

# CANDOUR

News and Views for Ministers

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## Ministers' stress

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Amanda Wells (editor)  
 Telephone: 04 381-8285  
 Email: [candour@presbyterian.org.nz](mailto:candour@presbyterian.org.nz)  
 PO Box 9049, Wellington

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John W. Riggs, *Baptism in the Reformed Tradition: An Historical and Practical Theology* (Westminster John Knox Press, 2002)\* *Reviewed by Fyfe Blair*

In an age when there is so much flux and uncertainty, we hear more about “emerging” church. But what does all this mean for Reformed Presbyterian circles? On one hand, we can neglect the fact that Scripture and the tradition we are a part of is one of *semper reformanda*. Secondly, we are in danger of neglecting to dig deep into our historical roots to learn how this may inform our practical theology today.

With such concerns, I picked up this book regarding baptism by John Riggs. His writing style was easy to follow and while it may annoy some, it may be useful to note that in his desire to make his point(s) and offer clarity, there is often a recapitulation of previous chapters. His essential concern is expressed as follows: “basic problems can arise when a theological movement, with its own assumptions, is fitted to a tradition that may not share these assumptions”(p1). The matter in hand being the methods and theologies brought to bear upon Reformed baptismal liturgy by the liturgical renewal movement. While recognising that his focus begs the question of whether we should still hold divisions as Protestant and Catholic, he maintains that the reformers hold out for us positions that “distinguish” the traditions.

Riggs explores some of the influences of the liturgical renewal movement and offers an appraisal of the question of ecclesiology. He then looks at the Lutheran Book of Worship and the idea that “something was lost from Luther that was central to his theology and baptismal theology” (p15). And so the remainder of the book is intended to contribute to a similar analysis of Reformed baptismal practice. He begins with the foundations of Reformed baptismal theology by first-generation theologians (Zwingli, Luther, Bucer), then with the second-generation (Bullinger and Calvin), including a chapter looking more deeply at Calvin’s development in his position. The final section is concerned with the “Trajectory of Reformed Baptismal Theology”.

For me this is the sort of book that is worthy of a read as we consider aspects of reform in the Presbyterian Church of Aotearoa New Zealand today. This would ably sit alongside Graham Redding’s book *Prayer and the Priesthood of Christ in the Reformed Tradition* (T&T Clark, 2003).

\*This book is available from the Hewitson Library and may be borrowed by emailing [hewitson@xtra.co.nz](mailto:hewitson@xtra.co.nz)

# Naming the stress struggle

Amanda Wells

Sore teeth; stiff neck; twitching eyelid. We all have our signs of stress (see page 19 for a comprehensive and disturbing list).

Part of the problem with stress is how we view it. If you're stressed, but others operating in similar contexts appear unruffled, then that stressed reaction might seem somehow your fault; some kind of personality flaw that you should hide. It's true that some people have greater predispositions to anxiety than others. But it's all too easy to create a climate in which everyone puts enormous energy into maintaining a stress-less façade.

Ministry is stressful. Ministers are stressed. After reading this issue, no other conclusion is possible. So rather than expending energy debating whether stress exists, we need to concentrate on the mechanisms we have in place to manage it; whether via supervision, support networks or personal development.

Personality analysis tools such as the Myers Briggs Type Indicator are useful for gaining a different perspective on your stress response. I find the idea that your "shadow side" – the reverse of your Myers Briggs type – emerges when under extreme pressure a valuable one for making sense of those moments when you're suddenly someone else. Entering "stress" and your Myers Briggs type into Google can lead down some interesting paths.

For me, to define my state as "stressed" means I am experiencing excess pressure; not that I am experiencing the healthy level of stress that makes life seem alive. We're not very good at distinguishing between stimulating and overstimulating states, with this tipping point varying hugely between individuals and even between different stages of your own life.

And then there are different ways of holding stress in balance. You might be Jupiter, with the stresses circling like moons. You're carefully juggling them, making sure they don't collide, but their gravity inexorably pulls at your calm surface. To add another moon or two into the mix or to blow one up destroys that delicate equilibrium. Or you could be like Saturn, your stresses sitting in the layers that are your rings. If a new one is added, or one evaporates, your planet core remains stable.

The point that I'm trying to make (in my N-preferred way) is that if I'm content only because I have carefully balanced all the stress factors in my life, how will I react when the next thing hits me out of the blue? This is about something more fundamental than stress management, and relates to the diagram supplied by John Daniel on page 18 entitled "aspects of leadership".

While I wouldn't describe myself as a Willow Creek devotee, I recommend an article by Bill Hybels recently published on christianitytoday.com that examines the concept of "self-leadership": "remember Jesus' pattern of intense ministry quickly followed by time set aside for reflection, prayer, fasting, and solitude? That pattern is repeated throughout his ministry... He would go to a quiet place and recalibrate... Even Jesus needed to invest regularly in keeping his calling clear, avoiding mission drift, and keeping distraction and temptation at bay."

Hybels relates the story of a pastor who had burned out in a very public way. When this man wrote about his own experience, he said: "eventually I couldn't even sleep at night. Another wave of broken lives would come to shore at the church, and I found I didn't have enough compassion for them any more. And inside I became angry, angry, angry. Many people still wonder whatever happened to me. They think I had a crisis of faith. The fact is I simply collapsed on the inside."

In this issue, we have an excellent introduction to stress and ministry by Kevin Gwynne, an analysis of traumatic stress and its repercussions by Peter MacKenzie and a consideration by John Franklin of the near-impossible pressure that can arise when being pushed to grow a dying church. We have some powerful personal accounts of stressful experiences. Then Richard Dawson calls for an end to discouragement, while Scott Thomson suggests that limitations to ministry are sometimes appropriate. The issue comes to a close with excerpts from a report delivered to the Council of Assembly late last year, underlining the seriousness with which this issue is being viewed at the Church's governance level.

I'd love to receive some letters to the editor in response to this issue. The next issue of *Candour* will indirectly consider ways to lessen pressure on ministers, with its theme of "sharing resources and creating networks", and spontaneous contributions are very welcome.

# Stress: Definitions and coping skills

Kevin Gwynne\*

Stress is something we all get from time to time; the issue is what do we do when it becomes dis-stress? “Stress” is the commonly used term to describe the symptoms produced by the body in response to increased tension. Healthy stress can help us deal with some of the challenges in life, as it can enable us to concentrate, make decisions, and allow us to function in a positive manner.

Rather than being a simple medical condition, stress is a combination of physical, mental and emotional responses that result in pressure, worry and anxiety. When we get overcome by these factors, it becomes unhealthy and results in dis-stress, which may make us feel out of control, unwell, and no longer able to handle demands made on us, even simple ones. Eventually, unless dealt with, further symptoms might arise, including depression or burn-out. As a simple rule: if the stress you are under exceeds your ability to cope, unhealthy stress must be the result.

Surveys conducted have concluded that ministry is one of the top half-dozen most stressful occupations to be in. I’m sure we all know colleagues who have either suffered from burn-out or left the ministry due to stress.

We often live in a “fish bowl”, where we somehow feel on display - even our families. Pastors’ kids are somehow expected to be better than normal kids - whatever that might mean! There seem to be endless expectations from parishioners for us to live up to. How often have you been told you must visit Mrs Smith today because she’s either unwell, in hospital, or upset about the fact there weren’t enough hymns in the service last Sunday?

