Fully *Alive*

A Resource to Guide Clergy Towards Four Behaviors of Flourishing

Duke | CLERGY HEALTH COLLABORATIVE

The Duke Clergy Health Collaborative (formerly the Clergy Health Initiative and the Religion and Social Change Lab) translates original research into shared resources that help United Methodist clergy in North Carolina—and beyond—serve well and be well at the same time.

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James B. Duke
THE DUKE ENDOWMENT

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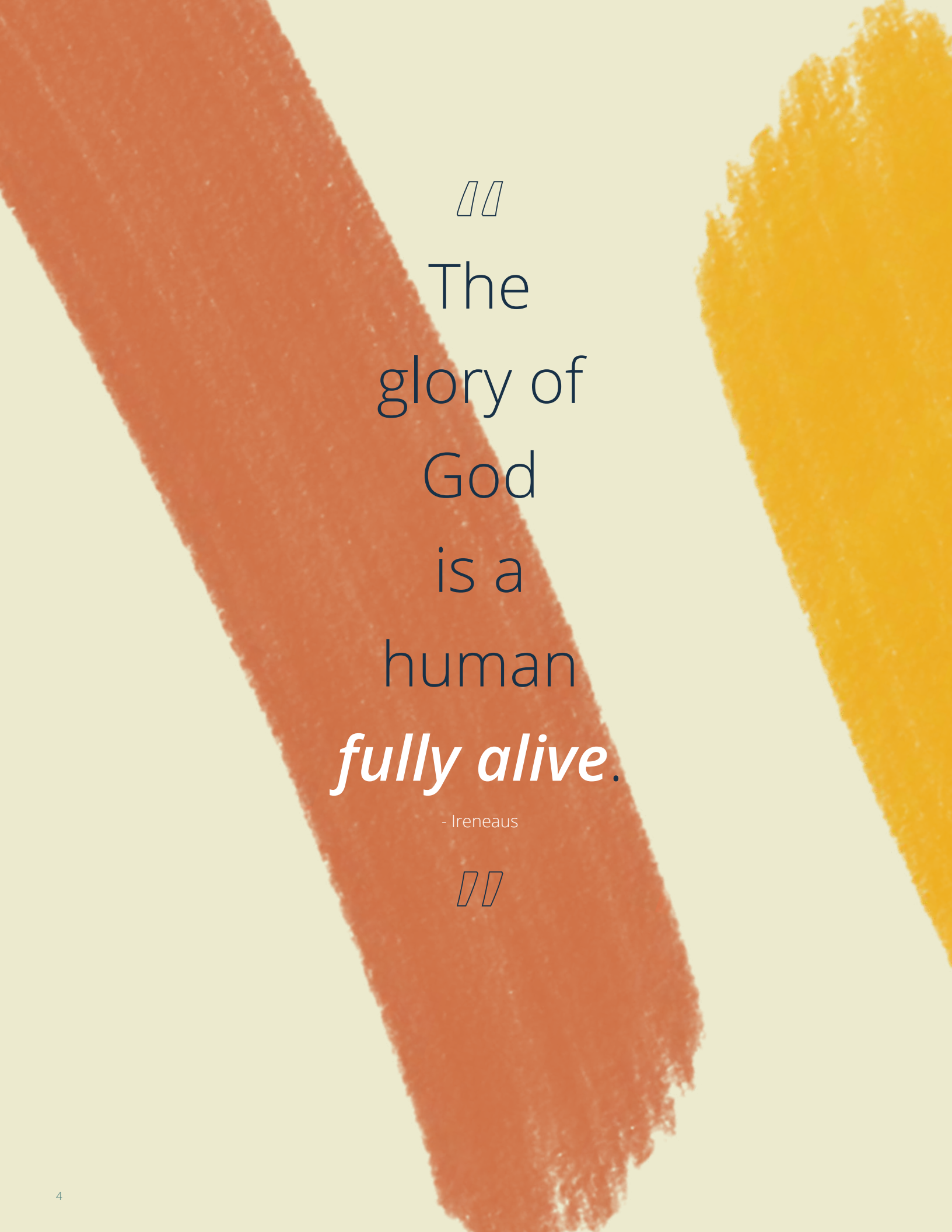
Jesus said, "I came that they may have life and have it ***more abundantly***."

John 10:10


"
The
glory of
God
is a
human
fully alive.
- Ireneaus
"

WHAT IS FLOURISHING?

The second century Church father, Irenaeus, would answer that question by asserting that a flourishing life is one that is filled with the life of God. It is a gift that we receive by abiding in Christ. Throughout the history of the Church, this is how Christians have talked about being well. When we are in Christ, we are well, and our lives become living reflections of God's glory in this world. When we are well, God is glorified.

Since 2007, the Duke Clergy Health Initiative has assessed and worked to improve the health and well-being of United Methodist clergy in North Carolina. We know that clergy face challenges to their physical health, such as obesity and high cholesterol. We also know that clergy experience mental distress in the forms of depression, anxiety, and burnout. But a discussion of well-being isn't complete if we're only looking at disease. We want to explore what it actually means to be well – physically, mentally, and spiritually. We want to better understand the modern contours and behaviors of a life that a Church father might describe as "fully alive."

We call this state of being well *flourishing*, and, for the purpose of this resource, **we define those who flourish as those who report low levels of anxiety and depression, low levels of emotional exhaustion, and high levels of personal accomplishment and positive mental health.** Put another way, flourishing is a state of healthy emotional, psychological, and social functioning. It is associated with a reduced risk for future mental and physical illness, too. **As you read this resource, our prayer is that you begin to understand *flourishing* as a way of life that is attained by being in right relationship to one's human limits, in right relationship to one's physical and emotional needs as embodied creatures, in right relationship to God's calling and activity in the world, and in right relationship with others in systems of support and accountability.**

Since 2014, the Duke Clergy Health Initiative has not only been researching the challenges facing North Carolina United Methodist clergy, but we've also been trying to understand what is working and how it is working for those who report flourishing in the midst of their clergy vocations. Newly updated in 2024, this resource attempts to capture what we know about *flourishing* clergy and share it in a format that can guide *all* clergy towards behaviors that our research has shown are part of a flourishing pastoral vocation. This resource, and the accompanying reflection questions, were designed to be used by individuals or small groups of pastors, particularly in settings focused on forming new clergy into habits that will not only sustain their vocation over time, but result in lives through which God is glorified.

CLERGY MENTAL HEALTH PROFILES

Since 2008, the Duke Clergy Health Initiative has surveyed clergy from the two United Methodist Conferences in the state of North Carolina, collecting data on symptoms of mental distress such as anxiety, depression, stress, and burnout, and adding positive mental health metrics in 2014. A clergy's well-being can be categorized into four common profiles of well-being: Flourishing, Burdened but Fulfilled, Languishing, and Distressed. These four profiles are described in the chart below.

In research following clergy between 2014-2023, we have learned that a **Flourishing** mental health profile is protective of future mental health, even in the face of extraordinary

Four Common Profiles of Mental Well-Being

Flourishing	Burdened but Fulfilled	Languishing	Distressed
LOW depressive & anxiety symptoms	**MODERATE** depressive & anxiety symptoms	**MODERATE** depressive & anxiety symptoms	**HIGH** depressive & anxiety symptoms
LOW emotional exhaustion and **HIGH** personal accomplishment	**MODERATE** emotional exhaustion and **HIGH** personal accomplishment	**MODERATE** emotional exhaustion and personal accomplishment	**HIGH** emotional exhaustion and **LOW** personal accomplishment
HIGH positive mental health	**HIGH** positive mental health	**MODERATE** positive mental health	**LOW** positive mental health

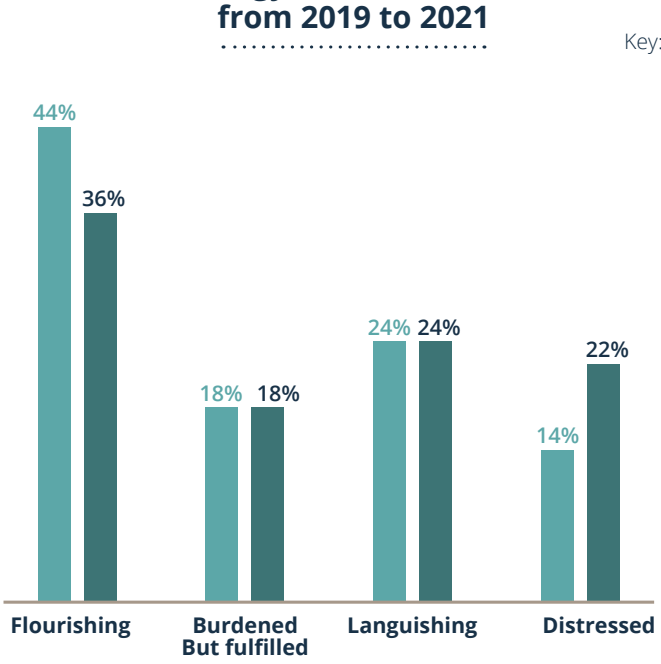
stressors such as the COVID-19 pandemic, disaffiliation, and an increasingly tense political climate. For example, more than 76% of clergy who were flourishing in 2019 were still flourishing in 2021 at the height of the pandemic and disaffiliation.

