Clergy Supportive Spiritual Practices

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Abstract

Clergy wellness is of keen interest to church leadership in recent years as mainline Canadian churches face rapid decline. The financial diminishment of the church has led to fewer clergy looking after more churches, and larger churches having fewer staff. The result is increased demands on clergy’s time and energy that pose a challenge to their wellness. Given this current reality, the importance of understanding what can support clergy wellness is crucial. The purpose of this research is to explore the question: “What is the experience of Anglican priests in the Diocese of Huron as they engage in supportive spiritual practices?” Through this research, a more thorough exploration of clergy’s narrated experience of their supportive practices has led to a deeper understanding of how these practices support wellness. Interviews were conducted with thirteen priests of the Diocese of Huron and analyzed using Jean Clandinin’s (2013) qualitative method of Narrative Inquiry. Themes that emerged from the research were as follows: care for their bodies, maintenance of their personal boundaries, nurture of their self-awareness, maintenance of their social support, clergy focus on effective communication, and linking their personal narrative with their understanding of the larger narrative of the Gospel. This research project provides the Diocese of Huron with insight into priests’ experience of spiritual practices and will be a helpful resource in supporting priests as they engage in their vocations. Further research is needed into the identified sub-theme of the congregational dynamic that sees increased expectations from congregation members when their clergy-person is in crisis. Also needed is further research into the identified theme of the experience of clergy as they place their own narratives inside and outside their understanding of the narrative of the Gospel.
# Contents

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Introduction</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Description of the Project</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Background: Diocese of Huron Population Decline</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Literature Review</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Challenges to Clergy Wellness</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Use of time</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Affirmation</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Outpouring of self</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conflict</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Supportive Factors for Clergy Wellness</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Practical self-care</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The spiritual life of clergy</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Method</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Point of connection with the researcher</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Narrative Inquiry</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pragmatic research philosophy</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Understanding of inquiry and knowledge</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Knowledge and moral responsibility</td>
<td>38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Implications for research</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Experience as Basic Unit........................................................................................................ 40

Commonplace of Sociality .................................................................................................... 45

Procedure ............................................................................................................................. 48

Interview Questions ............................................................................................................. 50

Sampling and Selection, and Ethical Implications ................................................................. 50

Interview Process ................................................................................................................ 52

Data Collection .................................................................................................................... 53

Data Analysis ........................................................................................................................ 54

Resonant Threads .................................................................................................................. 54

1. Care for the Body .............................................................................................................. 54

2. Boundaries ...................................................................................................................... 57

2a) Pushing of boundaries ................................................................................................... 57

2b) Helper versus boundary-setter ..................................................................................... 63

3. Self-Awareness ............................................................................................................... 66

4. Social Support ............................................................................................................... 69

5. Communication .............................................................................................................. 72

6. Narrative of the Gospel ................................................................................................. 75

6a) Change in tone .............................................................................................................. 76

6b) Shift in perspective ....................................................................................................... 80

6c) Acceptance of self and others ..................................................................................... 83
Discussion .......................................................................................................................... 84

Use of Time ...................................................................................................................................... 84

Affirmation .................................................................................................................................... 90

Conflict ......................................................................................................................................... 93

Outpouring of Self ......................................................................................................................... 95

Practical Self-Care ........................................................................................................................ 99

The Spiritual Life of Clergy .......................................................................................................... 99

Narrative of the Gospel and Institution of the Church ............................................................... 101

Implications of this Research ...................................................................................................... 104

Limitations of this Research ........................................................................................................ 108

Implications for Further Research ............................................................................................ 109

Theological Reflection .................................................................................................................. 110

Conclusion .................................................................................................................................... 115

References ...................................................................................................................................... 117

APPENDIX A .................................................................................................................................. 127

APPENDIX B .................................................................................................................................. 128

APPENDIX C .................................................................................................................................. 129

APPENDIX D .................................................................................................................................. 131

APPENDIX E .................................................................................................................................. 135

Natalie ............................................................................................................................................. 135
Jodi ................................................................. 136
Theo ................................................................. 137
Shawn ............................................................... 139
Roger ................................................................. 141
Mandy ................................................................. 144
Landon ............................................................... 147
Stella ................................................................. 150
Betty ................................................................. 152
Travis ............................................................... 154
Melissa ............................................................ 155
Jerry ................................................................. 156
Blair ................................................................. 158
Introduction

Description of the Project

The purpose of this research is to explore the question: “What is the experience of Anglican priests in the Diocese of Huron as they engage in supportive spiritual practices?” I am an Anglican priest in the Diocese of Huron, and I am deeply concerned about clergy wellness. The wellbeing of clergy is key as they offer leadership. Over the years, however, I have been saddened to watch several of my colleagues leave ministry, and express that their wellness has been so jeopardized that they have burned out. It has been my observation in this diocese that congregations may take years to recover from the conflict and confusion that ensues when a priests’ wellbeing has deteriorated to the point of self-describing that they have burned out. As the institution of the church declines, it must rely on fewer leaders. As it does so, the wellness of these leaders is of key importance.

For the purposes of this study, a person’s wellness is self-defined as their perceived ability to find fulfillment in life as well as cope with life’s challenges (see page 10). Spiritual practices are also self-defined by the research participants. The literature indicates that spiritual practices such as prayer and scripture reading significantly support clergy wellness as clergy continue in their vocation (Chandler, 2010; Epperly & Epperly, 2008; Golden, Piedmont, Ciarrocchi, & Rodgerson, 2004; Grosch & Olsen, 2000; Jackson-Jordan, 2013; Meek, K. R.; McMinn, M. R.; Brower, C. M.; Burnett, T. D.; McRay, B. W.; Ramey, M. L.; Swanson, D. W.; Villa, D. D., 2003; Miner, 2007; Oswald, 1991; Turton & Francis, 2007). However, the storied (narrative) experiences of clergy engaging in spiritual practice is, for the most part, absent from the literature. This is a further reason for this research.
The existing literature has included two foci: the negative causes of the decline of wellness, and the positive practices that support the wellness of clergy in their ministry. The literature discussing the decline of clergy wellness focusses on stress caused by multiple and conflicting expectations of clergy’s time, clergy’s expectation of affirmation, conflict in the church, and the clergy’s outpouring of self.

Various supportive practices are described in the literature. One theme is practical clergy self-care. These include time management (Randall, 1994), healthy lifestyle (Lindholm, Johnston, Dong, Moore, & Ablah, 2016), and maintaining social support (Muskett & Village, 2016). Another important theme in the literature is the nurture and support offered by a clergy’s personal spiritual practice (Chandler, 2010; Epperly & Epperly, 2008; Golden et al., 2004; Grosch & Olsen, 2000; Jackson-Jordan, 2013; Meek et al., 2003; Miner, 2007; Oswald, 1991; Turton & Francis, 2007). This theme is of key interest to the current research project. Although this theme has been identified in the literature, there was not any research providing an in-depth exploration of the narrative experience of clergy as they engage in personal spiritual practices. It is expected that a qualitative exploration of clergy’s narrated experience of their personal spiritual practices will have the potential to lead to a deeper understanding of how these practices support the wellness of priests.

This research project is a qualitative analysis designed to explore this gap in the existing research, specific to the experience of priests in the Diocese of Huron. Using Jean Clandinin's (2013) qualitative narrative method, thirteen priests were interviewed. This research presents an understanding of clergy’s experience engaging in personal spiritual practices.
Background: Diocese of Huron Population Decline

The Diocese of Huron was established in 1857 when it had sufficient numbers and organizational capacity to emerge as an independent diocese from the Diocese of Toronto. It encompasses the area from Windsor to Tobermory, and east to Clarksburg (see Appendix A). At its peak in 1961, there were 307 churches in the Diocese (Anglican Church of Canada [1961] Statistics of the Anglican Church of Canada, retrieved from http://www.anglican.ca/wp-content/uploads/2011/07/National-Statistics-1959-1961.pdf). By 2016 this number had dropped to 175 churches, and continues to drop rapidly. In 1961, there were over 120,000 Anglicans in the Diocese of Huron (Anglican Church of Canada [1961] Statistics of the Anglican Church of Canada, retrieved from http://www.anglican.ca/wp-content/uploads/2011/07/National-Statistics-1959-1961.pdf). In January of 2016, the Diocesan Director of Administrative Services and Secretary-Treasurer, Canon Paul Rathbone, reported from the diocesan office in London that the number is now approximately 50,000 people. He went on to say that most of this decline has been in the last 15 years, during which the population of the diocese decreased by half. Clergy in the Diocese of Huron find themselves in older buildings with aging congregations that have fewer people and financial resources.

Senior congregation members reminisce about the 1950s as being a time when the church was growing and new churches were being built. These same congregation members express puzzlement at the younger generations’ lack of church attendance. In an attempt to reverse this trend, clergy feel pressure from the laity to preach better sermons, lead new programs to bring in the youth, or otherwise increase the size of their congregations. Clergy experience increased stress at a time when they feel pressured to save the church by over-performing, while at the same time not seeing a positive effect from their efforts as the congregation continues to decline.
To better understand what supports or inhibits clergy wellbeing, it is important to explore the existing literature.

**Literature Review**

The focus of this study is on clergy spiritual practices as they pertain to wellness. The concept of wellness has not been defined conclusively in the literature. For the purposes of this qualitative study, the researcher has defined wellness as a person’s perceived ability to find fulfillment in life as well as cope with life’s challenges. By this definition, wellness does not imply a constant state of happiness or a lack of negative stress. Challenges may arise, but those feeling challenged perceive themselves as being healthy enough to face these challenges without going into prolonged distress.

There is significant existing literature (discussed below) about the wellness of clergy that focusses on the negative challenges that clergy experience. Such findings contribute to an understanding of the difficulties clergy face in maintaining wellness as they engage in ministry. This paper examines these considerations, and then explores the literature on positive supportive practices for clergy wellness. The latter includes practical steps for managing self-care and the spiritual practices of clergy.

**Challenges to Clergy Wellness**

Stress is understood as being both positive and negative in its effects on wellness. Little, Simmons, & Nelson (2007), in their study of health in organizational leadership, defined the distinction as follows:

If an individual appraises a demand as threatening or harmful, he or she experiences a degree of distress, the negative stress response. Conversely, if an individual appraises a
demand as positive or preserving well-being, he or she experiences eustress, the positive stress response. (p. 243)

They go on to state that while distress may lead to negative health outcomes, eustress (positive stress) may actually support a person’s health. Furthermore, the same challenge may be experienced by one individual as eustress, while another may perceive the same challenge to be a threat, causing distress. Anisk (2016) quotes from her interview with psychologist Kelly McGonigal that a person’s sense of capability, rather than the stressful situation itself, will determine whether or not the stress is experienced as eustress or distress. In this interview, McGonigal explains,

The same situation can trigger either response, based on whether the person has either a basic sense of self-trust or self-doubt. A challenge response is what happens in your brain and body when your stance is, ‘I can handle this! I possess the resources to face it’; and a threat response is what happens when you lack that self-trust, and your initial sense is, ‘I can’t handle this; it’s too much’. Based on that initial impression, a cascade of physiological changes is set off to prepare you to deal with the type of situation that your brain and body now expect — depending on whether you feel you can handle the situation or not. (Anisk, 2016, p. 91)

Burnout is a clear indication of a lack of wellness and occurs when chronic distress over time leaves a person feeling depleted. Maslach, Jackson, & Leiter (1996) observed that burnout leaves people feeling that “they are no longer able to give of themselves at a psychological level” (p. 4). Schaufeli, Leiter, & Maslach (2009) go on to describe the three dimensions of burnout, understood to be emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and reduction of personal accomplishment. Lewis, Turton, & Francis (2007) examined six studies of clergy from a variety
of denominations from Australia, the United Kingdom, and the United States. Lewis et al. (2007) reported that, “consistent findings across all six studies indicated a high level of work-related burnout among the samples of clergy, irrespective of religious denomination or country” (p. 1).

As noted above, there are numerous observations in the literature about significant challenges to clergy wellness. For the purposes of this research, these have been gathered into four main themes: use of time, affirmation, outpouring of self, and conflict.

**Use of time.**

As priests attempt to schedule their time, they wrestle with priorities (Willimon, 1988). For example, there may be an expectation that they focus primarily on pastoral care to elderly shut-ins, yet others in the congregation simultaneously express the expectation that the primary focus ought to be building youth attendance. Both are important and, in terms of time, mutually exclusive. Another expectation is that the priest should lead quality educational events. This also takes time, time that various committees are vying for when they express the expectation that the priest attend or often chair each of the church meetings. Epperly (2014), in correspondence with pastors in North American Protestant churches, noted that congregation members increasingly expect immediate and detailed responses to communication via electronic media such as email and texting. Excellence in preaching is demanded by congregations, especially in an age of competing media. Quality sermons take time to research and compose, but this time is in competition with other time used to satisfy the expectation that the priest attend all the congregational fund-raisers and social events. Many expect the priest to be learned through continuing education, which takes time. Those seeking face to face pastoral care will complain when the priest is off on another course, instead of being available for regular office hours.

Forward’s (2000) interview-based study of clergy stress, involving 29 Protestant pastors in urban
California, noted a clergy-person could easily work 100 hours a week, and, as a result, sacrifice needed time for her/his personal life. Forward (2000) stated that, “the stress resulting from task overload and limited time is [prevalent] in ministry” (p. 167).

Adding to this stress, church attendance in mainline Christianity in Canada is generally and significantly diminishing (Bibby, 1987). Willimon (1997) spoke of the disassociation of younger generations from the organized church, even among those who continue to have spiritual interests. He (1997) stated, “I don't meet any young adults interested in feeding national organizations. But Jesus is doing quite well among them” (Campolo, A., Frey, W. B., Hestenes, R., & Willimon, 1997, p. 20). Bibby (2004, 2011) has also given attention to the spirituality younger generations, including millennials (Bibby 2009), and has pointed to statistics showing unexpected trends of higher youth church attendance (Bibby, 2002). However, these encouraging fluctuations have not translated into any present nor projected substantial rebound in church attendance or financial support for the Canadian Anglican church. The focus is often on youth, but those seen as “missing from the pews” include members of all generations, including the siblings and children of the oldest attending members. The statistics that do speak of Canadian Christian church growth are heavily influenced by immigration from parts of the world where the church is strong. This has predominantly bolstered Roman Catholic churches and Pentecostal Churches (Bibby, 2012).

For Anglican and many mainline churches, the competition the few remaining attending Christians increases the pressure for clergy to fulfill all the competing roles well. Irvine (1997) noted:

[Clergy] have been seduced by a world that has slipped into the church demanding measures of success that are quantitatively obvious and descriptively visible...we have
accepted that success and even survival is based on competition….This competition implies developing a better product than the church next door. (p. 107)

As attendance decreases, churches are forced to close or amalgamate due to limited finances. Multi-point parishes are formed when churches keep their individual buildings but share one priest. Clergy overseeing multi-point parishes face a challenge that is unique (Brewster, 2014; Robbins & Francis, 2014). In their study of Anglican clergy overseeing multi-point parishes in England and Wales, Francis & Brewster (2012) noted that, in terms of potential burnout, the clergy they studied “report significantly lower levels of personal accomplishment” (p. 163). Francis and Brewster (2012) noted that as clergy work to “keep as much of the historic pattern of ministry available as possible,” (p. 162) they spend their time reactively maintaining their churches rather than overseeing new initiatives. When a clergy-person has not one but several church councils, and several Sunday services at multiple locations, and several seasonal church events to attend, the duplication of these maintenance tasks fills a priest’s schedule. For some clergy, focussing on church maintenance may be fulfilling. Others may be in danger of burnout due to feeling a lack of personal accomplishment.

The stress caused by multiple and conflicting expectations of a clergy-person’s time is often a challenge to wellness. Such external expectations are compounded by internal stress clergy may place on themselves, such as the stress of seeking approval from their congregation members.

**Affirmation.**

Many clergy evaluate their work by the feedback of the congregation. When a clergy-person engages in work that is above and beyond what was done in the past, the congregation begins to expect this new level as the norm. For example, a clergy-person may decide to put
other priorities aside and visit every shut-in once a month. At first, the clergy-person will be praised for accomplishing so many visits. Soon, however, the congregation will simply expect this from the clergy, without offering added praise. A new equilibrium has been achieved with the former level of affirmation, but now with higher demands (Perry, 2003). Olson and Grosch (1991) summarized this complex issue in their case study research of a Protestant American pastor suffering from symptoms of burnout:

In congregational life…the pastor functions as an idealized self-object for parishioners with whom they can merge as an image of calmness, infallibility, and perfection. He or she is sought after for advice, spiritual counsel, utilized in times of joy and crisis, and expected on Sundays to deliver a word from God. While intellectually the pastor may know that these are idealizations, they are still so flattering that the pastor works even harder to gain more idealization. Sermons are measured by the amount of flattering comments at the door, and late-night emergency visits are made worthwhile by flattering comments such as ‘we could never have come through this crisis without your help.’ Thus, congregational transference and idealization colludes with the grandiose self the pastor is invested in. This begins a vicious feedback loop. The more the pastor attempts to be all that the congregation expects him or her to be (thereby using the congregation as a self-object), the more the congregation expects. One late-night emergency visit sets up patterns of more and more late-night visits until the congregation begins to expect this type of pastoral service. As a result, the pastor must work even harder to keep up with their expectations, so as to preserve the grandiose self. (p. 622)
Clergy may desire elusive positive feedback from congregational members. The seeking of affirmation may be one of the factors motivating a clergy-person to set aside healthy boundaries and give too much of themselves.

**Outpouring of self.**

Whether offering pastoral care, leading worship, or preaching, members of the clergy are giving of themselves. As noted in the above section, clergy may give too much of themselves in an effort to receive affirmation from their congregation. The seeking of affirmation is not the only factor in clergy’s outpouring of self. Friendships are ‘give and take’, but the relationship between clergy and the congregation is professional in nature, and professional relationships are unidirectional (Aravind, Krishnaram, & Thasneem, 2012). Too often, clergy can find neither time nor methods to tend to their own lives and to replenish their inner resources (Doolittle, 2007; Muse, 2000; Oswald, 1991; Steinke, 2006). Hendron (2014) also noted that the outpouring of self may also include vicarious trauma from “their daily pastoral ministry in offering care and support to those who have encountered life’s daily tragedies” (p. 1). Stalfa (1994), in his overview of transgenerational family systems theory as it relates to the caregiving role in ministry, noted that outpouring of self may lead to “loss of personal boundaries, guilt over not doing enough, neglect of self and family, and a quiet resentment from a sense of being exploited by the very cause to which they are committed” (p. 380).

The outpouring of self may have its roots in unmet needs that initially drew some to become clergy. Weiser (1994) explained that,

> While clergy serve as healers, they are…themselves people in need and in process of healing. As they seek the missing pieces of themselves and try to understand the wounds of their past before these become transmogrified into the wounds of the present, they
must realize that they are doing this in the presence of other wounded people of their own sort….How often has the motivation for entry into the ecclesiastical profession been described in these very terms? Candidates often cite their desire to help people as primary. The problems occur when helping others is primarily motivated by the need for self-importance or self-fulfillment that comes through quasi-messianic means. (p. 137)

When there exists, for a clergy-person, a dysfunctional need to be the helper, it is difficult for the clergy-person to set appropriate boundaries. Self-identification as the helper simultaneously defines the congregation members as being unable to help themselves. The inflated sense of being needed makes drawing boundaries all that more difficult. Difficulty drawing and maintaining boundaries can have detrimental effects, including an unchecked outpouring of self that undermines their wellness. In addition to this, when a clergy-person self-identifies as a helper, it may be painful when those they seek to help are in conflict with one another or with the clergy-person (Muse, 2000).

Conflict.

Many clergy experience significant stress due to the amount of ongoing conflict within their congregations (Forney, 2010; Gortner, 2010; Lehr, 2006; Rediger, 1982; Wicks, 2000; Nicholson, 1998). Zondag (2007), in his research on Roman Catholic and Reformed clergy in the Netherlands, wrote that a “sense of helplessness may arise when pastors become involved in a conflict between [congregation members]. If they understand both people’s positions, feel concern for both, and want to protect them both, whose side are they to take?” (p. 93). The clergy-person may experience stress at the need to engage in conflict by choosing a leadership direction that may cause a rift between themselves and some within the congregation. Congregational conflicts may be complex. Situations present themselves, requiring a decision,
yet any decision might be met with anger by some, directed toward the clergy. An example of such a decision would be matters of liturgical preference. In the Diocese of Huron, the rector is considered to be the chief liturgical officer (second to the bishop), with final say over decisions pertaining to liturgy. As such, there may be pressure for the rector to make final decisions about conflictual liturgical considerations.

If, for example, members of the congregation become concerned about the lack of youth attendance, they may come to the conclusion that contemporary praise music would “bring in the youth”. They might pressure the priest to order a change in the style of worship music. No matter what decision is made, those whose favourite music is not played may accuse the clergy of being callous to their feelings. The following are a few more examples of the kinds of decisions clergy may be asked to make, yet find themselves criticized as being uncaring when they do: cancelling a program, disciplining volunteers, making changes to the liturgical space, deciding whether the choir needs to wear robes, or offering a vision for future ministries. A priest may respond by engaging in collaborative decision making. The people who do not “win” such arguments may still pressure the rector to use his or her power to force the decision.

Such situations also highlight a perceived conflict in the expectations of the clergy’s role. On the one hand, they may be expected to be decisive leaders. Simultaneously, they are expected to be empathetic pastors to all church members. The role of decisive leadership may put the clergy-person in conflict with their other role as empathetic pastor when those who oppose a decision state that they feel uncared for. As Friedman (2007) pointed out, the accusation that a clergy-person is uncaring may be used by congregation members as a tool to undermine clergy leadership decisions. When making a leadership decision, those who do not approve of the decision may engage in what Friedman (2007) refers to as “leadership-toxic” (p. 2) behaviour.
By “leadership-toxic” (p. 2) Friedman is referring to behaviours intended to undermine the authority of the leader, such as rallying support against the leader. Such activities may include formal petitions, the use of positions of power to stall objectives, informal meetings, complaints of ill-health due to the insensitivity of the leader, and manipulative gossip. Friedman (2007) stated that those who wish to undermine a clergy-person’s leadership position may do so by accusing the clergy-person of being harsh and unpastoral.

Because there is an expectation that a clergy-person be warm and caring, congregation members may demand that all feelings not only be acknowledged, but also responded to with adjustments in leadership direction. The expectation by the congregation that their clergy offer solid leadership, coupled with the constant opposition to that same leadership when it is offered, is a significant source of stress for clergy leaders who find themselves “sabotaged rather than supported” (p. 14) as they attempt to make decisions.

In addition to local instances of leadership erosion, there has been a general societal waning of the respect for clergy over the last half century (Doolittle, 2007; Epperly, 2014). Hotchkiss (2009) described how Jewish and Christian ministers in the early part of the 20th century used to hold positions of respect. Hotchkiss (2009) stated that an area’s “priest, minister, or rabbi held a position of respect and sometimes influence, ranking usually just below the heads of a half-dozen leading families” (p. 24).

The Reverend Canon David Bowyer, who is known in the Diocese of Huron for his extensive historical knowledge, noted that the first clergy in the Diocese of Huron were mostly landed gentry from England and Ireland. In the mid-1800’s, they occupied a higher level of the class system that existed at the time. Because they were affluent, they could afford an education. Upon coming to Canada, they were the priests of what was, then, the official national church.
The combination of class, wealth, education, and national status fostered a relationship of respect between the Anglican priests in the Diocese of Huron and the congregation members. This was especially the case in a time when many of the congregation members did not have today’s access to education. The relationship of respect for the priest became a part of the cultural fabric of the Diocese of Huron for years to come. (D. Bowyer, Personal Communication, December 15, 2017)

Hotchkiss (2009) describes how Protestant Christian clergy in North America now “live in a time of the cultural disestablishment of Protestant Christianity…and increasing tensions over clergy, born both out of a general distrust of leaders and of the special ambiguities belonging to the pastoral office” (p. 25). Clergy from any era could expect opposition from congregation members, and factions that may form to support or oppose their decisions. Today, clergy operate with less authority for enacting their decisions, and may be under more pressure when they attempt to do so.

Some of the distress experienced by clergy in the diocese is the difficulty in developing a different leadership style given the changing context. This includes the unwillingness of some congregation members to accept traditional authoritarian leadership. At the same time, this also includes the unwillingness of others to accept a priest who engages in collaborative leadership. A personal example of the latter occurred in this researcher’s first week of ministry. Members of the Altar Guild were in conflict about the way they should set up the altar area for a particular occasion. Sensing that some members of the Altar Guild would appreciate a collaborative approach, I began by asking the question, “How have you done this in the past?” The head of the Altar Guild answered with the cross remark, “In the past we had a Rector who could make a
decision!” It was clear that this leading member of the Altar Guild was operating on an understanding of leadership that was based on a former, more authoritarian model.

In addition to a change in the respect for the authority of clergy, there is also a general decreasing trust of clergy leadership created by widespread and highly publicised scandals within the wider church. In their study of the impact of sexual abuse scandals in the Catholic Church in the Archdiocese of Boston, Kline, McMackin, and Lezotte (2008) concluded from their research that,

The crisis has conditioned parishioners to see all priests as tainted by the criminal misconduct of perpetrators. Many participants expressed sad resignation that no new allegation of misconduct against any priest or church leader could now “surprise” or “shock” them. This may reveal the unfortunate spread of anger and mistrust from those responsible for the scandal to other priests and bishops. (p. 296)

Scandals from the Diocese of Huron have shaken the trust of some congregation members. One of my colleagues (who wished to remain unnamed in this paper) ministered in a parish after one of the previous priests was found to be involved in a sexual scandal. My colleague saw divisions between members of the congregation who rallied behind the former clergy-person, and those who were deeply angered and felt betrayed. This colleague became exhausted trying to convince congregation members to trust in the current leadership, and to work together despite their divisions. This colleague reported coming close to burnout from this experience.

