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# The Dance of Formation: Engaging Faith Practices As A Way to Shape Clergy Spouse Life in The Evangelical Lutheran Church in America

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GEORGE FOX UNIVERSITY

THE DANCE OF FORMATION:  
ENGAGING FAITH PRACTICES AS A WAY TO SHAPE CLERGY SPOUSE LIFE  
IN THE EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CHURCH IN AMERICA

A DISSERTATION SUBMITTED TO  
THE FACULTY OF GEORGE FOX EVANGELICAL SEMINARY  
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DOCTOR OF MINISTRY

BY  
ERIN SWENSON-REINHOLD

PORTLAND, OREGON

FEBRUARY 2016

George Fox Evangelical Seminary  
George Fox University  
Portland, Oregon

CERTIFICATE OF APPROVAL

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DMin Dissertation

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This is to certify that the DMin Dissertation of

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has been approved by  
the Dissertation Committee on February 25, 2016  
for the degree of Doctor of Ministry in Leadership and Spiritual Formation.

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Finally, I want to express thanksgiving for the endless grace and mercy of the Lord, Jesus Christ who charges us to rise up and embrace God's call with the strength and courage to do so with grace and dignity.

## ABSTRACT

Christian spiritual formation is a lifelong process of being transformed into the image of Christ. The current model of theological education in the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA) often fails to prepare seminarians and their spouses for the challenges of long-term ministry by neglecting the spiritual formation process in favor of skill-based training. When this occurs, problems may arise in the marriage or ministry. This dissertation proposes there is a definite need for spiritual nourishment and spiritual formation for clergy *and* their families, and faith practices are important predictors of individual and relational health.

The first five years of ministry is an ideal time for clergy spouses to benefit from an intentional Christian spiritual formation program that focuses on Sabbath practice, Scripture reading, and prayer within the context of mentoring relationships. Christian spiritual formation is an individual yet communal affair, and one that requires intentionality and engagement. This being the case, an intentional Christian spiritual formation process needs to be invitational instead of prescriptive, recognizing that all persons can benefit from the practices of the spiritual disciplines.

The paradox of the clergy spouse role is that it is a place of privilege and challenge. It is life-giving, but often isolating and spiritually lonely. The spiritual disciplines help the clergy spouse embrace her role by deepening her relationships with God, self, and others. Regardless of how the clergy spouse enters the dance—whether grudgingly or willingly—the clergy family life is one that requires practice and discipline in order to dance with grace and joy.

## CHAPTER ONE

### INTRODUCTION

*Much of what contributes to our positive spiritual formation may be ordinary activities that, when humbly received from God, are used to weave the wonderful tapestry of our formation.*

– James Wilhoit<sup>1</sup>

### **The Dance of Formation**

This dissertation is an invitation to explore and engage an intentional process of Christian spiritual formation, to enter a dialogue with God, with self, and with others. It is specifically geared towards clergy spouses, although it is a model that is open and available to anyone on a journey of faith.<sup>2</sup> This conversation is rooted in our Christian heritage with recognizable connections to Lutheranism. Unfortunately, it is a process that has too often been ignored or overlooked in favor of focusing on a more cognitive training in theological and biblical studies.

Christian spiritual formation is a lifelong process of being transformed into the image of Christ, and it is generally recognized as ‘discipleship’ in the Lutheran world. It is this lifelong process of transformation that this dissertation hopes to explore. The current model of Lutheran theological education often fails to prepare seminarians and their spouses for the challenges of long-term ministry by neglecting the spiritual formation process in favor of skill-based training.<sup>3</sup> When this occurs, problems may arise

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<sup>1</sup> James C. Wilhoit, *Spiritual Formation as If the Church Mattered: Growing in Christ through Community* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2008), 36.

<sup>2</sup> For clarification’s sake, the remainder of this paper will refer to the partner of the seminarian as ‘seminary spouse’ whether this person is male or female. At times the term ‘clergy spouse’ will be used to refer to a person married to an ordained pastor.

<sup>3</sup> James T. Flynn, “Firewall: Health Essentials for Ministers and Their Families,” *Christian Education Journal* 6, no. 2 (September 1, 2009): 309, accessed January 19, 2015, ATLASerials, Religion

in the marriage or ministry. In his research on clergy spouses, Harvey Guthrie ascertained that issues which develop into problems, whether in the family or ministry, often were present during seminary.<sup>4</sup> Mark Butler, Julie Stout, and Brandt Gardner share Guthrie's claim. Likewise, this study provides evidence of definitive need for spiritual nourishment and spiritual formation for clergy *and* their families, and that faith practices are important predictors of individual and relational health.<sup>5</sup>

In his years of counseling clergy couples, Frank Stalfa discovered that experienced clergy couples recognize the challenges of congregational life. "However, those who are new to parish life, or still in seminary, may not be as adequately prepared for living within the dynamics of this 'eternal triangle' of clergy, spouse, and congregation."<sup>6</sup> Imperative for clergy families is to discover healthy ways for handling this triangle, and the earlier the better. Mark McMinn and colleagues acknowledge a divide can occur in clergy marriages when the seminarian engages the formation process while the spouse does not. They write, "Wives whose husbands are in training sometimes

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Collection; Henri J. M. Nouwen, *The Way of the Heart*, Reprint ed. (New York: Ballantine Books, 2003), 39, concurs that the goal of theological education is to lead students into an "ever-growing communion with God, with each other, and with their fellow human beings. Theological education is meant to form our whole person toward an increasing conformity with the mind of Christ so that our way of praying and our way of believing will be one."

<sup>4</sup> Harvey H. Guthrie, "Group Therapy and Seminary Wives," *Journal of Pastoral Care* 15, no. 2 (1961): 101, accessed October 28, 2014, ATLA Religion Database with ATLASerials.

<sup>5</sup> Mark H. Butler, Julie A. Stout, and Brandt C. Gardner, "Prayer as a Conflict Resolution Ritual: Clinical Implications of Religious Couples' Report of Relationship Softening, Healing Perspective, and Change Responsibility," *American Journal of Family Therapy* 30, no. 1 (2002): 19, accessed March 10, 2014, Academic Search Premier.

<sup>6</sup> Frank J. Stalfa Jr., "Protestant Clergy Marriage in the Congregational Context: A Report from the Field," *Journal of Pastoral Care and Counseling* 62, no. 3 (September 1, 2008): 249, accessed November 10, 2013, ATLA Religion Database with ATLASerials.

feel left out, no longer needed, left behind academically and spiritually as if two major institutions are vying for the husband's time: the family and the church.”<sup>7</sup>

Sheryl Fancher addresses the complexity of clergy spouse life:

Professional ministry is not the “career” of the clergy spouse, but his or her life is bound up in the church by virtue of marriage to a clergyperson. Our society and world have changed at an accelerated pace and have changed the traditional role of the “minister’s wife.” The clergy spouse today, must balance a life dancing in and out of the shadows of a spouse’s career, the church and its expectations, and his/her own spiritual journey. Like dancing, life is a constant struggle to keep one’s rhythm without stumbling. Life as a clergy spouse can be a waltz between tremendous satisfaction and deep frustration.<sup>8</sup>

Although researchers acknowledge the challenges of the clergy spouse role, McMinn and his colleagues report that most clergy spouses journey through clergy family life with “skill and grace.”<sup>9</sup> The paradox of the clergy-spouse role is that it is a place of privilege and challenge. Regardless of how the spouse enters the dance—whether grudgingly or willingly—the clergy family life is one that requires practice and discipline in order to dance with grace and joy. It is this dance that we are to enter if we desire to empower and strengthen not only clergy spouses but their families and ministries as well.

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<sup>7</sup> Mark R. McMinn et al., “Care for Pastors: Learning from Clergy and Their Spouses,” *Pastoral Psychology* 53, no. 6 (July 2005): 563-81, accessed November 1, 2013, Academic Search Premier; According to Guthrie, “Group Therapy,” 102, “If there was any common element in the husband-wife relationship it seemed to be anxious uncertainty. Wives felt ‘left out,’ ‘no longer needed,’ ‘left behind academically.’ All felt ‘left behind spiritually.’”

<sup>8</sup> Sheryl Carle Fancher, *Shadow Dancing: Life as a Clergy Spouse* (Westchester, IL: The Midwest Ministry Development Service, 1998), 1.

<sup>9</sup> McMinn et al., “Care for Pastors,” 567.

## **Vignettes**

### **Jane and Bob**

Jane and Bob met in college through their active involvement with campus ministry. This faith community offered them intentional opportunities to use their gifts for ministry and to foster their spiritual and emotional lives. After graduation and soon after they married, they discerned that Bob was being called to enter professional ministry as an ordained pastor. Jane and Bob chose to follow the call, and soon found themselves immersed in seminary life. To Jane's surprise, she watched Bob's faith flourish while her own faith began to flounder in the midst of what they had hoped would be a life-giving experiencing for both of them.

For the first two years of seminary, Jane struggled with questions of identity and with envisioning what their future would entail as a clergy family. She attempted to find her place in the seminary community, but often felt isolated and alone without a mentor or guide. As internship approached, Jane was hopeful to foster her spiritual life through relationships with persons in what she perceived would be the 'real world' of Bob's internship congregation. However, Jane quickly lost heart as she fought to define her role and to identify those persons with whom she could be transparent and vulnerable. Questions about her role as a future clergy spouse, her identity as a baptized child of God, and God's presence in her life were becoming more prevalent as Bob's internship progressed.

As this couple entered Bob's first ministerial call, Jane reported feeling isolated from her spouse, herself, and God. Jane recognized how Bob had grown in his spiritual life, but felt a sense of spiritual stagnation that was magnified by her feelings of isolation and

loneliness. To complicate matters, Jane recognized the dualistic nature of Bob's role as her pastor and her husband and partner. Jane grieved the reality that she was a spiritual orphan, and her sense of loneliness only deepened.

### Joe and Carrie

Joe was established in his career when he met Carrie, who had just entered the seminary as a second-career student. Joe recognized that Carrie wanted to be a pastor, but he did not fully understand what life as a clergy family would entail, nor did he embrace the idea of becoming a clergy spouse. Despite his uncertainty about Carrie's vocational role, the couple married, and Carrie was assigned a local internship site to accommodate Joe's job. Over the course of Carrie's internship year, the couple had numerous conversations about how their future would look following graduation. Carrie wanted Joe to join with her in church life, and she encouraged Joe to choose ministry areas where he felt called to serve. In order to support Carrie, Joe attended worship occasionally and offered to help as needed for big events.

Internship strengthened Carrie's call to serve as an ordained pastor, but Joe often felt confused and frustrated with Carrie's inability to see the ministry as simply a 'job.' He did not understand Carrie's 'call' to ministry or the sense of pastoral identity that Carrie was developing. Joe caught himself comparing Carrie's internship to programs that were meant to offer skills training instead of formational experiences. He tried to be supportive of the time she spent visiting parishioners and attending church events, but he viewed these activities more as school requirements than an actual ministerial call to serve God and others.



During Carrie's senior year of seminary, she experienced tension when she realized that Joe did not desire to view her ministry as anything other than a job that would provide a paycheck. She struggled with the realization that her call to ministry was not simply something she could hang at the door when she arrived home each evening. She wondered what would happen when the first crisis occurred during an inconvenient family time. Would Joe realize that she was not choosing God over him and their family? Would Joe begin to resent her or even God? Would Joe's expectations and involvement change when they had children? Would he participate more fully in the life of the church at that point, or would Carrie's call to ordained ministry simply pull their family apart?

### **Roles of the Author**

I was born and raised in the Lutheran church, and as an adult I have chosen to remain in the Lutheran tradition, specifically the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA). Throughout my varied experiences, I have embraced the opportunity to question and challenge my beliefs and have willingly claimed my Lutheran heritage with its blessings and pitfalls. As a licensed clinical social worker (LCSW), I have journeyed with church workers and their families from multiple denominations, and I have witnessed the impact clergy life has on individuals, couples, and families. I am also married to an ELCA pastor, which means that I, too, am a clergy spouse. Through our marriage, we have traveled the seminary process, transitioned into ordained ministry, and discovered how to embrace clergy family life.

In his book, *The Soul of the Congregation*, Thomas Frank writes, "Our places are a gift from God so that we will have a means for seeking God among us. God's presence

comes at the places in which our lives meet in community with others and with God.”<sup>10</sup> It is within this meeting place that I hope clergy spouses can feel God’s presence and enter into a journey of transformation. I have witnessed the gift that a healthy formative experience has on the life of clergy families, and I have witnessed the pain of those who felt abandoned and vulnerable in their journeys of faith. Sheryl Carle Fancher articulates my personal experience in her writing about the challenges clergy spouses can experience, in the metaphor of dance. She describes the deep pain the clergy spouse can experience, resulting in a spiritual woundedness and a desire for a spiritual journey to explore and reconnect with God’s love and grace.<sup>11</sup> Sadly, many clergy spouses are not prepared for the spiritual journey and are left to cope with their woundedness alone.

I recognize how my faith has grown and been challenged through the clergy-family life experience. Once I had a pastor to mentor and guide me in my theological questioning and understanding, but now my pastor is my intimate life partner and he cannot serve as an objective guide or mentor for me. Gail Murphy-Geiss echoes this sentiment. She discovered many clergy spouses desire a pastor, but they are unable to accept their partner in that role. When a clergy spouse lacks a pastoral connection or opportunities for spiritual growth, religious life can become solitary even while in the midst of a congregation.<sup>12</sup> This dissertation maintains that although the life of a clergy

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<sup>10</sup> Thomas Edward Frank, *The Soul of the Congregation: An Invitation to Congregational Reflection* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2000), 42.

<sup>11</sup> Fancher, *Shadow Dancing*, 3.

<sup>12</sup> Gail Murphy-Geiss, *Clergy Spouses and Families in the United Methodist Church 2009: Part II: Local Church Expectations and What Clergy Spouses Most Want the UMC to Know* (Chicago: General Commission on the Status and Role of Women, 2009), 15, accessed February 10, 2015, [www.gbophb.org/assets/1/7/Clergy\\_Spouses\\_Families\\_Analysis\\_Report.pdf](http://www.gbophb.org/assets/1/7/Clergy_Spouses_Families_Analysis_Report.pdf); G. Wade Rowatt, “Stress and Satisfaction in Ministry Families,” *Review and Expositor* 98, no. 4 (2001): 533, accessed November 2,

spouse is filled with joys and blessings as she journeys with fellow travelers, it can be an emotionally and spiritually lonely life. However, the spiritual disciplines can be a deterrent to spiritual loneliness when utilized in an intentional Christian spiritual formation process.

### **Literature Review**

Little research has been conducted on clergy spouses, let alone faith practices that support clergy spouses.<sup>13</sup> One challenge in tackling this area of study is discovering the lack of or limited (if any) research on the impact of intentional Christian spiritual formation for Lutheran clergy spouses. As is typical in other Protestant denominations, Lutheran seminaries tend to focus on the formation process of the seminarians while neglecting the formation of the spouses. This dissertation focuses primarily on female clergy spouses, given the lack of research on male clergy spouses.<sup>14</sup> In addition, the majority of my own ministry focuses on the struggles of female clergy spouses.

In this field of study, some researchers have focused on coping skills and ways to enhance the health of the clergy family, while others have brought attention to the ongoing stress on clergy and their spouses.<sup>15</sup> McMinn observes that most research in this

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2014, ATLA Religion Database with ATLASerials, identifies “Every pastor needs a pastor. A pastor for the pastor and for clergy families seems to reduce stress and provide a needed component of support.”

<sup>13</sup> Amy C. Luedtke, “The Lived Experience of Being a Wesleyan Clergy Wife: A Phenomenological Study” (PhD diss., Capella University, 2011), notes the lack of available research on clergy spouses in her dissertation about Wesleyan clergy wives; McMinn et al. (2005) report that clergy spouses are a population that is under-researched and under-reported.

<sup>14</sup> It should be noted that this dissertation is available to all clergy spouses, but it may not directly address the specific needs of male clergy spouses. The remainder of this work will refer to the clergy spouse as female, but the content remains applicable to male clergy spouses.

<sup>15</sup> Read Flynn (2009); McMinn et al. (2005); Carol Anderson Darling, E. Wayne Hill, and Lenore M. McWey, “Understanding Stress and Quality of Life for Clergy and Clergy Spouses,” *Stress and Health: Journal of International Society for the Investigation of Stress* 20, no. 5 (December 2004): 261-77,

field of study is focused on clergy “distress, impairment, and pathology rather than coping and resilience.”<sup>16</sup> However, McMinn discovered that utilizing faith practices is an important component of clergy family health.<sup>17</sup> This dissertation echoes the belief that implementing faith practices is instrumental for healthy clergy families.

Amy Luedtke specifically speaks to pastors’ wives by addressing the positive ways wives cope with the daunting stress of the clergy-spouse role. She recognizes that clergy spouses encounter high expectations from congregations, their partners, and the larger church.<sup>18</sup> Although Luedtke acknowledges the high profile of and demands on clergy can create stress and impact the clergy spouses’ well-being, she fails to propose a preventative formula for addressing this issue. We will remedy this concern by identifying benefits from practicing the spiritual disciplines.

In her research on clergy spouses, Sheryl Trefsgar examines the process of preparing clergy wives for life in ministry. As a therapist, I echo Trefsgar’s concern about the tendency for clergy spouses to abdicate spiritual growth to the ‘professional’ minister in the clergy family. Trefsgar writes, “I am alarmed by the tendency for many pastors’ wives to hide behind their husbands’ seminary training. Each Christian, including the pastor’s wife, needs to be grounded in his or her faith and understanding.”<sup>19</sup> While

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accessed November 1, 2013, DOI: 10.1002.smi1031; Cameron Lee, “Patterns of Stress and Support Among Adventist Clergy: Do Pastors and Their Spouses Differ?” *Pastoral Psychology* 55, no. 6 (2007): 761-71, accessed October 28, 2014, Psychology and Behavioral Sciences Collection, for further information.

<sup>16</sup> Mark R. McMinn et al., “Positive Coping Practices among Wives of Male Christian Clergy,” *Pastoral Psychology* 56, no. 4 (March 2008): 446, accessed November 1, 2013, Academic Search Premier.

<sup>17</sup> McMinn et al., “Care for Pastors,” 577.

<sup>18</sup> Luedtke, “The Lived Experience,” 3.

<sup>19</sup> Sheryl Trefsgar, “Ministering to the Minister's Wife: Preparation for Life in the Pastorate” (DMin diss., Westminster Theological Seminary, 2010), 17.

Trefsgar's work addresses vital functions of clergy family life and deserves consideration in ministry preparation, we differ in the examination of the role of the spiritual disciplines in supporting clergy-spouse formation.

From a systemic perspective, John Cattich's three models of clergy systems help clarify the dynamics of clergy families.<sup>20</sup> His research is beneficial for exploring the systemic implications of clergy family health and the interrelatedness of people and their environment, framing the conversation of how an intentional Christian spiritual formation process can benefit clergy spouses. When clergy spouses focus on growing into the likeness of Christ and refuse to live into the false expectations of others, they are free to embrace their God-given call. Acknowledging a call on one's life corresponds to the Lutheran belief in the priesthood of all believers, claiming that all persons are called into a life of spiritual formation. This empowers and strengthens the clergy spouse and clergy family.

Bradley Hanson explores Lutheran spirituality, giving voice to the oft-unstated expectations regarding Lutheran faith formation and offering a critical voice to this particular subject of study. Historically, Lutherans have not readily embraced the spiritual disciplines and have been reticent to claim the validity of an experiential faith, but Hanson makes a compelling case to the contrary. Through their study of formative practices, Bass and Dykstra identify that prayer and Bible study are two spiritual practices that have been constant formative practices throughout Christian history, and

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<sup>20</sup> John Cattich, "Three Models of Clergy Systems: Analysis of Couple Processes and Spiritual Meaning," *Pastoral Psychology* 61, no. 2 (2012): 180, accessed November 1, 2013, Academic Search Premier. Read footnote number ten in Chapter Seven for further information on Cattich's three models.

they propose that prayer and Bible study are foundational for all other practices.<sup>21</sup>

Furthermore, Richard Foster has been instrumental in making the spiritual disciplines more accepted across all evangelical faiths through his book, *Celebration of Discipline*. Foster encourages readers to integrate the spiritual disciplines into everyday life to engage God's transformative force and notes that the spiritual disciplines are a conduit for receiving God's grace.<sup>22</sup> Lutherans tend to be wary of a pietistic faith and would rather stress reliance on the objective word of God; however, either extreme, Orthodox or Pietist, leaves Christian spiritual formation lacking, while a balanced approach can be a solidly Lutheran stance. Taking into consideration the above alternative views, this dissertation builds upon the conviction that Lutheran theology and the spiritual disciplines can be intricately related and foundational for healthy spiritual formation, particularly the faith practices of Sabbath practice, Scripture reading, and prayer.

### **The Identified Problem**

Although studies have been conducted on clergy formation, little research or training material is available regarding Christian spiritual formation processes for clergy spouses.<sup>23</sup> Gail E. Murphy-Geiss acknowledges in her research on clergy spouses that most of the studies on clergy spouses have focused on female spouses of clergymen:

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<sup>21</sup> Dorothy C. Bass and Craig Dykstra, "Growing in the Practices of Faith," *Practicing Our Faith: A Way of Life for a Searching People*, ed. Dorothy C. Bass (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1997), 201-202.

<sup>22</sup> Richard Foster, *Celebration of Discipline: The Path to Spiritual Growth*, 20<sup>th</sup> ed. (New York: Harper San Francisco, 1998), 7.

<sup>23</sup> Flynn, "Firewall," 313, describes the dangers of a limited spiritual formation process. He wrote, "If our students are formed with strong biblical language skills, a strong background in church history, a solid systematic theology background, and excellent homiletics preparation, yet have little built into their lives during the formation process to help them withstand the deformative forces commonly encountered in ministry, all may be lost when they fail under pressure and are blown out of the ministry." This statement corresponds to the proposal that if clergy spouses fail to engage an intentional spiritual formation process, they, too, will fall prey to ministerial deformative forces.

“Partly, this is due to obtaining adequate sample sizes in a still male-dominant career, where the overwhelming majority of pastors in the United States are male.”<sup>24</sup> However, according to the ELCA website, approximately an equal number of women and men are preparing for ministry within the ELCA’s eight seminaries.<sup>25</sup>

Historically, support for seminary spouses has been in the form of site-specific, seminary-based groups that have focused on building community and offering support, but generally these have not focused on teaching faith practices that invite the spouse into a deeper relationship with God, self, and others. Many spouses report a lack of preparation for becoming a clergy spouse, other than “on-the-job training, with training being the expectations of people.”<sup>26</sup> The lack of training often leads to the clergy spouse feeling frustrated and resentful towards the church and even one’s partner.

Research reports that nearly one third of clergy leaving the ministry reported some form of family problem.<sup>27</sup> In her dissertation on clergy spouses, Sarah Kerrick’s findings are consistent with this data; specifically, Kerrick discovered a connection between the quality of the pastor’s relationship with the spouse and the quality of the

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<sup>24</sup> Gail E. Murphy-Geiss, “Married to the Minister: The Status of the Clergy Spouse as Part of a Two-Person Single Career,” *Journal of Family Issues* 32, no. 7 (2011): 936, accessed November 10, 2014, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1177/0192513X10396660>.

<sup>25</sup> “ELCA Facts,” Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, accessed March 10, 2015, <http://www.elca.org/News-and-Events/ELCA-Facts>.

<sup>26</sup> Lorna Dobson, *I’m More Than the Pastor’s Wife: Authentic Living in a Fishbowl World* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2003), 26; According to Cameron Lee and Judith Iverson-Gilbert, “Demand, Support, and Perception in Family-Related Stress among Protestant Clergy,” *Family Relations* 52, no. 3 (2003): 249, accessed March 11, 2014, SocINDEX, “Intrusive expectations apply not only to pastors but also to their children and their spouses, particularly the wives of male pastors.”

<sup>27</sup> M.L. Morris and P. W. Blanton, “The Influence of Work-Related Stressors on Clergy Husbands and their Wives,” *Family Relations* 43, no. 2 (1994): 190, accessed November 2, 2014, Agricola. Craig Smith discovered in his research that 80 percent of clergy spouses wish their partner would choose another profession.

spouse's relationship with God.<sup>28</sup> Consequently, clergy families with a stronger relationship with each other often experienced a closer relationship with God. As a therapist who works with clergy families, I have witnessed the slow dissolution of clergy marriages when clergy, spouse, or both experience resentment and frustration with the Church or God. Stalfa too recognizes the need to support clergy marriage and urges seminaries, congregations, and church bodies to support clergy marital and family life through courses, workshops, and retreats for clergy spouses that invite them and their families into the formational process and prepare them for the challenges and blessings of congregational life.<sup>29</sup>

Hill and his colleagues identify the isolation and separateness clergy spouses experience, and Lori Wilhite echoes this concern in her writing: "People treat you differently when you're married to the pastor. As soon as people realize who you are, their perception of you changes."<sup>30</sup> What many clergy spouses come to realize is that clergy family life is often lonely, and they often lose someone to minister to them, hence becoming spiritual orphans, which enhances their sense of isolation.<sup>31</sup> In her research, Kerrick acknowledges that the psychological strain and energy it takes to conceal distress

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<sup>28</sup> Sarah Pierson Kerrick, "Positive Coping Practices Among Wives of Male Christian Clergy" (PsyD diss., Wheaton College, March 2010), 11-12.

<sup>29</sup> Stalfa, "Protestant Clergy Marriage," 257.

<sup>30</sup> E. Wayne Hill, Carol Anderson Darling, and Nikki M. Raimondi, "Understanding Boundary-Related Stress in Clergy Families," *Marriage and Family Review* 35, no. 1 (2003): 157, accessed November 14, 2013, [http://dx.doi.org/10.1300/J002v35n01\\_09](http://dx.doi.org/10.1300/J002v35n01_09); Lori Wilhite and Brandi Wilson, *Leading and Loving It: Encouragement for Pastors' Wives and Women in Leadership* (New York: FaithWords, 2013), 26.

<sup>31</sup> Linda Hileman, "The Unique Needs of Protestant Clergy Families: Implications for Marriage and Family Counseling," *Journal of Spirituality in Mental Health* 10, no. 2 (October 11, 2008): 124, accessed November 13, 2014, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/19349630802081152>; Murphy-Geiss, "Married to the Minister", 949; and Hill et al., 159, echo this sentiment in their research; Murphy-Geiss, *Clergy Spouses and Families*, 15, writes: "A number of spouses wished to have a pastor, as they couldn't accept their spouse in that role."



and problems within clergy families can lead to poor health.<sup>32</sup> Christian spiritual formation is an individual, yet communal affair and is not intended to be so lonely. The spiritual disciplines offer form and structure to engaging clergy family life in difficult times, allowing God to transform the clergy spouse into Christlikeness.

Self-awareness is critical for growth and transformation. Nancy Ammerman describes the benefits of a formation process: “The knowledge of God that grows out of a relationship with God cannot but change us—challenging us to examine how we live our lives, drawing us into transformation, calling us to be prophets, and creating a deeper faithfulness.”<sup>33</sup> Clergy spouses who seek spiritual resources as a method of coping give evidence of a higher quality of life. Despite this awareness, the current model of theological and spiritual formation in the ELCA gives prime importance to the seminarian’s formation but fails to encourage an intentional formation process for the clergy spouse.<sup>34</sup> We encourage clergy spouses to reclaim their personal responsibility for engaging a Christian spiritual formation process and to experience the benefits therein.

Spiritual disciplines and faith practices are vital for individual and communal formation since they lead to greater self-differentiation, spiritual well-being, and ongoing transformation. In her advice to clergy spouses, Donna Bordelon Alder encourages them

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<sup>32</sup> Kerrick, “Positive Coping Practices,” 30; Flynn, “Firewall,” 312, identifies several symptoms of a faulty formation process including ministry departure, fatigue and depression, moral failure, sexual indiscretion, divorce, and marriage problems.

<sup>33</sup> Nancy Ammerman et al., eds., *Studying Congregations: A New Handbook* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1998), 23.