We also learned that clergy whose mental health would be categorized in our profiles as **Burdened but Fulfilled** and **Languishing** were most at risk of worsening mental health in the face of these same stressors. More than 24% of clergy in each of these subgroups in 2019 became **Distressed** in 2021.

Clergy with a pre-pandemic status of Distressed had the highest probability of staying in that same subgroup after the onset of COVID-19 (80%), continuing to report substantial levels of anxiety and burnout.

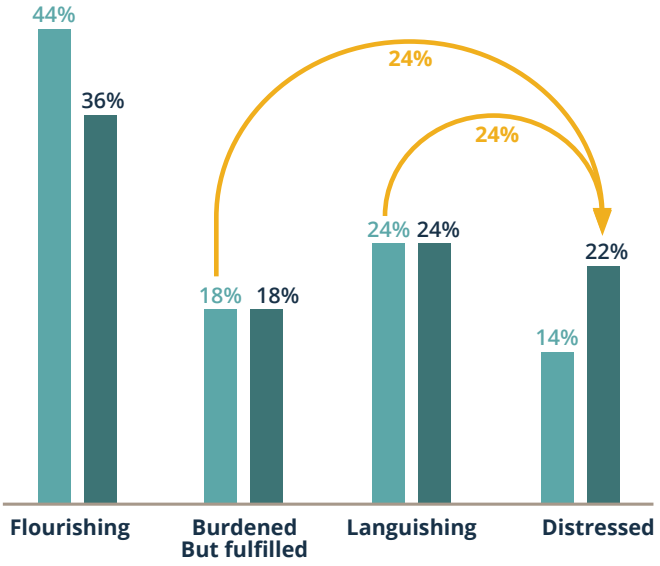
The good news is this: regardless of where a person finds themselves today, the health-promoting behaviors of flourishing clergy are accessible and achievable for all.

Clergy Mental Health from 2019 to 2021



Between 2019 and 2021, the overall percentage of clergy with Burdened but Fulfilled and with Languishing mental health stayed the same while the percentage of Distressed clergy increased.

How Clergy Well-being Profiles Shifted Through the Pandemic



Substantial proportions of individual clergy within each mental health group in 2019 changed status in 2021, with the largest movements being Burdened but Fulfilled and Languishing clergy shifting to Distressed.

AM I FLOURISHING?

Assessing Depression

Each of the mental health profiles is defined by a combination of scores on measures of depression, anxiety, burnout, and positive mental health. Although the way we measured and categorized clergy has too many items to include here, we provide a few items for you to consider. You might have a sense of whether you would score low, moderate, or high in these areas and can estimate your current profile.

For example, for depression symptoms, we used a 8-question measure called the Patient Health Questionnaire (PHQ)-8. For a general assessment, consider these two questions from the PHQ-2 , commonly used in primary care screenings.

On this 2-item version, scores of 3 and greater indicate that you may have moderate or high levels of depression symptoms and may want to consider a fuller assessment with a therapist or your primary care doctor.

Over the **last 2 weeks**, how often have you been bothered by the following problems?	Not at all	Several days	More than half the days	Nearly every day
1. Little interest or pleasure in doing things	0	+1	+2	+3
2. Feeling down, depressed or hopeless	0	+1	+2	+3

Assessing Anxiety

For anxiety symptoms, we used the 7-item Generalized Anxiety Disorder (GAD)-7. This, too, has a validated 2-item version.

On this 2-item version, scores of 3 and greater indicate that you may have moderate or high levels of anxiety symptoms and may want to consider a fuller assessment.

Over the **last 2 weeks**, how often have you been bothered by the following problems?	Not at all	Several days	More than half the days	Nearly every day
1. Feeling nervous, anxious or on edge	0	+1	+2	+3
2. Not being able to stop or control worrying	0	+1	+2	+3

Assessing Burnout

Burnout was measured in our study using the 22-item Maslach Burnout Inventory for Human Services. In general, burnout is defined as a combination of three factors: emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and a reduced sense of personal accomplishment. You might ask yourself the 3 questions to the right.

If you answered more than weekly to the first two questions, or less than weekly to the sense of accomplishment question, you may be experiencing some level of burnout.

- **How often do you feel emotionally overextended or exhausted by your work?**
- **How often do you find yourself having an impersonal response towards your congregants or others you serve?**
- **How often do you feel a sense of accomplishment or successful achievement in your work?**

Now that you've self-assessed these symptoms of mental distress, we invite you to turn toward considering signs of positive mental health.

THE IMPORTANCE OF POSITIVE MENTAL HEALTH

One's complete mental health status is more than just having or lacking mental distress symptoms; it also includes aspects of Positive Mental Health, which can exist alongside symptoms of mental distress. In fact, the Clergy Health Initiative is finding that it is very informative to look at a fuller, more complex picture of mental health that includes Positive Mental Health. **Flourishers** and **Burdened but Fulfilled** clergy in the four mental health profiles had high Positive Mental Health scores. This section will help you consider the role that positive mental health plays in your life and assess the quality of your positive mental health using the same assessment that is part of our Statewide Clergy Health Survey.

Defining Positive Emotions: Small Parts of a Foundation for Flourishing

On any given day, we experience a wide range of emotions, from joy and excitement to anger and sadness, and these emotions trigger certain thoughts and actions. We do not categorize emotions as either good or bad as all emotions have a role in our lives. We talk about positive emotions as ones that are typically more desirable and pleasant, while negative emotions are emotions that are more difficult to experience. For example, a negative emotion like anger plays an important role in giving us energy to right a wrong.

Positive emotions play a role in our survival as well. For example, joy makes us feel more playful and open to interacting with others, which can lead us to try new activities and gain skills. In fact, turning to positive emotions during times of stress may help pastors recover faster. Research has shown that experiencing positive emotions after a difficult or stressful event helps us "shake it off" more quickly and allows our bodies to recover physically and our minds to think normally again.

Experiencing positive emotions has been shown to **broaden** our thinking and help us be open to new ideas. When this happens, we are better

equipped to solve a problem or come up with a new strategy. Further, this broadening makes us more sociable, which might lead us to make new friends or deepen existing relationships. A broadened mindset also makes us more open to trying new behaviors, such as signing up for a class that stretches our skill sets. While each individual experience of a positive emotion may be short-lived, over time, these broadened behaviors and worldview help us **build** skills along with personal and psychological resources.**

*** Broaden and build theory is drawn from the work of Barbara Fredrickson.*

EMOTION	THOUGHT ACTION TENDENCY	RESOURCES ACCRUED
JOY	Play, get involved	Skills gained via experiential learning
GRATITUDE	Creative urge to be social	Skills for showing care, loyalty, social bonds
CONTENTMENT	Savor and integrate	New priorities, new view of self
INTEREST	Explore, learn	Knowledge
PRIDE	Dream big	Achievement, motivation
AMUSEMENT	Share, laugh, joviality	Social bonds
AWE	Absorb and accommodate	New worldviews

How Positive Emotions and Deeper Happiness Combine

Is experiencing positive emotions the same as "being happy?" Not really, because there are different kinds of happiness. What we've described so far is the first kind—a short-term happiness that is created by positive emotions. When you feel content, pleasantly excited, or joyful, you're experiencing positive emotions. They may not last, but they're important, for they are part of an abundant life. They help us broaden and build. A second kind of happiness is longer-term and deeply satisfying. It also is more constant and usually takes months to shift. This kind of happiness comes from:

How well you're doing as an individual — having meaning in your life, accepting yourself, and feeling like you're growing as a person.