Then there’s the constant frustrations about the use of new music verses old music, shifting the piano or lectern, seats versus pews, and endless other trivialities. And the financial woes of the parish that, though we have a treasurer, somehow become your responsibility and problem, too. Furthermore, as we all experience, every church has its own matriarch and patriarch who, at least in their eyes, are there to tell us what to do. And to remind us that the previous minister did this, that or the next thing!

It might appear cynical, or possibly even funny, but too often these things lead to inner frustration, anxiety, self criticism, worry, and sleeplessness. Either consciously or subconsciously we are trying to live up to others’ expectations of us, and sometimes their demands on us.

Unfortunately, we can sometimes also get caught up in the trap of wondering if what we are doing is “good enough for God”. That somehow we have to live up to his expectations of us, too. We can even find appropriate scriptures to back up our mind-set - that we have to do and give our best to God.

Yes, of course that’s true; but we don’t have to strive for that acceptance. The Lord’s love, grace, mercy etc, are always there for us. When we have a healthy sense of self-esteem and self-worth, we are able to acknowledge this; but, when the chips are down, we may worry unmercifully as to whether what we are doing is going to ever satisfy. Will God be pleased with me? Inevitably this kind of thinking becomes a major stress factor, and one that will be unhealthy both for us personally and for our ministry.

Another stress can be pressure - sermons to prepare, meetings to attend, deadlines to meet, parishioners to visit, funerals, or other unexpected matters that crop up during the week that we have to attend to.

Then, for most of us, there is the not-so-small matter of our families. Tragically, how often have our families been neglected, to both their and our detriment, because we have put others or the church first? We must remember that is not the Biblical model! I was personally very grateful to have once received this wise advice: God first, family second, ministry third.

There are various forms of what we could call “workplace stress”. In ministry, as in other occupations that are highly people-orientated, other factors come into play. Simply dealing with a wide variety of human beings with all their various quirks can cause its own stresses. There are issues of good or poor relationships, of communication, misinformation or misunderstandings, negative attitudes, judgementalism, internal politics, circulation of rumours, inconsistent management, resentment, hierarchical structures, social and cultural differences, language, ethnic, or gender barriers, dress or values differences and so on.

We vary also in our ministry environment; rural, town, or city. Some have many centres of worship, some two or three, some one. Each of these congregations can have their own flavour, and difficulties, if you’re in a multi

setting. There may be staffing issues. Many churches are sole charge positions; some may have colleagues - which may or may not be expressed in terms of senior or assistant positions, then there may be staff teams, including youth pastor, parish secretary etc. In all these unique variables, there comes differing experiences of responsibility, expectations and associated stress.

So let's look now at symptoms of stress and ways of managing it. As mentioned before, stress affects our physical state as much as it does our emotional and spiritual well-being. Typical symptoms may include: headaches, migraines, fatigue, tiredness, rapid pulse, breathing problems, nausea, diarrhoea, neck or back pain, aching joints, palpitations, sweating, knotted stomach, indigestion, difficulty sleeping, nervous twitches, not eating properly, frequent colds or flu, irritability, impatience, tearfulness, poor concentration, forgetfulness, difficulty making decisions, loss of confidence, drinking more alcohol, increased tension and anxiety, loss of interest in sex, loss of zeal for life - including family, friends, or work.

Associated feelings include anger, guilt, inferiority, uncertainty, repression, anxiety, loss of control, and suppression of true feelings. As our efficiency levels drop, we may then experience depression, burn-out, or even a breakdown.

Stress can be triggered by a combination of internal and external factors and life events such as: changes in life-style; moving to a new place; new ministry; birth of a child; death of a family member/close friend; child leaving home; break up of a marriage or relationship and divorce; personal illness or injury; change in health circumstances; threat of redundancy; retirement; difficulty with relationships - at home; or in the parish/ministry setting; change in sleeping/eating habits; having sexual difficulties; financial problems/mortgage; pressure - including meeting time restraints/deadlines/goals; trying to live up to others' expectations/demands of you; excessive workload/hours; no clear job description; isolation; boredom; repetitiveness of work; sensory effects caused by noise, heat, humidity, cold etc; unpleasant working conditions and environment; malfunction of office/church equipment - computer/data projector, copier etc; being afraid of up-dating skills; lack of enthusiasm/loss of ministry job satisfaction/motivation/ambition; violations of the law - including minor traffic offences; and going on holiday or vacation (believe it or not!).

Remember: stress in itself is not the problem - it is how you react to it that is crucial. Most people can deal with stressful periods in their lives if they understand the de-

mands and constraints causing the pressure, identify the problem, and learn to deal with it appropriately. It is important to remember too, that our stress has a ripple effect on others. Therefore it is imperative that we deal with it, both for their sakes and ours.

- Firstly, achieve a satisfactory balance in life: a balance between tension and relaxation; a balance between good self-care, family, and ministry.
- Our spiritual identity can assist us in developing appropriate coping mechanisms.
- Don't try to be all things to all people - it doesn't work.
- Discern what the Lord wants you to do, rather than following the demands and expectations of others.
- Learn to recognise your own stress factors, and if necessary seek professional help in dealing with them.
- Keep a daily rhythm of prayer, Bible study, and reflection.
- Observe a day of Sabbath rest weekly - don't allow other things to impinge on it.
- Take regular days throughout the year to spend time with God - put them in your diary so it happens.
- Set appropriate boundaries for time-off, holidays, family, self etc.
- Keep a journal of your spiritual journey.
- Get a supervisor - someone who you trust, and to whom you are accountable for your ministry, and with whom you can talk over any personal confidential issues, be it concerns or joys.
- Learn good time management skills.
- Do away with "shoulds and oughts".
- Don't feel guilty - when there's no need to be.
- Recognise the Martha in you - don't get weighed down with busy-ness.
- Set achievable, realistic goals.
- Enjoy things. Do something FUN. Put some laughter into your day.
- Make sure you create time for hobbies, recreation, sport, friendships, etc.
- Take time for regular exercise - walking, biking, tramp-ing, running, swimming, gym, etc.
- Eat healthy. Have regular meals, and healthy foods.
- Get sufficient sleep to recharge your batteries.
- Pay attention to your body - it can warn us about our stress factors.
- Learn to relax - take rest times, read, listen to music, do relaxation exercises / breathing, "switch off".
- Accentuate the positive; don't criticise yourself or others; be in harmony, and don't allow small conflicts to grow.
- Go easy on yourself.
- Be more assertive - learn to say NO.

- Regain control over your life - in accordance with the Lord's will and purpose - 2 Corinthians 12 : 9 - 10  
"My Grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness. Therefore I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses, so that Christ's power may rest on me. For when I am weak, then I am strong."

**Sources of Information :**

Beating Stress - Toni Battison  
Mental Health Foundation of N.Z.  
Principles for Coping with Stress - Brenda Brown

Dr. Sherill - Ann Wilson - G. P.  
Rev. Derek Lightbourne - Missioner O.S. L.  
My own personal experiences over 25 years in ministry.

*\*Kevin Gwynne is an Anglican minister who works as part-time ecumenical chaplain at Wairau Hospital in Blenheim, and part-time as associate minister at St. Ninian's Wairau Presbyterian Parish. He is a qualified Christian counsellor, spiritual director with Spiritual Growth Ministries, and a trained Clinical Pastoral Supervisor, through the CAIRA programme.*

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# Ministers and traumatic stress

*Peter MacKenzie, Johnsonville Uniting Church, Wellington*

Psychologists understand that stress is a process rather than an event or thing. The process begins with a stressor, is moderated by cognitive, emotional, physical and spiritual responses, and may result in strain (which is the negative result of stress). The process occurs within an environment that may or may not be helpful and is affected by personality and health concerns. It is clear that there are a lot of variables involved in working with stress, especially in Christian ministry.