<sup>34</sup> “Seminaries,” Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, accessed March 10, 2015, <http://www.elca.org/Our-Work/Leadership/Seminaries>. An important component of Lutheran theological education is the emphasis on “inviting and equipping people to participate in listening to God, each other and to the world” to “love and serve our neighbor with a living, daring confidence in God’s grace.”

to engage some form of spiritual discipline to foster spiritual and emotional growth.<sup>35</sup>

Kerrick also encourages clergy spouses to engage faith practices: “These practices of Scripture reading, prayer, and worship all reflect a general discipline toward awareness of God’s presence in their daily lives.”<sup>36</sup> Clergy spouses who adopt faith practices and increase their awareness are more likely to maintain a sense of perspective and balance in daily life. In Luedtke’s research on clergy spouses, she discovered “behaviors such as praying, drawing close to God, and reading the Bible have a constructive impact on the life of a pastor’s wife,” and the presence of a spiritual guide can be beneficial throughout clergy family life.<sup>37</sup> Therefore, how can the church be a conduit for healthy Christian spiritual formation for clergy spouses? If faith practices (a.k.a. spiritual disciplines) are a type of witness for healthy spiritual, relational, and emotional life, how can the church model, encourage, and foster these patterns for future ministries?

Flynn recommends that “ministerial formation should be designed to take into account the key stressors found in ministry environments and build the precise knowledge, skills, and formation of being into those being trained to allow them to stand under stress without collapsing.”<sup>38</sup> Spiritual formation is critical for clergy spouses since they are called into ministry alongside their partner even if it is not an overt ministerial call. Therefore, why is the ELCA overlooking formation issues for clergy families during the first five years of ministry, which tend to be the most challenging? The following is a

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<sup>35</sup> Donna Bordelon Alder, *When the Pastor Is Your Husband: The Joy and Pain of Ministry Wives* (Kansas City: Beacon Hill Press of Kansas City, 2011), 49.

<sup>36</sup> Kerrick, “Positive Coping Practices,” 88; McMinn et al., “Care for Pastors,” 577, report spiritual practices are an important resource for the care of clergy spouses.

<sup>37</sup> Luedtke, “The Lived Experience,” 38.

<sup>38</sup> Flynn, “Firewall,” 313.

proposal for an invitational, intentional Christian spiritual formation process for clergy spouses, focusing on the spiritual disciplines of Sabbath practice, Scripture reading, and prayer. It explores the theological/historical/sociological framework and examines the transformational nature of the spiritual disciplines. Finally, it assesses the challenges and benefits of Sabbath practice, Scripture reading, and prayer through a proposed model for its practical application. This dissertation invites the ELCA to return to the basics—to move from doing to being and abiding in God’s presence. We propose that the spiritual disciplines foster and create a sacred space where God can transform the clergy spouse, and this dissertation offers a model for intentional integration of the spiritual disciplines into the life of the clergy spouse.

### **Thesis**

The first five years of ministry is an ideal time for clergy spouses to benefit from an intentional Christian spiritual formation program that focuses on Sabbath practice, Scripture reading, and prayer within the context of mentoring relationships. Lutherans are more apt to embrace the term ‘formative’ or ‘faith practices’ than the oft-perceived ‘Catholic’ term of ‘spiritual disciplines’, though the terms will be used interchangeably throughout this dissertation. Christian spiritual formation is an individual yet communal affair, and one that requires intentionality and engagement. This being the case, an intentional Christian spiritual formation process needs to be invitational instead of prescriptive, recognizing that all persons can benefit from the practices of the spiritual disciplines. Helping clergy spouses strengthen their spiritual well-being through the Christian formation process fosters an acceptance of the priesthood of all believers. Therefore, any service to the Church or vocation outside the Church is ordained which

empowers and strengthens the clergy spouse's relationships with God, self, and others and decreases her spiritual isolation, improves her spiritual well-being, and fosters acceptance of her role as a clergy spouse.

## CHAPTER TWO

### THEOLOGICAL, HISTORICAL, AND SOCIOLOGICAL FRAMEWORK

#### **Introduction**

Surprisingly, little material is available for the examination of biblical models to help shape the practice of spiritual formation of Lutheran clergy spouses. Despite the sparse guidance on the specifics of these formative practices, the Christian narrative is rich with examples of persons engaging in faith practices within relational contexts, and it serves as an invitation for the clergy spouse to engage the spiritual disciplines of Sabbath practice, Scripture reading, and prayer. In her book on clergy spouses, Susie Hawkins draws attention to couples in the early church who served together as ministry partners.<sup>1</sup> Priscilla and Aquila are one such couple that is mentioned by name, and likely they were church leaders who jointly accompanied Paul on his missionary journey. Similarly, throughout Church history there is a recorded pattern of clergy spouses, generally wives, who served faithfully and effectively alongside their partners. As Susie Hawkins notes, “Some of these women took very public roles, yet others served and supported the ministry God gave them in a quieter and less visible role.”<sup>2</sup> Regardless of the role, they represent women who intentionally sought spiritual nourishment that often accompanies formative practices. Most clergy spouses are thirsty for similar spiritual nourishment and this chapter explores the theological, historical, and sociological framework for clergy spouses to engage lives filled with faith practices.

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<sup>1</sup> Susie Hawkins, *From One Ministry Wife to Another: Honest Conversations about Ministry Connections* (Chicago: Moody Publishers, 2009), 21.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, 41.

## Theological Framework

In his book on spiritual practices, Tony Jones describes the tradition among the followers of Jesus of searching: “It’s a quest, really, for ways to connect with God.”<sup>3</sup> The spiritual formation process mirrors this quest as the clergy spouse seeks ways to deepen her relationship with God. The process of growing into the likeness of Christ can challenge the clergy spouse if she experiences spiritual isolation within her defined faith community. This may prompt her to seek alternative support, or it may push her further into spiritual loneliness and brokenness. As a therapist, I attempt to address these struggles, but our society tends to short circuit the transformation process by seeking quick and easy fixes that minimize discomfort and tension. Robert Mulholland echoes this sentiment in his writing on spiritual formation: “We tend to look for some piece of information, some technique or method of spiritual formation that will take us from where we are to where we want to be with a minimum of inconvenience, pain, or suffering.”<sup>4</sup> However, the transformation journey does not lend itself to a swift and easy process free of discomfort or pain.

A clergy spouse can fall into a state of spiritual apathy and discontent if she does not acknowledge the inherent struggles and intentionally engage formative practices that foster her emotional and spiritual health and wholeness. Intentional formative practices such as solitude, silence, fasting, and Sabbath practice encourage a clergy spouse to disrupt her natural thoughts, feelings and behaviors thus renewing her mind to the truth of who God is, who she is, and those she is to love. Spiritual disciplines also include faith

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<sup>3</sup> Tony Jones, *The Sacred Way: Spiritual Practices for Everyday Life* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan/Youth Specialties, 2005), 16-17.

<sup>4</sup> M. Robert Mulholland, Jr., *Shaped by the Word: The Power of Scripture in Spiritual Formation*, rev. ed. (Nashville: Upper Room, 2001), 106.

practices that engage spiritual development, such as worship, Scripture reading, prayer, and fellowship. We propose that the spiritual disciplines of Sabbath practice, Scripture reading, and prayer are a component through which discipleship and spiritual formation occurs as the clergy spouse grows into Christ-likeness.

### **Lutheran Spirituality**

Identifying and clarifying a clergy spouse's spirituality is an integral component of her faith formation process. Lutheran scholar Bradley Hanson described spirituality as a "living faith that is nurtured and expressed by certain practices that together make up a spiritual path."<sup>5</sup> However, Lutherans have differed in their interpretation of which faith practices can or should be nurtured and expressed. Ultimately, spirituality is a living entity that incorporates a way of understanding God and our relationship with God. This dissertation concurs that Lutheran spirituality is rooted in the gospel of Jesus Christ, utilizes a Lutheran theological framework to interpret the gospel, and offers the freedom to incorporate faith practices that are consistent with the gospel.<sup>6</sup> Thereby, we propose that Lutheran clergy spouses can embrace the spiritual disciplines as tools to foster spiritual formation.

Historically, the Lutheran tradition has placed more emphasis on theological formation, which focuses on the objective part of faith, rather than with Christian spiritual formation, which emphasizes the experiential aspects of faith. Lutheran

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<sup>5</sup> Bradley Hanson, *A Graceful Life: Lutheran Spirituality for Today* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress Publishers, 2000), 9.

<sup>6</sup> Hanson, *A Graceful Life*, 9. Sophia R. G. Steibel, in "Christian Education and Spiritual Formation: One and the Same?" *Christian Education Journal* 7, no. 2 (September 2010): 341, accessed November 10, 2013, ATLASerials, Religion Collection, quotes J.H. Westerhoff as saying spirituality is "ordinary, everyday life lived in an ever-deepening and loving relationship with God and therefore to one's true or healthy self, all people, and the whole of creation."

theologian Bengt Hoffman defines Lutheran spirituality as the “awareness of the Holy Spirit mediated by the risen Christ,” and he proposes that Martin Luther’s theology and spirituality contained elements of the “inward, personal, and subjective.”<sup>7</sup> Luther spent significant time in the objective components of faith while also engaging the spiritual disciplines as an expression of his experiential faith. He recognized the interconnectivity between the intellectual and experiential parts of formation noting both are essential for transformation into the likeness of Christ.<sup>8</sup> Luther writes,

This life is not godliness but the process of becoming godly, not health but getting well, not being but becoming, not rest but exercise. We are not now what we shall be, but we are on the way. The process is not yet finished, but it is actively going on. This is not the goal but it is the right road. At present, everything does not gleam or sparkle, but everything is being cleansed.<sup>9</sup>

The clergy spouse is encouraged to embrace the objective and experiential aspects of her faith and to foster them intentionally through the use of the spiritual disciplines.

Embracing both aspects of her faith allows the clergy spouse to live fully into her identity as a child of God.

Hanson writes, “The very heart of Lutheran spirituality is that it seeks to foster a relationship of trust that God’s merciful grace undergirds all of life. Stated in doctrinal terms, this is what Lutherans call justification by faith, or more accurately, justification by grace through faith.”<sup>10</sup> A core component of a Lutheran clergy spouse’s faith is her

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<sup>7</sup> Bengt Hoffman, “Lutheran Spirituality,” in *Exploring Christian Spirituality: An Ecumenical Reader*, ed. Kenneth J. Collins (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2000), 124.

<sup>8</sup> Eric W. Gritsch, *Fortress Introduction to Lutheranism* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1994), 8, writes: “Luther was not an innovator but rather a defender of the ancient Christian teachings that focused on Christ.”

<sup>9</sup> Martin Luther, *Luther's Works: Career of the Reformer II* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 2001), vol. 32, page 24, CD-ROM.

<sup>10</sup> Hanson, *A Graceful Life*, 38.



belief in justification by grace through faith within the fullness of her relationship with the Trinity. We suggest Lutheran clergy spouses tend to be more comfortable engaging the cognitive, objective part of faith over the experiential, feeling part of faith.

Traditionally, Lutherans embrace God the Father and God the Son, but tend to shy away from embracing the ambiguity of the Holy Spirit and the indefinite, experiential components of faith.<sup>11</sup> Hoffman laments the Lutheran disengagement from experiential spirituality:

Spirituality in Lutheran garb has been the object of censoring treatment under the impact of theological thought molded by pragmatic and empirical and scientific reasoning. As a consequence, the ordinary, the public, and the objective in the life of faith tend to take precedence over and almost occluded their complementary counter-points, the extraordinary, the private-personal, and the subjective.<sup>12</sup>

However, the fullness of Lutheran spirituality and faith is developed with the integration of the experiential and cognitive aspects of spirituality.

A preoccupation with the intellectual has framed most accounts of Luther's theology and has minimized his experiential references and his affinity with the mystics.<sup>13</sup> In contrast, Hoffman discovered "Luther used expressions like 'the mystical Christ,' 'mystical incarnation,' 'mystical theology,' and 'mystical eyes' when he wanted to depict life in God."<sup>14</sup> Luther's perspective of mystical theology was grounded in *his*

<sup>11</sup> Read Hoffman, "Lutheran Spirituality," for his interpretation on Lutheran spirituality and the objective and experiential formative practices.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid., 126.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid., 125.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid., 127; Bengt R. Hoffman, *Theology of the Heart: The Role of Mysticism in the Theology of Martin Luther*, ed. Pearl Willemssen Hoffman (Minneapolis: Kirk House Pub, 2003), 20, writes: "The experiential played a major role in the theology of the Reformer."

*experience* of God and his corresponding interpretation of scripture. Philipp Jakob Spener clarified the difference between scholastic dogmatics and that of the mystics. He writes,

Dogmatics is customarily directed to designate what is true and correct according to single articles, to bring this to the attention of hearers, to convince them by written or logical procedures and to impress all of this upon their thought. Mysticism, on the other hand, is not satisfied with mere knowledge. It takes the whole mind and all the powers of the soul into its realm, and in these, wishes to establish once again the divine image.<sup>15</sup>

Luther's faith was both intellectual and experiential, and mystic theology helped Luther bridge the gap between the different aspects of his faith. Hoffman describes Luther's definition of experiential faith in this way: "It is the inner, spiritual side of Christian faith. It is what prayer leads to. It is the awesome and joyful knowledge, beyond purely rational knowledge, that God is present. It is heart rather than head, but never the one without the other."<sup>16</sup> It is this combined response to theology that enables clergy spouses to fully embrace life in Christ and to be open to the practices of the spiritual disciplines.

A balanced approach between a studied theology and one that is experiential frees the clergy spouse to know God from different perspectives and aspects of life, allowing God to be in charge instead of the clergy spouse attempting to control God. This dissertation maintains that Lutheran clergy spouses can use the spiritual disciplines as a tool to bridge the complementary counter-points, thereby recognizing Luther's insight into a spiritual walk that condemns neither side of the conversation, but incorporates both. Sabbath practice, Scripture reading, and prayer are faithful Lutheran responses to the invitation God offers the clergy spouse to engage a transformative life.

### **Historical Framework**

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<sup>15</sup> Philipp Jakob Spener, "On Hindrances to Theological Studies," in *Pietists: Selected Writings*, ed. Peter C. Erb (Ramsey, NJ: Paulist Press, 1983), 65.

<sup>16</sup> Hoffman, "Lutheran Spirituality," 127.

## Lutheran Pietism and Orthodoxy

Over the course of time, history has unveiled multiple voices within the conversation of Lutheran spiritual formation, with two primary trains emerging feeling they are both a faithful Lutheran expression—that of Lutheran Orthodoxy and Lutheran Pietism.<sup>17</sup> Joachim Lange describes the difference between these forms of Lutheran spirituality:

What the Orthodox thought was the careless dismissal of religion and its doctrine and support, was for the Pietists an earnest engagement in what they believed was the whole paradigm of Christian life. And what the Pietists mistook for rigid church dogma on the part of the Orthodox, was a real attempt to guard Evangelical (or Reformation) doctrine from those who questioned its origin, truth or effect.<sup>18</sup>

Peter Erb echoes this sentiment: “From its beginnings Lutheran Orthodoxy was opposed by men who were primarily interested in personal renewal, individual growth in holiness, and religious experience.”<sup>19</sup>

The Pietists were interested in a personal experience of faith in Jesus that was manifest in a highly moral life and public witness to others. Philipp Jakob Spener (1635-1705) was instrumental in contributing to the Pietism movement structure through his treatise, *Pia Desideria*, which offered proposals for improving Christian life through the

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<sup>17</sup> Kurt W. Peterson and R. J. Snell, “Faith Forms the Intellectual Task: The Pietist Option in Christian Higher Education,” in *Princeton Theological Monograph Series*, vol. 155, *The Pietist Impulse in Christianity*, ed. Christian T. Collins Winn (Eugene, OR: Pickwick, 2011), 223, write: “Classical Pietism did not reject Orthodox Lutheranism on the centrality and necessity of justification but placed particular emphasis on new birth.” Christian T. Collins Winn, Christopher Gehrz, and G. William Carlson, “Introduction,” in *Princeton Theological Monograph Series*, vol. 155, *The Pietist Impulse in Christianity* (Eugene, OR: Pickwick, 2011), xxii, write: “Pietism began as an effort to ‘leaven the church’ with a heart religion and break the bonds of a culturally captive Christianity.”

<sup>18</sup> Joachim Lange, “Lutheran Pietist Theologian and Halle Apologist,” in *Princeton Theological Monograph Series*, vol. 155, *The Pietist Impulse in Christianity*, ed. Christian T. Collins Winn (Eugene, OR: Pickwick, 2011), 91.

<sup>19</sup> Peter C. Erb, “Introduction,” in *Pietists: Selected Writings*, ed. Peter C. Erb (London: SPCK Publishing, 1984), 3. Lange, “Lutheran Pietist Theologian,” 87, notes the Concordia Historical Institute, the Luther Academy, and the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod have voiced their opposition to Pietism.

study of Scripture, small groups (conventicles), the practice of the priesthood of all believers, and the practice of piety.<sup>20</sup> However, an argument levied against the Pietists was that they tended to focus on spiritual practices and disciplines that appeared as works-righteousness. Peterson and Snell write: “Rather than the small morals and legalism so often depicted, pietists opposed legalism and works-righteousness, since their understanding of living faith claims communion with God as the sole source of a reoriented life.”<sup>21</sup> Therefore, conflict arose in the interpretation of the intent behind the spiritual practices the Pietists employed.

While it may be true that some pious individuals fell into legalism and moralism, the Pietist movement as a whole did not embrace Christianity from this vantage point.<sup>22</sup> Therefore, the clergy spouse can engage the spiritual disciplines with an openness to experience God with subjectivity and emotionality within a theological Lutheran construct. Hoffman differentiates the experiential spirituality of piety from works righteousness by stating, “The formation of a Christian life occurs, for Luther, in ‘conformation to Christ’—the soul being ‘formed in Christ.’ From this spiritual communion with Christ comes active service and doing of justice.”<sup>23</sup> Therefore, one can

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<sup>20</sup> Erb, “Introduction,” 5; Read Carter Lindberg, *The Third Reformation: Charismatic Movements and the Lutheran Tradition* (Macon, GA: Mercer Univ. Pr., 1983), 145-146, for the identified six proposals Philipp Jakob Spener submitted for the reform of the church through his publication, *Pia Desideria*.

<sup>21</sup> Peterson and Snell, “Faith Forms,” 228.

<sup>22</sup> Roger E. Olson, “Pietism: Myths and Realities,” *Princeton Theological Monograph Series*, vol. 155, *The Pietist Impulse in Christianity*, ed. Christian T. Collins Winn (Eugene, OR: Pickwick, 2011), 14.

<sup>23</sup> Hoffman, “Lutheran Spirituality,” 133; Douglas Shantz, “The Origin of Pietist Notions of New Birth and the New Man: Alchemy and Alchemists in Gottfried Arnold and Johann Henrich Reitz,” *Princeton Theological Monograph Series*, vol. 155, *The Pietist Impulse in Christianity*, ed. Christian T. Collins Winn (Eugene: Pickwick, 2011), 31, writes, “The spiritual alchemy of the Pietists expressed a profound yearning for inner, spiritual transformation, for the new man.”

argue the clergy spouse's ability to love and serve others stems from her love for God and incorporates the charge of the Great Commandment into the process of her spiritual formation.

Numerous voices of dissent have been noted, with an early Karl Barth setting the tone for other theologians to negate the benefits of Pietism.<sup>24</sup> During the twentieth century Barth attacked Pietism for being "individualistic, sectarian, emotional, anti-intellectual and otherworldly."<sup>25</sup> Peterson and Snell write, "Biblical scholars have accused Pietists of excessive subjectivism that undermines both creed and ecclesiastical authority. Ethicists have accused Pietists of preaching individual moralism at the expense of social responsibility."<sup>26</sup> Yet, one of the central elements of Lutheran Pietism is the centrality of biblical devotion.<sup>27</sup> Peterson and Snell describe Burtchaell's argument that Pietists were so committed to individual devotion that they "sacrificed theological rigor and defense of doctrine."<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> Peterson and Snell, "Faith Forms," 218; Roy Olson, "Pietism," 7, notes the six major criticisms leveled at Pietism in his article on the myths and realities of Pietism:

1. Pietism is so heavenly-minded that it is no earthly good.
2. Pietism fosters emotional subjectivism so that it is antagonistic to the life of the mind.
3. Pietism encourages neglect of doctrine and leads to latitudinarianism and liberal theology.
4. Pietism is individualistic and tends to ignore the Christian community.
5. Pietism is legalistic and moralistic so that it effectively denies justification by grace through faith alone.
6. Pietism is pe(r)fectionistic and thus promotes self-righteousness or despair.

<sup>25</sup> Olson, "Pietism," 5.

<sup>26</sup> Peterson and Snell, "Faith Forms," 218.

<sup>27</sup> Jonathan Strom, "Problems and Promises of Pietism Research," *Church History* 71, no. 3 (September 2002): 540, accessed October 15, 2015, ATLASerials, Religion Collection.

<sup>28</sup> Peterson and Snell, "Faith Forms," 220.

Lutheran church history addresses the theological separation that has stemmed from the differences between Pietism and Orthodoxy. Over the centuries, the objective perspective of Orthodoxy has prevailed over the experiential expression of Pietism.<sup>29</sup> Hoffman describes the theological differences this way: “In both orthodox and liberal Lutheran discourses we therefore frequently find an emphasis on ‘theological faith’ as opposed to ‘actual change’ in heart and mind.”<sup>30</sup> Lutheran Orthodox leaders tend to focus on the doctrinal differences between Lutherans and other denominations while Lutheran Pietist leaders utilize formative practices that Orthodox Lutherans may not as readily embrace. For example, some spiritual disciplines are viewed by Lutherans as Catholic practices that adhere to a more Orthodox theology, and some Lutherans express concern that Pietism offers the perception of an indeterminate religious experience over the objective word of God.<sup>31</sup> Lindberg writes, “Both Luther and Pietism understood faith to be the central organ of the Christian life and grace as the divine activity in the process of salvation.”<sup>32</sup> However disparate the movements may appear, the ELCA appears to concur with Hoffman’s reminder that “The two sides of the gospel proclamation, the Christ-for-

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<sup>29</sup> Peter C. Erb, “Foreword,” *Princeton Theological Monograph Series*, vol. 155, *The Pietist Impulse in Christianity*, ed. Christian T. Collins Winn (Eugene, OR: Pickwick, 2011), xiii, concurs that Pietism has been excoriated by its opponents – particularly the 17<sup>th</sup> century Protestant scholars and the 19<sup>th</sup> century liberals.

<sup>30</sup> Hoffman, “Lutheran Spirituality,” 126.

<sup>31</sup> Hanson, *A Graceful Life*, 17; Hoffman, “Lutheran Spirituality,” 125-126, writes: “A spirituality with mystical overtones is considered heretical in many Protestant accounts and is assigned to pietism or Catholicism. The matter of Lutheran spirituality has thus contributed to a censoring Lutheran posture with regard to Catholic doctrine.”

<sup>32</sup> Lindberg, *The Third Reformation*, 140.

us of Lutheran Orthodoxy and the Christ-in-us of Lutheran Pietism, are integrally related in Luther's thought."<sup>33</sup>

The social justice and ethical implications of Pietistic teachings have persuaded more Lutherans to embrace this theological perspective despite the claim that Pietism is individualistic and ignores Christian community.<sup>34</sup> During the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, "movements for spiritual renewal created interest in mission work and in public schools all over Lutheran Scandinavia. Thanks to the influence of Pietism, catechetical instruction for confirmation was introduced" paving the way for other forms of lay theological education.<sup>35</sup> The foundation of a solid lay theological education empowers a clergy spouse to embrace her call into the priesthood of all believers, and Sabbath practice, Scripture reading, and prayer bridge the Orthodox and Pietist movements enabling Lutheran clergy spouses to utilize these faith practices as transformative tools.

### **The Historical Role of Lay Theological Education**

One of the goals of theological education is differentiating the self, faith, and beliefs apart, and hopefully not counter to others. Historically, this process differs for clergy and laity. Jonathan Strom examines these differences in his writing: "Pietism marks one of the major moments in redefining the relationship between laity and clergy

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<sup>33</sup> Hoffman, "Lutheran Spirituality," 125.

<sup>34</sup> Olson, "Pietism," 13, writes: "It rests on a stereotype of Pietism drawn from the movement's emphasis on inward experience of God and its criticisms of the established churches with their nominal Christianity based entirely on participation in the sacraments and confession of correct doctrines."

<sup>35</sup> Hoffman, "Lutheran Spirituality," 135.

in Protestantism.”<sup>36</sup> Through the Protestant Reformers and the Pietist movement, a new understanding of the laity and the relationship between education and personal piety was established.<sup>37</sup> We are reminded by Luther that persons are joined to Christ by baptism and faith and share in the priesthood of all believers; however, laity were often separated from professional ministers by the degree of education. Unfortunately, since spouses were not considered clergy, they were not involved in seminary education, and therefore had to rely on learning as laity. Here we take a look at sources of lay theological education for Lutherans and its effects on clergy spouses.

Lutherans believe the Church is charged to be a community responsible for shaping and nurturing Christian faith. The Church’s primary calling is to:

1. Give instruction in Christian faith and practices
2. Lend support for living Christian faith
3. Provide help and comfort in times of need.<sup>38</sup>

Hanson’s definition lends itself to the conviction that the Lutheran Church is called to educate all persons in faith practices thereby supporting the growth of disciples. This charge also challenges clergy spouses to discern their call in educating and mentoring other persons within their community of faith in order to profoundly strengthen their own faith and relationships.

Historically, seminaries have existed to equip people for service in ordained ministry.<sup>39</sup> In his research on seminary educations, Ian Randall discovered the seminaries

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<sup>36</sup> Jonathan Strom, “The Common Priesthood and the Pietist Challenge for Ministry and Laity,” in *Princeton Theological Monograph Series*, vol. 155, *The Pietist Impulse in Christianity*, ed. Christian T. Collins Winn (Eugene, OR: Pickwick, 2011), 42.

<sup>37</sup> Susan Willhauck, “For Excellent Purposes: Aspects of Lay Theological Education in the United Methodist Church,” *Quarterly Review* 24, no. 2 (Summer 2004): 154, accessed March 18, 2014, ATLASerials, Religion Collection.

<sup>38</sup> Hanson, *A Graceful Life*, 118.



most able to integrate spiritual formation and education are those with a clear sense of their identity including history, heritage, and spirituality.<sup>40</sup> Randall claims spiritual formation is a necessary element in theological education, and he identifies increased attention to spiritual formation as a feature of seminary education over the last two decades.<sup>41</sup> James Flynn echoes the importance of spiritual formation in Christian education: “One of the main goals of Christian education is to produce strong and vibrant disciples who live full, fruitful lives while fulfilling their God-given destiny.”<sup>42</sup> When a seminary is functioning effectively, it offers the seminarian opportunities for instruction, formation, and training. Those within the seminary community discuss the principles of formation, but often overlook the preventive tools that strengthen clergy families for life in ministry. In his writing on biblical communities and spiritual formation, Gordon Johnston comments:

Evangelical theological education is often content oriented, suffering a dichotomy between the affective and cognitive domains. Better balance may come by

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<sup>39</sup> Richard A. Norris Jr., “The Episcopal Church and Theological Education: Some Remarks,” *Anglican Theological Review Supplementary Series* 2: 90, *America: History and Life*, EBSCOhost; Willhauck, “For Excellent Purposes,” 158, describes the World Council of Churches bulletin that addressed theological education and lay training. The report claims theological education should offer the skills to be a Christian witness and tools to integrate fully into society. The report states the aims of theological education are to:

1. Promote open dialogue and theological reflection on living and on things that matter;
2. Discover purpose and meaning in a complex world
3. Pursue a deeper relationship with God and to enact that in the world
4. Discern one’s vocation and calling to ministry
5. Gain knowledge about the Christian faith
6. Acquire leadership skills and prepare for specialized ministries

<sup>40</sup> Ian M Randall, “To Give the First Place to Spiritual Fervour Priorities for Seminary Education,” *Journal of European Baptist Studies* 7, no. 2 (2007): 9, accessed November 6, 2014, Religion and Philosophy Collection.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, 5.

<sup>42</sup> James T. Flynn, “Firewall: Health Essentials for Ministers and Their Families,” *Christian Education Journal* 6, no. 2 (September 1, 2009): 309, accessed January 19, 2015, ATLASerials, Religion Collection, 309.

cultivating a sense of Christian community. While academic excellence is critical in theological education, the Christian campus must not ignore the essential core values of spiritual formation and community. As much as the church needs proficient academicians, the world needs the life and power of Christian community.<sup>43</sup>

Although Johnston addresses evangelical theological education, his premise remains a vital charge for the entire Lutheran faith community. We propose that Christian community fosters support and encouragement for clergy spouses intentionally to embrace the spiritual disciplines.