As clergy work to balance competing demands associated with their use of time, seek the affirmation of their congregation and hierarchy, and give of themselves, the added stress they associate with inevitable conflict is a significant factor in the maintaining of their wellness.
The above four themes have elaborated factors that challenge and undermine clergy wellness. The next section examines the literature that highlights supportive factors.

**Supportive Factors for Clergy Wellness**

**Practical self-care.**

The literature includes information about clergy stress management through practical self-care. Included is literature on time management (Randall, 1994); maintaining a healthy lifestyle of nutrition, exercise, and rest (Lindholm et al., 2016); and monitoring intentional connection with a network of social support (Muskett & Village, 2016). The primary focus of this portion of the reviewed literature is on self-improvement through practical actions. Some of these practices (such as managing one’s schedule so that time away from ministry may be taken) may be accomplished through spiritual practice (such as attending a spiritual retreat). In this way, self-care may overlap with the next theme identified in the literature: the spiritual life of clergy.

**The spiritual life of clergy.**

The literature suggests that clergy are more resilient when they engage in supportive spiritual practices (Chandler, 2010; Epperly & Epperly, 2008; Golden et al., 2004; Grosch & Olsen, 2000; Jackson-Jordan, 2013; Meek et al., 2003; Miner, 2007; Oswald, 1991; Turton et al., 2007). Miner et al. (2015) observed that, “In studies of occupational well-being among church leaders, spirituality is a relevant, but an often neglected, focus of the study” (p. 59). The literature includes quantitative research with statistics from surveys and from randomized clinical trials, such as Miner et al.’s (2015) study of church leaders in a variety of denominations in Australia, and Turton & Francis’s (2007) study of stipendiary parochial clergy working in the Church of England. Turton & Francis’s (2007) study indicated that adherence to personal spiritual practice is supportive of clergy wellness. They (2007) noted, “The results indicated that
a positive attitude toward prayer was associated with lower levels of emotional exhaustion, lower levels of depersonalization, and higher levels of personal accomplishment” (p. 5). Their (2007) research does not offer firm conclusions as to why this is so. Turton & Francis (2007) did, however, note that, “people who pray enjoy a range of psychological benefits, including a greater sense of purpose in life, a higher level of satisfaction with life, and better psychological well-being” (p. 71). They (2007) also speculated that this may be due to prayer supporting a view of being valued by a transcendent being, and may also connect priests psychologically with the seminary practices of prayer, devotions, and regular worship that initially supported them in their priestly formation.

There are qualitative studies (Chandler, 2010; Campbell-Reed & Scharen, 2013) concluding that spiritual practices are a support for clergy in their ministry. Chandler (2010), in her study of mainline and nondenominational clergy, stated that spiritual leaders link their strong spiritual practices to their ability to maintain “personal engagement, health, and well-being” (p. 7). Chandler (2010) does not go into detail about how spiritual practices achieve this, but stated that, “The participants indicated that these practices formed the foundation of their relationships with others including their families and church members” (p. 7). Chandler (2010) also concludes that the findings prompt the need for further in-depth study, including an examination of “specific personal spiritual growth practices” (p. 7). In their study of diverse American pastoral leaders who were new to ministry, Campbell-Reed & Scharen (2013) pointed out the importance of clergy spirituality for helping clergy to see their ordained work as a spiritual practice. They (2013) described how, by maintaining a spiritual focus in their ministry, clergy may be open to the work of God in difficult ministry situations, turning challenges into opportunities, rather than reacting defensively to conflicts with congregation members. In this way, spiritual practices may
nurture a shift in perspective (Campbell-Reed & Scharen, 2013; Pargament, 2011; Wimberly, 1980) resulting in behaviour that creatively resolves what might otherwise become problematic and distressing situations. Epperly & Epperly (2009) similarly state,

When a pastor takes time to...respond in spiritual awareness, she can respond from the perspective of God’s wisdom....We take a moment to open ourselves to God’s reconciling hospitality that embraces friend and foe alike. We allow our vision to become aligned with God’s vision as a prelude to responding with hospitality as well as honesty. (Ch. 5, Section 3, para. 13)

No literature was found that examines clergy’s storied experiences of their personal spiritual practices as they support and nurture them in their ministry. This gap in the research has led to the research question: “What is the experience of Anglican priests in the Diocese of Huron as they engage in supportive spiritual practices?” Clergy lead worship, Bible Study, and prayer for others, but what is their experience of engaging in spiritual practices that nurture and support their own personal and professional lives?

In order to research the experience of clergy as they engage in supportive spiritual practices, it is important to begin with an exploration of the nature of spiritual practice itself. Separate from the topic of clergy, there is a great deal of research about the supportive nature of spiritual practice. Doehring (2015) noted that, “spiritual practices fostering positive emotions like contentment, love, and joy broaden one’s repertoire of thoughts and actions when faced with suffering” (Chapter 5, Section 2, para. 1). Doehring (2015) also noted that, “life-giving spiritual practices induce eschatological moments of hope, shifting people out of isolated suffering and negative emotions into compassion for self and others” (Chapter 5, Section 7, Subsection 3, para. 3). It is also helpful to explore an understanding of the word “spiritual”. The definitions of
“spiritual” are wide ranging. Within those wide-ranging definitions, there are two consistent elements. The first element of the definition of “spiritual” is grounding (Nouwen, 2009; Ludwig & Kabat-Zinn, 2008; Barreto, 2015; Buttle, 2015; Hanh, T. N., 2011; Wilhoit, 2014). The second element of the definition of “spiritual” is divine attachment (Ellison, Bradshaw, Flannelly, & Galek, 2014; Kirkpatrick, 2005; Kirkpatrick & Shaver, 1990; Pan, Lee, Chang, & Jiang, 2012; Golden et al., 2004).

**Grounding.**

The first element of the ‘spiritual’ as it relates to spiritual practice is a grounding in the here and now. Theologian Henri Nouwen (2009) stated succinctly that, “the spiritual life is not a life before, after, or beyond our everyday existence. [It] can only be real when it is lived in the midst of the pains and joys of the here and now” (Chapter 1, para. 1). This definition accounts for spiritual practices that are not only found in a religious context, but would also apply to those now increasingly found in mainstream secular contexts such as health care and education (Ludwig & Kabat-Zinn, 2008; Griffin, Johnson, Kitzmann, Kolste, & Dusek, 2015; Barreto, 2015; Buttle, 2015; Bueno, V. F., Kozasa, E. H., da Silva, M. A., Alves, T. M., Louzã, M. R., & Pompéia, S., 2015). One such spiritual practice that finds broad application and focusses on grounding in the here and now is that of mindfulness.

Mindfulness is one example of a spiritual practice that is recognized in both secular and religious contexts for its supportive effects. Mindfulness was described by Daniel Siegel (2007), as “being aware of the present moment without grasping on to judgments” (p. 259). Formal mindfulness practices include meditation, yoga, and tai chi (Hardy, 2015). Kabat-Zinn (1990) described how mindfulness may informally include any practice of “paying attention in a particular way—on purpose, to the present moment, nonjudgmentally” (p. 64).
Mindfulness has been applied in the medical field “to reduce the psychological morbidity in emotional and behavioural disorders and for the treatment of chronic mental illness, fibromyalgia, anxiety and panic attacks, mood swings and stress in cancer patients, binge eating disorder, and multiple sclerosis” (Grecucci, Pappaianni, Siugzdaite, Theuninck, & Job, 2015, p. 1). It has also been found to assist those coping with addictions (Schaub, 2013) and other physical ailments such as diabetes (Hardy, 2015). Brain studies using fMRI at St Joseph’s Hospital in Toronto (Farb, N., Segal, Z., Mayberg, H. Bean, J., McKeon, D., Fatima, Z., and Anderson, A., 2007) have observed the physiological results of mindfulness, showing it to affect neural processes in a way that improves body awareness and the ability to focus attention. Of particular interest, the measured effect occurs when mindfulness is a regular practice (Siegel, 2007). Siegel (2007) described,

In neuroplasticity terms, this is how new patterns of repeated neural circuit activation strengthen the synaptic connections associated with those states that then lead to synaptic strengthening and synaptic growth. This is the mechanism by which practice [emphasis added] harnesses neural plasticity to alter synaptic connections in a way that transforms a temporary state into a more long-lasting trait of the individual” (p. 259).

By practicing mindfulness, one’s situation may remain the same, but what has changed is “the way that one either unthinkingly reacts to it or consciously responds to and works with it” (Detert, 2015, p. 369). Specifically, a person may improve their ability to focus their mind away from negative and compelling thoughts. This ability supports general health, ability to refresh through sleep, and overall resilience (Kemper, Mo, & Khayat, 2015; Dorman, 2015; Foster, 2015).
Schaub (2013) noted that although mindfulness in the medical field is viewed as “particularly suited for anyone struggling with internal conflicts and impulses” (p. 1178), in a religious context it may be encouraged as a regular spiritual practice that is simply a way of life. Schaub (2013) continues noting that, “The cultivating of the meditative state… in which the body and the personality quiet down, and awareness becomes subtler and more harmonious, is central to all the spiritual paths” (p. 1178).

The Vietnamese Buddhist Monk and author Thich Nhat Hanh (2011) described how mindfulness may be a way of life, practiced regularly, even during a simple walk:

When you take a step, you can touch the earth in such a way that you establish yourself in the present moment. You arrive in the here and the now. You don't need to make any effort at all. Suddenly, you are free - from all projects, all worries, and all expectations. You are fully present, fully alive, and you are touching the earth. (pp. 8)

It should be noted that, due to their connection with non-Christian religions, mindfulness and meditation have been viewed with distrust by some Christian groups. For example, an article in Christianity Today magazine reported that:

The biblical worldview is completely at odds with the pantheistic concepts driving Eastern meditation....No amount of chanting, breathing, visualizing, or physical contortions will melt away the sin that separates us from the Lord of the cosmos—however ‘peaceful’ these practices may feel. Moreover, Paul warns that ‘Satan himself masquerades as an angel of light’ (2 Cor. 11:14). ‘Pleasant’ experiences may be portals to peril. Even yoga teachers warn that yoga may open one up to spiritual and physical maladies. (retrieved from http://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2004/november/10.78.html)
In contrast to this, other Christian organizations, such as the World Community for Christian Meditation, have embraced mindfulness and meditation (Mermis-Cava, 2009). Their practice is based in the work of Benedictine monk John Main (1926–1982). They speak of the suspicion some Christians have of wordless spiritual practices based in mindfulness, saying, “In Christianity this tradition of contemplation, the prayer of the heart or ‘apophatic prayer’, became marginalized and often even sometimes suspect” (retrieved from http://wccm.org/content/what-meditation). Many in the Anglican Church of Canada (including the Diocese of Huron) have a growing appreciation for the benefit of mindfulness and meditation. Several churches within the Diocese host meditation and mindfulness activities. There are Canadian Anglican websites that openly advertise Christian meditation, describing it as a “prayer of the heart” (retrieved from, http://www.stpetersanglican.ca/christian-education/christian-meditation).

Some forms of prayer, such as centering prayer, are also based in mindfulness and have significant overlap with meditation. Wilhoit (2014) described the practice, saying,

Centering prayer is intended to be an individual prayer practice that is best learned in a group setting and maintained through periodic retreats where it is intensely practiced. …

The pray-er is asked to sit in silence for an established period of time, twenty minutes is suggested, with the intention of being present before God. (pp. 108-109)

The historically Anglican practice of reciting what is known as the ‘Daily Office’ may be experienced as an exercise in mindfulness. The Daily Office is a set of prescribed prayers and scripture readings which are intended to be said as a part of a regular practice, at various points during the day. Because the words of the Daily Office are prescribed, they may bring the participant away from rambling thoughts about the past or future, and into the present moment of
this activity. The Daily Office also includes divine attachment, which is the second identified element of the literature’s definition of the spiritual.

**Divine attachment.**

This second element of the “spiritual”, as it relates to spiritual practice, is the nurturing of relationship with a divine attachment figure. White (1964) describes the sense of calling from God that attracts many clergy to the ministry. Ellison et al. (2014) noted that, “close relationships between humans and God constitute attachments, and that the teachings of Christianity (and other monotheistic world faiths) often invoke parent-child imagery” (p. 213). Ellison (2014) went on to say that, “Researchers working in the attachment theory tradition have reported that secure … attachment to God is associated with higher levels of life satisfaction, and with lower levels of depressed affect, psychological distress, and feelings of loneliness” (p. 213). In spiritual practices involving prayer and scripture and liturgy, God is often described as the definitive attachment figure (Kirkpatrick, 2005). When under stress, religious people may seek the support of this divine attachment figure (Kirkpatrick & Shaver, 1990). Encountering God in a secure relationship, through prayer and scripture and liturgy, may be a great source of psychological support. Studies suggest that, “Christian spirituality has…direct and powerful effects on well-being and can moderate the relationship between stress and life satisfaction” (Pan, 2012, p. 2). Golden et al. (2004) suggested that a Christian’s outlook on life and relationship with stress can be supported by a personal relationship with God. In their (2004) study of active United Methodist clergy in the United States, they (2004) concluded, “The less one feels oneself in intimate relationship with the Divine, the greater the likelihood of burnout” (p. 123).

Within the range and overlap of the two elements of grounding in the here and now and nurturing relationship with a divine attachment figure, the variety of activities that may be
considered spiritual practices are numerous. These may include, but are not limited to, “prayer, worship, Scripture reading, journaling, intentional rest-taking, renewing fellowship with others, and coaching and/or accountability relationships” (Chandler, 2010, p. 7). An individual might define any one of these activities as ‘spiritual practices’ and another person, engaged in the same activity, might not. The internal experience of the activity is what may lead a person to define an activity as a spiritual practice. Epperly & Epperly (2009) explain that, “You may find that you have more ‘spiritual practices’ than you might initially imagine, especially if you include activities as simple and repetitive as drinking a cup of coffee or prayerful breathing” (Introduction, Section 2, para. 11). For the purposes of this research, therefore, it is important that the participants are the ones to self-define what activities are, for them, spiritual practices.

**Method**

**Point of connection with the researcher**

Clandinin (2013) reflected on Narrative Inquiry with the following observation: “As a narrative inquirer, I enter into research in the midst of my own life” (Chapter 12, para. 1). From the philosophical viewpoint of Narrative Inquiry it is important that this researcher begins the description of this methodology by acknowledging the subjective experiences that have motivated me to choose it, as Clandinin (2013) said, “in the midst of my own life” (Chapter 12, para. 1). My choice of methodology was neither random nor objective, but very much initiated out of my own subjective experiences. I therefore begin this section of my paper by outlining an experience that led me to choose Narrative Inquiry as my research methodology.

Several years ago, a letter arrived at my church’s address, asking me, as the clergy-person, to participate in a research study about clergy. The researcher did not identify whether he was a clergy-person, but referenced other research into clergy who live with various addictions.
His research was a quantitative study based on a survey, which the letter asked me to fill out. The survey asked participating clergy to rate themselves in terms of their “addictive tendencies” for such things as alcohol, drugs, and pornography. In the letter, he stated that this was part of his investigation into whether or not clergy are significantly more likely to have “addictive personalities” than the general population.

The term “clergy” was used in a general sense (as opposed to “Anglican” or “mainline” clergy). The letter implied that, if the results showed a significant statistical difference between the participating clergy and the general population, this difference would be used to support the theory that people who become clergy may be more likely to have “addictive personalities”.

While the research would likely reveal interesting and important information, I found it to be an odd experience participating in what felt, at the time, like a one-sided conversation. I wondered what biases might be present in the researcher as the data was analyzed and summarized. As a participant, I imagined myself walking into church to lead worship on a Sunday morning after people in the congregation had opened the newspaper to the headline, “Research shows clergy more likely to have addictive personalities for such things as alcohol, drugs, and pornography”.

I understood the benefits of a broad survey including a statistically significant number of participants. I knew a survey of this size would very likely preclude the researcher from having time to discuss the survey with each of the participants. I also knew that conversation, especially with some of the participants and not others, could bias the results.

However, as a participant I found myself wanting an opportunity for conversation with the researcher. I wanted a better sense of what biases may be present and an opportunity to ask questions. For example, how was the word “addiction” being defined by the researcher? Where
in the scale of 1 to 10 was a distinction being drawn between disinterest, interest, and addiction? I wanted to ask the motivation for doing the research, and how the information was intended to be used.

Although I am supportive of a variety of methodologies including survey research, this personal experience helped shape my choice of methodology for this research project. Each quantitative and qualitative methodology has strengths. Some methods are more suited than others for particular research. A quantitative methodology could be an excellent choice for studies into clergy spiritual practices. For my study, however, I looked for a methodology that would allow me to explore the inherent complexity and particularities of participants’ experiences as expressed in the words of their own narratives. I wanted researcher and participant to have the opportunity to develop a shared understanding of the meanings they associate with the studied experience of supportive spiritual practices. Quantitative research has already indicated that spiritual practices support clergy in coping with their vocations (Chandler, 2010; Golden et al., 2004; Grosch & Olsen, 2000; Jackson-Jordan, 2013; Meek et al., 2003; Miner, 2007; Turton & Francis, 2007). My research is a narrative investigation of supportive clergy spiritual practices for a selection of Anglican priests in the Diocese of Huron.

**Narrative Inquiry**

Narrative Inquiry is a branch of qualitative research. The narrative methodology of Jean Clandinin (2013) is the basis for this research project.

**Pragmatic research philosophy.**

Clandinin and Connelly (2010) viewed Narrative Inquiry as having been born out of the work of John Dewey. John Dewey was an American philosopher who promoted the school of thought known as pragmatism (Hickman, Neubert, & Reich, 2009, p. 5). Pragmatism arose as an
alternative to empiricism. The distinctions between empiricism and Dewey’s pragmatism are key
to an understanding of the methodology of Narrative inquiry. To this end, the following two
illustrations used by Dewey were offered: the tabula rasa (Dewey, 1915) and the reflex arc
(Dewey, 1896).

Dewey (1915) explained that the tabula rasa was an empirical metaphor used by John
Locke, whom Dewey described as “the most influential of the empiricists” (Dewey, 1915,
Section “Summary”, para. 9) and wrote about Locke’s description of the human mind as being “a
blank piece of paper, or a wax tablet with nothing engraved on it at birth (a tabula rasa)” (Dewey,
1915, Section “Summary”, para. 9). Dewey (1915) was critical of this empirical view. Citing his
pragmatic philosophy, Dewey (1915) posited that the mind is never a blank slate. Rather, it is
interrelated with a person’s environment. This may include the person’s culture, history, and
experiences. The person gaining knowledge is not passively receiving knowledge like a blank
slate being written upon, but rather gains knowledge by engaging the environment.

Dewey (1910b) based this pragmatic view, in part, on his understanding of Darwin’s
evolutionary theory. Dewey (1910b) understood Darwin’s theories to show that species are
dynamic and constantly adapting and changing in relation to their environment. Likewise, for
Dewey (1910b), the mind is dynamic and constantly adapting and changing in relation to the
environment. This is how we learn and grow.

With regards to learning, Dewey (1896) distinguished empiricism from pragmatism with
a critique of the reflex arc concept. This concept was first posited by Descartes (1633), whose
writings suggest the hypothetical example of a person whose foot is being burned. Some manner
of cord (now understood to be nerves) from the foot communicates to the brain that the foot is in
danger. The brain then communicates to the muscles the instruction to pull away from the flame.
This pathway from the foot to the brain has come to be termed the reflex arc. Dewey (1896) explained that the reflex arc is used as a model of learning, from an empirical point of view. The mind encounters stimulus from the environment, and responds.

Dewey (1896) expounded upon this idea by offering William James’ (1890) example of a child who reaches for a candle flame. However, rather than being a passive mind that is stimulated by the environment, as Descartes (1633) described, Dewey (1910a) explained that both the child and the environment produce the experience. Dewey (1910a) elaborated on this notion by positing five steps involved in learning. The steps are listed below, followed by an example articulated by Hickman (2009).

i) a felt difficulty

ii) its location and definition

iii) suggestion of possible solution

iv) development by reasoning of the bearings of the suggestion

v) further observation and experiment leading to its acceptance or rejection; that is, the conclusion of a belief or disbelief. (Dewey, 1910a, Chapter 6, para. 10)

Hickman (2009) articulates an example based on Dewey’s (1910a) five steps of learning:

i) …the child comes upon something new: a candle…

ii) …the child locates this experience with past experiences of objects: such as a toy…

iii) …the child uses a familiar method: reaching…

iv) …the reach results in pain…
v) …the child, in this case, no longer reaches for candles: the circuit of learning, in this case, is complete. (p. 7)

Through his five steps of learning, Dewey (1910a) demonstrated a model of learning that focusses on the particular and interrelated nature of learning. This model was intended by Dewey to replace the model of the reflex arc. Dewey (1896) summarized his critique of the reflex arc by stating,

The reflex arc idea, as commonly employed, is defective in that it assumes sensory stimulus and motor response as distinct psychical existences, while in reality they are always inside a coordination and have their significance purely from the part played in maintaining or reconstituting the coordination. (para. 8)

This move from empirical to pragmatic in the understanding of how learning occurs has implications that stretch far beyond the small example, given above, of a child and a candle. A research method based on Dewey’s pragmatic understanding of the learning process views data acquisition as happening in relationship with participants and their environment. From this perspective, it is not enough to passively observe a stimulus response relationship (such as a simple reflex arc) and draw conclusions. Much more is going on in such a learning interaction, including the location of past experiences, as well as the effect of the most recent experience in its influencing of future encounters.

For studies of human behaviour, Dewey’s (1896) model of learning also has implications for the researcher. Researchers are not ‘tabula rasa’ when they observe. The researcher locates an experiment or inquiry within past experiences, which include preconceived biases about those being researched. The research itself involves dynamics and adaptation, affecting both the researcher, the environment in which the research is undertaken, and those being researched.
This notion of the complexity and interrelatedness of the learning process is key in the methodology of Narrative Inquiry.

**Understanding of inquiry and knowledge.**

As Dewey (1916) developed his pragmatic philosophy, he rejected the term ‘epistemology’. In its place, he spoke of ‘inquiry’. The term ‘epistemology’, for Dewey (1916), represented the empirical model of the passive mind that acquires knowledge about the environment, without being in active relationship with the environment. Dewey (1916) critiqued this empirical notion of independent knowing, by having stated:

The identification of mind with the self, and the setting up of the self as something independent and self-sufficient, created such a gulf between the knowing mind and the world that it became a question how knowledge was possible at all. Given a subject—the knower—and an object—the thing to be known—wholly separate from one another, it is necessary to frame a theory to explain how they get into connection with each other so that valid knowledge may result. (Chapter 22, Section 1, para. 3)

Dewey’s (1916) theory of inquiry, by contrast, holds that our knowing cannot exist apart from the world. Our thoughts and the knowledge we gain are attained by inquiring, which involves interacting with and being in relation with the environment.

Inherent in this distinction is the philosophical shift away from theology or metaphysics. In theology, there is a supernatural source of knowledge which is separate from both the organism and the environment. In metaphysics, knowledge stands on its own in a cosmic ideal. Dewey (1910b), again referring to Darwin’s evolutionary work, held that knowledge can be understood by solely considering the interactions between creatures and the environment in which they develop. Dewey (1910b) maintained that there is no knowledge that exists outside of
these interactions, and neither is there fixed knowledge. Knowledge, by this reasoning, is
dynamic, like the creatures and environments that create knowledge out of their interactions.

This connects with Dewey’s (1908) notion that knowledge cannot be proven with
certainty, as in the empirical model, because knowledge is ever shifting. Dewey (1908)
elaborates, saying,

No, nature is not an unchangeable order, unwinding itself majestically from the reel of
law under the control of deified forces. It is an indefinite congeries of changes. Laws are
not governmental regulations which limit change, but are convenient formulations of
selected portions of change followed through a longer or shorter period of time, and then
registered in statistical forms that are amenable to mathematical manipulation. (para. 32)

Dewey (1908) was clear that this is not to say knowledge is so relative as to have no form.
Knowledge, though dynamic, does exist within a particular context and can be learned and
studied.

In his critique of metaphysics, Dewey (1903) was critical of its hypostatization.

Hypostatization refers to the abstract being treated as if it occupies some separate reality. In a
hypostatizing empirical model, once a theory is proven, it is considered to hold its own objective
truth. The truth of a theory is seen as proven if it is in agreement with reality. However, Dewey
(1903) reasoned that thought and reality cannot stand on their own objectively, or there would be
no way to verify an idea’s truth. “To talk about knowing the external world through ideas which
are merely within us is to talk of an inherent self-contradiction. There is no common ground in
which the external world and our ideas can meet”. (Dewey 1903, Chapter IV, para. 29). Dewey
reiterated this view years later, stating, “A metaphysical hypostatizing of meanings into essences
or subsistences having some sort of mysterious being apart from qualitative things and changes is a source of regret” (Dewey 1916, Section 6, para. 1).