How well you're doing with other people — having a sense of belonging and that you're contributing to the well-being of others. After all, we humans are social beings.

Some studies suggest that experiencing both kinds of happiness is what leads to the fullest, most engaged life.

Positive Emotions Help Us Engage with the World

Research has shown that experiencing positive emotions can make us more likely to do things like:

- SIGN A PETITION
- VOLUNTEER OUR TIME
- ACT PLAYFUL
- SOCIALIZE WITH PEOPLE WE DON'T KNOW
- DONATE BLOOD
- SET HIGHER GOALS FOR OURSELVES
- HAVE GREATER INTEREST IN ENGAGING IN PHYSICAL ACTIVITIES
- EXPERIENCE INCREASES IN WILLPOWER OVER TEMPTATIONS
- PERSIST AT A TASK LONGER
- GENERATE MORE SOLUTIONS AND MORE CREATIVE SOLUTIONS

Positive Mental Health Assessment

Want to gauge your current positive mental health status? Read the items below, think about how you've felt the **past month**, and choose from the following answer options for each. There's a blank beside each item where you can write in your response, if you wish.

A. Never | **B. Once or twice** | **C. About once a week** | **D. Two or three times a week** | **E. Almost every day** | **F. Every day**

Positive Emotion Items: ***During the past month, how often did you feel… ?***

1. Happy 1. _____
2. Interested in life 2. _____
3. Satisfied with life 3. _____

Social Items: ***During the past month, how often did you feel… ?***

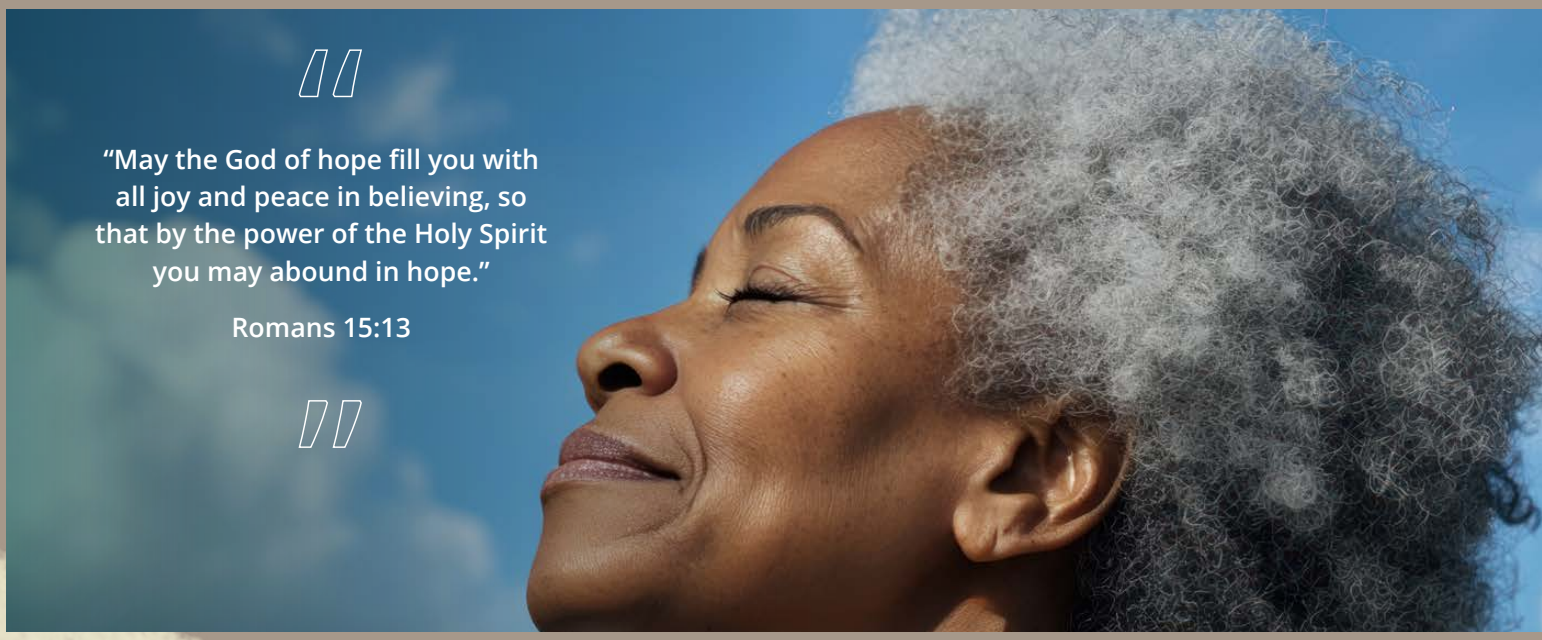
1. That you had something important to contribute to society 1. _____
2. That you belonged to a community (like a social group, faith community, church, school, neighborhood, etc.) 2. _____
3. That our society is a good place, or is becoming a better place, for all people 3. _____
4. That people are basically good 4. _____
5. That the way our society works makes sense to you 5. _____

Individual Items: ***During the past month, how often did you feel… ?***

1. That you liked most parts of your daily life 1. _____
2. Good at managing the responsibilities of your daily life 2. _____
3. That you had warm and trusting relationships with others 3. _____
4. That you had experiences that challenged you to grow and become a better person 4. _____
5. Confident to think or express your own ideas or opinions 5. _____
6. That your life has a sense of direction or meaning to it 6. _____

** These items are the Mental Health Continuum-Short Form developed by Corey Keyes*

If you could answer "every day" or "almost every day" (E's and F's) to at least 1 item from the Positive Emotion section AND at least 6 of the 11 items in the Social and Individual sections, you would be considered to be flourishing, with high positive mental health.



Questions for Reflection

- After completing the Positive Mental Health Assessment, reflect on what surprised you about your answers. What items indicate strength for you? What items indicate an opportunity to cultivate new habits or practices?
- Knowing that positive mental health includes regularly experiencing positive emotions, what are some ways that you can be intentional about being in spaces and with people who leave you feeling good?
- We all feel positive emotions at times. Flourishers are good at revisiting and extending their positive emotions. How might you do that more often? Do you already have a ritual for savoring the good in your day and week? How often do you share with others the good things you experience and see happening?
- Recall a time when you were experiencing a serious stressor. While feeling many unpleasant emotions, do you also remember moments of pleasant emotions, such as when receiving support from a friend? Do you believe unpleasant and pleasant emotions can occur during the same day? The same hour?
- Consider a difficult pastoral situation you find (or once found) yourself in. How could positive emotions be a buttress for you and those you're supporting?

Pull It All Together

Now that you've estimated your anxiety, depression, and burnout symptoms as well as your Positive Mental Health, return to the chart on page 6. Based on your responses today, can you identify the profile in which you are most likely living today? What can you celebrate? What areas do you note need attention in your life? No matter where you find yourself today, keep reading to gain insight on four intentional behaviors of clergy who are Flourishing.

HOW CAN I FLOURISH?

The Four Behaviors of Flourishing Clergy - Then and Now

In 2014, we interviewed 52 appointed UMC pastors in North Carolina about their daily lives and how they approach challenges. The pastors also completed a series of surveys and maintained a daily activity log for one week. At the time we were able to group clergy into two groups: flourishing with low burnout and low flourishing with high burnout based on markers of positive mental health and burnout. When we compared the responses between the two sets of pastors, we noticed differences in how they took care of themselves and oriented themselves their work.

Ten years later, we analyzed new interviews conducted in 2020-2022 with a different set of 52 UMC pastors in North Carolina and sought to find out if the behaviors of "flourishing" clergy in 2014 still held in the changed landscape of pastoral ministry. In fact, our findings were remarkably similar to those from a decade prior. We were able to distinguish Flourishing clergy using a new, more complex profile of high positive mental health and low burnout, anxiety, and depressive symptoms. **In the pages that follow, you'll discover four health-promoting behaviors held in common by pastors who are flourishing.**

BEHAVIOR #1

Protecting Personal Time Each Day:
Flourishing clergy are intentional about protecting time each day for themselves outside of work.