One particular stressor that can often be identified as a source of strain is trauma. Trauma is associated with

physical or emotional shock – for example, in accidents, fires, crimes, sudden deaths, or near misses. It is clear that all trauma is stressful, but not all trauma leads to strain. The ability to cope with a traumatic experience is dependent on the resources available to an individual and the environment in which it occurs.

One of those resources can be a minister helping a person work through their experiences. This leads to the realisation that trauma is like a stone thrown into a lake – ripples emanate from the centre. In stress research this is identified as primary, secondary and tertiary traumatic stress.

Primary traumatic stress is that experienced by the participants of the traumatic experience. Using a road accident as an example, the victims of the crash will suffer traumatic stress because of the experience and without the resources to work through their experience they may suffer from a consequent strain – known as post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). Some people can cope by themselves, others need significant support to deal with the physical, emotional, cognitive and spiritual issues that have arisen for them. That support may come from doctors, psychologists, family, friends, or ministers.

Secondary traumatic stress is less obvious, but is experienced by those who help the victims of trauma: fire, police and ambulance officers on the scene, medical professionals, funeral directors, counsellors and ministers. All of these people are caught up in the ripple effect and experience a level of traumatic stress. Again, note that they will all experience traumatic stress, but the resources available will determine whether they suffer a consequence – usually denoted as burn-out for the helping professions.

Ministers are vulnerable to secondary traumatic stress, especially as we deal with families at times of grief and counsel those who have had bad experiences. With no coping resources a minister will quickly be drained of energy and suffer from burn-out. This suggests that ministers should be aware of their own state of body, mind, heart and soul. If the body is unfit or tired, dealing with trauma is far harder – a regular programme of exercise and time off for sick leave is certainly helpful. When the mind is not clear and emotions are uncontrolled, traumatic stress can lead to a misinterpretation of the problem – working through the issues in supervision can help us to think more clearly and feel appropriately. The need for regular spiritual food is also essential – it gives meaning to the experience and strengthens the person. Ministers can build these resources through regular supervision, spiritual exercises and physical activity – sometimes alone or with others.

Most ministers develop their own coping strategies to overcome secondary traumatic stress, and this is something that usually comes with experience. Depending on personality and circumstance, it may be appropriate to go for a long walk, soak in the bath, read a book or have a long conversation. But if the coping strategy that is employed fails to really deal with the underlying stress, a minister may simply be compounding the problem and be on the way to a breakdown.

Tertiary traumatic stress has seldom been talked about, but it is the next ripple in the pond. This is the effect that

a traumatic event has on the family and friends of those who help the traumatised. Clergy families often bear the brunt of this stress – walking quietly about the house as the minister storms in anger, missing family occasions for the sake of ministry, losing the person they love in a haze of burn-out and depression. Without due care, tertiary traumatic stress can lead to marital breakdowns, violence or other forms of abuse. It is important for ministers to be aware that as they deal with trauma situations they need to deal with their own stress and the impact on their families.

This suggests that the ripple is far reaching – and while the wave may not swamp people immediately, the eroding effect of many waves can cause great damage. Pastors' kids playing up in school may be a sign of tertiary post-traumatic stress disorder – an idea that is difficult to conceive but very real in Christian ministry. If the minister does not work through the physical, cognitive, emotional and spiritual implications of the traumatic situations which they are dealing with, the resultant strain may lead to compassion fatigue and burnout. Take time to smell the roses and share them with a friend.

*Peter McKenzie will be doing some research later this year on stress in ministry as part of a thesis toward an MSc in organisational psychology. He recommends the following poem:*

A poem by Stephen Spender

<p>What I expected was thunder, fighting, long struggles with men and climbing. After continual straining I should grow strong; then the rocks would shake and I should rest long.</p>	<p>The wearing of Time, and the watching of cripples pass with limbs shaped like questions in their odd twist, the pulverous grief melting the bones with pity, the sick falling from earth – these, I could not foresee.</p>
<p>What I had not foreseen was the gradual day weakening the will leaking the brightness away, the lack of good to touch the fading of body and soul like smoke before wind corrupt, unsubstantial.</p>	<p>For I had expected always some brightness to hold in trust, some final innocence to save from dust; that, hanging solid, would dangle through all like the created poem or the dazzling crystal.</p>

# Pressure to grow in the face of decline

John Franklin, lodged certificate, Palmerston North\*

“We’ve done study groups, house groups, Alpha, 40 Days of Purpose; we’ve had parish retreats, guest speakers and things like special Lenten services; we’ve changed the music, the seating and goodness knows what else; I’ve attended the conferences and read the books, and nothing much has changed. What am I going to do next?” This is the sort of thing I have heard ministers say during supervision, feeling that it is their job to grow the church. While there are some notable exceptions, many congregations are increasing in age rather than in numbers, vision and energy. When conducting services for colleagues, I continue to note in some places that after 33 years in ministry, I am still one of the younger ones!

What do we do? The church that St Augustine wrote about has disappeared along with the woodlands and streams he described. We have a “goodly heritage” (Ps16); we are the inheritors of a rich, faith-filled tradition; but will the next census figures confirm that we are on the way out too?

The temptation is to despair. This is more than a 40 days and 40 nights Lenten discipline we are going through. Our culture seems interested enough in “spirituality”, but why does our presentation of the gospel of Jesus Christ seem to have so few takers? What are the disciplines that can check despair and save us from the discouragement of feeling that we are personally responsible for the very existence of the Church?

Our heritage calls us to the discipline of faithfulness. We are to preach the word in season and out of season; to faithfully visit the sick, support the poor, comfort the bereaved and resource the growing. Faithfulness also asks us to continue to try to think outside the square and ask, “what is God up to?” There is a faithfulness in talking with and listening to colleagues as well. We are not asked to be in this alone, and conversation will help us explore what God might be up to, quite apart from reflecting on what I’m up to. And there is a faithfulness in seeking to keep our own faith nourished and growing, even if it means entering into our grief for the church, owning it, sharing it, and inviting God into it rather than reaching for the quick-fix spiritual paracetamol. “Only grief permits newness,” as Walter Brueggemann reminds us. Faithfulness keeps us rooted.

With faithfulness, there is the discipline of trust. Phrases

like “King and Head of the Church” and “Lord of the Ages” roll off the tongue, but beyond them, we can balance our perspective by asking, “whose church is it?” What would happen if a presbytery, synod, conference or Assembly were to “waste time” and wait on God and one another? This may well be a time to not just do something but to stand there, trusting for and listening for guidance from the head of the Church. The alternative is to “fix” the church with organisational/human behaviour theory.

The outer face of trust is obedience. What does obedience to the call to ministry look like as circumstances continue to change? For many it has involved considerable sacrifice in the early days, but what now? What do we make of the Word of the Lord to others in exile, those whom Jeremiah, Isaiah, and Ezekiel were addressing as they faced the challenge of singing the Lord’s song in a strange land? Is it a word for us too?

