roles	Other-Centered Roles	Group-Centered Roles
• Group clown • Group expert • Egocentric (always a bigger and better story) • One-issue individual (turning every discussion to an area of their own expertise) • Counselee • Group cynic • Group gossip	• Friend (able to reach across barriers to develop significant relationships) • Group affirmer (finding the good qualities in others) • Group sensitizer (senses what others are thinking or feeling) • Servant	• Focus person (reminds group of why they come together) • Issue clarifier • Question asker • Problem solver • Summarizer • Reality tester • Coordinator (of any aspect of the group)

[48] Ibid., 159.
[49] Ibid.

Rothwell joins Arnold in identifying different types of roles people play within a group, related to task, maintenance, and disruption:[50]

Task Roles	Maintenance Roles	Self-Centered or Disruptive Roles
1. Initiator-contributor 2. Information seeker 3. Opinion seeker 4. Information giver 5. Clarifier-elaborator 6. Coordinator 7. Evaluator-critic 8. Energizer 9. Secretary 10. Director	1. Supporter-encourager 2. Harmonizer-tension reliever 3. Gatekeeper-expediter 4. Feeling expresser	1. Stage hog 2. Isolate 3. Clown 4. Blocker 5. Fighter-controller 6. Zealot 7. Cynic

Rothwell also notes that "During a single committee meeting an individual may play several of these roles.[51]

A similar scheme is used by Paul Meier in his book *Filling the Holes in Our Souls,* as he describes "The Perfectionistic Person" ("logical, usually intelligent...not, however, closely in touch with his feelings."[52]); "The Emotional Person" ("able to share their feelings readily and are helpful in the bonding process of the group...[however] he may want to dominate the group by doing all the talking."[53]); "The Secretive Person" ("doesn't trust people...prefers 'safe' subjects, such as doctrinal issues."[54]); "The Dependent Person" ("an underachiever...often plays 'poor me' in the sharing time."[55]);

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[50] J. Dan Rothwell, *In Mixed Company: Small Group Communication* (Fort Worth: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich College Publishers, 1992), 127-129.
[51] Ibid., 129.
[52] Paul Meier, *Filling the Holes in Our Souls: Caring Groups That Build Lasting Relationships* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1992), 148.
[53] Ibid., 149.
[54] Ibid., 149.
[55] Ibid., 150.

"The Shy Person" ("afraid of anger...avoids confrontation at all costs"[56]); "The Explosive Person" ("Most of the time is calm and pleasant...He does, however, keep track of wrongs subconsciously, and the kettle simmers, building up steam under the lid."[57]); "The High/Low Person" ("The high/low person is ecstatic one week but has 'lost his salvation' the next week...Everything for him is the experience of the moment."[58]); and "The Antisocial Person" ("extremely self-centered...sees people as objects to be used...The needs of the antisocial person are a bottomless pit because his continual question is, 'What can the group do for me?'"[59]). Meier explains that:

> It isn't really necessary to get a graduate degree in psychology [to lead a small group], but at some time all small group leaders...are going to feel woefully inadequate when faced with the variety of human personalities...The better we understand one another, the better we can minister to one another.[60]

Within every small group there will be a variety of personality types that effect the chemistry of the group. These roles can also present challenges to those leading small groups. Individuals may play several roles in the same group. Taking some time to understand these roles can facilitate better ministry and understanding in the small group.

Effects of Size on the Small Group

Several of the authors comment on the effects of small group size. Particularly, they address the dynamics of personal support and size as they impact the complexity of potential interactions and adequate time for meetings.

Dan Williams in *Seven Myths About Small Groups* writes that a nurture group—the most typical group—needs to allow about ten to fifteen minutes per member. He

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[56] Ibid., 151.
[57] Ibid., 152.
[58] Ibid., 153.
[59] Ibid., 154.
[60] Ibid., 147.

explains his formula for how long a meeting should be (and consequently how large the group should be):

> Take the amount of time the group is able to meet and divide by 15 minutes. For example, many downtown and campus ministries operate lunchtime groups that have at most sixty minutes. Sixty divided by 15 would suggest that 4 members would be an optimal number for the group. (Probably 3 would be better, given the time spent in traveling). Following this rule will ensure that the group members will actually feel "heard" in the meeting.[61]

Holly Arrow, Joseph E. McGrath and Jennifer L. Berdahl align with Williams' perspective in *Small Groups as Complex Systems.* They note that "Motivation losses tend to increase as group size increases." They believe possible reasons for these problems "include fewer opportunities to participate productively, a sense that one's contributions are not critical or identifiable, and greater depersonalization."[62] McBride also argues that because of the "expanding number of potential relationships," it is better to keep numbers on the low side.[63]

Many potential group problems intersect with each other. According to Williams, most nurture groups would function best with three or four people. However, if they have not established a covenant for attendance, it may be that only one or two members will show up to each meeting. He believes that one must take all of these factors—covenant, available time, and ideal number—into account in order to have an effective small group.

The theme of group size is also addressed in J. Dan Rothwell's book, *In Mixed Company.* He puts forward several reasons why he agrees with Williams about the size of group numbers: "One of the most significant changes affecting groups is an increase in

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[61] Dan Williams, *Seven Myths About Small Groups: How to Keep from Falling into Common Traps* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1991), 53.
[62] Holly Arrow, Joseph E. McGrath and Jennifer L. Berdahl, *Small Groups as Complex Systems: Formation, Coordination, Development, and Adaptation* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 2000) 75.
[63] McBride, 81.

size. As groups increase in numerical size, complexity increases. This increase in complexity has significant ramifications for how groups function."[64]

The number of possible interactions between members increases exponentially as members are added, with a group of three having nine possible interactions and a group of eight having 1056 possible interactions.[65] McBride similarly notes that as "group size increases, the potential interpersonal relationships expand geometrically."[66] Rothwell also notes that larger groups inhibit participation, which leads him to draw the studied conclusion that "The appropriate size for a group is the smallest size capable of performing the task effectively" because "As groups increase in size and therefore complexity, satisfaction with the group experience diminishes.[67]

Arnold affirms what other authors have said about the size of groups. It is easy for a group to grow too large to function as a small group, therefore "the group should recognize that it may need to split if it gets too large."[68]

As groups grow in size and complexity they typically lose their ability to provide personal support. Therefore, as groups grow often the individual member's satisfaction goes down. Groups often need to split in order to keep size—and accompanying complexity, with decreasing satisfaction—in check.

Types of Small Groups

The literature is rich with many different types of small groups that are popular in the Church today.

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[64] Rothwell, 38.
[65] Ibid., 38.
[66] McBride, 81.
[67] Rothwell, 41.
[68] Arnold and Black, 187.

After briefly surveying the important role of small groups in the life of the early church, Donahue identifies five basic types of small groups: Disciple-Making Groups, Community Groups, Service Groups, Seeker Groups, and Support Groups. Each group has its own particular kind of members, curriculum, emphasis, multiplication, duration, and what he calls the "open chair."[69] The open chair is a metaphor—though sometimes groups may actually bring an empty chair into their meetings—of the desire to reach out and add new members to the group. Each kind of group has its own method of multiplication and open chair principles. According to Donahue, groups typically form around areas of affinity such as marital status, age, ministry, task, personal need, and life stage.[70]

Arnold closes his book with a review of the various kinds of groups that take shape from the basic principles of community. The groups include: Covenant Group (most general), Discipleship Group, Ministry Group, Special Needs Group, Affinity Group, and House Church. For each type of group, Arnold lists a description, a probable focus, a membership profile, and some strengths and weaknesses.

Like Arnold, McBride identifies particular kinds of small groups that are common in church settings:

Relationship-Oriented Groups	**Content-Oriented Groups**	**Task-Oriented Groups**	**Need-Oriented Groups**
1. Assimilation groups 2. Growth groups 3. Recreational groups	1. Bible studies 2. Discussion groups	1. Leadership groups 2. Service groups 3. Advocacy groups	1. Recovery groups 2. Support groups 3. Self-help groups 4. Group counseling

[69] Donahue, 28.
[70] Ibid., 28.

While there are a variety of types of small groups in the church today, the literature divides them primarily into groups that primarily support one another, learn, or perform a task together (or a combination of these things).

Longevity of Small Groups

Some of the literature addressed the appropriate term for small groups. Sometimes this included a 'contract' concerning length and member commitment. *Seven Myths About Small Groups: How to Keep From Falling into Common Traps* by Dan Williams exposes common misunderstandings about small group life and gives very practical suggestions about how effective groups operate. The overarching principle of the book is that small groups have a natural life-cycle that should be pre-determined by a covenant. His first 'myth' is "Groups Should Last Forever." Williams says, "When groups do not plan to end from the very start, they usually last one year too long—and it can seem like a very long one year, discouraging, frustrating, draining."[71] The first resource at the end of the book is on "Contracting." Whether it is called a contract, a covenant, or simply a term commitment, Williams advises creating an explicitly stated terminus for any small group.

Wuthnow notes that only thirteen percent of the small group members in his survey of small groups had a "term after which [the group] disbands."[72] However, he concludes that at least an "implicit contract to attend faithfully is…a minimum requirement for making small groups work well."[73]

While groups do not last forever, they normally have a life-cycle that can be predetermined by an agreement of some kind (contract, covenant, etc.). Some stated or implied contract of longevity is helpful to the health of the small group.

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[71] Williams, 17.
[72] Wuthnow, 135.
[73] Ibid., 157.

Openness in Small Groups

While Donahue suggests small groups typically have an "open chair"[74] there are concerns in the literature about how open a group can be. A critical 'myth' addressed by Williams is that "Groups Should Not Be Cliques." Most Christians will always want to add another person to the group. However, these additions often destroy the small group dynamic. It takes time to create an intimate small group environment. Those who come into the group at a later time will be at a disadvantage. Williams notes that, "Nurture groups should not add folks too late in the life of the group (say after one and a half years). It will not be a great experience for the new member (too much group history with which to integrate and not enough time left to do it)..."[75]

Christian groups tend, as Donahue suggests, to create groups that are always open to new members, but Williams says that late additions can harm the small group environment.

Summary of Small Group Dynamics

The literature on small groups set the boundaries at three to twelve members (Arnold, Gorman, McBride, Williams). There are many different kinds of groups with unique functions (Arnold, Donahue, McBride) and there are also many different roles that members play within the group (Arnold, Meier, Rothwell). This can present unique challenges to the leader (Meier). The size of the group determines the number of potential interactions and therefore the degree of intimacy that is possible within group meetings (Arrow, McBride, Rothwell). The challenges of the small group community are

[74] Donahue, 28.
[75] Williams, 40.

worth pursuing as we learn to love one another and fulfill Christ's call to unity (Bonhoeffer, Gorman).

Pastoral Self-Care and Longevity

There is a growing amount of literature on Christian self-care, including work directed at clergy. The literature addressed the significance of self-care and a variety of principles of the practice of self-care.

The Significance of Clergy Self-Care

The data suggesting clergy are leaving ministry in large numbers[76] has led to recent literature written on clergy-self care. The books address the significance of this new focus. *Going the Distance: How to Stay Fit for a Lifetime of Ministry* by Peter Brain is a practical book for those in ministry, both lay and ordained, who want to "keep fit mentally, physically, emotionally and spiritually for the long-haul."[77] Brain elaborates on this theme in his opening chapter:

> All pastors want to be faithful. Our attitude to self-care will keep us from premature burnout, joyless survival and the unsatisfying experience of living on the edge...An intentional self-care on the part of pastors is not a matter of selfish pampering, it is essential to maintaining an effective ministry over the long term.[78]

Brain makes his case that many factors contribute to an unbiblical and unhealthy view of pastoral ministry. He discusses factors such as the nature of modern church life (irregular attendance, high expectations), the trend away from denominational allegiance, pressures of church growth, expectations of other church leaders, and personal expectations. All of these pressures can lead to a Messiah complex, which "manifests

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[76] See the Introduction of this dissertation, pages 2-3.
[77] Peter Brain, *Going the Distance: How to Stay Fit for a Lifetime of Ministry* (Kingsford, Australia: Matthias Media, 2006), from the book cover.
[78] Ibid., 10.

itself in the need to be seen and approved by people" and "drives us to attempt everything."[79]

In the following chapters, he works through a variety of issues that challenge pastoral longevity, including burnout, stress, depression, anger, family, and sexual temptation. In the ninth chapter, Brain begins to shift his focus from problems to solutions, and he discusses the unique role of pastoral friendships. The tenth chapter is an overview of principles and strategies for self-care. The principles flow from his study of Jesus' example in the gospels, and they are affirmed by a survey of Australian Anglican clergy. Brain explains, "Intentional self-care is a means by which we keep ourselves refreshed for the work of ministry...the God who commissions us has built into our work the means of renewing us."[80]

As Brain concludes his principles of self-care he notes a marked similarity between the eight principles he commends and the strategies employed by Perth clergy members.[81]

Kirk Byron Jones pours twenty years of pastoral experience into *Rest in the Storm: Self-Care Strategies for Clergy and Other Caregivers.* The title of the book alludes to the gospel account of Jesus' sleeping in the back of the boat while the storm rose and began to batter the vessel.[82] This is the dominant image of the book: self-care as practiced by Jesus that results in 'peace in the storm.' His primary thesis is that "Well-doing, devoid of proper self-care is, at best, doing well poorly. Exemplary care for others

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[79] Ibid., 17.
[80] Ibid., 160.
[81] Ibid., 166-167. The Perth, Australia clergy noted ten strategies for pastoral self-care, including: (1) Maintaining a regular day off, (2) Regular prayer and Bible reading, (3) Pursuit of hobbies and other interests, (4) Physical exercise, (5) Spiritual direction, (6) Wife and family, (7) Support groups, (8) Reading and courses, (9) Regular holidays, and (10) Careful use of a diary.
[82] Mark 4:35-41.

is rooted in vigilant self-care."[83] Jones goes so far as to say that "hurry and overload may rightfully be labeled forms of violence. This form of self-violence is particularly potent and prevalent for two primary reasons: social acceptance and easy camouflage."[84]

Jones believes leaders are often undone by three internal drives: achievement, adrenaline, and affirmation. Other "formidable obstructions to confessing self-violence" include a lack of personal accountability, a spirit of ecclesial competition, and the denial of personhood (being lost in your ministerial role).[85] The need to follow Jesus into rest in the back of the boat is blocked by perceived indispensability, invincibility, and what he calls "the great denial," which is viewing ourselves as a role rather than a person. Jones asserts that "before you are a minister, a preacher, a teacher, or a pastor, and even before you are a parent, spouse, or friend, you are a child of God, a person whom God loves unconditionally.[86] Jones delivers a strong warning near the end of the book:

> One of the tragedies of vocational ministry is that many of us lose ourselves in the process of becoming professional ecclesiastical servants. It happens innocently and slowly. We begin with a burning passion inside to do good, to help people, and to make the world a better place by trying to console or remove some of life's hurts...Initially, the feeling of being needed is a source of great satisfaction, but then a cloud begins to settle over our sacred competency...we are our work. We are no longer persons; we are what we do. The downward spiral begins. The work loses its luster; the requests of people begin to feel like pinches on our skin. Resentment builds up inside...we want out.[87]

The Right Road: Life Choices for Clergy by Gwen Halaas, M. D. reveals a physician's perspective on self-care. Her comprehensive approach to self-care encompasses physical well-being, emotional well-being, intellectual well-being,

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[83] Kirk Byron Jones, *Rest in the Storm: Self-Care Strategies for Clergy and Other Caregivers* (Valley Forge, Penn.: Judson Press, 2001), 8.
[84] Ibid., 13.
[85] Ibid., 20. "The tragic and pervasive problem of ministry is that, along the pathway of service to others, many well-meaning ministerial aspirants forget who they are apart from any religious activity."
[86] Ibid., 35.
[87] Ibid., 94.

social/interpersonal well-being, vocational well-being, spiritual well-being, as well as additional thoughts on living well, wellness in public ministry, and the unique challenges of pastors. A diagram in the introduction illustrates her belief that all these kinds of "well-being" are interconnected and impact one another.

Roy Oswald is a Senior Consultant for the Alban Institute and has authored *Clergy Self-Care: Finding A Balance for Effective Ministry.* He believes that "self-care is little more than being a steward of some rather special gifts" and "making a commitment to God when we accept the role of resident religious authority."[88] Oswald summarizes the problem pastors face this way:

> I believe [the pastor's] chief task here on earth is to learn and grow. Unfortunately, in our culture we usually think of learning and growing strictly in terms of our intellects. So we have bright, capable people who are infantile in their emotional lives, shallow spiritually, and unable to manage the cravings and addictions of their bodies.[89]

Oswald presents his arguments in three sections, highlighting the problem of clergy self-care, strategies for practicing self-care, and final applications for our ministry of appropriate self-care. The problem stems from a failure to see the four aspects of personal health: physical, emotional, intellectual, and spiritual. When pastors fail to maintain this four-fold heath, it invariably leads to stress and sometimes to burnout. Oswald gives self-diagnostic tools in chapters four and eight so that readers can evaluate themselves.

The middle section of Oswald's book gives strategies for practicing self-care: "The difference between an effective and health-full ministry and a stressed-out, burned-out ministry can be described in one word: balance…What we're looking for is a way to

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[88] Roy M. Oswald, *Clergy Self-Care: Finding a Balance for Effective Ministry* (Herndon, VA: The Alban Institute, 1991), 5.
[89] Ibid., 7.

be fully engaged in our ministries while maintaining our balance and our health."[90] Oswald presents thirteen chapters on various aspects of self-care involving Biblical rest, relationships, Biblical goals and definitions, boundaries, spiritual life, physical health, and emotional health.[91]

Michael Todd Wilson and Brad Hoffman created a book entitled *Preventing Ministry Failure* that connects pastoral self-care with effective long-term pastoral leadership. Wilson is a licensed professional counselor, and Hoffman is a senior pastor. Together they founded a ministry called ShepherdCare, and their book puts forward the principles they believe will help "people in ministry to prepare them to withstand common pressures and to flourish in the ministry."[92]

The introduction to the book establishes the fact that many American pastors are struggling. They cite a number of pastoral ministry surveys which reveal that:

> 25 percent have been forced out of or fired from their ministry at least once. 90 percent feel inadequately trained to cope with ministry demands. 80 percent believe that pastoral ministry affects their families negatively. 45 percent say they've experienced depression or burnout to the extent that they needed to take a leave of absence. 40 percent have serious conflict with a church member at least once a month. 20 percent admit to having an affair while in ministry. 37 percent admit that Internet pornography is a current struggle. 70 percent do not have someone they consider a close friend.[93]

In light of these staggering statistics, they put forward seven "foundation stones" for effective long-term ministry: intimacy, calling, stress management, boundaries, re-creation, people skills, and leadership skills. Their goal is for small groups of three to six pastors to work through the materials together for "maximum benefit." They explain this

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[90] Ibid., 83.
[91] See Appendix C for more detailed headings.
[92] Michael Todd Wilson and Brad Hoffman, *Preventing Ministry Failure* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2007), cover.
[93] Ibid., 31.

goal directly: "...truth is still truth: the factor causing more downfalls than anything in Christian ministry is our isolation from genuine relationships with others."[94] Working through the materials with other pastors furthers the overall goal of preventing ministry failure.

A line of books entitled the "Pulpit & Pew" series is currently being written on pastoral longevity and excellence. The series describes itself as "arising out of a major research project that aims to better understand and strengthen Protestant and Catholic pastoral leadership in the U.S."[95] The first book in the series is *Pastors in Transition: Why Clergy Leave Local Church Ministry* by Dean R. Hoge and Jacqueline E. Wenger. The authors interviewed, in a variety of forms, about two hundred pastors from five different American Protestant denominations, for a total sample of a thousand pastors.

Seven primary themes emerged from the interviews. These seven themes were the primary reasons that pastors left congregations, or, in some cases, left the ministry altogether. Some of the themes overlap, but the authors felt it best to discuss them separately. The seven themes (reasons for leaving the ministry) include: preference for another kind of ministry, the need to care for children or family, conflict in the congregation, conflict with denominational leaders, feeling burned out or discouraged, sexual misconduct, and divorce or marital problems. The book closes with perspectives from denominational leaders about these themes, the impact of gender in pastoral transitions, and some summary recommendations for those who want to remain in ministry despite the challenges.

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[94] Ibid., 11.
[95] Dean R. Hoge, and Jacqueline E. Wenger, *Pastors in Transition: Why Clergy Leave Local Church Ministry* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2005), cover.