Busyness is endemic in American culture. It is easy to fall into the trap of believing that a busy schedule or constant demands on our time are a sign of our value. When we fail to recognize our human limits, or fall into the trap of believing that we cannot stop working because the salvation of others or the church depends on us, we make a grave theological error. The impact of failing to honor our limits and trusting God to be God by protecting time each day away from our work can be detrimental to our well-being.

Ministry is a vocation in which the work is never complete. There is always more that can be done. Living in a culture that glorifies busyness and equates self-worth with productivity, clergy are tempted to allow work to spill into all areas of their lives. When we do this, we pay the cost in the form of poor physical health, poor mental health, and strained relationships.

Flourishing pastors are intentional about protecting time for themselves outside of work. One word for this form of protection is boundaries. Contrary to some interpretations, boundaries are not walls. Boundaries are an invitation to healthy relationships–with our work, with others, and with ourselves. Having a clear sense of what is healthy in these most important relationships and the courage to protect it creates the conditions in which good work can be done. When boundaries are violated, it can lead to disrespect, harm, burnout, and exhaustion. Difficulty with boundaries can be a result of unclear or unreasonable expectations (often of ourselves!), poor communication, or difficulty saying "no."

Flourishers more frequently established clear work-life boundaries compared to Languishing and Distressed pastors. **Flourishers** emphasized prioritizing family needs, maintaining separate work-related phone numbers and social media accounts, and ensuring regular, healthy time away from congregational responsibilities.

Protecting Personal Time Each Day. What Works?

PICK THE TIME THAT WORKS FOR YOU

- Schedule activities in clumps. Pick one night of the week when you will attend night-time church meetings and urge others to use this as a basis for scheduling.
- Set "office hours" for when you will be available at the church each week, and let your congregation know.
- To create distance from their work on an afternoon off, some pastors recommend going out of town —even if it's only as far as the next town.

COMMUNICATE CLEARLY AND REGULARLY

- Keep a Sabbath, and include that information in the signature on your emails.
- If you have to say no to a request on a day away from work, offer an alternate time/day when you could help that person.
- Ask the P/SPRC what their top priorities for you are and share your own. Then discuss where your expectations diverge. Being honest about your gifts and limitations as a leader and a pastor is important.

MANAGE YOUR TECHNOLOGY

- Some pastors set a stop time every evening, after which they will not pick up any call they receive. These clergy say they check voicemail and will respond if there's an emergency, but by waiting for a message, they can decide whether something needs to be addressed that night or can wait.
- Work with another pastor who can be "on call" when you are off or away. Include this person's contact information in an automatic email reply and on your outgoing voice message.
- Utilize the "guardrails" that are built into the technology that we all carry around in our pockets. Using "Do Not Disturb" and setting up blocks for apps that are a distraction when we need to be present with sermon preparation or our families are easy habits to establish. With these guardrails, it is possible to be fully present in the moment while also trusting that a true emergency can get through to you if necessary.

The Romero Prayer

It helps, now and then, to step back and take the long view.

The Kingdom is not only beyond our efforts; it is even beyond our vision.

We accomplish in our lifetime only a fraction of the magnificent enterprise that is God's work.

Nothing we do is complete, which is another way of saying that the kingdom always lies beyond us.

No statement says all that could be said. No prayer fully expresses our faith. No confession brings perfection. No pastoral visit brings wholeness. No program accomplishes the church's mission. No set of goals and objectives includes everything.

This is what we are about.

We plant the seeds that one day will grow. We water the seeds already planted, knowing that they hold future promise. We lay foundations that will need further development. We provide yeast that produces effects far beyond our capabilities.

We cannot do everything and there is a sense of liberation in realizing that. This enables us to do something and to do it well. It may be incomplete, but it is a beginning, a step along the way, an opportunity for the Lord's grace to enter and do the rest. We may never see the end results, but that is the difference between the master builder and the worker.

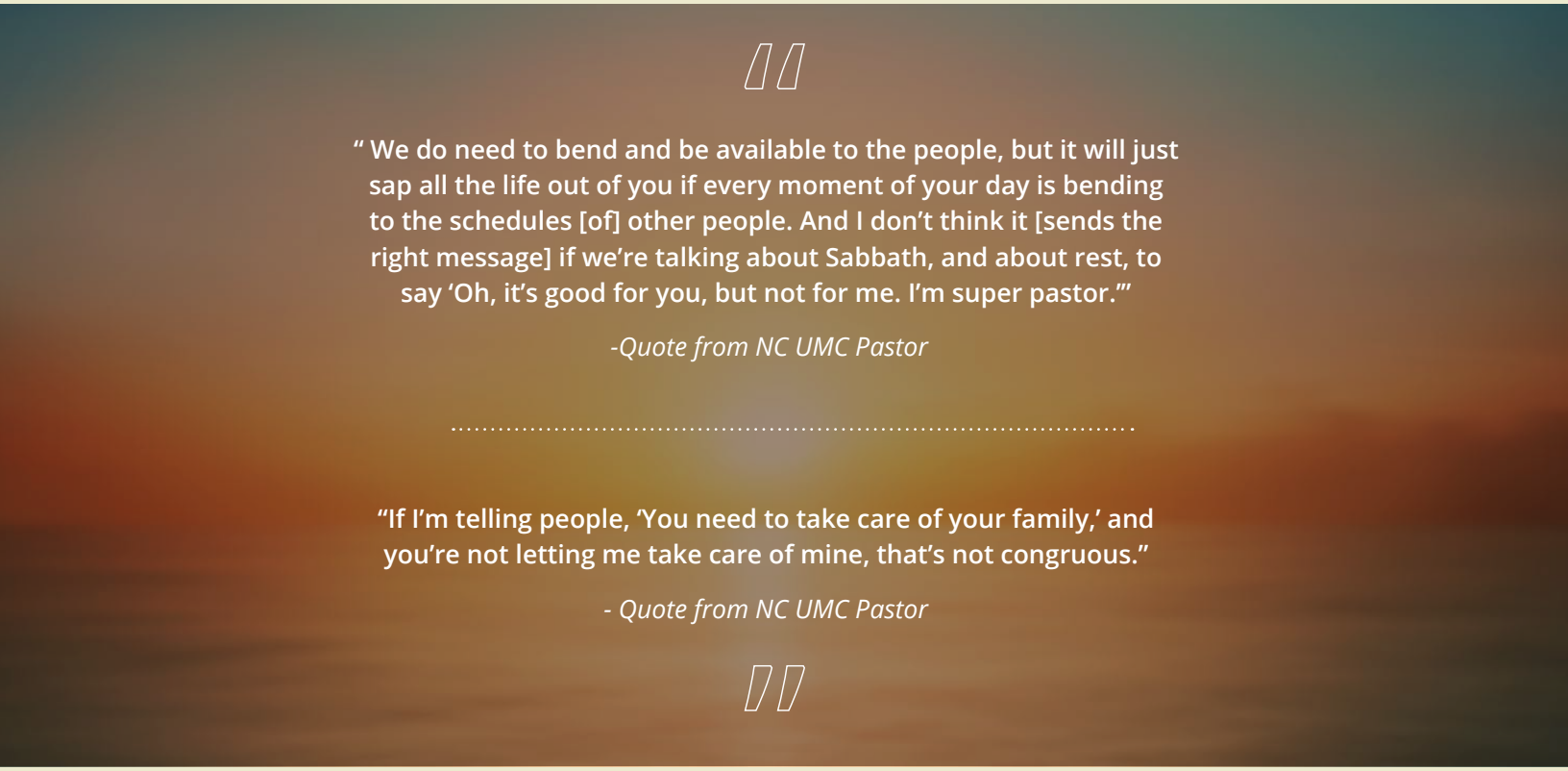
We are workers, not master builders; ministers, not messiahs.

We are prophets of a future not our own.

**This prayer is commonly attributed to Catholic Archbishop Oscar Romero though he is not the original author. This prayer was written by Bishop Ken Utener.*

BEHAVIOR #1

Protecting Personal Time Each Day:
Flourishing clergy are intentional about protecting time each day for themselves outside of work.



