

# If It Works for You...

## Ideas from You and Your Colleagues for Managing Stress

*Collected and Organized by the Health and Wholeness Team  
New England Synod  
2007*

### Introduction

It isn't a secret that pastors—both single and married—often are stressed. The demands of ministry, personal time, and family time frequently conflict. The following suggestions are the responses to a questionnaire the Health and Wholeness Team sent out last year. They are being passed on as options that you and your spouse (if you have one) might find helpful. Most of the ideas in this pamphlet came from pastors, but associates in ministry, deaconesses, and diaconal ministers are urged to utilize these suggestions as they apply to managing their stressors.

Some of what follows will not apply to single pastors. However, many of these suggestions can be utilized by pastors who are single—in some cases with adaptation. Also, some suggestions were made specifically by single pastors who want to share how they deal with their unique stressors.

Our Team can share ideas, but only you can decide to be proactive in dealing with your stressors. Indeed, the value of this pamphlet lies in how you use and adapt these ideas. May God bless your exploration of ways to be more effective in managing stress in your life and in the life of your family!

### Time Management

Divide your work day into thirds: morning, afternoon, and evening. Work no more than two-thirds each day.

Take two days off per week. If that isn't workable in a given week, then be sure to take one day off.

Limit yourself to no more than three evenings of work per week.

Be intentional about time away from the office each day in order to do housework, garden, and rest. Let your voice-mail or answering machine screen calls during this time.

Take all of your vacation time.

Evaluate carefully how much time you can spend on synodical, ecumenical, inter-faith, and community activities.

You don't have to attend every meeting in your congregation, and you don't need to be present for the entire meeting of each committee or group.

If you have a retired pastor or a pastor on special call in your congregation, utilize his/her abilities and strengths. Also, rely on that pastor for support.

Make Monday a "let down day"—no appointments or commitments—only what catches your attention.

Leave work before you are too exhausted to talk to anyone in the evening.

Don't answer the phone at dinner.

Learn to say "No."

Delegate! Delegate! Delegate!

## **Relationships**

Be intentional about having dinner with your spouse and/or family. See it as sacred family time together.

Expect all members of your household to stay at the dinner table for the entire meal and conversation.

Set aside one evening a week as "date night" with your spouse. See it as time that can be interrupted only for emergencies.

Have a brunch with family and/or friends following services on Sunday morning (with no agenda).

Schedule an "appointment" with your spouse and tell people that your calendar is "full" at that time.

Be intentional about attending your children's school, sports, and/or musical events.

If possible, try to have mutual day(s) off with your spouse.

Schedule one activity with family or friends every weekend.

Play with your grandchildren.

Be clear with your congregation that they are not to expect your family to be more involved in the congregation than any other members—and only by their choice.

## **Activities**

Develop a hobby, and schedule time for it. Consider a hobby that puts you into regular contact with other people (especially if you are single).

Exercise regularly (e.g., gym, cycling, jogging, hiking, swimming, walking, outdoor activities, lifting weights, aerobic exercises).

Get involved with a community group (e.g., drama club, book club).

Be a part of a collegial group.

Develop non-clergy friendships.

Socialize outside of church activities and parishioners.

Walk your dog.

Go on a hike.

Read books unrelated to ministry.

Play computer games, crossword puzzles, etc.

Eat healthfully. Cut down on between-meal treats. Drink plenty of water.

Do gardening.

Join a flag football league in the fall and a softball league in the spring.

Keep in touch with friends on a regular basis.

Participate in a chat room for single pastors.

## **Spiritual Health**

Pray frequently. Develop contemplative prayer—don't ask for anything, but be present with God.

Attend a prayer group (preferably outside your congregation).

Read the Bible devotionally—not just in preparation for sermons, lessons, etc.

Be involved in a support group.

Utilize a mutual ministry committee.

Participate in Marriage Encounter.

Participate in Taize services.

In your car, play CDs of Taize music devotionally—sing and pray along with the music.

Engage in spiritual direction.

Do yoga.

Spend some time in silence every day.

Go on retreats.

Select a pastor and utilize his/her ministry to you.

Utilize the Ministry Assistance Program of our Synod when an individual, family, or vocational problem arises. Address the issue early and before it becomes a major problem.

*The Health and Wholeness Team thanks those who responded to our questionnaire on managing stress. We hope that you will find some ideas in these pages that may be helpful.*