**Knowledge and moral responsibility.**

In contrast, Dewey (1910a) suggested that, if an idea is to be of value, it must demonstrate its place within the relationship between people and the world around. Knowledge never exists independently of the intelligence that conceives it. A thought that is a simple abstraction is of no value and cannot be proven. Since knowledge and growth arise out of the relationship between organism and environment, it holds that a thought would demonstrate its value through its impact on these. Dewey (1910a) noted:

> Knowledge of the process and conditions of physical and social change through experimental science and genetic history has one result with a double name: increase of control, and increase of responsibility; increase of power to direct natural change, and increase of responsibility for its equitable direction toward fuller good. (para. 33)

This connection between knowledge and morality that relates directly to Dewey’s work is his definition of logic. Dewey (1916) viewed logic as language based. It is a symbolic rehearsal of an adaptive behaviour before being acted upon. This is of critical importance because it recognizes the metaphorical quality of logical thought. Logic cannot be objective or separated from the ones doing the logical thinking. All logic is based on language, and all language is metaphorical and therefore subjective. Dewey (1916) noted, “The bare fact that language consists of sounds which are mutually intelligible is enough of itself to show that its meaning depends on connection with a shared experience” (Chapter 2, Section 2, para. 8). It is critical we understand this because our knowledge, being born out of interaction between the person(s) and the world around, affects both. When we ascribe to the belief that our ideas are objective, we lose
critical awareness and insight into the biases behind our ideas and the ways these biases will seek to affect the world. Dewey (1908) observed that, “when freedom is conceived to be transcendental, the coercive restraint of immediate necessity will lay its harsh hand upon the mass of men [sic]” (para. 33). We must, therefore, be sensitive to the fact that research into human behaviour has the potential to affect those being studied.

**Implications for research.**

Research into human behaviour that does not acknowledge the biased nature of its motivation to engage in inquiry would be less likely to consider the perspectives of those being studied. When a researcher sets out to do research on a segment of the population, that researcher would do well to ask such questions as, “Why am I engaging in this research? What insights might I gain in having conversation with those I am studying? What impact might my research have on this group of people?” When we believe ourselves to be objective and detached from the human behaviours being studied, we run the risk of acting out of our own unexamined biases (Dewey, 1905). More than this, we run the risk of allowing those biases to impact those being studied in a negative way, through the way the research conclusions are used. A helpful remedy to this may be extrapolated from Dewey’s (1900) work on education and curriculum, in which he highlights the need for research to be done in the context of relationship between research ideas and those who are the subject of research. Research into human behaviour is best done when the researcher’s subjectivity is recognized and the relationship between the researcher and those whose behaviour is being studied is acknowledged.
Experience as Basic Unit.

Clandinin (2013), in her model for Narrative Inquiry, placed much emphasis on Dewey’s (1938) view of experience as the basic unit of behavioural and societal change that connects people. With regards to this view of experience, Dewey (1938) stated, 

We live from birth to death in a world of persons and things which in large measure is what it is because of what has been done and transmitted from previous human activities. When this fact is ignored, experience is treated as if it were something which goes on exclusively inside an individual’s body and mind. It ought not to be necessary to say that experience does not occur in a vacuum. There are sources outside an individual which give rise to experience. It is constantly fed from these springs. (Chapter 3, para. 15)

Experiences, therefore, are pervasive in the construction of our reality. They construct our inner reality, yet are interrelated, and, in part, determine our external behaviour. Dewey (1938) noted, “Every experience enacted and undergone modifies the one who acts and undergoes, while this modification affects, whether we wish it to or not, the quality of subsequent experiences” (Chapter 3, para. 6). This, in turn, affects the construction of our outer reality. Dewey (1938) went on to say, “Previous experiences have changed the objective conditions under which subsequent experiences take place” (Chapter 3, para. 14). In his work, Education and Experience (1938), Dewey called for the further development of a “philosophy of experience” (Chapter 4, para. 1), a pragmatic philosophical understanding of experience as the ongoing basis of our constructed reality.

Clandinin’s (2013) presentation of Narrative Inquiry is one answer to Dewey’s (1938) call for a philosophy of experience. To attain a deeper understanding of human behaviour, Narrative Inquiry acknowledges the value of examining particular and local experiences, while at
the same time accepting that such experiences are connected with the wider world of context.

Clandinin’s (2013) research method centres around the concept of human experiences as having a depth which is lost when they are reduced to being generalized. Her research method seeks a deeper understanding of experiences which, while not isolated, are both local and particular. As Dewey (1938) wrote,

> The statement that individuals live in a world means, in the concrete, that they live in a series of situations. And when it is said that they live in these situations, the meaning of the word ‘in’ is different from its meaning when it is said that pennies are ‘in’ a pocket or paint is ‘in’ a can. It means, once more, that interaction is going on between an individual and objects and other persons. The conceptions of situation and of interaction are inseparable from each other. *An experience is always what it is because of a transaction taking place between an individual and what, at the time, constitutes [the person’s] environment* [emphasis added]. (Chapter 3, para. 23)

Experience, therefore, includes both the particular situations in which the individual is acting, and also inherent interaction of the situationally placed individual with the world around. Narrative inquiry allows for a deeper understanding of human experiences by studying narratives as the basic expression of such local and particular, yet interrelated, experiences.

Dewey’s (1938) work developed during philosophical shifts in Western culture. Clandinin (2007) described four philosophical ‘turns’, as she referred to them, that have continued since that time, creating the space for the development of Narrative Inquiry. Each of these four philosophical turns represents a shift from previous important assumptions of paradigmatic knowing.

Clandinin (2007) stated,
As we read the literature that has emerged from various narrative research projects and the critiques of positivism, post-modernism and post-structuralism, the accounts of research groups in various disciplines that have embraced narrative or asserted narrative as a way of knowing the world, we identified some common themes in the movement toward Narrative Inquiry. From our study, we came to realize that as an individual, discipline, or group of researchers moves toward a Narrative Inquiry approach to research, there are four turns in their thinking and action that occur. By turn, we mean a change in direction from one way of thinking or being toward another (p. 7).

Clandinin (2007) examines the turns away from assumptions: reliability, objectivity, generalizability, and validity.

The first philosophical turn of paradigmatic knowing is a turn from the assumptions behind the concept of reliability. Positivistic studies break data down into units which can then be analyzed. Qualitative research has often followed this philosophy by breaking data into units of meaning, which are then collected and compared. Numbers may be assigned to social facts to facilitate this analysis. Clandinin (2007) noted that, by transforming the data in this way, quantitative research is assumed to be more reliable as it “allows the measurement of feeling, thinking, and caring to be consistent, accurate, and metaphor free” (p. 29). The language of numbers forms the basis of statistical inference and probability. These are seen, from a positivistic perspective, as the basis for knowing.

However, Clandinin (2013) stated that, for narrative researchers, there has been a philosophical turn away from this narrow conception of determining reliability. She questions the notion that it is possible for data on human experience to be reduced to metaphor-free units of analysis. Rather, all research is language based, and therefore is metaphorical. Numbers are
words which represent a concept, as are other units of meaning. The concepts, in turn, can only be described with words, which are metaphorical.

Among the ways this philosophical turn is expressed is in critiques of cross cultural research using empirically based standardized testing. Ford, Moore, Whiting, & Grantham (2008) stated that,

Racially, culturally, and linguistically responsive researchers recognize that knowledge is subjective, value-laden, and reciprocal (i.e., researchers and participants learn from each other). Just as important, at every level or phase of the research, multiple worldviews and explanations are considered…seeking partnerships with participants. (p. 89)

This philosophical turn is one of the paradigmatic shifts that has opened the space for the development of Narrative Inquiry, in which the subjective stories of participants form the data, and the data is expected to be based in metaphor, and analyzed as a whole. Narrative inquiry conceives of human relationships as being complex and the data provided by our basic unit of communication (the story) as not separated from context. Clandinin (2007) noted that for research to be reliable, it must take into full consideration the “the metaphoric quality of language and the connectedness and coherence of the extended discourse of the story entwined with exposition, argumentation, and description” (p. 29). As such, the story is not divided into ‘meaning units’ as it might be for other types of qualitative research, such as Giorgi’s (2009) phenomenological method. From the perspective of Narrative Inquiry, the story would lose its context if it were divided into meaning units, collected by subject with meaning units from several transcripts, and then the fragmented collections analyzed. Narrative inquirers do not claim that other qualitative or quantitative methods are without value (Clandinin, 2007, pp. 21-22). Narrative inquirers simply point out that various methods are more appropriate for some
research projects than for others. Narrative inquiry is a reliable form of research for developing a deeper understanding of the particular, local, and contextual human experience.

The second philosophical turn of paradigmatic knowing is a turn from the assumptions behind the concept of objectivity. This has everything to do with the assumed relationship between the researcher and what is being researched. The turn is away from the assumption that what is being studied can be treated as having an existence separate from the researcher, as if research is a neutral activity. The critique of this paradigm is that it denies the reality of human connectedness and ongoing growth. Researchers choose what they research for a reason. If they are not open about their biases, researchers may lose sight of the subjective nature of the metaphors they use to describe abstractions. Subjectivity becomes hidden in what is assumed to be objective. Clandinin (2007) noted that, “Scientific’ objectivity is understanding that knowing other people and their interactions is always a relationship process that ultimately involves caring for, curiosity, interest, passion, and change” (p. 29).

The third philosophical turn of paradigmatic knowing is a turn from the assumptions behind the concept of generalizability. This concept of generalizability is one that favours the prediction and control offered by universal conclusions, and downplays the value of the local and particular. Clandinin (2007) noted that,

Social scientists [traditionally] embraced positivistic research processes because of the seductive quality of generalizability. Researchers in the social sciences wanted to be able to discover universal law as that which could be used in any context to account for and guide prediction about and thus help control humans and human interaction. (pp. 29-30) The turn away from this paradigm is based on the critique that human relationships and interactions are complex and interrelated, and that there is value in research that achieves a
deeper understanding of the complex and interrelated local and particular experience, rather than losing such understanding by generalizing research results. Geertz (1983) eloquently supported the notion that local and particular knowledge is the most important basis for understanding human culture and the interactions of individuals, stating that,

To see others as sharing a nature with ourselves is the merest decency. But it is from the far more difficult achievement of seeing ourselves amongst others, as a local example of the forms human life has locally taken, a case among cases, a world among worlds, that the largeness of mind, without which objectivity is self-congratulation and tolerance a sham, comes. (p. 16)

The fourth philosophical turn of paradigmatic knowing is a turn from the assumptions behind the concept of validity. Positivistic research makes use of reliable and numeric measurements that demonstrate validity through establishing predictability and control. The turn away from this paradigm is due to the many additional ways of knowing that apply to the realm of studying human interaction. Narrative inquirers seek a form of knowing that has neither claim nor interest in prediction or control. Rather, Narrative Inquiry seeks knowledge in a deeper, storied understanding of the local and particular. This knowledge may then be used as the basis of further research of a variety of types.

Commonplace of Sociality

Clandinin (2013) stated that narrative research acknowledges participants are not isolated units. Rather, they exist within, and interact with, a social environment. She refers to this social environment as the “commonplace of sociality” of the participants (Chapter 2, para. 18, 24). To more fully understand the particular commonplace of the sociality of the participants within this
study of priests in the Diocese of Huron, it is helpful to first examine Max Weber’s (1915) theory of the “routinization of charisma” (p. 369).

In Weber’s (1915) discussion of the “routinization of charisma” (p. 369), he noted that religious movements begin with a charismatic leader. Followers are attracted to the charisma of the leader, who represents an alternative from the established governance and economy of the wider culture. Weber (1915) noted that, in time, however, the leader dies and, “for charisma to be transformed into a permanent routine structure, it is necessary that its anti-economic character should be altered. It must be adapted to some form of fiscal organization to provide for the needs of the group” (p. 369).

This theory applies well to the Diocese of Huron. On the one hand, the diocese proclaims the narrative of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Jesus represents an alternative to the worldly narratives of government and economy. He taught of the presence of the Kingdom of God, and warned of having one’s primary focus on the economy of money. An example of this is may be found in Matthew 6:31-33, where Jesus said,

Therefore, do not worry, saying, ‘What will we eat?’ or ‘What will we drink?’ or ‘What will we wear?’ For it is the Gentiles who strive for all these things; and indeed your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things. But strive first for the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well (New Revised Standard Version of the Bible).

When a priest is called to ministry, it is this narrative of the Gospel that is definitive for her or his call (Epperly, 2014; White, 1964). As one of this study’s participants (Natalie, pseudonym to protect her identity) described, “If my ministry wasn't focused on my relationship
with God, first and foremost, and how that influences my relationship with others, it would kind of be a hollow ministry, wouldn't it?"

As Weber’s (1915) theory implies, however, the followers of Jesus needed to establish routinization after he was no longer walking among them. After the charismatic leader was no longer present with them in close physical contact as he had been before, they needed to define structure and roles. According to Weber (1915), the resulting institutional structure develops separate from, or even in conflict with, the charismatic narrative. A church service, for example, may include the reading from Matthew chapter 6, in which Jesus admonishes his disciples not to worry about tomorrow. Yet, following this service, there may be an annual meeting to elect signing officers, to establish an annual budget, to report on investments, to establish a five year plan that includes saving for the possibility that the boiler may fail, and to express worry over a drop in donations. This meeting will be necessary to meet legal requirements and ensure the institutional structure continues. Yet much of the content of this institutional work may seem in conflict with the ministry of Jesus, the charismatic leader, who even preached against planning and saving for the future.

Clandinin (2013) stated that narrative research acknowledges participants exist within, and interact with, a social environment. Priests in the Diocese of Huron find themselves called to ministry by a narrative of the Gospel. Yet, they find themselves working within the social environment of the institutional church. The tension between the clergy’s calling to ministry by the narrative of the Gospel, and the daily tasks of serving the intuitional church, relates to many of the stressors that challenge clergy’s wellness and underscore the importance of their engaging in spiritual practices.
Procedure

Clandinin and Connelly (2000) spoke of Narrative Inquiry beginning with a research puzzle.

Each Narrative Inquiry is composed around a particular wonder, and, rather than thinking about framing a research question with a precise definition or expectation of an answer, narrative inquirers frame a research puzzle that carries with it ‘a sense of a search, a ‘re-search,’ a searching again…a sense of continual reformulation’. (p. 124)

I began this research in the midst of my own questions about the relatively high number of priests who leave the ministry before retirement, reporting they have burned out. The literature on clergy wellness left me wondering: In a vocation that espouses the virtues of spirituality, were there any practices clergy engaged in that gave them an experience of being nurtured and sustained? Specifically, what sustains them in their ministry? In a vocation that espouses the virtues of spirituality, were there any practices clergy engaged in that gave them an experience of being nurtured and sustained?

To apply research into the narrative experiences of priests being sustained in their ministry, this study was designed using Narrative Inquiry (Clandinin, 2013), in which thirteen priests in the Diocese of Huron participated. This researcher was also a priest in the Diocese of Huron, like the research participants. As such, their stories resonated with the researcher. As a relational methodology, this researcher was bracketed into this study, acknowledging the common experience as a priest, and the potential for reading personal experiences into the words of those interviewed. Regardless of whether the researcher is a part of the community of participants, Clandinin (2013) sees the relational aspect of Narrative Inquiry as being inevitable and also essential. Both the participant and the researcher are changed by the experience of
engaging one another in the participant’s narrative. This relates to Dewey’s (1896) theory of learning. In terms of a research method, a pragmatic understanding of the learning process would view data acquisition as being relational. From this perspective, studies in human behaviour go beyond passive observation of stimuli, as researchers are not ‘tabula rasa’ when they observe research participants. The researcher has her or his own past experiences in which the inquiry is located. The research also affects both the researcher and those being researched, as both interact through the experience. Clandinin (2013) stated, “As narrative inquirers, we become part of participants’ lives and they part of ours. Therefore, our lives—and who we are and are becoming, on our and their landscapes—are also under study” (Chapter 1, para. 46). In terms of this research study, it is acknowledged that this researcher’s common experience of being a priest in the Diocese of Huron would cause a resonating with the experiences related in the stories of the participants, inevitably causing this researcher’s to reflect on personal experiences. As an interviewer, this researcher also had the benefit of a first-hand understanding the complexities of the external settings they described. This allowed this researcher to engage relationally with the participants as, together, their stories were explored in response to the successive interview questions.

Although the interviews were conversational and involved the telling of stories, the interview questions and their progression was formalized and quite intentional. Since this research studies the experience of clergy as they engage in spiritual practices that support them, the examination began with the existing literature, which identified four main challenges to clergy wellness:

1. Chronic stress caused by multiple and conflicting expectations of clergy’s time,
2. Clergy’s cumulative expectation of affirmation,
3. Ongoing conflict in the church congregation,

With these in mind, a set of questions was composed to give the opportunity for participants to offer stories about their experience of being supported by their spiritual practices, in the face of these four challenges to their wellbeing.

**Interview Questions**

Prior to this research, a set of questions was designed and used for a pilot study in Advanced Research course TH680E. These acted as preliminary practice interviews. After the pilot study, the research questions were adapted as a result of what was learned in this initial study. The revised set of questions allowed for researcher and participant to relationally explore the participants’ experiences of what nurtures and supports the participants in their ministry, as expressed through the participants’ own stories. The interviews began by asking what nurtures and supports the participants. The questions then moved into an exploration of their experience of these resources, in consideration of the stressors identified in the literature. The questions then asked if the nurturing and supportive activities were experienced as spiritual practices. For the revised interview questions, refer to Appendix B.

**Sampling and Selection, and Ethical Implications**

Clandinin’s (2013) Narrative Inquiry does not look to reduce the experiences of all participants to a set reality that defines a universal truth. Rather, Narrative Inquiry explores the storied experiences with a focus on the local and particular. These experiences are examined through the three-dimensional space of time, place, and sociality. Therefore, a Narrative Inquiry investigation typically requires a limited number of participants from a specific population in the
unique context being studied. The chosen research population for this study is active Anglican priests in the Diocese of Huron.

Approval for this research was received from the University of Laurier's Research Ethics Board, under project # 4226. The diocesan office was then asked to circulate an email invitation (see Appendix C) to priests in the Diocese of Huron. Participants were given or emailed a blank copy of an informed consent form (see Appendix D). Participants were given time to read this form, and to ask any questions before choosing to sign. The first thirteen who responded with interest in participating were interviewed. Participants included men and women from various stages in ministry, with varying personalities, and from different theological and philosophical perspectives. It is important to note that it is not the practice of Narrative Inquiry to seek comparative analysis on the diversity of those interviewed within the group whose behaviour is being studied. As such, it was intentional that comparative studies were not run between the responses of men versus women, or between those who were trained at one theological college from those trained at another, or introverts versus extroverts. Such comparative research methods have strengths and benefits, but such comparisons would require a different methodology and do not conform to the methodology of Narrative Inquiry research. For the purposes of this Narrative Inquiry research, participants were intentionally viewed as simply being part of the group identified as active Anglican priests in the Diocese of Huron.

For ethical reasons, Narrative Inquiry interviews are constructed to be collaborative and relational. Clandinin (2013) spoke of collaboration as being at the heart of ethics for Narrative Inquiry, saying:

Narrative Inquiry is a deeply ethical project. Narrative Inquiry understood as ethical work means we cannot separate the ethical from the living of the inquiry. Relational ethics live
at the very heart, perhaps are the very heart, of our work as narrative inquirers…[They] are the starting point and stance that narrative inquirers take throughout a Narrative Inquiry; a commitment to relationships, that is, to live in collaborative ways, allows us to re-compose and negotiate stories. (Chapter 1, para. 47)

With this in mind, interviews were constructed to be collaborative and relational by encouraging participants to speak in their own narratives. If a research method involving surveys had been chosen, a list of spiritual practices may have been provided for participants to check off and perhaps elaborate on. However, as a Narrative Inquiry, the data was developed over the course of a co-constructed conversation within the framework of some carefully chosen questions.

Clandinin (2013) also stated that, “relational ethics call us to social responsibilities regarding how we live in relation with others and with our worlds” (Chapter 1, para. 47).

Specifically, it was important that participants were made aware of how the data will be used.

**Interview Process**

Semi-structured interviews were conducted, both in person and by telephone, as a participant-observer (Evans, 1988). The same set of questions was used for each interview, while allowing the participant to digress in their responses, and the researcher and participant to explore the question relationally. The intent was to give structure and direction to the interview, using the questions derived from the existing literature, while exploring with the participants what was important to them. This allowed the receiving of fresh perspectives, directions, and insights from the participants as they expressed their narratives. Interviews followed the lead of the participants in terms of the length, and ranged in time from approximately fifteen minutes to
an hour. After each interview, participants were asked what it was like for them to be interviewed in this manner. Everyone interviewed reported it to be a positive experience.

**Data Collection**

Interviews were audio recorded, and later transcribed. For this paper, the seven interviews from the pilot study were not included. Thirteen interviews were transcribed, comprising 60,613 words. Following each interview, field notes were made alongside each interview. To assist with bracketing the interviewer’s personal responses as a participant-observer, notes were also made regarding the interviewer’s own experience of participating in the interview, and the ways in which the participant’s contributions challenged the interviewer. When the data was transcribed and analyzed, all names and certain details were adjusted to protect the participants’ identities.

As is the process for Clandinin’s (2013) method of Narrative Inquiry, transcripts were analyzed as a whole. After analyzing each of the transcripts, the researcher looked for what Clandinin (2013) referred to as the “individual narrative accounts to inquire into resonant threads or patterns” (Chapter 6, Section: Multiple Narrative Accounts, para. 2). By intentionally focusing on “threads” (Chapter 6, Section: Multiple Narrative Accounts, para. 2), the researcher followed “particular plotlines that threaded or wove over time and [were placed] through an individual’s narrative account” (Chapter 6, Section: Multiple Narrative Accounts, para. 3). The accounts were then laid “metaphorically alongside one another” as the researcher searched for “resonances or echoes that reverberated across accounts” (Chapter 6, Section: Multiple Narrative Accounts, para. 3). Story fragments from the thirteen transcripts are found in Appendix E. These undergird the subsequent examination of the resonant threads.
Data Analysis

Resonant Threads

Six resonant threads became apparent in the transcripts. These are the following: 1. care for the body, 2. boundaries, 3. self-awareness, 4. social support, 5. open communication, and 6. narrative of the Gospel.

1. Care for the Body

Participants made a connection between their bodies and their spiritual life. They related how the body and the spirit affect each other and that by expressing care for the body, they would also experience care for the spirit. For this reason, care for the body was described as a support for work in ministry. Care for the body took a variety of forms, including time at the gym, being out in nature, sitting in yoga, managing one’s diet, or receiving services such as massage. Stella spoke right away of the importance of exercise. By addressing the bodily symptoms of stress, she experiences care for her spiritual life. She said, “Exercise is key because I store a lot of tension in my body. So, I just have to get out there and swim like crazy or walk.” She went on to elaborate about how care for the body is care for her spiritual well-being. She said,

I don't have that whole dichotomy between body and spirit. The body is part of my spirit….Care for the body makes me feel calm and centred. I'm able to focus better when my body is happy and when I've let go of some of the tension....The day runs smoothly because the body is happy.

When asked about nurturing herself, Melissa seemed to build on Stella’s words by saying, “Regular massage helps with the tension in my shoulders. I also have my feet cared for regularly by a podiatrist....I carve out at least twenty minutes a day for yoga. I centre myself
through stretching and moving.” Melissa described how the body is not experienced as some separate thing to receive care. By caring for her body, Melissa receives care for her whole self. She spoke of a time when she had gotten away from doing yoga. For Melissa, this was a spiritual issue. Getting away from the spiritual practice of yoga was symptomatic of a lack of respect for herself. She noted, “when I begin introducing things like yoga back into my day, I am saying to myself ‘You deserve to have this time.’” In this way, the reinstating of her spiritual practice was, in and of itself, experienced as spiritually nurturing.

Jerry spoke of his spiritual practice of care for the body, which affects his whole being. He described how exercise at the gym helped him to “feel happier and more comfortable in my own skin.” For Jerry, exercise was a supportive “prayerful experience.” Roger spoke of how exercise in nature is, for him, a spiritual practice. He said, “It's rare that a day goes by that I don't spend at least an hour on the trail somewhere…That's really important to me. That’s where a lot of prayer happens for me, out there in the wilderness.” Jodi echoed Roger’s emphasis on moving the body in nature. She said, “The rhythm of my body while walking outdoors is a kind of meditation.” Shawn spoke of caring for himself by beginning each day with a walk in nature. He said, “I go for a 45 minute walk every morning that's quiet time, it's time to refuel me… It’s crucial I do that every day….Otherwise I would burn myself out, and I would be no use to anyone.”

For Jodi, being in nature is an experience of being close to God. She said, “I also love to swim out in the lake, where I can't see anything other than water…because I can feel like it's just me and God out there…in the world, which is God's creation.” Jodi was clear her physical activities in nature are a spiritual exercise, saying, “It’s never felt like a task. It's spiritual.”
Jodi took the conversation beyond exercise and spoke of other ways she cares for her body, in the face of recent medical challenges. She said, “Because of a recent diagnosis, physical health care has become even more important. Certain vegetables are now my friends. I've always had a healthy diet, but now we always eat fresh fruits, whole foods.” The diagnosis was a reason for Jodi to re-examine her priorities. She no longer sacrifices health for the sake of her work. She views her recent prioritizing of her health to be a spiritual practice. She spoke of her body and its movement and rhythms as being a part of her meditation and awareness practice. Caring for her body is deeply connected with a valuing of herself. She said, “I focus on healthy eating, exercise, sleep, and minimizing stress. I know all those things support healing in the body. … So, I don't push the edges as much as I did before.”