Historically, Luther encouraged the church to educate all persons in the life of faith, and the ELCA embraced this tradition by offering biblical and theological training to lay and ordained persons. The ELCA proclaims that through the educational process, the Holy Spirit encounters all persons so that they are “nurtured in faith, grow in knowledge and experience, and are inspired and empowered to live as disciples of Jesus Christ. This call to discipleship compels us to share our faith and serve others in the home, the community and the world.”<sup>44</sup> Although Lutheran Christian education seeks to train persons for faithful living in the world, a formal clergy-spouse formation process has not been identified or implemented.<sup>45</sup>

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<sup>43</sup> Gordon Johnston, “Old Testament Community and Spiritual Formation,” in *Foundations of Spiritual Formation: A Community Approach to Becoming Like Christ* (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Academic & Professional, 2008), 87.

<sup>44</sup> “Faith Practices,” Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, accessed March 10, 2015, <http://www.elca.org/en/Our-Work/Congregations-and-Synods/Faith-Practices>.

<sup>45</sup> The publication *Lutheran Women* was used as a source for biblical and theological training for women prior to their acceptance into the seminaries and continues to serve as a tool for educating the laity.

The ELCA is based on Luther's belief that the church is "energized by lively engagement in our faith and life."<sup>46</sup> Faith is living and active, and the ELCA identifies faith practices as tools to live out faith through the process of discipleship. In 2000 the ELCA introduced the initiative, "Living the Faith – Call to Discipleship," geared towards promoting seven faith practices as guides to discipleship: invite, pray, study, worship, give, encourage, and serve.<sup>47</sup> Although the ELCA encouraged these faith practices by individuals and congregations, their application has not transferred into an intentional Christian spiritual formation process for clergy spouses. In addition, ELCA seminaries face the challenge of integrating faith practices into community life in part due to the ever-changing landscape of learners comprised of commuters, distance-learners, and non-traditional students. Where the seminary campus once was a conduit for community building, now clergy families are challenged to discover and engage formative opportunities individually and communally. When faith practices are not modeled in seminary, clergy families have more difficulty implementing them in their future ministries.

A central task of faith formation is identifying our highest commitment and in what we place our ultimate trust. Our beliefs form and frame us. For the clergy spouse, this is an integral process that incorporates differentiating self, faith, and beliefs apart, but hopefully not counter to their partner. If the spouse and partner's beliefs do not align, conflict arises in the self, the marriage, or the ministry. The Lutheran confessions remind us that when we place our trust primarily in ourselves or some other creature, we are

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<sup>46</sup> "Faith Practices"; Martin Luther, *Luther's Works, Vol 21: The Sermon on the Mount and The Magnificat* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 2001), CD-ROM, The Sixth Chapter.

<sup>47</sup> "Faith Practices."

unable to fully trust God. Gritsch writes, “When something other than God is the center of our heart, then our life becomes unbalanced. It lacks enduring stability and peace.”<sup>48</sup> Hanson challenges Lutherans that “to turn from trusting primarily in ourselves or some other creature to trusting in God is a fundamental reorientation of the self.”<sup>49</sup> A reorientation of the self is the goal of the spiritual formation process and the fruit of the spiritual disciplines. Since not all clergy spouses engage in formal seminary training, personal piety in the local church community remains their main source of theological education. It also fosters a deeper awareness of the ongoing, active, and experiential work of the Holy Spirit forming persons into Christ-likeness which strengthens, challenges, and forms the clergy spouse’s faith.

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<sup>48</sup> Gritsch, *Fortress Introduction*, 25.

<sup>49</sup> Hanson, *A Graceful Life*, 33.

## **Sociological Framework**

After exploring the theological and historical framework for an intentional Christian spiritual formation process for clergy spouses, we turn to the sociological framework. The priesthood of all believers is a core component of the clergy spouse's understanding of her purpose and role. Role identification and ownership becomes part of the dance of formation to which each clergy spouse is invited to engage. The spiritual disciplines are beneficial in helping the clergy spouse clarify and embrace her role and identity as a clergy spouse and ultimately as a child of God.

### **Priesthood of All Believers and the Clergy Spouse**

The foundational Lutheran doctrine of the priesthood of all believers, which invites all persons into a life of faith formation and ministry, establishes a solid directive for clergy, spouse and church community. Gritsch writes, "All Christians are commissioned by their baptism into a ministry on earth until Christ's second coming; this ministry is carried out either through a full-time, lifelong priesthood or through other vocations."<sup>50</sup> James Wilhoit echoes this claim: "The priesthood of all believers places equipping for spiritual service at the heart of the church's formational ministry."<sup>51</sup> Through the priesthood of all believers, clergy spouses are invited into transformative lives filled with the faith practices that challenge the clergy spouse to grow.

Olson quotes Stoeffler in his article on Pietism: "The priesthood of all believers was not the freedom of each to be saved in his own way, let alone the right of each 'to go

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<sup>50</sup> Gritsch, *Fortress Introduction*, 8; Strom, "Problems and Promises of Pietism Research," 551, notes the rise of Pietism opponents claimed the prominence of women in ministry was heretical, but their presence paved the way for women to begin claiming a public voice in ministry.

<sup>51</sup> James C. Wilhoit, *Spiritual Formation as if the Church Mattered: Growing in Christ through Community* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2008), 156.

to hell in his own way': it was rather the unlimited obligation which each had to seek the eternal well-being of all in God's inbreaking Kingdom."<sup>52</sup> This is a direct invitation to hear the call that has been placed on the clergy spouse alongside the ordained partner. Although the call may not be to rostered ministry, it recognizes and honors that God places a call on each person's life.<sup>53</sup>

When a clergy spouse embraces her role, she also accepts this as part of her God-given call. Hanson's charge to all Lutherans to embrace their call to ministry is applicable to the clergy spouses' journey: "Although normally only ordained ministers publicly proclaim the word and administer the sacraments, all Christian believers are called by God to minister to others."<sup>54</sup> Susie Hawkins speaks to the impact a call to ministry has on the clergy spouse: "If our husbands are called to ministry, then we share that calling also... You may not be employed by a church as he is, but that does not mean you do not share a calling by God to ministry."<sup>55</sup> Gritsch echoes the belief that all are called to a life of ministry:

Since Lutheranism views the ministry of the baptized as service through the vocations and callings of its members, pastors should encourage and support the members in their mission to witness to Christ in the world. The ordained and non-ordained constitute a partnership in representing the embodied Word of God in the world. Whether in the ordained public ministry of word and sacrament or in another vocation, faithfulness to ministry means doing one's best.<sup>56</sup>

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<sup>52</sup> Olson, "Pietism," 14; Strom, "The Common Priesthood," 43, writes: "Timothy Wengert has argued that the priesthood of all believers in Luther is a 'pious myth' concocted by later Protestants, especially Pietists."

<sup>53</sup> The ELCA list of rostered leaders encompasses ordained clergy and chaplains and rostered laity including: Associates in Ministry, Diaconal Ministers, and Deaconesses.

<sup>54</sup> Hanson, *A Graceful Life*, 115.

<sup>55</sup> Susie Hawkins, *From One Ministry Wife to Another*, 37.

<sup>56</sup> Gritsch, *Fortress Introduction*, 111.

Through the sacrament of baptism and the belief in the priesthood of all believers, all persons are commissioned into a life of ministry.

### **Call and Acceptance of the Clergy Spouse Role**

In their research on clergy spouses, Fredrickson and Smith make the following discovery:

With a call to ordained and full-time ministry, the balance of the marriage or union is challenged. The two individuals find that their vision of what their common life would be changed.... While both partners follow Jesus, it is this equality before God that becomes a foundation for a marriage or union that honors the gifts and faith of both.<sup>57</sup>

However, not all persons married to a pastor feel compelled to enter a spiritual formation process, and more clergy spouses are viewing the ‘professional’ call as distinct and separate from a ‘family’ call to ministry. In their research on clergy families, Mickey and Ashmore discovered that clergy families no longer view religion as a unifying experience for the clergy family as it was in 1965.<sup>58</sup> Lutheran clergy spouses were traditionally expected to be model leaders in their homes, congregations, and communities. They were expected to be an extension of their partner’s ministry and were asked to serve as unofficial assistant ministers without theological training.<sup>59</sup>

Although clergy spouses today appear to experience more autonomy, most are still expected to be exemplary spouses and parents, or at least appear to be so in their

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<sup>57</sup> Johnna Fredrickson and William A. Smith, *How the Other Half Lives: The Challenges Facing Clergy Spouses and Partners* (Cleveland: Pilgrim Press, 2010), 11.

<sup>58</sup> Paul A. Mickey and Ginny W. Ashmore, *Clergy Families: Is Normal Life Possible?* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1991), 38.

<sup>59</sup> David Cecil Baker, “Predictors of Well-Being among Wives of Lutheran Parish Pastors” (PhD diss., Texas Tech University, 1988), 16, accessed January 5, 2015, <http://hdl.handle.net.georgefox.idm.oclc.org/2346/8800>.

highly visible relationships and roles. Lee and Iverson-Gilbert's research raises the concern that not all clergy family members share the call to ministry equally, and if left unrecognized, resentment can build and questions of family identity surface. They write, "A clergy family should share meaning not only with regard to its own identity, but the purpose of ministry. To put the matter differently, does the family live according to a jointly held and articulated sense of mission?"<sup>60</sup> Therefore, what happens to the clergy family and ministry if the clergy family does not hold an articulated sense of mission? What happens to the clergy spouse, the marriage, and the ministry, if the clergy spouse does not feel called to clergy family life?

This dissertation encourages clergy families to reflect on the intentionality with which each person participates in their spiritual journey. If only the 'professional' member of the partnership is participating in the life of the church, this may impact the formative process in their relationships with each other, with God, and with the faith community. Strom writes, "Spener, like Grossgebauer, Vilitz, and to a certain extent Betke, decried the fact that the 'so-called' laity largely neglected all spiritual acts and left the study of Scripture, prayer, teaching, and admonishing fellow Christians to the clergy alone."<sup>61</sup> When the clergy spouse neglects her spiritual formation, she is more apt to experience spiritual isolation, frustration, and resentment.

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<sup>60</sup> Cameron Lee and Judith Iverson-Gilbert, "Demand, Support, and Perception in Family-Related Stress among Protestant Clergy," *Family Relations* 52, no. 3 (2003): 255, accessed March 11, 2014, SocINDEX.

<sup>61</sup> Strom, "The Common Priesthood," 48; Duane Paul Alleman, "The Psychosocial Adjustment of Pastors' Wives" (PhD diss., Fuller Theological Seminary, 1987), 18, discovered in his research on pastors' wives that, "the wives of Episcopal-Lutheran-Presbyterian ministers were more frequently 'relatively detached' from their husbands' work, regarding it as 'his profession rather than their common calling.'"



Some clergy families do not see themselves on a mutual journey of faith and choose to lead divergent but complementary lives, in which case, Fredrickson and Smith express concern:

Sometimes no common ground can be found, no agreement on how personal life and public ministry relate seems available. There may be no common ground of baptism, no shared faith, and no way to lead lives that complement each other. In this case, the one 'called' leaves the partner behind in the boat, holding the nets and perhaps the remains of their former family life.<sup>62</sup>

Challenges arise within the clergy family especially when ordination is pursued and a call is taken in spite of the clergy spouse's wishes. Fredrickson and Smith claim, "A covenant relationship cannot survive unless mutual regard for the gifts of both involved remains.

Disregard for the faith journey of either partner leads to spiritual resentment and bankruptcy that can shatter marriages and unions."<sup>63</sup> Trefsgar expresses concern that some denominational studies indicate that half of all couples who leave the ministry early are prompted by the spouse's unhappiness.<sup>64</sup> She also notes, "Eighty percent of pastors' wives feel pressured to be someone they are not and do things they are not called to do in the church."<sup>65</sup> It is not surprising to find that clergy couples who together embrace a family call into ministry thrive better than those that compartmentalize ministry into a professional job or career that the pastor 'does.'

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<sup>62</sup> Fredrickson and Smith, *How the Other Half Lives*, 15.

<sup>63</sup> Ibid., 21; Frank J. Stalfa Jr., "Protestant Clergy Marriage in the Congregational Context: A Report from the Field," *Journal of Pastoral Care and Counseling* 62, no. 3 (September 1, 2008): 249, accessed November 10, 2013, ATLA Religion Database with ATLASerials claims, "Unless the clergy spouse has a sound identification with the purposes of ministry and the value of the faith community, effective pastoral ministry is virtually impossible."<sup>63</sup>

<sup>64</sup> Sheryl Trefsgar, "Ministering to the Minister's Wife: Preparation for Life in the Pastorate" (DMin diss., Westminster Theological Seminary, 2010), 54; According to Lee and Iverson-Gilbert, "Demand, Support, and Perception," 249, "Nearly half of the respondents agreed that pastoring had been difficult on their families, and this was one important reason reported by clergy for leaving the ministry."

<sup>65</sup> Trefsgar, "Ministering to the Minister's Wife," 72.

## Healthy Differentiation

One of the challenges clergy spouses encounter is to define their person apart from their role as the pastor's spouse, but this is a critical formative opportunity for the clergy spouse. When clergy spouses participate in the Christian spiritual formation process, they are electing to be transformed by the powerful mercy and grace of God into the likeness of Christ and living into the call that God places on each person's life. More clergy have attempted to stress that they are the ones hired by the church, not their spouses, in response to the traditional expectation of a church receiving a free worker in the form of the clergy spouse. However, encouraging healthy differentiation of roles and expectations has led to an attitude that views the clergy spouse as just another parishioner who can choose to be involved in the parish however he or she wishes. Trefsgar notes that the clergy spouse who understands the call to ministry will realize that the "first allegiance is to the will of her Father and not to the overwhelming and everpresent needs of the people in her church family."<sup>66</sup>

Despite the desire and need for healthy differentiation, the clergy spouse is not just another lay person. Being married to a pastor changes the way a spouse experiences the community of faith, and, inevitably, the spouse changes the way he or she acts due to the ascribed role of being the pastor's spouse. Susie Hawkins writes, "Like it or not, church members watch the ministry family. If the minister's wife and children have a degree of involvement in church life, it gives great credibility to the leadership of the minister."<sup>67</sup> Tracy Miller echoes this sentiment when she names the challenge of role

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<sup>66</sup> Ibid., 37.

<sup>67</sup> Susie Hawkins, "From One Ministry Wife to Another," 96.

differentiation: “Like it or not, the clergy spouse’s identity in the parish is defined by his or her marriage to the priest.”<sup>68</sup>

Fredrickson and Smith acknowledge some of the challenges clergy families encounter: “The covenant partners are no longer on equal footing within the faith community. Even if the faith community is willing and able to foster the faith lives of both, the roles have changed. Being a minister is a public role, being a spouse a semiprivate one. Everyone knows who the partner is, but what is the place for him or her?”<sup>69</sup> Sadly, some congregations view the clergy spouse as an extension of the pastor instead of an entity into his or her own right. If the spouse begins to believe this reality, Fredrickson and Smith acknowledge that “something precious is lost: the profound truth that before God the working out of baptismal ministry is a holy and blessed endeavor. No one should ever be made to feel like the shadow of another, especially in faith.”<sup>70</sup>

When congregations call a married pastor, they establish an implicit relationship with the spouse. Stalfa states, “No matter how carefully boundaries are delineated or how clearly roles and expectations of the ordained spouse are understood, the natural intimacy between pastor and congregation tends to set up powerful dynamics within the clergy marriage.”<sup>71</sup> The stated and unstated expectations that clergy spouses experience inevitably place undue stress on their marriages and families, thus impacting their

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<sup>68</sup> Tracy Wells Miller, “Not Just another Layperson: The Unique Position of Clergy Spouses,” *From the Mountain*, Spring 2011, 14-15, accessed November 1, 2013, [theology.sewanee.edu/assets/uploads/ClergySpouses\\_FTMFALL11.pdf](http://theology.sewanee.edu/assets/uploads/ClergySpouses_FTMFALL11.pdf).

<sup>69</sup> Fredrickson and Smith, *How the Other Half Lives*, 22.

<sup>70</sup> *Ibid.*, 26.

<sup>71</sup> Stalfa, “Protestant Clergy Marriage,” 257.

spouses' ability to sustain an effective ministry.<sup>72</sup> Social roles, patterns of expectations, duties, obligations, and responsibilities are all included within the stated and embedded theological messages of a faith community. Traditionally, clergy spouses have chosen from three primary models, whether this places the needs of the church above the family, the family above the church, or a balanced approach.<sup>73</sup> Society is changing and the Lutheran Church does not adhere to the traditional clergy spouse roles as rigidly as some other denominations. Alleman's research on the psychosocial adjustment of pastors' wives suggests that pastors' wives within mainline denominational groups are becoming less active in their husbands' ministries than was true in the past.<sup>74</sup>

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<sup>72</sup> Mary LaGrand Bouma, "Ministers' Wives: The Walking Wounded," *Leadership* (1980): 63, identified in her article that clergy rank third in the number of divorces granted each year; See also Polly S. Roberts, Hildy G. Getz, and Gary E. Skaggs, "Alleviating Stress in Clergy Wives," *Journal of Spirituality in Mental Health* 9, no. 1 (2006): 36, accessed November 14, 2013, [http://dx.doi.org/10.1300/J515v09n01\\_03](http://dx.doi.org/10.1300/J515v09n01_03).

<sup>73</sup> John Cattich, "Three Models of Clergy Systems: Analysis of Couple Processes and Spiritual Meaning," *Pastoral Psychology* 61, no. 2 (2012): 179 and 185, accessed November 1, 2013, Academic Search Premier. Further reading on this subject can be found in the work of Alleman, "The Psychosocial Adjustment of Pastors' Wives," 159. Alleman categorized the roles of clergy spouses into four main areas: 1. The Assistant – This clergy spouse shares pastoral responsibilities and acts as the pastor's 'right arm'. 2. The Partner – This clergy spouse develops a ministry alongside her partner and serves as his or her pastor. 3. The Companion – This clergy spouse ministers to her or his partner within the home in order that the pastor can more effectively pursue his or her sacred calling. 4. The Sacrificer – This clergy spouse asks little from her or his partner, financially or emotionally, and raises the children alone in order that her or his partner's work remains unhindered.

<sup>74</sup> Alleman, "The Psychosocial Adjustment of Pastors' Wives," 159.

## Role Identification

Based on Platt and Moss's research, three primary clergy spouse roles surface:

1. Team worker – This clergy spouse understands his or her role as being highly active in their spouse's ministry.
2. Background supporter – This clergy spouse sees himself or herself primarily in the role of spouse and parent.
3. Aloof participant – This clergy spouse married the person but not the pastor, and is almost never evident in the congregation.<sup>75</sup>

The role of a clergy spouse is also defined by the expectations of a denomination, region of the country, local church history, and seasons of life. Role identification and ownership becomes part of the dance of formation in which each clergy spouse is invited to engage. Whichever model takes precedence or whichever role is taken, it tends to be a systemic response to the interactions between clergy intentionality, the clergy spouse role, and congregational expectations.

Clergy spouses can feel overwhelmed by the undefined expectations and various demands from their family and the congregation. Platt and Moss reveal that varying expectations are often a driving force in clergy spouse preparation. "It is safe to say that seminary spouses cannot be trained to be clergy spouses. However, their main concern is often built on the expectations of future parish situations, along with their vulnerability and questions about those expectations."<sup>76</sup> While seminary would appear to be an ideal time to offer support for the clergy spouse, David Baker's research shows that the first

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<sup>75</sup> Nancy van Dyke Platt and David Moss, "The Priest's Husband," *Journal of Religion and Health* 49, no. 2 (June 2010): 235, accessed November 10, 2013, Academic Search Premier; Miller, "Not Just another Layperson," 15; Lenore Knight Johnson offers three models for clergy spouse roles in "Models of Clergy Spouse Involvement in Protestant Christian Congregations," *Review of Religious Research* 54, no. 1 (March 2012): 21, accessed November 4, 2013, Academic Search Premier. Her model for clergy spouse roles reflects Luther's concept of the priesthood of all believers in the ways which clergy spouses support their partners in ministry. She identified three primary models – the partnership model, the layperson model, and the independent model.

<sup>76</sup> Platt and Moss, "The Priest's Husband," 236.

five years after the seminarian's ordination are the most difficult for the spouse to adjust to the new role as clergy spouse.<sup>77</sup> Lee and Iverson-Gilbert address the challenges new pastors face. "Seminarians, particularly those with little life or no direct experience of being in professional ministry, may enter their first pastoral assignment with unrealistic expectations of the level of care, concern and even emotional health that they will confront in their parishioners."<sup>78</sup> While Lee and Iverson-Gilbert name the unrealistic expectations new ministers face, clergy spouses often enter the first ministerial family call with unrealistic expectations which creates frustration and resentment towards the congregation and the clergy partner.

In spite of Luther's convictions surrounding the priesthood of all believers, Lutheran seminaries have not historically prioritized the Christian spiritual formation of clergy spouses as a vital component of healthy clergy families. When the seminaries support spouses in their formation alongside the students' seminary journeys, they recognize and honor the clergy spouses' distinctive call. Whether this becomes a call to serve the church or a vocational call outside of the church, all are called to a life of ministry. In his dissertation, Steven George Bechtold writes, "The personal and congregational struggle of discerning the direction God intends for their ministry begins with the need to affirm each person's story as a significant expression of God's activity in their lives."<sup>79</sup>

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<sup>77</sup> Baker, "Predictors," 139.

<sup>78</sup> Lee and Iverson-Gilbert, "Demand, Support, and Perception," 255.

<sup>79</sup> Steven George Bechtold, "The Discernment of a Spiritual Foundation for Ministry through the Use of Spiritual Disciplines in Small Groups" (DMin diss., Drew University, 1995), 1.

We have proposed a series of critical issues that clergy spouses encounter—issues revolving around the clergy spouse’s acceptance of her personal and spiritual identity, as a believer, and as co-partner in ministry. First, she is challenged to embrace the ministerial call that God places on her life through the priesthood of all believers. Second, she must decipher what her family’s mission is and her role in it. Finally, she will contend with managing the expectations of others and of herself. The clergy spouse of a Lutheran pastor is uniquely shaped by her theological, historical and sociological framework. We believe the Church is called to foster authentic relationships with and in the community, enabling persons to grow and develop. Perhaps this will spark acceptance of the ancient disciplines that have historically been rejected out of fear, bias or suspicion. The question remains if the Church can be a conduit for fostering faith practices of clergy spouses within a community of faith. Our Lutheran heritage invites clergy spouses to approach these critical issues through the use of Sabbath practice, Scripture reading, and prayer on their journey towards health and wholeness.

## CHAPTER THREE

### SPIRITUAL DISCIPLINES AND FORMATIVE PRACTICES

#### Introduction

In his book on the interplay between spiritual formation and the spiritual disciplines, Robert Mulholland writes, “The core of spiritual formation is the process of breaking the crust of self and bringing forth a new creation in the image of Christ—breaking the distorted word we have become, and bringing forth the word God speaks us forth to be in the world.”<sup>1</sup> Spiritual formation is the process of transformation, and spiritual disciplines create a posture that allows the clergy spouse to be transformed by God and to gracefully embrace the role of clergy spouse. Martin Luther describes the inherent grace embedded throughout life’s transformative journey:

This life is not godliness but the process of becoming godly, not health but getting well, not being but becoming, not rest but exercise. We are not now what we shall be, but we are on the way. The process is not yet finished, but it is actively going on. This is not the goal but it is the right road. At present, everything does not gleam or sparkle, but everything is being cleansed.<sup>2</sup>

In agreement with Luther, we propose that the spiritual disciplines are vital components in helping the clergy spouse embrace her role as a clergy spouse and engage clergy family life feeling empowered and strengthened.

I have discovered through my counseling practice that accepting we are God-reliant for spiritual transformation is a challenge most clergy spouses struggle to embrace, but the spiritual disciplines place the clergy spouse in a receptive state that

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<sup>1</sup> M. Robert Mulholland Jr., *Shaped by the Word: The Power of Scripture in Spiritual Formation*, rev. ed. (Nashville: Upper Room, 2001), 113.

<sup>2</sup> Martin Luther, *Luther’s Works, Vol 32: Career of the Reformer II* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress), CD-ROM, 24.



heightens her openness to the transformation process. The spiritual disciplines place her in a posture of receiving. Through this posture of receiving, the clergy spouse recognizes her dependence—specifically, her dependence upon God. Beverly Vos writes about the intersection of the spiritual disciplines and Christian ministry: “While we are self-reliant and other-reliant for our personal and spiritual formation, we are totally God-reliant for our spiritual transformation.”<sup>3</sup>

The spiritual disciplines are not the end, but rather the means through which the clergy spouse places herself before God in order to be transformed.<sup>4</sup> The spiritual disciplines are a means of “loving obedience offered to God to be used for God’s purposes in our lives. Anything and everything we do can be a spiritual discipline if we offer it to God as a means for God to use in our lives if God so chooses.”<sup>5</sup> Richard Foster describes the spiritual disciplines in this way: “The Disciplines are God’s way of getting us into the ground; they put us where he can work within and transform us. By themselves the Spiritual Disciplines can do nothing; they can only get us to the place where something can be done. They are God’s means of grace.”<sup>6</sup> The sacraments are a means for receiving God’s grace, so Foster’s statement invites Lutherans to ponder

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<sup>3</sup> Beverly Vos, “The Spiritual Disciplines and Christian Ministry,” *Evangelical Review of Theology* 36, no. 2 (2012): 102, accessed May 14, 2014, Academic Search Premier; Richard J. Foster, *Sanctuary of the Soul: Journey into Meditative Prayer* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Books, 2011), 28, writes: “You are not in charge of the transformation of your heart. Neither am I. This is God’s domain, and you and I are utterly dependent on God to accomplish the work of heart transformation.”

<sup>4</sup> Vos, “The Spiritual Disciplines,” 102; Jonathan Morrow, “Introducing Spiritual Formation,” in *Foundations of Spiritual Formation: A Community Approach to Becoming Like Christ* (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Academic & Professional, 2008), 48; Phillip Carnes, “That They May One: Spiritual Formation and Its Locus in Community” (DMin diss., George Fox Evangelical Seminary, 2009), 14.

<sup>5</sup> Mulholland, *Shaped by the Word*, 114.

<sup>6</sup> Richard Foster, *Celebration of Discipline: The Path to Spiritual Growth*, 20<sup>th</sup> ed. (New York: Harper San Francisco, 1998), 7; Mulholland, *Shaped by the Word*, 114, defines a spiritual discipline as “something we offer to God as a means of God’s grace in our lives.”

whether the spiritual disciplines are sacramental in nature as a means for deepening our relationships with God, self, and others.<sup>7</sup>

Faith practices surround us, and we encourage clergy spouses to identify the formative practices they engage.<sup>8</sup> Thomas Edward Frank defines a practice as “an incarnational term for means of grace by which God is in the world. Every congregation is constituted by practices of seeking, inviting, hoping for God.”<sup>9</sup> Faith practices are more than actions as they are rooted in history and developed over time in communities and across generations. These ancient disciplines ground us in the Sacred Story and root us in our common Christian heritage, forming us as individuals and communities of faith. Faith practices are more than a means to an end and should be valued beyond their functionality or ability to achieve results. Frank reminds Christians that practices are a “kind of witness, together constituting a distinctive way of life.”<sup>10</sup> Historically, Lutherans have recognized the interconnectivity between faith and life, and faith practices are a tangible witness and reminder of their faith. Therefore, faith practices root the clergy spouse in her Christian identity offering solid footing for embracing her call alongside her partner.

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<sup>7</sup> Carter Lindberg, *The Third Reformation: Charismatic Movements and the Lutheran Tradition* (Macon, GA: Mercer Univ Pr, 1983), 159, discusses Gottfried Arnold’s perspective on the sacramental nature of rebirth and the Pietist movement. This offers an interesting perspective to the sacrament conversation.

<sup>8</sup> As a Church, Lutherans tend to be more receptive to the term ‘faith practices’ instead of ‘spiritual disciplines’ even though both terms refer to living faithfully through an intentional discipleship process.