The church as we know it is in indisputable decline — as Lloyd Geering predicted in the late 60’s — and there is real pressure to grow the church back again. Yet the gospel of Jesus Christ is not in decline. It is still transforming. The challenge, exercising the muscle of faithfulness, trust and obedience, is to resist despair and look to the One who says he is doing a new thing, and wait. There are some exciting programmes for growing the church, it would seem, but what will work at home? The question’s pressure is always there. Beyond programmes, we are dealing with mystery. We will do our best, but we look beyond ourselves trusting that God’s purpose will be fulfilled, not by our might and power alone.

Meantime, the prophet speaks encouragement:

For even though the fig tree does not blossom,  
nor fruit grow on the vine,  
even though the olive crop fail,  
and fields produce no harvest;  
even though flocks vanish from the folds  
and the stalls stand empty of cattle,  
yet I will rejoice in the Lord  
and exalt in God my saviour. (Hab 3:17-18)

\*John Franklin’s ministries are diverse: ministry supervision, spiritual direction, preaching, celebrating, running workshops, and tertiary teaching. He is also a senior research officer working on issues of literacy and employment at Massey University, Palmerston North.



# Handling different shapes of stress

Brett Walker, St Columba's, Taradale

Most of my stresses are “made by me,” like saying “yes” to writing something for Candour and then being overwhelmed by four funerals in one week. (Why didn't I write this last week, and surely I could have said “no” to at least one of the funerals...)

The greatest stress we have endured in the past year has likewise resulted from our own decisions. We bought a house, and moved out of the manse. This was not as simple as it sounds! The house was “for removal” and we had to also buy a section and then watch as they cut the house in half and transported it, wobbling to and fro, on a truck for 30km.

But the real stress came with the money - borrowing so much! Again, to complicate things, we couldn't find a section - so instead we bought a run-down house with

a subdividable section. So now we have two houses and a very large mortgage over \$400,000.

We had additional problems: the house was originally in the country and nine metres tall (it's an A frame with room for a third floor in the ceiling). Napier only allows houses to be eight metres tall including the foundation, so we had to cut 1.5 metres from the roof. \$20,000 and several sleepless nights later, we had our permits and eventually a new roof.

As I sit here today, we are in a lovely five-bedroom-plus-study house overlooking a park, and close to the local river where we walk the dog. You can't tell where the house was cut in half and the new roof looks like it has always been there. The subdivision is almost complete and soon we will cut our mortgage in half, and we would have gained well over \$50k in the process.

So much for the causes of our stress. How did we cope?

The greatest resource I found was the strong sense that this was the right thing to do and was going to work. I guess it's like the call to ministry. If that inner confidence is there then you can ride through the rough times. Such confidence can easily become overconfidence but the

combination of head and heart and the support of others bolstered my wavering faith at times. The head said there is some good money to be made here and the heart felt it was right - God is in this. The idea of living in our own house and being off the church site also greatly appealed to my wife.

The second thing was a right attitude. Since I had already invested \$400,000 of the bank's money into this, it had to work! I quickly adopted an attitude: what do we need to do to make this work? If it meant signing a bond with the council, I signed; if it meant lowering the roof, we lowered the roof.

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**The willingness to let the body of Christ be the body of Christ is crucial. I can't plumb or lay iron or rewire: I have to let the experts do their job**

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Some people told me all of the problems, I kept asking for solutions: what do we need to do to make this work, what do we need to do to get permission... This attitude defused the tightest bureaucrat and naysayer, and normally hardly cost us anything.

attitude defused the tightest bureaucrat and naysayer, and normally hardly cost us anything.

The final thing that was absolutely critical to the success of this project and in the alleviation of stress was outstanding support. We had great tradesmen who did their jobs (sometimes after some nagging!) My parents had just retired and sold their house, so they moved into the older house on the section and renovated it, and helped paint our house once it was onsite.

The willingness to let the body of Christ be the body of Christ is crucial. I can't plumb or lay iron or rewire: I have to let the experts do their job. At one stage, I was saying “the only thing I can do to help is write cheques” (since then I have been painting, papering and concreting). This really was a team effort, and without the team I would be in hospital with stomach ulcers.

My hope as we start a new year in the church is that when Jesus says “I will build my church”, I will have as much confidence that he is right, and that it can work. That I will maintain a “can do” attitude (and help others develop the same) and that I will be willing to use and develop a team in order to get the job done.

# Grappling with great expectations

*The contributor of this piece has asked to remain anonymous*

I entered my first parish full of anticipation; I was naive, young, idealistic but dying to get started and I was married with children. This church was urban, wealthy, professional and white; it was also very run down. It had an aging congregation of about 30, with a handful of young adults that indicated there was some hope for the future. There was no Sunday school, no youth group, the music was struggling, and there seemed to be little holding it together apart from the Sunday morning service.

The building was big, deteriorating, inappropriate and costing us money all the time. There were a few families in the church that had been there forever; they remembered the good old days when the church was full (it had a large seating capacity), kids were everywhere and the church was a vibrant and happening place to be. They had history on their side, they were well and truly invested in the place and their relationships between each other went back along way.

They called me because I was young, energetic and a change agent, they gave me a mandate to bring the changes necessary to bring them into the 21st century, and I believe at the time they meant it and wanted it as much as I did. But when the rubber hit the road and the changes were implemented, and they began to realise there was no turning back, their attitude changed. They really struggled, kicked, screamed and fought hard to retain what they liked, what they were used to, and they complained long and hard about the smallest little things.

To some degree you can understand this, and I had anticipated as much. There is no doubt in my mind I could have handled things better and brought some of the changes in at a slower pace, but at the same time it had to be fairly radical, with the church facing nonviability. Nevertheless, as a result of these changes, the church grew, the youth group flourished, the worship took off, the Sunday school boomed, and on the outside things really did look good. But the people with the power, and the money, struggled. We basically had grown a new church within an old one. All the new people loved what we were doing, they had never known anything else, and they couldn't see the problem, but the ones who'd been there "pre-me" harked back to how it used to be.

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**I felt so incredibly let down, used and abused.  
I did not think Christians could be like this**

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I worked my butt off for years; I set up the youth group, ran the youth group, my other half set up and ran the Sunday school, I organised and ran the worship team, which grew from one or two to about 20 people. I ran camps, social events, family nights, you name it, I did it: basically anything that happened in the church centered around me... my mistake not theirs, and it eventually took its

toll. The growth was great, good things were beginning to happen, but I could never satisfy some people. I didn't visit

enough, the music was too loud, the kids wrecked the building, the old folk were neglected, etc etc etc.

I was a very motivated, enthusiastic person who enjoyed a challenge, who thrived on change and activity. Stupidly, I thought that growth would make people happy but, try as I might, I could not please the ones who "ultimately counted". Again, my mistake. I failed to realise just how much power and politics were involved in church life; as an adult convert, I had missed this developmental stage!! But when mixed in with sacred things, power and politics can become weapons of mass destruction. I learnt the hard way that there was a game going on and I lost. But the tragedy was that I was never really playing the game.

I remember a "car park conversation" with one of the key people in the church. She had a lot of power, she was very intelligent and very articulate, and people followed her lead. She threatened to leave the church, said it wasn't really "her" place anymore. Foolishly in that moment, out of my desire to please, make things right, keep the numbers up, or whatever, I said... I'd leave before she did. It was in that moment that I knew it was over. I had just handed the power back. She'd won and I'd lost. From that moment on things were never the same. It was a "tipping point", at least for me. I went into the church after that conversation and it dawned on me what had just happened. It doesn't sound like much, but I knew I'd just lost. I cried.

In the end, I recognised I had to get out because they were crushing me. I had foolishly sold my soul to the ministry, my identity was too wrapped up in doing well, in growing, in pleasing people, and I've learnt that it's impossible.

