

Clergy wellbeing

4Ms of Wellbeing

- i. Our wellbeing **matters** – it matters to God and to those in our care. It has a direct impact on the fruitfulness of our ministry - wellbeing is such a deep & rich subject to reflect upon and goes to the heart of what it means to be human, as God's image bearers
- ii. Our wellbeing is **multi-faceted** – its complex & intricate as the Psalmist says, "*We are fearfully and wonderfully made*"¹; made in the very image of God.
- iii. Our wellbeing is **malleable** (or can be **managed**) – in other words it is responsive and open to change – it's not a static fixed state like "*a beach you go & lie on*" but "*a dynamic dance*"²
- iv. For wellbeing to have real substance, it has to have **meaning**, even during the *darkest night of the soul*, substantial enough to encompass all of life's experiences - a wellbeing which can sustain us in declining health, besetting illness or during crises in our ministry.

Definition

Wellbeing is where an individual "*realizes his or her own potential, can cope with the normal stresses of life, can work productively and fruitfully, and is able to make a contribution to her or his community*" WHO

Research Findings

1. **Experiences of Ministry Survey** conducted by Church of England Ministry Division and Kings College, London

Over the 3 surveys in 2011, 2013 and 2015 about 5000 participants with 300 who have completed all 3

Conclusions:

- ✓ Around 90% of clergy agree that their role is intellectually, spiritually and emotionally demanding
- ✓ Many clergy groups work very long hours
- ✓ Administration and organisation continue to be the activity they spend most time on
- ✓ The vast majority of clergy are both highly engaged in their ministry & do not report substantively high levels of burnout
- ✓ Sacrificial behaviour is positively associated with the measures of clergy engagement in ministry but also with lower levels of clergy wellbeing (questioning how sustainable high levels of sacrificial behaviour may be over the longer term)

2. **Managing Ministry Pressure Better** delivered by InterHealth subsidized by St Luke's Healthcare

1607 clergy from 10 dioceses (Blackburn, Chelmsford, Durham, Ipswich, Peterborough, Ely, Rochester, York, Oxford & Chester) looking at 8 separate areas (Demands, Culture, Relationship,

¹ Psalm 139 : 14

² "*Wellbeing is not a beach you go and lie on. It's a sort of dynamic dance and there's movement in that all the time*" Nick Marks from the New Economic Foundation on Radio 4's Reasons to be cheerful

Control, Role, Change & Support plus an additional set of 11 questions on possible specifically Ministry pressures exploring to what extent these areas were sources of significant stress;

36% women and 77% full-time

71% ≥50 years of age with 32% with ≥20 years in ministry

4% Senior staff, 59% incumbents, 12% curates & 25% other clergy

Archdeacon (n=9), Associate (n=102), Cathedral staff (n=24), Curate (n=197), Diocesan officer (n=16), Non-ordained (n=4), NSM/SSM (n=130), Other or dual ministry (n=165), Rector/Vicar (n=945) & Senior staff (n=15)

Conclusions:

- ✓ Not more stressed than secular workers
- ✓ Relationships (17%) and support are very good
- ✓ Work demands (60%) was highlighted with Evangelicals more pressured by demands
- ✓ Ministry pressure and lack of support are greatest at 10-19 years' service
- ✓ Church finances are a significant pressure
- ✓ Gender, marital status and length in current post are not significantly associated with pressure

3. **Ministry Burnout: Myth or Reality?** by Leslie J Francis published in 2005

Conclusions:

- ✓ **Emotional exhaustion** - nearly a third of the Anglican clergymen felt that they were working too hard in their parish ministry (31%) and said that they felt used up at the end of the day in the parish (29%). While one in five felt frustrated by their parish ministry (21%).
- ✓ **Depersonalisation**: one in ten said that they were less patient with parishioners than they used to be (11%) and that parish ministry was hardening them emotionally (9%).
- ✓ **Personal accomplishment**: less than half of the Anglican clergymen felt that they had accomplished many worthwhile things in their ministry (48%), or that they were positively influencing people's lives in their parish ministry (44%).

4. **Clergy Burnout: A Comparison Study with Other Helping Professions in the USA 2016 & study of Methodist Ministers in the USA published in 2012 looked at personality types and emotional exhaustion & satisfaction in ministry**

Conclusions:

- ✓ Burnout scores for clergy³ were relatively better than those of police and emergency personnel, similar to those of social workers and teachers, and worse than those of counsellors suggesting that clergy generally cope well and may have things to teach other Helping Professions
- ✓ **Clergy simultaneously experience burnout⁴ and ministry satisfaction**

³ Emotional Exhaustion (16 - 19%), Depersonalisation (5 - 7%) & Personal Accomplishment (35 - 39%)

⁴ Factors associated with lower burnout scores were:

- a. Extraversion
- b. Satisfaction with leisure activities/purposeful leisure activities
- c. Positive attitude to prayer

- ✓ Clergy who are high in self-compassion i.e. kind towards themselves during times of stress or failure, see themselves as connected with others and are able to hold their worries in mindful awareness without ruminating are less likely to experience burnout and likely to have more satisfaction in ministry.