<sup>9</sup> Thomas Edward Frank, *The Soul of the Congregation: An Invitation to Congregational Reflection* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2000), 48.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid., 46-47, writes: “Practices sustain and carry forward traditions, bringing together the heritage of a local congregation with the heritage of larger denominational and confessional groups.”

The use of the spiritual disciplines helps clarify the beliefs, behaviors, and attitudes that nurture and give expression to faith.<sup>11</sup> A faith practice is complex: it is small enough to be an individualistic means to deepen a relationship with God, self, and others, yet it is large enough to be implemented as a means to develop a faith community. Faith practices address fundamental human needs and form a way of life, yet the Lutheran Church has struggled to identify, implement, and encourage them. Since the spiritual disciplines have a tendency to create discomfort and tension as a person engages the process of transformation, it has been easier to dismiss or overlook the spiritual disciplines in favor of other forms of faith development, such as Sunday school or confirmation. This has often left the clergy spouse struggling in her spiritual isolation without resources or tools to maneuver through the spiritual journey.

As people of faith, we engage in multiple faith practices in one form or another, often without awareness. For example, the spiritual discipline of Sabbath-keeping is practiced as we rest, and the spiritual discipline of hospitality is practiced simply by meeting new people. However, most clergy spouses do not intentionally engage these acts with the purpose of deepening their relationships with God, with ourselves, and with the world. When a clergy spouse intentionally engages the spiritual disciplines, however, something profound and wonderful takes place; basic human interactions become a reflection of God's presence and responsive to God's love and grace. The process of spiritual formation shifts her natural tendency to seek personal gratification through her ego-centric needs into a posture of openness and receptivity to the workings of God in her life and the lives around her. Mulholland writes, "Genuine spiritual formation brings

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<sup>11</sup> "What Are Christian Practices?" Practicing Our Faith, accessed September 8, 2014, <http://www.practicingourfaith.org/what-are-christian-practices>: "Our practices are shaped by our beliefs, and our beliefs arise from and take on meaning within our practices."

about a fundamental shift from being our own production to being God's creation."<sup>12</sup>

When a clergy spouse is willing to be open and receptive to the process of transformation, we propose it allows her to move into a state of acceptance of her clergy spouse role, which in turn helps foster healthy clergy families and ministries.

### **The Transformative Nature of the Spiritual Disciplines**

We are constantly being conformed by the world and the relationships in which we engage. Being mindful and aware of the formative process helps us understand the interplay between our beliefs and actions, recognizing that we cannot separate ourselves from this dance. The word 'formation' implies a method or an image in which we are seeking to be fashioned, and as Christians we seek to conform—to be shaped into—by the wisdom and instructions of Jesus Christ. The question becomes, how? Sophia Steibel describes the difference between Christian education and formation: "The element of intentionality and purpose for teaching and learning is unique to Christian education while such themes as the awareness of the true self, mystical encounters, and spiritual practices are distinguishing themes in spiritual formation."<sup>13</sup>

The primary aim of a clergy spouse's Christian spiritual formation process is to manifest Christ and identify God as the designated leader in the sacred dance between engaging and distancing with the world. Karen Marie Yust and E. Byron Anderson in their book, *Taught by God: Teaching and Spiritual Formation* describe the spiritual life as "a movement between inward reflection and outward service, calling forth a new

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<sup>12</sup> Mulholland, *Shaped by the Word*, 27.

<sup>13</sup> Sophia R. G. Steibel, "Christian Education and Spiritual Formation: One and the Same?" *Christian Education Journal* 7, no. 2 (September 2010): 342, accessed November 10, 2013, ATLASerials, Religion Collection.

vision of the self as a child of God and the world as God's creation."<sup>14</sup> This dance reflects the transformation that occurs when the clergy spouse engages the inward and outward expressions of faith. When a clergy spouse comes into alignment with Christ, her ideas, beliefs, feelings, and behaviors are renovated in addition to her relationships and social interactions.

Christian formation incorporates the process of being present to God, to self, to others, and to creation while being formed by God. Tension is a part of the Christian spiritual formation process and should not be confused with nonbelief. It is a normalizing process whereby the clergy spouse begins to embrace the spiritual journey and practice the spiritual disciplines that will train her to be more in tune with the music of God's voice. The transformation process invites clergy spouses to engage essential Christian beliefs and disciplines that help form lifelong patterns of spiritual formation. Ironically, the places of discomfort hold some of the most profound opportunities for transformation and growth. Although the inclination is to surround oneself with persons of affinity or situations of comfort, it is in challenging groups and situations that the clergy spouse is forced to die to self in order to be formed into the likeness of Christ. These areas of resistance tend to highlight the parts of life that need to be offered to God for transformation.

Some researchers, authors, and theologians have attempted to understand the spiritual formation process by compartmentalizing it into stages or tasks to be accomplished. This dissertation agrees with the independent premises that Henri J.M. Nouwen and James Wilhoit propose regarding the internal and external aspects of the

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<sup>14</sup> Karen Marie Yust and E. Byron Anderson, *Taught by God: Teaching and Spiritual Formation* (St. Louis: Chalice Press, 2006), 53.

spiritual formation process. Nouwen describes the transformative nature of the spiritual formation process and the challenges that lie therein by separating spiritual formation into two separate journeys:

Spiritual formation...requires both a journey inward and journey outward. The journey inward is the journey to find the Christ dwelling within us. The journey outward is the journey to find the Christ dwelling among us and in the world. The journey inward calls for the disciplines of solitude, silence, prayer, meditation, contemplation, and attentiveness to the movements of our heart. The journey outward in community and mission calls for the disciplines of care, compassion, witness, outreach, healing, accountability, and attentiveness to the movement of other people's hearts. These two journeys belong together to strengthen each other and should never be separated.<sup>15</sup>

Wilhoit proposes that spiritual formation has two sides: the formative and receptive. On the formative side, the clergy spouse grows by teaching, administering the sacraments, and ministering to others. On the alternate side, the clergy spouse works at creating an environment of receptivity that fosters a continuous flow of gifting to and receiving from God and others.<sup>16</sup> Similarly, Nouwen addresses the need for openness and receptivity to invite God's transformative handiwork. He writes, "If theological reflection is an openness of one's mind to God's truth and wisdom, spiritual formation is the openness of one's heart in gratitude to God and God's people. Both require a radical receptivity to God's great gift of life and a consistent spiritual practice to slowly create space for God to be revealed."<sup>17</sup> A clergy spouse's openness and receptivity to God's transformation can reduce the discomfort and resistance that may be experienced in this formative journey.

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<sup>15</sup> Henri J.M. Nouwen, *Spiritual Formation: Following the Movements of the Spirit* (New York: HarperOne, 2010), 123.

<sup>16</sup> James C. Wilhoit, *Spiritual Formation as if the Church Mattered: Growing in Christ through Community* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2008), 63.

<sup>17</sup> Nouwen, *Spiritual Formation*, 22.

The spiritual formation process invites intentional engagement with God and the transformation God seeks in our lives.<sup>18</sup> However, our society tends to lack a general acceptance of the spiritual disciplines in Christian life.<sup>19</sup> While the evangelical Church is growing in its awareness of the spiritual disciplines, it has been less apt to encourage discipline with formative practices particularly for clergy spouses. Nouwen challenges Christians to examine the intentionality with which they engage their faith lives: “We can’t expect to be formed in faith without committing to living a spiritual life with regular spiritual disciplines or practices.”<sup>20</sup> Yet, the assumption remains that one’s spiritual life will develop and grow without intentionality and discipline. Just like a person who expects physical transformation chooses a disciplined life of exercise and healthy eating, a clergy spouse who seeks spiritual growth must engage a life filled with the discipline of the faith practices.

Many churches have become programmatic institutions instead of sacred spaces that foster spiritual formation. Anne Dilenschneider expresses a very real concern that “as a result of their own poverty in spiritual formation and relationship with God, pastors are not prepared to help people build relationships with God.”<sup>21</sup> When a church is lacking a spiritual guide, it becomes challenging for members to engage a life filled with the

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<sup>18</sup> Klaus Issler, “The Soul and Spiritual Formation,” in *Foundations of Spiritual Formation: A Community Approach to Becoming Like Christ* (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Academic & Professional, 2008), 140, writes: “Spiritual formation is not a work we do alone or in isolation from God. We intentionally make space for God to do his work in us.”

<sup>19</sup> Foster, *Celebration of Discipline*, 3, echoes this sentiment when he writes: “Today there is an abysmal ignorance of the most simple and practical aspects of nearly all the classic Spiritual Disciplines.”

<sup>20</sup> Nouwen, *Spiritual Formation*, xxi.

<sup>21</sup> Anne Dilenschneider, “Soul Care and the Cause of Clergy Burnout,” *SpouseConnect: Where Ministers’ Spouses Can Find Community* (blog), August 25, 2010, accessed December 3, 2013, [spouseconnectblogspot.com/2010/08/soul-care-and-cause-of-clergy-burnout.html](http://spouseconnectblogspot.com/2010/08/soul-care-and-cause-of-clergy-burnout.html).

spiritual disciplines. It also makes it difficult for the clergy spouse to either learn from or lead others in the formation process, thus contributing further to her sense of spiritual isolation. If she chooses to engage the formation process without a spiritual guide, she may find herself on a solitary spiritual journey.

Historically, Lutherans have focused on select spiritual disciplines during specific seasons of the church year such as Advent and Lent. K. Glen Johnson challenges Lutherans to embrace the spiritual disciplines throughout the church year since they were practiced, taught, and encouraged by the reformers.<sup>22</sup> For example, Scripture reading is a core spiritual discipline among many Lutherans, particularly meditation on the Bible, as Luther believed Scripture meditation was a critical element in the spiritual discipline of prayer.<sup>23</sup> We see other examples of the spiritual disciplines when studying the Large Catechism. Luther utilized the spiritual discipline of prayer to examine the Lord's Prayer, and we can interpret Luther's invitation to Holy Communion as an example of the spiritual discipline of hospitality. We propose that the spiritual disciplines are tools to intentionally connect Christians to God and to other persons, therefore strengthening the clergy spouse's ability to embrace her call, manage expectations, and address spiritual loneliness. Conde-Frazier et al. write, "A spiritual practice is carried out, therefore, not because it works but because it is good. It is a way of connecting with God, our neighbors, and our environment. The outcome of the practice is beyond us, but it is something we do together consistently. In this way, we help one another grow. We learn

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<sup>22</sup> K. Glen Johnson, "Spiritual Disciplines," *Lutheran Forum* 40, no. 2 (Summer 2006): 75.

<sup>23</sup> Hanson, *A Graceful Life*, 74.



the practices in small increments of daily faithfulness.”<sup>24</sup> I concur with the charge Conde-Frazier and her colleagues propose, and I suggest the spiritual disciplines are beneficial to the spiritual health and well-being of the clergy spouse, noting the growth and transformation that occurs from a spirit-filled life.

### **Discipline and Discipleship in Relationship**

The word “discipline” summons a connection with discipleship. Practicing the spiritual disciplines is an intentional means of increasing the clergy spouse’s self-awareness as she draws closer to God. As a society, the tendency is to approach God with one’s wishes and desires instead of asking what God wants in one’s life. The spiritual disciplines enable the clergy spouse to reflect on God’s desires for her life and the call that God places on her life. Like any activity that requires discipline, discipleship necessitates practice and intentionality. Learning faith practices educates the clergy spouse about a practice in addition to offering the clergy spouse surprising insights about God, her neighbors, and the world.<sup>25</sup> Despite the benefits of intentionally practicing the spiritual disciplines, Nouwen is quick to warn: “Whereas discipline without discipleship leads to rigid formalism, discipleship without discipline ends in sentimental romanticism.”<sup>26</sup> Therefore, clergy spouses should practice the spiritual disciplines within a faith community, that offers accountability and feedback that ultimately leads to healthy spiritual formation.

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<sup>24</sup> Elizabeth Conde-Frazier, S. Steve Kang, and Gary A. Parrett, *A Many Colored Kingdom: Multicultural Dynamics for Spiritual Formation* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2004), 169.

<sup>25</sup> Dorothy C. Bass and Craig Dykstra, “Growing in the Practices of Faith,” *Practicing Our Faith: A Way of Life for a Searching People*, ed. Dorothy C. Bass (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1997), 200.

<sup>26</sup> Nouwen, *Spiritual Formation*, 18.

In addition to the formative benefits, faith practices offer opportunities for shaping communities, which helps address the spiritual isolation clergy spouses experience. Christian spiritual practices are ancient but surprisingly relevant in their ability to weave communities together in ways communities are unable to do on their own. Faith practices are adaptable and flexible as they find forms of expression in every faith community offering the clergy spouse a variety of ways she can experience and utilize the spiritual disciplines.<sup>27</sup> When practiced in community, the spiritual disciplines demonstrate their relationality as they remind us that we are God's. Darrell Bock echoes this sentiment: "We are not, as our culture repeatedly teaches us, independent agents free to live and do whatever we choose."<sup>28</sup> Even if she struggles to accept her role, the clergy spouse cannot remove herself from the relationship with God and others. Faith practices are a tool to remain in relationship despite the tension and angst the clergy spouse may experience.

Genuine spiritual formation is inseparable from one's relationship with God and others. Society vocalizes the belief that faith is a private matter that others, the community, and the world cannot impact. Contrary to what this individualistic society proclaims, transformation occurs most effectively in community. Through the power of community, faith flourishes and is strengthened. Romans 12:4-5 reminds Christians of the call to live as individuals within a community implementing both individual and corporate faith practices. The challenge remains for the clergy spouse who does not feel

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<sup>27</sup> Craig Dykstra and Dorothy C. Bass, "Times of Yearning, Practices of Faith," in *Practicing Our Faith: A Way of Life for a Searching People*, ed. Dorothy C. Bass (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1997), 7.

<sup>28</sup> Darrell Bock, "New Testament Community and Spiritual Formation," in *Foundations of Spiritual Formation: A Community Approach to Becoming Like Christ*, ed. Paul Pettit (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Academic & Professional, 2008), 109.

safe or secure in the faith community that corresponds with her partner's ministerial call. What are her options? Identifying a safe faith community can be a challenge to many clergy spouses, let alone a community where the clergy spouses can be authentic and vulnerable.

Nouwen said, "Christian spirituality not only flows from community but creates community. It nurtures the life of the Spirit in us, within us, and among us."<sup>29</sup> Spiritual formation is challenging and difficult, and a faith community is vital for health and longevity. Through the community of faith, persons bear one another's burdens and build each other up, but this does not always occur for the clergy spouse.<sup>30</sup> Her need to maintain healthy boundaries creates a barrier through which true community is more difficult to establish. In this case, it may be necessary for the clergy spouse to seek alternative faith communities where she can be authentic and vulnerable in an environment as described by Wilhoit:

Spiritual formation is concerned with facilitating spiritual change in people. People change most readily when they are in environments that foster change as they learn to live out their unique communal calling. Such environments supply both support and challenge, and participants accept community responsibility as a way of life.<sup>31</sup>

A gift of practicing the spiritual disciplines is the ability to participate in God's creative and transformative activity within the community of Christian faith and also in workplaces, homes, and the larger society. Although the spiritual disciplines may be utilized as individual practices, they are designed for practice in a community of

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<sup>29</sup> Nouwen, *Spiritual Formation*, xxvii.

<sup>30</sup> The following are passages that highlight the importance of a community of faith within the spiritual formation process: Gal 6:2; 1 Thess. 5:11; Eph. 4:12, 16, 29.

<sup>31</sup> Wilhoit, *Spiritual Formation*, 184.

believers, and this is where clergy spouses will experience the greatest impact. The clergy spouse is tasked with identifying a faith community where she feels safe and secure for the transformation process to occur.

Supportive relationships are necessary in ministry, as Lee and Iverson-Gilbert discovered, “The greater the number of supportive relationships a minister has, whether in his or her family, congregation, denomination, or community, the greater his or her well-being, life satisfaction, optimism, and marital satisfaction and the lower his or her burnout.”<sup>32</sup> Although Lee and Iverson-Gilbert’s research was geared towards ministers, clergy spouses and families also need supportive relationships for similar reasons. Biblical characters Priscilla and Aquila and Ruth and Naomi are ones who followed God’s call and worked in tandem toward the common mission while supporting each other in ministry. They stepped into a life of spiritual formation and service and incorporated practices that resemble spiritual disciplines into their lives, such as hospitality, worship, prayer, and mentoring.

### **Discipline and Discipleship in Practices**

Historically, Christians “covenanted with one another to strengthen their understanding of and participation in certain practices. Beginning in ancient times, groups of women or men founded religious orders defined by ‘rules’ that ordered the practices of the members.”<sup>33</sup> Philipp Jakob Spener writes, “It is by no means enough to

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<sup>32</sup> According to Cameron Lee and Judith Iverson-Gilbert, “Demand, Support, and Perception in Family-Related Stress among Protestant Clergy,” *Family Relations* 52, no. 3 (2003): 252, accessed March 11, 2014, SocINDEX.

<sup>33</sup> Bass and Dykstra, “Growing in the Practices,” 201.

have knowledge of the Christian faith, for Christianity consists rather of practice.”<sup>34</sup>

Throughout the Gospels, the biblical narrative offers concrete and specific acts of devotion that filled Jesus’ life. Wilhoit describes the devotional acts of Jesus in his book, *Spiritual Formation as if the Church Mattered*. He classifies Jesus’ devotional acts into three main areas:

1. private acts - solitude, prayer retreats
2. small group practices - pilgrimage, fellowship, teaching, sacraments, worship, and
3. large group meetings - teaching, synagogue worship, healing.<sup>35</sup>

The spiritual disciplines can similarly be classified into private and communal acts.

However, each aspect of the spiritual disciplines, whether private acts, small group practices, or large group meetings, is integral to the totality of spiritual formation and is an opportunity for the clergy spouse to embrace her spiritual growth and transformation.

We remember our connection to God and others as we listen to the stories of Christ in people’s lives, as we read and listen to the stories of the Bible, and as we practice the spiritual disciplines. Each of these acts helps us remain focused on God. As clergy spouses, it is helpful to listen to Ian Randall’s charge: “The primary means for spiritual formation is living closely in a community of believers who themselves know well the Christian Story and who are deeply and actively engaged in its practices.”<sup>36</sup>

Although there are benefits to practicing the spiritual disciplines independently and in solitude, the clergy spouse is encouraged to seek opportunities to practice the spiritual

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<sup>34</sup> Philipp Jakob Spener, “*Pia Desideria*,” in *Pietists: Selected Writings*, ed. Peter C. Erb (Ramsey, NJ: Paulist Press, 1983), 36.

<sup>35</sup> Wilhoit, *Spiritual Formation*, 40.

<sup>36</sup> Ian M Randall, “To Give the First Place to Spiritual Fervour Priorities for Seminary Education,” *Journal of European Baptist Studies* 7, no. 2 (2007): 9, accessed November 6, 2014, Religion and Philosophy Collection.

disciplines within a faith community of her choosing. This can be challenging for Westernized Christians due to our personal desire as well as society's encouragement to travel the spiritual journey alone. However, we are called into a community of believers. Nouwen writes, "Spiritual formation is not an exercise of private devotion but one of corporate spirituality. We do not have personal experiences of God, but together we are formed as the people of God."<sup>37</sup> Next we will take a closer look at the challenges of practicing spiritual disciplines while recognizing spiritual formation as the communal process of blessing and freedom it was intended to be

### **Challenges of Practicing the Spiritual Disciplines**

Spiritual formation invites transformation of the entire being; however, the challenge remains that practicing the spiritual disciplines does not necessarily guarantee emotional, physical, or spiritual health for the clergy spouse. If we are to believe that we are formed through our relationships with God, self, and others, then the Church is called to view spiritual formation as its primary task. Despite this charge, our society conceives spiritual formation as an individual endeavor that Christians practice alone with God.<sup>38</sup> This is particularly true with clergy spouses who are left to journey through the formation process without a guide, mentor, or even a safe faith community.

### **Danger of Performance**

Faith practices tend to be externalized and turned into a task that must be managed, accomplished and completed, instead of recognizing them for the intrinsic

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<sup>37</sup> Nouwen, *Spiritual Formation*, xxvi.

<sup>38</sup> Carnes, "That They May Be One," 2.

blessing they are meant to be. Foster challenges readers to examine the intent behind practicing the spiritual disciplines to avoid falling into a law-based Christianity:

If we are to progress in the spiritual walk so that the Disciplines are a blessing and not a curse, we must come to the place in our lives where we can lay down the everlasting burden of always needing to manage others. This drive, more than any single thing, will lead us to turn the Spiritual Disciplines into laws. Once we have made a law, we have an ‘externalism’ by which we judge who is measuring up and who is not. Without laws the Disciplines are primarily an internal work. When we genuinely believe that inner transformation is God’s work and not ours, we can put to rest our passion to set others straight.<sup>39</sup>

The danger of trying to emulate the ‘right’ behavior lies in our interpretation of what is ‘right’ or ‘wrong’. By focusing on performing ‘right’ behavior, the focus shifts away from the formative opportunities the biblical narrative may be offering. Clergy spouses can fall into similar trappings when the spiritual disciplines are viewed as tasks to perform correctly in order to achieve the desired religious impact.

Another danger of engaging a life of the spiritual disciplines is the tendency to tie worth to accomplishments. The use of formative practices challenges Lutherans to embrace what can be perceived as works righteousness in the face of grace alone.

Mulholland describes this dilemma in his book, *Shaped by the Word*:

Our spiritual disciplines must emerge from our relationship with God if they are to become a means of grace to free us from our misformed false self and form us in the image of Christ. The first thing that happens if our spiritual disciplines don’t emerge from our relationship with God is that they become a very subtle and destructive form of works-righteousness. They become a means by which we either attempt to transform ourselves into the image of Christ or attempt to gain God’s favor. When this happens, scripture becomes a collection of rules or behaviors to be observed in order to achieve the desired results.<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>39</sup> Foster, *Celebration of Discipline*, 10.

<sup>40</sup> Mulholland, *Shaped by the Word*, 94.

Rick Langer expresses a similar concern in that discipleship can focus on the task at the expense of being conformed: “Our doing flows out of our being. In spiritual formation, the problem with being conformed is that we have a strong tendency to think that if only we do the right things we will be the right kind of Christian, as though our doing would bring about our being.”<sup>41</sup> This mirrors the Lutheran debate of grace versus works righteousness. However, it is a challenge to focus on the process of being conformed in a society that is performance-oriented. Langer challenges Christians to clarify the process of ‘doing’ by examining the perception that ‘doing’ and ‘being’ could potentially be the same concept on different ends of the spectrum. He writes:

We need to clarify our discourse of doing. Prayer, meditation, and listening are all things we do. In fact, resting is something we do. The spiritual formation movement has been right to point out our neglect of these disciplines, but it might be better to label this correction as a replacing some activities with other activities instead of a replacing doing with being. This would force people to distinguish more carefully between different kinds of doing.<sup>42</sup>

The performance aspect of practicing the spiritual disciplines can interfere with the clergy spouse’s formative process, thereby undermining the potential benefits.

In his book on spiritual practices, Tony Jones invites Christians to engage in the spiritual disciplines “not out of duty or obligation but because there is a promise attached: God will personally meet us in the midst of these disciplines.”<sup>43</sup> Clergy spouses are invited to take heed of Jones’ invitation to see the freedom the spiritual practices offer when they are integrated into everyday life. Spiritual disciplines are a component of the

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<sup>41</sup> Rick Langer, “Points of Unease with the Spiritual Formation Movement,” *Journal of Spiritual Formation and Soul Care* 5, no. 2 (2012): 194, accessed November 6, 2014, Academic Search Premier.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid., 199.

<sup>43</sup> Tony Jones, *The Sacred Way: Spiritual Practices for Everyday Life* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan/Youth Specialties, 2005), 18.



formation process, but their inherent blessing dissipates if they become the sole focus of the discipleship process. As with any behavior we choose to engage, intentionality and awareness are vital to prevent the action from becoming the goal instead of the practice serving as a means to develop deeper relationships with God, self, and others.

Despite the natural inclination to implement a program, follow a process, or complete a task, the spiritual formation process cannot be undertaken in hopes that transformation will occur through these means alone.<sup>44</sup> Nouwen warns Christians to be wary of becoming performance-oriented in a society that places great value in tangible, measurable progress and achievement.<sup>45</sup> The spiritual disciplines are countercultural in they offer profound transformation through their discomfort and ability to intrude in those areas of life where God seeks to liberate us. The desert saints of the Early Church believed that struggle was a mark of transformation and encouraged Christians to embark upon a life filled with the ascetic spiritual disciplines. For the desert saints, a struggle demonstrated that the believer was taking the Christian faith seriously.<sup>46</sup> Although the idea of inviting discomfort and tension into one's life may be unappealing to the clergy spouse, the transformative benefits are one of the primary reasons to engage a life filled with the spiritual disciplines. When the clergy spouse experiences resistance engaging a faith practice, this may be a crucial point for spiritual formation; it may be a place of

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<sup>44</sup> Dallas Willard, "Spiritual Formation in Christ: A Perspective on What It Is and How It Might Be Done," *Spiritual Formation, Counseling, and Psychotherapy*, eds. Todd W. Hall and Mark R. McMinn (New York: Nova Science Pub Inc., 2003), 7, writes: "The realities of Christian spiritual formation are that we will not be transformed into his likeness by more information, or by infusions, inspirations, or ministrations alone."

<sup>45</sup> Nouwen, *Spiritual Formation*, xv.

<sup>46</sup> Gerald L. Sittser, *Water from a Deep Well: Christian Spirituality from Early Martyrs to Modern Missionaries* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Books, 2010), 30 and 74, writes: "Discipleship implies suffering, leads to persecution, tests mettle, demands steadfastness, requires endurance and even leads to death."

resistance with God or an area of growth she is reluctant to address. The places of discomfort are opportunities to experience God's work of transforming grace.

### **Power and Control**

Another challenge of practicing the spiritual disciplines is the issue of control and power, and discipline is an integral component of spiritual formation and the faith practices. In her article about neuroplasticity and spiritual growth, Sudi Kate Gliebe describes discipline as essential to spiritual maturity in that discipline creates space and openness for God to work on and in the clergy spouse.<sup>47</sup> When a clergy spouse regularly practices a spiritual discipline, she is more apt to abdicate her will to God's will. Through the formation process, the clergy spouse is invited to abandon her agenda and yield to God's will. Out of brokenness and desire to control the formative process, we believe we have the ability to choose and select the areas of spiritual growth and the corresponding spiritual discipline. Yet, when we do the choosing, we tend to pick spiritual disciplines that are comfortable and compatible with our current spiritual state. These choices limit the clergy spouse's opportunities for growth and transformation and keep her in bondage to those areas where she most needs God's grace.<sup>48</sup> It is normal to be fearful of the uncertainty that results in abdicating power and control to God, and Christian community offers the clergy spouse support, accountability, and partners in discernment to clarify those growth areas. Dykstra described the process of engaging the spiritual disciplines in this manner:

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<sup>47</sup> Sudi Kate Gliebe, "Neuroplasticity and Spiritual Growth: Weaving Circuits of Faith," *Lutheran Education* (2012): 3, accessed March 1, 2014, EBSCOhost.

<sup>48</sup> Mulholland, *Shaped by the Word*, 79-80, writes: "Ultimately spiritual disciplines are not something we choose for ourselves."

Christian practices are not activities we do to make something spiritual happen in our lives. Nor are they duties we undertake to be obedient to God. Rather, they are patterns of communal action that create openings in our lives where the grace, mercy, and presence of God may be made known to us. They are places where the power of God is experienced. In the end, these are not ultimately our practices but forms of participation in the practice of God.<sup>49</sup>

The challenge remains finding and fostering a safe faith community where the clergy spouse can be authentic and vulnerable in her faith journey. When a clergy spouse practices the spiritual disciplines, it is an intentional act of reaching to God with a posture of openness and vulnerability that ultimately leads her to health and wholeness.

### **Dichotomy between Doing and Being**

The transition from doing into being is challenging and difficult and often experienced through a sense of disconnection the clergy spouse feels from others, from God, and ultimately from herself. When a person loves God with her entire heart, soul, and mind, the other commandments can be followed and expressed with more openness. The spiritual disciplines foster this sense of receptivity and love for God. As a clergy spouse embraces formative practices, she is invited into a sacred space. While filled with opportunities for growth and transformation, the transformative process can be difficult to embrace. The dichotomy between doing and being can also be referred to as the difference between functionality and relationality. As spouses, we tend to operate on a functional basis where we act on our vision of what we think God desires instead of embracing a relational process that responds to God?<sup>50</sup> Identifying this distinction is important for the clergy spouse because it undergirds the path for the spiritual formation

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<sup>49</sup> “What Are Christian Practices?”