The second publication in the "Pulpit & Pew" series is *God's Potters: Pastoral Leadership and the Shaping of Congregations* by Jackson W. Carroll. Much of this book is devoted to a variety of demographic facts about today's American clergy. However, a portion of the book focuses more directly on long-term pastoral excellence, addressing problems faced, the meaning of excellent ministry, and some strategies for nurturing excellence. While most pastors have a strong sense of their call to ministry, nearly forty percent at least "once in a while" have "doubted their call to ministry in the last five years."[96] The percentage goes up five to ten percent when the pastor is involved in a congregational conflict.[97]

> Congregational criticism, congregational conflict, and a perception that the congregation makes too many demands are, not surprisingly, contributors to dissatisfaction...Relational issues, whether positive or negative, are important or moderately important correlates of each of the satisfaction themes..."[98]

Conflict arises from the way pastors are treated ("people relate to me differently because I'm a pastor," "difficulty of having a private life apart from the clergy role"), from the stresses that ministry puts on their spouse ("resentment over financial situation," "resentment over amount of time ministry takes up"), and from congregational life ("professional criticism," "Excessive demands," "congregational criticism").[99] These conflicts often cause pastors to doubt their call to ministry, and "Pastors who describe the conflict as significant were more likely to report doubting their call fairly often."[100]

George Barna has edited and contributed to *Leaders on Leadership: Wisdom, Advice and Encouragement on the Art of Leading God's People*. He pulled together a

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[96] Jackson W. Carroll, *God's Potters: Pastoral Leadership and the Shaping of Congregations* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2006), 163.
[97] Ibid., 168.
[98] Ibid., 176.
[99] Ibid., 165.
[100] Ibid., 168.

"dream team" of Christian leaders to write fifteen chapters on various aspects of pastoral leadership. The chapters range from personal character issues to practical leadership issues. He writes in large part because "the American church is dying due to a lack of strong leadership."[101] Two of the chapters intersected particularly well with the topic of pastoral self-care and longevity, those written by H. B. London and Kenneth O. Gangel.

H. B. London wrote a chapter entitled "Being a Tough but Tender Leader," which promotes the need to get tougher on the outside while becoming softer on the inside. Or, as Stuart Briscoe puts it: "To be a successful pastor one must have the mind of a scholar, the heart of a child, and the hide of a rhinoceros." London reminds us that "we must either get tough or we will be destroyed."[102] He believes that the primary challenges faced by pastors are self-imposed. He asserts: "In the midst of conflict, every pastor-leader must first ask himself: Am I being fair? Have I looked deeply inside my own soul?"[103] He also points out that pastors face challenges created by criticism, bad communication, staff problems, and change.

In Kenneth O. Gangel's chapter on "What Leaders Do," he notes that a typical American pastor is in his mid-forties and has been to three different churches, with an average tenure of 4.9 years. This average has declined from the seven years per church in the 1970's. Gangel says simply that effective Christian leaders are those that endure. He asserts:

> Effective leaders stay in a ministry as long as necessary to get the job done. The ability to plan, to make decisions and to envision a ministry's future requires a willingness to see yourself in the scenario for a long time...The effective

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[101] George Barna, et al, *Leaders on Leadership: Wisdom, Advice and Encouragement on the Art of Leading People* (Ventura, CA: Regal Books), 18.
[102] Ibid., 112.
[103] Ibid., 111.

> corporations as well as the effective churches in North America are usually headed by people who have "stayed with the stuff" over the long haul.[104]

Barna offers fifteen chapters on pastoral leadership because "In the end, although leaders receive a lot of applause and are frequently in the public eye, leadership is a lonely business. It is a wearing task."[105] But as London writes, we will be blessed by growing along the way and as Gangel reminds us, we can be a blessing to others if we are willing to stay for the long haul.

Ronald Heifetz and Marty Linsky co-wrote *Leadership On the Line: Staying Alive Through the Dangers of Leading.* In the last section of the book, they discuss self-care issues related to leadership. They encourage leaders to manage their hungers, anchor themselves, appreciate the intangibles of leadership, and maintain a "sacred heart." They describe a sacred heart as, "The capacity to encompass the entire range of your human experience without hardening or closing yourself...in the midst of disappointment and defeat, you remain connected to people and to the sources of your most profound purposes."[106]

Pastors are leaders and the principles Heifetz and Linsky address regarding the challenges, strategies, and blessings of leadership apply directly to pastoral calling. They unintentionally echo the pastoral directive of H. B. London to have the mind of a scholar, the heart of a child, and the hide of a rhinoceros[107], maintaining a "sacred heart."

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[104] Ibid., 43-44.
[105] Ibid., 53.
[106] Ronald A. Heifetz, and Marty Linsky, *Leadership on the Line: Staying Alive Through the Dangers of Leading* (Boston: Harvard Business School Press), 230.
[107] Barna, *Leaders on Leadership*, 112.

Challenges to Self-Care and Longevity

There are a variety of challenges working against pastoral self-care and longevity in ministry. The primary concerns in the literature include: processing change in an organization, dealing effectively with conflict, and personal failure.

Processing Change

Heifetz and Linsky's experiences as consultants in the fields of psychiatry (Heifetz) and politics (Linsky), which have been "distilled and captured" in previous lectures and books, are now reorganized as a guide "to help you name, organize, and make sense out of your experience."[108] While they are not writing for pastors, they are writing for leaders who broker change. Pastors are continually leading their congregations through change, whether it is the personal change of sanctification or the corporate changes of ministry and mission.

In their introduction they get straight to the theme of "dangers:"

> You disturb people when you take unpopular initiatives in your community, put provocative new ideas on the table in your organization, or ask friends and relatives to face up to tough realities. You risk people's ire and make yourself vulnerable. Exercising leadership can get you into a lot of trouble.[109]

The first chapter more thoroughly details the dangers of leadership. They believe that "People do not resist change, per se. People resist loss."[110] The challenge of leadership is to cast a vision of a better future that helps overcome the resistance and fear of change. This fear often leads people to postpone painful adjustments or to ask others to adjust instead of themselves. In facing the inevitable hostility of loss, leaders must have

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[108] Heifetz and Linsky, 5.
[109] Ibid., 2.
[110] Ibid., 11.

"the capacity to stomach hostility so that [they] can stay connected to people, lest [they] disengage from them and exacerbate the danger."[111]

In chapter two, Heifetz and Linsky discuss more of the personal aspects of danger to the leader himself. They warn of the risk of being "marginalized, diverted, attacked, or seduced."[112] Attack is a "tried-and-true method" of stopping change.[113]

> For the most part, people criticize you when they don't like the message. But rather than focus on the content of your message, taking issue with its merits, they frequently find it more effective to discredit you. Of course you may be giving them opportunities to do so; surely every one of us can continue to improve our style and our self-discipline. The point is not that you are blameless, but that the blame is largely misplaced in order to draw attention away from the message itself.[114]

They close part one of their book ("The Challenge") with a summary reminder that opposition will come to the leader in some form, and it is her task to manage that opposition. "Leadership, then requires not only reverence for the pains of change and recognition of the manifestations of danger, but also the skill to respond."[115]

Part two of their book ("The Response") walks through principles of managing change. Their strategies are well explained and are reflected in the chapter titles: Get on the Balcony, Think Politically, Orchestrate the Conflict, Give the Work Back, and Hold Steady. The most dominant image of these five is the first one (Get on the Balcony) and they return to this metaphor through the rest of the book.

"Getting on the Balcony" is their metaphor for trying to remove oneself from the situation and take an objective survey of what is really happening in order to gain

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[111] Ibid., 18.
[112] Ibid., 31.
[113] Ibid., 40.
[114] Ibid., 41.
[115] Ibid., 48.

"perspective in the midst of action."[116] They call this skill "getting off the dance floor and going to the balcony," an image that captures the mental activity of stepping back in the midst of action and asking, "What's really going on here?"[117]

While perspective in action is important, they also caution that "Staying on the balcony in a safe observer role is as much a prescription for ineffectuality as never achieving that perspective in the first place."[118] Leaders must continually move back and forth from the action to the observation post. If a leader stays in the 'balcony' no one trusts their judgments about the hard realities of the action, but if they don't remove themselves from the action to get the larger sense of what is happening they won't be effective at leading. They say, "The goal is to come as close as you can to being in both places simultaneously...When you observe from the balcony you must see yourself as well as the other participants."[119]

Conflict

The literature addresses conflict, both between church members and church staff, as significant sources of conflict that challenge the pastor's effectiveness and longevity.

Most of these issues raised in Hoge and Wenger's *Pastors in Transition* have their foundation in conflict. Twenty-seven percent of the pastors surveyed left the ministry because of congregational conflict. Another twelve percent cited burnout, while ten percent cited conflict with denominational authorities. The authors note that "Where conflict is present, apathy is not a problem."[120] While it is great to know that people care, conflict is still draining. Indeed, most of the conflict identified in the study was not

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[116] Ibid., 51.
[117] Ibid., 51.
[118] Ibid., 53.
[119] Ibid., 53-54.
[120] Hoge and Wenger, 77.

dramatic, but rather "prosaic," found in the "day-to-day functioning of the congregation: the style of the pastor and of worship, the relationships among staff, and the handling of finances and building space."[121] The research identified five areas in which conflict is most destructive: "pastoral leadership style, finances, changes in worship style, interpersonal conflicts, and issues about new building or renovation."[122]

In Heifetz and Linsky's treatment of managing conflict, they give nine practical directions for raising and lowering the "temperature," which is another way that they describe the degree of conflict:[123]

Raise the Temperature	Lower the Temperature
1. Draw attention to the tough questions 2. Give people more responsibility than they are comfortable with 3. Bring conflicts to the surface 4. Protect gadflies and oddballs	1. Address the technical aspects of the problem 2. Establish a structure for the problem-solving process by breaking the problem into parts and creating time frames, decision rules, and clear role assignments 3. Temporarily reclaim responsibility for the tough issues 4. Employ work avoidance mechanisms 5. Slow down the process of challenging norms and expectations

Conflict is a part of pastoral leadership and is one of the leading reasons clergy change positions or leave ministry altogether. Training in leadership and managing change can help pastors survive what Heifetz and Linsky call the dangers of leading.

Personal Failure

Sometimes pastors leave because of their own flaws and failures. The literature addresses the need to understand and work through sin patterns and personal failure that threatens longevity in ministry.

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[121] Ibid., 84.
[122] Ibid., 96.
[123] Heifetz and Linsky, 111.

Hoge and Wenger note that in their research 'sexual misconduct' is among the seven main motivations for leaving ministry. Six to eight percent of clergy leave ministry due to allegations of sexual misconduct.[124]

Overcoming the Dark Side of Leadership by Gary L. McIntosh and Samuel D. Rima, Sr. addresses the stumbling blocks pastors face from their own sin nature. The primary thesis of the book is that we all have besetting sins and other sin patterns that, if left unchecked, could destroy us, our testimony, our ministry, and our family. Their book was motivated by a number of high profile pastoral moral failures. The authors assume several things about leaders. First, that every leader suffers from some degree of personal dysfunction. Second, that personal dysfunction can be a driving force behind desire and success as a leader. Third, that many leaders aren't aware of their dysfunctions. Fourth, that our dysfunctions can actually help the organizations succeed, while the leader personally fails (they call this the "the paradox of personal dysfunction"[125]). Fifth, that leaders can learn from Scripture how to grow through, change, or mitigate the effects of our dysfunction. And sixth, that Scripture has much to say about the dark sides of our personalities and the leader's effort to understand these dynamics and grow through them can increase their effectiveness as a leader. [126]

They believe that the more we can be aware of these potential patterns, the more we can put up a wall of prayer and tactical defense. In chapter fourteen, they note that "The purpose for examining the past is not for the assignment of blame, but for self-

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[124] Hoge and Wenger, 38.
[125] Gary L. McIntosh, and Samuel D. Rima, Sr., *Overcoming the Dark Side of Leadership* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1997), 13.
[126] Ibid., 12-13.

understanding."[127] With the digging must also come a spirit of forgiveness. As Neil Anderson stated, "Forgiveness is necessary to avoid entrapment by Satan. I have discovered in my counseling that unforgiveness is the number one avenue Satan uses to gain entrance to believers' lives."[128]

The middle section of the book includes a series of self-tests, and it details the five basic forms of dysfunctional leadership they have identified: the compulsive leader, the narcissistic leader, the paranoid leader, the codependent leader, and the passive-aggressive leader. The compulsive leader is one who has a "need to maintain absolute order."[129] The authors suggest Moses as a biblical example of the compulsive leader who sometimes has outbursts of anger and needs his father-in-law Jethro to help suggest changes that would loosen Moses' control, yet be healthier for himself and his people.[130] The narcissistic leader is one who is obsessed with his image. Solomon is put forward as an example of this problem as Solomon writes in the book of Ecclesiastes. McIntosh and Rima warn that "When a pastor or Christian executive says to himself, *This church (or organization) would suffer if I left,* it is a sign of narcissism."[131] The paranoid leader is typified by King Saul. This leader is "characteristically suspicious, hostile, and guarded...they are deeply insecure in their own abilities."[132] The authors note that in the political climate of many churches fears about ones position are "not always entirely without merit."[133] The codependent leader can "obsessively worry about the feelings of others, often to the point of becoming emotionally and physically ill...the problem of

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[127] Ibid., 162.
[128] Ibid., 166.
[129] Ibid., 87.
[130] Exodus 18:17-18.
[131] McIntosh and Rima, 100.
[132] Ibid., 108.
[133] Ibid., 109.

codependency involves the ways that an individual copes with the behavior and expectations of those around him or her."[134] Finally, the passive-aggressive leader has "a tendency to resist demands to adequately perform tasks. Their resistance is often expressed through behaviors such as procrastination, dawdling, stubbornness, forgetfulness, and intentional inefficiency."[135] The prophet Jonah is put forward as a biblical example of this passive resistance.

The final section delivers three steps toward "Redeeming Our Dark Side:" acknowledging it, examining the past, and resisting the poison. In addition to these three steps, they suggest a retooling of spiritual disciplines, including personal retreats, devotional reading, journaling, and in some cases further self-revealing tools such as professional therapy, psychological tests, accountability groups, and performance evaluations. They point out that all forms of information are helpful tools:

> The more knowledge we gain about ourselves, the better able we are to overcome our dark side. As long as we choose to live in ignorance of our unique weaknesses and dysfunctions, we will continue to be victimized by them. With increased knowledge will come the increased power to live a life of balance, free from the destructive effects of our dark side.[136]

While their book is not marketed as a prescription for clergy self-care, their suggestions for redeeming our dark side echo the themes of the Halaas, Oswald and others (i.e. spiritual disciplines, personal retreats, accountability groups). The book is a call to admit and redeem the sin-patterns that sometimes superficially lift us up, but will eventually bring us down.

Processing change, conflict with member, staff, and denominational leadership, as well as personal failure can all negatively impact clergy longevity. The literature

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[134] Ibid., 122.
[135] Ibid., 130.
[136] Ibid., 201.

promotes a proactive approach toward all of these pitfalls in order to survive the challenges of leadership.

Recommended Components of Clergy Self-Care and Longevity

In the review of the literature eight general themes of self-care and longevity emerged. The principles of clergy self-care and longevity included: Biblical rest, healthy relationships, Biblical goals and self-identity, boundaries, lifelong learning, spiritual health, physical health, and emotional health.

Biblical Rest

The literature promotes Sabbath keeping, sabbaticals, and personal retreats for maintenance of clergy self-care. From Jesus' example in the gospels (especially Jesus' commissioning of the seventy-two disciples in Luke 10[137]) Peter Brain draws eight principles of self-care. The first principle is Sabbath rest. He notes that the principle of rest is grounded in creation and says "Physically rested people are better able to remember God, reflect upon his goodness and purposes and then serve others through their work."[138] Jones also commends actively planning retreat time.[139]

In his chapter on prayer in *Working the Angles,* Eugene Peterson addresses the need for a real weekly Sabbath experience, rather than merely a day off. Sabbath rest is grounded in creation, and the practice of it makes prayer, Scripture reading, and spiritual direction effective. Several phrases and images help define and capture the impact of Biblical Sabbath-keeping:

> Uncluttered time and space to distance ourselves from the frenzy of our own activities so we can see what God has been and is doing...Quieting the internal noise so we hear the still small voice of our Lord...Uncluttered time and space to

[137] Brain, 162.
[138] Ibid., 161.
[139] Jones, 39.

> detach ourselves from the people around us so that they have a chance to deal with God without our poking around and kibitzing...Separating ourselves from the people who are clinging to us, from the routines to which we are clinging for our identity, and offering them all up to God in praise.[140]

Peterson exhorts his readers (the series is for pastors) to practice a weekly Sabbath, not only because it is commanded, but because Sabbath practice is "God's will not only for [pastors] but also for the battered world."[141] He shares the example of his own Sabbath-keeping but is careful not to press his practice into someone else's law:

> The technology of Sabbath-keeping is not complex. We simply select a day of the week (Paul seemed to think any day would do as well as any other; Rom. 14:5-6) and quit our work. Having selected the day, we need also to protect it, for our workday instincts and habits will not serve us well. It is not a day when we do anything useful. It is not a day that proves its worth, justifies itself. Entering into empty, nonfunctional time is difficult and needs protection, for we have been taught that time is money.[142]

For Peterson, self-care is part of our calling, our duty as pastors. Not taking time to stop, listen, reflect, pray, or get off the treadmill is not only hazardous to our spiritual health, it is an offense to God's principle of Sabbath resting in Him.

Sabbath rest, sabbaticals, and personal retreats are valuable tools in maintaining personal care. Additionally, the principle of Sabbath rest is part of God's creation order and a blessing for pastors and a fallen world in general.

Healthy Relationships

Throughout the literature there was an emphasis on healthy relationships. They provide partnership, protection, strength, and help reveal potentially dangerous blind spots. The second principle Brain addressed was partnership. Jesus sent the seventy-two out with partners. He says "Whether it be team ministries, husband and wife working

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[140] Eugene H. Peterson, *Working the Angles: The Shape of Pastoral Integrity* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1987), 72-73.
[141] Ibid., 80.
[142] Ibid.

together, pastors and lay people, pastors who meet regularly with other pastors, denominational leaders and pastors or any combination, it is a principle worth pursuing."[143] The sixth principle Brain addressed was finding hospitality. The disciples were to find people who welcomed their message and stay in their home. Allowing those who receive ministry to minister in return "can and indeed ought to provide a warm context for the care of pastors."[144]

Emotional health and loneliness are recurring themes in Carroll's *God's Potters* regarding the problems pastors face. While citing the potential pitfalls of relationships within the congregation and with fellow clergy, they conclude that "friendships with parishioners and non-parishioners as well as with fellow clergy are essential for a pastor's mental and spiritual well being...Without them, the ministry can be a lonely and debilitating experience."[145]

The title of Heifetz and Linsky's second principle of change is "Think Politically," but the focus is on the skill of developing and maintaining good relationships. They believe successful leaders are distinguished by this emphasis on successful personal relationships. Positive relationships (partners) must be sought out and nurtured; they "provide protection" and "strengthen both you and your initiatives."[146] Negative relationships (opponents) must be managed carefully because "To survive and succeed in exercising leadership, you must work as closely with your opponents as you do with your supporters."[147] But leaders are often in a position to persuade others who are neither explicitly in agreement with them nor in opposition to them. For those open to

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[143] Brain, 162.
[144] Ibid., 165.
[145] Carroll, 178.
[146] Heifetz and Linsky, 78.
[147] Ibid., 87.

persuasion, they challenge the leader to accept responsibility, acknowledge loss, model behavior, and accept casualties. Maintaining healthy relationships will be essential to "staying alive."

> The lone warrior myth of leadership is a sure route to heroic suicide. Though you may feel alone at times with either creative ideas or the burden of final decision-making authority, psychological attachments to operating solo will get you into trouble. You need partners...Relating to people is central to leading and staying alive.[148]

Herrington, Creech and Taylor promote the importance of finding a "few safe relationships in which you ask for ongoing feedback about your behavior." It is very important for self-awareness; we all have blind spots. The blind spots are graphically depicted in tool called "Joharri's window" created by Joe Luft and Harry Ingham.[149]

1 Free to self and others	2 Blind to self, seen by others
3 Free to self, hidden from others	4 Unknown to self and others

The goal of the self-aware leader is to maximize boxes 1-3 and to shrink box 4, even though it will never completely disappear.

In their summary chapter, they call leaders to be the spark plugs of a "learning community that embraces the values of grace giving and truth telling."[150] They quote Reggie McNeal from *A Work of Heart* on the need for a peer group as a powerful tool in the learning community:

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[148] Ibid., 100.
[149] Herrington, Creech, and Taylor, 72.
[150] Ibid., 145.

> A critical intellectual capacity for twenty-first century leadership success will be the ability to build knowledge together with other colleagues…Academic, conferential, and self-guided learning must be supplemented through a peer mentoring process for debriefing life and ministry experiences.[151]

Healthy relationships help combat loneliness and provide a variety of the necessary support ingredients to longevity. Strong friendships need to be sought out and nurtured.

Biblical Goals and Self-Identity

Clergy, like all Christians, are prone to define themselves by a vague standard outside the Word of God. The literature speaks to a Biblical view of the pastor's calling, goals and self-identity. A proper understanding of this promotes self-care.

The third principle Brain wrote about was realism. Jesus warned that some would receive the disciples' message, but others would not. The outcome of their mission is in the hands of God's sovereignty for he "gives the growth and brings about conversion."[152] The fourth principle is to remember that "your names are written in heaven." Jesus tells his disciples not to rejoice in the fact that the demons are subject to them, but that their names are written in heaven.[153] Brain expands on this teaching:

> Neither a deflated self-image, not a swollen head, is conducive to personal care and health…The health that flows from the knowledge of who we are as pastors depends primarily upon God's gracious calling of us to be Christians ("your names are written in heaven"), and not from what we achieve in God's work through our ministry.[154]

The fifth principle is to remember "it is God's work." This principle is similar to the third and is a call to remember the balance between fulfilling our calling and God's sovereignty in conversion.