Jodi noted the mixed messages she has received from church leadership about care for the body, which she views as an important spiritual practice. She said, “On the one hand, we’re told to take care of ourselves. But then the expectation is that we work so hard we drive ourselves crazy. That doesn't work.” She spoke of the ‘workaholic’ ethic amongst many of the clergy in positions of higher authority. Jodi noted that care for the body is seen by some of her superiors as an inconvenient necessity, rather than a healthy spiritual practice. She said, “Sometimes our leaders view caring for the body as, ‘Oh, she's getting old’. I've actually had that said to me. But no, I'm getting smart.” Jodi related how much more nurtured she is in her ministry, now that she prioritizes her spiritual practice of caring for her body, saying “I'm calmer and more centred.”

By speaking of the body and spirit being connected, participants elaborated on care for the body being a form of spiritual care. When care for the body involves being out in nature, participants also spoke of feeling closer to God amid God’s creation. An experience of calm and groundedness was described as the result of a healthier body and of moving the body in creation.
2. Boundaries

A professional boundary is the line of distinction between a professional relationship and relationships of another kind (Aravind, et al., 2012). It is important to note that, due to the power imbalance of a professional relationship, there is a boundary between the professional relationship and personal friendship (Aravind, et al., 2012). Clergy live and work amid their congregations. The work of a priest would be ineffective if the priest had no relationship with the congregation. In the same way, a priest’s work is out of balance if the priest has no sense of the boundary between the priest’s self and that of the congregation. For example, if a priest sees his or herself as simply being another member of the congregation, or a personal friend to members of the congregation, the boundary between the priest’s professional self and the congregation would have been blurred. For congregation and priest to be healthy, boundaries need to be maintained. A priest that maintains personal boundaries may have a secure sense of self apart from the congregation, yet be emotionally healthy enough to enter into relationship with the congregation in a positive way. The theme of boundaries, as it became evident in the interviews, includes the following three subcategories: pushing of boundaries, competition with clergy’s personal life, and helper versus boundary-setter.

2a) Pushing of boundaries.

The clergy hold a unique place in the life of the congregation. In addition to the many roles of clergy, the congregation seeks the clergy’s time and attention. After a church service, a long line may form at the back of the church with people wanting to connect with the clergy before leaving the sanctuary. During the week, people may “pop by” the office for one reason or another, using their proximity to the clergy as a reason to “chat.” Part of the priestly function is to provide pastoral care, which includes visiting members in their homes or institutions during
the week. Each of these multiple roles are an important part of the clergy-person’s work. However, if a priest is unable to maintain a boundary between personal life and professional duties, the personal life may suffer or disappear altogether. It is not the role of the congregation members to establish or maintain boundaries around the priest’s personal life. Boundary setting is the role of the priest. Congregation members simply seek to get their needs met, making demands of the clergy-person’s time.

Within the congregation, there are also administrative expectations. Most churches look to their rector to chair the Parish Council. As church attendance continues to decline, finances demand that the rector in most churches is the only paid staff (other than the organist or, in some cases, part time secretary or custodian). Much of the work done in the Diocese of Huron has been enacted by volunteers who look to their priest for guidance. In many cases, the volunteers may not feel entirely confident in the roles they have undertaken and feel anxiety about their success. Such volunteers may seek the authoritative presence of the clergy to calm their anxieties. Groups and leaders may make demands of the schedule of the clergy, asking the clergy to attend all the meetings, and to have smaller meetings between meetings to discuss their work with them at each juncture. When this happens, the clergy become connected and knowledgeable about aspects of the congregational life, making them even more sought after for support and procedural approval. Again, it is up to the clergy-person to set boundaries between personal and professional life.

Theo spoke of learning to set and maintain boundaries when his congregational leadership became anxious and demanded more of his presence at meetings. The president of the women’s group retired and the group was feeling anxious about choosing new leadership. They asked Theo to be at the meeting. He knew they did not need him there, and they had chosen a
date and time for their meeting that overlapped with his time off. He related how he attended for
the first 15 minutes, and then said, “I'm sorry, I need to get away. I have an appointment.” Theo
explained that the laity demonstrated their competence, and the meeting went quite well without
him. He added, “They were, in fact, quite creative about it. They didn't need me there.”

Clergy have an authoritative role in the Diocese of Huron. Therefore, it is not the
congregation members’ responsibility to set or respect boundaries with their clergy’s time. They
may express concern about the health of their clergy, reminding the clergy often to keep their
days off, and may even speak ill of others who push a boundary by demanding clergy’s personal
time. However, when congregation members have a need, they often express an expectation that
the clergy will put personal priorities aside to accommodate them. Shawn spoke of this, saying,

I find in all parishes they are very good at saying, ‘You need to take time for yourself.
You need to take care of yourself! Right after you take care of what I need you to take
care of right now’.

When a clergy-person attempts to set a boundary, congregation members may respond by
pushing harder to get their needs met. This may be expressed individually via harsh emails, or
may involve other members of the congregation in ‘parking lot’ meetings, or may been seen in
open conflict involving others in leadership, such as the archdeacon or bishop. Melissa spoke
about the resistance she received from setting a boundary around her use of time. She had
communicated to her church in advance that she needed to be away to care for, and then bury, an
immediate family member with whom she was very close. Melissa spoke in detail about having
experienced an aggressive pushback for having set a boundary around her use of time.
Fortunately, the Archdeacon was supportive in helping to resolve this issue.
While Melissa found support in the hierarchy, other participants spoke of the challenge of maintaining boundaries around their use of time, amid hierarchical expectations over the clergy-person’s use of time. One of the participants, who preferred not to have his pseudo-name connected with this quote, stated,

Bishops have to understand [boundaries around time] when they sound out a directive that ‘Thou wilt be there’ [attending diocesan events]. I’ve had the bishop’s office calling me on Mondays [when many clergy take their day off] and I have had to say to them, ‘If you want me to be healthy, please don’t call me to do stuff on Mondays that I can do on Tuesdays. … [They] have to understand that sometimes ‘no’ is an acceptable answer, as long as it has a reason behind it, because I’m stressed out, I’ve burned out, and I need my time.

This challenge is even more difficult when hierarchical and congregational expectations are both in competition with the clergy-person’s time for family and personal life. Theo spoke of this difficulty. His own solution was simply to “go by the rank of the person demanding my time”. This approach may or may not be respected by congregation members who have varying levels of respect for the institution of the Diocese of Huron.

The flexible schedule of a clergy-person can contribute to a lack of scheduling boundaries. During evenings and weekends people may call the clergy about minor matters, or seek pastoral or administrative intervention for crises (some real, some imagined) and demand immediate access to the clergy-person. Clergy may be pressured to attend meetings on their day off, since the time works better for other committee members. Evening and weekend meetings, Bible studies, church social functions, fund raising events, and pastoral calls can easily fill a schedule.
In times of church-related conflict, the boundary between work and time with family may be challenged even more. Jodi spoke of a conflict between herself and a lay leader in the church. The conflict became all-encompassing. Rather than having a boundary between time at work and time at home, she noticed the church conflict had become the dominant conversation topic at home. When clergy turn to their families for support, clergy families may find themselves feeling defensive on behalf of the clergy, harbouring feelings against the congregation members. This impacts the families’ ability to worship or participate in the life of the church. Jodi decided to set some boundaries around her time at home with family: “I coped by trying not to talk about church conflict at home… I would say to my spouse, ‘Tonight we're … not going to talk about this conflict and everything that's happening.” Jodi reported that this kind of boundary-setting around time with family was a way to support herself in her ministry.

Betty echoed Jodi, saying “I try hard to not bring my work home… I don't share with my husband that someone in the church is behaving terribly…Because in the sharing of it, I have to relive it.” Betty’s way of supporting herself is to set a boundary around time with family, describing her home as a “kind of a ‘church-free’ zone. So that I can just be me… I work hard to create an environment that's distinct.”

The family of clergy may begin to resent what they perceive as the church’s intrusion on their time. Likewise, setting aside time with friends or personal pursuits may become a challenge for the clergy-person. All of this is made more complicated when the congregation perceives themselves to be the clergy-person’s family and friends. Many churches refer to themselves as a ‘church family’. It may seem a logical step for them to consider the priest to be a part of the family of the church. More traditional members may even refer to their priest as “Father,” though this is generally discouraged in recent years because of the gender-exclusive nature of the title.
Again, the power dynamic has an interesting effect. From the perspective of congregation members, why wouldn’t the clergy-person want to go with them to a movie some evening as social time? Or have the clergy-person stop by their house often, for a meal? Or have congregation members stop by the clergy-person’s house, unannounced, at any hour of day? Or perhaps accompany them on vacation? They may ask themselves, are we not part of one big parish family? Are we not good friends? And wouldn’t my clergy want to come back from their vacation to lead the wedding on my special day? Or to officiate the funeral for another dear member of the congregation?

Jerry found this to be a particularly difficult challenge while working with his congregation. He experienced that a lack of clarity around relationship boundaries interfered with setting such time boundaries. He stated, “We weren't just parishioner and priest, we were friends.” Later he repeated, “they became my friends. Very close friends.” I asked him about the imbalance in the relationship. I asked whether this was not actually an unequal friendship since the people he served needed something from him in terms of his role as priest. Jerry responded, “Absolutely!” and related that he is now aware that this lack of boundaries had a negative impact on his ministry.

Travis related his need to set boundaries for the sake of his family. “Before having a family I did not feel the need to enforce professional boundaries.” He spoke of how he accepted giving his personal time away. However, this changed for him when he became a parent. “Now it's our whole family's time and having a family includes new responsibilities. So, my family is saying, ‘You can't give it all away and leave nothing for us’.”

When clergy attempt to draw boundaries between their church and their personal lives, it may lead to confusion and hurt feelings on the part of the congregation members. Some clergy
find establishing such boundaries to become so difficult that they retreat often, completely
severing contact when they do, to force the boundary. Travis said that part of his self-care, is to
say “all communication will be rerouted to my associate or to my wardens and I turn everything
off. That's the only way I can do it.” Jerry echoed this in his interview. He saw no option but to
completely remove himself from the situation by being far out of town. “There was no halfway
with this,” he said. He stated his need to spend significant time away from the parish, so he could
be “anonymous.” Jerry spoke of not having seen boundary setting as an important spiritual
practice. After having been so deeply enmeshed in the parish, he completely burned out. It was at
this point that he could no longer even be in contact with his parish and made himself completely
absent from church life.

As clergy work to satisfy the needs and expectations of their hierarchy, congregations,
and families, they find themselves having to set boundaries. The act of setting of boundaries
between themselves and those they seek to help becomes, in and of itself, a source of stress.

2b) Helper versus boundary-setter.

Clergy may feel conflicted about setting and maintaining boundaries with their
congregations because of a strong motivation to be helpers. Clergy may enter the ministry with a
deep desire to assist those around them (Muse, 2000). They love the church and want to help it
grow. They feel empathy for the people in the congregation and want to be there for them or help
them achieve their goals. Melissa expressed her desire to help, saying, “When I arrived at my
first parish, right out of seminary, it was as if I was saying, ‘Just tell me what you want me to do
and I'll do it’.” Shawn recognized the same tendency to want to help everyone without setting
boundaries around his own needs. He is now intentional about watching for this behaviour in
newly ordained colleagues. “I talk all the time to newly ordained clergy about the need to not try and be everything to everybody....Otherwise you get burnout.”

Since the relationship between the congregation and the clergy includes the power dynamic of the clergy being in a position of authority, it is not the congregation’s responsibility to respect the maintenance of boundaries around the clergy’s time. This is the responsibility of the clergy. As helper, however, many clergy may find it difficult to set these boundaries when doing so may seem to go against their motivation to help others. However, as Shawn noted, if the boundaries are not maintained the clergy-person will become overwhelmed, lose focus, find themselves reacting by speaking and behaving inappropriately, and “be of no help to anyone.”

Although Melissa spoke of beginning her ministry by reactively people pleasing, it did not take her long to observe that, “Oh my! I don't think I've had a day off since I've been here.” She then asked herself, “What's going on?” She no longer overbooks herself or reactively interrupts her schedule with every helping opportunity. Though it was a struggle at first, she learned to set boundaries and the congregation responded well. She said, “It's taken some time but [the boundaries] are there now, which is wonderful.”

Betty’s strategy for setting boundaries on her time is to book spiritually nurturing activities into her schedule, rather than simply hoping the time will be there after helping everyone else. She said, “It allows me to accomplish the things that nourish me. I focus on the management of time, and I see this as a spiritual practice.” Nourishing herself spiritually also benefits her schedule. She explained that when she takes time for her spiritual practices, she is better able to help others in a productive way. “If I make the time [for her spiritual practices], I will actually yield time in the end. And if I don't [make time for her spiritual practices], then… I won't be productive.”
Roger related how boundary setting does not need to be rigid to be effective. He takes regularly scheduled days off. But rather than setting rigid boundaries, he finds nurture by being flexible with his schedule as he helps others or goes about unexpected tasks. Roger used the metaphor of driving a car. When opportunities arise to help people, this is like pressing on the gas pedal. When opportunities for rest are available, this is like pressing on the brakes. But to resist an opportunity to help someone because of a rigid belief that self-care must happen right then would be like applying the gas and the brakes at the same time. “One foot on the gas and one on the brakes,” Roger said with a chuckle. “It's a bad way to go about living.” He added, “For me it is part of my contemplative practice to try to be centred, no matter what I’m doing. Whether I find myself working or resting.”

For many of the clergy, maintaining boundaries means accepting the tension between their desire to help the congregation, and their need to care for themselves. Shawn, for example, was quite willing to put aside his personal life when there were a series of deaths in his parish. “I did six funerals in nine days and five of them were people I knew quite well… And at the end of those nine days I was pretty much a basket case.” But rather than allow the boundaries around his time to continue to go unchecked, he communicated clearly with the congregation about what he needed. He had given up time, and now he needed some time back. “I just announced, and was supported quickly by the church, that I'm taking three days off… And I came back to work ready and able to support the community I was in.”

Landon also spoke of the importance of accepting times when boundaries around time cannot be maintained. When crises happen, he said, “you have to break into family time, or the holiday time, or break into a day off that you desperately need.” However, he was quick to speak
of the importance of re-establishing the needed balance. He advises clergy, saying that after the
unexpected tasks are resolved,

You're going to take your break and… you're not going to be anxious about it. You don't
need to be a superhero and work for 24 days straight without a day off. You arrange it
differently. This is how I cope, nurturing and supporting myself in my ministry.

The issue of setting boundaries was prominent in the interviews. The clergy I interviewed
demonstrated a variety of ways of managing these boundaries. Many spoke of the boundary
maintenance as a supportive practice, and even a spiritual one. The ability to set such boundaries
required self-awareness.

3. Self-Awareness

Roger, Landon, Mandy, Shawn and Blair spoke of their spiritual practice of nurturing
self-awareness, and how this was a crucial support in their ministry. The seeking of formal
education was highlighted as an important part of this spiritual practice. Also highlighted were
meditation, journaling, therapy, meeting regularly with others who seek self-awareness, prayer,
and developing the skill of intentionally checking-in with themselves. This check-in included
expanding their awareness of personal feelings, anxiety levels, personality traits, and habitual
behaviours. This practice helped them to maintain perspective in situations, so that, rather than
being reactive or anxious, they could instead respond in a way that both cared for themselves and
retained their effectiveness in their vocation.

Roger told of how an awareness of his own feelings was important in nurturing himself
in his work. He said, “my practices to nurture my spirit include the nurturing of my own self
awareness, which includes an honest awareness of my shortcomings”. He gave the example of
having to resolve his own feelings before he could effectively engage in a pastoral task. He was
tired after a very long day, and then received a call requesting pastoral care at the hospital. He felt resistance within himself, because he did not want to go. Without his spiritual practice of developing self-awareness, he might have reacted. However, his regular spiritual practice of deepening his self-awareness allowed him to be “aware of my feelings, so I wasn't acting them out when I went to the hospital. Instead I owned them and allow them to find their place. … Nurturing my inner awareness helped me in that concrete situation.”

Landon spoke of developing self-awareness as a spiritual practice. Through regular therapy, intentional conversations, and educational endeavors, Landon intentionally develops his self-awareness. He views this as a spiritual practice that supports him by helping him to stay balanced, rather than taking on the anxieties of his congregation members. Landon talked about working with congregations amid “high anxiety, such as the fear of not being able to meet the budget, or the fear of asking people to give more money, or the fear of being able to speak face-to-face with strangers.” His spiritual practice of developing self-awareness nurtures his ability to monitor his own self-talk. He practices noticing his inner dialogue when it takes on the congregations’ anxieties. He said, “I look in the mirror and ask myself, ‘Whose issue is whose?’” Landon recognized the consequences of taking on the combined anxieties of an entire congregation. He said, “I can't take on their anxiety or I'll have a heart attack.” When asked how he nurtures himself amid congregational anxiety, Landon spoke of psychological studies and sensitivity training, personal therapy, and working in a group for self-reflection. Self-awareness was not simply the result of having done these things. Rather, seeing self-awareness as a spiritual practice has lead Landon to engage in these activities. He elaborated on how this spiritual practice supports him in his ministry, saying, “I have to be in good spiritual and psychological
shape….I have to deal with my fears and anxieties first, so I can walk with them as they deal
with theirs.”

Mandy begins each morning with her spiritual practice of nurturing self-awareness. She
said that each morning, within Morning Prayer, she intentionally sits quietly to journal,
examining the day before. This is not a simple recounting of events. Rather, she said, “this
allows me to be honest about what's going on for me”. By examining her motivations and
feelings, this spiritual practice allows her to respond to the days events with choices based in
awareness, rather than unexamined emotional reactions.

When asked what he does to nurture and support himself in ministry, Shawn’s immediate
response was, “the most important thing is self-awareness”. For Shawn, self-awareness is a
spiritual practice as it informs his understanding of his spiritual life. Shawn had struggled for
years trying to fit his activities into a preconceived idea of what it is to be “spiritual”. He
described how he got in touch with his actual spiritual life when his self-awareness grew. With
self-awareness, he understood and accepted that rote prayers are not a way he connects with
God. Making self-awareness an intentional practice allowed him to embrace his unique prayer
life, take opportunities for conversation with God while walking, and understand his relationship
with God as being a friendship.

Blair also raised the importance of nurturing self-awareness, which he included among
his spiritual practices. He said, “If you deny yourself work in self-awareness, you're not going to
survive.” He spoke of how nurturing self-awareness assists clergy in maintaining humility before
God. By remaining humble, clergy avoid taking responsibility for the emotional imbalances that
exist within a church community. He said,
Otherwise, you take on all the finger-pointing and believe it's all your fault. … There are plenty of people out there that can’t simply admit who they are....Whoever you meet and whatever happens, it's all connected with something much larger. And I've had to learn to see that. … Today, I feel like, very subtly, I am not that important. Before, I thought everything was up to me.

The participants who nurture self-awareness as a spiritual practice reported that it assists them in taking perspective and responding to anxiety. In addition to self-awareness, clergy spoke of the importance of maintaining external support through nurturing relationships.

4. Social Support

Shawn, Roger, Natalie, Mandy, Jodi, Stella, and Melissa spoke about being nurtured in their ministry through social support. They included the intentional seeking of social support as a spiritual practice. This support was found in family, friends, colleagues, and those in formal relationships such as spiritual direction.

Several participants spoke of the importance of their family in supporting them. For Roger, intentionally booking time to connect with his partner is a spiritual practice that supports him. He said, “When my partner and I take time out of our busy schedules to go out for breakfast, that nurtures my spirit.” Natalie spoke of the eating meals together with her family as a sustaining spiritual practice. She said, “Every time we gather for a meal… we support each other. It's incredibly nourishing.”

However, several also remarked about the limitations of relying on family for social support with regards to ministry. As noted above, families can resent the intrusion of church on their time with their loved one. Family members may also become stressed when a clergy-person turns to them for support over a matter of conflict in the church. The family members may lose
their ability to have a positive worship experience at their church when they go there while feeling defensive on behalf of their clergy family member. Some clergy, like Betty, were quite explicit about establishing their homes as places where the church is not discussed, saying, “One of the things I try hard to do is to not bring my work home…. It kind of creates a little bubble for me.”

Roger, Natalie, Theo, Shawn, Mandy, Jodi, Stella, and Melissa spoke of friends, colleagues, and spiritual directors as they engage in the spiritual practice of intentionally seeking social support. Roger spoke of being selective about which friends he can trust to offer this support. He said, “I meet for a coffee with a friend with whom I can be honest about what's happening with me.” Natalie spoke of intentionally getting together with colleagues, as did Theo, who enjoys “commiserating or celebrating or whatever it is we need to do” as colleagues in the church.

Shawn spoke of the importance of seeking collegial support as a spiritual practice. He asked, "If we as clergy can't help one another then how can we help other people?" He then added, gravely, “I think we've all known people that we would've called lone wolves in the ministry and I think they're very dangerous people.” Without the spiritual support that may be found in collegial participation, he said, “I've seen too many of them implode,” doing damage to their congregations as they do.

Roger, however, finds collegial support doesn’t do enough to nurture the kind of vulnerable interaction he needs in his ministry. Instead, his spiritual practices include keeping membership in an organization outside the diocese that regularly meets to intentionally challenge and support each other. He said, “I seek a group where I can be open and accountable for myself and my feelings….I don’t find this at Clericus [meetings]….I need a place where I can openly
and honestly say what is going on with me.” Blair also spoke of this inability to find safe and open social support among colleagues, saying, “I see far too much competition between ministers. Everybody wants to be the next bishop.”

Clergy have more options for social support for their ministry than turning to family, friends, or colleagues. They may, instead, engage in the spiritual practice of spiritual direction. A spiritual director is someone trained in conversations about the spiritual life. Natalie, Mandy, Jodi, and Stella find their spiritual practice of meeting with a spiritual director or mentor to be supportive in a way that other relationships are not. Where family and friends might simply listen, or may try to help problem solve, Mandy spoke of how her spiritual director is able to challenge her in a supportive way. She said, “She is very good for me. She doesn't let me get away with anything...She challenges me.” When Mandy speaks to her spiritual director about the difficulties she is facing in ministry, her spiritual director directs her to be intentional about her spiritual life, asking things like, “What is your prayer life like? Are you praying? Are you taking time off or continuing to work when it's your time off?”

Melissa spoke of how her spiritual director helped her find a broader perspective in a particular situation, saying, “She helped me put things back in perspective because I was very upset. … I was taking this [work situation] awfully personally and I didn't need to.” Melissa described how she appreciates the candour of the relationship, saying, “It's nice to have somebody who can be that straight with you and you don't take offence.” The spiritual director is in a role that differs from family and friends, able to offer support as an uninvolved third party. Melissa summarized this relationship as not only reconnecting her with an awareness of God, but also grounding her in the present moment. She said, “If I'm having one of those moments where I
am hyperventilating with anxiety, she can bring me back to earth pretty quickly and do it in a way that I know I'm being heard, respected, and safe.”

Providing ministry can be an isolating experience. By engaging in a spiritual practice of intentionally seeking social support, clergy find themselves better able to meet the challenges they face. This social support not only provides a listening ear, it may also assist the clergy in maintaining perspective, in being grounded, and in helping them to bring their focus back to the faith that called them to the ministry in the first place. In addition to social support, many participants also spoke of nurturing healthy communication as being one of their spiritual practices.

5. Communication

Participants spoke of supporting themselves in their vocation by engaging in the spiritual practice of intentionally bringing awareness to their communication. By doing this, they would go beyond the usual pattern of quickly reacting to the content of what was being communicated to them. By being grounded and by bringing the presence of God into the process of their communication, clergy were able to respond thoughtfully to conflict when it happens.

Stella realized the importance of listening as part of healthy communication. When a conflict upset her, she engaged in communication as a spiritual practice and found herself able to intentionally listen to what her congregation members had to say. She said, “The first thing I do is to sit down and journal about it. Then I pray and reflect on it.” She was then ready to “listen to them and hear what they are saying.” Having prepared herself to truly listen, she found she could move with the others toward resolution, rather than reacting and exacerbating the conflict.

Natalie spoke of having numerous draining conflicts in her church. Rather than focus on defending herself against the content of conflictual communications from congregation
members, she focussed instead on communication as something spiritual that connects her to her community. Instead of defensively shutting down communication, she sought feedback and impressions from her congregation members. She said, “When I try something new I want to know if they like it or not… I want to keep the lines of communication open… Feedback helps me to plan ahead.”

Shawn noticed his tendency to avoid conflict by shutting down communication, and how this would make things worse. He chose, instead, to engage in what he sees as a spiritual practice of intentionally focussing on communication, and in a non-reactive way. He said, “When congregation members are doing absolutely all they can to fight with me, I stay very calm and very cool. It turns the situation around [in a positive way].” Shawn spoke of how this practice would spiritually reframe communication. Rather than focussing on defending himself from the content of the communication, he would shift his attention to loving and respecting the congregation members. He spoke of recognizing when they are hurting, saying, “As for the people who are causing the most problems, I just want to give them a hug. As if to say, let's move forward together.”

Roger engages in a spiritual practice of honouring communication as a spiritual act, rather than simply using it as a means to an end. When there seemed to be an initial consensus, Roger took to heart the strong possibility that some congregation members were staying silent rather than having their voices heard. For communication to be honoured, it was important to Roger that all voices were heard, so he would purposely state an opposing opinion. He said, “I deliberately engaged in a little conflict with the folks of a committee… We managed our way through that conflict in a healthy manner”. Roger found this practice to be supportive of his ministry, because the faith community was stronger when everyone participated. He reflected on
the experience, saying, “It was a good thing for all of us that it wasn't initially a unanimous approach.”