<sup>50</sup> Mulholland, *Shaped by the Word*, 95, writes: “Do we seek to function out of our relationship with God, or do we try to function ourselves into relationship with God?”

journey. To foster long-term growth, the spiritual disciplines are designed to be invitational in nature instead of a task the clergy spouse performs out of duty or guilt. As a clergy spouse, it is imperative to integrate the spiritual disciplines into faith life instead of adding another task to ‘do.’

As Lutherans, the dichotomy between ‘doing’ and ‘being’ becomes a crevasse when we fail to see the grace and freedom that come from a balanced state of the work we do for God out of our love for God. The spiritual formation movement has attempted to address this dichotomy by balancing knowledge of God with love for God.<sup>51</sup> The formative practices offer clergy spouses a gift in their ability to bridge the divide between thinking and doing and by demonstrating their interrelatedness. Often, formative practices are avoided out of discomfort with change and death. The process of ‘doing’ enables the clergy spouse to avoid the death of old behaviors, beliefs, and attitudes that if engaged ultimately leads to new Life. Jones reminds Christians, “It is often when we’re swallowed up in God that we find our true selves. We discover our true identity, not as do-ers, but as be-ers.”<sup>52</sup> Although uncomfortable, the process of moving from a state of doing into a state of being offers clergy spouses the opportunity to accept their call as child of God and their role as clergy spouse.

As part of his book, *Conformed to His Image*, Kenneth Boa offers clarification on the dichotomy between doing and being in the spiritual formation process. He writes, “Being and doing are interrelated, but the biblical order is critical: what we do should flow out of who we are, not the other way around. Otherwise our worth and identity are determined by achievements and accomplishments, and when we stop performing, we

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<sup>51</sup> Langer, “Points of Unease,” 184.

<sup>52</sup> Jones, *The Sacred Way*, 42.

cease to be valuable.”<sup>53</sup> Boa’s clarification is vital for clergy families since their worth and value can quickly become intertwined with their role as a clergy family instead of their identity as children of God. When a clergy spouse is unable to discern her worth apart from her role, she will inevitably face hardship when this role changes either by choice or circumstance.

Clergy spouses are invited to manage the balance between “silence and words, withdrawal and involvement, distance and closeness, solitude and community.”<sup>54</sup> Each of these concepts are included in the spectrum of formative practices and vital for transformation since balance is required to engage the spiritual disciplines in a healthy manner. We propose a healthy spiritual formation process for clergy spouses that implements faith practices that are embedded with grace. This dissertation invites clergy spouses to intentionally explore and undertake the freedom of formative practices that move a person from ‘doing’ into ‘being.’ Instead of focusing on the rigidity of keeping the spiritual disciplines, formative practices are available to deepen our relationships with God, self, and others. As clergy spouses, freedom and grace are present when a person embraces a spiritual discipline for growth instead of complying out of fear, condemnation, or judgment.

### **Benefits to the Clergy Spouse**

In his research on effective church leadership, Kennon Callahan writes that the “laity are on this journey to discover who they are, how they relate to the community,

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<sup>53</sup> Kenneth Boa, *Conformed to His Image: Biblical and Practical Approaches to Spiritual Formation* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2001), 270. Langer, “Points of Unease,” 193, writes: “It has become a commonplace of spiritual formation literature to strongly distinguish between being and doing.”

<sup>54</sup> Nouwen, *Spiritual Formation*, 21.

where they find meaning for their lives, and hope that there is possibility that springs from this search.”<sup>55</sup> These are questions that clergy spouses also struggle to address in the formation process of their identity and their spiritual life. Steibel writes, “Christian practices liberate the true self.”<sup>56</sup> Through her partnership with God, the clergy spouse experiences this liberation, more effectively manages stress, solves problems, and faces life’s challenges.<sup>57</sup>

When clergy spouses are empowered with greater spiritual resources, they tend to experience lower psychological and physiological stress in addition to feeling empowered to manage their lives which helps them experience a higher quality of life.<sup>58</sup> In her research on positive coping practices, Kerrick reveals that “spiritual practices often left them (clergy wives) feeling more relaxed, less distressed, and generally more focused. Taking time to listen to God’s Word or experiencing God’s presence allowed them to receive a sense of support and nurture from a loving God.”<sup>59</sup> Cattich echoes these findings, in that clergy spouses who perceive greater support correlate positively with marital adjustment and sentiment, negatively with depressive symptoms and perceived

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<sup>55</sup> Kennon L. Callahan, *Effective Church Leadership: Building On the Twelve Keys* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1997), 63.

<sup>56</sup> Steibel, “Christian Education and Spiritual Formation,” 349.

<sup>57</sup> Sarah Pierson Kerrick, “Positive Coping Practices Among Wives of Male Christian Clergy” (PsyD diss., Wheaton College, March 2010), 86.

<sup>58</sup> Carol Anderson Darling, E. Wayne Hill, and Lenore M. McWey, “Understanding Stress and Quality of Life for Clergy and Clergy Spouses,” *Stress and Health: Journal of International Society for the Investigation of Stress* 20, no. 5 (December 2004): 269, accessed November 1, 2013, DOI: 10.1002.smi1031, discovered that spiritual resources combatted compassion fatigue, moderated psychological and physiological stress, and provided a sense of coherence in life.

<sup>59</sup> Kerrick, “Positive Coping Practices,” 82.

stress, and moderated the link between role strain and marital decline.<sup>60</sup> In my therapeutic practice, I have witnessed the positive impact perceived support and lack thereof has on the clergy spouse's ability to cope with the stress of being a clergy family. The spiritual disciplines help bolster the clergy spouse's coping skills and empowers her to embrace the role along with the challenges and blessings therein.

Formative practices also help foster healthy boundaries in a clergy spouse's relationships. Nouwen writes, "The various disciplines of the spiritual life are meant for freedom and are reliable means for the creation of helpful boundaries in our lives within which God's voice can be heard, God's presence felt, and God's guidance experienced."<sup>61</sup> Boundaries highlight the need for self-differentiation, which is critical in identity formation and acceptance of life role. Clarifying and establishing healthy boundaries empowers clergy spouses to embrace their call and role instead of feeling burdened by the role. One way boundaries are established is engaging the faith practices with discipline and intentionality. This discipline offers clergy spouses routines, rhythms, and habits that are invitational to a Jesus-like lifestyle that was filled with the consistent practice of spiritual disciplines. Wilhoit writes:

Prayer, solitude, fasting, meditation, worship, and service were part of the very fabric of his (Jesus) life. They are critical because they place us in God's healing and sustaining presence. Also, they contain physical, psychological, social, intellectual, and emotional dimensions and demonstrate that spiritual growth and vitality stem from what we actually do with our lives, from the habits we form, and from the character that results. The proper grace-oriented practice of these disciplines is an essential part of our formation, moving us from reliance on our own willpower to dependence on God's grace.<sup>62</sup>

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<sup>60</sup> John Cattich, "Three Models of Clergy Systems: Analysis of Couple Processes and Spiritual Meaning," *Pastoral Psychology* 61, no. 2 (2012): 181, Academic Search Premier.

<sup>61</sup> Nouwen, *Spiritual Formation*, 18.

<sup>62</sup> Wilhoit, *Spiritual Formation*, 93.

We concur with Wilhoit's assessment of the beneficial gifts the spiritual disciplines offer clergy spouses and propose clergy spouses explore faith practices as a means for spiritual growth and vitality.

Clergy spouses also cope better when they are grounded in their faith and turn to God for grace and transformation.<sup>63</sup> Kerrick identifies in her research on clergy wives that clergy spouses who utilize spiritual discipline such as prayer, Scripture reading, and meditation coped better than those clergy spouses who did not by increasing their awareness of God's presence in daily life and improving their perspective and balance in daily life.<sup>64</sup> McMinn and his colleagues identify the spiritual disciplines assist in coping with catastrophic challenges in life by heightening the clergy spouses' awareness of God's presence.<sup>65</sup> In fact, McMinn writes that "Spiritual growth in times of difficulty is no coincidence because it often is related to disciplines and spiritual practices that have become well-established prior to the onset of the catastrophic stress."<sup>66</sup> McMinn's findings are an encouragement for the clergy spouse to engage the spiritual disciplines as a preventative measure to bolster healthy coping skills, families, and ministries.

Lutherans are grounded in the belief that all persons are gifted and called to lives of ministry through the priesthood of all believers, and we propose clergy spouses are

<sup>63</sup> Kerrick, "Positive Coping Practices," 143.

<sup>64</sup> Ibid., 82; Donna Bordelon Alder, *When the Pastor Is Your Husband: The Joy and Pain of Ministry Wives* (Kansas City: Beacon Hill Press of Kansas City, 2011), 26, discovered that one of the greatest strengths for clergy wives was the spiritual strength they derived from scripture and prayer.

<sup>65</sup> Mark R. McMinn et al., "Positive Coping Practices among Wives of Male Christian Clergy," *Pastoral Psychology* 56, no. 4 (March 2008): 451, accessed November 1, 2013, Academic Search Premier.

<sup>66</sup> Ibid., 454.



empowered by claiming their God-given gifts. Steven Bechtold declares that acceptance of these gifts enables a clergy spouse to claim her identity and to define her relationships with God, self, and others: “Accepting the gifts, tasks and demands of the Holy Spirit moves persons away from having to find acceptance based on what they can do for others. It shifts their search for meaning to one major focus: Who God wants me to be in and for the world?”<sup>67</sup> Although self-differentiation is a challenging task, we propose that freedom flows when the clergy spouse asks the question of who God wants her to be in and for the world apart from who the world wants her to be.

Luther utilized a method of exploration, study, and transformation by focusing on three components: *oratio*, *meditatio*, *tentatio*.<sup>68</sup> These components of exploration incorporate the three spiritual disciplines that are discussed in this dissertation. *Oratio* is the act of prayer; *meditatio* incorporates the discipline of Scripture reading; and *tentatio* is the juncture of faith and practice that can occur during the practice of Sabbath. Each of these components places the clergy spouse in the posture of openness where she relegates her power and control to receive the transformation God is offering. The spiritual disciplines are helpful with role clarification and acceptance of what can oft be a challenging position for the clergy spouse. Formative faith practices help her manage others’ expectations by establishing healthy boundaries. Finally, the spiritual disciplines address the spiritual isolation a clergy spouse experiences by deepening her relationships with God, self, and others.

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<sup>67</sup> Steven George Bechtold, “The Discernment of a Spiritual Foundation for Ministry through the Use of Spiritual Disciplines in Small Groups” (DMin diss., Drew University, 1995), 35.

<sup>68</sup> Gordon A. Jensen, “Envisioning Theological Education for the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada,” *Consensus* 30, no. 2 (2005): 55-76, accessed March 1, 2014, ATLA Religion Database with ATLASerials.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### SABBATH PRACTICE TO START THE DANCE

*Our spiritual journeys are, therefore, motivated both by a deep desire to find a higher meaning and by a longing to be healed, to be made whole, to find true rest.*  
- Bradley Hanson<sup>1</sup>

#### Introduction

Sabbath practice is a countercultural experience that challenges many clergy spouses.<sup>2</sup> It is an ancient spiritual discipline that is quickly becoming a lost art as our society loses its ability to rest.<sup>3</sup> With the advances in technology, clergy spouses are more plugged in and less able to enter a state of rest God set forth from the beginning of Creation as an integral part of human design. Therefore, Sabbath practice becomes an act of resistance and an alternative to a prescribed societal norm that leads to a weary and distracted clergy spouse. The Sabbath goes against the societal fabric of multitasking, which is deeply ingrained in many of us. When a clergy spouse remembers and practices the Sabbath, she becomes less driven and frantic and more present and calm. She moves from a state of doing into an intentional state of being.<sup>4</sup> With this shift, the clergy spouse is more present in her relationships with God, self, and others. This spiritual

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<sup>1</sup> Bradley Hanson, *A Graceful Life: Lutheran Spirituality for Today* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress Publishers, 2000), 2.

<sup>2</sup> This dissertation uses the term Sabbath practice instead of Sabbath-keeping to highlight that the Sabbath is not something we can own or control. Using the term ‘practice’ moves it from a mandate and recognizes it as a gift from God. It also implies a level of intentionality that accompanies the spiritual discipline.

<sup>3</sup> A.J. Cocksworth, “Attending to the Sabbath: An Alternative Direction in Karl Barth’s Theology of Prayer,” *International Journal of Systematic Theology* 13, no. 3 (July 2011): 263, Accessed November 4, 2013, Academic Search Premier.

<sup>4</sup> Walter Brueggemann, *Sabbath as Resistance: Saying No to the Culture of Now* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2014), 42.

transformation enables the clergy spouse to embrace her identity as a child of God and her role as a clergy spouse.

Sabbath practice is a spiritual discipline that invites clergy spouses to examine how the busyness of life can be an obstacle to a full and meaningful life with God and others. In their book on clergy families, Fredrickson and Smith observe, “Sabbath is not a day for catching up on sleep and chores that were left undone from the week. It is not a time to get a start on the upcoming workweek. Sabbath is meant to be a time set apart for rest, not just physical rest but emotional and spiritual rest as well. It is a day to reconnect with God and each other.”<sup>5</sup> We were created with the purpose and intent of resting in God’s presence, and the Sabbath is a sacred space of true rest. Sabbath rest is not an absence of work, but rather an intentional time of attending to God, which inadvertently can turn into another task for the clergy spouse to accomplish. An important aspect of Sabbath practice is the intentionality of setting aside time for rest and restoration in God’s presence, confronting the spiritual isolation a clergy spouse can experience.

In his research on clergy families, James Flynn echoes the sentiment that Sabbath practice is integral for clergy family health: “Effective work can only be accomplished by proper rest in God’s strength and power.”<sup>6</sup> Exhaustion, depression, and struggling relationships soon follow when clergy families do not partake in Sabbath rest. For clergy spouses, the prospect of Sabbath practice can appear daunting and unattainable, particularly in a church system with a culture of clergy family dependency. Simply deciding when to rest and what to cease can be an overwhelming task when confronted

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<sup>5</sup> Johnna Fredrickson and William A. Smith, *How the Other Half Lives: The Challenges Facing Clergy Spouses and Partners* (Cleveland: Pilgrim Press, 2010), 84.

<sup>6</sup> James T. Flynn, “Firewall: Health Essentials for Ministers and Their Families,” *Christian Education Journal* 6, no. 2 (September 1, 2009): 315, ATLASerials, Religion Collection.

by others' expectations. However, Sabbath practice invites the clergy spouse to remember the freedom that stems from sacred rest, by ceasing those activities that enslave her and draw her away from what God calls her to be and do. Sabbath practice requires a willingness to surrender time, plans, and expectations to God.

Despite there being numerous reasons to embrace this spiritual discipline, Sabbath practice remains difficult for clergy spouses. Fredrickson and Smith inquire into the fundamental reason for this difficulty: "What happens to the spiritual lives of spouses when Sunday becomes a workplace for their other halves? When the faith community becomes a workplace rather than a place of worship and rest only, what happens to Sabbath?"<sup>7</sup> Clergy families are challenged to define their Sabbath apart from the Sunday workday if they collectively are to experience sacred rest. If clergy families fail to delineate a Sabbath day, then they become susceptible to emotional, physical, and spiritual hardship.<sup>8</sup> Therefore, we propose that the spiritual discipline of Sabbath practice is integral for the ongoing health and wellbeing of clergy spouses and their families, since it models healthy living for a world that is over-structured, over-committed, and over-exhausted.

### **Transformative Nature of Sabbath Practice**

Through the course of Judeo-Christian history, the Sabbath has been celebrated and interpreted in a multitude of ways, but what remains consistent has been an emphasis on the sanctity of keeping the Sabbath holy. By focusing on the work/rest pattern and not

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<sup>7</sup> Fredrickson and Smith, *How the Other Half Lives*, 33.

<sup>8</sup> Mark Buchanan, *The Rest of God: Restoring Your Soul by Restoring Sabbath* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2007), 4, writes: "Neglecting the gift too long will make your soul, like soil never left fallow, hard and dry and spent."

merely the delineation of the seventh day, Sabbath practice remains an important component of spiritual formation. Although much of the debate involving Sabbath practice has centered on defining the Sabbath calendar day, today's Church faces the task of offering a viable reason for practicing Sabbath in light of the societal demands placed on the lives of its congregants and clergy families. The local church is also tasked with empowering clergy families to keep a Sabbath holy by delineating and protecting a sacred day of rest. In her book, *Sabbath Practice*, Lynne Baab proposes that the purpose of the Sabbath is to remove life's distractions to foster space to rest in God and experience God's grace.<sup>9</sup>

Sabbath practice is foundational for the other spiritual disciplines, and this is a primary reason clergy spouses are invited to learn and integrate Sabbath practice into their lives.<sup>10</sup> Sabbath practice is a way of orienting life toward God in contrast to viewing Sabbath as simply the identification of a certain day of the week. Sabbath is both a day and an attitude. Lynne Baab describes the Jewish perspective on Sabbath:

Rabbis teach that on Sunday, Monday and Tuesday we are to remember the preceding sabbath, experiencing joy while we look back at the lovely day of rest as a gift from God. On Wednesday through Friday we prepare ourselves to observe the next sabbath, looking ahead with joyful expectation. Thus the sabbath flows into the whole week, bringing its sweetness and fragrance to every day.<sup>11</sup>

Mark Buchanan observes, "It is both time on a calendar and a way we see. Sabbath imparts the rest of God—actual physical, mental, spiritual rest, but also the rest of God—

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<sup>9</sup> Lynne M. Baab, *Sabbath Keeping: Finding Freedom in the Rhythms of Rest* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Books, 2005), 11.

<sup>10</sup> Steven George Bechtold, "The Discernment of a Spiritual Foundation for Ministry through the Use of Spiritual Disciplines in Small Groups" (DMin diss., Drew University, 1995), 21, writes: "Spiritual disciplines make little difference in anyone's life without Sabbath experience as a container for the practice of the spiritual life."

<sup>11</sup> Baab, *Sabbath Keeping*, 40.

the things of God's nature and presence we miss in our busyness."<sup>12</sup> When a clergy spouse begins to practice the Sabbath intentionally, a pattern and rhythm emerges as she learns to work from her rest instead of resting from work. The week divides as the clergy spouse prepares three days for the Sabbath and remembers the Sabbath on the other three. Therefore, the Sabbath marks the entirety of her week and her being.<sup>13</sup> When the clergy spouse marks her week by the Sabbath, she prioritizes God as the center of her life, challenging her sense of spiritual isolation.

Out of God's endless love for humankind, God offered a restorative model for spiritual, emotional, and physical health and well-being. From the beginning, God recognized the need for rest and restoration and sought this for His creation. The word 'Sabbath' comes from the Hebrew word Shabbat, which means "to cease."<sup>14</sup> Sabbath practice is typically associated with the Fourth Commandment that was given to the

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<sup>12</sup> Buchanan, *The Rest of God*, 3.

<sup>13</sup> Marva J. Dawn, *Keeping the Sabbath Wholly: Ceasing, Resting, Embracing, Feasting* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing, 1989), 54, divides the Sabbath week into three parts:

1. Anticipation – On Thursday, Friday, and Saturday, Christians observe the Sabbath as found in Deut. 5:12.
2. Celebration – The Sabbath is celebrated on Sunday as practice resting in God's presence.
3. Reflection – On Monday, Tuesday, and Wednesday, Christians remember the freedom that comes from keeping the Sabbath and being in relationship with God as referenced in Exodus 20:8.

Lauren F. Winner, *Mudhouse Sabbath* (Brewster, MA: Paraclete Press, 2003), 9, writes: "Sunday, Monday, and Tuesday are caught up in remembering the preceding Shabbat, while Wednesday through Friday are devoted to preparing for the next Shabbat." Buchanan, *The Rest of God*, 197, writes: "Both Sabbath and Eucharist join all three: remember, reflect, anticipate."

<sup>14</sup> Tony Jones, *The Sacred Way: Spiritual Practices for Everyday Life* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan/Youth Specialties, 2005), 180.

Israelites after their exodus from Egypt. However, some persons argue that the origin of the Sabbath is in the creation story where God demonstrates Sabbath rest.<sup>15</sup>

Genesis 1-2, particularly Genesis 2:2-3, serves as the foundation for a biblical theology of the Christian Sabbath through the creation narrative lens.<sup>16</sup> On the seventh day, God stopped. God rested. God blessed the day and found delight and wonder in His creation. Through this act of blessing, God offered a universal pattern for Sabbath practice by working six days and resting on the seventh.<sup>17</sup> In the creation narrative, God does not stipulate whether the seventh day has to be Saturday, Sunday, or even Monday. Instead, God offers a self-care model that invites clergy spouses to imitate the rest/work pattern honoring that God rested not out of state of exhaustion but as a sign that creation was complete.

The Decalogue further expounds on the Sabbath command by offering clergy spouses a perspective on God's desire for healthy relationships. Exodus 20:8-11 is grounded in the Creation Story and focuses on the act of remembering the Sabbath. Ellen Bernstein writes, "The Sabbath commandment is the only one of the ten that bids us to 'remember,' as if God knows we will forget. Remember to take the time to honor all the gifts of creation that the Sabbath commemorates; remember to delight in life and all of its

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<sup>15</sup> Margaret Diddams, Lisa Klein Surdyk, and Denise Daniels, "Rediscovering Models of Sabbath Keeping: Implications for Psychological Well-Being," *Journal of Psychology and Theology* 32, no. 1 (2004): 4, accessed November 6, 2014, Academic Search Premier.

<sup>16</sup> For additional information on the creation narrative, see Robert Caldwell, "Call the Sabbath a Delight: Jonathan Edwards on the Lord's Day," *Southwestern Journal of Theology* 47, no. 2 (March 1, 2005): 198, accessed October 29, 2013, ATLA Religion Database.

<sup>17</sup> There has been much debate as to whether the Sabbath is Saturday or Sunday. Ibid., 199, examines this debate in his study of Jonathan Edwards.

fruits; remember to rest and replenish and nourish yourself.”<sup>18</sup> The Exodus version of the Sabbath commandment highlights the interrelatedness of God with His people and reminds clergy spouses they are created in the image of God in both work and rest. Christians are asked to sanctify a day and be fully attentive to God. Sabbath becomes a holy day of rest wherein we imitate God who rested and in turn offered rest to all of creation. By reserving time and space to observe the Sabbath, the clergy spouse fosters intentional relationships with God and others.

Deuteronomy 5:12-15 focuses on the observation of the Sabbath commandment by ‘observing’ the Sabbath in place of ‘remembering’ it. Bernstein records: “Observe, as if we’re seeing for the first time. Witness the day. Watch all the creatures; become intimate with your surroundings; take walks in the woods; care for them. Observe the Sabbath; keep it holy by insuring its integrity, its wholeness.”<sup>19</sup> The Deuteronomy version of the Sabbath command is tied to the Israelites’ experience being released from slavery. From this perspective, Sabbath is a refusal to return to Egypt and is a remembrance and embrace of Eden. Sabbath becomes an intentional choice for freedom and the subsequent rest that follows.<sup>20</sup> Buchanan claims, “To refuse Sabbath is in effect to spurn the gift of freedom. It is to resume willingly what we once cried out for God to

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<sup>18</sup> Ellen Bernstein, “Celebrating God, Celebrating Earth: Psalms, Sabbath, and Holy Days,” *Currents in Theology and Mission* 37, no. 5 (October 1, 2010): 383, accessed October 29, 2013, ATLA Religion Database with ATLASerials.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid.

<sup>20</sup> Phillip Camp, “The Lord's Supper as Sabbath Observance,” *Restoration Quarterly* 51, no. 2 (January 1, 2009): 84, accessed October 29, 2013, ATLA Religion Database with ATLASerials; Dorothy C. Bass, “Keeping Sabbath,” in *Practicing Our Faith: A Way of Life for a Searching People*, ed. Dorothy C. Bass (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1997), 79.



deliver us from. It is choosing what once we shunned.”<sup>21</sup> From this perspective, the Sabbath frees the clergy spouse from all that enslaves her.

The Exodus text emphasizes the cessation of work on the seventh day, but the Deuteronomy text is a reminder of how God saved the Israelites from the bondage of slavery. The Exodus text recognizes God’s gift of rest; the Deuteronomy passage emphasizes God’s strength.<sup>22</sup> The Exodus version focuses on ‘remembering,’ and the Deuteronomy version focuses on ‘observing.’ Naming Sabbath practice as one of the Ten Commandments offers insight into the importance of rest as a spiritual discipline. Practicing the Sabbath is as important as not killing, stealing, or committing adultery for maintaining an ethical life and community. However, Sabbath practice is rarely upheld or viewed as an important component of community maintenance as it has become an optional commandment that tends to be overlooked and dismissed in our overworked, overscheduled society. Bernstein expresses her concern, “Violating the Sabbath, like breaking any of the commandments, leads to the unraveling of the fabric of our culture. It’s just that the effects of the violation of the Sabbath are more insidious.”<sup>23</sup> The clergy spouse is charged with identifying how she neglects the Sabbath and the impact this choice has on her spiritual, emotional, and physical well-being.

Jesus’ life and ministry offers witness to the manner in which He engaged the Sabbath particularly since His first ministry act was to follow the Holy Spirit into the wilderness for an extended Sabbath of prayer and meditation. Nouwen writes, “In the lonely place Jesus finds the courage to follow God’s will and not his own; to speak God’s

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<sup>21</sup> Buchanan, *The Rest of God*, 90.

<sup>22</sup> Bernstein, “Celebrating God,” 383.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid.

words and not his own; to do God's work and not his own."<sup>24</sup> Jesus offered God His full attention by implementing a similar routine of Sabbath rest as a natural and essential companion to work throughout His ministry. Jesus viewed the Sabbath as a day to do good works, show mercy to others, save life and free people from bondage. Baab writes: "These acts, appropriate for the Sabbath, spoke of God's nature: a merciful God, the God who heals, the God who delivers people from evil. Acts that glorify God can never be a breach of the Sabbath."<sup>25</sup> By healing the sick and feeding the hungry on the Sabbath, Jesus angered the law-abiding Jewish leaders who were concerned with complying with the legalistic mandate of the Sabbath command.<sup>26</sup> Throughout the gospels, Jesus challenged the leaders by emphasizing the relational perspective of the law, and Sabbath practice invites clergy spouses to recognize the freedom within the law.

The spiritual discipline of Sabbath practice is designed to help clergy spouses become more aware and mindful of the presence of God by setting aside sacred time with God. During the Reformation, Luther and Calvin viewed the Sabbath commandment as an important spiritual practice that focused on sacred time for worship and the need for experiencing and granting physical rest.<sup>27</sup> The Book of Acts addressed the Early Church's response to Sabbath practice. A Sunday evening meeting in Ephesus was considered an appropriate occasion to gather for worship and celebrate the Lord's Supper. These events fostered relationships and Sabbath rest within the community of

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<sup>24</sup> Henri J.M. Nouwen, *Spiritual Formation: Following the Movements of the Spirit* (New York: HarperOne, 2010), 21.

<sup>25</sup> Baab, *Sabbath Keeping*, 46.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid., 45-46, identifies this conflict when she identified that Jesus clashed with the religious authorities six times over the Sabbath.

<sup>27</sup> Camp, "The Lord's Supper," 82.

believers and with God.<sup>28</sup> In Luther's writings, we hear him make a case for Sabbath practice:

God set apart the seventh day and appointed it for rest. ... What is meant by 'keeping it holy'? Nothing else than to devote it to holy words, holy works, holy life. In itself the day needs no sanctification, for it was created holy. But God wants it be holy to you. So it becomes holy or unholy on your account, according as you spend the day in doing holy or unholy things.<sup>29</sup>

Clergy families are reminded that healthy ministry and life flows from a theology of Sabbath rest as the Sabbath is a tangible reminder to cease from working and rest with God.<sup>30</sup>

### **Implementing Sabbath Practice**

In order to embrace Sabbath practice, clergy spouses are invited to be present and attune to God and God's workings. This is a challenge for most clergy spouses since Sabbath practice requires a reorientation away from societal pressures regarding work and rest. When a clergy spouse practices Sabbath, it requires intentionality to establish boundaries around work, church, and social availability. Initially, this may be uncomfortable as the clergy spouse and her relationships adjust to the new schedule. Sabbath practice invites the clergy spouse to examine the way she views God and time as Sabbath is both a day and an attitude. Sabbath practice invokes sacrifice, and each clergy spouse is called to determine what will be ceased to experience true Sabbath rest.