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[151] Ibid., 152.
[152] Brain, 162.
[153] Luke 10:20.
[154] Brain, 163.

Jones suggests several keys to effective self-care, including acceptance ("it takes great energy to accept the need to retreat to the back of the boat"[155]). He also calls pastors to refuse to measure "life solely in terms of production and speed."[156]

In Dan Allender's *Leading with a Limp: Turning Your Struggles into Strengths,* the author shares his own story of growth through leadership struggles. In chapter three, he explains and illustrates how leaders face a series of common challenges, including betrayal (and a temptation to narcissism), crisis (and a temptation to cowardice), complexity (and a temptation to rigidity), loneliness (and a temptation to hiding), and weariness (and a temptation to fatalism):

> A requirement of leadership is that we operate at high levels of intensity for lengthy periods of time. The battering waves of crises don't stop, and often the structures that are designed to move us forward break down under constant friction. One breakdown usually exposes the weakness in processes, people, and systems. And new crises are birthed in the face of the precipitating crisis. It's no secret why leaders are exhausted.[157]

The following chapters go into greater detail on each of these areas of challenge.

In Wilson and Hoffman's discussion of leadership, they employ the term "transformative leaders." They define these leaders as those who "are willing to continually be remade from the inside out by the power and direction of the Holy Spirit. They are humble learners open to God's instruction and shaping in their own personal lives."[158] Not surprisingly, they tie effective congregational leadership to the ability to deal effectively with change. Wilson and Hoffman build on this theme and affirm several unique styles of leadership. Their descriptions are tied to a kind of clothing: fieldmaster

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[155] Jones, 39.
[156] Ibid., 58.
[157] Dan B. Allender, *Leading with a Limp: Turning Your Struggles into Strengths* (Colorado Springs, CO: WaterBrook Press, 2006), 45.
[158] Wilson and Hoffman, 30.

adventurewear (mapping a plan and bringing people on a new journey), blue-collar workwear (collaborative, team-oriented), corporate businesswear (skill and talent developing), dinner party formalwear (oriented to quality of relationships), and emergency responder uniformwear (the most directive, leading people to safety in crisis). They encourage pastors to identify the kind of 'clothing' they wear best and to assess the kind of leadership their congregation needs most. They assert that "While our strongest leadership will come through our best fitting styles, another style may be what the organization needs to move into the next phase of God's overall plan."[159]

Kent and Barbara Hughes have co-written their reflections on the challenges of ministry in *Liberating Ministry from the Success Syndrome.* The wrote the book because of concern about "the morale and survival of those in Christian ministry...[those in various areas of] Christian service often face significant feelings of failure, usually fueled by misguided expectations for success."[160] After a childhood conversion and call to ministry, Kent pursued seminar training and entered the ministry. While planting a daughter church, he became deeply depressed. He harbored anger against God for calling him into ministry and allowing him to fail. He and his wife began searching the scriptures for a new definition of ministerial success. What they found changed their hearts. Barbara reports, "In our study of the Scriptures, Kent and I had learned that we are not called to success, as the world fancies it, but to *faithfulness*. We realized that the results are for God and eternity to reveal."[161] Their study of Scripture led them to define success as forms of "striving." First, we should be striving to be faithful. Pastors are called to be

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[159] Ibid., 237.
[160] Kent Hughes, and Barbara Hughes, *Liberating Ministry from the Success Syndrome* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2008), 9.
[161] Ibid., 106.

obedient to God's word and hardworking. Second, we should be striving to serve God and others. This is the example of Jesus and our testimony to the world.[162] Third, we should strive to love God. This is the first and greatest commandment.[163] Fourth, we should strive to believe he *is.* God blesses those who earnestly seek him.[164] Fifth, we should strive to pray. God's people are called to pray without ceasing[165], but often struggle with prayerlessness. Sixth, we should strive to pursue holiness. Without holiness no one will see God. While it is Christ's holiness that purchases our entrance, we are exhorted in scripture to become what we already are through. Sanctification is real work.[166] Finally, seventh, we should strive to develop a positive attitude.[167]

The third section of the book addresses the kinds of encouragement that pastors receive as they minister, including personal stories and illustrations from church history regarding encouragement from God, from His call to ministry, from fellow workers, from God's final reward, and for ordinary people. They point out that "One of the supreme glories of the gospel ministry is that our weakness is the opportunity for his power—*our ordinariness for his extraordinariness.*"[168]

Self-care is promoted by having a Biblical view of the pastor's role. Pastors must be realistic about themselves, their goals, and their identity in Christ.

Boundaries

All of the literature exclusively on clergy self care (Oswald, Brain, Jones, Halaas) reviewed made some mention of the importance of appropriate boundaries for clergy.

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[162] John 15:13.
[163] Matthew 22:37-38.
[164] Hebrews 11:6.
[165] 1 Thessalonians 5:17.
[166] Colossians 3:5-10.
[167] Hughes and Hughes, 106-107.
[168] Barna, *Leaders on Leadership*, 134.

That would include appropriate behavior (as one who deals with confidential issues) as well as limits on the expectations of others. Peter Scazzero also writes extensively about boundaries as part of his discussion of emotional health.[169]

Halaas says that to preserve "trustworthiness, it is necessary to keep appropriate professional boundaries and behavior."[170] She suggests that in order to respect professional boundaries, but at the same time to meet the need for emotional support and honest reflection that pastors pursue "collegial relationships with other clergy…[as] an appropriate outlet for frustration or doubt, for reflection on congregational issues, and for moral support and continued professional growth."[171]

Oswald frames the issue of boundaries around appropriate assertiveness. Particularly, pastors need to be "able to assert our needs in the face of the demands of others."[172] He warns that "sacrificing our rights usually trains others to mistreat us."[173] Oswald says an inability to respect boundaries can make us less effective pastors:

> An overuse of our ability to care, to be sensitive and perceptive, and to notice the pain of others can result in our becoming strung out and emotionally depleted. We become easy prey for people who either consciously or unconsciously exploit the caring feelings of others to gain attention, power, or affection. In the long run, we become less effective ministers.[174]

Jones exhorts pastors to learn "the big small word" which is 'no.'[175] Brain takes a theological approach and reminds pastors that while we are called to do the hard work of

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[169] Page 55 of this dissertation.
[170] Halaas, 82.
[171] Ibid.
[172] Oswald, 173.
[173] Ibid.
[174] Ibid.
[175] Jones, 40.

ministry the source of all effective ministry is God. He reminds that "balanced doctrinal views [of sovereignty and responsibility] will contribute to balanced pastoral health."[176]

Lifelong Learning

Ongoing learning and growth was noted in the literature. Whether through informal or formal means, lifelong learning plays a role in clergy self-care. The seventh principle Brain wrote about was to "take action in taking time." Like Mary at Jesus' feet, we are to take time and "be intentional about marking out and planning times for our own learning and growth."[177]

Halaas notes the significance and value of daily mental activity such as "crossword puzzles and mathematical puzzles, learning new skills, practicing a musical instrument, or reading challenging books."[178] She also notes that more formal learning is valuable and that "taking the time for directed learning in a way that challenges and expands your intellect and your knowledge is an essential step toward intellectual and vocational health."[179]

Formal and information intellectual stimulation appears in the literature as a support to clergy self-care.

Spiritual Health

As it might be expected, all of the literature on clergy self-care noted spiritual formation practice or spiritual health as an essential component of self-care promotion. These theme is also the central focus of other literature directed at pastors.

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[176] Brain, 164.
[177] Ibid., 165.
[178] Halaas, 37.
[179] Ibid., 83.

The eighth principle Brain wrote about was prayer. Jesus taught his disciples to pray. Brain affirms "There is little doubt that everyone benefits when the pastor is exercising self-care in [prayer]."[180] Jones suggests setting aside a prayer and play day.[181]

Eugene Peterson has been a prolific writer on topics of historic Christian discipleship and has written a series of books for pastors.[182] In his book *Working the Angles* (part of his series), he calls pastors back to the basics of their vocation. He believes that pastors are "abandoning their posts" without actually leaving the church by succumbing to the business model of the church.[183] He says that most pastoral duties could be easily faked and that the pastor of integrity will strive to maintain a foundation of "praying, reading Scripture, and giving spiritual direction."[184] The core of the book is his exposition of these three "pastoral acts." Peterson summarizes his focus for the book this way: "My intent [is]...to call the attention of my brothers and sisters in pastoral ministry to what all our predecessors agreed was basic in the practice of our calling; to insist that pastoral work has no integrity unconnected with the angles of prayer, Scripture, and spiritual direction."[185]

Peterson's *The Contemplative Pastor: Returning to the Art of Spiritual Direction* (Peterson's fourth book in the series for pastors) also addresses issue of pastoral self-care. His call to lead our people well flows from his observations about how we define our calling:

> ...[in my readings and study] I was impressed that everyday pastoral life was primarily concerned with developing a life of prayer among the people...With my

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[180] Brain, 165.
[181] Jones, 43.
[182] Eugene Peterson's other books for pastors include *Five Smooth Stones for Pastoral Work, Under the Unpredictable Plant,* and *The Contemplative Pastor.*
[183] Peterson, *Working the Angles*, 1.
[184] Ibid., 3.
[185] Ibid., 18.

> mind full of these thoughts, my pastor friend and I stopped at a service station for gasoline. My friend, a gregarious person, bantered with the attendant. Something in the exchange provoked a question.
>
> "What do you do?"
>
> "I run a church."
>
> No answer could have surprised me more. I knew, of course, that pastoral life included institutional responsibilities, but it never occurred to me that I would be defined by those responsibilities. But the moment I became ordained, I found I was so defined both by the pastors and executives over me and by the parishioners around me.[186]

Peterson calls pastors away from lives consumed by administration into a life guided by spiritual direction. While the Sunday tasks are fairly well-defined for pastors, he writes about what we do "between Sundays." Peterson hopes for a vocational reformation through a "rediscovery of the pastoral work of the cure of souls."[187] He believes that "The cure of souls…is the Scripture-directed, prayer-shaped care that is devoted to persons singly or in groups, in settings sacred and profane."[188] In one way or another, the entire book is about the creative use of language—primarily the language of intimacy and prayer—and seeing our job as the learning and teaching of this language to our people.

Jim Herrington, R. Robert Creech, and Trisha Taylor have written *The Leader's Journey: Accepting the Call to Personal and Congregational Transformation.* Through their pastoral (Jim, R. Robert) and counseling (Trisha) backgrounds, they combine their understanding of pastoral challenges, the need for personal spiritual growth, and their technical knowledge of systems theory. They believe that "personal transformation in

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[186] Eugene Peterson, *The Contemplative Pastor: Returning to the Art of Spiritual Direction* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1989), 58.
[187] Ibid., 56.
[188] Ibid., 57.

one's own life is the only foundation on which effective leadership can be constructed."[189] Their book points out:

> An intimate relationship with God is the center of gravity that keeps our lives in balance when the pressures of the system threaten to topple us. We are more likely to achieve the goal of personal transformation if we intentionally form a grace-giving, truth-telling community that surrounds [leaders] in this transformational journey.[190]

The literature reminds pastors that they cannot effectively lead congregations into spiritual health without practicing personal spiritual formation, including prayer, reading scripture, and pursuing personal transformation.

Physical Health

The literature addressed the value of physical health, sometimes vaguely, and sometimes very specifically. Halaas is a physician and she has the most extended and detailed views on clergy maintenance of physical health.

Jones calls clergy to actively control the pace of life (a "sacred pace").[191] As one might expect from a physician, Halaas strongly emphasizes the physical impact of many differing types of well-being:

> ...research done on ordained ministers from various churches and on rostered lay leaders identifies significant health problems that need to be addressed. These problems include the following: 1. Stress and depression...2. Weight and lack of physical activity...3. Nutrition and cholesterol...4. High blood pressure and heart disease.[192]

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[189] Jim Herrington, R. Robert Creech, and Trisha Taylor, *A Leader's Journey: Accepting the Call to Personal and Congregational Transformation* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2003), 14.
[190] Ibid., xv.
[191] Jones, Chapter Five.
[192] Gwen Wagstrom Halaas, *The Right Road: Life Choices for Clergy* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2004), 1-2.

Her main chapter speaks to a variety of health issues such as physical activity, healthy food habits, vitamins, weight, adequate rest, and a healthy sex life.[193] The book closes with an appendix "Wellness Guide" that gives a framework for the reader to self-assess in matters of physical health, emotional health, social health, intellectual health, vocational health, and spiritual health, as well as notes on "living well with disease" and "dying well."

Brain notes that the Perth clergy study put "physical exercise" in their top ten recommendations for "going the distance."[194] However, he acknowledges that this is hard to keep up and he is "not very fit."[195]

While typically a minor sub-point in the literature, physical health is noted in the literature as a component of self-care.

Emotional Health

A final area of self-care which appears in the literature is emotional health. This is a kind of emotional maturity that leaders must practice in order to maintain self-care and promote healthy discipleship.

In the chapter on emotional well-being, Halaas ties in several warnings about depression: "Successful coping is related to realistic optimism—the tendency to anticipate positive outcomes. Pessimism, however, is related to avoidance and social isolation, leading to depression and anxiety...Planning for regular vacation or personal time away is...important."[196] Halaas reminds that "physical activity reduces the

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[193] She includes the calculation for a recommended Body Mass Index (BMI) which is to divide your weight by you height in inches, divide the result again by your height in inches, then multiply by 703. The BMI should be between 18.5 and 25.

[194] Brain, 168.

[195] Ibid.

[196] Halaas, 30.

symptoms of anxiety and depression." Through her holistic approach, she offers practical advice on how to pursue health, such as "doing crossword puzzles and mathematical puzzles, learning new skills, practicing a musical instrument, or reading challenging books" as means of exercising your mind.[197]

Peter Scazzero's *The Emotionally Healthy Church* is about "discipleship's missing link,"[198] which is emotional health. Scazzero says, "The link between emotional health and spiritual maturity is a large, unexplored area of discipleship."[199] He argues that there is a strong ripple effect of the healthy, or unhealthy, emotional life of the senior pastor. Scazzero says, "The overall health of any church or ministry depends primarily on the emotional and spiritual health of its leadership. In fact, the key to successful spiritual leadership has much more to do with the leader's internal life than with the leader's expertise, gifts, or experience."[200]

Scazzero makes his case that the emotional health of the senior pastor directly impacts—in concentric circles—family of origin, spouse and family, staff and interns, elders and board, actively serving leaders, leaders in development, and the rest of the congregation. He points out, "The starting point for change in any nation, church, or ministry has always been the leader: As go the leaders, so goes the church…When you do the hard work of becoming an emotionally and spiritually mature disciple of Jesus Christ, the impact will be felt all around you."[201]

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[197] Ibid., 36-37.
[198] Peter Scazzero, *The Emotionally Healthy Church* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2003), taken from the table of contents and introduction.
[199] Ibid.,18.
[200] Ibid., 20.
[201] Ibid., 36.

Scazzero makes a biblical case for attention to emotional health from the life of Jesus. He reminds the reader that the gospels show Jesus as fully human, with a wide range of emotions and reactions: tears,[202] joy,[203] grief,[204] anger,[205] sadness,[206] sorrow,[207] astonishment and wonder,[208] and distress.[209] [210] Jesus was greatly moved and disturbed in spirit,[211] had emotional longings,[212] and displayed deep compassion.[213] Scazzero summarizes the effect that Jesus' emotional life had on his method of discipleship:

> Jesus lived that way with himself but also with others. Readers can observe countless incidents in the Gospels of Jesus' discerning what was below the surface of people's actions and then acting accordingly...We consistently see Jesus seeking to take people, especially his small community of twelve, below the surface in order to transform them from the inside out.[214]

After making his case for the significance of emotional health and asserting that the emotional health of a congregation is deeply affected by the senior pastor, he turns his attention to six principles of emotional health. First, he says we need to "look beneath the surface"[215] and he uses the image of an iceberg to explain how the emotional issues that we don't see can often have a damaging effect because, like the iceberg, ninety percent is buried under the water. Without looking beneath the surface "it is easy to remain in a comfortable, distorted illusion about our lives. Something may not be true, but we

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[202] Luke 9:41.
[203] Luke 10:21.
[204] Luke 14:34.
[205] Mark 3:5.
[206] Matthew 26:37.
[207] Luke 7:13.
[208] Mark 6:6; Luke 7:9.
[209] Mark 3:5; Luke 12:50.
[210] Scazzero, 32-33.
[211] John 11:33.
[212] Luke 22:15.
[213] Matthew 20:34; Mark 1:41; Luke 7:13; Scazzero, 76.
[214] Scazzero, 76.
[215] Ibid., 69.

become so used to it that it feels right."[216] Second, we need to "break the power of the past." In this chapter Scazzero gives an overview of the powerful influences of family systems. In the power of the gospel the church becomes a place where believers are reparented, by working through their family histories and learning to thank "God for our story, for our past, and for the place, time, and family into which we were born."[217] Third, we need to "live in brokenness and vulnerability." The key scripture for this principle is 2 Corinthians 12, verses 8-10, where Paul is tormented by a thorn in the flesh, but Jesus reminds Paul that his "grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness." Scazzero encourages the leader to accept your gift of a handicap:

> Our world treats weakness and failure as terminal. It says, "You are a loser." God says, "This is a universal human experience, cutting across all ages, cultures, races, and social classes. It is my gift specially crafted for you so you can lead out of weakness and brokenness, not your own strength and power.[218]

Fourth, he calls the reader to "receive the gift of limits." Other authors use the more familiar term of "boundaries" to describe the limits we all have on our time, energy and emotions.[219] Scazzero writes that "Emotionally healthy people understand the limits God has given them. They joyfully receive the one, two, seven, or ten talents God has so graciously distributed." And because of this acceptance they "are marked by contentment and joy.[220] Fifth, we are called to "embrace grieving and loss." Each of us carries brokenness and loss. Scazzero argues that "the degree to which I learn to grieve my own losses is in direct proportion to the depth and quality of my relationship with God and the

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[216] Ibid., 71.
[217] Ibid., 104.
[218] Ibid., 118.
[219] I became familiar with the term "boundaries" through the book of the same title by Dr. Henry Cloud and Dr. John Townsend, but the term is widely used today.
[220] Scazzero, 132.

compassion I can offer to others."[221] And finally, sixth, he challenges the reader to "make incarnation your model for loving well." Emotionally healthy church "learn to follow the three dynamics of incarnation found in the life of Jesus in order to love other people: entering another's world, holding on to yourself, and hanging between two worlds."[222] We are called to be the body of Christ in this world. He writes, "We are called, in the name of Jesus and by the indwelling of the Holy Spirit, to be skin for people all around us."[223] These principles form the foundation of an emotionally healthy person, which in turn affects the concentric circles of a leader's influence.

Allender reminds us in *Leading with a Limp* that the work of leadership will put us in the center of conflict, "urging others to stop acting out of hostility...stepping into the morass of hurt accusation, and defenses."[224] This will require "emotional intelligence"[225] ("Knowing one's emotions, managing emotions, motivating oneself, recognizing emotions in others, and handling relationships."[226]) to avoid being taken down by the very troubles we are trying to fix:

> The moment we are called to influence a person or process in a moment of chaos, we lead. We lead through every act of courage that connects us to others and to God. Every leader builds bridges of connection and tends to the fissures that threaten to divide people. This work of connecting is a priestly dimension of leadership. It involves bridging broken parts in an attempt to reconcile those who are separated. The divide might separate two warring parties or two opposing ideas. Either way, a leader connects. He draws people to himself (connection 1) in order to take people out of a spiral that would end in chaos or destruction. Then in his attempt to forge a connection between the opposing sides (connection 2), he often draws fire from both.[227]

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[221] Ibid., 154.
[222] Ibid., 172.
[223] Ibid., 175.
[224] Allender, 59.
[225] This term was popularized by Daniel Goleman's *Emotional Intelligence: Why it Can Matter More than IQ* (New York: Bantam Books, 1995).
[226] Ibid., 43.
[227] Allender, 59.