As my time in this church ended I was very, very hurt by some things people said and did; to this day I struggle with it all, I felt so incredibly let down, used and abused. I did not think Christians could be like this. I wasn't completely innocent, don't get me wrong, I did some unwise things and made mistakes, but I don't think I was ever nasty or cruel. My naivety was well and truly gone and I was becoming cynical and bitter. It was definitely time to go.

We moved out not knowing where we were going to live, or how. We had no income, no home and three children whose lives were being turned upside down as well. But God in his gracious and loving way provided miraculously for us as a family. Within months we had new jobs, a new home, a new church and a new life.

For several years I've been out of ministry and have enjoyed the break enormously. I met some awesome Christian people who made me laugh again, and I loved it. I have recently taken up a new call with fear and trembling. I was scared it was going to be the same old, same old. I really had to overcome some hurdles just to get back in the door. But to my joy, it's all been good. The people expect me to be part of the team, they appreciate anything I do, and seem to be excited about getting involved. I don't feel as if I have to beg people to run things; they are the ones coming to me and it's great. They are eager, enthusiastic and excited about getting their hands dirty, and this is a wonderful thing for me. It makes my heart sing.

I have learned many things, including that being in ministry is a huge call. The expectations are enormous, both from the congregation and from ministers themselves. In the time since I left, my family and I have been involved in another church and seen what a healthy church really looks like. The atmosphere, the attitudes, and the feel of the place were sooo different and so lovely. I have had time to heal and time to reflect on my mistakes. I will never, ever work that hard again; I will never, ever fall over myself trying to meet other people's expectations; I will go easy on myself and enjoy my family, my church and serving my God as best I can. If people are not satisfied with that, then it's just too bad.

Part of my problem in all this was that I mixed up ministry with identity, and vocation with faith, with chaos the result. Since then I've come to realise they must be kept separate; vocation in Christ must be distinct from identity in Christ. In this way, my faith stands aside from my vocation, and my identity stands aside from my ministry. Although they are interrelated they can not be dependent upon each other. I guess I've come to understand that I

am not my ministry; I am not my vocation; I simply am who I am, and as my faith continues to shape me and refine me, God is satisfied with that, so I should be too.

Nevertheless as I look back, whether my fault or their fault (probably both), I was terribly hurt: I gave it everything and it wasn't enough; I did really well and it wasn't enough. I was in this church for many years but it could have been a lifelong ministry, I originally thought it would be. I felt short-changed when I left, as if my job had not run its natural course. Not many in the church had any idea why I really left and of course I could never tell them. I felt as if I had no where to go with all this, and no one to tell. I ended badly, and this disappoints me to this day.

I feel so sorry for the people who really loved me and were willing to get on board with what was happening, and the tragedy was that this actually was the majority of people. A small minority had the power, and when they felt it slipping away they grasped it back. I almost feel sorry for them: they were reacting against something they could not handle and did not really want, and I still don't think they realise the impact of what they did on me, or on the congregation.

So much good happened at this church, but my memory of it is scarred by the incidents that happened with such a small group. I am healing, I know it will take a while, and that's OK. I saw a counselor for a while, and she was terrific, she really helped me understand why I felt so hurt, so devastated and scared about returning to ministry.

My new parish is great, the people are great; what happened to me was tough, but it was not the end of the world. I am looking forward to many more years in ministry, many more trials no doubt, but hopefully this time I will handle them well and not get so personally shaken by it all. All in all, I feel ready for more. I know things will not always be rosy when it comes to ministry; I know some of the pitfalls and I think I know how to protect myself better; I know I have to have a "life"; I know I can't be consumed with church life at the expense of everything else; I know people will let me down from time to time. I know that I have my limitations; I know I need to take care of myself better, and I know God is with me, faithful till the end.

I am glad I got out when I did; it was definitely the right thing for me to do. It gave me the space I needed, and renewed my sense of call. I am still passionate about the church, perhaps a lot more realistic about it too, but that's not a bad thing, after all.

# Why are we so discouraging?

*Richard Dawson, St Stephen's Leith Valley Presbyterian Parish, Dunedin*

About six months ago, in the depths of a Dunedin winter, I sat down with a young student in the hallway just next to where we run student.soul, our church plant amongst the students in the tertiary sector in Dunedin.

Church was still in progress and it was noisy with talk and music. The hallway was also busy but at least a bit quieter than the common room where we were running church. The young woman was crying. A major dissertation was due in 12 days that she'd not been able to concentrate on. Relationship problems and a number of other things had been getting in the way.

As we talked I simply reassured her that finishing her course would be a good idea and that she had the ability to do it. I listened to her for another five or 10 minutes and said a number of other things along similar lines and she thanked me and left. It was not a classic counselling encounter. I had not tried to analyse her or offer anything particularly therapeutic except to encourage her and get her to see that she could indeed complete the next task in her life. She's back this year. She passed her course and is looking very positive about life now. It wasn't much, but the encouragement I was able to offer was, I think, crucial for her at that time and it's something anyone can do. But as a church, and even as a race, we seem to struggle greatly with the giving of encouragement.

As I look around at the church that I have grown to love over my short 47 years on this earth, I can't think of a single issue more responsible for stunting the faith and works of both people and clergy than that of discouragement. Culturally we are a people almost allergic to its opposite - encouragement. We shun the limelight and dislike those who appear to enjoy it. We revel in obscurity and delight in the mediocre. We are wary of praise and slow to bless those who succeed. And in the midst of this fertile loam, discouragement grows rampant like the couch grass in Dunedin soils, and like couch it spreads ferociously once established. What is perhaps worse is that in the church it appears things are no different.

If we are to become the community that Christ has called us to be in the Presbyterian Church of Aotearoa New Zealand, then this must change. We must become compulsive encouragers looking with every conversation to leave behind not an atmosphere of doubt and disappointment but one of joy and belief and anticipation. And we can do

this whilst still remaining a discerning people. There are times when the truth must be told or at least discussed. There are times when we must face the harsh reality of our own sinfulness or others'. When we've let others down, when we've hurt others callously, when we've not given a measured and fair response to others, we need to face that and they do also.

But the endemic pessimism and sarcasm that so often characterises our attitude and communication must be rooted out if we are going to operate well as a community again. It eats away not only at our ability to enter into real mission but, worse, it eats away at any desire our young people might have to share with us in this place of God. They are not fooled by loving rhetoric from the pulpit that is sandwiched between weeks of cutting remarks and tales of doom.

Perhaps even more discouraging for them are the entrenched attitudes to how church "should" be done. Prevailing orthodoxies in this regard become mortal enemies of a younger generation who want to experiment and right the wrongs of past generations. When worship styles and approaches cannot take into account the needs of a younger generation, then what we do in the place where we are most visible - Sunday worship - has become a discouragement for the very people we should first be able to convert.

Where do we start? With ourselves, of course. Jesus said, "the kingdom of God is within you". I pray regularly for a gracious tongue and a loving heart. Slowly I am changing from the person who was once so quick to judge those who disagreed with me to one who is far more cautious with my words and far more intentional about leaving behind something positive and encouraging. I make those who rub me up the wrong way also a matter for prayer and I try to be especially patient with them. I try to take responsibility for my own feelings rather than blaming them on the behaviour of others and I am particularly careful with negative feelings. Ministers and elders must lead in this area especially.

For most people encouragement is a source of life – it makes it worth living. Isn't that what should be bubbling up from us?