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<sup>28</sup> Jones, *The Sacred Way*, 184, writes: "Sunday became a day for Christians to gather for worship, prayer, and a big agape meal (love feast), including the Lord's Supper."

<sup>29</sup> Eric W. Gritsch, *Fortress Introduction to Lutheranism* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1994), 118, references Luther's writings, BC 375:80, 376-77:87.

<sup>30</sup> Dawn, "Keeping the Sabbath Wholly," 56.

Flynn recommends that clergy implement the spiritual discipline of Sabbath practice while preparing for ministry. I concur that clergy spouses and their families who practice the Sabbath early in ministry (preferably in seminary or before) benefit from this faith practice. Seminary is an ideal time to “introduce, encourage, and model the kinds of rhythms in ministerial life that establish proper time and access boundaries.”<sup>31</sup> The clergy spouse is invited to determine the specifics of these rhythms including a weekly Sabbath day, monthly times of reflection, and extended retreats. Part of the freedom inherent in this faith practice is that Sabbath practice changes throughout the clergy spouse’s spiritual journey while carrying a thread of familiarity.

### **Sabbath Rest**

Sabbath rest is one of the most tangible forms of Sabbath practice. Clergy families tend to recognize and identify Sabbath as a time to rest and relax, and sleep can be one way the clergy spouse experiences Sabbath rest. However, sleep is more than a task to do. It is a process of relinquishment and self-abandonment as the spouse concedes control, power, and consciousness. During sleep we control and master nothing. Buchanan writes, “Sleep, besides being a necessity, is also an act of faith....Every time we sleep we place ourselves again in this position of vulnerability, of defenselessness, of dependency....We give ourselves, regardless of our unfinished business into God’s care. We sleep simply because we believe God will look after us.”<sup>32</sup> Deep sleep is a state of true Sabbath rest where we abdicate control and place our trust in God. When a clergy spouse enters a state

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<sup>31</sup> Flynn, “Firewall,” 316.

<sup>32</sup> Buchanan, *The Rest of God*, 62.

of Sabbath rest, she is emptied and filled at the same time as she releases all that has kept her in bondage and fills herself with the strength and grace that only God can provide.

### **Three Approaches to Sabbath Practice**

Diddams and her colleagues offer three approaches to Sabbath practice that may help the clergy spouse clarify the role of Sabbath practice throughout her spiritual journey:

1. Life Segmentation – Designated times for rest
2. Prescribed Meaning – Designated Sabbath times and relationships prescribed with meaning
3. Integrated Sabbath – An integrated belief system inclusive of rest, reflection, and relationships<sup>33</sup>

Clergy spouses who approach Sabbath from a life segmentation model intentionally segment work and other parts of life. This type of Sabbath model is not necessarily tied to religious or spiritual practice, but the clergy spouse who uses this model experiences more distinct boundaries between work and home. Clear boundaries have become increasingly important to clergy families as the physical boundaries between work and home diminish with technological advances, particularly for those clergy families who reside in a parsonage where the physical boundaries are less defined. Diddams et al. note, “The key benefit to this model is that people find respite or experience less stress by inserting ‘punctuation’ around their activities each week.”<sup>34</sup>

The Prescribed Meaning model of Sabbath practice offers clergy spouses a technique of associating positive or religious meaning with a period of rest. When a

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<sup>33</sup> Diddams et al., “Rediscovering Models of Sabbath Keeping,” 4, writes: “Someone who practices Sabbath keeping as described in model two continues to incorporate aspects of life segmentation from model one. Similarly, the third model of integrated Sabbath presumes both life segmentation and prescribed meaning.”

<sup>34</sup> Ibid.

clergy spouse prescribes meaning to an intentional period of rest, she is more apt to “experience positive emotion and psychological well-being in the midst of stressful situations.”<sup>35</sup> Therefore, Sunday worship or morning devotions can remain sacred space in midst of others’ expectations and agendas. In this model, the clergy spouse experiences freedom from defining and delineating the Sabbath time.

The third model of Sabbath practice is the Integrated Sabbath. Diddams et al. write, “With integrated Sabbath we recognize what we can control and what we actively surrender—it is an internalized rest, not one forced upon or withheld from us by social considerations.”<sup>36</sup> This Sabbath model is an intentional state of mind that creates a sense of balance in life and an ability to cope with life’s demands. An Integrated Sabbath recognizes the seasons and cycles of life, yet it claims the value of rest by preventing work from controlling life. Robert Plummer claims, “There are seasons of sleeplessness and seemingly incessant activity that accompany the lives of those seeking to serve God and love his people.”<sup>37</sup> The Integrated Model empowers the clergy spouse to identify difficult times as seasons and clarify techniques to reclaim Sabbath rest instead of allowing the season to turn into longer lasting patterns of behavior. Although this model appears the most balanced and flexible of the three Sabbath models, Diddams et al. note a concern that Sabbath practice is more apt to be integrated when a clergy spouse feels able to devote an entire day to practicing the Sabbath without that time negatively impacting

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<sup>35</sup> Ibid., 5.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid., 6.

<sup>37</sup> Robert Plummer, “Are the Spiritual Disciplines of ‘Silence and Solitude’ Really Biblical?” *Journal of Spiritual Formation and Soul Care* 2, no. 1 (2009): 111, accessed March 10, 2014, ATLA Religion Database with ATLASerials.

her life.<sup>38</sup> Therefore, the inherent freedom within the practice itself empowers the clergy spouse to embrace the spiritual discipline and feel empowered in her role as clergy spouse.

### **Challenges to Engaging Sabbath Practice**

One of the biggest challenges in engaging a life fitted with Sabbath practice is the inability to rest. As a culture, Americans tend to value doing over being as productivity often is a gauge for success, and clergy families are no different. For many, Sabbath time appears as unproductive and useless time. Although most persons recognize the physical necessity for rest, it is more difficult to identify the value of Sabbath rest as something other than a tool to prepare for the next event. Diddams et al. observe, “Society challenges Sabbath, but at the same time, Sabbath challenges society. Sabbath is prophetic and relevant for our time...precisely because so many people find it difficult.”<sup>39</sup> Most clergy spouses feel more hurried and less relaxed as technology has enabled us to work more in less time but compelled to stay connected more of the time. Many clergy families feel compelled to view their ministerial call as a 24-7 job without clear definition or delineation of boundaries—emotional, physical, or spiritual.<sup>40</sup> In his book on Sabbath, Alan Fadling writes, “When we fail to make space for Sabbath rest in

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<sup>38</sup> Ibid., 7.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid., 9; Dorothy C. Bass, *Receiving the Day: Christian Practices for Opening the Gift of Time* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2001), 63.

<sup>40</sup> Wayne Muller, *Sabbath: Restoring the Sacred Rhythm of Rest* (New York: Bantam Books, 1999), 1, writes: “Our culture invariably supposes that action and accomplishment are better than rest, that doing something—anything—is better than doing nothing.” Brueggemann, *Sabbath as Resistance*, xii, writes: “We are a society of 24/7 multitasking in order to achieve, accomplish, perform, and possess.”

our schedules, we are behaving as though we are slaves too.”<sup>41</sup> Not only does this harm the clergy family, it harms the congregation when the clergy family opts not to model the importance of the Sabbath. Nouwen’s writing challenges clergy spouses to reconsider their perspective on time:

The world says, “If you are not making good use of your time, you are useless.” Jesus said: “Come spend some useless time with me.” If we think about prayer in terms of its usefulness to us—what insights we will gain, what divine presence we may feel—God cannot easily speak to us. But if we can detach ourselves from the idea of the usefulness of prayer and the results of prayer, we become free to ‘waste’ a precious hour with God in prayer. Gradually, we may find, our ‘useless’ time will transform us, and everything around us will be different.<sup>42</sup>

Whether it is prayer or Sabbath rest, time spent with God and others without expectation or agenda is beneficial and productive in fostering relationships, improving coping, and reducing spiritual isolation.

Sabbath practice often lacks community support to observe an entire Sabbath day, and clergy families typically experience exhaustion or burnout before prioritizing Sabbath rest.<sup>43</sup> Churches are notorious for filling Sundays with meetings, events, and gatherings that turn the Sabbath from a day of worship and rest into a day of tasks. Clergy families tend to view Sundays as work days instead of Sabbath days filled with rest and relaxation. Although worship with a community of fellow believers helps foster relationships with God and others, a working Sunday is not Sabbath. Fredrickson and Smith echo this concern: “The irony for partners and their clergy halves is that the Sabbath rest, not only suggested but commanded for the faithful, is sacrificed to the

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<sup>41</sup> Alan Fadling, *An Unhurried Life: Following Jesus’ Rhythms of Work and Rest* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Books, 2013), 117.

<sup>42</sup> Nouwen, *Spiritual Formation*, 19.

<sup>43</sup> Diddams et al., “Rediscovering Models of Sabbath Keeping,” 8.



church's schedule and the needs of the community.”<sup>44</sup> Therefore, clergy families are called to creatively engage Sabbath practice as both individuals and family units by delineating a different day or time as Sabbath. The clergy spouse is charged to embrace this challenge because the intentionality of examining the household calendar also builds awareness as to the priorities we give other areas of life apart from God.

Another challenge of practicing Sabbath is the tendency to engage it from a legalistic perspective, which removes the joy from the spiritual practice. Jesus freed us to embrace the blessings of the Sabbath for the Sabbath was made for humanity, not humanity for the Sabbath.<sup>45</sup> However, when the Sabbath is reduced to a series of mandates and technicalities, it becomes legalistic dogma.<sup>46</sup> Buchanan expresses concern about the inherent rewards of legalism: “Legalism feels good, in a perverse sort of way. It strokes our ego, fills us with the pleasure of achievement, knowing we spelled all the words correctly, and in such a nice, tidy script to boot.”<sup>47</sup> However, when the clergy spouse add rules to her life in order to ‘keep’ Sabbath, it tends to reduce her sense of control, increases her stress, and diminishes her ability to cope.<sup>48</sup>

We live in a society that is driven by tasks, procedures, and accomplishments with the belief that the busier a person is, the more important she is. In his book, *Sabbath*, Wayne Muller writes: “To be unavailable to our friends and family, to be unable to find

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<sup>44</sup> Fredrickson and Smith, *How the Other Half Lives*, 91.

<sup>45</sup> Mark 2:27 “‘The Sabbath,’ Jesus said, ‘was made for man, not man for the Sabbath.’”

<sup>46</sup> Diddams et al., “Rediscovering Models of Sabbath Keeping,” 8; Cocksworth, “Attending to the Sabbath,” 263, writes: “Too often the command to enter into rest is restrained to a set of legalistic dos and don’ts to enforce Sabbath practice....”

<sup>47</sup> Buchanan, *The Rest of God*, 108.

<sup>48</sup> Diddams et al., “Rediscovering Models of Sabbath Keeping,” 4-5.

time for the sunset, to whiz through our obligations without time for a single, mindful breath, this has become the model of a successful life.”<sup>49</sup> In a world driven by productivity and deadlines, the practice of Sabbath spotlights the clergy spouse’s tendency towards extreme busyness, her inability to trust God, and her unwillingness to ask others for help. Fadling argues, “It takes trust in God’s faithfulness to choose to stop our work. When we choose soul rest, we are putting our trust in God’s work, not our own, and we then experience the gift of Sabbath.”<sup>50</sup> Sabbath practice requires a sense of surrendering to God and all that binds us. Muller adds, “If we refuse rest until we are finished, we will never rest until we die. Sabbath dissolves the artificial urgency of our days, because it liberates us from the need to be finished.”<sup>51</sup> Clergy spouses are challenged to examine their ability to surrender to rest and to engage the Sabbath.

If clergy families fail to model Sabbath practice, then congregations are less apt to recognize the need for Sabbath rest. We feel more frantic and compelled to constant activity. Ruth Haley Barton expressed concern that these feelings may lead to “escapist behaviors—such as compulsive eating, drinking, spending, watching television—because we are too tired to choose activities that are truly life-giving.”<sup>52</sup> When clergy spouses fail to engage a life of Sabbath practice, the body—emotionally, physically, and spiritually—

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<sup>49</sup> Muller, *Sabbath*, 2.

<sup>50</sup> Fadling, *An Unhurried Life*, 114.

<sup>51</sup> Muller, *Sabbath*, 83.

<sup>52</sup> Ruth Haley Barton, *Invitation to Solitude and Silence: Experiencing God’s Transforming Presence*, (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Books, 2004), 59.

eventually cries out. Muller writes, “If we do not allow for a rhythm of rest in our overly busy lives, illness becomes our Sabbath.”<sup>53</sup>

### **Benefits of Implementing Sabbath Practice**

The Sabbath is comprised of rhythm and intentionality. Sabbath practice offers clergy spouses an intentional experience of resting in and with God, which fosters opportunities for transformation. The rhythm of Sabbath practice becomes a form of prayer that leads clergy spouses deeper into relationship with God and others. Baab observes, “The sabbath provides a structure to build ‘doing nothing’ into our schedules. This kind of rest provides a foundation for deeper prayer and continued growth in friendship with God because it nurtures within us the stillness and silence that are essential to prayer.”<sup>54</sup> Therefore, the process of Sabbath rest offers the clergy spouse a dynamic, vital component of faith in action leading to Christian formation.

Sabbath practice builds community as it develops relationships with God, self, and others.<sup>55</sup> One of the central tenets of Christian Sabbath practice is community worship with fellow believers.<sup>56</sup> Diddams et al. describes, “Sacred assembly can be an important aspect of Sabbath keeping, strengthening one’s social identity with others who

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<sup>53</sup> Ibid., 20.

<sup>54</sup> Baab, *Sabbath Keeping*, 20.

<sup>55</sup> Alan D. Goldberg “The Sabbath: Implications for Mental Health,” *Counseling and Values* 31, no. 2 (1987): 152, writes: “Participation in the regular Sabbath activities of the community also places people in contact with a social support network that offers new opportunities for social-emotional support, personal identity, and meaning.”

<sup>56</sup> Baab, *Sabbath Keeping*, 74.

also keep the Sabbath.”<sup>57</sup> Community worship helps a clergy spouse foster support and reduces a sense of isolation. When the clergy spouse sets aside Sabbath time to cease being productive and invests in relationships around her, she can simply ‘be’ with others and learn about them out of her desire to be in relationship instead of from a need for something from them.

Regular Sabbath is an ongoing prerequisite for healthy ministry. Prayer, Scripture reading, and Sabbath practice help facilitate and maintain health and clarity regarding one’s calling.<sup>58</sup> Brueggemann states, “Those who remember and keep Sabbath find they are less driven, less coerced, less frantic to meet deadlines, free to be, rather than to do.”<sup>59</sup> Sabbath practice offers clergy spouses the opportunity to examine their lives bringing forth the longings of the soul. The practice of setting aside one day a week for reflection and intentional time with God allows the truth about God and oneself to rise to the surface.<sup>60</sup> Muller writes about the benefits of Sabbath practice:

Our willingness to rest depends on what we believe we will find there. At rest, we come face-to-face with the essence of life. If we believe life is fundamentally good, we will seek out rest as a taste of that goodness. If we believe life is fundamentally bad or flawed, we will be reluctant to quiet ourselves, afraid of meeting the darkness that resides in things—or in ourselves.<sup>61</sup>

Ultimately, we seek Sabbath out of our trust in God and God’s faithfulness. Sabbath practice merely holds the mirror for clergy spouses to examine the fears and longings that

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<sup>57</sup> Diddams et al., “Rediscovering Models of Sabbath Keeping,” 8; Bass, *Receiving the Day*, 70, writes: “Joyful worship that restores us to communion with the risen Christ and our fellow members of his body, the church, is an essential part of a Christian sabbath.”

<sup>58</sup> Stephen Muse and Edwin Chase, “Healing the Wounded Healers: “Soul” Food for Clergy,” *Journal of Psychology and Christianity* 12, no. 2 (1993): 147.

<sup>59</sup> Brueggemann, *Sabbath as Resistance*, 42.

<sup>60</sup> Baab, *Sabbath Keeping*, 28.

<sup>61</sup> Muller, *Sabbath*, 40.

both draw and repel us from this vital spiritual discipline. Fredrickson and Smith said, “Sanity and Sabbath go together.”<sup>62</sup> When clergy families engage Sabbath practice, health is more possible to attain.

Sabbath practice invites clergy spouses to abdicate control and surrender to God. In her book on Sabbath keeping, Marva Dawn identifies a benefit of Sabbath practice. “We learn to let God take care of us—not by becoming passive and lazy, but in the freedom of giving up our feeble attempts to be God in our own lives.”<sup>63</sup> Muller agrees, “When we stop, we see that the world continues without us....When we stop, with no chores or agenda, we let our eyes rest, our bodies heal, our activities languish, and taste the fruits of our labor, as the Psalmist invites us: Be still, and know.”<sup>64</sup> By failing to surrender to God by observing the Sabbath and conceding to the busyness of life, the clergy spouse overlooks the inherent gifts and blessings of life. Disengaging from work frees the clergy spouse to seek a balanced life, which heightens her ability to cope with stress and provides greater psychological resiliency.<sup>65</sup> Diddams et al. write, “Literature in the area of stress and stress management has highlighted the importance of balance in one’s life as a way to effectively cope with stress that cannot be eliminated.”<sup>66</sup> The reality remains that clergy family life is filled with stress that cannot be eliminated by the clergy

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<sup>62</sup> Fredrickson and Smith, *How the Other Half Lives*, 101.

<sup>63</sup> Dawn, *Keeping the Sabbath Wholly*, 4.

<sup>64</sup> Muller, *Sabbath*, 84.

<sup>65</sup> Diddams et al., 4, “Rediscovering Models of Sabbath Keeping,” writes: “Literature in the area of stress and stress management has highlighted the importance of balance in one’s life as a way to effectively cope with stress that cannot be eliminated.”

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*

spouse's doing. Sabbath practice frees the clergy spouse to embrace this reality and move towards a place of acceptance.

Finally, Sabbath practice allows the clergy spouse to recognize she is not God and the world is not dependent upon her. Ultimately, Sabbath practice is about reorienting to God and trusting God with life. Dawn's writing challenges clergy spouses to embrace Sabbath:

A major blessing of Sabbath practice is that it forces us to rely on God for our future. On that day we do nothing to create our own way. We abstain from work, from our incessant need to produce and accomplish, from all the anxieties about how we can be successful in all that we have to do to get ahead. The result is that we can let God be God in our lives.<sup>67</sup>

When clergy spouses make the shift from resting from work, to resting to work, it frees the clergy spouse to engage life instead of being held in bondage to life from acting like God to trusting fully in God. Practicing Sabbath transforms the clergy spouse's relationships, encourages her to establish healthy boundaries, frees her to relinquish control, and empowers her to embrace her identity as a child of God and her role as a clergy spouse.

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<sup>67</sup> Dawn, *Keeping the Sabbath Wholly*, 29.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### SCRIPTURE READING TO ENHANCE THE DANCE

#### Introduction

Lutheran professor Bradley Hanson says, “To meditate on a portion of the Bible is to listen for what God has to say to us in our current situation through these particular words.”<sup>1</sup> For the clergy spouse struggling to accept her role and who is feeling spiritually isolated, reading Scripture can be a breath of life in the midst of deep darkness.

Throughout history, Christian writers and theologians have offered various processes of Scripture reading. These descriptions have ranged from a place to discover God to a formational event with specific rules and tasks.<sup>2</sup> Whichever perspective the clergy spouse employs, the process of Scripture reading is a formative practice that challenges her to grow and develop.

Nouwen describes the Bible as “a book not of information but of formation, not merely a book to be analyzed, scrutinized, and discussed but a sacred book to nurture us, to unify our hearts and minds, and to serve as a constant source of contemplation.”<sup>3</sup> The Bible is invitational in nature with endless formative opportunities for the clergy spouse. Grace and blessings abound when a clergy spouse discovers God in the Sacred space where Scripture and her relationship with God intersect. Therefore, we propose regular

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<sup>1</sup> Bradley Hanson, *A Graceful Life: Lutheran Spirituality for Today* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress Publishers, 2000), 74.

<sup>2</sup> William Barry, “Prayer in Pastoral Care: A Contribution from the Tradition of Spiritual Direction,” *Journal of Pastoral Care* 31, no. 2 (June 1, 1977): 93, accessed October 27, 2013, ATLA Religion Database with ATLA Serials, describes the process of listening to Scripture as a “privileged place to ‘find’ God.”

<sup>3</sup> Henri J.M. Nouwen, *Spiritual Formation: Following the Movements of the Spirit* (New York: HarperOne, 2010), xxiii.

study, meditation, and memorization of Scripture is a spiritual discipline that empowers the clergy spouse to accept her role, reduces her sense of spiritual isolation, and fosters positive coping skills.

### **Transformative Nature of Scripture Reading**

The use of Scripture reading as a faith practice can be traced through Christian history. Whether it occurred through individual readings of biblical texts or corporate readings of Scripture, these experiences provided opportunities for Christians to meditate on the Sacred Story.<sup>4</sup> The desert saints followed a rhythm of work, prayer, and solitude, incorporating fasting and Scripture study into their regular routine. It has been discovered that they fasted according to the Church year in addition to listening to, memorizing, and meditating on Scripture.<sup>5</sup> Although the desert fathers and mothers are known for their solitary faith practices, they were a community of believers who practiced the spiritual disciplines. In this manner, they are an example of how clergy spouses can utilize Scripture reading as a solitary spiritual discipline but practice it within the container of a larger faith community, even a supportive, dispersed faith community.

God uses Scripture reading as a conduit to form faith communities into the image of Christ.<sup>6</sup> Scripture reading rallies clergy spouses together through the communal nature

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<sup>4</sup> Evan Howard, "Lectio Divina in the Evangelical Tradition," *Journal of Spiritual Formation and Soul Care* 5, no. 1 (2012): 58, ATLA Religion Database with ATLASerials. Meditation on scripture was also a way to understand and assimilate the biblical text through repeated recollection of it.

<sup>5</sup> Gerald L. Sittser, *Water from a Deep Well: Christian Spirituality from Early Martyrs to Modern Missionaries* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Books, 2010), 88.

<sup>6</sup> Jonathan Morrow, "Introducing Spiritual Formation," in *Foundations of Spiritual Formation: A Community Approach to Becoming Like Christ* (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Academic & Professional, 2008), 45; August Hermann Francke, "Following Christ," *Pietists: Selected Writings*, ed. Peter C. Erb (Ramsey, NJ: Paulist Press, 1983), 144, writes, "The Holy Scripture will be a teacher which will instruct you and the love of Jesus will drive you to it..."



of the Sacred Story when Scripture is read with intentionality and awareness. Richard Foster describes this type of Scripture reading as a transformative process in which “the written Word becomes a living word addressed to you [the reader].”<sup>7</sup> It is within those moments of formative Scripture reading that the Sacred Story comes alive and the clergy spouse experiences growth and transformation.

The spiritual formation journey is a formative process as the clergy spouse is shaped into the image of Christ. Robert Mulholland describes spiritual formation as “the shaping of our ‘word’ by the Word of God.”<sup>8</sup> Mulholland’s reference to our word and the Word of God highlights an important consideration for Lutherans. Theologically, Lutherans believe Jesus is the Word of God and to acknowledge the interconnectedness between God as Word and our ‘word’ as believer evokes a sense of the sacred. The priesthood of all believers invites clergy spouses to discern and utilize the call God offers as we are formed through the Word shaping the clergy spouse’s role and identity. In the midst of this process, Scripture can feel intrusive and disruptive in its ability to speak to the clergy spouse. Scripture breaks into life causing the clergy spouse to consider where God is speaking personally and communally, and it is in these intrusive, disruptive moments that the clergy spouse experiences spiritual formation. Although uncomfortable and potentially disconcerting, we maintain that Scripture reading is a vital spiritual discipline for the growth and transformation of the clergy spouse and the clarification of her identity and the acceptance of her role as clergy spouse.

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<sup>7</sup> Richard Foster, *Celebration of Discipline: The Path to Spiritual Growth*, 20<sup>th</sup> ed. (New York: Harper San Francisco, 1998), 29.

<sup>8</sup> M. Robert Mulholland Jr., *Shaped by the Word: The Power of Scripture in Spiritual Formation*, rev. ed. (Nashville: Upper Room, 2001), 102.

## Martin Luther and Scripture Reading

Martin Luther professed a theology of *sola Scriptura*, which recognizes Scripture alone as the authoritative and normative source for preaching, teaching, and practice.<sup>9</sup> It is sometimes assumed that Lutherans are in agreement about the interpretation of Scripture; however, the Lutheran church incorporates different perspectives which impacts whether the clergy spouse feels supported within her faith community. We propose that clergy spouses are responsible for playing an active role in the practice of Scripture reading instead of relying solely on others to be the interpreters of Scripture. This proposal is in alignment with the Lutheran belief that all persons should have access to and be educated in the Sacred Story.<sup>10</sup> Luther describes the practice of Scripture reading: “You should meditate, that is, not only in your heart, but also externally, by actually repeating and comparing oral speech and literal words of the book, reading and rereading them with diligent attention and reflection, so that you may see what the Holy Spirit means by them.”<sup>11</sup> As with the other spiritual disciplines, Scripture reading is best practiced both individually and communally with intentionality and self-awareness. When the clergy spouse reads Scripture in this fashion, she will be more apt to understand—both cognitively and spiritually—the workings of God. This, in turn, enhances her ability to positively cope as a clergy spouse.

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<sup>9</sup> Hanson, *A Graceful Life*, 70. Martin Luther professed in the beliefs of ‘Faith Alone’, ‘Grace Alone’, and ‘Scripture Alone’. However, as Lutherans, we recognize that each of these concepts is not an entity unto itself and they all play an integral role in the dance of formation.

<sup>10</sup> As a Lutheran, Pietist theologian Philipp Spener addressed the question of lay persons interpreting the Bible. He advocated that all persons can learn and comprehend the biblical texts. Read Philipp Spener, “Spiritual Prieshood,” #35 in *Pietists: Select Writings of Classics of Western Spirituality*, ed. Peter C. Erb, 34, for further information.

<sup>11</sup> Martin Luther, *Luther’s Works, Vol 34: Preface to the Wittenberg Edition of Luther’s German Writings* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 2001), CD-ROM, 285; Howard, “*Lectio Divina*,” 67.

Howard claims that Luther used Psalm 119 as a guide to study theology utilizing three components: *Oratio*, *Meditatio*, and *Tentatio*.<sup>12</sup> Though these steps can be viewed as separate exercises that reflect individual spiritual disciplines, this three-step process can also be applied to the formative practice of Scripture reading. Reading, reflecting, and responding are critical elements in the process of reading Scripture. *Oratio* (prayer) was Luther's first step and should be incorporated naturally into the Scripture reading process. The second step was *Meditatio* (meditation). Howard claims that Luther proposed the practice of *meditatio* should include "reading, studying the oral speech and literal words of the books. It involves reading and re-reading works with diligent attention to detail. It includes preaching, reading and hearing, studying and speaking. It cannot be done in isolation, but only in a community of laity, theologians and pastors."<sup>13</sup> Clergy spouses are included in this faith community, and they play a distinct role in the communal aspect of studying Scripture. Finally, the third step, *Tentatio*, addresses the realities of the challenges and temptations that come with life. Luther was quoted as saying, "This is the touchstone which teaches you not only to know and understand, but also to experience how right, how true, how sweet, how lovely, how mighty, how comforting God's Word is, wisdom beyond all wisdom."<sup>14</sup> In many respects, the third step is the practical application of reading Scripture. It is an opportunity for the clergy spouse to identify the challenges and unveil God's offer of life and transformation which

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<sup>12</sup> Howard, "*Lectio Divina*," 65.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, 67.

<sup>14</sup> Gordon A. Jensen, "Envisioning Theological Education for the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada," *Consensus* 30, no. 2 (2005): 55-76, accessed March 1, 2014, ATLASerials, Religion Database, 67.

frees the clergy spouse to embrace her identity as a child of God and accept her role as clergy spouse.