This struggle to learn through our weaknesses and to continue to lead can leave us with divided hearts, as "every heart at one step wants to serve God, and with the next step prefers to escape into a life that is much safer and far saner."[228] Allender concludes that these hard choices exist largely because "God...loves to use our strengths to get us into situations where our weaknesses are exposed and used for his glory."[229] Our own personal growth will determine whether we can humbly lead and avoid the temptations of becoming a trouble-maker, a dogmatist, or a dictator.[230]

The second section of Herrington, Creech and Taylor's book gives a layman's level primer on systems theory. Scripture speaks of the 'body of Christ' and the organic unity Christ brings to those who have faith in Him.[231] Systems theory is described in similar terms:

> Whenever you engage in a relationship that is long-term, intense, and significant, you become emotionally connected to one another in a living system. Each person who is part of this interaction begins to affect, and be affected by, the anxiety and behaviors of the others. The better we understand the functioning and implications of a living system, the more effectively we undergo personal transformation and learn to lead with integrity.[232]

The leader is called to exercise emotional maturity in assessing situations, leading change, and managing anxiety (often brought about by change). To be an effective leader, you must "see what is going on around you, observe the anxiety, note your own part in it, and manage yourself amid the pressure."[233] They assert that "Effective leadership comes from someone with enough emotional maturity to call a congregation to discern and

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[228] Ibid., 137.
[229] Ibid., 187.
[230] Ibid., 186.
[231] 1 Corinthians 12:12-13.
[232] Herrington, Creech, and Taylor, 29.
[233] Ibid., 47.

pursue a shared vision, to remain connected with those who differ with the leader or the majority, and to remain a calm presence when the anxiety rises."[234]

In chapter five of Herrington, Creech and Taylor's book the authors call the leader to be the calm presence in the midst of anxiety. They promote four calming practices that leaders should practice during times of stress. First, increase your self-awareness. They write, "Finding a few safe relationships is which you ask for ongoing feedback about your behavior can help increase your self-awareness."[235] Second, monitor your thinking patterns. They give many examples of what this might look like, such as "Overgeneralization: you see a single, negative event as a never-ending pattern of defeat."[236] Third, manage your feelings. They give the example of Paul's admonition to the Ephesians in chapter four not to "go to bed angry." We have choices to make regarding our feelings and managing them. Finally, fourth, we can slow the pace. They explain that "Anxiety intensifies when leaders cannot reflect on their own inner lives and on the life of the system around them. Slowing the pace helps reduce the leader's anxiety."[237]

Oswald broadens the category of emotional health to include activities that allow us to detach from stress in a positive way. He explains:

> When we can't get our minds off stressful subjects, our bodies continue to pump adrenaline into our system and the stress can become destructive. All of us need one or two activities that captivate our minds and energies completely, thus allowing us to detach temporarily from the parts of our lives that are destroying us.[238]

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[234] Ibid., 46.
[235] Ibid., 71.
[236] Ibid., 75.
[237] Ibid., 80.
[238] Oswald, 187.

Oswald goes on to commend hobbies, sports, arts, and other forms of reflective or expressive work[239] as significant routes of detachment.[240]

Emotional health is a relatively new term for the ability to process your emotions maturely and lead others through the same process. The principles of emotional health were practiced and modeled by Jesus and will help clergy become effective leaders. Emotional health helps the leader to effectively process conflict, anxiety, and stress, which in turn promotes self-care. Hobbies and recreation are also a practical way to detach from stress and promote emotional health.

Summary of Literature Review

The literature on small group dynamics defined a small group typically a group of three to twelve people. There are a variety of factors that draw us into a small group, such as relational care, community building, the opportunity to play a particular role within the community, and the goal that we have within the community. The size of the small group plays a major role in the depth of relationships. More participants means more potential interactions between the members; this results in less intimacy, which is one of the draws to many kinds of small groups (support groups, discipleship groups, covenant groups, etc.). The literature on Biblical unity touched on the tensions between organization unity and spiritual unity. Kik and Jones clearly defined spiritual unity and the successes and failures of the evangelical movement to achieve it.

The literature on pastoral self-care and longevity focused on the challenges that often negatively impact self-care and the principles of effective self-care. Eight general

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[239] This would include journal keeping, poetry writing, singing, dancing, performing, painting, sculpting, macramé, flower arranging, corresponding with family/friends.
[240] Oswald, 187.

categories of self-care were commended[241], including: Biblical rest (Sabbath rest, sabbatical, and retreats), healthy relationships, Biblical goals and self identity (defining yourself and your success according to God's standards), boundaries (saying 'no', gaining control of our time, and learning to trust in God's sovereignty), lifelong learning, spiritual health (active spiritual nurture; practice of spiritual formation), physical health, and emotional health. The area of emotional health is the singular focus of Peter Scazzero's *The Emotionally Healthy Church* and if Scazzero is correct, this field of emotional health is "a large, unexplored area of discipleship."[242]

The authors also warned of the dangers of leadership with Heifetz and Linsky focused mainly on external threats and McIntosh and Rima focused mainly on internal threats (the 'dark side' of leadership). Most of the authors gave strategies for effectively leading through seasons of change. The effective leader will not just call for change but model change as a transformative leader. Kent and Barbara Hughes called the pastor to redefine the meaning of success in leadership according to God's standards in His Word.

[241] Appendix C.
[242] Scazzero, 18.

CHAPTER THREE – METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this study was to explore how evangelical clergy form and sustain safe, trustworthy friendships. A methodological plan using qualitative research was utilized to accomplish this. This chapter will describe how this qualitative research was carried out. It will review the design of the study, introduce the study participants and their personal backgrounds, describe the interview process, and describe the limitations of the study.

Design of the Study

The research design of this study has followed a qualitative approach. In her book *Qualitative Research and Case Study Applications in Education*, Sharan B. Merriam explains that the qualitative method has the following characteristics:

1. "Qualitative researchers are interested in understanding the meaning people have constructed, that is, how they make sense of their world and the experiences they have in the world."

2. "The researcher is the primary instrument for data collection and analysis. Data are mediated through this human instrument, the researcher, rather than through some inanimate inventory, questionnaire, or computer."

3. Qualitative research "usually involves fieldwork. The researcher must physically go to the people, setting, site, institution (the field) in order to observe behavior in its natural setting."

4. "Qualitative research primarily employs an inductive research strategy. That is, this type of research builds abstractions, concepts, hypotheses, or theories rather than tests existing theory."

5. "Since qualitative research focuses on process, meaning, and understanding, the product of a qualitative study is richly descriptive. Words and pictures rather than

> numbers are used to convey what the researcher has learned about a phenomenon."[243]

After a survey of the relevant literature, I met with each of the pastors in the Lincoln group. The primary source of data was gleaned from individual thirty-minute interviews. These interviews were transcribed, and the results were coded for common themes. I have synthesized the results and will report my findings in chapter four.

Introduction to Study Participants and Personal Background

The initial written survey was sent to 240 Christian pastors in Lincoln, Nebraska. This included a wide variety of Christian denominations. The surveys were sent to male and female pastors. The data from this survey served as a baseline used to develop questions for my primary interviews.

There are nine members of the Lincoln group who served as my primary source of data. I met with each of the members for personal recorded interviews. The members include:

Ted, age 52, is the pastor of a large evangelical congregation of about 1,100 weekly attenders. He has been married for 31 years and is the father of four children, ranging in age from 18 to 30. Ted has been a pastor for 32 years; over 26 of those ministry years have been at his current church. He has seen the church grow from being a mid-sized church in his early ministry to being a large church today. Ted holds both a Bachelor of Arts in Bible and Ministries degree and a Master of Ministry degree.

Robert, age 59, is the senior pastor of a large Bible church with a weekly attendance of about 800. He has been married for 41 years and is the father of three grown children and grandfather to nine grandchildren. His youngest daughter died from

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[243] Sharan B. Merriam, *Qualitative Research and Case Study Applications in Education* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Publishers, 1998), 6-8.

cancer last year at age 28. Robert has been in pastoral ministry for 35 years and 24 of those years have been in Lincoln at two different congregations. He planted his current congregation and has been the senior pastor from its inception. Robert holds a Bachelors of Christian Education and a Master of Ministry degree.

Harris, age 37, is the senior pastor of a mid-sized reformed church with a weekly attendance of about 300 people. He has been married for 13 years and is a father to three young children ages three, five, and seven. Harris has been in pastoral ministry for 15 years with ten of those years being in Lincoln. He planted the current congregation from a core group of thirty five members about nine years ago. Harris holds a Masters of Divinity degree.

Chris, age 50, is the senior pastor of a very large evangelical congregation with weekly attendance of over 5,000. He has been married for 28 years and is the father to three, ages 22, 25, and 28. Chris has served in pastoral ministry for 27 years, all in the state of Nebraska. He has been at his current position for the past 17 years and has guided the congregation through a successful transition from a long-term pastorate into his pastorate. The church has grown from about 1,500 to the current size in those 17 years of his leadership. Chris has a Masters degree, a Masters of Divinity degree, and Doctor of Ministry degree.

Dan, age 55, is the senior pastor of a mid-sized charismatic church with a congregation of about 300 people. It is a mixed race congregation of 50% Anglo, 35% African-American, and 15% Hispanic members. He planted the congregation from scratch twenty years ago. Dan has been married for 35 years and has two grown children and six grandchildren. About five years ago his congregation built their first permanent

facility on the edge of town. He hold a Master of Divinity degree and is beginning work this year on a Doctor of Ministry degree.

Keith, age 46, is the senior pastor of a mid-sized reformed church with a weekly attendance of about 400. He has been married for 25 years and has three children, two in college and one in high school. Keith has been on staff at his church for 20 years, 17 of which have been as the senior pastor. In the data he functions as the participant-observer. He holds both a Bachelors of Science in Education and a Masters of Divinity degree.

Jim, age 50, is the senior pastor of a large evangelical church with a weekly attendance of about 800. He has been married for 30 years and has two grown children. Jim replaced the founding pastor eight and a half years ago, and before coming to Lincoln ministered 20 years in various capacities. He holds a Bachelor of Arts in Religion degree, a Masters of Divinity degree, and a Doctor of Ministry degree.

Bob, age 56, is the senior pastor of a large evangelical church of about 1,100. He has been married for 32 years and has three grown children. Bob has worked 31 years at the same congregation in Lincoln, first as a youth pastor, then as their senior pastor. He has both Theology of Ministry and Doctor of Ministry degrees.

Rick, age 57, was the senior pastor of a large charismatic congregation with a weekly attendance of about 900. He has been married for 36 years and has three adult children and six grandchildren. Rick has planted a church and before becoming the senior pastor at his congregation was a key staff pastor. He has been in ministry for 33 years. He served as interim pastor during the senior pastor's illness and departure and was eventually elected as senior pastor for a total of 18 years. Rick has a Masters in Biblical Studies, a Masters in Counseling Psychology, and a Doctor of Ministry in Marriage and

Family Counseling. In between church planting and becoming a staff pastor he had a full time counseling practice. This past year Rick resigned as senior pastor and returned to full time work as a Licensed Mental Health Practitioner.

Summary of Interview Participants

Name	Age	Church Attenders	Years Married	Children (Grand-children)	Years in Ministry (Years in Lincoln)	Highest Degree Awarded
Ted	52	Evangelical 1,100	31	4	32 (26)	Master of Ministry
Robert	59	Bible 800	41	3 (9)	35 (24)	Master of Ministry
Harris	37	Reformed 300	13	3	15 (10)	Master of Divinity
Chris	50	Evangelical 5,000	28	3	27 (17)	Doctor of Ministry
Dan	55	Charismatic 300	35	2 (6)	20 (20)	Master of Divinity
Keith	46	Reformed 400	25	3	20 (20)	Master of Divinity
Jim	50	Evangelical 800	30	2	20 (8)	Doctor of Ministry
Bob	56	Evangelical 1,100	32	3	31 (31)	Doctor of Ministry
Rick	57	Charismatic 800	36	3 (6)	33 (18)	Doctor of Ministry

Methodology Design

The data for the study was gathered primarily from 1) a general survey of clergy in the Lincoln area, 2) the observations of the participant-observer (Keith), and 3) the personal interviews of the nine members of the Lincoln group. Keith was a *complete participant* and member of the group being studied.[244]

[244] Merriam, 100.

The initial written survey was conducted by mail and postage-paid return envelope. I mailed the survey to every Christian pastor in Lincoln, Nebraska through a mailing list provided by the Lincoln Interfaith Council. There were a total of 240 Christian pastors and churches in the greater Lincoln area who received the survey. (Lincoln itself and rural areas considered part of the greater Lincoln market.) I received 124 completed surveys by return mail, for a response rate well over fifty percent. I asked the subjects to circle words which describe themselves and their approach to mutually supportive friendships among Christian pastors in the Lincoln area.[245] This survey gave me a small snapshot of some of the issues surrounding mutual support in Lincoln.

The primary source of data came from personal interviews with the members of the Lincoln group. I met with each one individually in their own offices and after a brief explanation of the process and signing of a release form began the interview. The interviews were each recorded and then transcribed. I sorted through the transcripts and highlighted themes in the responses from each of the interviews under each of the questions asked. I also did word counts on key words that emerged in the interview transcripts. The questions posted in this study reflect very closely the linear format of each interview. The interviews took from twenty to thirty minutes.

Interview and Focus-group Questions

As I met with each of the nine senior pastors from the Lincoln group I asked the following questions:

1. Why did members of the Lincoln pastors' group initially begin to meet? Was there anything that might have prevented you from participating?

[245] "Appendix A" is a copy of the actual survey.

2. What characteristics of this group have been important to its survival and longevity? What keeps you coming back each month?

3. What have you done to refresh yourself in ministry?

4. Have you experienced a period of burnout or loneliness? If so, how did you get through it? What steps would you take to avoid it in the future?

5. As you leave a luncheon, what is the difference between a "good" meeting and a "bad" meeting?

6. What role has the Lincoln pastors group played in your personal life? In your ministry life?

Data Analysis

The method of data analysis throughout this study is the constant comparative method. This method is a primary means of analysis in qualitative research. This method is a primary means of analysis in qualitative research. Sharan B. Merriam gives a short summary of the method:

> The basic strategy of the method is to do just what its name implies—constantly compare. The researcher begins with a particular incident from an interview, field notes, or document and compares it with another incident in the same set of data or in another set. These comparisons lead to tentative categories that are then compared to each other and to other instances. Comparisons are constantly made within and between levels of conceptualization until a theory can be formulated.[246]

The interviews—the primary source of data—were transcribed from digital audio and used by the researcher as Microsoft Word files. The "Find" function of Word was used to help identify themes and commonly used words. After the transcriptions were completed I read them and did some manual coding of themes. After reviewing the relevant literature, reviewing the interview transcripts, manually and electronically

[246] Merriam, 159.

searching for key words and potential themes I developed some tentative themes for my further analysis. These themes were discussed with my dissertation advisor, Dr. Robert Burns, who helped refocus my themes and analysis.

As a participant-observer (*complete participant*) Keith avoided the possible disadvantages Merriam warns about ("being labeled a spy or traitor when research activities are revealed"[247]) by explaining the research project before conducting the personal interviews and asking for feedback after interviews were concluded and initial findings were shared with the interviewees. This also served as a form of *triangulation.*[248]

Validity and Reliability

Qualitative research, like all ethical research, "is concerned with producing valid and reliable knowledge."[249] The two primary ways qualitative research is judged valid is through internal and external tests. Merriam writes that "Internal validity deals with the question of how research findings match reality"[250] whereas "External validity is concerned with the extent to which the findings of one study can be applied to other situations."[251] Merriam says that external validity can be thought of in terms of "the extent to which a study's findings apply to other situations."[252]

Internal validity for my study was provided through *triangulation*[253], using multiple participants who differed in age, family status, denominational affiliation, and professional training. It was also validated through *member checks*[254]after the interviews were completed to test the tentative findings with the interview source group (the Lincoln

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[247] Merriam, 100.
[248] Ibid, 204.
[249] Ibid, 198.
[250] Ibid, 201.
[251] Ibid, 207.
[252] Ibid, 211.
[253] Ibid, 204.
[254] Ibid.

group). To some degree *long-term observation* also contributes to the validity of the research, as interview participants are all at least eight year members of the interview source group, and five have been participants for thirteen years.

External validity for my study was provided primarily by *rich, thick description* so the readers will be able to effectively evaluate the findings in light of their own situations.

Finally, Merriam says that "Reliability refers to the extent to which research findings can be replicated."[255] She also uses the terms "dependability" and "consistently" interchangeably with "reliability."[256] I sought dependability through a consistent process of design, data collection, and analysis. Finally, my *credibility* as a researcher is enhanced by my position as a pastor for twenty years who has served in the role of senior pastor—the position of the interview group members—for seventeen years.

Limitations of the Study

This study was limited to interviews involving nine pastors in Lincoln, Nebraska. As such, it is possible that the findings will have limited application in other geographical areas. Hopefully, the findings will shed some light on the relationships of pastors in other cities. In addition, this study is limited to interviewees who were senior pastors, and it did not include para-church ministers, associate ministers, assistant ministers, or youth ministers. It is probable that senior ministers would reflect differently upon the theology and involvement in ecumenism of their congregation than ministers working in other positions. The initial written survey was mailed to all Christian clergy in Lincoln and would include non-evangelical protestants, Roman Catholics and female pastors. The

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[255] Merriam, 205.
[256] Merriam, 206.

personal interviews conducted with the Lincoln group all involved male evangelical senior pastors.

In my initial search for bibliographic material, it became obvious that there is an enormous wealth of technical material on small groups. In order to make this study manageable, it was necessary to focus more narrowly on the dynamics of Christian small groups. This limits the scope of this study because the bibliography reflects primarily, although not exclusively, the more popular Christian works on small groups. There was a limited amount of material exclusively on clergy self-care, so other works not targeted for clergy were included in that section of the literature review.

Summary

This chapter described how qualitative research methodology was utilized to explore how evangelical clergy form and sustain safe, trustworthy friendships. I reviewed the design of the study, introduced the study participants and their personal backgrounds, and described the interview process. I provided an overview of the data analysis, addressed the validity and reliability of the study, and described the limitations of the study. The next chapter will review the research findings from the participant interviews.

CHAPTER FOUR – DATA REPORT AND ANALYSIS

The purpose of this study was to explore how clergy form and sustain mutually supportive friendships. The research questions guiding the study were:

1. How are mutually supportive friendships among evangelical clergy formed?
2. How are mutually supportive friendships among evangelical clergy maintained?
3. What prevents pastors from being involved in mutually supportive friendships?

I did an initial survey of the clergy in Lincoln, Nebraska through a mailer. I also conducted personal interviews with eight senior pastors who meet with monthly for fellowship (The group has a total of nine members, including myself; I did not include my input in an interview format).. The research questions for those interviews were:

1. Why did members of the Lincoln pastors' group initially begin to meet? Was there anything that might have prevented you from participating?
2. What characteristics of this group have been important to its survival and longevity? What keeps you coming back each month?
3. What have you done to refresh yourself in ministry?
4. Have you experienced a period of burnout or loneliness? If so, how did you get through it? What steps would you take to avoid it in the future?
5. As you leave a luncheon, what is the difference between a "good" meeting and a "bad" meeting?

6. What role has the Lincoln pastors group played in your personal life? In your ministry life?

In this chapter, I will review the key findings of the initial survey mailed to all the Christian pastors in the greater Lincoln area. Then the data from the nine participants of the Lincoln pastors group gleaned from the research will be presented.

Initial Survey

The initial survey (see Appendix A) was mailed to all of the Christian pastors in Lincoln, Nebraska that were listed in a data base provided by the Lincoln Interfaith Council. Non-Christian pastors or groups were eliminated from the mailing list. Of the remaining 240 surveys sent out, 124 were returned for a fifty-two percent response rate. Respondents were asked to describe their denominational traditions. Several respondents had been part of multiple denominations and Christian traditions, so the percentages total more than one hundred percent:

Denominational Traditions
1. Lutheran (25%)
2. Methodist (19%)
3. Presbyterian (15%)
4. Baptist (13%)
5. Bible Church (11%)
6. Catholic (11%)
7. Community Church (10%)
8. Charismatic (8%)
9. Reformed (7%)
10. Disciples of Christ (6%)
11. Assembly of God (4%)
12. Less than 2%, Mennonite, United Church of Christ, Seventh-Day Adventist

The largest denominational groups in Lincoln were Lutherans, Methodists, and Roman Catholics.[257] The vast majority (eighty-three percent) of the respondents had no theological convictions that prohibited them from meeting with other pastors. This super-majority far exceeded the number who describe themselves as evangelical (sixty percent), conservative (fifty-two percent) and traditional (forty-two percent).

Self-Descriptors
1. Evangelical (60%)
2. Conservative (52%)
3. Traditional (42%)
4. Progressive (40%)
5. Ecumenical (37%)
6. Contemporary (36%)
7. Liturgical (35%)
8. Mainline (35%)
9. Moderate (28%)
10. Liberal (23%)
11. Reformed (19%)
12. Dispensational (7%)

All of the seventeen percent who cited theological convictions that prohibited them from meeting with other pastors gave follow-up explanations for their convictions. Several themes that emerged will now be discussed.

Current Participation in Small Groups with Other Clergy

Nearly two-thirds of the survey respondents said that they "meet regularly with other pastors outside of [their] own congregation" (sixty-five percent). The kind of group and the size of the group was broad ranging. Of the respondents who described their meetings with pastors outside of their congregation, ninety-one percent were involved in a small group.[258] Due to theological reasons, some pastors (i.e. Missouri Synod

[257] This is based on the Interfaith Council mailing list. It accounts for numbers of churches or parishes, but not numbers of members or attenders.

[258] I am defining a small group, based on the literature (see Appendix A), as a group of three to twelve people.