# The stress of turning the tide

Steve Millward, Crossroads Christian Centre, Mangatangi

How I deal with stress, as a minister, especially in the sphere of seeking to grow a church that has been in decline since 1914 and its longest ministry, 1970-1978, was not a time of growth...

## Historical Background:

In July 1997 I started as a lay supply minister in my current parish, which is 40 minutes drive from Manukau City but is clearly a rural parish. I had come from having 11 and a half years in what was then the largest evangelical, charismatic Presbyterian parish in New Zealand, as well as being predominantly European. Church attendance increased and we were having a good time, but after four and half years, I had really only seen a few adults come to Christ and although we were running two thriving kids clubs consisting of 7-13 yr olds, I was frustrated. I had come from a Church where we had seen many young adults make decisions for Christ and although we were having a good time, according to me it wasn't really happening.<sup>1</sup> I did not want to do the same stuff for the next four and half years and get the same results. It was also time for a sabbatical, so after 16 full-time years as a lay pastor, we decided it was right to go to the SOM. We also promised to return to our parish to serve out the remaining time on our five-year contract with them. Before returning to the parish I made it very clear that when I returned I would be seeking to bring about spiritual and structural change because things could not continue as they had and they voted to bring us back on that understanding.

Since the beginning of 2004 things have changed in our parish and with that some stress has come knocking on our door. Three examples of some of this stress are:

- Having one meeting with 14 disgruntled, mainly older, members of the congregation who told me "I was not anointed by the Lord"; "I wasn't giving any feeding - we need deeper stuff"; "we don't like the new songs or the drums" (we had drums and new songs before we went to Dunedin) and various other grumbles.
- We have continued with the process of selling off real estate to enable us to build a new facility on the 18 acres of land we own as a church. This has resulted in numerous newspaper articles and a TV3 news item where we have been cast as the bad guys. There has also been verbal abuse, letters, and letterboxes smashed.

- There is the ongoing stress of seeking to grow our Church with limited human resources. We are very vulnerable.

Here are some of the ways I am handling the stress of helping to bring a church from a mindset and culture of the 1960s into the 21st century, in a rural setting, while seeking to help it to grow in every sense of the word:<sup>2</sup>

## Re-educate:

I knew I did not have the tools to help change the culture of the church and make us a healthy 21st century church. Realising this, I went to the SOM and there I had time to re-educate in terms of leadership and self-awareness, and had a fantastic time in the amazing "mainland". Praise God for the South Island! My re-education has been invaluable in helping me deal with the stress that constructive change has brought about.<sup>3</sup> This, of course, is ongoing. Change brings stress, but at least the constructive change that has occurred is change that empowers. This, in my opinion, is a whole lot more healthy than the powerlessness one feels due to the destructive change that automatically occurs when the status quo reigns supreme and unchallenged. There is a cost to change but the cost of keeping the status quo is greater.

## Re-frame:

One of my personal struggles with stress is my emphasis on numbers at church and the whole comparison thing. To help me deal with this inner stress, I am learning to re-frame. I know we are not a large church if I compare our church with a city church and with the church I served in before coming here. To help me, I re-frame and the fact is that we are a rural church. The good news is that we are doing pretty well for a rural church. Praise God for re-framing! Numbers do matter and we have set some goals in this area for 2006, but the numbers are set in different frames.

## Re-word:

My predisposition to equate numbers and success has an upside and a downside. To help myself deal with the downside I am learning to re-word: I am seeking to use the words "healthy" and "fruitful" instead of "success" and "numbers". For example, when talking about the Faithfest we have run over the past two years, I have used numbers, but I am more aware of that trap<sup>4</sup> and try to tell the faith stories of individuals who have been changed to

keep it healthier. That approach has helped me deal with some of my inner stress. The interesting thing I am discovering is that this approach gives real satisfaction and encouragement. “Fresh Up” has got to be good for me, but this re-wording is better!

## Re-fuel:

After that meeting with the odd squad (see example one above) - and I know I am pretty wacky at times too - I asked the Elders and others who attended that same meeting, “do you really want me to stay?” I was partly looking for a way out. They affirmed their desire to have me stay, have hung in with me and have re-fuelled me with encouragement and faith. I also spend time each day in prayer and read a large portion of scripture. These disciplines have been invaluable. I also attend a Pentecostal church most Sunday nights when I am not sharing somewhere else. This has helped to keep me tanked up with a sense of God’s love and encouragement and helps me to keep things in perspective. Without a doubt, my wife has been a huge support — her clear thinking and counsel, when I have lost perspective over what is happening, have re-fuelled me and enabled me to carry on.

## Refresh:

Holidays and days off help me deal with this challenge. Mike Breen’s<sup>5</sup> emphasis on work flowing from rest and scheduling in a down-time before a busy period has also helped me deal with the stress of constructive change. If I want to work more effectively I need times of rest and refreshment and as time goes by, I just praise God for holidays and days off and his amazing creation. I also find exercise and some hard manual labour around our lifestyle block of six and a half acres particularly helpful.

## Releasing:

I try to regularly release the church into God’s hands. I also realise my need to release my mistakes to God and people. A very few were unable, for one reason or another, to make the transition from where we have been to where we are at this time. That was especially difficult personally because I don’t like losing anyone, and in a rural area it is possibly a little more difficult to come to terms with than in a city situation for obvious reasons. At least in the follow-up visiting, it has been a fairly pleasant time with them.

## Renew:

There are three occasions when a Church is open to change according to what I have read, and Murray Robertson speaks of a fourth:

- a) When there is a special moving of the Holy Spirit
- b) When the church is desperate
- c) When it is young and has few traditions.
- d) When it has an attendance of under 50 adults.

We filled the bill in one of these categories and then after looking at where we had been, where we were, and where we were going if status quo remained unchallenged, this provided a sense of creative tension and, with it, stress. Thirdly, God began to move in a special way in our services, where many people have been prayed for as the Holy Spirit touched lives anew. These three factors began to change the church quite a bit and it has been really interesting to see people who didn’t attend church getting saved and coming. Praise God! The way I was helped to handle the stress with all this was to keep asking the question: if we continue to do what we have always done, can we afford to live with the same results? And the answer was, of course, no! The other encouragement was the wonderful, positive, feedback from the church as people began to get excited about God and church.

Having said all this, I am aware that but for the grace of God there go I, and it has only been by His grace that I have made it this far.

I realise we all have different ways of dealing with the stress of our calling in Christ, so I pray that whatever stress you may be going through right now, God may grant you His peace, comfort, inspiration, and encouragement to go the distance and may we all hear these words one day: “well done, good and faithful servant, come and share your Master’s happiness”.

## References

<sup>1</sup> My primary giftings according to the Network Course and comments various people have made over the years are Evangelism, Administration, Teaching, and Leadership. I am also an action person and I like to see things happen. I am a passionate and somewhat driven person, and realise I have been a workaholic at times. Mellowing with age, my family, redefining success, and other factors have helped me address this ongoing challenge.

<sup>2</sup> Some of my headings may seem a little artificial and they overlap, but I hope you will bear with me. I was called to be a preacher and my preaching style does influence the way I write.