The Three-Lens Approach to Wellbeing

To build up a comprehensive picture of our wellbeing it is helpful to consider wellbeing looking through three separate lenses; the lens of our **health**, **ministry** and our **soul health**:

1. **Health** i.e. to what extent am I enjoying good health?

In terms of illness & disease and health as the absence of disease, using a biomedical model on which western medicine was based encompassing both physical and mental health. It is a lens that examines the functioning of our bodily systems, the state of our coronary arteries, the size of our prostate or our peri menopausal symptoms, our body mass index or our plasma thyroxine level or the amounts of dopamine or serotonin between our synapses.

Although some aspects of our health might be fixed and unchangeable e.g. genetic makeup, other aspects such as lifestyle choices are amenable to change.

Key areas to consider:

- How to promote healthy lifestyle measures
- The role of periodic health checks
- Access to secondary care and/or psychological health services
- Availability of specialist Occupational Health Services

2. **Ministry** i.e. to what extent am I actively & enthusiastically engaged in ministry?

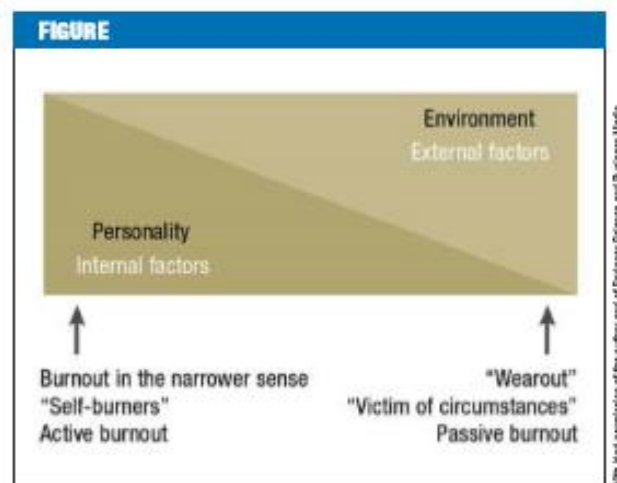
There is good evidence to indicate that good work promotes wellbeing. It could be argued that the work of a Priest has all the ingredients of the ultimate “good work” i.e. tasked with the cure of souls drawing on the very resources of heaven but a variety of internal & external factors can threaten this e.g. expectations inside & outside of the parish, individual characteristics of clergy, Church structures & processes.

-
- d. Collaborative conflict management style
 - e. Seeking mentors/mentioning relationships
 - f. Positive self-esteem
 - g. Congregation size
 - h. Sabbath-keeping

Christina Maslach, a social psychologist & the creator of the Maslach Burnout Inventory (MBI) defined **Job Burnout** as the “*prolonged response to chronic emotional and interpersonal stressors on the job*” and is characterised by the triad of “*exhaustion*”, particularly emotional, “*depersonalisation*” sometimes called cynicism or detachment and “*inefficacy*” or a lack of accomplishment.

The word **Engagement**, and in particular work engagement has been seen as “*the positive antithesis of burnout*” characterised by “*energy*”, “*involvement*” and “*efficacy*” drawing from concepts within the growing discipline of positive psychology.

The Utrecht University group of occupational psychologists have described **work engagement** as a “*persistent positive affective-motivational state of fulfilment in employees*” characterised by “*vigour*” by which they had in mind energy, resilience & effort, “*dedication*” (for example enthusiasm, inspiration and pride in their work) and “*absorption*” with the idea of concentration and being thoroughly engrossed in one’s work. (For more details register with the Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development (CIPD) www.cipd.co.uk)



A conceptual framework for Job Burnout⁵

Key areas to consider:

- The extent to which a person’s job description is do-able and realistic
- Understanding personal characteristics e.g. Kahler’s five common drivers that motivate us⁶

⁵ Kaschka WP, Korczak D, Broich K: Burnout—a fashionable diagnosis. Dtsch Arztebl Int 2011; 108(46): 781–7. DOI: 10.3238/arztebl.2011.0781

⁶ Be Perfect, Be Strong, Hurry Up, Please Others & Try Hard. These drivers can lead to some very positive, as well as destructive behaviours

- Work culture including systems & processes, quality of leadership⁷- the rules, values & hierarchies of the organisation and whether they violate principles of fairness & equality⁸
- Proportion of time spent on energising tasks which play to strengths⁹
- Management of work stressors¹⁰

3. **Soul** i.e. to what extent can I say, “It is well with my soul”?

“Sooner or later, your world will fall apart. What will matter then is the soul you have constructed”¹¹.