" We do need to bend and be available to the people, but it will just sap all the life out of you if every moment of your day is bending to the schedules [of] other people. And I don't think it [sends the right message] if we're talking about Sabbath, and about rest, to say 'Oh, it's good for you, but not for me. I'm super pastor.'"

-Quote from NC UMC Pastor

"If I'm telling people, 'You need to take care of your family,' and you're not letting me take care of mine, that's not congruous."

- Quote from NC UMC Pastor

Questions for Reflection

- What is one clear boundary that you have in your life (personal or professional) that you recognize enables you to have a healthy relationship with that person or thing?
- What boundaries have you set with church leaders and congregants about when and how you will be expected to respond to congregational demands? In what ways do you protect your Sabbath day or vacation times? Are there reasonable and mutually-agreeable expectations for responsiveness that you might need to establish? What practices, such as out of office replies and voicemail messages, are you using to communicate these boundaries with your congregation? Have you had a conversation about what constitutes an emergency?*
- What are ways that you've learned to respond to intrusive demands that also allow you to protect time for yourself outside of work?
- Are the greatest barriers to having protected time away from work internal or external for you? Do you find yourself saying yes to requests or working after hours because you're afraid of disappointing others? If the demands are external, who might support you to (re)establish a healthy boundary?

*We suggest our resource, *Keeping the Faith*, as a guide to facilitate these conversations.

BEHAVIOR #2

Intentional Self-Care:
Flourishing clergy are proactive and flexible in taking care of their physical and mental health.

Well-being doesn't just happen. Well-being is the outcome of small, persistent and intentional practices that add up to larger results benefiting our physical, spiritual, and emotional well-being. The good news is that there is not "one way" to be healthy. The ways pastors care for themselves are as unique as each pastor. The best care practices for staying healthy are unique as each pastor and can be changed up over time.

Flourishers choose an intentional well-being practice or two and plan when they will do them - and then they make a backup plan for when they will do it if their first time gets interrupted. Flourishers more frequently described engaging in deliberate physical and mental well-being practices including activities such as walking, prioritizing their health (e.g., seeking a doctor, undergoing regular check-ups), and attending workout classes such as practicing yoga or kickboxing. They also mentioned having a therapist, coach, or spiritual director, observing a Sabbath, playing an instrument, journaling, listening to music, and actively reducing the pace of their lives. Overall, they appear to consistently adopt and participate in strategies that promote both physical and mental well-being.

BEHAVIOR #2

Intentional Self-Care:
Flourishing clergy are proactive and flexible in taking care of their physical and mental health.

Intentional Physical and Mental Health Practices. What works?

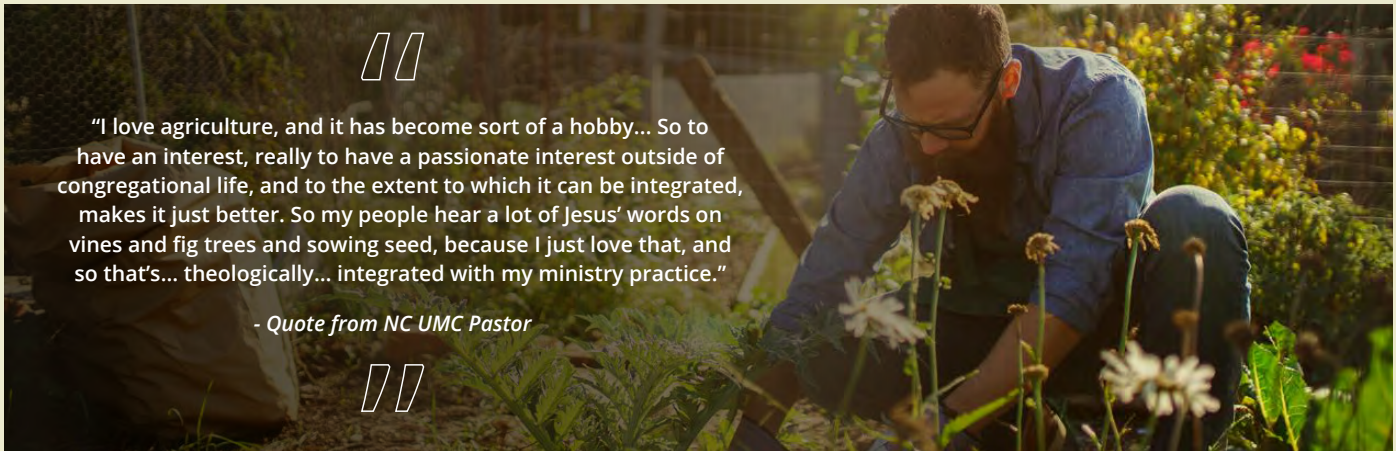
PRIORITIZE HEALTHY BEHAVIORS

- There is tremendous pressure to eat what is offered to you at church gatherings. Remind yourself that your congregants don't want to make you unhealthy. Take smaller portions and don't feel badly about it.
- Go to the doctor regularly; get annual check-ups.
- Get outside. Ride bikes, play golf, or go for a walk every day and set a goal for the number of steps you want to achieve.
- Find time to get some fresh air.
- Make healthy activities a priority, but also adjust how you incorporate those healthy behaviors into your daily routine. Do you prefer to go to the gym, but there's no time for that today? Could you hold your meeting while walking?

Note: We know pastors' lives can be very unpredictable, and it's difficult to keep to the same habits every day. That doesn't mean you cannot be healthy. ***Make a plan and have a back up plan! Think outside the box*** *for how you can include physical and mental well-being practices into the life you have. The final pages of this guide have an Action and Coping Planning worksheet for you to use as a guide.*

INVEST IN YOUR MENTAL WELL-BEING

- Start each day with time for quiet, prayer, and reflection. Traveling and can't read Scripture? Take your devotional time on the road with you. Apps like Pray as you Go, Lectio 365, or Reimagining the Examen are great ways to get started.
- Block time in your calendar for solitude and stillness.
- Journal.
- Keep a regular Sabbath. Make time to pray and play.
- Seek professional support from a counselor, coach, or spiritual director.



"I love agriculture, and it has become sort of a hobby... So to have an interest, really to have a passionate interest outside of congregational life, and to the extent to which it can be integrated, makes it just better. So my people hear a lot of Jesus' words on vines and fig trees and sowing seed, because I just love that, and so that's... theologically... integrated with my ministry practice."

- Quote from NC UMC Pastor

> **"I am an introvert... but I have to balance... putting myself out [there] with a lot of quiet time, and I think... it has worked best for me [to set aside time] in the morning... so then I have the time. It's just me and God, and you do your Scripture reading, you do your prayers, you do your sacred reading or other things... For me... [that] has to be a daily thing... that's a big part of filling things back up."**
>
> ***- Quote from NC UMC Pastor***

MAKE TIME FOR PERSONAL INTERESTS

- Set aside time to engage in your personal interests. Find ways to incorporate these into your ministry if possible.
- Engage in a hobby that is fun, creative, or connects you to others.

Questions for Reflection

Good physical and mental health doesn't happen without intentionality. We prioritize what's most important to us, and too often, practices of caring for our bodies and souls are the first to fall off the calendar for more "urgent" and pressing tasks.

- What makes it difficult for you to prioritize and keep sacred on your calendar healthy behaviors (such as regular exercise, healthy eating, or getting enough sleep), spiritual care (such as a structured prayer practice or finding time to regularly connect with God), or personal interests (such as a life-giving hobby)?
- What is the cost of not prioritizing health behaviors in the long term?
- What is an intentional practice you'd like to incorporate into your life? Can you imagine how you might find flexible and creative ways within the context of your actual life right now to incorporate it?
- What is a SMART (specific, measurable, attainable, realistic, and time-bound) goal for ONE intentional health practice that you want to incorporate into your life?
- Who can you invite into gracious accountability with and for you?

Self-care is not selfish. It is not about being exclusively focused on our needs, pleasure, and well-being without consideration or regard for others. When we recognize our self as a sacred gift of God who is meant to be in relationship with other beings who are also wonderfully and beautifully made in the image of God, **self-care becomes a fulfillment of the second part of the Great Commandment: "Love your neighbor as you love yourself."**

Dr Chanequa Walker-Barnes, *Sacred Self-Care*, 19

BEHAVIOR #3

Partnering with God's Work:
Flourishing clergy focus on process and work in alignment with God.