Lutherans, LCMS) do not pray with or have communion with other pastors outside of their denomination, but they might meet for fellowship. Accordingly, most of the LCMS pastors who completed the survey cited their meetings with other LCMS pastors as "outside their congregation," even though those pastors were within their denomination.

The survey respondents reported meeting with a broad range of groups. Some gather for study and sermon planning ("text studies weekly," "Tues. text study," "weekly lectionary group," "pastor text study"). Some gather for personal support and prayer ("lunch, fellowship, and prayer," "gather regularly for lunch, fellowship," "support and discussion," "weekly for prayer," "prayer and support"). Thirty-seven percent of the respondents were involved in denomination-related groups.

Objections to Meeting with Other Clergy

Of the seventeen percent who reported that they would not be willing to meet with other clergy, most of the objections came from evangelicals who viewed other clergy as unorthodox, liberal, or non-evangelical (twenty out of twenty-three). The written survey asked the respondents to "briefly summarize these convictions [that would prohibit them from meeting with other pastors]."

There were a variety of responses from evangelical or fundamentalist respondents that generally connected Christian unity with an orthodox view of Christ. One said, "I don't feel I can have true fellowship with those who don't really know Christ. I am all for unity, but true unity based on truth and a common faith in the true Jesus Christ." Another broadened the concern to a "Denial of the fundamentals of the faith such as the deity of Christ, salvation by grace, inspired scripture." Another respondent used reformation categories such as "the Inerrancy of Scripture—sola Scriptura; faith in Christ for

salvation—sola Fide; salvation apart from works—sola Gratia; orthodoxy versus heterodoxy." Still others had more specific issues that would prevent fellowship. One said,"[They would] need to stand on the Blood Atonement, Virgin Birth, Proper Baptism, King James Bible, Local Church, and other Baptist doctrines." Another stated "infant baptism" As an issue that prevented such fellowship. One simply stated that, "I don't care to unite with clergy whose theology is different than the scriptures. "Be not unequally yoked together with unbelievers."

There were also three non-evangelicals who would not meet with evangelical pastors out of conviction. One said, "[conservatives] believe we liberals are outside of God's grace. I've never lived in a community with such barriers between churches." Another wrote, "I find fundamentalist [sic] to be often too narrow in their theology and perspectives and judgmental, especially of those who do not fit into their theological and ideological beliefs." Yet another expressed concerns about being judged and said, "The only thing that would stop me with meeting other clergy is if those clergy who differ from my views would judge me as wrong, non-Christian."

The vast majority who were driven by theological convictions to meet with other pastors were motivated by the Biblical call to unity in Christ. One said, "Jesus wants his church to be unified" and another affirmed "True unity in the Body of Christ is always desirable." One pastor described his church as a congregation with "Christian unity as our passion." Several commented that their desire to be unified comes from "Jesus [sic] prayer in John 17 that we be one in Spirit." Several others cited the John 17 prayer of Christ as a motivator for unity.

In summary, the vast majority of the clergy respondents in Lincoln (eighty-three percent) were willing to meet with other clergy to pursue Biblical unity. Of the sixty-five percent who reported being part of such a group, ninety-one percent were part of a small group with three to twelve members. The primary reasons that they joined these groups were study, support, prayer, fellowship, and denominational connection. Of the seventeen percent who are not interested in meeting with other clergy, self-described evangelicals tended to avoid meetings with other clergy if they perceived them as liberal or non-orthodox. Three self-described liberals (or progressives) tended to avoid meetings with other clergy if they perceived them as fundamentalist. Each of the three either used the word "judged" or described the experience of feeling judged.

Personal Interviews

The primary tool to address the research questions was a series of interviews with the pastors forming the Lincoln group. This group has a total of nine pastors. The interviews were transcribed and formed thirty-nine pages of single-spaced questions and answers.

The Participants

The participants were all senior pastors of evangelical churches. Two were charismatic (Rick and Dan). Two were reformed (Harris, Keith). The remaining five were evangelical, but not charismatic or reformed (Chris, Ted, Bob, Robert, and Jim). The men ranged in age from mid-thirties to mid-fifties. Four of the nine grew up in Nebraska. All were married and have children. Their ministry experience ranged from fifteen years to more than thirty years in pastoral ministry. These men continue to meet for lunch

monthly at a local restaurant or at one of the pastors' churches for a ninety minute luncheon. The luncheon has no set agenda and occasionally includes some brief prayer.

The churches these men lead range in size from about three hundred to over five thousand attenders. The churches included independent Bible, independent Charismatic, Assembly of God, Berean, Evangelical Free, Christian church, Southern Baptist, and Presbyterian Church in America (PCA).

I met with each of them in their own offices and conducted the interviews one-on-one. Each interview was digitally captured on a hand-held Canon recorder and then transcribed. Most interviews took between twenty-five and thirty minutes, not including time spent describing the project, explaining and signing a release form or personal matters. At the end of each interview the subject was asked if they had anything else they would like to add before the interview was closed.

Initial Formation

Every interviewee had a different recollection of how the Lincoln group started. Some didn't even recall how they were initially invited. Ted admitted, "I don't exactly remember who brought the group together, so I can't remember if I was invited to come. I must have been invited to come. I wouldn't have just shown up."

The earliest recollections related to the group go back to the 1980's when Bob recalled that Warren Wiersbe[259] moved to Lincoln and was shocked by the spirit of competition between the churches. Bob reported:

> When Warren Wiersbe moved into town, he went to Berean...He went to [Berean's pastor at that time] and he said, "There's something wrong with Lincoln." And he says, "There's something wrong with the churches. There is such a competitive spirit among the churches. I haven't seen anything like this in

[259] Warren Wiersbe came to Lincoln initially to lead Back to the Bible radio ministry. He retired after a few years and made the Berean church his home church.

> the other cities that I've been to." And he said, "Why don't you start a prayer group?"[260]

The initial prayer group that Bob joined began disintegrating as pastors left their positions and transitions took place. With only one or two from the original prayer group, the current Lincoln group was born.

There were other efforts during this same time frame to bring pastors together in Lincoln, but those efforts were eventually abandoned as ineffective. Chris explains:

> There was a ministerial group in town at that time that, in my opinion, was pretty much a gathering of the disgruntled, disenfranchised, struggling, "I think I'm going to quit" pastors, and I didn't view myself that way...So it was really awkward to set up something on the side with three of the churches that would have been fairly well known, and that group kind of feeling like we had snubbed them, and we didn't want them to melt into our group. You know, we kind of joked about it being a pastoral clique, but it kind of was. We really weren't open to anybody jumping on board, because we were very protective of what we had.

Of the three churches that came together (Berean, Evangelical Free, Assembly of God), all had connections to the original prayer group. They decided to begin extending personal invitations to pastors they thought would fit the personality of the group. Keith was invited by Alex (one of the original three who is not currently in Lincoln). Some current members of the group remember being invited by Alex, Chris, or Bob. Two members of the group left for new positions, and their successors were invited to the group. Harris was added after a trip that five of the pastors took together to a John Piper conference in Minneapolis, Minnesota.[261]

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[260] All quotations from pastors in this section are taken from the interview transcripts.

[261] The road trip to Piper's Pastor's Conference was the only significant travel experience together. Participants included Chris, Robert, Harris, Keith, Jim and Robert's associate pastor. The conference was perceived to be broad enough theologically to benefit everyone. It was actually a "John Calvin love-fest" (the group's designation) and provided humor to our luncheons for several months.

Problems to Overcome

Several of the group members noted that shared theological assumptions, which have at times kept groups like this from forming, have actually helped to form and sustain the Lincoln group. Many of the churches trace their heritage to the fundamentalist movement of the twentieth century that reacted against the modernist (liberal) movement. Separation from other churches was a sign of commitment, and fellowship with other denominations was viewed suspiciously. Also, a large church's attitude toward the rest of the city impacted pastors' willingness to fellowship with each other. Chris explains how this "flagship" church and his own tradition affected the climate in Lincoln with respect to the willingness of the city's pastors to meet together:

> Lincoln had a long history of being a divided church because of a flagship church in town who basically believed that was the right way to do church, and if you violated that, you were likely to end up in a sermon. And because of their size and influence, that was a very significant thing. And so it really created an environment where churches were very competitive and very divided, separated, just no cooperation.

He continued:

> Really, there was a pretty strong bent away from churches that didn't agree with every jot and tittle…of a doctrinal statement. So [Bob's church] probably would have been okay. [Keith's church][262] would have been way out of bounds. The charismatics would have been way out of bounds. Christian Church, out of bounds.

According to the "old school" perspective, as Chris explains it, the current Lincoln group of nine would be reduced to four.

Crossing theological boundaries was challenging for Dan, but the relationships that were built over time helped to ease the occasional offenses. He asserted that in order to have a successful group, there must be:

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[262] Keith's church baptizes infants and is not Dispensational and Premillenial.

> ...a genuine willingness on each person's part to agree to disagree when it comes to certain theological issues. I think there also had to be, within the framework of each individual, the ability to not take offense. For example...if somebody were to say something in jest, or something in a..."derogatory" is not the word I want, but in just a different way, about, say, charismatics or Pentecostals, that you have to have a thick enough skin that it doesn't bother you and that you know down deep that the individuals sitting around that table are out for your good and not to tear you down.

Jim had previous experiences in other cities that made him wonder if he should be involved in the Lincoln group:

> My past experience in the last two cities I lived in, in Las Cruces, New Mexico, and then just outside of Dallas...I wouldn't call it antagonism, but there was a lot of competition among the denominations. And so there was lack of trust, and the idea was, why in the world would you want to meet with somebody who's your competition?...[there were] no cohesive friendships.

In order for the Lincoln group to be formed, certain problems had to be overcome. Those challenges included a history of division and competition between churches in the city of Lincoln, a flagship church in Lincoln that had targeted other congregations with criticism, and personal concerns based on past experiences.

Core Unity Affirmed

Some of the Lincoln group members made passing references to the unity on key theological issues that is largely assumed, but nonetheless provides a key foundation to the relationships. Speaking of the group's initial formation and basis for unity, Bob said, "We all affirm the deity of Christ and the substitutionary atonement of Christ and the inerrancy of the Scriptures, and the same belief system, you know. It was really all about Jesus." Chris said, "We don't see all these things the same way, but I think we all love God as much and I think we all hold the scriptures highly." Jim was more specific about our unity in Christ when he said, "we try to...figure out what really is important, and we're going to love Jesus and let the Bible be our guide, and then where we have

differences of opinions…those are [not] going to be a litmus test for friendship. So I think that's been a real help with that group."

Similarity of Pastoral Calling

While the Lincoln group churches are in different denominations and of different sizes, there is enough similarity to the pastoral calling that it helps provide a baseline of common understanding. In this case, all participants are senior pastors, have multiple staff members, share an evangelical outlook, and work in the same city. There is also an intangible of personality that seems to play a role. Ted observed that, "[The Lincoln group's] common calling is Lincoln, our common love for the city is what—and Jesus, of course—but love for the city really brings us together. And because we're in close proximity to each other, in some ways we're able to have closer relationships than I would otherwise." Chris broadened the categories of unity:

> …all of us preach, so there was a common interest in terms of what we're preaching and what we're reading and what's happening in the culture…I think we share similar passions. I think we genuinely help one another, because our churches were in different places and had experienced different things…I frankly have way more in common with that group of pastors than with the pastors of our own fellowship, because most of them are rural churches of 50 or less people and we just don't have a lot in common with them. (Later in interview) …we have been very protective of our group, and I think that's one of the reasons it's worked. I think if people feel like they need to let everybody in, it loses what makes it work. And there are chemistry issues, where sometimes it just may not work.

Rick commented on some of the same issues and said that "the guys tend to be theologically pretty close. I think they're comparable age, comparable experience in ministry, tend to be pastors of larger, healthier churches. I don't sense that they have huge connection with what I would call sister pastors, or pastors in their own denomination. I think that's not there, so I think this becomes a clustering supportive

place for them. Certainly it has been for me. There's more commonality between myself and those guys than most of the guys in my denomination that are in this area, probably because of church size."

For Jim the commonalities were more personal. He sees "[Lincoln group members] talking about books they're reading, so I'm being exposed to things that I've not read. I'm hearing guys share about struggles, and so that also helps me, because I'm hearing how people are working through staff problems, or...a few times you and I have talked about our wives' illness[263], and just having some camaraderie...it seems like most of us are struggling with a lot of the same issues. So it's just a group that I feel a real partnership with. Robert summarized the ministry and personality commonalities that make the group work:

> ...the [initial] invitation was based on, basically, like-sized, like-missional churches where mutual encouragement, the same kind of shared challenges, those needs were similar, and kind of a place just to find encouragement, support. Not necessarily look for solutions and answers, but just to encourage and support others and be finding that support, because we understood, kind of lived in the same world.

In spite of some of the initial challenges, the group formed largely due to a core unity of belief (what Robert called "like-missional") and a similarity of calling among the pastors. Jim notes that the group has developed a sense of "camaraderie and partnership."

Keys to Longevity

The current members of the group have been meeting for luncheons at local restaurants and in their own church facilities for about thirteen years. When the participants were asked about the keys to the Lincoln group's longevity, three general

[263] Both of our wives have auto-immune diseases.

themes emerged: Nurtured Friendship, Willingness to Share Struggles, Feelings, and Be Transparent, and Safety in Communication.

Nurtured Friendship

The second and fourth most common words used in the interviews were "Relationship" and "Friend." These pastors enjoy spending time with each other. This is what primarily brings them to the monthly luncheons and keeps them coming back. Words such as "friend," "love," "fellowship," "encourage," and "support," were used throughout the interviews. The interviewees spoke of "feelings" eighty times. A common word to all the interviews was "relationship." Ted mused, "I think that over the years…we've become great friends. Now I come for the relationship end of it…the outcome of the friendships. I would say that's the best part of it."

Chris noted that, "If relationally there isn't a sense deep down that we really do like to be together, we really like one another and care about one another, [the group] probably doesn't work." He goes on:

> I would say number one would be relational. And I'm an introvert. I'm not a real social kind of a guy. But I genuinely love these guys, I love the time together, I consider them friends. If I meet somebody in town, I'm always very happy to identify with them and offer my support for them. So it's just a group of guys I genuinely enjoy being with.

Chris demonstrated that love very tangibly to Keith. A number of years ago, he shared with the group the physical and spiritual struggles he experienced as his father eventually died from complications associated with rheumatoid arthritis (RA). He knew that Keith's wife was suffering from RA. He asked one day if she found relief in a hot tub. Keith replied "Yes." Shortly afterward, with the help of some anonymous parties, he

told him to go to a pool and spa retailer and pick out a hot tub that would work for their family. It would be a gift.

Rick noted that "It's just a chance to be with other guys that are in ministry that I trust and respect. They've become friends." Dan agreed, "On a very surface level, it's the fellowship, obviously. I enjoy just being with the guys." Robert attributed the longevity of the group to "an incredible sense of genuine care and love for each other that is never…a sense of competition." Jim added, "I feel like everybody around there actually cares for one another."

Bob illustrated the practical meaning of these friendships with this story:

> [The group] plays a key role in my life personally, which I believe therefore has a key role in its impact for our church. Just give you an example, I lost a good friend yesterday. He had a heart attack and died. And it happened to be, his son is the worship pastor at [Independent Bible Church]. And so…I get called to the hospital about 1:00 in the afternoon, and there's Robert coming in, and we're praying together, and we're talking, and just…there's my brother [Robert]...

The friendships are also nurtured through joking, teasing, and a general playfulness with each other. Echoes of this theme are heard mostly through the vocal tone of the interviews and sometimes in the words, like these from Robert: "If there are distinctions among us, they have been dealt with in an authentic, humorous, and relational way…usually there's been a little ribbing going on."

The men come to the monthly luncheons primarily because of the personal relationships. The group has developed a sense of brotherhood in ministry and caring for one another.

Willingness to Share Struggles, Feelings, and Be Transparent

The level of friendship has shown itself in the group particularly through the willingness of the members to walk through their personal struggles with each other. This

was a strong theme that came up in all of the interviews. The members of the group have listened to each other and helped each other process grief, betrayal of church members, financial pressures, family illness, job transitions, struggles with children, staff challenges, a church fire, and the death of a young daughter with small children. Jim summarized it this way:

> I think the thing that impresses me every time we've hit it is the vulnerability of the guys around the table. And it's not every week…or every time we meet. It's not that everyone does it. But there's usually someone around the table who will talk about what's going on in their lives, and then the guys don't let it rest. They'll stay at it. And I don't ever feel like a project, but I do feel that people are interested in me…I'm hearing guys share about struggles, and so that also helps me, because I'm hearing how people are working through staff problems, or…you know, a few times you and I have talked about our wives' illness, and just having some camaraderie about going through the same things…there's a freshness when people are actually being honest about the struggles…

Bob added that in the Lincoln group "We learn from each other. There is an iron-sharpening-iron aspect to it. Somebody may come on a particular month and be down, you know, like Robert losing…his daughter."[264] He noted that group members often come alongside each other and gave an example of him and Alex "going and praying with Chris before he had his heart surgery…when somebody's down, there's the encouragement… I'm a more emotional person, you know, so I'm prone to get down, prone to depression and so on. And that is…like a booster shot to me…in the arm. I always come back revitalized." Chris said the group is "always a source of encouragement. It's just typically a breath of fresh air to be with them. You know, we've gone through some pretty hard stuff together, which has been really neat."

However this closeness did not come quickly or automatically. Ted noted:

> In the early years, it was pretty much on the surface level, which I think is typical of any group. At some point in time, it went from us talking about the good stuff

[264] Bob is referring to the death of Robert's daughter, a young mother.

> that's going on in our lives to...it moved to, it was okay to talk about the bad stuff that's going on in our lives and in the church. And I know particularly with Robert's whole experience, I felt like that really cemented our fellowship. I think that that...yeah, how can you not watch a friend go through something like that and not have it affect you? Some of those guys that I thought, wow, these guys are something—and they are something—but they have struggles and they have questions and doubts, you know, they have problems in their family. And so I'm a lot less intimidated than I used to be.

Over time the dynamic of support has emerged. Dan said confidently that "I know if I'm struggling in an area or in trouble, if I know that I'm hitting a wall, I can get counsel and go to one of the...any of the guys...they're after my success and this church's success, as well as their own. That's what actually, down deep, keeps me coming back. When you can get down to the personal transparency of how I feel, what I'm going through, I think those are the more valuable times, for sure."

Harris, one of the more recent additions to the group and the youngest member, has observed the dynamic of the men caring pastorally for each other:

> I think a number of those guys find their primary source of safety and encouragement and ability to vent difficult ministry situations and just kind of be themselves with one another. On top of that, when these individual guys have gone through some pretty tough personal times...a number of those guys have really pastored one another...Chris talking about his childhood, where his dad was a faithful hymn writer and minister, he was always chronically ill and always in pain...the situation of Rick recently transitioning out of a pastoral ministry he had been part of for eighteen years...the real difficulty and heartache of life and ministry, and when the heart comes out...I just eat out of those guys' hands when they're real. It doesn't come all the time, and maybe not that often, but when it does, it's worth its weight in gold...that's the stuff that keeps me coming back and encouraged, that these guys are real men with real difficulties, and but for the grace of God they're continuing to press on, so it keeps me pressing on.

The more personal the meeting has been and the more pastoral the relationships have been, the better the luncheon has been for Rick. He said that "If we had gotten to personal stuff and people were willing to disclose, that made [the meeting] a bigger win. Whether

it was everybody in the group, but at least it got beyond the typical 'how are you, what's happening in your church' stuff; it got to what we were facing."

Robert summarized the value of transparency in his life through this example:

> I'll never forget sitting across town, all the way over at the 77 bypass, and one of my brothers said to the guys, says, is everybody okay? I don't sense everybody is okay. And one of them broke down, guy sitting right to my left broke down and started crying. And he said, I checked myself into the hospital last night, the emergency room, thought I was dying of a heart attack. And it was an anxiety attack. And immediately, immediately, the guys stood up, surrounded him, laid hands on him, and started to pray for him as he wept...one of the other brothers said, [I'm] going to be in your office in twenty minutes; I was on the gurney two years ago myself; let me come over and...share with you what God taught me. And I went, yeah, you can't get that anywhere but in a brotherhood that loves one another. The good [meetings] are just always when everybody's been there, they've been themselves, they've been transparent enough to say, yeah, right now life sucks and my ministry is not going very well either...

The members of the group feel the freedom to be transparent with one another and are encouraged by the opportunity to share struggles with one another.

Safety in Communication

Closely connected to personal transparency is a strong sense of safety in communication. Though it has never been explicitly stated in a meeting, there is an assumed confidentiality in communication. The stories of sharing personal struggles flow from this assumption.

Ted said, "I think there's a sense of safety there. It took me a little while to know that that was the case, but I think there's a real sense of 'what is said here stays here.' I feel like it's a safe place, that if I need to unload, I can." Rick agreed that the group practices confidentiality, but has never actually discussed it as a group. He said, "I assumed there was confidentiality, but it wasn't discussed when I went, because the group was already...had been meeting. I assumed that, and have continued to assume it."