### **Lutheran Scripture Reading**

Pietist Philipp Jakob Spener was a proponent of reading Scripture and believed it was essential for Christian life. He also believed that reading Scripture was not reserved for professional ministers and should be placed in the hands of the laity. Jonathan Strom writes: “Spener is confident that because of the illumination of the Holy Spirit, even pious, simple Christians can come to understand it, especially when it is done with prayer and humility. Direct encounter with Scripture becomes a central task for all Christians.”<sup>15</sup> Clergy spouses can interpret this as a direct invitation to participate in the faith practice of Scripture reading integrating it into their daily living. Spener explains, “The Word of God remains the seed from which all that is good in us must grow. If we succeed in getting the people to seek eagerly and diligently in the book of life for their joy, their spiritual life will be wonderfully strengthened and they will become altogether different people....”<sup>16</sup> Therefore, the clergy spouse is offered hope that she will experience spiritual transformation by reading Scripture and engaging this spiritual discipline.

Carter Lindberg writes, “The Word is the foundation of the church and the sacraments are the Word made visible.”<sup>17</sup> From a Lutheran perspective, there exists a clear delineation between the Word of God (Jesus Christ) and the word of God

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<sup>15</sup> Jonathan Strom, “The Common Priesthood and the Pietist Challenge for Ministry and Laity,” in *Princeton Theological Monograph Series*, vol. 155, *The Pietist Impulse in Christianity*, ed. Christian T. Collins Winn (Eugene, OR: Pickwick, 2011), 49.

<sup>16</sup> Philipp Jakob Spener, “*Pia Desideria*,” in *Pietists: Selected Writings*, ed. Peter C. Erb (Ramsey, NJ: Paulist Press, 1983), 34.

<sup>17</sup> Carter Lindberg, *The Third Reformation: Charismatic Movements and the Lutheran Tradition* (Macon, GA: Mercer Univ. Pr., 1983), 51.

(Scripture). Martin Luther said: “Scripture is the manger in which we find the Christ child,” and Luther was clear not to confuse the two.<sup>18</sup> James Estep echoes Luther by claiming, “An evangelical rationale for spiritual formation is a relationship with Jesus Christ *through* Scripture, *not* Scripture itself. The Bible is a means to an end, not the end itself. When one reads an autobiography or biography, it is not the book but the person portrayed by the book that draws the reader into relationship.”<sup>19</sup> Scripture is not meant to be the tool through which the clergy spouse experiences growth and transformation, but the spiritual discipline of reading Scripture is meant to deepen her relationship with Christ, through which transformation occurs.

In general, Lutherans tend to be more comfortable reading the Bible from a cognitive perspective, attempting to discern what is supposed to be gleaned and learned from study. However, the Bible is not merely a tool to be analyzed and examined for the right answer; it is also a formative tool that nurtures and challenges believers. One of the greatest benefits of studying and memorizing Scripture is that it increases the clergy spouse’s faith as it penetrates her heart, mind, and soul. It is in the places of tension that transformation occurs as she grows in Christlikeness. Hanson teaches, “Whenever we interpret something from the Bible, a conversation takes place between the words of Scripture and ourselves in our life situation. We bring to Scripture our distinctive life experience and needs, which color what we see and hear in the text.”<sup>20</sup> Hanson highlights

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<sup>18</sup> Martin Luther, “Martin Luther Quotes about Bible,” [http://www.azquotes.com/author/9142-Martin\\_Luther/tag/bible](http://www.azquotes.com/author/9142-Martin_Luther/tag/bible) (accessed August 29, 2015). Martin Luther, *Luther’s Works, Vol 52* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 2001), CD-ROM, 21.

<sup>19</sup> James Riley Estep Jr., “Scripture and Spiritual Formation in the German Pietist Tradition,” *Christian Education Journal* 9 (Spring 2012): S107, ProQuest Religion.

<sup>20</sup> Hanson, *A Graceful Life*, 55.

an important concept in that each clergy spouse brings a unique perspective and lens to her Scripture reading. Lutherans address this tension by promoting reading and studying Scripture within an intentional faith community. If the clergy spouse is not immersed in a faith community, her sense of spiritual isolation and loneliness may heighten.

Dietrich Bonhoeffer wrote about the benefits of intentional faith communities in his book *Life Together*. Neil Holm used this text to examine classroom formation and spiritual awareness: “For Bonhoeffer, the main purpose of reading Scripture aloud is to be drawn into and to participate in the biblical narrative, to receive part of that which once took place, to experience God’s action, and for the books of Scripture to become alive in new ways.”<sup>21</sup> David Brisben and Amelia Klein write, “Setting the scriptural story alongside our story, we are no longer limited to our own interpretations of our experiences. Rather, we open ourselves to God’s interpretations of those experiences.”<sup>22</sup> Furthermore, intentional Scripture reading is one of the central tents of Pietism and both Spener and Count von Zinzendorf used Scripture reading as a means for “kindling faith.”<sup>23</sup> Spener recommends that Scripture be read in a family context, as individuals, and within a faith community.<sup>24</sup> Therefore, a safe faith community offers a clergy spouse a platform upon which the Christ child comes alive and speaks in new and profound ways.

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<sup>21</sup> Neil Holm, “Classroom Formation and Spiritual Awareness Pedagogy Based on Bonhoeffer’s *Life Together*,” *Journal of Education and Christian Belief* 12, no. 2 (October 2008): 164, accessed October 29, 2013, Academic Search Premier.

<sup>22</sup> David Brisben and Amelia Klein, “Reading the Old Testament as Story: A Pedagogy for Spiritual Formation,” *Christian Education Journal* 9, no. 2 (2012): 333.

<sup>23</sup> Estep, “Scripture and Spiritual Formation,” S94.

<sup>24</sup> Spener, “Spiritual Priesthood,” 54-55.

For Lutherans, reading Scripture within a faith community brings the Sacred Story to life and offers a container for discernment and wisdom that is difficult to create when the clergy spouse reads Scripture alone. When Scripture is read communally in large passages, it tends to emphasize the biblical narrative and the interconnectedness between chapters, allowing biblical themes to emerge. This type of formational Scripture reading encourages the clergy spouse to engage with the biblical narrative personally while remaining rooted in the community of faith.<sup>25</sup> In turn, this process decreases the clergy spouse's sense of spiritual isolation when she feels rooted in the biblical narrative within the container of a safe and supportive faith community, helping the clergy spouse embrace her call and role as clergy spouse.

Lutheran Pietist Augustus Herman Francke identified seven different ways to read Scripture: grammatical, historical, analytical, expository, doctrinal, inferential, and practical (devotional).<sup>26</sup> Each of these forms of Scripture reading impacts the clergy spouse when her goal is to be mastered by the Word and not to master it. Lutherans have a strong history of using Scripture reading as a tool for faith formation, particularly with lay women of the church.<sup>27</sup> The publication *Lutheran Women Today* has served to educate women as it has preserved the narrative web of Scripture within the life of the church.<sup>28</sup> In their research on Lutheran women, Diane Levy Jacobson and her colleagues

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<sup>25</sup> Holm, "Classroom Formation," 164.

<sup>26</sup> Howard, "*Lectio Divina*," 60-61.

<sup>27</sup> Diane Levy Jacobson, Carol Schersten LaHurd, and Susan Wilds McArver, "Luther's Legacy in American Lutheran Women's Bible Study," *Dialog: A Journal of Theology* 45, no. 1 (2006): 33, accessed March 11, 2014, Academic Search Premier, write: "Most Christian denominations facilitate Bible study among their members, but few have the ELCA's legacy of Martin Luther's commitment to thorough education, including the religious education, of the people."

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, 29.

discovered that Lutheran women Bible studies fostered women's leadership development in addition to assisting women in identifying their voice and call within the larger church.<sup>29</sup> For clergy spouses today, *Lutheran Women Today* continues to play a role in biblical and theological education, but it no longer serves as the only means for women's faith formation. Clergy spouses of today are charged with identifying what form of Scripture reading fosters their spiritual formation in light of their context.

### Forms of Scripture Reading

When examining the means for reading Scripture, it is prudent to consider the purpose for engaging this spiritual discipline to determine whether the clergy spouse is using Scripture for her benefit or allowing God to work on her through Scripture. The question arises whether she approaches Scripture with an openness to God or seeks a method of managing God.<sup>30</sup> Alice Fryling describes this distinction using the terms 'formative' and 'informational' Scripture reading: "Informational reading is linear and analytical: 'We seek to master the text. We seek to grasp it, to get our minds around it, to bring it under our control.' In formational reading, on the other hand, the point is to 'allow the text to master you.'"<sup>31</sup> When a clergy spouse engages Scripture reading from an informational perspective, it tends to promote a false sense of understanding and clarity regarding God's Word, which may further enhance her sense of spiritual loneliness.

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<sup>29</sup> Ibid., 32.

<sup>30</sup> Mulholland, *Shaped by the Word*, 95, writes: "Do we seek to function out of our relationship with God, or do we try to function ourselves into relationship with God?"

<sup>31</sup> Alice Fryling, *Seeking God Together: An Introduction to Group Spiritual Direction* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Books, 2009), 66; Mulholland, *Shaped by the Word*, 51-53, echoes this sentiment.



In contrast, formational Scripture reading avoids quantifying the amount or content of the reading. Formational reading is in-depth Scripture reading that allows God to form the clergy spouse through the biblical text instead of the clergy spouse forming her own interpretation of Scripture; this requires an openness and willingness to let God speak through the text.<sup>32</sup> When clergy spouses engage Scripture reading from a formational perspective, the goal becomes nurturing the relationships with God, self, and others. As a spiritual discipline, formational reading invites God into the practice of Scripture reading placing God at the center of the transformative process. In contrast, informational reading or the act of reading Scripture lends itself to surface content and knowledge as it inherently insulates and protects the clergy spouse from the awareness and disclosure God offers through Scripture.

The informational method of reading Scripture can leave the clergy spouse struggling to connect in a faith community where she may already feel isolated. Informational Scripture reading tends to be analytical, critical, and judgmental, and it can move the clergy spouse into a cognitive space where theological understanding takes precedence over spiritual formation. Brisben and Klein express concern over reading and understanding Scripture for doctrine and theology over the process of formation and growth.<sup>33</sup> Reading Scripture is transformational, particularly when it is read and experienced as a biblical narrative where the clergy spouse can participate as a witness in the Sacred Story. Although informational Scripture reading may feel more comfortable to

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<sup>32</sup> Mulholland, *Shaped by the Word*, 55-59; Susan Muto, "The Art and Discipline of Formative Reading: Revisiting Holy Scripture with Humble Receptivity," *Journal of Spiritual Formation and Soul Care* 5, no. 1 (2012): 103, accessed March 10, 2014, ATLA Religion Database with ATLASerials.

<sup>33</sup> Brisben and Klein, "Reading the Old Testament as Story," 327; Henry A. Corcoran, "Biblical Narratives and Life Transformation: An Apology for the Narrative Teaching of Bible Stories," *Christian Education Journal* 40, no. 1 (2007): 36, accessed October 1, 2015, ATLASerials, Religion Collection, discusses this perspective throughout his article.

the Lutheran clergy spouse, it can stifle her spiritual formation and foster her sense of spiritual isolation.

Richard Foster identifies a five-step formational process for reading Scripture:

1. *Submit* to the biblical text and allow the message “to flow into us rather than attempting to master it.”
2. *Biblical reflection* from a head and heart perspective.
3. *Pray* the biblical text with cries of gratitude, confession, lament and petition.
4. *Identify* the connection between the biblical text and life application.
5. *Obey* the Scripture by “turning from our personal desires to yielding to the will of God.”<sup>34</sup>

Ultimately, one can see from Foster’s five steps that the process of reading Scripture is not a means to a personal goal, but it is a spiritual discipline the clergy spouse offers to God with no expectations or demands. When a clergy spouse allows Scripture reading to be formational, in the words of Mulholland, she becomes open to the “penetration of God’s living Word, and responsive to the shaping of God’s will for our wholeness and life.”<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> Richard J. Foster, *Sanctuary of the Soul: Journey into Meditative Prayer* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Books, 2011), 40-41; Muto, in “The Art and Discipline of Formative Reading,” 111-12, offers a process of formational Scripture reading that she terms Integrative Reading: Hear, Read, Mark, Learn, Inwardly Digest; Mulholland, *Shaped by the Word*, 162, deems the three rhythms of reading scripture for spiritual formation: Approach, Encounter, and Response.

<sup>35</sup> Mulholland, *Shaped by the Word*, 147.

### ***Lectio Divina***

Lutherans are typically well versed in informational Scripture reading, but discomfort tends to arise at the prospect of reading Scripture formatively, where the clergy spouse listens for God through the biblical text. Faith practices such as *Lectio divina* and *visio divina* invite Lutheran clergy spouses to engage Scripture and to listen for God in a new manner. *Lectio divina* or “divine reading” is a form of praying with Scripture where the biblical text is read with reverence and openness to what God is saying in the present moment.<sup>36</sup> It comes from the Benedictine tradition and refers to sacred or devotional reading of the Bible where both the mind and the heart are incorporated into the faith practice,<sup>37</sup> and it is a formational method of reading Scripture that invites the clergy spouse to read, reflect, and respond to the Word of God. Clergy spouses can use *lectio divina* as a tool on their faith journey as a means for support, wisdom, and discernment.

As with any spiritual discipline, there are general guidelines but freedom within to express and utilize the faith practice in the manner that most effectively helps the clergy spouse grow closer to God. For example, some clergy spouses begin *lectio divina* with a prayer requesting God’s guidance while some read the same biblical text, such as a Psalm. Generally, there are four calm, deliberate, and gradual components to the process of *lectio divina*:

1. *Lectio* (reading)
2. *Meditatio* (meditating)
3. *Oratio* (praying)

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<sup>36</sup> Pieter Roose, “*Lectio Divina* among the Monks,” *Communio* 13, no. 4 (1986): 368, accessed March 10, 2014, ATLA Religion Database with ATLA Serials, writes: “Divine reading means reading the Bible, reading the Word of God.”

<sup>37</sup> Nouwen, *Spiritual Formation*, xxiii.

4. *Contemplatio* (contemplation)  
Sometimes add: *operatio* (action).<sup>38</sup>

Sarah Butler expands on the four moves of *lectio divina* with her description:

1. Read (*lectio*): “Read the story that is told in God’s Word. Be present to the Word. Listen to it for information. Digest it. Absorb it.”
2. Reflect (*meditatio*): “Become actively involved with the story. Pay attention to what attracts your attention. Notice your own feelings. Reflect on your own inner experience of the scripture. Allow the gospel (or other text) to be a mirror of your own life.”
3. Respond (*oratio*): “Be free to express what is pouring out of the reflection – praise, tears, repentance, thanksgiving, and so on. How is God becoming formed in you? Celebrate this with acceptance.”
4. Rest (*contemplatio*): “Let go of all reflections and responses in order to allow God to speak to you in the mystery of silence and quiet presence. Surrender to the mystery.”<sup>39</sup>

During *lectio divina*, Scripture is read slowly and repetitively with a goal of growth and transformation. Evan Howard describes the intentionality that is required of the participant: “Self-examination is an assumed component of this process as the horizons between the text and reader are bridged through the means of this practice and through the work of the Spirit of God.”<sup>40</sup> The process of self-examination invites the clergy spouse to begin differentiating herself apart from others’ expectations, which leads to healthier boundaries and ultimately to healthier clergy spouses, families, and ministries. Nouwen notes that one of the benefits of regularly practicing *lectio divina* practice is that it presents opportunities for the clergy spouse’s story and God’s story to intersect creating

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<sup>38</sup> Tony Jones, *The Sacred Way: Spiritual Practices for Everyday Life* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan/Youth Specialties, 2005), 52-53.

<sup>39</sup> Sarah Butler, “*Lectio Divina* as a Tool for Discernment,” *Sewanee Theological Review* 43, no. 3 (2000): 303, accessed March 10, 2014, ATLA Religion Database with ATLASerials; Christine Valters Paintner, *Eyes of the Heart: Photography as a Christian Contemplative Practice* (Notre Dame, IN: Sorin Books, 2013), 34.

<sup>40</sup> Howard, “*Lectio Divina*,” 69; Fryling, *Seeking God Together*, 68. The point about *lectio divina* is that it not only enlightens the mind, it also massages the will.

beautiful and amazing surprises.<sup>41</sup> These surprises may create tension and discomfort as the clergy spouse is asked to examine parts of her life that have been hidden. However, *lectio divina* lends itself to a prayerful, sacred time when the clergy spouse recognizes God's presence in her life and the life of those around her. Christine Paintner reminds clergy spouses that through the practice of *lectio divina*, "everything becomes a potential sacred text through which God can speak to us."<sup>42</sup>

## **Meditation**

Meditation tends to be identified as a form of prayer, but it also is a formational manner to read Scripture. The process of meditation tends to be devotional in nature whereby biblical text study is analytical and informational. Foster writes, "Meditation will relish a word; study will explicate it."<sup>43</sup> Meditating involves listening to God's word, reflecting on God's works, and practicing God's deeds with the focus being a change in behavior that results from an encounter with God. Meditating is prayerful reading of Scripture with the ultimate goal of having "prayerful conversation" with God.<sup>44</sup>

Foster identifies the following four steps in meditative Scripture reading:

1. *Repetition* channels the mind in a specific direction thereby instilling habits of thought.
2. *Concentration* centers the mind.
3. *Comprehension* clarifies the topic of study by focusing on the knowledge of the biblical text.
4. *Reflection* highlights the significance of the Scriptural study.<sup>45</sup>

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<sup>41</sup> Nouwen, *Spiritual Formation*, xxiii; Jones, *The Sacred Way*, 54, offers a guide that can be used to facilitate Group *Lectio Divina*.

<sup>42</sup> Paintner, *Eyes of the Heart*, 33.

<sup>43</sup> Foster, *Celebration of Discipline*, 64.

<sup>44</sup> Roose, "Lectio Divina among the Monks," 370.

<sup>45</sup> Foster, *Celebration of Discipline*, 64-66.

One of the benefits of meditation is the process of reflection, which leads to a change in attitude and beliefs opening the clergy spouse to the transformation process. It also offers the clergy spouse opportunities to examine those areas of resistance that may be impinging on her ability to fully accept her role as clergy spouse.

### **Challenges to Engaging Scripture Reading**

Although we maintain that Scripture reading is a vital spiritual discipline for clergy spouses to engage, there exists the belief that Scripture reading is a rudimentary exercise reserved for young Christians. Reading Scripture can be indicative of immature faith when it does not incorporate a contemplative component. However, we propose that Scripture reading, particularly formational Scripture reading, is foundational for the faith journey of the clergy spouse by its ability to place her in the Word of God. This grounding enables the clergy spouse to explore faith practices and faith communities that will further develop and deepen her faith.

Some critics have expressed concern that the practice of *lectio divina* is too Catholic, New Age, or too closely related to contemplative mystical prayer.<sup>46</sup> As with any faith practice, the clergy spouse is charged to keep God at the center of the practice to ensure the discipline refrains from becoming ego-centric. Scripture reading is part of the life-long faith journey. The biblical text will speak differently when read at different times throughout the spiritual journey.<sup>47</sup> Therefore, the spiritual discipline of Scripture

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<sup>46</sup> Howard, "*Lectio Divina*," 56.

<sup>47</sup> Estep, "Scripture and Spiritual Formation," S106.

reading offers the clergy spouse a tool to remain engaged and rooted in the Word of God in what can feel like an ever-evolving spiritual journey.

Scripture reading is disruptive and challenging because of our limited perspective on life, faith, and relationships. When informational Scripture reading becomes the primary method of engaging God, it can dampen God's voice in the clergy spouse's life and elevate her tendency to listen to her desires over the will of God. Mulholland's writing challenges clergy spouses to consider whose will is taking precedence:

If our view of ourselves is anything less than being a word spoken forth by God, then our self-image is a self-constructed façade—a crust of self, a false self....This false self approaches the scripture informationally and utilizes it functionally to support and maintain the façade, especially the religious façade, rather than be open and receptive to the living, penetrating Word of God who meets it in the scripture.<sup>48</sup>

The reading of Scripture is not intended for the sole functional purpose of gathering information or satisfying curiosity, for that turns Scripture reading into a task to accomplish or a skill to master. Rather, reading Scripture is meant to deepen the clergy spouse's relationship with Christ and transform her into Christlikeness.

Nouwen warns Christians: "When the disciplines of the Word, silence, and guidance are practiced in an individualistic milieu, they may well do no more than nourish our narcissistic tendencies and strengthen spiritual self-centeredness."<sup>49</sup> When a clergy spouse lives in a world fabricated by these delusions of self, God, and others, attempts are made to maintain that façade out of habit and fear, which often involve attempting to control Scripture and inherently God. This makes it more difficult for the clergy spouse to embrace her identity as a child of God and accept her role as a clergy

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<sup>48</sup> Mulholland, *Shaped by the Word*, 112.

<sup>49</sup> Nouwen, *Spiritual Formation*, xxvii.

spouse. Scripture can also be taken out of context by asking a clergy spouse to read a biblical text listening for a particular word that captures her attention in order to prove a point or gather evidence.<sup>50</sup> When Scripture reading is practiced as a communal discipline within a faith community, it fortifies discernment and wisdom to prevent the above-mentioned concern from occurring. As Lutherans, we encounter Christ through Scripture; therefore, Scripture reading roots the clergy spouse in the Word of God serves as a vital component for spiritual formation, and reminds her of her call to ministry through the priesthood of all believers.

### **Benefits of Engaging Scripture Reading**

Sudi Kate Gliebe discovers in her research on neuroplasticity and spiritual growth that one of the challenges of engaging any faith practice is the discipline required to create a new habit. She finds that reading Scripture strengthens the neural connections necessary for establishing patterns of behavior. She writes, “The synapses created by focused attention recruit a large number of neurons so that when the mind focuses repeatedly on the Scripture through reading, prayer and meditation, synapses are strengthened making these habits formed in the brain.”<sup>51</sup> Not only does reading Scripture benefit the spiritual life of the clergy spouse, but it positively alters her cognition; therefore, her mind and heart are transformed. All of the spiritual disciplines require practice and discipline to instill them as new beliefs and habits. Sarah Butler warns, “There is no way of getting around the necessity for structures and disciplines in the

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<sup>50</sup> Rick Langer, “Points of Unease with the Spiritual Formation Movement,” *Journal of Spiritual Formation and Soul Care* 5, no. 2 (2012): 202, accessed November 6, 2014, Academic Search Premier.

<sup>51</sup> Sudi Kate Gliebe, “Neuroplasticity and Spiritual Growth: Weaving Circuits of Faith,” *Lutheran Education* (2012): 2, accessed March 1, 2014, EBSCOhost.



spiritual life. Rather than imposing a burden, they open and support deeper knowledge of God's love."<sup>52</sup> Implementing a new faith practice offers benefits beyond the external habits and behaviors that are initially identified and perhaps sought. Therefore, choosing to practice a spiritual discipline that neurologically promotes positive habits benefits the clergy spouse, her family, and their ministry.

Reading Scripture builds bridges and communities across the relational components of life whether with the self, God, or others. Engaging the Scriptures offers the clergy spouse opportunities for growth and transformation and acceptance of her identity through the renewal of her heart and mind. The biblical narrative acts as a map to discover her identity by unveiling her sense of self in the world around her.<sup>53</sup> Brisben and Klein describes how reading Scripture enables clergy spouses to strengthen their faith and build relationships through a shared biblical narrative:

When one has her own story, hears another grander story, and can put her story within the grander story, her faith is nurtured. This explains how Christians with their own stories, when reading and hearing the Old Testament as story, are then able to place themselves in the story and thus experience greater faith development.<sup>54</sup>

Nouwen echoes this sentiment: "The regular practice of *lectio divina* presents occasions when my story and God's story meet, and in that moment something surprising can happen. To read the Bible in this way means therefore to read 'on my knees' - reverently, attentively, and with the deep faith that God has a word for me in my own unique

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<sup>52</sup> Butler, "*Lectio Divina* as a Tool for Discernment," 304.

<sup>53</sup> Brisben and Klein, "Reading the Old Testament as Story," 328.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*, 328-29.

situation.”<sup>55</sup> Ultimately, formational Scripture reading lends itself to a deeper faith for the clergy spouse.

The practice of reading Scripture aloud encourages the development of listening skills that aids the clergy spouse’s communication skills. In communal Scripture reading, Lutheran clergy spouses share their hopes, dreams, and struggles in daily life. These readings become formative events where the goal is insight about self and fostering deeper relationships. Neil Holm laments that, as a society, “we do not listen well to each other, because we have become so self-oriented. We cannot truly be other-oriented unless we listen deeply, are deeply aware of others and are truly present to them.”<sup>56</sup> Therefore, when a clergy spouse engages communal Scripture reading as a formative practice, her sense of spiritual isolation lessens through the community building process. Roose discovered that *lectio divina* “fosters the unity of one’s personal spiritual life, unity in the community that listens to the same Word, as well as unity between generations that have all heard the same Word and have reacted to it in doctrine and life.”<sup>57</sup> Through a shared biblical narrative, the clergy spouse deepens her relationships, builds community, and decreases her sense of spiritual loneliness, thus enabling her to embrace her role as a clergy spouse.

Reading Scripture fosters positive coping skills within clergy spouses when Scripture becomes integrated and personalized. In her research on positive coping practices, Kerrick claims that clergy spouses changed after reading Scripture: “They

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<sup>55</sup> Nouwen, *Spiritual Formation*, xxiii.

<sup>56</sup> Holm, “Classroom Formation,” 164.

<sup>57</sup> Roose, “*Lectio Divina* among the Monks,” 369.

found comfort and reassurance from the Bible concerning the stresses they face. They received new insights into how to handle these stresses by reading the Bible. And at times, they were convicted by a new truth they encountered in Scripture, which later led to a change of attitude or actions.”<sup>58</sup> Scripture reading and formational study enables clergy spouses to gain insight and awareness into their lives, fostering healthy coping skills.<sup>59</sup> It also enables clergy spouses to manage others’ expectations by strengthening their emotional and spiritual well-being.

Narratives play a strong role in all of our lives. Edward Wimberly states, “Anchoring one’s life in the sacred story and plot brings a fundamental change in individual personalities” as the biblical stories become the narrative through which life is lived.<sup>60</sup> Corcoran adds, “The narrative nature of consciousness grants a sense of self by uniting the stored images of memory, the present experience, and the imagined future. I am the storied version of what I did, what I do, and what I imagine I might do. Personal narratives give the gift of meaning to life events for a person.”<sup>61</sup> Choosing a narrative in which to anchor one’s life frees and empowers the clergy spouse to manage others’ expectations and embrace her call. Biblical narratives allow the clergy spouse to explore a new life, community, and worldview by offering her an opportunity to play a role in the ‘re-storying’ of her life.<sup>62</sup> Corcoran writes, “Biblical narratives of disruption and

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<sup>58</sup> Sarah Pierson Kerrick, “Positive Coping Practices Among Wives of Male Christian Clergy” (PsyD diss., Wheaton College, March 2010), 93.

<sup>59</sup> Ibid., 96.

<sup>60</sup> Edward P. Wimberly, *Prayer in Pastoral Counseling: Suffering, Healing, and Discernment* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1990), 20.

<sup>61</sup> Corcoran, “Biblical Narratives,” 36.

<sup>62</sup> Ibid.

discontinuity may resonate with seekers at the time of transition.”<sup>63</sup> These narratives offer the clergy spouse hope and strength during the challenges of ministry when it is difficult to accept her role as a clergy spouse. Ultimately, a clergy spouse’s coping skills improves through the strength, insight, guidance, and relief she experiences by sharing her burdens with God. Kerrick discovered that “Centering themselves on God during their prayers, devotions, and Scripture readings also allows them to change their focus, which in turn provides a new perspective on the daily hassles and the stresses related to being married to a pastor that they face.”<sup>64</sup>

Scripture reading is vital in the process of transformation and the acceptance of the clergy spouse role. The spiritual discipline of Scripture reading challenges clergy spouses to intentionally examine the areas of life where she has become human-centered and refocuses her attention onto a God-centered reality. Bernstein says, “The psalms pull us out of a human-centered reality and plant us in a God-centered one.”<sup>65</sup> When the clergy spouse reframes her life, she is more apt to accept her role as a clergy spouse, and she is able to release the burden of meeting others’ expectations of what she perceives the clergy spouse role should entail. This acceptance rises from her ability to hear God’s call in her life beckoning her into the life God desperately wants for her. Scripture reading is meant to propel clergy spouses into a God-centered reality so they may experience grace, freedom, growth, and transformation.