It is common for mental health practitioners and their clients to discuss what is in a person's control and what is outside of a person's control. Significant change begins to happen when a person loosens their grip on what is outside their control and redirects their energy towards what is in their control. In pastoral ministry, this same freedom is gained when a pastor recognizes that the Kingdom towards and for which we strive does not come by our efforts alone. **Pastors work in alignment with God who has been at work in our ministry settings long before we arrived and will still be at work long after we are gone.** It is a shift to being process-focused rather than outcome-focused that enables clergy to adopt healthier measures of success, especially in the face of criticism, and align their energy with what God is already blessing in their ministry context.

In our research, **Flourishers** were more likely than Languishers and Distressed pastors to describe their orientation to ministry as being process-focused rather than outcome-oriented.

" I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the growth."
1 Corinthians 3:6

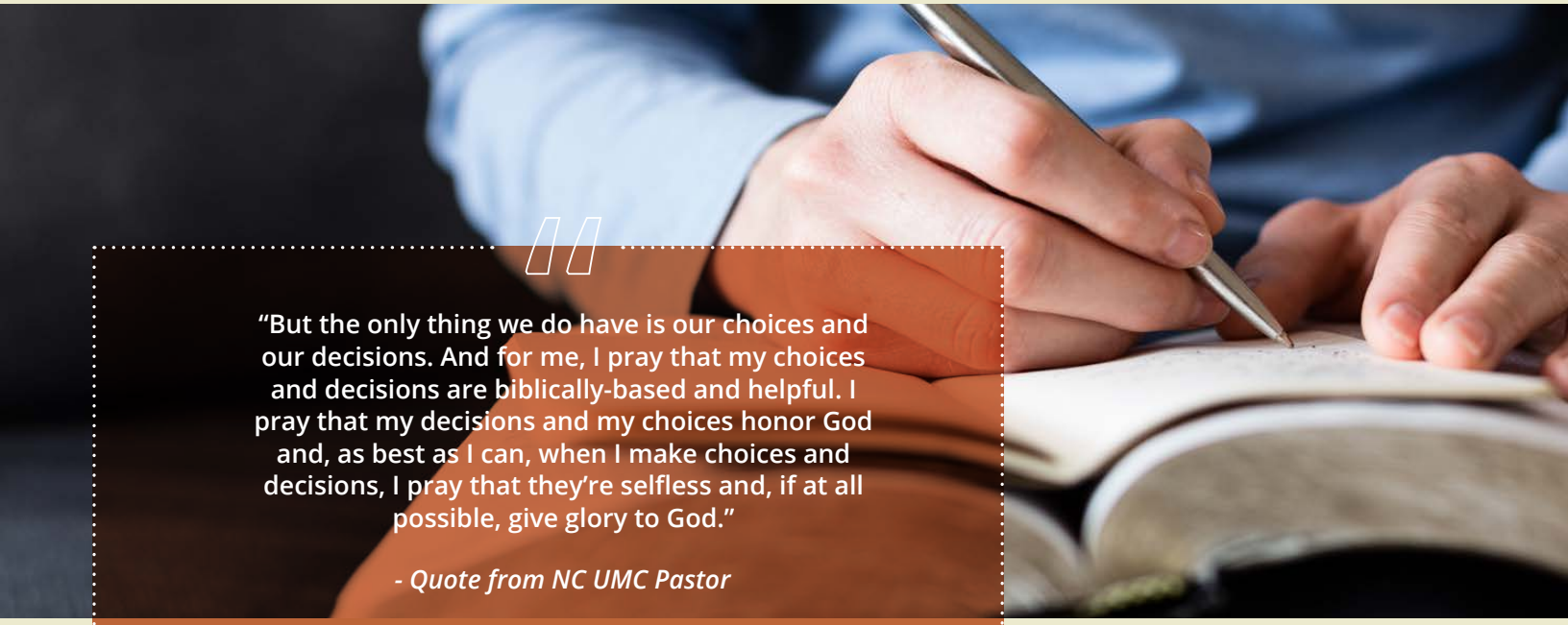
Working in Alignment with God. What works?

REMEMBER WHO YOU SERVE

- Rather than solely looking for praise from the pews, derive your sense of success from knowing you're doing your part to enact the work God calls you to do.
- Remember that you are participating in a process — you are working with God, and only God sees the full picture.

DISCERN, DISCERN, DISCERN

- Create time for spiritual disciplines like prayer and Bible study to understand the work God is calling you to do.



"But the only thing we do have is our choices and our decisions. And for me, I pray that my choices and decisions are biblically-based and helpful. I pray that my decisions and my choices honor God and, as best as I can, when I make choices and decisions, I pray that they're selfless and, if at all possible, give glory to God."

- Quote from NC UMC Pastor

"I can spend days crafting a technically perfect sermon, but if the spirit of God doesn't show up, it's meaningless. And somehow or other, we have to assess, did we as clergy do our part? And if that means that the outcome was not what we anticipated, can we look at one another and say, 'Huh, apparently God didn't want that.' And that's the piece of assessment that we have never been able to come up with."

- Quote from NC UMC Pastor

BEHAVIOR #3

Partnering with God's Work:
Flourishing clergy focus on working in alignment with God.

PRAYER OF DAILY EXAMEN

The Daily Examen is a method of prayerful reflection on the events of the day in order to see where God has been present and to discern God's current direction for you. It takes only 10-15 minutes and can be used to reflect on positive emotions, move past negative emotions, and align your work with God's work. It can be done individually or aloud together as a group.

BECOME AWARE OF GOD'S PRESENCE

Thank God for the day and ask for the company of the Holy Spirit.

REVIEW THE DAY WITH GRATITUDE

Walk through the past 24 hours, recalling two to three things for which you are grateful.

PAY ATTENTION TO YOUR EMOTIONS

Reflect on the feelings you experienced during the day. With the guidance of the Holy Spirit, pray through these emotions, noticing which are drawing you closer to God or pulling you away from God.