<sup>3</sup> Four books that were especially helpful were:

James D. Glasse, *Putting it Together in the Parish* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1972)

Speed B. Leas, *Discover Your Conflict Management Style* (New York: Alban Institute, 1984)

Peter L Steinke, *Healthy Congregations - a systems ap-*

*proach* (New York: Alban Institute, 1996)

Jim Herrington, Mike Bonem, James Furr, *Leading Congregational Change: A Practical Guide For The Transformational Journey* (San Francisco: Jossey Bass, 2000)

<sup>4</sup> Doug Fields, *Your First Two Years in Youth Ministry - a*

*Personal and Practical Guide to Starting Right* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2002) 26.

<sup>5</sup> Mike Breen and Walt Kallestad, *The Passionate Church-The Art of Life-Changing Discipleship* (Eastbourne: Kingsway Communications, 2005) 61.

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# Standing our ground in ministry

Scott Thomson, *minister emeritus, Masterton*

When our tradition abandoned the confessional and the prayer book, it set clergy up for a rough ride. You can't hide yourself and you can't just read it. What they see is what they get: you.

## Like it or not

The probability is that most people won't like you enough to spend most Sunday mornings with you. At best this is only one possible use of a nice day and at worst we are into the niche market where only what gives the right strokes is worth time. We don't have it on our own. This is the age of MMP, of divergent cultures, the one-make car club and logging onto specialty sites on the net.

It follows that unless you want to stress yourself out on missions impossible, both you as a clergy person and the congregation need to be constantly clarifying what you are on about and where you stand. I don't mean a lot of tedious, banal "mission statements". But I do remember that a fair number of my disasters arose because I (or they) were unclear about what we were attempting.

Sometimes the stress also comes from people who have been away for ages or don't do their homework on faith or social issues. In God's school it's wise to assume that nobody does the homework – then we can be pleasantly surprised. Sometimes the trouble, alas, comes through lightly concealed sabotage from people who want things to be different.

How precious were the parish people who stood firm and worked through it with me!

## If only...

I think we have two rather dangerous expectations. One is the expectation of people who want things the way they were, and that is not ours to give. The other is the expectation that we can compete if only we wheel in enough technology. My current bogey is "power point", not be-

cause I don't like visuals, but because it is extremely time consuming to produce a visual service to more than home video standard. Beware lest the medium skews the message of the service. Expensive technology has to work well in the low-budget, time-pressured environment of parish life. The card index may still be mightier than the computer.

## Time

Work less, think smarter. Work ethic gives points to the hyper-active. When in doubt, look busy. In my experience, this leads too many into attempting quite unrealistic work beyond our competence level - like attempting to counsel everybody who blows in off the street. Some expectations are unhealthy for the recipient, reinforcing dependent behavior. The nurturing and caring part of our souls that draws us into ministry may sprout unrealistic weeds. Quite a disproportionate amount of time is taken and more productive work is squeezed out. My own work was teaching and preaching - Ministry of Word and Sacrament was the priority.

Now safely retired, my observation is that too many sermons are poorly and hastily prepared. I hated being a last-minute man. It was not of virtue but fear that my services were usually complete by Wednesday – you never know what may come up. For what it is worth, I worked on a system of periods – morning, afternoon or evening – nominally twelve to a week and certainly never more than fifteen. Within this discipline, I took time out – usually later in the week. My mind was always busy on Monday, working through last Sunday and next.

As years passed, it took me more time to wind down after a meeting. I am fortunate to have lots of interests and popped into one of my private worlds. I don't suppose I lost more than 10 nights' sleep over parish matters in my 33 years of full-time ministry.

## Loyalty

We had some great parish folk. I think our children did all right out of being Manse kids. I would not do funerals on Saturday and made sure we stuck to wedding fees – tax declared – to fund family compensations. I never scrupled about taking the children out of school if it suited our family, but we always made it clear that we had parish loyalty too. I don't think their degree prospects suffered too much. Barbara played a big part in our church life, but more in parallel than in partnership. I wonder now if the number of older people being ordained reflects a stress of managing parish and family life. For the sake of those in those precious family years, those pressures should be strongly resisted.

### A story

Towards the end of ministry in my last parish a strange thing happened. My son asked me to do a couple of interviews in a nearby city for a book he was writing. They

proved very hard to arrange and the deadline was close. All was arranged when the funeral director rang: an old man with no church connections, but in my patch. I didn't need to do it but we were first call. I reluctantly asked the director to find somebody else – and felt rather ashamed of myself.

Then a very special friend rang. Her childhood companion had died unexpectedly. On the way to the interview I called in and spent quality time, later checking in to meet my daughter at Barbara's office for tea. Daughter arrived in tears – her marriage had just broken up. So here I was 100km from home when I "should" have been taking a funeral. Spooky?

On my reading of the gospels, Jesus was pretty selective about who he ministered to – and how. And maybe so should we be.

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# Report: *Ministers under significant stress*

*This article includes excerpts from a report by Garry Marquand and John Daniel that was delivered to the November 2005 meeting of the Council of Assembly, with some subsequent additional comments from John Daniel.*

The Moderator said he views part of his role as being to meet one-on-one with ministers to "reflect together about their experience of the ministry realities they face in their local church context, and to offer some encouragement".

He reported that there are "significant levels of stress among our ministers":

"While not true of every minister, this is clearly a widespread reality. Some pressure has always been associated with this 'people-centred ministry', but my impression is that this is growing to levels that should cause serious concern. (There are a number of related words that might be woven into this observation: discouragement, depression, weariness, resentment, burnout, anger, betrayal, isolation.)

"This reality of ministerial stress may not be immediately obvious, for typically ministers seek to be positive, are servant-hearted, and faithful to a strong sense of call.

"I would like to highlight the following factors that contribute to this increasing stress:

"1. Large numbers of our ministers serve in congrega-

tions, and a denomination, that have been in decline for many years. As people resources have declined (smaller and aging congregations) and financial resources have declined, increasing pressure has grown on ministers to sustain congregational life. This has come from both congregational expectations, and the good will and the hard work that ministers are prepared to invest. There are increasing struggles with low morale and a sense of failure.

"2. Many ministers have mentioned to me their feelings of inadequacy. This relates not to their pastoral ministry but to what they acknowledge to be a responsibility to offer 'servant mission leadership', to exercise a different model of ministry in today's context of church and world, and to transition churches into mission-centred congregations. A spiritual director, whose clients include a number of ministers, told me that uncertainties about role is a frequently raised issue. Their theological training did not include these new requirements of ministry, nor has the Church systemically addressed this area for present minister. Many have been unable to access such training on their own. Some have decided that the cost is too high to transition into a new model of ministry.



“3. Some ministers are willing to grow and engage in mission leadership, adopt a new model of ministry, and seek to transition their congregation. While such change inevitably creates tension, some ministers encounter significant resistance from members of their own session/parish council or parish members. Faults are not always on one side, of course, but overall the stress of these conflicts is borne primarily by the minister. (In some cases these parish-based difficulties are compounded by presbytery resistance to new strategies for today’s context that conflict with traditional ways.)

“Some quotations [from ministers]: ‘Enormous expectations’, ‘I am very weary’, ‘at one point I was exhausted’, ‘there are rising expectations’, ‘basically I have to do everything’, ‘sometimes the load is so heavy I feel paralysed’, ‘they say you do it’, ‘if I can’t make it here, I won’t try another parish’, ‘it’s not easy’, ‘I’ve thought about quitting but my call gets in the way’, ‘we’re not cutting much ice are we’, ‘if I don’t do it, it doesn’t get done’, ‘I’m out five nights this week, and four next week’, ‘I feel I have failed’...