Dan spoke about his initial fear that he might be used as an illustration in someone else's pulpit. He recalled that Alex, who invited him into the group, addressed his fears:

> The thing that I remember [Alex] talking to me about at that first meeting was how they valued the confidentiality within the group, that what was said in the group stayed in the group. I think the other characteristic [for longevity of the group] was the confidentiality, the ability to speak and know that your words are not going to be beat or used against you from somebody's pulpit, or that something that you believe or say would not be some kind of sermon illustration the next week. And that was very important.

The Lincoln group has been going for thirteen years according to its members primarily because of nurtured friendship, a willingness to share struggles, feelings, and be transparent, and an implied—and according to the interviews practiced—safety in communication. The members feel the freedom to speak about their feelings and believe they will be supported by the rest of the group.

Burnout

Each of the interviewees was asked about seasons of burnout or loneliness in ministry. Some had very specific situations that they recollected, while others could not identify any specific seasons of burnout. The situations previously mentioned (betrayal of church members, financial pressures, family illness, job transitions, struggles with children, staff challenges, a church fire, and the death of a young daughter with small children) caused stress in each case. Several themes contributing to burnout emerged, including: Job and Calling, Staff and Member Conflict, the Burdens of Counseling, and feelings of Loneliness.

Job and Calling

Robert had more than one season of questioning his calling. The first situation was due to congregational conflict:

> It was a constant battle zone in the church. And at the end of two years, I just literally wrote ministry off as a possibility, just local church ministry. And during the last six months of that stint, my wife attempted suicide because of the weight of the ministry. And my answer then was a man who had loved me like a spiritual father confronted me, perceiving something wasn't right. And he was the only guy who had the ability…he was president of the Bible college. But he said, 'I don't go to your church, I have no authority, but I'm firing you as a staff member.' And so I resigned from the ministry, expecting I would never be back vocationally involved. But I just went and got a job and moved back to Nebraska with my family. And in six months, my wife was already praying me back into the ministry.

The second situation Robert faced was quite recent. His daughter was a survivor of childhood cancer and miraculously was able to conceive a child. However as a young mother of three she was stricken with cancer again and died in 2007. Robert explained that a recurrence of cancer after a serious childhood bout is common. After his daughter's death he recalls a conversation about his calling:

> A very trusted, long-term friend, not in an orchestrated method, but took me aside and said, do you believe God might be lifting the call to ministry from your shoulders and freeing you up to do something else with your remaining years? And at that point, [wife] and I really had to prayerfully evaluate, why is it we serve in the local church on the level we do? And the elders, seeing that that period of trial was coming, gave me a sabbatical period, where I just…I mostly attended here, and I kept office hours only if I chose to. I just spent the time reading and praying and thinking clearly and leaning on the brothers in the fellowship group, actually. And through that period of time, God then…just clearly reaffirmed the call to what we're doing.

Robert questioned his calling due to intense seasons of trial in his family. He continued in ministry with the guidance of his wife and close friends who helped him process his ongoing call and supported him during his low points.

Staff and Member Conflict

For four of the nine interviewees, staff and congregational conflict contributed to stress and burnout. Keith, Ted, Rick, and Robert all experienced stress related to staff conflict. Ted summarized his situation: "Several years ago, we had to let a staff member go, and I'd never been a part of anything like that. There were some folks on staff who did not feel like it was the right call."

Ted and Rick also had significant congregational conflict. Ted had a long-time member request information about staff salaries, and when Ted informed him that it was not the church's policy to release individual salary numbers the member left the church and wrote a letter of complaint to two hundred households in the congregation. As he processed the situation with the group, Ted found that each of the churches represented had similar policies regarding staff salary confidentiality.

Rick stepped into the shoes of the founding senior pastor (who had a twenty-five year tenure) after serving as a staff pastor for thirteen years. He first served as an interim pastor for five years, but was eventually elected to the senior pastor position. A variety of conflicts made the situation stressful, and he recently resigned from the position. Rick recalled his wife's words:

> At one point she said, "We're either going to solve this, or I'm leaving. Which do you want it to be?" Well, that was a wakeup call. So we actually went out of town for four days of kind of intense counseling together to look at what we were doing, how I was managing it.

Rick listened to his wife and her ultimatum was a turning point for their situation. The pressures of staff and congregational conflict are topics that are processed in the Lincoln group as they arise. In the case of Ted primary support came from the group members,

where Ted tested the validity of his approach against that of the group members. But in the case of Rick primary encouragement to action (an ultimatum) came from his wife.

Burdens of Counseling

Two of the pastors cited involvement in pastoral counseling as being something they enjoy, yet also something that is emotionally draining and can lead to stress and burnout. Bob revealed:

> There was a time where I went to my elders, and I realized that I was burned out. In fact, some of them knew that I was burned out. And I went to them and basically said, "Do you want me to be the church's counselor or the church's pastor?" Because I was doing a lot of counseling, and I'm an emotional person, and so that's not always a good mix, because I would enter into everybody's situation, and that would drain me.

Jim also said that he struggled with this issue:

> Burned out? I think I'm a little on the edge of that most of the time. But again, I think that's—getting redundant—but I think that's…you know, to quote the great theologian Spiderman, "this is my blessing; this is my curse." (Laughter) The pastoral gift is an awesome gift, but the expectations and requests always exceed my resources. And so…and I'm one who gets in the ditches with people. And I love that. I'm an encourager, so I love being involved in that, and don't delegate quickly enough…I think the word, more than "burnout," is just "weary." And that probably is the biggest thing I would struggle with.

The stresses of counseling were answered by Bob through the intervention of his elders to design his job in a different manner. The stresses that Jim faces have not yet been resolved.

Loneliness

Some of the pastors in the Lincoln group didn't see themselves as 'burned out' on ministry, but did cite seasons of loneliness or a 'crisis of confidence'. Dan put it this way:

> I don't think I've been "burned out." I've never been able to really determine what the definition of that is, actually. Loneliness, by all means. Although…I think the biggest shock I had becoming a senior pastor when I moved here—I had been an associate all my life prior—the senior pastor role, I was shocked by that

> very dynamic of the loneliness of that role. I could not believe it. I still have a hard time putting my mind around it sometimes. You try to have friends in the body. And the couple of times that I've tried that, where you have close friends, it's ended with rather disastrous results. And I've sort of sworn off that. And that's why this group has become more important. The part of this group that maybe would be missing…is just the play time. It's good to talk about the job…our conversations around the table tend to generate more around our job, or issues we're currently facing, and that's all very valuable. But sometimes you just want to leave the job and just play, and you have no one to play with.

Harris didn't want to use the words 'burnout' or 'loneliness' but coined his own phrase for personal struggle. He said, "Where I've struggled the most with the question of loneliness is maybe at times being struck with a crisis of confidence, being in a church situation and seeing people leave your church, questioning your leadership, and at some point…wondering…just having questions about whether I'm doing the right thing that God wants me to do. And then where do you go to, to process that information? At the end of the day, 'no' to the question of burnout, 'no' to the question of loneliness. But, crisis of confidence? Yes, from time to time."

Rick has served as a pastor and a licensed mental health practitioner for over thirty years. He had strong feelings about how churches and denominations deal with burnout:

> I think there needs to be a far greater training and education and support system for most pastors. And it's not…it's beyond just this group kind of thing. It's, "Do you understand what's creating it? Do you understand the systems that you're involved with? Can you work with those to help them become healthier? How do you create a place for you in ministry that's a safe…not easy, but at least a healthy place?" I think there's a need at denominational levels to help people manage the increasing complexity of ministry, far more than it is now. And probably be more intentional to build those kinds of group contexts where that can happen, because they happen, to my mind, infrequently and almost anecdotally, instead of intentionally, purposefully, prayerfully, connected with a bigger strategy: We're going to help you do ministry in a more powerful, effective, spiritually impacting way. I think every denomination needs to figure out how to do that through their whole systems.

Declining to use the term "burnout" the pastors were more apt to describe seasons of loneliness or even a "crisis of confidence" largely due to less experience in ministry. Rick expressed strong feelings about the need for denominational support through these various forms of ministry stress.

The challenges that each of the interview subjects have faced, regarding job and calling, staff and member conflict, the burdens of counseling, and feelings of loneliness have driven one of the nine out of ministry (Rick). Sometimes elder boards or wives came alongside to encourage and support. Overall, they have all ministered long-term in spite of these challenges.[265]

Refreshment in Ministry

Jesus chided the church in Ephesus because they had "forsaken their first love."[266] Pastors need to find ways to refresh that love for Christ, His gospel, and the people we serve in Christ's name. A few of the interviewees admitted that they don't do a very good job of staying refreshed. Indeed, Dan admitted, "I don't think I've done very well at that, to be perfectly honest." However, each of them has had at least some unique way of finding refreshment in ministry. The interviews found themes of Sabbatical, Supportive and Accountable Relationships, Personal Retreats, Life-long Learning, Hobbies and Recreation, and Spiritual Formation Practices.

Sabbatical

There is no universal definition of a "sabbatical," but several of the interviewees have taken sabbaticals from active ministry and would commend them as a good practice

[265] See table in section on **Introduction to Study Participants and Personal Background.**
[266] Revelation 2:4.

for self-care. Multiple views on pastoral sabbaticals were given with no consensus. Bob was guided in his sabbatical by a professional. He remembered:

> [The church elders] wanted me to take a sabbatical, which was wonderful…took three and a half months on a sabbatical, and went to see a person who kind of helps pastors or ministry workers with burnout. And he basically said there are four things that you need: You need renewal for your mind, rest for your body, relaxation for your soul, and refreshment for your spirit…

However, some of the interviewees had different approaches toward sabbaticals. Chris asserted:

> I think it's more important to find a rhythm of life that's healthy than to look for vacations and sabbaticals and even my day off as kind of coming to the rescue, if I don't get it I'm going to crash and burn…we preach to our staff, if you think about the pace you're living and working right now and imagine yourself doing that the next twenty years, if that seems good to you, you're probably healthy. If it seems unsustainable, you probably have a problem.

Dan, on the other hand, said that, "Our particular line of church, our DNA-type church, the idea of a sabbatical is very foreign. We don't do that."

Robert was blessed with a period of sabbatical as his daughter's death loomed. His elders saw that a "period of trial was coming" and gave him a sabbatical period where he "kept office hours only if I chose to" and "spent the time reading and praying and thinking clearly." Though the forms—and words used to describe it—vary, five of the nine reported taking a season of sabbatical.

Supportive and Accountable Relationships

Some of the interviewees find their primary support through the Lincoln group, and some find their primary support in other relationships, but all appreciate the need for personal support as a key component of refreshment in ministry. Chris said, "[I'm kept fresh in ministry through] accountable relationships. I have a guy I've met with for

probably 12 to 13 years that I could dump any load with, and he with me." Rick also would meet with "Really good friends in ministry."

For some, like Harris, the fellowship has been from the members of his own congregation:

> I've been okay to forge friendships with people in my church that I just have a natural affinity for. And so I watch football and I get together and I try to hang out with those men that I feel cared for and ministered by. And so I think those relationships have been a big thing.

The members of the Lincoln Group sometimes seek each other out individually and report this as a source of refreshment. The personal meetings are supported through the group meetings. Robert affirmed, "[I find support through] coffee appointments with likeminded brothers, just to talk ministry… I don't think that the other aspects of refreshment would have the impact they do without the regular connection with these guys [the Lincoln group]." Some find this same kind of refreshment through supportive and accountable friendships with other ministry friends or members of their church.

Personal Retreats

Some of the interviewees noted that retreats were an important part of refreshment in ministry. They mentioned several types, including prayer retreats, planning retreats, and personal retreats. Bob takes personal retreats twice a year "for my own personal mini-sabbatical. And what I mean by that, it's usually about a three-day trip. I have a friend who has a cabin up in Clarks Nebraska that will loan me a cabin. And I go up there with my groceries and sleeping bag, and talk to God, but also try to listen to God." Jim affirmed that "Personal retreat has become almost a necessity. The thing that I like about the personal retreat is, for a couple of days I don't really think a lot about the immediate issues that are going on in the church. And those are the things that keep me from

wanting to go, because I think I can't afford to leave. But the minute I take off for a couple of days, all of a sudden I rise above the fog and can see the big picture."

Keith, Ted, Rick, Robert, and Jim have been part of a 48 hour prayer summit that has provided a personal retreat annually.[267] Personal retreats function like mini-sabbaticals helping pastors to listen to God and see their life and ministry in a fresh way.

Life-Long Learning

Annual conferences, seminars or learning opportunities are important to several of the interviewees. Though they find it in a variety of places, life-long learning is a significant part of their ministry refreshment. Bob revealed, "I get rejuvenated by reading. I get rejuvenated by certain conferences that I've been able to go to...I look forward to them." Ted and Dan noted that they try to participate regularly in continuing education opportunities or conferences. Robert said:

> My first love for ministry refreshment is visiting other churches and sitting under the ministry of men that I know and respect...[also through] pastors' conferences that aren't characterized by breakout seminars, but more just sitting under the powerful preaching of the word, those environments where worship is ramped up to a new level, and as I affectionately say, the guys just come and shoot their silver bullet, you just get to receive the word from somebody who's really honed his ability to do it.

Jim's staff participates in lifelong learning as a group. He explained:

> Every August, [church staff] go to the leadership summit that Willow puts on. And so that's just a shot in the arm, because you're exposed to not just Christian church leaders, but business-minded people who are interested in people development, and I'm just exposed to fresh thinking.

The Lincoln group pastors use a variety of means to keep themselves fresh and practice life-long learning, including conferences, seminars, and four of the nine have completed Doctor of Ministry degrees.[268]

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[267] This is called the "Lincoln Leaders' Prayer Summit" and has met twice a year for the past four years. Six of the nine members of the study group have attended at least one of the prayer summits.

Hobbies and Recreation

Chris specifically engages in cognitive hobbies to create a break from church-related issues. He elucidated:

> I'm a big hobby guy...I can't go home and just sit and watch TV or something, because my mind keeps processing. And so what I learned about myself is I have to give myself an alternative to think about. So my hobbies are really things that...have a cognitive element to them. It might be blacksmithing, it might be welding, it might be woodworking, it might be fishing, it might be horse training. All of those have a cognitive element to them...So I find lots of times in my down time, that's what I'm thinking about. At night, if I can't sleep because ministry stuff is on my brain, I back up and rethink how to forge a new tool or how to correct something with the horse. I go a different direction, because I can't just say, "I've got to stop thinking about this."...for me personally, my mind just won't shut down that way. So I think...about how to train this in the horse, and before you know it, I'm asleep.

Jim relies on exercise and time spent outdoors. He said:

> Exercise is good, and getting outside. Nature speaks to me and breathes life into me like no other things, so that's a good thing. And if I can hang with a trusted friend, that's always good...if it's not a parishioner...it's somebody outside the circle that just likes to go out and exercise, ride bikes, or go hit golf balls or something, that's a good thing.

An ongoing joke in the group is Harris' interest in cigars. For most of the group, the idea of cigar smoking as a hobby was unusual at first, but not any more. The friendships have allowed group members to discuss issues of Christian liberty and actually joke about the different convictions, rather than being divided over them.

One of the founding members (Alex) experienced a season of burnout that led to his resignation. When several members of the Lincoln group went to his home to pray with him, one asked what his hobbies were. Alex paused and said he really didn't have any hobbies because his life was focused on the church. This exchange (on hobbies) was a topic of discussion at subsequent luncheons.

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[268] See table, page 69 of this dissertation.

Spiritual Formation Practices

The literature on clergy self-care highlights the need for pastor to pay attention to their own spiritual formation.[269] Sadly, scripture reading (apart from lesson or sermon planning), prayer, and devotional reading can be neglected by those who teach these principles to others. Ted noted that it is easy to take for granted the most basic Christian disciplines while serving as a pastor. He said that his personal devotional life has played an important role in preventing burnout:

> For the last several years, I've been able to have what I would consider a really consistent quiet time. You know, I say that and it sounds prideful, and I don't mean for it to sound prideful at all...in fact, if anything, I'm kind of embarrassed that I'm fifty-one years old, and it wasn't until I was probably forty-four or forty-five years old that I began to have a consistent quiet time. But that probably helped me as much as anything else.

Chris agreed:

> [I find refreshment in] my study and preaching time part of my ministry. It's about twenty-five percent of what I do, but it is my best twenty-five percent. So I do have times each day that's blocked out just for that. And I've found if I maintain those, those are in many ways my spiritual discipline. I have quiet, I have solitude, I have study, I have prayer.

When practiced, spiritual formation disciplines can help a pastor remain fresh in his own walk with Christ and deepen his teaching. Spiritual health was one of the three topics covered (out of eight) by each of the authors writing explicitly on clergy self-care.[270] Spiritual formation is often taken for granted, even by seasoned pastors, but plays a crucial role in remaining fresh in ministry.

A "Good" or a "Bad" Luncheon

As each interview wound down, I asked each member, "As you leave a luncheon, what is the difference between a "good" meeting and a "bad" meeting?" The responses

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[269] See Appendix C.
[270] See Appendix C.

repeated many of the themes already discussed in this chapter. Jim said, "If we didn't talk about what individuals are feeling or...if we didn't talk about celebrations or frustrations personally, then that's a meeting I could probably do without...But if we've got guys talking about the nuts and bolts of struggles and celebrations (smiles and nods)." Dan agreed that "[Good meetings] tend to be those meetings that...where there's a little bit more honesty, or personal honesty, I want to say it that way, or personal transparency—that's the word I want—personal transparency being displayed—and I stress the word *personal* there—as opposed to just the chitchat."

Chris highlighted the personal support of the group:

> Sometimes you go away really burdened for your brothers who are going through some really tough stuff, but you still have a sense, this was good today, we needed each other today. So when it's more informal, relationally driven, you have a sense that it was a place where we could really encourage one another because there was that sense of, we were really brothers today, fellow soldiers, to me, that's good.

Ted said that after a good meeting as he's driving away he knows internally that:

> 'Yeah, I really needed to do this, this was a good investment of my time.' I know that other people are going through hard things. I also get to hear the exciting things that are going on in the city and know that we're a part of that, and it's pretty great.

The most common word in describing a bad luncheon was "agenda." They each described their ministries as full of meetings and information, and those are not the things that draw them to the Lincoln group. Jim said, "[If the luncheon is] just agenda driven, that we've got some project that we're working on, or somebody is just talking generally about sermon prep or some conference they went to, that can tend to bog me down. Robert agreed that "the ones I'm disappointed in usually got off on a cooperative agenda thing of some kind. Somebody has got something they want us all to sign up for." Ted

said, "It doesn't happen very often, but occasionally the agenda may get—whether it's intentional or not—get hijacked. When it's less relational and more something else, then I would say I would feel less inclined to think that it was a good meeting."

Chris summarized the feelings of several members with a word picture:

> Bad meeting probably when something happened where it became much more of an agenda-driven, administrative type of a meeting… When it was just another meeting with an agenda and some details, I come away feeling like I kind of missed what I…went on a date with my wife, but you know, we just picked out carpet and went home. That's kind of what it felt like.

For Harris a bad meeting is when the group talks "about the theoretical concepts about church growth." For Dan, a charismatic pastor on the opposite side of town from the majority of the other churches, when discussions drift to people who would never "darken the door" of his congregation or issues unique to the other side of town the meetings "are not as productive." Rick said that bad meetings are "Impersonal, kind of generic discussion. Floating conversation, without much direction or much…or at least the content I didn't connect with. I kind of walk away going, 'Yeah, it's good to see the guys, but that was about a B.'" Bob agreed that every meeting won't be a "home run" but that in the end he would still come because "I still need this group."

Generally, good meetings—where the participant feels like their time was well invested—are meetings where the relationships take precedence. These are the meetings where participants share personal stories, wins, losses, struggles, and successes. The bad meetings—where the participant feels like their time was not well invested—are meetings where agendas took over the relationships. Personal stories always win over theoretical concepts.

The Role of the Group in My Life and Ministry

At the end of each interview, the pastor was asked to characterize the role of the Lincoln group in his personal life and ministry. Most of the comments were a repetition of the themes of the topics already covered. At the very end, each interviewee was asked, "Is there anything else you would like to add?" Three comments were representative of the tone of the interviews and summarize the spirit of the group. Jim stated:

> I love the group. I...and I need the group...there are times that when I walk out...there's phone calls and e-mails and stuff, and there's times that it's hard to go to that meeting. But it's like that retreat. I know I need to go, but there's such a pull for the nuts and bolts of things. And so once I get in the car and I'm headed there, I'm glad I'm there.

Chris also noted:

> I think we have been very protective of our group, and I think that's one of the reasons it's worked. I think if people feel like they need to let everybody in, it loses what makes it work. And there are chemistry issues, where sometimes it just may not work. It's like buying a horse that you don't get along with. You might as well sell it and get a different one instead of fighting the thing for the next ten years. And I think we all have to be able to admit that. You know, our encouragement to other pastors in town is not to exclude them, but to encourage them to do the same thing, to form their groups. It would be really a great thing if there were ten of these groups all over town, maybe once a year they all get together. But to my knowledge, there's still just the one, really, at least that meets in the way that we do.