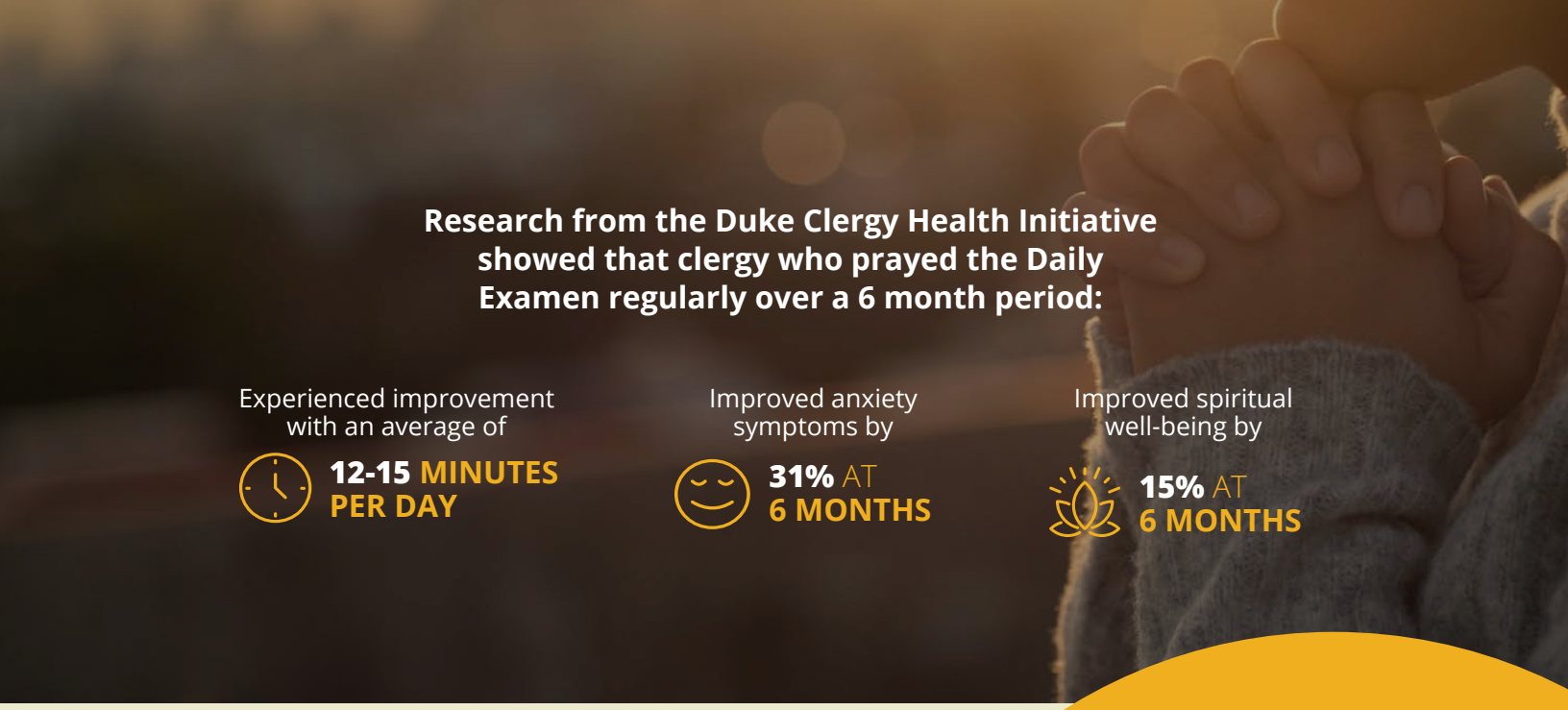
CHOOSE ONE FEATURE OF THE DAY AND PRAY FROM IT

Talk with God about what emotion and event is standing out for you. If needed, ask for forgiveness.

LOOK TOWARD TOMORROW

What is the one thing you should do? Where do you need God's assistance?

Close your prayer by praying the Lord's Prayer or with a simple gesture of gratitude.



Research from the Duke Clergy Health Initiative showed that clergy who prayed the Daily Examen regularly over a 6 month period:

Experienced improvement with an average of

12-15 MINUTES PER DAY

Improved anxiety symptoms by

31% AT **6 MONTHS**

Improved spiritual well-being by

15% AT **6 MONTHS**

Questions for Reflection:

- How do you define and measure success in ministry?
- What are concrete ways that ministry might be different for pastors who believe their job is to join God and participate in the work God is already doing in the world versus those who believe they are responsible for God's work in the world? Where do you see evidence of each of these two beliefs in your life and ministry?
- What is the relationship between spiritual disciplines like prayer or Scripture reading and understanding your work as a partnership with God?
- What disciplines are sustaining you right now? What areas of your spiritual life may need to be strengthened?

EVERY DAY IS AN OPPORTUNITY TO BE FULLY AWAKE AND PRESENT TO THE MOVEMENTS OF THE HOLY SPIRIT.

But often we are passively carried down river by all the unacknowledged thoughts and emotions that flow through us on a daily basis. We are influenced in various directions without even realizing it, distracted by a hyperactive world or numbing tasks. Staying awake requires noticing and reflecting.

Karen R. Keen, *Redwood Center for Spiritual Care and Education*

Important pastoral note: This is not intended to be an opportunity for individuals to shame themselves or others for what they may (or may not) be doing as a spiritual discipline. There are pervasive and insidious "shoulds" about "good" pastors and spiritual disciplines that, as clergy, we cannot help but internalize as we do this work. These are unhelpful and prevent us from being honest with ourselves and others. The good news is that the spiritual life is not one-size-fits-all. It does not remain consistent across all seasons of our lives. What works for any individual to connect with the deep and ever-present mystery of God is as unique as each one of us. May this time of reflection allow you to be honest about any struggles connect with God during different seasons of life. May conversation with peers become an opportunity for you to bless yourself and one another with creativity and imagination for new ways to connect to the Holy.

BEHAVIOR #4

Maintaining a Network of Social Support:
Flourishing clergy nourish friendships and mutual relationships.

Russian Orthodox artist Andrei Rublev's icon of the Trinity, painted in the early 15th century, is one of the most iconic portrayals of God. It is a reminder that the God we worship is not a solo, isolated deity. God does God's work, not as a top-down hierarchy, but as a relationship, as a community of mutuality.

In the book of Genesis, following the creation of the first human, Adam, God states, "It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him a helper as his partner" (Genesis 2:18). The arrival of Eve into the Biblical story reflects God's provision of others such that no human is required to live or work alone.

At the heart of United Methodist doctrine and polity is the idea of connectionalism. That is, we are organized into networks of classes, societies, and annual conferences because of our core belief that our interconnection with others "enables us to carry out our mission in unity and strength" (Book of Discipline, ¶ 701).

You cannot do ministry alone. You will need support from individuals both inside and outside the church to do this work well. Receiving support, encouragement, and mentorship is not a sign of weakness or failure; it is a mark of strength.

In our research, **Flourishers** were more likely to report having an existing social support network including individuals who provide emotional, tangible, and spiritual support. In fact, our analysis also showed that Flourishing clergy members have a greater number and more diverse sources of support. But it's not just about increasing the number of connections you have. The literature on support suggests it is the quality of support that matters, and for ministry satisfaction, having diverse sources of support, including family, friends, and congregants, matters.

> "The God who is Divine community is known only in human community. Deep knowing of perfect love, just like deep knowing of ourselves, demands that we be in relationships of spiritual friendships."
>
> Dr. David Benner, *The Gift of Being Yourself*, 49

You'll recall at the beginning of this resource that we talked about positive emotions and how flourishing clergy find ways to extend those pleasant feelings. From daily diary data, we know that they do so through sharing with others the news and happenings that make them happy. They do not sit silently at their desk to celebrate a parishioner returning to the congregation, a community meeting that is lively and fruitful, or a family member's good news. Rather, they pick up the phone and share it with someone, which serves to extend their positive emotions and also, perhaps inadvertently, deepen their connections with others. **The reason for relationships is not ultimately for you to "have support," but because this is the way of God.**

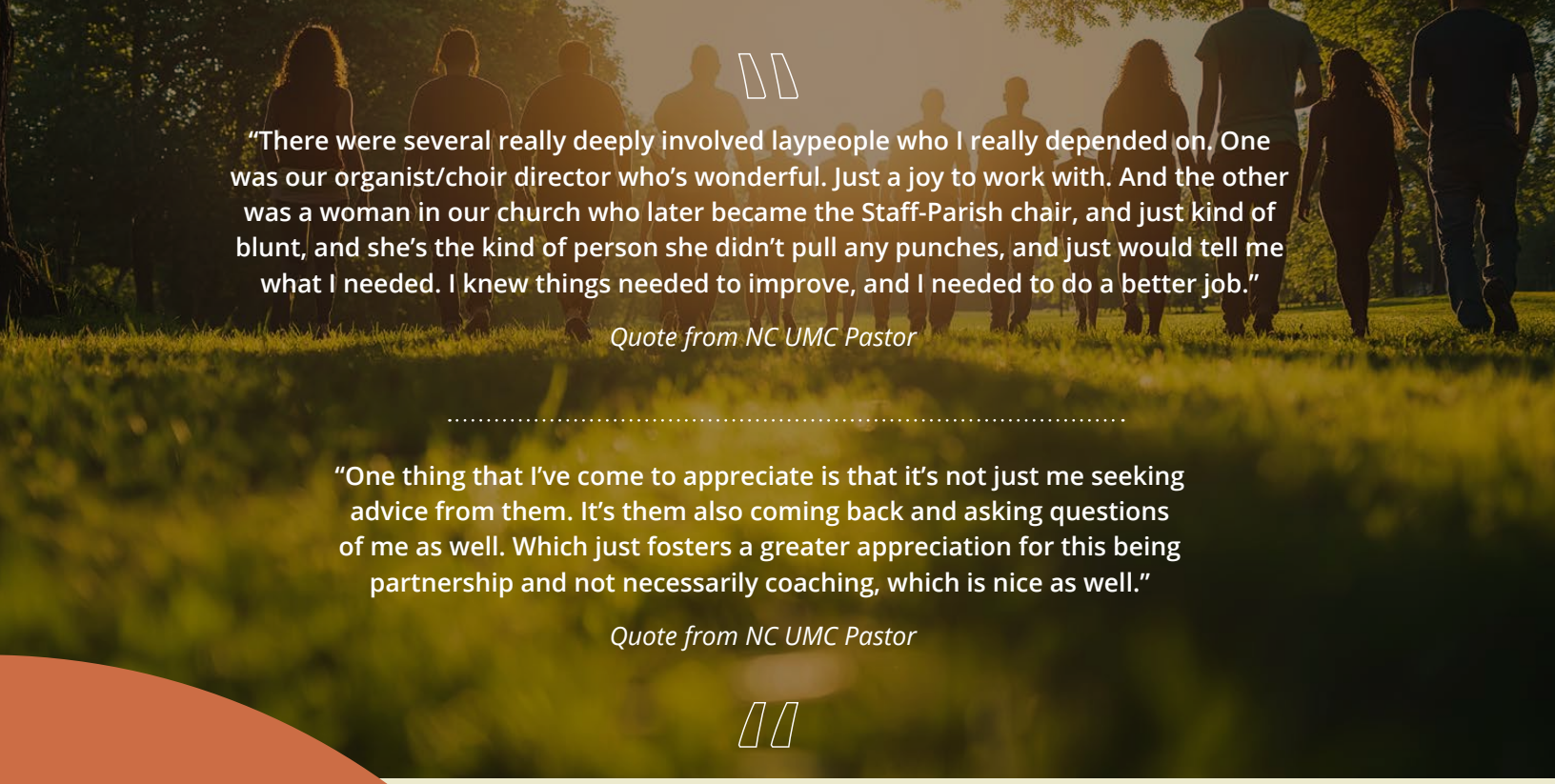
Building Networks of Support. What works?