Landon similarly included the honouring of communication as a spiritual practice. Like Roger, he spoke of harnessing healthy conflict for the benefit of open and honest communication. He said,

As my ministry matured and I grew in self-confidence, I maintained a policy of open disclosure….So, if there's a conflict… I would say ‘We have different expectations. Let's have a conversation about that’… Conflicts are not good or bad, they’re just forms of energy that can be used for good or for ill. So, we can choose to use it for good, and not be afraid of it.

Landon does not view communication as merely the giving and receiving of information. He very much sees it as a communal activity to be honoured. He included in this the importance of engaging in open communication about his own errors. He said,

I easily own up, and say ‘that's my fault’. I feel as comfortable as possible doing that. I hate making mistakes. But I’ve found that if I own up to them, as opposed to becoming defensive, that helps people deal with their disappointment.

By engaging in the spiritual practice of focusing on and honouring communication, Landon stated that he is “nurtured and supported” in his ministry.

Travis spoke of communication as being at its best when communication happens as a spiritual practice within the context of faith, prayer, and community. He said,

When our communication is at its best, we're communicating with everyone gathered around a single table, face-to-face, in the context of prayer. That's a spiritual practice. …

When we meet as the congregational council, … we have a prayer service before we start
our meeting. It’s deeply spiritual. That's good communication in my book. … it leads to an entering into the shared work of the community from a spiritual place as opposed to simply our personal concerns, or worries, or personal agendas… We offer our conversation over to God and it is deeply spiritual.

The participants spoke at length of communication itself being a spiritual practice that supports and nurtures them in their ministry. This related to the next narrative thread of seeing not only communication, but all of their work, as being a part of the Gospel narrative.

6. Narrative of the Gospel

The sixth resonant thread became evident as the words of the participants moved from their work in the institutional church to the support they experience in their spiritual practices. For the purposes of this paper, the ‘narrative of the Gospel’ will refer to the whole of the scriptural stories, read as the overarching story of humanity in relationship to God through Christ. It is important to note that different clergy have their own interpretations of the content and focus of the narrative of the Gospel. For example, some understand the narrative of the Gospel as being primarily about social justice. Others experience the narrative of the Gospel as a message of freedom from sin. Still others look to the narrative of the Gospel as a key to salvation. These are only a few examples.

Most priests begin their ministry in response to a sense that the God they encounter in the narrative of the Gospel is personally calling them to serve through leadership in the church (Epperly, 2014). In this way, the person’s personal narrative is experienced as having become a part of the larger narrative of the Gospel (White, 1964). Yet, they often find themselves losing touch with the narrative of the Gospel as they engage in church management. When roofs are leaking, finances are lacking, congregation members are in conflict, and staff and volunteers
need administration, priests can begin to lose touch with the sense that their narrative is operating within the narrative of the Gospel. As participants spoke of their ministry, they spoke of their own narratives from either within or outside of the narrative of the Gospel. This thread of the narrative of the Gospel was expressed in three subcategories: change in tone, shift in perspective, and acceptance of self and others.

6a) Change in tone.

Natalie provided an example of a shift in tone. At several points in the conversation, her personal narrative disconnected from the narrative of the Gospel and spoke solely of church management. When this happened, she spoke of events and situations that she found to be stressful, with no reference to her faith. She expressed her stress through a quickened pace of speech. Her conversation skipped disjointedly from topic to topic, and she interrupted the questions in an agitated way. At other points in her interview, however, she connected her stories with the narrative of the Gospel. She spoke of praying often, or of meeting with her spiritual director, or of connecting with a mentoring colleague to discuss faith. In times when she spoke of her spiritual practices of prayer, spiritual direction, or time connecting with others, her voice became calm.

At one point, she was speaking of a conflict she experienced amid church management and said sardonically, “there’s nothing like getting kicked when you’re down.” Shortly after, however, when she spoke of the spiritual practice of regularly connecting with a colleague to discuss her faith, her tone changed dramatically. She said calmly and warmly that this practice helps her to see that, “my whole day and my whole life is ensconced in prayer.” Her words echoed Landon’s words, when he referenced the scriptural quote of 1 Thessalonians 5:16-18. Landon said,
I suppose that's how I would interpret [the apostle] Paul's words about praying unceasingly: Just keep talking with Jesus and keep looking for the Holy Spirit. Know that the Holy Spirit is present and had showed up long before I got here. Be open in a self-disclosing conversation with Jesus and the Holy Spirit.

In this way, these participants connected their life and practice with the narrative of the Gospel.

Landon’s tone also changed when he told the story of gathering a small group to discuss their spiritual life, with a focus on their friendship with Jesus. Landon even noted, "As I'm retelling the story now, I'm re-encouraged by what happened there.” Simply speaking of a past experience from within the narrative of the Gospel was nurturing and encouraging for him.

Stella demonstrated a similar change in her tone. She sounded distressed as she spoke of a stressful situation that occurred amid institutional church management. She experienced it as being so difficult that she said, "I cried that night because I was so exhausted and frustrated.” However, when Stella's narrative shifted back to how her spiritual practices nurtured and supported her, her tone changed. When she described caring for her body through rest or walking, she said serenely, “it makes me feel calm and centred… the peace of Christ.” She spoke warmly of how cleaning her house is, for her, a spiritual practice that has the same effect,

It's creating a space for God in my heart and my life....So when I'm in my home and making a clean and tidy office, or even cleaning my floors, it's like an invitation for God to be really present....[It's] time alone with God.

Stella sounded relaxed and positive as she spoke of her practice of cleaning in silence, and how in the quiet of her work the inner chatter she described goes silent as well, and she calms herself.
Roger recognized the way his prayerful spiritual practices affect his tone as he engages in routinized ministry within the institution of the church. He said,

Those supportive practices enable me to manage conflict gently, without stridently proclaiming my own point of view… My ability to manage my way through has its roots in those daily practices.

Shawn echoed Roger when he spoke of his tone shifting when he nurtures and supports himself through practices such as walking and praying. He said, “It leaves me in such a better internal space to handle situations.”

In contrast, Shawn reports that when he does not engage in nurturing practices, his tone changes dramatically for the worse. He said,

I get to the point where it’s like I’m chasing my tail around. I may be doing a lot of things. But, I’m blustering and going all over the place, and there's no substance to what I’m doing...I say the wrong thing at the wrong time. I’m not as helpful for people. It leads me to poor choices, and to depression.

Betty spoke of her change in tone when she locates her narrative within the narrative of the Gospel. She used the metaphor of food to describe the change she experiences in herself, saying,

It is truly spiritual food that sustains me....Living is draining, and this just fills me up....I feel nourished, so I'm not hungry....When I’m hungry and tired and grumpy, it's hard to give. But when I stop and intentionally give myself the opportunity to interact with the divine...then my need is met! So now I can say, ‘Can I help you?’

Blair spoke in an agitated tone about his experiences offering leadership in the local church. He referred to conflicts, anxieties, and bad behaviour on the part of congregation
members. However, when he spoke of his work overseas, he spoke of the faith of the people there, their remarkable capacity for forgiveness, and their faith in God, his tone changed dramatically. When asked whether his overseas work was refreshing or draining, he commented, “Oh, very refreshing”. He went on to speak of the deep faith of the people there, and how he found it not only refreshing, but also nurturing. “But”, he added, “you’ve got to get out of the parish to do that”. For Blair, his work overseas was all about preaching, receiving, and witnessing acts of faith, all of which connected his work with the narrative of the Gospel. However, when he spoke of his work at congregations in this diocese, his tone was agitated as he referred to institutional woes. At those points in the conversation, he did not refer to faith, but spoke of travel distance between multiple points, competing interests and “trivia” between groups and individuals, and people worried about money issues. Later, he referred again to his work overseas, and again his tone became calm as he spoke of “really experiencing ministry” and the ability to “engage in ministry that matters”.

Melissa began our conversation by speaking anxiously of situations in the institutional church that she found to be exasperating. Her tone changed when she located her narrative within the narrative of the Gospel. This shift began when she connected her ministry with some of the Gospel stories of Jesus, saying,

I can understand Christ's frustration. He would speak to the people and they would do what they wanted anyway. In the same way, I raised a concern. Somebody may hear it, or it may just evaporate. Maybe someone down the road will say, ‘Oh, remember when she said this?’...I have a responsibility to be the voice that people don't want to hear, even when it's easier to be quiet.
As she continued to speak from within the narrative of the Gospel, Melissa’s tone continued to change. She not only stopped speaking of taking situations personally, she also described how she has found nurture and support in the work she does. Melissa then described how even her work itself is a spiritual practice, saying:

It’s a spiritual practice when I’m having a mindful conversation with someone as I offer pastoral care. They gift me with their presence and share their story. They may express anxiety and sadness, and I can be present for them and be mindful of what they're saying. I make sure they know the conversation we are having is being honoured, and will be held a secret, and they will be prayed for....It is a wonderful way to connect with the Divine...the Holy Spirit was most definitely present. I know I can't do this on my own. It's impossible. The Holy Spirit is present and available.

Melissa’s anxieties fade when she feels a connection with the God she has encountered in the Gospel narrative. She spoke about her experience of the Holy Spirit being present, saying:

My experience is an incredible feeling of calm....We are invoking the Holy Spirit to be with us. And it's a feeling of peace and serenity...that we're being held in the embrace of our Lord.

Melissa also described how, when she locates her narrative within the narrative of the Gospel, she feels grounded. Rather than being lost in anxious thoughts, she is present in the here and now. She said, "And that helps me to allay the anxiety of ‘I should be doing this’ or ‘I could be doing that’ or ‘is this the best use of my time?’ and getting lost in that busyness.”

6b) Shift in perspective.

It was not only tone that changed when participants located their narratives within the narrative of the Gospel. Jodi found her perspective shift as well. She spoke of how, when she
engages in the practice of prayer, she finds her story within God’s story. This shift in perspective supports her in stressful situations. She said,

I’m going to come out of it with God’s help, but I’ve got to go there with God. I’ve got to intentionally invite God into this mess...When I do, it calms me. It helps with taking perspective, so I don’t just focus on everything that's happening. I can realize I’m not in it alone....I think we all believe that God is there with us. But our deepest part of ourselves needs to know that. So, by praying and intentionally inviting God into it...it's like my soul, the deepest part of myself is saying ‘It's going to be okay. God is here with me’.

Mandy spoke of engaging in the routines of her ministry, including interpersonal conflicts. Her spiritual practices shift her perspective so she “sees the world differently.” By journaling while reading scripture, Mandy intentionally connects her life with the narrative of the Gospel. She said:

Through journaling with scripture, I notice: “What have I been doing, and where is God in what I’ve been doing? Where are the nudgings from God?...In the crazy things that are going on, where is God in all of that?...What am I called to do? Who am I called to be?”

Mandy described how her perspective shifts when she places herself within the narrative of the Gospel, connecting her life with an awareness of the presence of God. From this new perspective, she can “not get caught in the craziness” of her work in the institutional church.

Blair spoke of his ministry in the Diocese of Huron from a perspective of cynicism, until near the end of his interview. At that point he connected his work with his spiritual life, and his perspective shifted. He said, “As far as I'm concerned, the whole of our life is spiritual. Whoever you meet and whatever happens, it's all connected to something much larger”. This was a shift in
perspective from the rest of his interview, when his references to meeting people in the
congregation were spoken from a perspective of dismay.

Travis spoke of the importance of communication. At first, this may seem like a practical
consideration. For Travis, however, communication goes beyond being a practical activity of the
institutional church. Rather, communication is about communion with God as experienced in the
Body of Christ. This presents a shift of perspective. He explained,

Coming together as a community and living that life together, which includes all the
difficult decisions that we make each week, is a spiritual practice. Because again it comes
back to, to use our theology, recognizing that you're not alone. You bring the Body of
Christ with you.

In this way, Travis located the act of communication as being within the narrative of the Gospel.
This changed not only his intentionality with communication, but also the way he framed
communication with his church leadership. He formalized this understanding of communication
with the way he begins his week and his meetings. He described, saying,

My associate and I start each week, usually Monday mornings, with a worship service
including only ourselves. It's wonderful. We take turns leading it for each other...And we
offer up to God all the things we're going to be doing [together] this week and ask God to
bless them and to give us all that we need to accomplish. It really grounds me.

Similarly, each meeting of the church leadership is intentionally connected with the narrative of
the Gospel. The meetings begin with a meal together and prayer. Travis described this way of
beginning a meeting as "deeply spiritual. That's good communication in my book.” He
elaborated, saying,
It leads us to share the work of the community from a spiritual place, as opposed to simply our personal concerns, or worries, or personal agendas….We offer it over to God…and that is deeply spiritual….When we start our meeting that way do we rarely find ourselves in conflict with one another.

Jerry spoke of his spiritual practice offering him a shift in perspective. He said meditation “helps me become a lot more accepting of things around me.” He said that without this spiritual practice, his perspective would be one of problem solving, “to get in there and fix a situation.” Instead, meditation causes Jerry to shift perspective from urgency and micro-managing, to a perspective of humility and acceptance. He said,

I step back and ask myself, 'What's going to happen here?' It’s happening for a reason. I can let it happen....There is a greater ability to find peace within the conflict….I don't always need to fix things.

When asked to describe his experience of meditation, Jerry located his narrative within the narrative of the Gospel. He described feeling both connected with God, and also becoming grounded in an acceptance of what God is doing in the world around him. Rather than being caught in a conversation in his mind about how to fix a situation, he referred to feeling a sense of peace and groundedness as he connected with "the flow" of the energy of the transcendent at work in the imminent. Meditation offers Jerry a shift in perspective that, he said, “helps me become a lot more accepting of things around me.”

6c) Acceptance of self and others.

Shawn engages in spiritual practices that connect him with the Gospel narrative, including a form of walking prayer. He describes walking prayer as “an opportunity to have conversations with God” that offer him an experience of being accepted. When his narrative is
placed within the narrative of the Gospel, with a God who accepts him as he is, Shawn finds himself also accepting of those around him. He said, “It allows me then to talk to people and interact with people in the same way God interacts with me.”

Similar to Shawn, Natalie also experiences a shift in her acceptance of those around her when she locates her narrative within the larger narrative of the Gospel. When Natalie had spoken earlier of church management, but without connecting her stories to the narrative of the Gospel, she spoke in terms of disappointment and exasperation with others. Yet, after speaking of her spiritual practices, she related how these practices cause her to see that, “relationships are as much about our relationship with the individual as they are about our relationship with God. We see Christ in everybody, therefore everything is about how we relate to God.” Where before, the people were portrayed by Natalie as causing her harm, her shift in perspective lead her to see “the possibility that God could be speaking through them, communicating something I haven't heard before.”

The resonant threads will now be considered in light of the literature review.

**Discussion**

The seven themes observed in the literature are use of time; affirmation; conflict; outpouring of self; practical self-care; the spiritual life of clergy; and the narrative of the Gospel and institution of the church.

**Use of Time**

The literature addressed the theme of chronic stress caused by multiple and conflicting expectations of clergy’s time. Forward (2000) in his study of 29 Protestant urban pastors in California, with regards to clergy stress and clergy role, speaks of the stress from “unrelenting time demands” (p. 166) which he stated are “ubiquitous in ministry” (p. 167). In the interviews,
participants were asked, “Tell me about a time when you’ve experienced competing demands on your time.” Every participant said they experienced such competing demands. Several of the participants agreed with enthusiasm, saying such things as, “Oh yes!” (Natalie), and “Oh my goodness, that’s every day, isn’t it?” (Roger).

The specific conflicts around time that participants mentioned included encroachments on personal time such as days off (all participants). Stalfa (1994), in his overview of transgenerational family systems theory and ministry, similarly referred to pastoral ministry’s demands as potentially leading to the “neglect of [clergy’s] self and family, and a quiet resentment from a sense of being exploited by the very cause to which they are committed” (p. 380).

In his interview, Travis spoke of scheduling conflicts when two events were happening at the same time (Travis). Travis ministers in a multi-point parish. Francis and Brewster (2012) in their study of 613 clergy working in multi-point parishes, also spoke of ‘time-related over-extension’. They (2012) went beyond simply scheduling conflicts and included several facets of ‘time-related over-extension’, including “being unable to respond to the needs of everyone”, “being expected to be involved in several communities”, and “giving attention to detailed matters in several churches” (p. 169).

Melissa and Natalie spoke of their congregations expecting more visits than time allowed. Epperly (2014) echoed this in his book about clergy self-care, when he quoted pastors about the things that give them stress, including “too many hospital and senior center and shut-in visits” for the time available (p.90). Pastoral visits were also referenced by Francis and Brewster (2012) with regards to clergy stress over use of time, from “being expected to give pastoral care in several communities” (p. 169, 170), which may include significant travel time as well.
Landon spoke of the congregational time expectations making it difficult to engage in continuing education classes and diocesan work. Tomic (2004) in his study of protestant clergy in the Netherlands, noted that clergy he studied identified the need for more “professional training, refresher courses, study leave and tutorship” (p. 241). Such opportunities, however, must compete with other congregational expectations for clergy’s use of time. Epperly (2014) spoke to Landon’s concern that, for a clergy-person to be able to make time for continuing education, the congregation members need to value its importance. Epperly (2014) stated,

A commitment to ministerial continuing education is a congregational as well as an individual matter. Congregations need to recognize and affirm the connection between professional and intellectual growth through DMin programs, clergy growth groups, continuing education programs, and sabbaticals and a pastor’s effectiveness, insightfulness, and happiness in ministry. (p. 80)

Theo, Travis, Betty, and Melissa noted the expectations of attending all meetings, including meetings that did not involve the clergy. They referred the believe of laity that their work is not honoured if the clergy-person does not attend. They also referred to laity feeling anxious about their abilities to lead, wanting the clergy to be there as back up. Willimon (1989) spoke of this in his book on ministry and burnout. Willimon (1989) addressed pitfall of clergy lacking boundaries around their use of time, so they end up doing work that is the rightful ministry of the laity.

When pastors are uncertain about the intrinsic worth of their vocation as enablers of the congregation, they trivialize their time. They waste hours in unproductive meetings, letting conversations drag on longer than necessary because they have no overriding self-understanding that helps them to organize their time. (p. 63, 64)
Epperly (2014) also referred to this expectation that he attend an unending schedule of meetings. He spoke of priorities becoming clear when a boundary is set as to the number of meetings a clergy-person agrees attend per week.

Many participants framed their conversation about conflicting expectations of time from within their discussion of the importance of boundary setting (Betty, Travis, Mandy, Landon, and Shawn). Stalfa (1994), in his research on caregiving in ministry, lists a “loss of personal boundaries” (p. 380) as being one of the common challenges of pastoral ministry. Forward (2000) likewise identifies the difficulties that arise when boundaries are not respected, and a clergy-person’s schedule fills itself with the almost unending need of the congregation members and church projects. Epperly (2014) speaks of the difficulty of clergy being “at the mercy of other’s agendas, expectations, and schedules” (p. 12).

For the participants, use of time is not merely a function of time management. It relates to spiritual practice as well. Shawn spoke of intentionally setting aside time each morning for spiritual practice. In this way, he starts each day being proactive about his use of time. Betty stated,

Boundaries around time allow for disciplines to have a place to operate. If I have time when I do my meditation, I have a time when I’m not doing something else. That allows me to accomplish things that nourish me. In that way the [intentional use] of time is a spiritual practice.

Epperly (2014) similarly connects use of time with spiritual practice. Epperly (2014) stated, “Amid the numerous, and often conflicting, demands on our time and energy, pastors need to find a still point, a sacred space-time” (p. 100). The very act of setting aside of time for the sacred is a spiritual practice that changes one’s relationship with time. Rather than bouncing
from one task to the next, without reflection or boundaries, regular spiritual practice means that
now demands on time must wait.

Mandy likewise begins each day with morning prayer and then journaling about the
previous day. By intentionally focussing on her previous day within a spiritual practice, she
brings awareness to her use of time. She said this allows her to be “proactive about which things
I choose to respond to” rather than being anxiously reactive.

The Diocese of Huron, as it is rapidly losing membership, finds individual churches no
longer able to afford full-time ordained ministry. To continue to provide ordained ministry, an
increasing number of congregations are being reorganized into multi-point parishes. Existing
multi-point parishes are also being reorganized, when a congregation needs to close or when
another congregation needs to join (Nicholls, 2017). The participants described the impact of
coping with competing expectations of different congregations in a multi-point configuration.

Theo spoke of having three churches who, on paper, had agreed to function as one parish.
However, they continued to behave as three separate congregations with three of every kind of
meeting, three unique liturgies requiring separate planning, and each church having the
expectation that the clergy be available for them as if they were a single point. Travis, who was
reopening a closed church, was being confronted by another church that, “didn’t want to give up
any of the hours” of his time, to which they felt entitled. Mandy was given the task of closing a
church and merging it with another. However, many in the congregation had a different
expectation, that she would use her time to sustain both congregations and prevent the merger.

When visiting a dying woman in hospital, the woman’s family complained that their mother was
dying because the clergy-person had broken her heart by closing her church.
In January of 2018, The Bishop of Huron stated that, amid a general trend toward congregational decline,
the priest at the heart of it all is working to stave off churches from decline, while keeping all of the administrative pieces flowing, while being exciting and dynamic about the possibilities for growth that she or he is nurturing. We know we are asking a lot of clergy. (L. Nicholls, Diocesan Meeting, January 2018)

There is literature specific to the issue of clergy stress in multi-point rural parishes. Robbins & Francis (2014), for example, concludes that clergy stress increases as points are added to a parish, with the stress level plateauing at three churches or more. This study focused on rural clergy with multi-point churches. In addition to the stress of having multiple churches, Robbins & Francis (2014) state, “Rural clergy… report significantly lower levels of personal accomplishment. In other words, they felt that they were achieving less in their ministry” (p. 162).

Francis & Brewster (2012) draw a connection between rural multi-point ministry and high levels of stress due to competing demands on time. The literature connects multi-point parishes with a rural setting. Multi-point parishes have been part of the rural landscape of the Diocese of Huron for decades. What is new is both the increased linking of multiple urban congregations under one priest, and the increased incidences of transition as existing multi-point parishes reorganize. Few clergy have been formally educated on how to facilitate merging congregation and the closing of churches. These are demanding situations and can be situations of further stress for clergy.

Mandy, Theo, and Travis all spoke of their spiritual practices supporting them in the midst of multi-point ministry. Mandy responded to the challenges of her multi-point situation
with “a lot of prayer and journaling around this. It reminded me that I'm doing this because I actually believe God is calling us to this place. I do. And I think God is calling me to lead in this.” Epperly & Epperly (2009) spoke similarly of spiritual practice offering perspective. They quoted a clergy-person who echoed Mandy when she said, “When I felt myself losing my spiritual center and becoming anxious, I reminded myself that God had called me to this church and that however things worked out, God was with me and the congregation” (Chapter 4, Section 3, para. 23). Theo spoke of the importance of “renewing my connection with the Body of Christ”. He was intentional about spending time with colleagues, sharing in faith and feeling supported. Travis similarly spoke of intentional communication as being a spiritual practice that supported him through time conflicts. Rather than trying to meet the congregations’ conflicting expectations over his use of time, Travis spoke of his spiritual practice of intentionally drawing in members of his congregations in communication. He said,

> The spiritual practice is coming together as a community and living that life together, which includes all the difficult decisions that we get to make that week. It is a spiritual practice because, it is theologically recognizing that you're not alone and you bring the Body of Christ with you when communication is at its best.

**Affirmation**

A second theme addressed in the literature is clergy’s cumulative expectation of affirmation (Perry, 2003; Olson and Grosch, 1991). The interviews did not reveal this theme to be prominent. Clergy did speak of wanting to be liked in their work. Mandy said, “I think the need for approval and the need to be liked is a hazard in ministry.” She recognized, however, that, “on several occasions God was calling me to lead in particular directions that wouldn’t include being liked once I was done.” She spoke of recognizing she had a role in the community,
and that this role was not about personal affirmation. Several participants (Landon, Travis, Jodi, and Natalie) did speak of wanting positive feedback, though it was with regards to new and creative initiatives rather than a cumulative need for affirmation. Others, (Roger, Landon, and Blair) spoke of wanting honest feedback, rather than positive feedback. Stella reported that she routinely receives feedback, both positive and negative. In his study of United Methodist candidates for ministry, Perry (2003) found that, compared to 90% of the general population, clergy are significantly more likely to get ill if they do not have affirmation. Perry (2003) stated, “If the clergy get the affirmation and reinforcement they feel they need, they will likely do okay. If they do not receive the affirmation and reinforcement they need, they will eventually tend to become physically ill” (p. 19). Olsen & Grosch (1991), in their study of clergy from the perspective of self-psychology and systems theory, conclude that the need for affirmation can present itself as a feedback loop:

Congregational transference and idealization colludes with the grandiose self the pastor is invested in. This begins a vicious feedback loop. The more the pastor attempts to be all that the congregation expects him or her to be (thereby using the congregation as a self-object), the more the congregation expects. (p. 301)

This need for affirmation as a major source of stress was not expressed by the participants. Some commented in ways that addressed this potential, however. Jodi, for example, said, “Part of self-care is to be able to discern the value of your work for yourself….You have to be your own feedback person.” Likewise, many of the clergy (Roger, Landon, Natalie, Shawn, and Blair) spoke of the importance of self-awareness, one of the resonant threads found in the interviews (see page 65), including awareness about their own need for affirmation. Epperly &
Epperly’s (2014) observe that affirmation may be healthy and sustainable if it is spiritual in nature, rather than egocentric. They (2014) state,

Healthy, spirit-centered pastors recognize that acknowledging and developing our own gifts is an expression of gratitude to God and to our own personal mentors. As Jesus counseled, we are called to let our light shine as a witness to God’s love. (p. 57)

Other participants (Natalie, Melissa, Stella, Shawn, Roger, Landon, Blair, Theo, and Travis) spoke of the importance of intentional communication, another resonant thread found in the interviews (see page 71), including the communication of constructive feedback about their work. Roger, for example, stated,

The kind of positive feedback that I need is more honest feedback rather than Pollyanna feedback… The practices that nurture my spirit are also trying to nurture my own self awareness, my own honesty with my shortcomings. … Spiritual practices help me to be more measured in my own attitude toward myself, not trying to be defensive of myself when things go amiss, but also trying to not be too hard on myself either.