Dan reflected that the Lincoln group "is not going to have me track down a road that would lead to my destruction, but...they're after my success and this church's success, as well as their own. That's what actually, down deep, keeps me coming back." A few of the participants cited the satisfaction they have from some cooperative efforts among the churches that have flowed from the strong relationships of the senior pastors.

Summary of Data Collected

After receiving the results of the mailed survey, I conducted personal interviews with eight senior pastors who meet for a monthly luncheon (the Lincoln group). The nine pastors are all senior pastors of evangelical churches ranging in age from mid-thirties to mid-fifties with ministry experience ranging from nine years to over thirty years. While all are evangelical, two are charismatic and two are reformed.

A common belief in core evangelical doctrines provides a foundation to the group's unity. Group members mentioned specifically the deity of Christ, the substitutionary atonement of Christ, and the inerrancy of Scripture. Each member of the Lincoln group is a senior pastor, an evangelical, who is serving in Lincoln. It was noted that there is an intangible of personality and ministry outlook that makes the group function effectively.

When asked about the keys to the longevity of the Lincoln group three general themes emerged: 1) Nurtured friendship, 2) Willingness to share struggles, feelings and be transparent, and 3) Safety in communication.

The Lincoln group members reported seasons of burnout or loneliness related to 1) Job and calling, 2) Staff and member conflict, 3) Burdens of counseling. One interviewee declined using the words 'burnout' or 'loneliness' but described experiencing an occasional "crisis of confidence".

When asked about sources of refreshment in ministry the Lincoln group members included: 1) Sabbatical (though some said sabbaticals are not part of their tradition), 2) Supportive and accountable relationships, 3) Personal retreats, 4) Life-long learning, 5) Hobbies and recreation, and 6) Spiritual formation practices.

A particularly good luncheon was defined in most of the interviews by a focus on relationships and personal transparency. The most common word describing a bad luncheon was "agenda". The group members described their ministries as full of meetings. Anything that draws the luncheon away from the focus on relationships and personal transparency was viewed negatively.

Interviewees noted that it is often hard to attend but that meetings are important to them personally and worthwhile. One pastor noted that the group has been protective of itself, but hopeful that other pastors would start similar groups. The group has joined together on several cooperative efforts that impact the city of Lincoln. In the next chapter the data reflected here will be discussed in the light of the literature and practice implications.

CHAPTER FIVE- DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to explore how evangelical clergy have formed and sustained safe, trustworthy friendships. Though a wide variety of questions were used, these were the essential research questions that I answered were:

1. How are mutually supportive friendships among evangelical clergy formed?
2. How are mutually supportive friendships among evangelical clergy maintained?
3. What prevents pastors from being involved in mutually supportive friendships?

In order to answer these questions, I identified the variables that contribute to or detract significantly from mutually supportive, safe, trustworthy friendships among evangelical clergy. My primary study group included nine pastors who meet monthly in Lincoln, Nebraska (identified in the introduction). This group was named the Lincoln group. A secondary source of information was a mailed survey of all clergy in Lincoln, Nebraska which had a fifty-two percent response rate.

This study has suggested that several factors contribute to and detract from mutually supportive, safe, trustworthy friendships among evangelical clergy. Positive contributors to mutually supportive friendships include: core unity of belief; similarity of pastoral calling; nurtured friendship; a willingness to share struggles, feelings, and be transparent; safety in communication. Factors leading toward burnout included: questions about job and calling; staff and member conflict; the burdens of counseling; and

loneliness. The study group said that sources of refreshment in ministry included: Sabbaticals; supportive and accountable relationships; personal retreats; life-long learning; hobbies and recreation; and spiritual formation practices.

Discussion of Initial Survey

The survey of all clergy in Lincoln revealed several trends. First, the vast majority of respondents (eighty-three percent) have no theological convictions that prohibit them from meeting with other pastors. This super-majority far exceeds any single self-descriptor (i.e. "Evangelical" sixty percent, "Conservative" fifty-two percent, "Mainline" thirty-five percent, "Liberal" twenty-three percent).

In addition, of the seventeen percent who cited theological convictions that prohibited them from meeting with other pastors, most were evangelicals (eighty-seven percent) who will not meet with clergy they view as unorthodox, liberal, or non-evangelical. The remaining clergy with convictions against meeting together were non-evangelicals who feel judged by those they label "fundamentalist." Sixty-five percent of the respondents said they "meet regularly with other pastors outside of [their] own congregation." Of those who reported meeting regularly with other pastors outside their own congregation, ninety-one percent are currently part of a small group (i.e. three to twelve members). The vast majority of clergy who were driven by theological convictions to meet with other pastors were motivated by the Biblical call to unity in Christ.

What stands out in the initial survey is that the vast majority (eighty-three percent) are willing to meet with others, primarily out of a sense of obedience to Christ's call to unity. It is also noteworthy that nearly two-thirds (sixty-five percent) already meet

with clergy outside their congregation in a small group format. The literature speaks of loneliness as a problem for clergy and finding healthy relationships as a primary solution.[271] In the survey group, the majority of respondents believe and practice principles of Biblical unity and small group support.

However, practicing this unity is prevented in some conservatives because of a suspicion that liberals are not orthodox in their belief. Practicing this unity is prevented in some liberals because of a feeling that they have already been judged as non-Christian. According to the survey, the liberals' perceptions are correct. They often have been judged. This will be a difficult challenge to overcome. From the perspective of the conservatives, their assumptions (about other pastors being unorthodox) have prevented them from taking the time to discern the truth.

Discussion of Interviews

The primary source of data collected and analyzed came from personal interviews from the Lincoln group of nine pastors who have met for a monthly luncheon for the past thirteen years. This research has identified six key elements that help evangelical clergy to form and sustain safe, trustworthy friendships: Size of group, 'Nurturing' of relationships, Baseline of common belief, Commonality of job description, Chemistry, and Coordination.

Size of Group

Both in the literature and in the study group interviews, the practical significance of the size of the group surfaced.

Chris spoke the most openly of the 'protection' and size of the group. His summary of our approach was not conscious, which made it even more critically

[271] See pages 43-45 of this dissertation.

important. He mused, "I think we have been very protective of our group, and I think that's one of the reasons it's worked. I think if people feel like they need to let everybody in, it loses what makes it work."

After a review of the literature and my experiences in Lincoln, I believe the single strongest controllable factor in creating mutually supportive friendships is the size of the group. Dan Williams says that for a nurture group, sometimes called a support group, you should "take the amount of time the group is able to meet and divide by 15 minutes."[272] This is supported by Arrow, McGrath, and Berdahl as they note that "Motivation losses tend to increase as group size increases." They believe possible reasons for these problems "include fewer opportunities to participate productively, a sense that one's contributions are not critical or identifiable, and greater depersonalization."[273]

The Lincoln group stumbled somewhat accidentally into what Williams and Arrow describe. For the first few years, there were six or seven pastors in the group. We would meet at 11:30 in the morning at a public restaurant, and we usually left at about 1:00 in the afternoon. At a typical luncheon, there would be five or six members present, with one or two unable to make it. With this group, if one divides the ninety minutes of the lunch into the number of members present, that leaves the fifteen minutes per person that are necessary for a successful nurture or support group. Everyone who comes is heard. It has personal value.

As the Lincoln group grew to nine members, one of two things would invariably happen at meetings. In the first case, two or three people would be unable to make it, and the group would be small enough to fit the nurture time frame. The other scenario would

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[272] Williams, 53.
[273] Arrow, McGrath, and Berdahl, 75.

be that everyone showed up, and for most of the luncheon, two sets of conversations took place. In this case, everyone still had the chance to be heard.

Over the years in this group, there were many attempts to gather pastors together to support one another and demonstrate unity in the gospel, but none of them lasted very long. The most recent effort, which was described by Chris, was something several pastors put a fair amount of energy into. However, Chris revealed some truth when he described it as "a ministerial group in town at that time that, in my opinion, was pretty much a gathering of the disgruntled, disenfranchised, struggling pastors." It did not last.

The primary reason these attempts failed is that the group was too large to provide nurture or support. If you listen to the words of the Lincoln group, most of the guys express struggles, fears, and ministry concerns. In fact, that is part of what draws the men to the group! These groups didn't fail because the pastors were struggling. One of the reasons they failed was because they could not provide nurture or support.

The data strongly suggests that a small group will not become personally supportive unless it has enough time for members to share personally. Such sharing requires time and the group must be small enough to accommodate the necessary time. Many small groups attempting to provide personal support may be doomed before they start because they have not allotted enough time for their meetings. This factor can only be controlled by either setting aside long meeting times or by limiting the size of the group. Busy pastors don't have long periods of time for support groups so the only recourse will be to limit group size.

'Nurturing' of Relationships

The most dominant theme in the interviews of the Lincoln group was easily the draw of relationships over agendas. It is the personal relationships that bring the members back each month. Sometimes the relationships fuel cooperative efforts outside of the monthly luncheons. But the relationships fuel the agendas, the agendas do not fuel the relationships.

As I was reading the transcripts and reflecting on this strong theme I watched an episode of "History Detectives" on the Public Broadcasting System (PBS).[274] The detectives were shown a ten shilling note that had a date of July 25, 1942 and thirty signatures, including those of Winston Churchill, Dwight Eisenhower, George Patton, and Franklin Roosevelt, as well as the words "Short Snorter"[275] as an important clue. The detectives went on to verify the note, the signatures, and the implied significance of the note.

The history detective traced the date a meeting in London to discuss a tighter partnership between the United States and Great Britain in the fight against Nazi Germany. This meeting, and at least one more in North Africa six months later, was attended by Harry L. Hopkins. Hopkins was Roosevelt's emissary to the world and specialized in getting people together and forming relationships. At least a portion of

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[274] All the following information and quotations regarding the Short Snorter and Harry L. Hopkins and quotations from "Time" magazine come from an episode transcript on the History Detective website, Season 5, Episode 2: http://www.pbs.org/opb/historydetectives/investigations/502_shortsnorter.html

[275] Tukufu Zuberi discovered a drinking game called "Short Snorter" that was played by servicemen during World War II. At a pub, the servicemen would each sign the others' currency, drink a "Short Snort" (shot glass) of whiskey, and collect as many signatures as they could before meeting again (hoping they would meet again safely). The man who collected the fewer signatures had to buy the other man their next short snort.

their time was spent playing a serviceman's drinking game, forging a level of trust among the potential allies.

The history detective, Tukufu Zuberi, interprets the historical significance of Harry Hopkins and the Short Snorter game. He believes that the ten shilling note is:

> A unique record of two of the turning points of the Second World War. America's decision on how to join the fight and the Allies' decision on how to end it. But it was more than this. It was an intimate record of friendship and trust. Of a special relationship between Britain and the United States. It was this relationship which would ultimately help defeat Hitler...In our ten shilling note, we can see the skillful diplomatic hand of Harry Hopkins, bringing powerful men together for a common purpose. It wasn't just the agreement made, but it also meant the conversations, the personal relationships were as important as the official discussions taking place.

The most important men in the world found that personal relationships were an indispensable ingredient to international cooperation, planning, and military victory. Harry Hopkins worked behind the scenes to foster these relationships. Harry Hopkins and the Short Snorter is a historical snapshot of what the current literature and my interviews demonstrate: there is tremendous power in mutually supportive friendships, but that potential must be fostered through time, encouragement, acceptance, and even playfulness.

In the literature J. Marcellus Kik observes that "no segment within the visible church has a greater reputation for disunity than the evangelicals."[276] In spite of the natural pull away from unity that Kik says typifies evangelicals, it is in the best interest of the pastor to pursue healthy relationships. Heifetz and Linsky say the maintenance of healthy relationships is essential to "staying alive" as a leader.[277] Carroll says that "friendships with parishioners and non-parishioners as well as with fellow clergy are

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[276] Kik, 132.
[277] Heifetz and Linsky, 100.

essential for a pastor's mental and spiritual well being."[278] Brain ties this need for healthy relationships into Jesus' model of sending out the seventy-two in pairs encourages team ministries, including "pastors who meet regularly with other pastors"[279] as an important principle of self-care and resulting longevity in ministry. Among the small group roles noted by Arnold and Rothwell we see a series of roles whose primary purpose is the nurture of healthy relationships, such as *friend, group affirmer, group sensitizer, servant, supporter-encourager,* or *harmonizer-tension reliever.*[280]

The size of the group is closely connected to the second (somewhat controllable) factor in creating mutually supportive friendships. By keeping the size of the Lincoln group within the parameters of a small group—three to twelve members—the group could spend enough time together monthly to provide nurture and support. It is important to note that the word "nurture" is not usually associated with men's groups. It is a maternal term. But it seems like the best way to describe the active care that a true brotherhood can provide and the work of maintaining a meaningful relationship. In Harris's words: "When these individual guys have gone through some pretty tough personal times...not necessarily the entire group, but individual men in that group have really been pastors to them...a number of those guys have really pastored one another." The care for one another far exceeded a ninety minute luncheon. Some of this is reflected in chapter four. Chris worked to buy a Hot Tub to support Keith's wife's health. Jim and Keith have spent time discussing our wives' struggles with auto-immune diseases. Jim counseled with Chris regarding a property dispute on their church campus with another

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[278] Carroll, 178.
[279] Brain, 162.
[280] Cited by Arnold, Rothwell, and summarized in two tables on page 16-17 of this dissertation.

Christian organization. Robert, Bob, Harris, Chris and Keith attended a pastor's conference in Minneapolis, spending sixteen hours in a van together.

Some of this care comes from my personal experiences with the group (as a participant-observer). Chris preached at the funeral of Robert's daughter. Jim and Bob have shared the struggle of losing church members and fielding congregational criticism. Keith received support and counsel in the middle of a staff conflict and a deep family conflict. Ted, Rick and Keith have helped lead the Lincoln Leaders' Prayer Summit and had opportunities to retreat together. Ted and Keith even smoked cigars together at the retreat, with many fond references to Harris. Robert and Jim have joined subsequent Prayer Summits and shared personal stories of loss with the entire group of twenty-five.

We have shared a barbeque and fellowship time with our wives at Keith's home and at Chris's home. Ted and Chris both offered the use of their facilities for Sunday services to Keith after his church building burned down. They met for morning worship services at Ted's building for three months. There was never any request for reimbursement for facility usage.[281] Several members of the group went to Alex's (group co-founder) home to pray with him as he suffered—at that point—an unknown ailment. Bob prayed with Chris in the hospital before heart surgery. All of the group members are busy senior pastors, so there isn't daily or even weekly contact, but there is meaningful nurture of the relationships that goes outside the bounds of the monthly luncheon.

The literature speaks of the importance of relationships and the study group confirms that investing in relationships, especially with other clergy, promotes self-care and longevity. In the case of the Lincoln group it also promotes a healthier small group.

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[281] As participant-observer, I believe any of the churches would have let Keith use their facilities, but Ted and Chris had the potential to allow his church to worship on Sunday mornings due to their building layout and Sunday morning usage.

Even for busy pastors, in order for friendships to remain healthy there must be purposeful time spent nurturing the relationship.

Baseline of Common Belief

Fey describes the 'Evangelical fear' that all efforts to unify the Church are sadly relativistic.[282] Kik agrees that evangelicals have a "reputation for disunity"[283] and a particular suspicion of organizational unity.[284] However, Kik[285] and Lloyd-Jones[286] remind us that spiritual unity is very Biblical. The very term 'evangelical' speaks of a baseline of particular Christian belief.

The small group literature says that acceptance, honesty, and trust are components of an effective small group.[287] Disunity on crucial issues of faith and truth will always be a barrier to small group health. This was a primary problem in the initial written survey group.

In Chris's words, Keith's church would have "been way out of bounds" for fellowship because it was reformed and Presbyterian (mostly because they baptize babies). This current acceptance, in Keith's case, is highly unusual and likely the result of his long-term residence in Lincoln. As a life-long Lincolnite (except for seminary) and a credentialed evangelical (he worked part-time for Youth for Christ), Keith was invited into the group in spite of denominational suspicion. The pastor who invited him was a charismatic pastor, and that pastor was the first member to break the ice of

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[282] Fey, 19.
[283] Kik, 132.
[284] Ibid., 53.
[285] Ibid., 46.
[286] Lloyd-Jones, 71.
[287] See summary table in Appendix D.

denominational suspicion in the Lincoln group. His church too would have been "out of bounds."

Pastors may be willing to meet with those whose beliefs are unknown. This was suggested in the initial written survey. But unless there is a common baseline of belief, the relationship will not become a mutually supportive friendship. The written survey suggested that a set of beliefs is sometimes assumed and imputed to other pastors according to their denominational label. It was difficult for my church to be recognized as a safe evangelical church until the personal relationships gave us an opportunity to explore our core of uniting theology or as Kik would call it, our spiritual unity.[288]

After about six years of meeting together, the Lincoln took a road trip to a John Piper conference for pastors. On the way back, someone finally asked Keith, "Why *do* you baptize infants?" Several of them were obviously curious, but they never asked until we had sixteen hours in a van together. The common baseline of belief provides just that, a baseline from which to start. More depth of belief—or conversations about deeper beliefs—will require more time.

Those efforts to form mutually supportive pastoral friendships in Lincoln that have worked have been either so grounded in a personal relationship that a statement of faith has not been needed, or they have formulated a simple enough statement of faith that only the truly unorthodox would be offended (i.e. Lincoln Leaders' Prayer Summit[289]).

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[288] Kik, 46.

[289] This is referenced on page 99 of this dissertation. The LLPS statement of faith has five bullet points: 1) God is three-in-one: Father, Son the Lord Jesus, and the Holy Spirit, 2) Jesus died and rose again for the forgiveness of sins, 3) Forgiveness for sins is by grace, through faith in Jesus, 4) The Bible is 100% true, 5) We agree with the historic teachings of the Church as expressed in the *Apostles' Creed* and the *Nicene Creed.*

The nurturing of relationships can help overcome differences, but unless there is a baseline of common belief the relationships may never get started.

Commonality of Job Description

Similarity of job description was also a theme in the study group. In the literature this theme is mostly absent. Brain and Carroll note the importance of having healthy relationships with other clergy, but there is a striking absence in the literature of the role of commonality of job description. The role of the senior pastor (all study group interviewees are senior pastors) is quite different from that of an associate or assistant pastor.

The study group indicated that similarity of pastoral calling was significant in the initial formation of the Lincoln group. Rick said there was more commonality between himself and the men in the Lincoln group "than most of the guys in my denomination."[290] He attributed some of it to church size. Another one of the pastors interviewed admitted, "I frankly have way more in common with that group of pastors [the Lincoln group] than with the pastors of our own fellowship." While there are theological differences between the members of the Lincoln group, the unique challenges that senior pastors face can form a stronger bond than theological unity. It is common for churches to cluster according to size and unique challenges.

One member of the Lincoln group is part of a "K Club" for churches in their denomination of one thousand members or more. The range of church sizes represented in the Lincoln group is much broader than that, ranging from about three hundred to over five thousand members, but the commonality of job description is still present. Each

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[290] Pages 84-85 of this dissertation.

member is the lead pastor, the lead preacher, the "face" of the congregation to the community, the leading voice on their leadership body, and the primary vision-caster for their congregation. Each also plays an administrative role in leading a staff. This is not the calling of an assistant pastor.

While all pastors have a similar calling and similar job description, a greater commonality of job description was a benefit to the study group.[291] The role job description plays in promoting or inhibiting openness, transparency and unity in a small group could be an area of further study.

Connection

Commonality of job description and a baseline of common belief can't fully account for how people will work together in a group.

People don't keep meeting in a group with others if they do not feel the presence of a certain connection with the other participants. Without personal connection, a task-oriented group or a study-group could probably function effectively, but a support group will not function unless there is a personality connection. Chris put it this way:

> I'm an introvert. I'm not a real social kind of a guy. But I genuinely love these guys, I love the time together, I consider them friends. If I meet somebody in town, I'm always very happy to identify with them and offer my support for them. So it's just a group of guys I genuinely enjoy being with.

This was echoed in many of the interviews. Jim said that after mentioning the other pastors in a sermon or service, congregation members approach him and say, "We think that's cool that you guys actually like each other and work with each other." He summarized it, saying, "I love the group...and I need the group."

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[291] Pages 84-85 of this dissertation.

While coming from a wide variety of denominations, Rick said, "The [group members] tend to be pretty theologically close." How can charismatics, evangelicals, and reformed-Presbyterians be "theologically close"? The theological closeness relates to the core of the gospel that Lloyd-Jones and Kik speak about.[293] It is a spiritual unity that distinguishes essentials from non-essentials. But the connection is also personal, being happy to identify with each other, liking each other, supporting each other.

Coordination (Structure)

Groups need at least a simple form of structure in order to function. Wuthnow reminds us that even the basics of where and when to meet provide a structure where relationships can be developed.[294] This is a smaller theme in the literature, but is an essential element in small group life.