John Ortberg describes the soul as the **operating system** having an **integrating** function for the will, the mind & the body, and **networking** the individual unit of ourselves with other people and with God

Soul-making is the *“deliberate intention on our part to pay attention to who we are called to be and to seek regular refreshment so that we can grow more and more into the people God yearns for us to be”*. It’s not so much about trying to keep body and soul together but *“living out a richly animated, integrated existence that brings life & refreshment”¹².*

Key areas to consider:

- The cultivation of holy habits - Thomas Aquinas *“Our only hope is not more willpower; it is for a new set of habits”*; reflecting on the place of sin and pursuit of personal holiness in Soul Health
- Resources for spiritual refreshment e.g. Spiritual Direction, Accountability Partner, Spiritual Retreats, following Methodist Church practice of Quarter Days (3 days each quarter taken together for personal prayer, study & reflection in lieu of 6-day working week)
- The Apostle Paul’s antidote to Burnout, Treasures in jars of clay - *“So we do not lose heart. Though our outer self is wasting away, our inner self is being renewed day by day. For this light momentary affliction is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison, as we look not to the things that are seen but to the things that are unseen.”* 2 Corinthians 4 : 7 – 18 ESV

⁷ Taken from Prof Swensen of Mayo Clinic presentation, “From burnout to joy in work... the beauty of fully engaged colleagues” in which he spoke of the vital importance of *“appreciative and collaborative”* leadership see <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kSfy1B29eMM>

⁸ “The most stressful events in humanitarian work have to do with the organizational culture, management style, or operational objectives of an NGO or agency rather than external security risks or poor environmental factors. Aid workers, basically, have a pretty shrewd idea of what they are getting into when they enter this career, and dirty clothes, gun shots at night and lack of electricity do not surprise them. Inter- and intra-agency politics, inconsistent management styles, lack of team work and unclear or conflicting organizational objectives, however, combine to create a background of chronic stress and pressure that over time wears people down and can lead to burnout or even physical collapse.” Quote in Resilience Building Resilient Managers in Humanitarian Organizations: Strengthening Key Organizational Structures and Personal Skills that Promote Resilience in Challenging Environments Lisa McKay 2011 People In Aid taken from Fawcett, J. (2003). Stress and trauma handbook: Strategies for flourishing in demanding environments, Monrovia, CA: World Vision International

⁹ From Frustration to Fulfilment advocates for clergy developing professional interests and specialisms early on in their ministry as one strategic way to sustain themselves for the long haul. It has been suggested that an incumbent might consider setting aside 10% of their time for extra-parish activities

¹⁰ See HSE Management Standards for Work related stress <http://www.hse.gov.uk/stress/standards/>

¹¹ Soul Keeping – Caring for the most important part of you by John Ortberg ISBN 978-0-310-27597-8

¹² Body – Biblical spirituality for the whole person by Paula Gooder ISBN 978-0-281-07100-5

Bibliography

Body – Biblical spirituality for the whole person by Paula Gooder ISBN 978-0-281-07100-5

Stress – The path to peace by Simon Vibert ISBN 978-1-78359-152-7

Honourably Wounded – Stress among Christian workers by Marjory Foyle ISBN 978-1-85424-139-7

What makes us human? - And other questions about God, Jesus and human identity by Mark Meynell ISBN 978-1-90991-905-1

Wellbeing by Alison Webster ISBN 978-0-334-02889-5

Driven beyond the Call of God – Discovering the rhythms of grace by Pamela Evans ISBN 978-1-84101-054-5

Finding Rest when the work is never done by Patrick Klingaman ISBN 978-1-56476-788-4

Working without Wilting – Starting well to finish strong by Jago Wynne ISBN 978-1-84474-372-8

Going the Distance – How to stay fit for a lifetime of ministry by Peter Brain ISBN 978-1-876326-73-5

Soul Keeping – Caring for the most important part of you by John Ortberg ISBN 978-0-310-27597-8

Zeal without Burnout – Seven keys to a lifelong ministry of sustainable sacrifice by Christopher Ash ISBN 978-1-784980214

Clergy Stress – Hidden conflicts in ministry by Mary Anne Coate ISBN 978-0-281-04409-0

Staying Fresh – Serving with joy by Paul Mallard ISBN 978-1-78359-193-0

Clergy in a Complex Age – Responses to the Guidelines for the professional conduct of the clergy by Jamie Harrison & Robert Innes ISBN 978-0-281-07492-1

The Wounded Healer – In our woundedness we can become a source of life for other by Henri Nouwen ISBN 978-0-232-52102-6

The Noonday Demon – A Modern Woman's Struggle with Soul-weariness by Kathleen Norris ISBN 978-0-7459-5366-3

Living Leadership website and resources <http://www.livingleadership.org/code-of-best-practice/>

Methodist Church in Britain resources <http://www.methodist.org.uk/for-ministers-and-office-holders/guidance-for-churches/wellbeing/>

Dr Simon Clift MFOM

Consultant in Occupational Medicine

Thrive Worldwide

simonclift@doctors.org.uk

September 2018