“In responding to the above, reference may be made to the importance of collegial relationships in presbyteries. The reality is that such collegiality depends very much on who you are, where you are, and the size of your presbytery. In my conversations, ministers have both affirmed the importance of their colleagues’ support, but also spoken of working in a culture of independence and of feeling very isolated. Relationships are too often formed around and limited to institutional functions rather than personal and ministerial support.

“To conclude, I repeat: I believe that levels of stress among our ministers are growing to levels that should cause serious concern.”

National mission enabler John Daniel reiterated the moderator’s comments about the reality of this issue.

He said: “Wellness in ministry leadership is an ongoing concern and not necessarily a ‘new issue’. However, the last three decades have seen a general increase in stress-related diseases and disorders in the wider community. One could expect this to be reflected in the context of the church. As a people-focused and concerned organisation with the message of wholeness, an opportunity exists for the Presbyterian Church and its governance body.

- a. To take leadership in the area
- b. To support and be seen to be support, our leaders at the coalface at a time of transition in the church
- c. To identify this as a project.

“Specifically, some the options include:

1. We can acknowledge the problem and respond proactively, through providing supportive education and care for those “walking alone”.
2. We can commission further work to confirm causes of the problem.
3. Some people have a predisposition owing to hereditary, background, and other factors. We can take preventative measures by:
  - a) taking this into account in our recruitment and assessment processes
  - b) ensuring that factors within our control are addressed in existing situations
  - c) intentionally publicising the issues, promoting good health practices and providing training in the area of personal wellness
  - d) having key accountabilities in the area of personal wellness practices and budgeting for this eventuality.
4. We can continue our strategy of ensuring strong regional bodies (presbyteries, synods, regional churches, etc) that attend to improving and strengthening the relational and social context in which ministry is provided.
5. We can learn from the work of the Uniting Church in Australia and the Reformed and Presbyterian Churches in the USA in the area.
6. We can initiate further research into whether there is a disproportionate number of ministry leaders exhibiting these
  - a) in relation to the wider community
  - b) in relation to other professions and
  - c) what this means for us in the Presbyterian Church of Aotearoa New Zealand.”

*John reports that ongoing work resulting from this presentation to Council includes:*

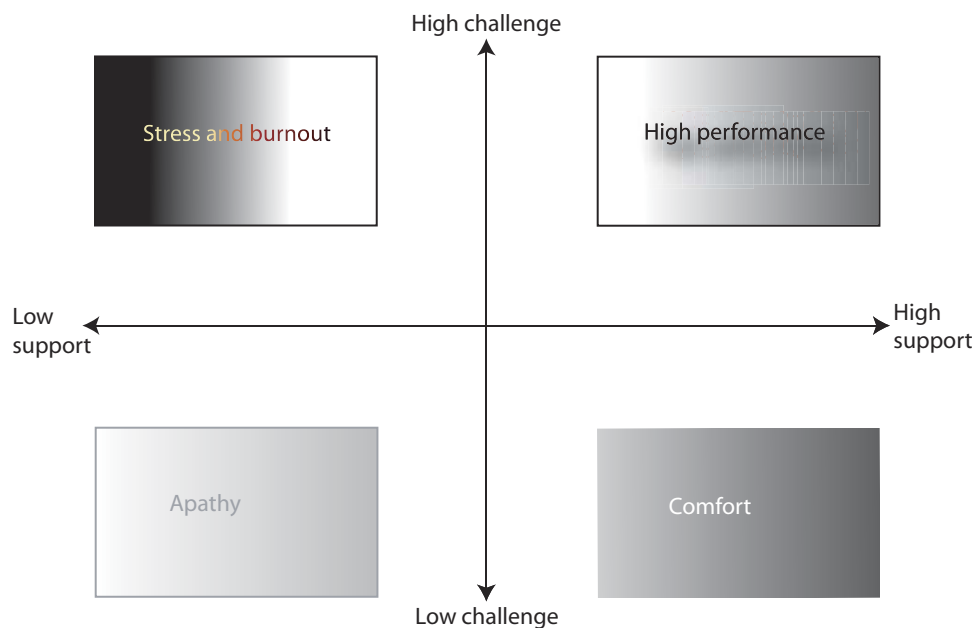
- a) *The Leadership Sub-committee examining key issues for ministers, with wellness and ministry being one of these.*
- b) *“Wellness in Ministry” project, which involves the creation of a network of people, including a variety of professionals, who are passionate about the wellness of Christian leaders and keen to be part of a group that addresses the issues they face.*
- c) *“Stress, Self care and Wholeness” – personal leadership seminars developed by John Daniel that will be made available through presbyteries and run by John along with other people.*

*He says: “I’m passionate about allowing our leaders to excel in who they are and what they’re doing for the sake of the Good News. As well as being the Good News for others, I want them to experience it for themselves. They deserve our support and our help and our loyalty.”*

# MISSION POSSIBLE

Created in consultation with national mission enabler John Daniel

## What's your performance state?



Think about the level of challenge, then about the level of support, that you are experiencing in your ministry role. The resulting quadrant reveals your performance state.

The key point illustrated by this diagram is that without support, burnout is inevitable. Considering it through this lens removes the suggestion that individuals should shoulder all blame for their mental state.

High performance is the only sustainable place to be, long term. If you're not there at the moment, consider how you can strengthen whichever of the dimensions are lacking.

## Aspects of leadership



- You are always incomplete in yourself. Everybody has one edge of the triangle that's shorter than the others; you need to find other people who will fill in the gaps to complete your triangle.
- Character can be sidelined in our processes. But it's a fundamental aspect of leadership; having only two sides of a triangle leaves you out of balance and open to external influences.
- Disengaging from people and from the community means losing perspective. If you remove your sources of accountability, self-awareness is the first thing to go.
- It is the community that reminds you who God is; reminds you that God is love.

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## Considering the effects of stress

- Think back to a recent stressful time and reflect on the ways in which you were affected.
- Write the headings “physical”, “mental”, “emotional” and “behavioural” on a blank piece of paper, and add the effects you experienced. Stress affects different people in different ways, but if you find you have nothing listed in a particular category, it’s possible that you’re missing some of its effects on you.
- Then compare your list with the checklist below.

<b>Physical</b>	<b>Mental</b>	<b>Emotional</b>	<b>Behavioural</b>
Headaches	Forgetfulness	Feeling discontented	Resisting change
Indigestion	Difficulty concentrating and thinking things through	Excessive anxiety/worry	Cynicism
Diarrhoea	Poor decision making	Continually feeling apprehensive	Absenteeism
Back ache	Excessive self criticism	Tearful	Talking a lot
Neck ache	Imagining the worst	Irritable	Overworking, always “busy”
Tense muscles	Being confused or muddled	Angry more than usual	Short attention span
Menstrual problems	Dreaming more than usual	Easily exasperated	Apathy, inertia
Tiredness		More despondent	Withdrawing from people
Restlessness		Excitable	Drinking more than usual
Cold hands and feet		Helplessness	Impatient with others
Jumpiness		Resentment	Taking less care of appearance and diet
Shaking			Reduced commitment to work
Sweating			Complaining a lot
Palpitations			Taking work home
Shallow breathing			“Indispensable” syndrome
Looking pale			

Knowing your individual symptoms of stress can give you a more detached perspective on the level of stress that you are currently experiencing. This can help you develop a threshold at which you need to take action - before a point of crisis is reached.

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*If you would like to be sent the previous pages in the Mission Possible series, please email [candour@presbyterian.org.nz](mailto:candour@presbyterian.org.nz).*

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