Keith is in no way the "leader" of the Lincoln group, but he has informally served as a coordinator. Though never elected or chosen, he evolved as the one who sends e-mail reminders of meetings and usually helps decide where and when to meet next. This informal role gives Keith opportunities to interact with each of the members on a personal level. Due to his informal role as coordinator, Ted wondered if Keith actually started the group.[295]

At the end of each interview the last question I asked was, "Is there anything else you'd like to add?" In response, Robert said:

> Bottom line—this can't get edited out—this fellowship would not exist and continue if it weren't for you.

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[293] Pages 11-15 of this dissertation.
[294] Wuthnow, 158-159.
[295] Keith did not start the group (see Initial Formation, pages 80-85 of this dissertation).

Though Robert's kindness overstates the case (as it relates to me), someone must play the role of coordinator if the group is going to function.

Wuthnow refers to the need for structure as the "small-groups paradox."[296] People are drawn to the group because of the informal benefit of relationships, but relationships can't form without a basic formal structure. In the case of the Lincoln group, the structure is minimal (i.e. meet monthly, pick a date, pick a place) and the coordinating is minimal (send an e-mail reminder, encourage RSVPs to the host, and make sure we pick the next date and place).

The interviews revealed several factors affecting the formation and maintenance of the study group, including size of group, 'nurturing of relationships', a baseline of common belief, commonality of job description, personal connection, and coordination.

Discussion of Keys to Self-Care and Longevity

The factors that lead to mutually supportive friendships overlap significantly with the five themes of self-care and longevity in ministry that emerged from the Lincoln group: biblical rest, healthy spiritual life, supportive friendships, lifelong learning, and hobbies and recreation. A survey of the literature (see Appendix C) would also include biblical goals and self-identity, boundaries, physical health, and emotional health.[297]

Biblical Rest

Each of the pastors recognized the need for a weekly pattern of work and rest, as well as the occasional need for a more significant break, such as a sabbatical. The two major exceptions were Chris and Dan. Chris felt that it was very important to work at a pace that is sustainable so that the "rescue" of a significant break would not be necessary.

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[296] Wuthnow, 158.

[297] Roy Oswald includes hobbies (routes to detachment) as a component of self-care and I have included it under the category of Emotional Health.

Dan shared that his church tradition would not support a pastoral sabbatical, so it is not really an option for him.

Senior pastors usually carry a heavy burden of leadership, but because they are "senior" pastors, they also have the ability to delegate responsibilities to other staff members. Multiple staff and delegation opens the door to short retreats and a freshened ministry perspective. Jim explained it this way:

> Personal retreat has become almost a necessity. And that, like our meeting, is one of the hardest things to do, because just the demands of schedule. But usually about once a semester I'll take off for two or three days...And I think the thing that I like about the personal retreat is, for a couple of days I don't really think a lot about the immediate issues that are going on in the church. And those are the things that keep me from wanting to go, because I think I can't afford to leave. But the minute I take off for a couple of days, all of a sudden I rise above the fog and can see the big picture.

Jim is describing one of the blessings of being a senior pastor. Of course, any pastor can and should effectively use lay leaders to do the work of ministry like scripture teaches,[298] but this often doesn't happen.

All of the literature reviewed on clergy self-care noted forms of Biblical rest as important. This would include professional sabbaticals, weekly days off, and actively planning retreat time. This was also a theme in the study group. Though some traditions don't support professional sabbaticals, there was a consistent theme of finding Biblical rest as a necessity in ministry and longevity.[299] Pastors need to take Biblical rest seriously, including all the forms noted in the literature (sabbatical, weekly day off, personal retreats), if they are to be effective in their role.

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[298] "It was [Christ] who gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers, [12]*to prepare God's people for works of service*" (Ephesians 4:11-12a).
[299] Pages 97-99 of this dissertation.

Spiritual Formation Practices

Spiritual health was also mentioned by every author on clergy self-care (see Appendix C). However, it was a minor topic in the study group interviews. I think this is because the spiritual formation practices of the pastor are largely assumed and therefore not discussed. Ted felt ashamed when he admitted that he didn't have a quality "quiet time" until his mid-forties.

Some, like Chris, take a holistic approach to spiritual formation and consider their study time the primary source of spiritual nurture. Others, like Ted, have a vision in their mind of what an effective quiet time ought to look like, and they work toward that goal. For the most part, our parishioners don't ask us about our spiritual formation, and rarely do we question each other. In eighteen years as a pastor, I don't remember a single member of my congregation, or another pastor for that matter, asking me, "How's your quiet time with the Lord going?" As participant-observer I have not noticed a spiritual formation inquiry to another member of the group in thirteen years.

Active spiritual formation practices should not be taken for granted and should not be assumed for the pastor. All of the clergy self-care literature reviewed exhorts pastors to take time for spiritual formation practices.

Supportive Friendships

Most of the pastors in the Lincoln group publicly pray for one another in their worship services and speak about the group (and our friendship) from the pulpit. But Dan noted that it can be difficult for pastors to form mutually supportive friendships with members of their own flock:

> You try to have friends in the body. And the couple of times that I've tried that, where you have close friends, it's ended with rather disastrous results. And I've

> sort of sworn off of that. And that's why [the Lincoln group] has become more important.

The members of the Lincoln group meet monthly for lunch, but there are many other contacts between members in between meetings.

After Keith's church's fire (on a Saturday morning), Ted called and asked him about his plans for Sunday's service. He said he'd try to be there. Ted does three services every Sunday morning and another service on Saturday night. He showed up part way through Keith's shell-shocked worship service, and after coming forward for communion, he served Keith communion. It was a sweet moment of friendship for both Keith and Ted.

Recently, Ted shared with the group that his son has gotten his girlfriend pregnant. Ted was thoroughly blessed by the support he received from his elders and from the Lincoln group as we listened. This is a critical function of supportive friendships: listening. We sometimes give advice to one another, but often we just listen.

The interviews are full of examples of the supportive friendships in the study group. The literature reviewed and the study group interviews show that supportive friendships are an essential ingredient to a small group *and* also a valuable ingredient to clergy self-care and longevity.[300] The literature and study group indicate that one of the best things pastors can do for their own care, the longevity of their ministry, and the blessing of a few peers would be to form a small group with other pastors.

Life-Long Learning

Most of the Lincoln group members, as well as the written survey respondents, cited learning opportunities that keep them fresh in ministry. The survey respondents

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[300] See Appendices C and D.

mentioned text study groups, lectionary groups, and book study groups that promoted learning. For the Lincoln group, it was mostly conferences, continuing education, and visiting each other's churches. Several of the Lincoln group members have been part of the Willow Creek Association or have attended conferences there.

While life-long learning was a minor theme (in terms of recorded comments), it is significant to each pastor's intellectual stimulation and emotional health. The group encourages each other to read and to stay current on relevant topics. Robert put is this way:

> I almost always take away a ministry tip or insight I didn't have before the meeting...something will click and I'll go, 'wow, that's a keeper.' And it's either a book to read, or a new approach, or a concept, or just something like, wow, I never thought of that before. And I don't know that I've ever left a meeting without that happening.

Each of the members of the Lincoln group takes advantage of a variety of learning opportunities that help keep their ministries moving forward. Four of the nine hold Doctor of Ministry degrees as evidence of their desire to keep learning.[301]

The literature, the study group interviews and the personal example of the study group participants validates the role of life-long learning as a support to self-care and longevity.

Hobbies and Recreation

Chris emphasized his hobbies and their help in refreshment: "I have to give myself an alternative to think about [to get his mind off work]. So my hobbies are really things that...have a cognitive element to them. It might be blacksmithing, it might be welding, it might be woodworking, it might be fishing, it might be horse training." Each of the members of the Lincoln group seems to have something outside of the ministry

[301] See table on page 68 of this dissertation.

that creates a positive distraction from the pressures they face. Dan is a pilot and goes sailing. Jim exercises. Robert loves to do home remodeling and construction. Harris smokes cigars and rides a motorcycle. Keith has a lot of land and enjoys all kinds of sports and exercise.

When one of the founders of the group, Alex, was stricken with an illness—eventually leading to a transfer of leadership, with Rick taking his place—the doctors could not diagnose his illness. Eventually, they eliminated all medical causes and determined that it was a form of burnout. When several of the Lincoln group members gathered to pray with him, someone asked him if he had any hobbies. Alex sat with a blank stare saying he really couldn't think of any because his life was focused on the church. This interaction became a point of discussion at the monthly luncheons, and the members drew the joint conclusion that without healthy distractions from ministry, we would all follow Alex's path.

Jim shared, "One of my mentors that was just huge for me early on, he told me… 'Jim,' he said, 'for six days out of the week you've got to work realizing people are going to hell, and on the seventh day, let them go to hell.' (Laughter)." Keith shared with the other pastors that he enjoys mowing the grass because when he is finished he can stand back, look at it, and see something that he's completed.

Every pastor lives in a world of uncompleted projects: people, ministries, and Kingdom building. Pastors live in the shadow of 'next Sunday,' and it never fades. Oswald reminds us that hobbies provide psychological and spiritual fulfillment as "routes

to detachment"[302] because they begin and end. Hobbies and recreation provide an opportunity to disconnect from the never ending cycles of pastoral ministry.

Synthesis and Summary of Discussion of Findings

The Lincoln group has unconsciously created an environment where most of the key factors for effective small groups and clergy self-care take place. Most of the factors for effective small groups and clergy self-care found in the literature have corresponding themes from the interviews with the Lincoln group. Upon closer examination, some of the themes didn't appear in the interviews, but are clearly present.

Factors for Effective Small Groups and Clergy Self-Care in the Literature	***Themes of Lincoln Group as Heard in the Personal Interviews***[303]
Community	Size of group; chemistry
Healthy relationships: acceptance, honesty	Nurturing of relationships; supportive friendships; supportive and accountable relationships
Trust; boundaries	Baseline of common beliefs; safety in communication; willingness to share struggles, feelings, and be transparent
Worship	
Mission	Commonality of job description
Structure	Coordinator (schedule)
Commitment	
Openness to new members	
Biblical rest	Sabbatical; Biblical rest; personal retreats
Biblical goals and self-identity	
Lifelong learning	Lifelong learning
Spiritual health	Healthy spiritual life; spiritual formation practices
Physical health	
Emotional health	Hobbies and recreation

[302] Oswald, 187.
[303] Contributions to Mutually Supportive Friendships, Refreshment in Ministry, and Keys to Group Longevity.

Less Significant Factors

Four factors were mentioned in the small group literature or the clergy self-care literature, but played little or no part in the study group data: worship, commitment, physical health, and openness to new members.

Worship

The group members do sometimes visit each others' churches and pray for one another's churches during worship services. We held occasional joint worship services and five of the nine have attended a prayer retreat together, but no one interviewed cited any kind of worship or prayer as a significant factor in the life of the study group.

Commitment

The group in its current form has held together for more than thirteen years. While never making a formal covenant with each other, we have not lost a member unless it involved a job transition. The group practices commitment, having met for over thirteen years, but has never formalized it.

Physical Health

The participant observer noted that group members rarely talk about their own health. Serious health issues were noted in the study group interviews, but mostly as it related to the personal relationship and care, not the practices of health maintenance.

Openness to new members

The group has expanded over the years, from the initial three that started the current version (Alex, Chris, Bob) to the current nine. We have embraced two pastors whose predecessors were part of the group. This openness is countered by a growing awareness that we cannot continue to function the same way if we become a large group.

While most of the members accept this intuitively, Chris was the primary one to point it out in the interviews when he said, "I think we have been very protective of our group, and I think that's one of the reasons it's worked." The principle of "openness to new members" still has limits. This corresponds to what Robert Wuthnow, the author who spoke of openness to new members as a desirable characteristic, wrote about effective principles of "small groups."[304]

The only components in the literature that really play no significant role in the Lincoln group would be biblical goals/self-identity and physical health. Each of the interviewees are in various states of health, but we rarely talk about or support each other in health practices. It could be argued that a biblical understanding of our roles, goals, and identity in Christ are part of the subtext of each meeting, but it did not appear in the interviews.

Overall, the group provides a platform for pastors to be supported in their unique calling through an environment that utilizes the best aspects of small group life and clergy self-care. If more were added to the group, it would teeter out of the "small group range" (three to twelve members) and begin to lose its value because is could not provide personal support. Two themes are extremely consistent in the literature: First, small groups stop being small groups after twelve people.[305] Second, support groups (or any kind of predominantly relational group) need to be on the smaller side. Williams, Arrow, Rothwell, and McBride all say that with larger size comes diminished relational value.[306] People will stop coming.

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[304] Wuthnow, 135, 154, 156-157.
[305] As noted by Arnold, Gorman, McBride, and Williams, and cited on pages 6-8 of this dissertation.
[306] As noted by Williams, Arrow, Rothwell, and McBride, and cited on pages 19-21 of this dissertation.

As I conclude this dissertation, one of the nine interviewees (Rick) is no longer a senior pastor, but it still living in Lincoln and working as a licensed mental health practitioner. His successor has arrived in town, and one of the church's staff members assumed that the connection with the Lincoln group is based on the church identities. As we discussed it, we recognized that there is a "connection" factor which is very significant to the group's functioning. While we welcome this brother into Lincoln, we aren't certain how to proceed. We agreed that the connection with the group should not be based on church identity but on a personal match with the group. Additionally, should we ask Rick to leave? He is not functioning as a senior pastor, but he is now our friend.

Dan Williams said that it was a myth that small groups should not be cliques. They are cliques. Chris pinpointed this when he said, "We kind of joked about [the group] being a pastoral clique, but it kind of was." And Chris also noted the best remedy to the problem of the growing small group:

> Our encouragement to other pastors in town is not to exclude them, but to encourage them to do the same thing, to form their groups. It would be really a great thing if there were ten of these groups all over town, maybe once a year they all get together. But to my knowledge, there's still just the one, really, at least that meets in the way that we do.

The literature says that worship, (formal) commitment, and openness to new members are often important components of a healthy Christian small group. Additionally, physical health is important to self-care. But none of these elements appear to play a significant role in the study group. In fact, the group's practice agrees with Williams that openness in a small group is a "myth."

Recommendations for Further Study

In the course of this study several questions emerged which might be worth further study:

Personal connection (or chemistry) seems a bit intangible, yet it plays a role in creating an effective small group. Is 'connection' predictable? Can it be created, prohibited, orchestrated, or induced?

What is the role of formal structure in a small group? What is the minimal amount of structure necessary in order to provide the platform for informal relationship building? How does being a coordinator (structure provider) of a small group affect that persons experience as a member of that group?

The principles of self-care and longevity appear to have significant overlap with the principles of an effective small group. What is the extent of that overlap? Are there areas of overlap this study has not observed?

What is the role of hobbies and recreation on self-care and longevity in ministry? What kinds of activities provide "routes to detachment"[307] that promote emotional health?

Finally, the Lincoln group members have an unusually long average of years in ministry (254 total years for an average of nearly twenty-six years in ministry). What effect does length of ministry have on the formation of mutually supportive friendships? What are the advantages and disadvantages of a lengthy pastoral tenure?

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[307] Oswald, 187.

Suggestions to Pastors Who Want to Form Mutually Supportive Friendships with Other Clergy

In the study group interviews Chris concluded that it would be best if pastors formed many groups in the city of Lincoln, rather than all trying to come together in one group. The literature on size of group supports Chris's perspective. How can pastors pursue this?

In the initial formation of the group certain individuals took it upon themselves to seek out and personally ask others to be part of a lunch group. They tended to seek people out who were "like-sized, like-missional" where pastors had similar "needs" and "challenges."[308] Groups tend to form around similarities. Who has a similar ministry that you would want to become better acquainted with?

There must also be someone to initiate. If a pastor has the desire to form a mutually supportive friendship with other clergy the written survey indicates there are plenty of pastors who are willing to meet. Finally, someone will eventually need to coordinate the group. If you sense the need and have the desire, perhaps that person is you. Start with pastors who you believe have a common baseline of belief, similarity of calling, and a good potential for connection and *initiate* a group of mutually supportive clergy.

Summary of Key Findings

In the literature, the written survey, and the study group interviews there were several findings. First, appear to be quite open to meeting with other pastors (eighty-three percent in the written survey said they were no convictions preventing them from meeting with other clergy). Second, if evangelical clergy do not want to meet with other

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[308] Robert's words from this dissertation, page 85.

clergy it is likely because the other clergy is viewed as unorthodox. Correspondingly, if liberal clergy do not want to meet with other clergy is could be because they feel their standing as a Christian has been pre-judged. Third, the literature and the experience of the study group indicate that the size of a small group is critical to providing personal support. Groups cannot sustain personal support if they are too large or do not have enough meeting time to support personal interaction. If groups do not sustain personal support they will not survive. As Wuthnow notes, the "fundamental reason for [a small group's] existence is quite often to provide deep, intimate interpersonal support—period."[309] Fourth, small group relationships must be nurtured, which often will mean support and contact outside of the formal group time. Fifth, a baseline of common belief will help overcome denominational barriers, but that 'baseline' can't be established unless somehow individuals break the ice of theological suspicion. This is a great challenge. Sixth, pastors often connect with other pastors who also have a commonality of job description. Seventh, every group must have a minimal amount of coordination (or structure). This is the "small-groups paradox"[310] meaning that structure (formality, which is not a stated value) permits intimacy (informality, which is the environment for small-group support). Eighth, the literature and the study group affirmed Biblical rest, a healthy spiritual life, supportive friendships, lifelong learning and hobbies as valuable tools in self-care and longevity in ministry. And finally, ninth, the hobbies and recreation provide an important 'route to detachment.' As the study group watched one of its members suffer from burnout, the group informally discussed this important ingredient to self-care.

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[309] Wuthnow, 159.
[310] Ibid., 158.

APPENDIX A

Your assistance is requested

I am working on a Doctor of Ministry project that involves Christian clergy in Lincoln. If you would complete the brief questionnaire and return it in the stamped self-addressed envelope it would be extremely helpful to the project. Your answers will be kept confidential.

Thank you, Rev. Stu Kerns
Zion Church, Lincoln, NE

Please circle as many of the following descriptors that apply to you:

Conservative	Liberal	Moderate	Progressive
Dispensational	Reformed	Evangelical	Traditional
Contemporary	Liturgical	Mainline	Ecumenical

Please circle as many of the denominational traditions that you (not your church) are connected to:

Catholic	Lutheran	Methodist	Presbyterian
Reformed	Charismatic	Pentecostal	Baptist
Bible	Mennonite	Assembly of God	Disc. Of Christ
Community	Congregational	Other_____	

Do you meet regularly with other pastors outside of your own congregation? Yes No

If YES, what is the group and how many are involved?

Are there theological convictions that prohibit you from meeting with other pastors? Yes No

If YES, can you briefly summarize these convictions?

If NO, are there theological convictions that drive your desire to meet with other pastors?

Would you be willing to participate in a personal or phone follow up interview? Yes No

If YES, please include the following information

Name_____ Church_____

Best way to contact you: ___ Phone _____

___ E-mail _____

___ Written follow-up questions

APPENDIX B

Synthesis of Principles of Clergy Self-Care from Literature Review

Category	*Clergy Self-Care (Oswald)*	*Going the Distance (Brain)*	*Rest in the Storm (Jones)*	*The Right Road (Halaas)*
Biblical rest	Time out	Sabbath rest	Actively planning retreat time	Sabbatical; Sabbath
Healthy Relationships	Support systems	Partnership; practicing and receiving hospitality		Intimate supportive relationships[311]
Biblical goals & self-identity	Monitoring our ambitions	Realism; 'Identity in Christ'	Redefining success; Acceptance	
Boundaries	Letting-go techniques; getting control of our time; assertiveness training	Trusting God's sovereignty	Saying 'no'; controlling the pace of life	Boundaries
Lifelong learning		Taking time for learning		Lifelong learning
Spiritual Health	Spiritual nurture;	Prayer	Setting aside pray and play time	Spiritual growth
Physical Health	Getting the body moving; monitoring our intake			Healthy habits
Emotional Health	Psychotherapy tune-up; the power of laughter; routes to detachment (hobbies)			

[311] While this is not a "bullet point" in her book, it is discussed throughout and entirely assumed. "Intimate relationships with family and friends are essential for emotional support and honest reflection…Sustaining supportive relationships is critical to good health." (Page 82).

APPENDIX C

Clergy Self-Care Comparison between Literature and Study Group

Clergy Self-Care in Literature	*Clergy Self-Care in Study Group*
Biblical rest	Biblical rest
Healthy relationships	Supportive friendships
Biblical goals and self-identity	
Boundaries	
Lifelong learning	Lifelong learning
Spiritual health	Healthy spiritual life
Physical health	
Emotional health	Hobbies and recreation[312]

[312] Oswald refers to hobbies as "routes to detachment" and they appear to primarily affect emotional health.

APPENDIX D

Comparison of Components of Effective Small Groups in Literature and Contributions to Mutually Supportive Friendships found in Study Group

Summary of Components of Effective Small Groups in Literature	*Study Group: Contributions to Mutually Supportive Friendships*
Community	Size of Group; chemistry
Acceptance	Nurturing of relationships
Honesty	Nurturing of relationships
Trust	Baseline of common beliefs
Worship	
Mission	Commonality of job description
Structure	Coordinator
Commitment	
Openness to new members	

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