This response corresponds with Epperly & Epperly’s (2014) observation that clergy may have a “commitment to developing their inter-personal communication and organizational leadership skills with appreciative and affirming prayerful awareness in which spiritual practices lead to holy and holistic habits of mind” (p. 57). Participant’s responses affirmed that congregational feedback does not need to be egocentric affirmation, but rather helpful information. By including the intentional seeking of communication as a spiritual practice, participants did not need to receive feedback as devastating criticism, but as helpful guidance held in God’s care.
Conflict

The theme of ongoing conflict is present in the literature about clergy wellness. Gortner (2010) in his exploration of leadership literature, examines the tendency for clergy find themselves unable to deal with the level of conflict that exist in churches. Zondag (2007), in his research on the relationship between personality traits of Dutch pastors, highlights conflict as a major source of stress for clergy gifted in “empathic perspective-taking”. The pastoral ability to adopt congregation members perspectives and sympathize with them may lead clergy to approach conflict from a pastoral perspective. As they try to empathize with both sides in a conflict, and try to care for both sides, “helplessness may arise” (p. 93) as clergy are unable to offer a leadership direction that might oppose or offend any within the congregation.

The theme of conflict resonated strongly with each participant. For example, when Blair was asked about conflict in the church, he said, “Oh, where do I begin?!”. He described often feeling like a “scapegoat” for the conflicts that existed in his congregations. Although there is literature on the stress of clergy overseeing a multi-point parish (Brewster, 2014; Francis & Brewster, 2012; Robbins & Francis, 2014), Blair noted that the level of conflict was particularly significant in multi-point parishes transitioning through an amalgamation. Blair described finding nurture and support in his spiritual practice of mission work. By regularly offering ministry in an impoverished part of the world, he sustains a perspective of participating in God’s work. Like Blair, most participants described situations of conflict that they experienced as being wounding and spoke of in terms of deep pain. Travis spoke of coming very close to leaving his church over a conflict. He relied on his spiritual practice of intentional communication. Gathering the leadership from all of his churches, he clearly communicated what he was experiencing. This practice supported him as he was no longer isolated in his leadership role.
The lay leaders worked with him as a leadership team. Some (Roger, Landon, Natalie, Shawn, and Blair) spoke positively about dealing with conflicts by managing their own thinking and behaviour with self-awareness, by opening lines of communication, and by working hard to treat all sides with love even when certain people’s behaviour was less than kind. This corresponds to Epperly & Epperly’s (2014) observation that, for clergy, “awareness of your mental, emotional, and spiritual well-being in the present moment is essential to authentic representation of God’s presence with and for others. It also helps one prevent reactive and defensive behaviours in stressful administrative situations” (p. 68). Others (Betty, Jodi, and Travis) spoke of setting firm boundaries between home and church, so the pain of the church related conflicts did not interfere with their home life. Jodi related how, despite her efforts, the church conflicts could not be separated from her personal life. “The church invades,” she said, with energy, “and there’s not a damn thing you can do about it.” Morris & Blanton (1998) spoke of a congregation’s family boundary intrusiveness and how this may “may intrude and impede the goals of marital, parental, and life satisfaction of clergy and their spouses” (p. 29). Travis spoke of his spiritual practice of communication. This involved intentional, open and honest communication with congregational leaders. It also involved intentional severing of communication when he was spending time with family. He stated, “It means completely severing communication, saying ‘you’re in good hands’ because I’ve arranged for pastoral coverage… It’s the best way for me to not constantly think about the congregation’s needs instead of my own”.

Several of the participants spoke of the significant stress they experience due to various church conflicts (Natalie, Jodi, Stella, Betty, Melissa, Jerry, and Blair). Ongoing conflict is prevalent in church communities, and participants connected it with the need for the nurture and support of their spiritual practices.
Outpouring of Self

In his study of United Methodist clergy, Doolittle (2007) quotes a clergy-person who reflected on the ideal that, “we pour ourselves out in the Lord’s service, serve ‘sacrificially’ and without counting the cost to ourselves, our health, and our families, work harder and longer without ever, ever, ever being lazy or giving up” (p. 37). Doolittle (2007) concludes from his research that, “Clergy who ‘pour themselves out’ for their congregation appear to have higher levels of emotional exhaustion” (p. 37). Stalf a (1994), in his research on the caregiving role in ministry, noted that outpouring of self may lead to “loss of personal boundaries, guilt over not doing enough, neglect of self and family, and a quiet resentment from a sense of being exploited by the very cause to which they are committed” (p. 380). This theme was evident in almost all the interviews. The participants recognized the stress of continually pastoring to others. Many of them (Stella, Melissa, Jerry, and Jodi) emphasized the importance of care for the body, which was identified as a resonant thread in this research (see page 53). This corresponds to case study research by Chase-Ziolek (2010), who noted, “Sustaining pastoral excellence for today's churches challenges clergy to practice their faith through honoring the body” (p. 71, 72). Oswald (1991) in his book on clergy self-care, implores clergy to exercise regularly, tending to their body’s health. Epperly (2014) adds, “Mind, body, and spirit are dynamically interdependent and healthy, and excellent ministry involves caring for the temple of God’s Spirit in every aspect of our lives” (p. 24).

Many participants (Roger, Natalie, Betty, Shawn, Blair, Mandy, and Melissa) spoke of seeking of social support as a means of maintaining balance against the outpouring of self. This was identified as a resonant thread (see page 68). Epperly (2014) upholds the importance of faithful friendships, and Oswald (1991) said of clergy, “most of us underestimate our
vulnerability” and our need to have “a group of people behind us to support us” (p. 129). Oswald (1991) spoke of the outpouring of self in terms of the clergy’s role of providing for the congregation. He was also clear that maintaining social support requires intentionality. He said, “We continue to assume that a good support network happens by accident. We fail to see that quality support takes work” (p. 134). Theo and Travis were clear about intentionally seeking social support as a spiritual practice which connected them to the Body of Christ.

While participants expressed awareness that outpouring of self is necessary in pastoral situations, many were also aware of the dangers of giving too much without replenishment. Blair noted the impact the outpouring of self may have on the clergy-person’s family, when he said, “Clergy give of themselves all the time. Quite often even without thinking. And sometimes we give too much I think. I've seen too many clergy families ruined by that.” Travis also spoke of the impact on the family of clergy. For example, he spoke of his young family complaining that he gives so much to the church, that there is not enough left for them. This resonated with family systems research by Stalfa (1994), in which he noted that the outpouring of self may lead clergy to a “neglect of self and family, and a quiet resentment from a sense of being exploited by the very cause to which they are committed” (p. 380). Travis went on to say, “my parish leadership keeps wanting more and more and more. I have to say, ‘You know what? Enough’s enough!’”

Epperly (2014) warns “those who are always on the go without replenishing themselves spiritually” will find themselves with “compassion fatigue, ill health, and burnout” (p. 108). Shawn stated,

I find in all parishes they are very good at saying, ‘You need to take time for yourself. You need to take care of yourself! Right after you take care of what I need you to take care of right now’.
Shawn then spoke of his need to be intentional about replenishing himself with his spiritual practices. Landon talked about times he gave of himself when a crisis emerged. He emphasized the need to recuperate after these crises by taking time off, away from church duties. He said, “Forget the stereotype of the pastor with wings.” He went on to explain that clergy are human and must be intentional about taking downtime later “so they aren’t feeling resentful” from giving too much of themselves.

Related to the theme of outpouring of self is the sub-theme of congregational expectations of self-giving when their clergy-person is in personal crisis. Two participants (Natalie and Melissa) described undergoing personal crises (such as the death of a close loved one) observed an increase in congregational or personal expectations of their own self-giving as clergy. When Natalie’s close family member had a serious health crisis, the conflict in the church increased, demanding more of her attention. When Melissa had a very close family member who was dying, one of her congregational leaders complained to the church hierarchy because she took a week to be with her dying family member, as well as arranging and attending the funeral. Jerry had two very close family members die within months of each other, followed by the brutal murder of a local friend at the hands of a family member of the victim. He said, “I was hearing people say, well take time to grieve. Take time to grieve. And just take care of yourself. But the subtext was, ‘hurry up’.” He hurried, not taking the necessary time and, in the weeks following, found himself unable to function and was soon on long term stress leave. The instinct for many clergy and the expectation of their congregations is that they take very little time for personal grieving. The resulting turn away from their own grief and focus on self-giving has led participants to significant stress and, in one case, complete burnout. Shawn expressed how even the deaths of parishioners can lead to untended grief for the clergy. He spoke of a time when he
led six funerals in nine days, and all but one of the people who died were people he felt personally close to and knew quite well. He foresaw the potential for burnout if he left his own grief untended. He said, “At the end of those nine days I was pretty much a basket case. So, I just announced that I'd be taking three days off.” There is literature that discusses the importance of a clergy-person recognizing the importance of tending to personal crisis, such as Willimon’s (1988) book examining the issue of burnout as it relates to church leaders. Willimon (1988) stated,

> Pastors are not immune to the same life crises that affect their parishioners. Churches would do well to consider formal leaves of absence and sabbaticals for pastors who experience a personal crisis. Too many times, a conscientious pastor will precipitously leave the ministry during a personal crisis rather than ask for a time away to work things out. (p. 28)

Hendron, Irving, & Taylor (2014), in their quantitative study of 16 clergy, spoke of the effects of vicarious trauma on clergy as they are “offering care and support to those who have encountered life’s daily tragedies” (p. 1). This research concluded that specialized training and intervention that goes beyond spiritual practices is needed for such trauma. The research also warned that, “presenting spirituality too strongly as a protective factor could result in those who experience impact not admitting this and tolling to seek help due to fear of their actions being perceived as a lack of faith” (p. 10).

However, I did not find literature focusing on the topic of personal crisis for clergy as it relates to an increase in congregation’s or self-imposed expectations of clergy self-giving.
Practical Self-Care

The literature contains practical information on self-care. This self-care includes time management (Randall, 1994), healthy lifestyle (Lindholm, Johnston, Dong, Moore, & Ablah, 2016), and maintaining social support (Muskett & Village, 2016). None of the participants focussed on the importance of time management. Some of the priests interviewed spoke of the importance of healthy eating (Jodi), exercise (Stella, Jerry, Roger, and Jodi), maintaining a social support network (Roger, Jodi, Betty, and Shawn), and having a day off each week and vacation time (Mandy, Betty, Melissa, Landon, and Jerry). What several of the priests (Shawn, Natalie, and Blair) did speak about, however, was personality-type and psychotherapeutic techniques. This corresponds with Francis & Smith (2016), in their study of 27 clergy found education in personality type indicators to be received as being helpful. They learned of specific pitfalls they may experience based on personality type, as well as ways to better cope with challenges that are unique to their personality type. Psycho-education may be an important self-identified support for clergy in the Diocese of Huron.

The Spiritual Life of Clergy

There is a great deal of literature about clergy wellness that makes the connection between supportive spiritual practices and clergy resiliency (Chandler, 2010; Epperly & Epperly, 2008; Golden et al., 2004; Grosch & Olsen, 2000; Jackson-Jordan, 2013; Meek et al., 2003; Miner, 2007; Miner et al., 2015; Oswald, 1991; Turton & Francis, 2007). Epperly (2014) stated, “Spiritual practices…are behaviors that are essential to shaping our personal, relational, and professional lives in healthy ways. Practices bring us closer to God and others and promote personal and professional self-awareness.” (p. 25) Much of this literature cites quantitative studies (Turton et al., 2007).
The participants I interviewed cited a wide range of activities they define as spiritual practices that support them in their ministry. The practices held most in common include prayer (both structured and unstructured) and meditation.

Most of those who spoke of structured prayer told me they pray the Daily Office. The Daily Office is the Anglican form of prayers and scripture reading for specific times during the day. Betty, Mandy, Roger, and Jodi spoke of the Daily Office being a supportive and nurturing spiritual practice. Jodi, for example, described the experience of praying structured prayers, saying, “Structure is a support that works for me. I keep a service book marked with the assigned readings for the day at my prayer desk at church.” Structured prayer offers such participants a routine and intentionality to prayerful spiritual practice.

Other participants (Landon, Shawn, Roger, and Natalie), however, spoke of unstructured prayer giving them nurture and support. Such participants spoke of conversations with the divine throughout the day. When Landon was asked if, by conversations with God, he meant “the feeling of a presence,” Landon was clear. “No,” he said, “It's verbal for me. I mean that...it's like an ongoing internal conversation.” Participants who speak to God conversationally expressed finding deep solace in the practice. No research studies were found specific to clergy’s experience of unstructured conversational prayer as a nurture and support in their ministry.

Participants also spoke of Meditation as being supportive of their spiritual life. Mandy, Betty, Jerry, and Natalie spoke of how their practice of meditation nurtures them in their ministry. Betty meditates in the morning and at night to quiet her inner dialogue and to support mindfulness. She describes meditation as a calming experience. She observed that when she meditates regularly, “things are less likely to rattle me… so if I have an emotional need I can meet it in an appropriate way.”
In addition to prayer and meditation, participants described a number of spiritual practices as being “prayerful” or “meditative.” These included yoga, journaling, and speaking with a spiritual director. What was consistent about all of these spiritual practices is that, when they spoke of them, I observed participants connecting their narratives with the narrative of the Gospel (see page 74).

**Narrative of the Gospel and Institution of the Church**

I found no literature about how clergy may regularly switch between situating their narrative within or outside the narrative of the Gospel. By “narrative of the Gospel,” I refer to the whole of the scriptural stories, read as the overarching story of humanity in relationship to God through Christ. As noted previously, different clergy have unique interpretations of the content and focus of the narrative of the Gospel. Many priests have in common experiences of their personal narrative being a part of the larger narrative of the Gospel.

In the Bible, Jeremiah 17:7-8 is an example of a passage that may be interpreted as describing the supportive experience of consistently placing one’s narrative within the larger divine narrative. It reads:

> But blessed is the one who trusts in the Lord, whose confidence is in him. They will be like a tree planted by the water that sends out its roots by the stream. It does not fear when heat comes; its leaves are always green. It has no worries in a year of drought and never fails to bear fruit. (New Revised Standard Version of the Bible)

In their book about spiritual practice and ministry, Epperly & Epperly (2009) describe how a personal spiritual practice (one they describe as “breathing in God’s spirit”) leads them to an awareness of their personal narratives being within the narrative of the Gospel. Epperly & Epperly (2009) state,
As a result of our commitment to breathing in God’s spirit as we go from task to task, the two of us have come to realize that in the varied movements of the day, we are really doing only one thing, and that is responding to God’s graceful and enlightening presence in each moment’s experience. (Introduction, Section 2, para. 10)

Participants interviewed for this research engaged in a short-term shifting in and out of the narrative of the Gospel. This shifting was within the course of minutes and was not as extreme as rapture and despair. Rather, participants would shift their focus from solely considering the institutional church, to placing their personal narratives within the larger narrative of the Gospel.

As participants moved back and forth between these two narrative perspectives, there was a significant shift in their tone and body language, shift in perspective, and acceptance of others. No literature was found on the shift in tone and body language immediately evident as participants moved in and out of the narrative of the Gospel. However, literature was found that pertained to a spiritual shift in perspective as a person locates their narrative within the narrative of the Gospel. An example is the work of Ken Pargament (2011) who writes about spiritually based shifts in perspective, calling them “positive spiritual reappraisals” (p. 101). Pargament refers to people taking events that might otherwise be viewed as negative, and giving new meaning from a positive spiritual perspective. Likewise, literature was found about a spiritual shift in the acceptance of others as a person locates their narrative within the narrative of the Gospel. Wimberly (1980), for example, writes that, “the pastor translates his/her being accepted and understood [by God] into an acceptance and understanding of others” (p. 146). This fits with the experience of participants such as Natalie, who said that her spiritual practices help her experience the acceptance of God. She related how her spiritual practices support her as she
accepts that she is loved by God, though she is not, “perfect in any way”. In the same way, she could be open to an acceptance of those she saw as imperfect and in conflict with her. She could see “the possibility that God could be speaking through [people I’m in conflict with], communicating something I haven't heard before.” Similarly, Shawn described how spiritual practice offers him an experience of being accepted by God. Shawn then finds himself also accepting of those around him. He said, “It allows me then to talk to people and interact with people in the same way God interacts with me.” Epperly & Epperly quote a clergy-person’s similar account, saying, “She looked for Christ’s presence in her detractors even as she rallied support for her self-differentiated yet companioning role as a visionary spiritual leader” (p. 67). However, as noted above, no literature was found of research examining a shifting back and forth in perspective or acceptance of others within a short period of time, as they locate their narrative from within and outside of the narrative of the Gospel.

Participants expressed a positive change in tone, perspective, and acceptance of self and others at times when they placed their narrative within their understanding of the narrative of the Gospel. This observation raises questions about how the Diocese of Huron might support clergy in maintaining this narrative viewpoint. For example, although diocesan meetings start with prayer, they often shift quickly into a business meeting that is institutional in focus. The question may be asked: How could diocesan meetings better place their activity within the larger narrative of the Gospel? By doing so, clergy may be offered opportunity, modeling, and practice in placing their own narratives within the narrative of the Gospel.

Another question this raises for further research is how the Diocese of Huron, when placing clergy to minister in a parish, might seek to match a clergy-person with their congregation based on a congruent understanding of the narrative of the Gospel. Although this
question was not raised by any of the participants and was not found in the literature, it is inferred based on the importance of the narrative of the Gospel for the experience of participants. For example, if a clergy-person understands the narrative of the Gospel as being primarily about social justice, it may be easier for that priest to see their own narrative as being within the narrative of the Gospel if that priest’s ministry entails social justice. In contrast, it may be difficult for that priest to see their work as being within the narrative of the Gospel if they are placed in a congregation whose focus is on a message of personal salvation and maintaining the status quo. This research suggests this may be a topic for further study.

**Implications of this Research**

Participants discussed many ways they nurture and support themselves in their ministry. Most spoke of having forms of prayer and meditation practice. Other practices included journaling, spiritual direction, care of the body, intentional communication, intentional nurturing of self-awareness, and intentional social support as an experience of the Body of Christ. All participants stated their ministry would suffer significantly if they did not engage in their spiritual practices.

This research underscores the importance of personal spiritual practices for clergy in their work. As the church faces increasing pressures due to a drop-off in attendance and finances, together with the linking, merging, and closing of churches, the benefits of personal spiritual practices will be even more critical. This research implies that an emphasis on personal spiritual practices would be helpful to the diocese. This could take many forms, including curriculum in seminary that trains future priests, and direction offered for priests already engaged in ministry.

My experience of formal instruction for clergy to maintain spiritual practices is that it has generally been in two forms. One is written encouragement for clergy to pray and tend their
spiritual life (The General Synod of the Anglican Church of Canada, 2013). Such encouragement, however, has not generally included education in this regard. Also, it has not offered suggestions of what priests might do when they are experiencing times of personal spiritual dryness. This research implies that education and training may be beneficial. Some possibilities may include formal opportunities for clergy discussions of their personal spiritual practices, and clergy training events about spiritual practices as a vital part of life in ministry.

The other form of formal diocesan instruction to maintain spiritual practices has been for clergy to be occasionally encouraged to engage in one or another specific spiritual practice. The ways participants experience personal spiritual practice was varied. Encouragements to do specific things are well intended, but often speak more to the experience of the person giving the instruction. These conversations may or may not hit the mark for specific priests. When previous encouragements did not fit, it caused at least one participant (Landon) to express feelings of guilt. In this way, the narrow scope of possibilities articulated by suggestions ended up having the opposite of their intended effect. Betty, Mandy, Jodi, and Roger were clear about their need for structured prayer. Landon, Shawn, Roger, and Natalie found support in dialogue with the divine. Jerry did not mention prayer at all but spoke of the importance of meditation. This research implies that helpful direction would included a wide scope of possibilities without implied judgement of which spiritual practices are “best”. Gentle presentation of options and information, a nurturing example by diocesan leadership, together with opportunities for clergy to engage in reflection about their spiritual practices, will encourage clergy to nurture the spiritual practices that uniquely support them as individuals.

As participants spoke of their spiritual practices, their narrative was expressed within the larger narrative of the Gospel. This placing of their narrative within the Gospel narrative uplifted
them. An example of this was given by Landon. He spoke of his practice of gathering with a small group in prayer, offering their day-to-day concerns to God, he said, “As I talk about this, I’m re-encouraged.” This research implies that the diocese would do well to intentionally model the placing of one’s narrative within the narrative of the Gospel. For example, we have clergy gatherings to discuss the future of the institutional church in the face of decline. At such events, we could discuss such questions as, “In what ways do our experiences of ministering to a declining church fit within the Gospel we proclaim?” Although meetings begin with prayer and an acknowledgement of the Holy Spirit within our midst, our leadership has tended to focus on encouragements to try harder and work smarter as a way of going against the trend of decline. Although such conversation is undeniably important, it is primarily an institutional focus. By modeling the placing of our larger organizational narrative within the narrative of the Gospel, individual clergy may find encouragement to place their own narratives within the narrative of the Gospel. As noted, participants engaged in such theological reflection during the interviews. A modeling by the Diocese would act as a support for clergy as they engage in spiritual practices that nurture them in theologically reflecting on their ministry.

During the interviews, four of the participants (Melissa, Shawn, Jerry, and Natalie) shared narratives about having been in a significant personal crisis involving grief. Shawn directly and assertively addressed his situation with his congregation. Jerry spoke of feeling pressure to get over his grief, and Melissa and Natalie described how the congregational leadership increased expectations of clergy self-giving during the clergy-person’s time of personal crisis. Congregational leaders rely on their clergy for support and may become anxious when the clergy-person is distracted by personal crisis. This has implications for archdeacons as they oversee clergy in their deaneries. When archdeacons hear of clergy going through a
personal crisis, the research implies archdeacons would do well to not only offer support to the priest, but also to connect with the congregational leadership (the wardens) of the priest’s church. In addition, a more robust diocesan system could be created for offering support and consultation to the congregations of clergy going through personal crises. By offering support and guidance to congregational leaders, escalation of anxiety and conflicts may be avoided.

This research highlights the trend of new and inexperienced clergy finding themselves engaged in the amalgamation and closing of parishes. At the time this research was begun, this was not something discussed openly at the diocesan level. The general belief and hope amongst Anglicans, both clergy and parishioners, was that somehow the decline in church attendance would turn around. Recently this has changed, with diocesan leadership being quite open about the dramatic number of increased amalgamations and possible closures. One of our executive staff recently indicated that, is that if trends continue, over half of our approximately 175 churches might close within the next five years. At a recent diocesan retreat day for newly ordained clergy, almost all priest participants were expected not only to engage in the steep learning curve of ministry, but also to lead congregations through conversations of mergers and/or closures. It would be easy for the personal spiritual practices of these newly ordained priests to be put aside amid their sense of urgency and overwork. This research suggests that, while the institutional focus is of critical importance, a focus on supportive spiritual practices is also vital. Participants such as Mandy expressed the difficulty of working as a priest with the task of amalgamating and closing churches. The fact that more and more churches will be amalgamating and closing implies that education, training, and support regarding the amalgamation and closing of churches will continue to be important for many newly ordained
clergy. This research indicates that it is vital that the offering of education, training, and support includes the nurturing of personal spiritual practices.

**Limitations of this Research**

This research involved a single interview with each participant. During the interview, priests were observed as being encouraged by the act of creating narratives about their spiritual practices. As they created these narratives, they placed their personal narratives within the larger narrative of the Gospel. It would have been interesting to have a second interview a week or two later to see if and how being asked the interview questions continued to impact the clergy-person. This may have offered insight into the impact of intentionally engaging clergy in conversations about spiritual practices. Does simply having an intentional conversation about spiritual practices assist clergy in nurturing and supporting themselves through such practices?

It would also have been interesting to do a comparative study of the unique challenges of clergy in various contexts. Clergy are trained together in seminary and then sent out into varied situations. How do these contexts impact clergy? In this research, participating clergy engaged in ministry in a variety of settings. Some were rural-based clergy who expressed feeling isolated from friends, yet over-exposed to parishioners, and not having enough time to be out of role. There were clergy in multi-point congregations expressed feeling caught between expectations of different congregations, so that work that was appreciated in one congregation was resented in the other. Some were engaged in amalgamating or closing congregations. Urban-based clergy often related feeling overloaded as they oversee administration and programming with little budget or staff. This research did not address the question of whether spiritual practices support and nurture clergy differently depending on context.
This research was limited to a focus on clergy who are priests in the Diocese of Huron. There are other orders of ministry in our diocese, such as deacon and bishop. It would be interesting to study those in other orders of ministry who may experience challenges that are unique to their role, and how their spiritual practices offer nurture and support. This research also does not speak to whether or not the experience of the clergy in the Diocese of Huron are similar or different from clergy in other dioceses, or whether these clergy experiences are shared by clergy from other Christian denominations.