CONNECT WITH OTHER CLERGY

- Reach out to someone, including a friend who is clergy, to share the bright spots you experience. This might be a quick call or leaving an audio text that shares the happiness in your voice, every couple weeks.
- Identify another pastor who can serve as a mentor.
- Form or join a peer or covenant group.
- Find at least one clergy person (who could be a coach or pastor outside of the UMC) in whom you can confide and who can support you in the face of ministerial and personal challenges.

SEEK OUT EMOTIONAL SUPPORT FROM FAMILY AND FRIENDS

- Meet a friend for lunch, especially if you feel yourself getting down or low on energy.
- Create an annual ritual, such as a retreat with friends, so you maintain your connection to them.
- Make yourself accountable to a close friend or spouse who knows the day-to-day stressors you're facing. Help each other maintain boundaries and healthy practices as well.
- Connect with professional support in the form of a therapist, coach, or spiritual director. You can do this proactively or during seasons that feel particularly difficult.



"There were several really deeply involved laypeople who I really depended on. One was our organist/choir director who's wonderful. Just a joy to work with. And the other was a woman in our church who later became the Staff-Parish chair, and just kind of blunt, and she's the kind of person she didn't pull any punches, and just would tell me what I needed. I knew things needed to improve, and I needed to do a better job."

Quote from NC UMC Pastor

"One thing that I've come to appreciate is that it's not just me seeking advice from them. It's them also coming back and asking questions of me as well. Which just fosters a greater appreciation for this being partnership and not necessarily coaching, which is nice as well."

Quote from NC UMC Pastor

Try It Out!

On survey data, we have found that sometimes clergy perceive that they have low support and yet on the same survey name many supportive individuals in their lives. Because the perception of having support available matters to well-being, if you perceive yours to be low, observe your life to see if there is evidence to the contrary.

If you're feeling isolated, over the next week make a log of every interaction you have, however brief, with a quick jot of one positive thing about the person or the encounter. Even if it was a difficult encounter, make an effort to name a grace experienced or a positive quality about the person. At the end of the week, read back over your list. Is it a **fact** or a **feeling** that you are isolated and alone? Where did God meet you in the presence of another in this past week?

Questions for Reflection:

- We cannot do ministry alone! Who are the people who support you in your life and ministry? What are some of the various roles they play? Are there particular social support needs in your life that aren't currently being met? Who do you call to celebrate on a good day?

- NCC Bishop Connie Shelton recently stated that "one of the primary occupational hazards for clergy is self-deception." Friends who regularly tell you the "truth in love" can help challenge your hubris and affirm your gifts. Who are these holy friends in your life? What are ways that you are cultivating intentional truth-telling and accountability with these persons?

- What expectations for congregational support do you carry—whether stated or unstated? If you were to complete the sentence, "Something my congregation could do to support me in this season of life is…, " what would you ask for? What are some ways that you can share the response to this with your congregation?

- What are some signs that you might need to seek out professional support?

If you may benefit from professional support, refer to the list of other resources at the end of this guide.

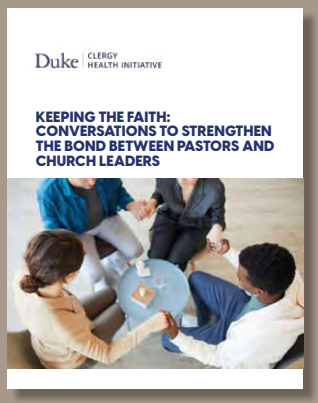
CONCLUSION

Every single one of us comes to ministry with a varied set of experiences and a unique temperament. We live out our ministries in contexts which, themselves, exist in varied degrees of health. The challenges we face as clergy in the day to day work of leading congregations–accompanying communities of people on the journey from birth to death, engaging in weekly rhythms of worship and prayer that come as predictably as our breath but often leave us wishing that we could catch our breath–can leave us filled with reverence and grief, sometimes all at the same time. We come to this beautiful vocation as human creatures who have physical, social, and emotional needs. We find the small but important part of God's work that we are called to do, and we work in faith that in partnership with our siblings in Christ, we are enough, there is enough, and God is more than enough. The four simple (but not easy!) behaviors described in this resource are an offering that we pray points you towards a more abundant life in Christ–fully alive, and with God fully glorified.

Further Resources

After working with clergy for almost 18 years, we have a wealth of knowledge and resources that you might find additionally helpful and which may fill in some of the gaps that this particular resource leaves open. They are offered to you without cost thanks to the generous support of The Duke Endowment.

Tending the Shepherds:
A more expansive report about the specific mental health needs of UMC clergy in NC



Keeping the Faith:
A conversation guide with tools to help P/SPRC committees and their pastors come together for difficult conversations and develop skills needed for healthy community

Well-Being Practices:
A list of evidence-based practices you can choose from, if you're not sure where to get started

ACTION & COPING PLANNING FOR MY WELL-BEING

1

Why do I want to care for my health more broadly?

- What scriptural or theological touchstone will ground me? (e.g. Genesis 1:31 / my body is good, Psalm 139:13-14 / my body is gift, 1 Corinthians 6:19 / my body is holy.)

- What scriptural or theological framework will I need to resist? (e.g. my body is bad, my body is secondary to my brain, my body is separate from my faith.)

2

What would it look like for me to eat, move, and/or sleep healthier? (Choose one area to start.)

- When will I act?

- Where will I act?

- How will I act?

(e.g. I will shop for healthy groceries on Saturday and bring my lunch to school/work at least three times a week.)

3

What kind of barriers am I likely to face in maintaining healthy behaviors?

- Barriers of time?

- Barriers of place?

- Barriers of pressure?

(e.g. When congregants invite me to a meal, I have trouble saying no for fear of offending them.)

What are my strategies for maintaining my health when challenges occur?

4

- Things I can do?

- Things I can say?

- Things I can remember?

(e.g. I can review menus of common meeting spots in advance to identify the healthiest options. I can say, "Sure thing. I love the [insert healthy option] at [such and such restaurant.]" I can remember that wherever we end up, I can limit portion sizes, skip dessert, and/or take a doggie bag home.)

Remember:
Anticipating challenges in advance and devising strategies for dealing with them eliminates the need to deliberate in the moment when it is more difficult to make good choices! Action and coping planning is a radical act of faith, hope, and love for God's future.

*from Johnston, Erin, David Eagle, Amy Corneli, et al., "Seminary Students and Physical Health: Beliefs, Behaviors, and Barriers," Journal of Religion and Health (2022) 61: 1207-1225. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10943-021-01480-7.

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Learn more about the research of the Clergy Health Collaborative and access many of the resources referenced inside this report. These resources are available to you and your congregation for free thanks to the generous support of The Duke Endowment.

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