As this was narrative research, it did not include an intentional comparing of clergy based on gender, partner relationship, particular seminary training, personality type, length of service, ethnicity, or age, to name a few. Are there comparative differences within clergy diversity, for preferences of personal spiritual practices? What unique challenges and joys in ministry do they experience, and how do their spiritual practices nurture and support them differently? Such research might assist what is taught in seminary or offered to active clergy.

**Implications for Further Research**

Future narrative research of a mixed qualitative and quantitative methodology may be beneficial. A small number of participants could be followed closely over the course of a month. An initial GHQ-12 (Goldberg, 1978) scoring of participants’ psychological wellness would be taken. Following this, clergy would be asked, on a weekly basis, a set of standardized questions worded in such a way as to place their personal narrative within the narrative of the Gospel. For example, “Could you tell me about a time when God was working in your life this week?” After several weeks, a second GHQ-12 (Goldberg, 1978) would score the participants on their psychological wellness. A clergy’s sense of wellness may change over time. This research would assess the effectiveness of counteracting this erosion in clergy wellness by a clergy-person
having regular conversations that place the clergy-person’s narrative within larger the narrative of the Gospel.

Future research could also examine the dynamics between a congregations and clergy who are tending to the grief of their own personal crisis. Narrative research could follow a small number of participants who self-identify as having been through a significant loss while ministering to a congregation. The research could also interview their congregational leadership to better understand their experience. This research could focus on the increase in congregations’ expectations of clergy self-giving, as well as increases in clergy’s self-imposed expectations. Research could offer a better understanding of this phenomenon and offer insights into how to better support both clergy and their congregations when clergy endure crises in their personal life.

**Theological Reflection**

As I engaged in theological reflection on my research in the writing of this paper, I realized the central role the institutional church has played in my life. Since birth, I have been a practicing Anglican. When I received my calling to ministry, my understanding of the church was embedded in Anglican liturgy, established governance structures, and regular worship, often in historic buildings. I responded to my sense of call by enrolling in seminary as soon as my undergraduate degree was completed. My first and only vocation has been the priesthood. There has not been a time in my life that I have not been heavily involved in the institutional church.

Like many of my colleagues, however, I found myself facing a theological dilemma: should I continue to respond to my calling from within the institutional church or seek new expressions of ministry? Two things led me to this theological dilemma. The first was the diminishment of the institutional church.
In the background section of this paper, I illustrated the declining nature of the church. While society shows various trends with regards to spiritual and religious interest, the downward trend of church attendance has been significant for the Diocese of Huron. During my twenty years of ministry in this diocese, attendance has diminished by more than half. Many in the church hoped this downward trend would reverse, but, to date, it has only accelerated. There are still many who believe this trend could be reversed if the remaining church members and leadership would only try harder, work longer, and give more. This has only increased the stress of all involved, while not yielding significant results.

In her article titled, “The Last Sunday,” Angie Mabry-Nauta (2015) asks hard questions about the wisdom of propping up the institutional church. Citing the experience of a particular church, she wrote, “The church’s leaders – those who were left – were over-burdened and overwhelmed” (p. 23).

Recently, some of our diocesan churches have engaged in fundraising campaigns to make repairs to their church buildings in excess of one million dollars. I have found myself asking if this will be a good use of stewardship and energy in an age when, statistically, the church is likely to experience ongoing severe decline in the years ahead. Or would it be more faithful to, as Mabry-Nauta puts it, make the “painfully brave decisions to close rather than limp on” (p. 23)?

What of my own local church? I have found fulfillment in my role, while worshipping in that beautiful and traditional building, and in the fellowship of the gathered community. Our attendance has sustained itself in recent years, but the writing is on the wall. As the backbone members of our congregation age, the younger members are unable to replace them in terms of numbers, finances, or volunteering. But our sanctuary needs structural work, and our roofing needs replacing. How do we discern whether to repair, rather than join another church, or even
whether to continue as the institutional church? How do we know when to keep trying harder, and when to make the difficult decision to close?

The second thing leading me to this theological dilemma is well detailed in the literature review of this paper. Although clergy find fulfilment in their work, many also have an experience of the institutional church that is often toxic. As stated in the literature, the institutional church is set up in a way that contributes to clergy stress over use of time, need for affirmation, outpouring of self, and conflict. Participants in the research related strongly to each of these, except for the need for affirmation. The stress they expressed in relation to the institutional church was significant, leading some participants to experience burnout.

The narrative of the Gospel is what inspired my sense of calling. I responded by seeking vocation in the institutional church. The narrative of the Gospel says, “The truth shall set you free,” yet the institutional church is often a source of stress and burnout. As I face my theological dilemma of whether I should continue to respond to my calling from within the institutional church or seek new expressions of ministry, I turn to scripture to better understand the nature of church.

In the narrative of the Gospel, Jesus did not speak of the institutional structure of church as we know it. In Matthew 18:20, Jesus said that where two or three are gathered, he is there among them. Other passages speak of breaking bread together (1 Corinthians 11:26), singing (Ephesians 5:19), and supporting one another (1 Corinthians 14:26). According to the narrative of the Gospel, to be church is to be in community, simultaneously with others and with God. These inspire our relationship with, and action in, the wider world.

As I reflect on the scriptures, I must confront my embedded theology about the nature of church. Diocesan laity and clergy alike have an idea of what church is. The following ideas are
common in the Diocese of Huron and arise out of an embedded theology that is often assumed to be based in scripture: Church means having large historic buildings that must last forever. Church means having a priest who is the administrative, pastoral, and worship leader. Church means having a diocesan structure that administers and supports laity and the paid staff and clergy. Church means that our attendance numbers and finances must increase, or at the very least sustain themselves. Church, as we know it, was created at Jesus’ command.

This embedded theology is not based on scriptures. Jesus never set up the “church” as this structure and organization. By confronting my embedded theology with regards to the nature of church, I realize my theological dilemma itself carries problematic embedded theology. As I reflect theologically, I see I held a false dichotomy between church as narrative of the Gospel and church as institution. Church is the gathering of the community in support and worship, where at least two or three are gathered, with Christ among them, breaking bread together, singing, and supporting one another. Institution is simply the practical matters that must be tended to for a church community to sustain its current form. In my local church, my experience of this institution currently includes policies, budgets, and buildings. I have friends who are part of a house church. They experience institution in the form of schedules, rosters, and both formal and informal considerations for the hosts, in whose house they are meeting. Institution is neither bad nor good; it is simply a reality. Any model of church will include institutional aspects. These must be evaluated for their utility and ability to support the church members and their ministry.

My theological dilemma is resolved when I realize my calling is neither about, nor not about, the institutional church. My calling is about my response to the narrative of the Gospel and will be expressed in any setting. Right now, that setting is in a particular form of church institution that happens to be declining. However, the narrative of the Gospel remains the same.
Likewise, my calling and my response to that calling remains the same regardless of what happens to this particular church institution. We run into difficulty when our embedded theology leads us to idolize the current institutional form, as if that form is intrinsic to the definition of church. When we allow the institution to simply be the practical matters that must be tended to as a church community sustains its form, we can let go and allow God to lead us through a time of transition.

So, I will continue to be faithful to my calling as it arises out of the narrative of the Gospel, wherever I am and whatever institutional forms are present. By maintaining my spiritual practices, I keep my focus on the narrative of the Gospel, and my wellness is nurtured and supported.

This has implications for the Diocese of Huron. As we face decline, we may separate our calling and identity from the church institution. When we focus instead on the narrative of the Gospel, a new understanding develops of the relationship between God, self and other. If the institution, as we know it, ceases to exist, that does not mean church ceases to exist.

As we transition from our previous embedded theological understanding of church and institution, the narrative of the Gospel may remain our focus. Some questions arise out of this theological reflection that may be helpful. As the church institution declines and the remaining clergy leadership push themselves ever harder in what may be an impossible task, how can we shift our focus toward supporting them? As laity work harder to keep the church buildings open, how can we focus more on loving and supporting them? In faith, how can we better consider our situation, be open to the movement of the Holy Spirit, trust in God, be caring to ourselves and the world, and have faith in the many ways Christ may lead us through death to resurrection?
Like the participants in this study, our personal spiritual practices may continue to nurture and support us in placing our own narrative within the Gospel narrative. When we place our narratives within the narrative of the Gospel, we find we are in good company. There are many in scripture who found their only assurance to be in God, while their futures were uncertain. By engaging in spiritual practices that nurture an experience of our own narrative as being a small part of the larger narrative of the Gospel, we trust in God amid this time of change. Whatever happens, we, as church, continue to find great comfort and strength by placing our story within the eternal story of God and the community of God’s people.

**Conclusion**

Clergy wellness is of critical importance to the Diocese of Huron as it faces decline and needs healthy leaders. There is increased clergy stress associated with the church’s decline. This paper addresses a gap in the literature about the narrative experience of clergy with regards to personal spiritual practices that encourage their wellness. Specifically, this research addresses the question of “What is the experience of Anglican priests in the Diocese of Huron as they engage in supportive spiritual practices?” It was found that participants’ experience of supportive spiritual practices include care for their bodies, the maintenance of their personal boundaries, the nurture of their self-awareness, the maintaining of their social support, and their focus on effective communication. It was also found that participants’ expressed wellness through tone, perspective, and acceptance of self and others when they spoke from an experience of their narrative being a part of their understanding of the larger narrative of the Gospel.

When relating these findings with the existing literature, several themes became evident. Specifically, clergy wellness is related to the following: expectations of their use of time, their need for affirmation, their stress over church conflict, the outpouring of the clergy’s self,
increased expectations of congregations when the clergy-person is in crisis, practical self-care, and the spiritual life of the clergy. Another identified theme was the tension between the clergy’s understanding of the narrative of the Gospel, which often attracts clergy to the ministry, and the institution of the church in which they find themselves working.

There is need for further research. A thorough understanding of the theme of increased expectations of congregation members when their clergy-person is in crisis was not found in the literature. In addition, further research is necessary regarding the experience of clergy as they place their own narratives in and outside of their understanding of the narrative of the Gospel. The literature does not adequately explore the short-term fluctuations of this phenomenon, nor the immediacy of its effect.
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APPENDIX A

Map of the Diocese of Huron, by Deanery.

Provided by email by Diane Picard, Executive Assistant to the Bishop of Huron.
Interview Questions

1. What do you do to nurture and support yourself in your ministry?

2. As a clergy-person, different people or groups within the church may have differing expectations of how you should use your time. Tell me about a time when you’ve experienced competing demands on your time. Were there ways in which doing the things you do to nurture and support yourself sustained you as you faced these competing demands?

3. Tell me about a time when you would have appreciated some positive feedback from the congregation, but little was given. Were there ways in which doing the things you do to nurture and support yourself sustained you?

4. Tell me about a time when there was conflict in the church, and if there were ways in which doing the things you do to nurture and support yourself sustained you.

5. Clergy often give of themselves for the sake of others. Tell me about a time when you gave of yourself, and if there were ways in which doing the things you do to nurture and support yourself replenished you.

6. Regarding the things you do to nurture and support yourself, would you consider any of these to be “spiritual practices”? If yes, please say more about that. If no, what would you consider to be a spiritual practice in your life?

7. What would happen to your ministry if you stopped engaging in these practices?

8. Is there anything else you’d like to say about your experience of what nurtures and supports you in your ministry?

9. What was it like being asked these questions?
Supporting Clergy in their Ministry

Archdeacon Tanya Phibbs <tphibbs@huron.anglican.ca>  19 November 2014 at 09:46

From the Rev’d Greg Jenkins

Dear Colleagues,

The topic of Clergy Wellness has been a focus for many of our Diocesan educational events. In the hope of contributing some information from the grass roots, I'm leading a study about our experience of what supports us in the midst of this often stressful vocation.

I am doing this research as part of a doctoral thesis through Wilfred Laurier University. I would appreciate the opportunity to have one brief conversation with you (10 minutes, either in person or over the phone).

(About confidentiality: These conversations will remain confidential. I will personally interview participants and participants will not know who other
participants are. Your participation will not be made known to other participants. In any published results, participant's identifying details will be changed to conceal their identity. Pseudonyms will be used. Participants be given the opportunity to vet the quotes used in the report. This project has received ethics approval (Wilfred Laurier University Research Ethics Board tracking number 4226)).

I know all of you are busy. For this reason, I will either phone or drive to meet you, and I will keep our time together brief, and, as a small thank you, participants will receive a $10 gift certificate to Starbucks or Tim’s.

To participate or for more info, simply email me at revgregjenkins@gmail.com

Thank you for your consideration,

Greg Jenkins
APPENDIX D

INFORMED CONSENT STATEMENT

WILFRID LAURIER UNIVERSITY

INFORMED CONSENT STATEMENT

Supportive Spiritual Practices of Clergy in the Diocese of Huron

You are invited to participate in a research study. The purpose of my research is to explore clergy’s experience of what supports them in the midst of this often stressful vocation. The researcher is Rev’d Greg Jenkins, who is a Doctor of Ministry candidate at Wilfrid Laurier University, under the supervision of Dr. Kristine Lund.

INFORMATION

A dozen or so participants will be met with or telephoned individually and confidentially. You will each be asked the following or similar questions:

1. What do you do to nurture and support yourself in your ministry?

2. As a clergyperson, different people or groups within the church may have differing expectations of how you should use your time. Tell me about a time when you’ve experienced competing demands on your time. Were there ways in which doing the things you do to nurture and support yourself sustained you as you faced these competing demands?

3. Tell me about a time when you would have appreciated some positive feedback from the congregation, but little was given. Were there ways in which doing the things you do to nurture and support yourself sustained you?

4. Tell me about a time when there was conflict in the church, and if there were ways in which doing the things you do to nurture and support yourself sustained you.
5. Clergy often give of themselves for the sake of others. Tell me about a time when you gave of yourself, and if there were ways in which doing the things you do to nurture and support yourself replenished you.

6. Regarding the things you do to nurture and support yourself, would you consider any of these to be “spiritual practices”? If yes, please say more about that. If no, what would you consider to be a spiritual practice in your life?

7. What would happen to your ministry if you stopped engaging in these practices?

8. Is there anything else you’d like to say about your experience of what nurtures and supports you in your ministry?
The interview will be 10 minutes or up to 30 minutes if you’d like time to elaborate on your answers to the questions.

As the researcher I will request your consent to tape-record the interview. If you decline to be tape-recorded, I will type notes during the interview. Only I as the researcher will have access to the notes and recordings, which will be encrypted and kept on my computer.

RISKS

It is recognized that you may feel pressure to participate in this research because you are known to the researcher. Your answers to the interview questions might include sensitive personal information, told to me as the researcher, being a colleague and a peer. This may be perceived by you as putting me in a position of social superiority.

BENEFITS

A chance to confidentially tell some of your story and share what you know. An opportunity to increase the Diocese’ understanding of clergy’s experience of practices that are supportive and nurturing as they engage in ministry.

CONFIDENTIALITY

You and the information you provide will remain confidential. Recordings will be stored electronically on the researcher’s computer and will be encrypted, and destroyed within 3 years. Your identifying details will be changed to conceal your identity. Pseudonyms will be used. If there are any quotations to be used in any write-ups or presentations, I will contact you directly to arrange (by email, mail, or in person) to give you an opportunity to review the quote before the study is complete. You will have the right to choose to not be quoted, or to review the quote and make changes to the content of the quote.

COMPENSATION

For participating in this study you will be offered a $10 gift certificate to Starbucks or Tim Horton’s coffee shops.

CONTACT

If you have questions at any time about the study or the procedures, you may contact the researcher, the Rev’d Greg Jenkins, at 12 Blair Road, Cambridge Ontario, and 519 621 8860. This project has been reviewed and approved by the University Research Ethics Board. If you feel you have not been treated according to the descriptions in this form, or your rights as a participant in research have been violated during the course of this project, you may contact Dr. Robert Basso, Chair, University Research Ethics Board, Wilfrid Laurier University, (519) 884-1970, extension 4994 or rbasso@wlu.ca

PARTICIPATION

Your participation in this study is voluntary; you may decline to participate without penalty. If you decide to participate, you may withdraw from the study at any time without penalty and without loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. If you withdraw from the study, every attempt will be made to remove your data from the study, and have it destroyed. You have the right to omit any question(s)/procedure(s) you choose.

FEEDBACK AND PUBLICATION

The results of the research will be made available to the public for download at no cost. The Diocese will have access to the publication, however the identity of participants will not be disclosed, and there will be no employment related repercussions to participation or non-participation in the study.
CONSENT

I have read and understand the above information. I have received a copy of this form. I agree to participate in this study.

Participant's signature ___________________________ Date ______________

Participant's signature that quotes they review and approve may be used

______________________________ Date ______________

Investigator's signature ___________________________ Date ______________
APPENDIX E

[all participants’ names have been changed to protect identity]

Natalie

Natalie began her interview by speaking positively of the nurture and support she has received from her family and also her prayer life. However, the conversation quickly turned to focus on the stresses she was experiencing in her vocation.

She said, “I can see God working in this world.” She then added in a somewhat defeated tone, “That sounds good, doesn’t it? I have to remind myself about it sometimes.” She told a stress-laden story of finding out the congregation was having a meeting without her to discuss their dissatisfaction with her work. She told a story of working with the Clericus (the regular meeting of the Anglican clergy in the area) to try to seek more support among colleagues in her deanery, and ending up feeling isolated. She told the story of a decade long conflict between a non-clergy staff member and the members of her church, and how this staff member had been experienced by the rest of the congregation as being divisive and bullying. In addition to these stories, Natalie also described dealing with property issues, and an instance of “being yelled at in the church.”

At one point she was speaking of church management and said sardonically, “there’s nothing like getting kicked when you’re down.” Shortly after, however, when she spoke of the spiritual practice of regularly connecting with a colleague to discuss faith, she said calmly that this helps her to see that, “my whole day and my whole life is ensconced in prayer.”

Later she spoke of the helpful perspective she gained through her spiritual practices, and how these nurtured and supported her ministry with people in the church. “I don't see myself as perfect in any way. Any good experience and any relationship can help me be a better person. That can be the voice of God speaking to me.” She also spoke of, “The possibility that God could
be speaking through [people I’m in conflict with], communicating something I haven't heard before.”

Natalie stated that, if she was to stop engaging in her personal spiritual practices, her ministry “wouldn't be much of a ministry, would it? …We need God to do what we do, and we need to nurture that relationship with God just as we need to nurture relationships with others.”

Jodi

When Jodi was asked about the things she does to nurture and support herself, she began with prayer. She said, “I try to do morning and evening prayer. It’s difficult sometimes, so you know I just sometimes get home and I want to fall into bed. Or in the morning it’s a little rushed and I don’t.” She went on to describe her intention to engage in the practice of prayer with regularity. She spoke of having her prayer book marked for praying twice a day, scheduling monthly meetings with a spiritual director (someone who is trained to walk with a person as they discern their spiritual life, asking questions that may be of assistance), and making plans to go on retreat twice a year. She said, “That spiritual element is good for me, to keep my feet on the ground.” She then led the conversation into the stresses she is experiencing with long hours, too many things going on, and health issues that interfere with her work.

When asked to tell about an instance when there were competing demands on her time, Jodi immediately responded with the story of a particularly difficult situation. She related how, over the past year, she had been dealing with a person in leadership at her church who was demonstrating severe bullying behaviour behind the scenes. The issue had become so complex and involved so many meetings and unscheduled phone calls that it became all-encompassing, making it impossible to leave her work behind when she went home. Jodi referred to her perception of the futility of recent encouragements from the Diocese that the clergy practice self-
care and set boundaries. She stated with energy, “even though the church wants self-care, and says to get away [for our days off]...the church can still invade and there's not a damn thing you can do about it.”

After speaking at length about this situation, the conversation returned to prayer. Jodi said, “prayer helps me to quiet me down because sometimes I'm high energy...but the negative side of that is acting out or saying something I might regret, or just feeling overwhelmed.”

Jodi went on to say how prayer connects her with God in her stressful situations. She listed several activities that also help her to feel connected with God. These included walking, swimming alone in the lake, gardening, and looking after her physical health. All of these involved using her body. She spoke of these activities having the feeling of meditation in “the rhythm of your body.”

Jodi was clear that all her nurturing activities were, for her, spiritual practices. When asked what would happen to her ministry without these practices, she said,

I would probably be finding myself off-centre at times, focused on the wrong things like getting a report done on time or having the best report, or worried about what other people think....Those are parts of what I know about myself when the weave feels a little loose. It's like your fabric is just a little overstretched and you're focused on the perfection of the work as opposed to God’s perfect peace.

Theo

Theo opened his interview by saying he had just begun the new practice of going to the gym, to nurture and support himself in his ministry. Theo spoke of his experience of the “prayerfulness of exertion.” Theo went on to tell stories of how he had given himself permission to look after his own health, rather than put aside his time off at the gym to placate unhelpful
congregational expectations. Specifically, he told stories of being expected to attend meetings that he thought would go better without him being present. From his perspective, the people would benefit more from learning to trust their own competence, rather than leaning too heavily on their priest for direction. “I put it onto the people whose responsibility [a situation] ultimately is… and backed out and said I need to go to this other thing.” In each instance, the people could find their way without him being present.

Theo spoke of practicing “vulnerability and honesty” with his parish leadership. He told the story of approaching his wardens to say that he is aware that his preaching is not a strength, and that their feedback is welcome.

What Theo did report as a stress in ministry was isolation and boredom. His description of being a parish priest involved potlucks or business-related meetings with a predominantly older generation. His descriptions did not include anything resembling a connection with the narrative of the Gospel. He told how he looks after a multi-point rural congregation, a configuration that is common in the Diocese of Huron. He is the only ministry staff among these congregations and, to nurture and support himself, he told me about times he practices getting together with colleagues to “commiserate or celebrate or whatever it is we need to do.” This occurs both socially and by involvement in diocesan committees. For Theo, connecting with colleagues is a spiritual practice which he describes with the Biblical words of “the Body of Christ” (Romans 12:5). He said, “The Body of Christ isn't only in the [towns] I work in, thank God. There are more people out there, through whom I renew my connection to the Body of Christ.”

These times of connection also provide an experience of being grounded in a new perspective. Theo related how
it takes me away from the mundane, ongoing life of the parish in [this area]. The problems here are real, but, by comparisons to some other places, they ought not to be overwhelming. So, it's nice to hear from other people who have different problems and realize that the problems in my area aren't in as big messes it would seem when I'm just mired in the middle of it.

Shawn

Shawn began by speaking of how he walks each morning, and views this as a spiritual practice. He told a story about trying to explain this to the leadership council in his first parish. "They asked me to do a timesheet," he said, "because they wanted to know what I did with my time." Shawn told me he agreed to their request, and wrote on his timesheet that he begins each day at 9am with a 45-minute walk in prayer. The congregational leaders responded, "We don't pay you to do that." Shawn told me how he used the interaction as an opportunity to teach his congregation about spiritual health. He explained to them that without time for prayer, he would burn himself out and not be able to carry out his ministry. He said,

I just assumed they would understand that prayer time was related to my work. It was educational for them to discuss this with me. I turned it around and ask them to keep a spiritual time sheet for me, for the next couple weeks, of what they did spiritually, how they worked on their faith. That wasn't overly successful, but it certainly helped them to understand.

Shawn commented on the conflict between what the church says about clergy self-care, and what actually happens.
I find in all churches they are very good at saying, ‘You need to take time for yourself. You need to take care of yourself! Right after you take care of what I need you to take care of right now.’

Shawn spoke of how he sees himself as different from some of his colleagues, because of how he prays. For Shawn, time in prayer does not mean the Daily Office, or marking his prayer book, or going through what he referred to as the "shopping list" prayer. He describes,

Well, you know, the shopping list prayer is that I've got to pray for the church, the bishops, the prime minister, my aunt and uncle and my dad, and the lady next-door who is not well and people from church who are in hospital. That's something I've struggled with all my life. When I first went back to church somebody said to me, you have to use the ACTS way of praying for Adoration, Confession, Thanksgiving, Supplication. But I just about drove myself nuts trying to hold to that because I would fall asleep in the middle of it. It just didn't work for me….No, I just want it to be a time to talk to God. Because we have a lot to say to each other. And some days we don't have very much to talk about at all. But that's okay, too.

Shawn related this narrative, of finding a mode of prayer that works for him, to the importance he places on self-awareness:

I have found tremendous help in various personality type indicators, and I really wish that the church would do more with them….Myers-Briggs, true colours and all those kind of things, and really encourage people to talk about how their personalities match with what their expectations are, and what the expectations are that the church may have for them.

By knowing himself, Shawn accepted the particular practices he needs to nurture and support himself in his ministry.
Shawn described how, when he engages in these practices, he is grounded and compassionate. Without these practices, he feels scattered and makes bad decisions. He told the stories of being mired in church conflicts, and how staying grounded through spiritual practice kept him balanced.

Going back to the rhythm of things, it helps me to understand that getting excited and being confrontational and getting emotional just doesn't help. So, I rely very much on that understanding [of staying grounded]. When congregation members are doing absolutely all they can to fight with me, I stay very calm and very cool.

Shawn spoke of of the importance of keeping clear boundaries around weekly his time off, saying this is how he “recharges [his] batteries”. When asked if there was anything he'd like to add about what nurtures and supports him in his ministry, Shawn spoke of the importance of collegial support. He asked, "If we as clergy can't help one another then how can we help other people?"

As for what would happen to him if he stopped engaging in his supportive practices, Shawn stated, “If I don't take this time I could see myself getting in trouble. I know that when I get down and overwhelmed I tend to say stupid things.”

Roger

Roger began his narrative by talking about the importance of prayer in his ministry. He said, "Each morning I come to the church before I begin work. That time of prayer is something that is public, but I don't usually have anybody join me. I'm usually by myself.” He told me how his daily practice of a form of centering prayer helps him maintain emotional balance and equilibrium.
But prayer in a quiet church is not his only discipline of prayer. He said, "it’s rare that a day goes by that I don't spend at least an hour on the trail somewhere....That's where a lot of prayer happens for me.” He told me of how he takes the dog with him or snowshoes through the bush. Another supportive practice is being sure to take sabbath time by getting out of town for a day each week.

Roger described his spiritual practices as helping him stay grounded. Since his work in ministry also helps him to stay grounded, Roger includes it as being a spiritual practice. He elaborated while speaking about not needing to be rigid in balancing his time between time set aside for work and time set aside for himself:

I love what I do and so it's a balancing act....I'll be doing some work to get the companion diocese plan for this year off the ground. And that will in of itself nurture my spirit....Sometimes the work itself, if it's truly satisfying, is its own benefit in terms of feeling enriched by what's happening in my life.

Roger spoke of engaging in intentional conflict with his congregation. He said,

We are doing a disability project right now to figure out ways to make this [church] a more accessible place. So, I deliberately engaged in a little conflict with the folks of the committee that are working on this, because my perception of what was the right approach was different from theirs.

When Roger described the above situation, he made a connection between his dealing with external situations, and his internal self-management. As a further example, he told the story of supporting a young man by going with him to his AA meeting. After a full day of work, and after the AA meeting, Roger was tired and looking forward to putting his feet up. But Roger
was also on call for the hospital, and then remembered his pager had gone off during the meeting. He supported himself by resolving his internal resistance before engaging in the task:

I got home last night and I decided to take my shoes off and take a cup of tea and then I thought, ‘Oh no, I forgot’. I dragged myself out there and I knew that this was something that I was doing a little unwillingly. I probably had forgotten about it because I didn’t want to be doing it. I was feeling a bit fatigued from the rest of the day. But I needed to go….The business of being in internal conflict was starting to resolve so I didn't go up there fighting it, thinking ‘I don't want to be here today’....That's part of the practice of self-nurture.

Roger spoke of keeping his membership in an organization outside the diocese that regularly meets and intentionally nurtures self-awareness. He said,

I'm seeking a sphere of accountability for my own functioning that I don't find in the church....I need a place where I can say, you know, this is what's going on with me....The nurturing of my own inner awareness helped me in that concrete situation last night....I knew what was going on with me and I could be open to it, and then get on with what needed to be done.

Throughout the conversation, it was clear that Roger sees every aspect of his life as spiritual. He said,

I don't make a kind of a dualistic distinction between the spiritual and the secular. When I'm stomping in my snowshoes through the bush, that's a profoundly spiritual practice....Or meeting for a coffee with a friend with whom I can be honest about what's happening with me. Or prayer. Or just being. Or sitting in front of the fire at the cottage,
staring at the flames. Or when my partner and I go out for breakfast. Or just taking some time. All these are things that nurture my spirit.

Roger expressed the view that his ability to engage in ministry is so tied to his spiritual practices, that without them he would not be able to offer good leadership. As for explaining what would happen to his ministry if he did not engage in his spiritual practices, Roger was grave. He stated he would be "ineffectual, unconscious, and dangerous."

Mandy

Mandy emphasised her morning practices of yoga, morning prayer, and journaling. She described her daily, 6am ritual, saying,

Yoga I do first thing in the morning, so I'm barely conscious....It stops me thinking right away. Because I'm concentrating on my breathing and on moving....Otherwise, I'm someone who wakes up thinking of lists. So, for about half an hour I concentrate just on breathing and moving. It stops the dialogue...and then I get a coffee and I do Morning Prayer. This way, my first dialogue of the day is in prayer....There's a rhythm and a ritual to all this. The rhythm and ritual even includes crossing myself....And then I check the readings. I pause, I think, then I journal…asking, ‘What are the moments that have grounded me for the last 24 hours? What am I asking God to shed light on? What do I need to notice? What am I being called to do?’ And then I end with the final prayers.

Mandy spoke about how this daily routine helps her keep perspective. She spoke bluntly about the people she encounters in her ministry:

There are lots of people who I deal with in ministry who I just don't like. They’re really nasty people....But I still have to minister to them. And so, one of the Morning Prayer and journaling aspects is that it's a way for me to actually be honest about the fact that I hate
that person while trying to love them and trying to care for them….In journaling, I have a
safe place to be honest.

Mandy told the story of helping two churches to merge into one church, which resulted in
the closing of one of the church buildings. This was an occasion for anxiety and grief for the
church whose building was being deconsecrated. She said,

I was sitting at a person’s dying bedsides in the hospital and the family told me that their
loved one was dying because I had closed their church....And I grapple with this
comment, thinking, ‘Oh, was it me doing all of this’? Then there are other times when I
just want to react out of anger, saying to them, 'Oh don't be stupid! What are you
thinking?’ But that wouldn't be very pastoral either! So, I did a lot of prayer and
journaling around this. It led me to the conclusion that I'm proceeding in my ministry
with them because I actually believe God is calling us in this direction. I do. And I think
God is calling me to lead in this’.

Mandy told the story of being true to her role of bringing the two churches together,
rather than giving in to the desire to be liked. She spoke of having the strength to do this because
of her morning spiritual practices:

It was the first Holy Week that we spent in the same place with the two churches. Once
we had all officially moved from one place to the other, the two chancel guilds were
setting up for Palm Sunday and they were at each other's throats. The presenting issue
was vases of palms: should they be behind the altar like they always were at the one
church, or should they be in front of the altar like they always were at the other church.
And I was sitting in my office because I can hear this argument escalating and escalating,
so I marched out and I said 'Hi. So, here's the thing: I'm the Rector and I make all the
liturgical decisions. The palms this year are going to be beside the altar'. Where they looked like crap. But, I simply said, 'This is where they're going', moved them there, looked at them and thought to myself, 'God, that looks hideous, but anyway'. And marched back out to my office. At that point they became united, in their hatred of me. [Laughter]...But that was my role. And I could only do that because I have done a lot of processing and thinking and praying about that being part of my role.

In addition to her morning spiritual practices, she also guarded her day off and spent a lot of time walking.

I do a lot of processing when I'm on walks. I sort through things. I mutter to myself a lot. I'm sure I look like a crazy middle-aged woman. I have no problem with that. [Laughter] Walking somehow makes me feel like I can cope again. Somehow the act of walking reminds me that I'm not just passive....I sort through what I am doing pastorally.

Mandy also expressed that she also uses art as a way of grounding herself in the here and now, rather than being caught up in her mind's focus on problems:

Painting and sketching let me see the world again. That's why I do it. I really, literally, look at the world differently when I do art. And I see differently when I do art on a regular basis....It does two things: one, it pulls me out of myself; two, it lets me see the beauty in the world around....I literally lift my head. It's like I'm looking at the intensity of that present situation or all situations. And you just see that little patch of ground. And then I lift my head and I can see that...what is that again? It makes me pay attention. It's a spiritual discipline.

Mandy spoke of the importance of having a spiritual director to challenge her and help her keep perspective.
She is very good for me. She doesn't let me get away with anything...She challenges me. Everything from, ‘What is my prayer life actually like? Am I actually praying? Am I actually taking time off or am I just doing odd stuff even when it's my time off?’. She's very good at that. She helps me reframe stuff....The spiritual director helps me to see the bigger picture.

As for what would happen to her ministry if she stopped engaging in her supportive practices, Mandy expressed that she not be nearly as able to cope. She said, “I would have burned out. Or become perilously close.”

**Landon**

Landon spoke of leading a spirituality group in his church. He said,

We met once a week, there were four of us, and it was for a couple of hours, and we would share a spiritual journey over the past week, not looking for solutions or problem-solving but just praying together. It was very powerful...not just personal growth and development but just a real sense of being nurtured. So, we’d leave that place with energy.

Landon related that he found nurturance in spiritual conversations with individuals and small groups, rather than his work at the diocesan level.

The small group could be a parish council, or a team of wardens, or a team of license lay readers, or a spirituality group, or educational group. Especially with a small intimate success could be seen and measured and then drawn from, worth drawing from spiritually. Oh, that felt good. Or people would have conversations about where people were in their spiritual life, or just their friendship with Jesus.
Landon told the story of a time when he had engaged in some continuing education. He had travelled into the United States to take a course.

I had to withdraw about two days in, from one of the courses, because I had a death back in my parish and it was a suicide, so it was really, really traumatic. There was no question about having to go back.

Landon was clear that a big challenge in situations like this is re-establishing balance, both in terms of time, and also emotionally. He said,

Forget the altruistic stuff about pastor with wings, going in and saving the day. You're grinding your teeth at the same time....I can remember one of my professors who said something very wise to me: ‘You're expected to show up. So dammit all, you better show up. And do what you're called to do. And then when it's done, then go look after yourself.’ I took that very much to heart.

Landon was very direct in his communication and did not sugar-coat his opinions. In spite of this, he spoke tenderly and vulnerably about this faith.

In the middle of this is my relationship to Jesus. And the way I currently understand that is as a friendship with Jesus. I know that I have a constant companion that parallels my faith, and is paralleling my acts and time in ministry.

In his narrative, Landon addressed the ways his spiritual practices do not follow the stereotype of an Anglican priest. "I could do the Daily Office,” he said. Then he added, "Once,” and laughed. He said,

You know I've spoken with clergy, particularly of former generations, who say, ‘You know, the Daily Office sustained me.’ God bless them! I'm happy that it certainly helps them. I go about it differently.
Landon described how prayer for him is "an ongoing internal conversation" with Jesus. Through prayer, he finds calm. "And when I've got myself calmed down...then I can meet my heart about things.” Landon described how there was a time he felt badly for not praying a structured Daily Office:

I can remember when I was first doing the Daily Office, and if I would miss it, I would go, 'that means I'm a bad priest', or that I'm a bad Christian, or not very spiritual....When I was finally able to grow past that, my prayer life was released.

This is one example of how Landon reported that his spiritual life depends on self-awareness. He needed to be aware of how what worked for him in terms of prayer. Landon spoke often about how his self-awareness nurtures and supports him. Landon said,

It's self-awareness....My experience around nurture and support, the evolution of that, goes right to my interpersonal training during my undergraduate and Masters of Divinity program. I learned a psychological awareness in my undergraduate program, in my psychology studies, in sensitivity training, Myers-Briggs, many other such tests, personal therapy, and particularly in my Master of Divinity.

Landon spoke of the importance of nurturing self-awareness in preparation for ministry:

I did a lot of work with leading a parish internship...of fifteen people...those who had a clear self-awareness and could do good intern work. They were the ones who did well. You could talk to them about the learning, the technique of preaching, the technique of administrating, and the technique of pastoral care. That can all be taught to receptive hearts and minds. But they cannot be effective unless there's a real clear self-awareness. So, that's what nurtures and supports me now, even 35 years later.
Landon told a story of how his self-awareness supports him. He spoke of his congregation members "moaning and groaning that [their church] didn't have enough money.” Landon said,

My response to that was there's more money here than you can shake a stick at....The real issue is getting their leadership to be comfortable around talking about stewardship....Of course, as soon as we talk about stewardship, the anxiety will go way, way up and congregation members will say the church is always asking for money, which is a lie. So, what I do to nurture and support myself is to separate the agendas. I see what my agenda is, and am understanding about what their agendas are, so that, with a non-anxious presence, I can manage the conflict in and effective way.

Near the end of the conversation, Landon stated of himself that, without his spiritual practices, "I would die, I would run away, I’d become really cynical, and I'd be angry all the time.”

Stella

Stella began by listing many things she does to nurture and support herself, such as swimming, walking while praying, journaling, meeting regularly with a mentor, and going on retreat. The spiritual practice she spoke most often about was cleaning her house. She describes this activity as being grounding.

As Stella's narrative included stories of her ministry, she expressed that she struggles with feelings of anxiety. She spoke of being bothered by mind-chatter such as "Am I missing anything for Sunday? Is there anybody out there that I should be calling?” These thoughts were based on a “sense of perfectionism” and trying to measure up to her perception of congregational expectations.
She told stories of being expected to go outside of her "comfort zone" to attend certain meetings she would rather not attend, or the uncomfortable task of running a stewardship campaign, asking people for money. She described how this "kind of stuff just tightens me up with anxiety." She offered an example of going outside her comfort zone, telling me about an afternoon community event. The morning of the event, one of the organizers, who was to lead one of the activities, called to say she would not be able to attend. This left Stella feeling the need to gather the materials and do what was, for her, substantial planning for the activity, in addition to leading her part of the event. Stella got everything ready, but the anxiety she felt was, for her, overwhelming.

When Stella's narrative switched back to how her spiritual practices nurture and support her, her tone changed. Simply speaking about her supportive practices seemed to ground her. When asked whether she saw these practices as spiritual, she was clear that she did. She spoke of God being as involved in her nurturing and supportive practices, and her voice brightened as she said, "God invites! This is an invitation from God! Yeah, this is God's invitation to me."

Stella's narrative then turned to a metaphor she used to describe her experience of spiritual practice.

It's reminding myself that it's not my ministry but it's God's....And that also helps me to psychologically step back from it so I don't feel like I'm carrying of the whole thing. And, of course the words [of Jesus] 'Come to me, all you who are weary and heavy laden and I will refresh you. My burden is easy and my yoke is light'. That whole thing is a piece that I will repeat to myself when the load is just unbelievable....For me it's like taking off the cloak....I'm in God's presence, but I'm not going to carry this.
Stella stated that she would burnout if she stopped engaging in these practices. She said when she does not engage in spiritual practices,

I can't handle any more. I need to space. So, I have to avoid places where I would meet my parishioners. I just can't I can't handle anymore. If it went for too long, I'd have to leave the parish. I couldn't continue. I’d quit.

Betty

Betty began the interview by speaking of her need for structure. She spoke for quite some time about her need to keep church related matters from encroaching on her day off. She told stories of being in conflict with her congregation over her schedule. Betty described how structuring time was a challenge because church events happen at various times, depending on the week. She found making a consistent schedule was difficult to sustain. It was not until later in our conversation that she elaborated on why her schedule was so important to her spiritually. When I asked her how she would see structured time as a spiritual practice, she answered, "I need to pray, I need to read, I need to reflect, and I also need to exercise. If I do those things, then I'm okay. And if I don't, I'm not....I have to make time." For Betty, prayer, meditation, reflection, reading the lectionary, praying the Daily Office, and exercise would be difficult to maintain if it were not for her routine.

In addition to routine, Betty spoke of finding her work to be nurturing when it aligned with what she described as her "life's purpose" or "higher value." As an example, she related that being a support to grieving families during funerals was a sustaining activity that she views as a spiritual practice.
As much as her ministry sustains her, her time away from ministry is also crucial. When she is feeling stress over a situation in her ministry, she said, “I don't want to have to relive that at home....One of the things I try hard to do is to not bring my work home.”

Betty returned to the topic of prayer, saying that meditation is a form of prayer for her. She told me how meditation, at the time she engages in it, feels ineffective because of what she calls "monkey brain,” referring to her thoughts racing from topic to topic. "And yet,” she added, "my experience of meditation is that it really supports mindfulness....With mindfulness, the things I do are more nurturing because I'm present to them.” She went on to express how meditation is calming for her, so she can meet her emotional needs "in an appropriate way, as opposed to being upset or screaming.”

Betty described her spiritual practices as being like "putting water in a dry well, so that when I go to pull the bucket out of the well, there's something in it.” She also used the metaphor of food.

It is truly spiritual food that sustains me....Living is draining, and this just fills me up....I feel nourished, so I'm not hungry....When you're hungry and tired and grumpy, it's really hard to give. But when I stop and intentionally give myself the opportunity to interact with the divine…then my need is met! So now I can say, “Can I help you?”

Without her spiritual practices, Betty reported that, "everything would be harder. Sometimes life makes it hard to get to all these practices.” And if she were not able to effectively schedule these practices, she said, "then I get into attitudes and behaviours that are not particular productive."
Travis

Travis spoke about his spiritual practice of communication. He looks after a multi-point parish and described his intentionality in gathering a clergy team, as well as a team of congregational leaders from across the parishes in which he serves. He noted that his family is very supportive of him. He describes his Clericus as supportive. Travis stated he is careful to work in teams, sharing the responsibility for decisions.

Travis told me of an experience early in his ministry that helped him realize the importance of communication as an intentional spiritual practice.

When we had our 'painting the church doors red' phase that went through diocese a number of years back, I talked them through that process and talked about what the symbolism is of having your doors bright red and open for others to see. We had the doors off the hinges and we were three quarters of the way through sanding them down when the warden who's doing them for me said, 'You know that we don't agree with this, right?' And I said, 'Then why are you doing it?' And he said, 'Well, we know how much you wanted the doors red so we're going to do it for you.'...The real lesson for me was that you always need to touch base to know that they are truly supporting you and not just going through the motions....So I test the waters that way whenever I'm doing anything. This seemed like it may have been a practical consideration rather than a spiritual practice, but Travis elaborated that he considered communication to be a deeply spiritual exercise, as a part of being the Body of Christ.

In addition to the spiritual practice of communication, Travis spoke of setting boundaries on his time. When he is not working, he is not accessible. In spite of saying they respect his need for time away from work, he finds people in his churches "want more and more....So I have to
say, all communication will be rerouted to my associate or to my wardens and I turn everything off. That's the only way I can do it."

When asked what would happen if he did not engage in these supportive practices, Travis said,

If I wasn't engaging in support networks, being deliberate with my prayer life, having professional boundaries that offer a Sabbath every now and then, my personal nature is such that I would give everything away until I would have nothing left. I would burn brightly, quickly, and then out of ministry. And probably ruin the relationships that mean most to me. That's my family and the people that I work with on a daily basis. I wouldn't be able to sustain it.

Melissa

Melissa began by saying that she nurtures and supports herself by caring for her body with massage and regular visits to the podiatrist, and practicing yoga. She also stated that she works on setting boundaries and intentionally working on communication with her congregation members.

She spoke of a time a very close family member had died. Melissa had arranged with the church leadership that she would be gone for eight days to care for the loved one as he died, and to attend the funeral. Even though her congregational leadership agreed at the time, one of them complained to the Archdeacon a month later. This congregational leader presented Melissa with a lengthy list of demands for her to satisfy before he said he would allow her to return to work. This is not within his authority. With the support of her Archdeacon, the situation was resolved.

Melissa expressed that she had seen the church as a family and herself as being a part of it. She had once told her congregation, "Remember, we're family. We don't always have to like
each other but we are commanded to love one another.” The family metaphor was challenged when the congregational leader attempted to discipline her. Melissa said, "I had been in the community a long time and feeling like I was part of the family. This situation made me realize that, no...I have a job to do.”

Another of Melissa's supportive practices is meeting with a spiritual advisor monthly. With the help of her spiritual advisor, Melissa could "put things back in perspective" so that she no longer took the incident personally. "If I'm having one of those moments where I am hyperventilating with anxiety, she can bring me back to earth quickly and do it in a way that I know I'm being heard, respected, and safe.” With the help of her spiritual advisor, her narrative shifted from being a member of a family who takes things personally, to being the priest in a church who expects challenging behaviours at times from congregation members.

As for what would happen to her ministry if she did not engage in the things she does to nurture and support herself, Melissa said, "I would explode.” She elaborated by speaking about a time when she didn't engage in her supportive practices, saying, "I was thoroughly and utterly exhausted."

Jerry

Jerry was quick to identify his spiritual practice as getting away and being unreachable. This was a newly discovered spiritual practice for him, after eight years of being in constant contact with his congregation. He also described “being transparent” as something he considered to be a supportive practice. Jerry expressed his belief that duplicity would drain his energy, so he practices "being as open as humanly possible" with his congregation. "That kept the stress down...because I didn't have to hide things." For Jerry, there is ideally no separation of himself from his role as priest.
However, Jerry recognized this practice has "drawbacks as well. There was absolutely no private life whatsoever.” He elaborated, saying,

For all the years I have been there, my phone was always on my hip. If there was an emergency, they knew they could get in contact with me, so I was never really ‘off’. Even when I took two weeks or a month, I was never really off. I was just waiting for the phone to ring. So, I could never relax.

Jerry spoke of having gone on a cruise for a holiday,

but it was with [congregation members]...and I thought, this is not a holiday! I'm not getting away. I'm just with the same people, but we're on a boat. And I was really looking forward as I was getting ready to go, thinking, 'Oh, I'm going to get away. It will be a vacation.' And then, two days into it I thought, 'This is not a vacation.”…I just want to be off the clock. I don't want to be the priest today...I just want to be me.

As Jerry spoke about "being an open book” and being constantly accessible to his congregation, it became clear this was a major factor in his recent experiences of burnout. "We hung out. We weren't just parishioner and priest, we were friends...Very close friends.” Jerry reflected that the relationships were not actually friendships, however, because the congregation members needed something from him as their priest. The relationship was not reciprocal. He said, "I did get to the point where I hit some burnout. It was pretty significant.”

Jerry went in and out of a narrative of simply being a friend to his congregation. At first, he spoke positively about how, from the day he first met his congregation, he attempted to be their friend, and an open book, with no distinction of himself being in the role of priest. He explained, saying, "I'm just some guy, a sinner like everybody else. And I've just got the benefit of having education that can help to transmit the Gospel to them.” As he told his story, however,
Jerry's narrative began to shift as he wrestled with his developing understanding that his role as priest conflicted with simply being a theologically educated member of the congregation. This led him back to talking about the need to get away and his being unreachable, which he found to be "a hugely healing element." Jerry has not quite reconciled these opposites of constant availability, and being unreachable, nor found a middle ground. He said that, for him, there is "no in between at all."

Jerry spoke of the supportive practice of meditation and described his experience of this in detail. Jerry meditates while cycling, or while sitting in quiet.

**Blair**

Blair began by listing practices that he sees as being supportive in his ministry. They included reading for relaxation, watching movies for relaxation, and meeting with a friend who acts as a mentor. Blair then spoke about the practice he is most passionate about. Blair travels to do mission work in another country. Blair elaborated on his time doing mission work by telling a heart-wrenching story about preaching there. This country was recently war torn. The people had been through much pain and violence, and asked Blair to teach them about forgiveness:

How could I even remotely understand and teach them about forgiveness? So, all I did was give them some biblical principles about forgiveness....And in numerous churches people came up to me for prayers that they would be able to forgive someone, always about murder. And one lady came up to me and she said, I want you to pray for me because I have to go to the man that murdered my family. And she meant her entire family, as she was the only one left. So, we prayed, and I thought 'Oh I'm not sure what is going to come of this'. That lady walked to the back of the church and then started talking to him. They were in the same church.
Another man in his congregation was about seven years old when forty-six members of his extended family died on the same day. "He was there when it happened. And I said, 'How did you survive?' And he said, 'I hid under the bodies'." Blair concluded by saying, "And you think we have troubles over here?"

Blair stated, "Oh, this work is very refreshing...There have been times when I didn't even want to come home." All of this led into a discussion about this ministry itself being a supportive practice. In this other country, Blair reported that the people want to talk about faith. Blair said that in Canada, if you want to talk with people about their faith, "you've got to get out of the parish to do that." He elaborated,

[In this other country] you can walk into a field and thirty or forty people will come out of the fields and say ‘Give us a word and pray for the crops’. You can do that right in the middle of the week, anywhere.

Blair finds that people there are eager to talk about their faith, because their faith is all they have. Canadian Christians, in contrast, exchange faith for worry.

You're with the people in poverty and they have nothing to lose. They're the happiest people in the world because of that. They have nothing to lose. I have two millionaires in my parish here and they are the biggest worrywarts I've ever met. It's because they have everything to lose and worry about it.

Despite the horrors he hears expressed by the people he ministers to in his mission trips, Blair said, "There have been times when I didn't even want to come home.” Blair explained by speaking of the importance of "doing ministry and seeing a result.” Here in Canada, he may manage a church and lead liturgies, but Blair does not often see people responding with a deeper faith. Instead, Blair spoke of how they bicker about "trivia.” When he is on a mission trip, he can
see clearly how his ministry is having a positive impact on people, and how the people share in the faith that Blair is so passionate about.

Blair spoke often about the theme of taking perspective. One example was the previously mentioned shift in faith perspective of Christians in Canada as compared to those he sees on his mission trips. In addition to this, however, he spoke of the importance of maintaining a healthy perspective for himself, and that this is a practice that nurtures and supports him in his ministry. One of the perspectives that he stated he finds supportive is the view that the survival of individual churches is not the responsibility of the priest, but is the responsibility of the congregations. The priest has a leadership role, but the responsibility for the survival of that church depends on the congregation engaging in faithful ministry, rather than the priest doing ministry for them. Blair described this shift in perspective as helping him to avoid taking things too personally.

Blair stated that self-awareness is crucial to his keeping a healthy perspective. He shared that at one time, years ago, he suffered from panic attacks. When he did, his perspective became unhealthy. However, by using Cognitive Behavioural Therapy techniques, he learned to return to a better perspective on his situations. Another perspective Blair stressed was the perspective offered by humility. "I feel like very subtly I'm not that important....I just do what needs to be done.” This comment about humility shed light on Blair’s later insistence that clergy need to support each other rather than trying to outshine each other. He said, “I see far too much competition between ministers....But it's not a career, it's a vocation.”