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<sup>63</sup> Ibid., 38.

<sup>64</sup> Kerrick, “Positive Coping Practices,” 96.

<sup>65</sup> Ellen Bernstein, “Celebrating God, Celebrating Earth: Psalms, Sabbath, and Holy Days,” *Currents in Theology and Mission* 37, no. 5 (October 1, 2010): 383, accessed October 29, 2013, ATLA Religion Database with ATLASerials, 379.

## CHAPTER SIX

### PRAYER TO EMBRACE THE DANCE

*To pray is to change. Prayer is the central avenue God uses to transform us....  
The closer we come to the heartbeat of God the more we see our need  
and the more we desire to be conformed to Christ.*

- Richard Foster<sup>1</sup>

#### Introduction

The last two chapters have focused on the benefits clergy spouses experience through the spiritual disciplines of Sabbath practice and Scripture reading. Sabbath practice is often seen as an individual spiritual discipline while Scripture reading acts as both an individual and communal discipline. Prayer too is practiced individually and communally, and it undergirds almost all other faith practices. We read Scripture in order to listen to God, but we pray as a response to His Word. Pieter Roose examines *Lectio Divina* and discovers: “This spirit of prayer therefore does not stand apart from Scripture, which in reading is a Word that becomes flesh, but in prayer is a Word that becomes Spirit and transforms us.”<sup>2</sup> Prayer is a tool that invites the clergy spouse into a deeper relationship with God.

The spiritual discipline of prayer requires an intentional and concentrated effort to create sacred space for God as prayer is a discipline of the heart and a spiritual practice of the present moment. Henri Nouwen reminds Christians: “When we abandon ourselves to God in prayer, then each moment becomes a sacrament of joy, gratitude, and loving

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<sup>1</sup> Richard Foster, *Celebration of Discipline: The Path to Spiritual Growth*, 20<sup>th</sup> ed. (New York: Harper San Francisco, 1998), 33.

<sup>2</sup> Pieter Roose, “*Lectio Divina* among the Monks,” *Communio* 13, no. 4 (1986): 376, accessed March 10, 2014, ATLA Religion Database with ATLASerials.

acceptance of the will of God manifest in that moment.”<sup>3</sup> Prayer enables the clergy spouse to embrace prayer’s sacramental nature and offers a window into the heart of God. Prayer fosters emotional and spiritual health to empower the clergy spouse to accept her call as a child of God, to manage the expectations of others, and to reduce her sense of spiritual loneliness.

### **Transformative Nature of Prayer**

Prayer is a vital component of the formation process, and clergy spouses are invited to participate in this faith practice both individually and communally since prayerful conversation with God grounds and transforms lives. Lutheran scholar, K. Glen Johnson describes prayer as the “most central of the spiritual disciplines and in some ways the most difficult, for to pray is to change.”<sup>4</sup> Prayer is a relational experience with God as we converse about life, joys, struggles, and desires.<sup>5</sup> Prayer is familiar conversation with God that deepens relationships and heightens the clergy spouse’s positive coping skills. A.J. Cockworth describes prayer as an “asking, a seeking and a knocking directed towards God. Prayer is decisively and simply petition, a ‘frank asking.’”<sup>6</sup> Prayer is a dialectic experience held within a sacred space that fosters the relationship with God. Richard Foster describes prayers as the most central of all the

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<sup>3</sup> Henri J.M. Nouwen, *Spiritual Formation: Following the Movements of the Spirit* (New York: HarperOne, 2010), 23.

<sup>4</sup> K. Glen Johnson, “Spiritual Disciplines,” *Lutheran Forum* 40, no. 2 (Summer 2006), 76.

<sup>5</sup> Susan Muto, “Living Contemplatively and Serving God in the World; Two Sides of the Coin of Christian Ministry,” *Journal of Spiritual Formation and Soul Care* 6, no. 1 (Spring 2013): 87, accessed October 27, 2013, Academic Search Premier, echoes this sentiment: “Prayer is an intimate sharing between friends.”

<sup>6</sup> A.J. Cockworth, “Attending to the Sabbath: An Alternative Direction in Karl Barth’s Theology of Prayer,” *International Journal of Systematic Theology* 13, no. 3 (July 2011): 254, accessed November 4, 2013, Academic Search Premier.

Spiritual Disciplines because prayer “ushers us into perpetual communion with the Father.”<sup>7</sup>

Prayer nurtures growth and change as we respond to God’s work in our life and the life of others, and this is critical for clergy spouses struggling to accept their role. In their book on faith practices, Bass and Dykstra suggest prayer is an opportunity for offering thanksgiving and praise, in addition to asking God for mercy and strength. They write: “We ask for God’s help in saying yes to that which is life-giving in the deepest sense and in saying the specific no that will loosen whatever chains bind us and others to destruction.”<sup>8</sup> Prayer frees the clergy spouse to embrace her imperfections, yet encourages her to strive towards health and wholeness. Susan Muto echoes this sentiment when she writes: “No matter what form prayer takes, it signifies our conviction that without God we are and can do nothing.”<sup>9</sup> Prayer invites the clergy spouse to recognize her dependency upon God and abdicate the illusion of control, thereby freeing her from the burden of managing her perception of others’ expectations.

The United States is a society that values productivity and usefulness and offers praise for busyness. Ultimately, prayer is an invitation to spend unscheduled, useless time with God without tasks or items to accomplish. Nouwen assures his readers,

But if we can detach ourselves from the idea of the usefulness of prayer and the results of prayer, we become free to ‘waste’ a precious hour with God in prayer. Gradually, we may find, our ‘useless’ time will transform us, and everything around us will be different.... Prayer is being unbusy with God instead of being

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<sup>7</sup> Foster, *Celebration of Discipline*, 33, writes: “Prayer catapults us onto the frontier of the spiritual life.” Rev. Dennis Robinson, “The Rector’s Conference,” *Seminary Journal* 19, no. 1 (2013): 5, writes: “Prayer is an essential point of spiritual formation.”

<sup>8</sup> Dorothy C. Bass and Craig Dykstra, “Growing in the Practices of Faith,” *Practicing Our Faith: A Way of Life for a Searching People*, ed. Dorothy C. Bass (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1997), 202.

<sup>9</sup> Muto, “Living Contemplatively,” 87.

busy with other beings. Prayer is primarily to do nothing useful or productive in the presence of God. To not be useful is to remind myself that if anything important or fruitful happens through prayer, it is God who achieves the results.<sup>10</sup>

The discipline of prayer frees the clergy spouse to be with God and simply abide in God's presence. The practice of prayer offers the clergy spouse space free from judgment and expectation to allow her to experience and embrace God's grace. When this occurs, she is more apt to reflect this freedom throughout all of her relationships.

### **Lutheran Response to Prayer as a Spiritual Discipline**

The monasteries are based in a rhythm of prayer and work and offer clergy spouses an example of how to utilize prayer as a spiritual discipline in order to restore balance in life. Gerald Sittser describes the balance of prayer and work: "Prayer draws us to God; work sends us into the world. Prayer centers and quiets us; work energizes us. Prayer restores us to God; work allows us to participate in God's restoration of the world."<sup>11</sup> The Gospels demonstrate a similar prayer-work rhythm in Jesus' life. Jesus offered the example of being in constant prayer, and He encouraged the disciples to utilize this practice to deepen their relationship with God.<sup>12</sup> He was intentional about creating space to pray in accordance with the time He spent preaching and healing. He even withdrew at the garden at Gethsemane to pray for strength to accept the call that was placed on His life. The clergy spouse can experience a similar routine of prayer and work which moves her from an internal state of introspection to an external state of action

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<sup>10</sup> Nouwen, *Spiritual Formation*, 19.

<sup>11</sup> Gerald L. Sittser, *Water from a Deep Well: Christian Spirituality from Early Martyrs to Modern Missionaries* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Books, 2010), 114.

<sup>12</sup> Listed are some biblical examples of Jesus seeking prayer during his life. Luke 4:42; Mark 6:46-47; Luke 6:12-13; Mark 6:31-32; Matt. 26:36; Mark 1:35; Luke 5:16; Matt 6:6; Mark 1:35; Luke 4:42; 5:16; 6:12; 9:18; Luke 6:28; 11:2; 18:1-8; 19:46; 21:36; 22:40, 46 (prayer); Luke 5:16; 6:12; 9:18, 28-29; 11:1; 22:32; 22:41-45.



where she can implement the transformation God offers and accept the call God places on her life.

Martin Luther modeled a life of prayer, as he was a faithful practitioner of the spiritual discipline of prayer and regularly spent two or three hours in prayer.<sup>13</sup> Luther writes, “We pray after all because we are unworthy to pray. The very fact that we are unworthy and that we dare to pray confidently, trusting only in the faithfulness of God, makes us worthy to pray and to have our prayer answered.”<sup>14</sup> Philipp Spener echoes Luther when he expresses his desire that Christians “would repeat their prayers throughout the whole day, during their work, and study in quiet, and in this manner hallow all their endeavors.”<sup>15</sup> The clergy spouse is offered encouragement through Luther and Spener’s statements, in that prayer is not dependent upon eloquence or effectiveness as pray-ers but merely a trust in God’s faithfulness. Cocksworth challenges persons to pray, “Being unable to pray is not then, a lack or a detriment but precisely the paradoxical grounds on which we can pray and indeed flourish in prayer.”<sup>16</sup> It is in this paradoxical state that a clergy spouse finds hope during the difficult and challenging times of ministry.

Karl Barth has been instrumental in clarifying a theological and ethical vision of prayer. Cocksworth, in his research on Barth, notes that life is comprised of unceasing

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<sup>13</sup> Johnson, “Spiritual Disciplines,” 76.

<sup>14</sup> Martin Luther, *Luther’s Works, Vol 42: Devotional Writings I* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 2001), CD-ROM; Gordon A. Jensen, “Envisioning Theological Education for the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada,” *Consensus* 30, no. 2 (2005): 66, accessed March 1, 2014, ATLA Religion Database with ATLASerials.

<sup>15</sup> Philipp Jakob Spener, “On Hindrances to Theological Studies,” in *Pietists: Selected Writings*, ed. Peter C. Erb (Ramsey, NJ: Paulist Press, 1983), 67.

<sup>16</sup> Cocksworth, “Attending to the Sabbath,” 253.

prayer, of “active calling upon God.”<sup>17</sup> Just as Jesus reminds the disciples to pray the Lord’s Prayer and Paul commands the Thessalonians to pray without ceasing, Barth invokes a call to unceasing, active prayer.<sup>18</sup> Spener notes the importance of prayer: “Let us then be zealous in our practice of prayer for there is certainly no more useful practice for the Christian man [stet.] than prayer. Let us pray at all times and in all places so that the Lord may also be hallowed in all places.”<sup>19</sup> Prayer is not a task to relegate to the church professionals or to liturgical events. Prayer is an ongoing, ever-present activity that grounds the clergy spouse in the present as it reinforces one’s relationship with God and places God at the center of one’s life. Although Luther’s practice of praying two to three hours a day may be daunting to clergy spouses, we propose that a life comprised of ceaseless prayer—intentionally abiding in God’s presence—is beneficial to the clergy spouse’s well-being.

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<sup>17</sup> Cocksworth, “Attending to the Sabbath,” 252; Frances Rice McCormick, “Sabbath Rest: A Theological Imperative According to Karl Barth,” *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 62, no. 2 (June 1, 1994): 543, accessed October 29, 2013, ATLA Religion Database with ATLASerials, writes: “Prayer has a form and sequence of its own, namely, praise and thanksgiving. However, the heart of Christian prayer which best expresses a life of obedience—the center of all its forms—is that of petition or the calling upon God.”

<sup>18</sup> Bradley Hanson, *A Graceful Life: Lutheran Spirituality for Today* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress Publishers, 2000), 74, reminds Lutherans that prayer is conversational in nature “from God to us and from us to God.”

<sup>19</sup> Philipp Jakob Spener, “God-Pleasing Prayer,” *Pietists: Selected Writings*, ed. Peter C. Erb (Ramsey, NJ: Paulist Press, 1983), 93.

### Forms of Prayer

The spiritual discipline of prayer takes a multitude of forms, whether practiced individually or communally. Prayer can take shape in reading Scripture, singing songs of praise, or speaking lyrics to a meaningful hymn or song. God does not dictate the form; God simply invites the clergy spouse into conversation to foster their relationship. In contrast to “religion”, where prayer is approached as a task to accomplish or a skill to learn, this presupposes an end to the spiritual journey as if prayer is a spiritual formation skill that can be mastered.<sup>20</sup> Nouwen writes, “Spiritual formation, I have come to believe, is not about steps or stages on the way to perfection. It’s about the movement from the mind to the heart through prayer in its many forms that reunite us with God, each other, and our truest selves.”<sup>21</sup> This dissertation presupposes that clergy spouses are on a faith journey, and thus proposes that the spiritual discipline of prayer helps foster life-long growth and transformation.

The clergy spouse is encouraged to participate in the spiritual discipline of prayer as a means through which spiritual formation occurs. As her relationship with God deepens and her spirituality matures, prayer becomes less active or petitionary and more receptive in nature.<sup>22</sup> In her research on the spiritual disciplines, Cynthia McKnight classifies prayer into four main types:

1. Prayer of transaction – The pray-er focuses on prayer as a dialogue
2. Prayer of petition – The pray-er makes a personal plea or request
3. Prayer of submission – The pray-er submits self, injury, or illness to God

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<sup>20</sup> Foster, *Celebration of Discipline*, 36.

<sup>21</sup> Nouwen, *Spiritual Formation*, xvi.

<sup>22</sup> Simon Dein and Ronald Littlewood, “The Psychology of Prayer and the Development of the Prayer Experience Questionnaire,” *Mental Health, Religion and Culture* 10, no. 1 (2008): 40, accessed November 16, 2014, PsycINFO.

4. Prayer of intercession – The pray-er offers prayer with and for others.<sup>23</sup>

When the clergy spouse is aware of the type of prayer being offered to God, her self-awareness is heightened and her ability to establish healthy boundaries is strengthened. Identifying the type of prayer also encourages the clergy spouse to be more intentional in her prayer life. While similar in nature to the above-mentioned types of prayer, Banziger and her colleagues identified four types of prayer that infuse a psychological need to pray. They classify the four types of prayer this way:

1. Religious prayer – focuses on communion and relationship with God
2. Petitionary prayer – focuses on a desired effect from prayer
3. Meditative prayer – focuses on the action, need, and effect of prayer
4. Psychological prayer – focuses on the psychological need to pray, regardless of the desired result.<sup>24</sup>

In his text on Lutheran formation, Bradley Hanson identifies three dimensions of prayer:

1. Listening to God (meditation)
2. Speaking to God
3. Attending to God's presence.<sup>25</sup>

Each dimension of prayer is important for a comprehensive conversation with God.

Nouwen teaches, "We do not take the spiritual life seriously if we do not set aside time to

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<sup>23</sup> Cynthia M. McKnight, "Spiritual Disciplines in Sports Medicine," *Athletic Training and Sport Health Care: The Journal for the Practicing Clinician* 1, no. 6 (2009): 282, accessed March 1, 2014, SPORTDiscus.

<sup>24</sup> Sarah Banziger, Marinus van Uden, and Jacques Janssen, "Praying and Coping: The Relation between Varieties of Praying and Religious Coping Styles," *Mental Health, Religion and Culture* 11, no. 1 (2008): 104, accessed November 16, 2014, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/13674670600748386>; Dein and Littlewood, "The Psychology of Prayer," 40-41, examines Poloma and Pendleton (1991) and their categories of prayer: ritual prayer, petitionary prayer, colloquial prayer, and meditative prayer; Read Leslie J. Francis and Mandy Robbins, "Psychological Type and Prayer Preferences: A Study Among Anglican Clergy in the United Kingdom," *Mental Health, Religion and Culture* 11, no. 1 (2008): 68, accessed March 1, 2014, PsycINFO, for further information on how they identifies tasks that reflect these four types of prayer. The clergy spouse may find their descriptions helpful in identifying specific tools to practice the spiritual discipline of prayer.

<sup>25</sup> Hanson, *A Graceful Life*, 75.

be with God and listen to him.”<sup>26</sup> Generally, Lutheran clergy spouses have been trained to talk to God, but not coached in how to listen to God. Listening is vital for receptivity.<sup>27</sup> Regardless of the form of prayer that the clergy spouse engages, her emotional and spiritual well-being are strengthened through prayer. There are many forms of prayer, such as petitionary, intercessory, and prayers of confession, that are already familiar to clergy spouses. We will focus on two primary forms that I believe are particularly meaningful to clergy spouses in identity formation and being companioned by God on their journey: the daily examen and contemplative prayers.

### **Daily Examen**

The Daily Examen is a form of prayer that has been utilized for centuries by Christians in order to reflect intentionally on daily choices and decisions.<sup>28</sup> The daily examen invites the clergy spouse into self-examination and reflection by asking her to identify the barriers between God and herself in addition to reflecting on the direction of her spiritual journey.<sup>29</sup> Lynne Baab writes: “Examen is a gentle, unforced noticing, with the goal of allowing God to bring to mind what He wants us to see. In examen, we don’t

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<sup>26</sup> Henri J. M. Nouwen, *Making All Things New: An Invitation to the Spiritual Life* (San Francisco: HarperOne, 2009), 69.

<sup>27</sup> Johnna Fredrickson and William A. Smith, *How the Other Half Lives: The Challenges Facing Clergy Spouses and Partners* (Cleveland: Pilgrim Press, 2010), 87, note “Prayer that refreshes and restores involves listening as well as speaking.”

<sup>28</sup> M. Shawn Copeland, “Saying Yes and Saying No,” in *Practicing Our Faith: A Way of Life for a Searching People*, ed. Dorothy C. Bass (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1997), 69.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, 70, offers the following questions for reflection: “How do things stand between me and God? Where and how is my life growing? Who and what am I becoming? To what am I really saying yes with my life? Are my no’s life-affirming ones.”

have to strain over every detail of our schedule to find God; we just reflect back in a prayerful way.”<sup>30</sup> Copeland describes the process:

1. Give thanks to God for the gifts we have received.
2. Ask God for the grace to know our sins and to rid us of them.
3. Give an account of our souls in regard to thoughts, words, and deeds for the period of time being reviewed.
4. Ask God for pardon.
5. Resolve, with God’s grace, to amend our ways.

Through this daily practice, the clergy spouse has the opportunity to reflect on and respond to God’s handiwork.

### **Contemplative Prayer**

Contemplative prayer has evolved into several subtypes of prayer with distinct benefits for the clergy spouse. What unifies contemplative prayer is its ability to reveal the “true nature of things; it unmask[s] the illusion of control, the possessiveness of possessions, and the pretense of the false world,” says Nouwen.<sup>31</sup> Contemplative prayer offers an intimate encounter with the love and grace of our Lord that frees the clergy spouse to be the person she is called to be by God and not fall prey to the expectations of others.<sup>32</sup> According to Nouwen, “In solitary prayer we become aware that our identity does not depend on what we have accomplished or possess, that our productivity does not define us, and that our worth is not the same as our usefulness.”<sup>33</sup> For these reasons, contemplative prayer is beneficial to clergy spouses.

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<sup>30</sup> Lynne M. Baab, *Sabbath Keeping: Finding Freedom in the Rhythms of Rest* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Books, 2005), 77.

<sup>31</sup> Nouwen, *Spiritual Formation*, 6.

<sup>32</sup> Hanson, *A Graceful Life*, 76, defined contemplative prayer as an “intimate form of communion with Christ the Word of God.”

<sup>33</sup> Nouwen, *Spiritual Formation*, 19.

Contemplative prayer requires vulnerability and transparency, as God unveils our true nature and His deepest desire for our lives. This can be particularly challenging or daunting for the clergy spouse if she has had difficulty trusting others or being vulnerable. Contemplative prayer can be freeing for the clergy spouse to claim a sacred space to share the deepest fears, concerns, and pains that often accompany clergy family life. Nouwen writes: “Contemplative prayer helps us remove our blindfolds and see the world as it truly is—as sacramental—connected and constantly revealing to us the great love of God.”<sup>34</sup>

Through this form of prayer, the clergy spouse offers herself to God in anticipation of receiving from God.<sup>35</sup> In contemplative prayer, she offers her full attention to God in a “passive, nondefensive, nondemanding, open way. It is a patient waiting on God to deepen one’s confidence in God’s power and love.”<sup>36</sup> The practice of contemplative prayer is generally engaged two times a day and requires faith and fortitude, since the daily commitment of two 20 or 30 minute periods a day is a demanding discipline.<sup>37</sup> The clergy spouse can concentrate on a repeated word or sentence and create an inner stillness, which helps her listen to the voice of God. Richard

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<sup>34</sup> Ibid., 12.

<sup>35</sup> Christine Valters Paintner, *Eyes of the Heart: Photography as a Christian Contemplative Practice* (Notre Dame, IN: Sorin Books, 2013), 17, writes: “Contemplative seeing and beholding are conscious acts of becoming receptive and dropping as much as possible, our own ego desires and projections. It is only from this space of openness and wonder that we truly see the movement of God in this world.”

<sup>36</sup> John R. Finney and H. Newton Malony, “Contemplative Prayer and Its Use in Psychotherapy: A Theoretical Model,” *Journal of Psychology and Theology* 13, no. 3 (September 1, 1985): 173, accessed October 27, 2013, ATLA Religion Database with ATLASerials.

<sup>37</sup> Frank X. Tuoti, “Contemplative Prayer: Antidote for an Ailing Generation,” *Merton Annual* 16 (November 2003): 31, accessed October 27, 2013, Academic Search Premier.

Rohr provides a tangible example of this technique through his meditation on Psalm 46:10. He encourages Christians to repeat and reflect the following phrase:

Be still and know that I am God.  
 Be still and know that I am.  
 Be still and know.  
 Be still.  
 Be.<sup>38</sup>

The most common techniques of contemplative prayer include focusing on a word or image, the Jesus Prayer, meditative Scripture reading, and Ignatian prayer methods.<sup>39</sup>

### *The Jesus Prayer*

The Jesus Prayer is the primary technique of contemplative prayer in the Eastern Orthodox tradition.<sup>40</sup> The pray-er offers a continuous, uninterrupted call on Jesus through prayerful word or thought referencing the biblical passage of Luke 18:9-14. Nouwen describes the benefits of this technique:

Such a simple, easily repeated prayer can slowly empty out our crowded interior life and create the quiet space where we can dwell with God. It can be like a ladder along which we can descend into the heart and ascend to God... This way of simple prayer, when we are faithful to it and practice it at regular times, slowly leads us to an experience of rest and opens us to God's active presence.<sup>41</sup>

The process of saying the Jesus Prayer is generally reflective in nature. Tony Jones describes the process:

Seated comfortably in a dimly lit room with the head bowed, attend to your breathing, and then begin the prayer in rhythm with your breathing. Breathe in: "Lord, Jesus Christ, Son of God"; breathe out: "have mercy on me, a sinner." Guarding the mind against all distractions, the pray-er focuses during every

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<sup>38</sup> Richard Rohr, *Everything Belongs: The Gift of Contemplative Prayer*, rev. ed. (New York: Crossroad Publishing Company, 2003), 62.

<sup>39</sup> Finney and Malony, "Contemplative Prayer," 175.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid.

<sup>41</sup> Nouwen, *The Way of the Heart*, 81.



repetition on the meaning of the words, praying them from the heart and in the heart.<sup>42</sup>

The Jesus Prayer grounds the clergy spouse in her dependent relationship upon God, rooting her in this grace-filled relationship. It also helps her manage others' expectations by directing her attention to God.

### *Centering Prayer*

Centering prayer in the Orthodox Church is a form of hesychast prayer wherein the heart and the mind are joined through silent prayer and meditation.<sup>43</sup> *Hesychasm* comes from the Greek word for quietness. Hesychastic prayer has often been referred to as “prayer of the heart.”<sup>44</sup> Jones writes, “The hesychasts believed that if the mind could achieve true silence, then it could hear from God.”<sup>45</sup> The hesychasts encourage Christians to unite the mind and the heart in prayer through the Prayer of the Heart. By quieting the mind, focusing on the heart, and repetitively praying a simple phrase, they believe Christians will experience the truth of the Scriptures.<sup>46</sup> Like the Jesus Prayer, centering prayer is contemplative, Scripture-based, and meditative.<sup>47</sup> This form of prayer can help clergy spouses connect with God through an intentional quieting time. It can even be

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<sup>42</sup> Tony Jones, *The Sacred Way: Spiritual Practices for Everyday Life* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan/Youth Specialties, 2005), 65.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid., 29.

<sup>44</sup> Nouwen, *The Way of the Heart*, 73.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid., 62.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid.

<sup>47</sup> James C. Wilhoit, *Spiritual Formation as If the Church Mattered: Growing in Christ through Community* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2008), 139.

utilized in combination with Sabbath practice and Scripture reading to further enhance the relationship with God.

### *Meditation*

In meditative prayer, the clergy spouse allows God to guide the process of prayer by creating emotional and spiritual space for God to work. Some Christians equate Christian meditation with Eastern meditation; however, the goal of Christian meditation is to fill the mind with God, while the goal of Eastern meditation is to empty the mind.<sup>48</sup> Lutherans historically have not encouraged the use of Christian meditation as a faith practice, but it can be beneficial in establishing healthy life patterns. The clergy spouse will find that *apophatic* or non-discursive meditation is similar to centering prayer when she attempts to minimize distractions and quiet the mind.<sup>49</sup>

Non-discursive meditation tends to be practiced individually while discursive meditation is a communal faith practice. In discursive or guided meditation, the clergy spouse follows a designated leader who uses words or images to usher her into God's presence.<sup>50</sup> This leader guides the process while encouraging the clergy spouse to visualize a biblical scene and then reflect on her experience following the meditation.<sup>51</sup> Protestants influenced by Martin Luther's doctrine of *sola scriptura* tend to reject practices that interject ideas into the biblical narrative.<sup>52</sup> However, Lutheran clergy

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<sup>48</sup> Foster, *Celebration of Discipline*, 20.

<sup>49</sup> Jones, *The Sacred Way*, 80.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid., 83.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid., 81.

spouses may discover Christian meditation to be a beneficial tool for mind, body, and spirit.

*Visio Divina (Praying with images or other media)*

Another form of praying involves the process of looking upon or viewing scripture with a sense of the sacred. *Visio divina* or divine seeing is a method of examining a pericope of Scripture in an art form, in order to invite the participant to experience the Word in a new way. Praying through the use of sacred images or icons is reemerging as a new way to see and sense the movement of God.<sup>53</sup> When a clergy spouse engages in *visio divina*, she enters a state of beholding. Christine Paintner says to behold is “to hold something in your gaze... You release your expectations of what you think you will see and instead receive what is actually there.”<sup>54</sup> The process of beholding opens the eyes and the heart of the pray-er allowing her to participate more fully in her spiritual life. As a society, we have become more visually oriented, so *visio divina* is a viable alternative for engaging the spiritual disciplines of prayer and Scripture reading. The clergy spouse may find *visio divina* to be a helpful form of prayer that offers insight and wisdom into God’s Word. As with other forms of prayer, God does not dictate the exact specifications but frees the clergy spouse to engage the formation process with intentionality and desire.<sup>55</sup>

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<sup>53</sup> Nouwen, *Spiritual Formation*, xxiv.

<sup>54</sup> Paintner, *Eyes of the Heart*, 16.

<sup>55</sup> Read Nouwen, *Spiritual Formation*, 15, 33, 55, 85, 101, for examples of sacred artwork.

### *Daily Office*

The Daily Office is a form of fixed-hour prayer, which along with the Lord's Supper is considered one of the oldest forms of Christian spirituality.<sup>56</sup> Different denominations offer versions of the Daily Office, and the Lutheran Church has a liturgical version that can be found in the Lutheran worship books. Since the Lutheran Church is in full communion with the Episcopal Church, Lutheran clergy spouses may find *The Book of Common Prayer* to be a helpful tool to practice this structured form of prayer. Lutheran clergy spouses may feel more comfortable with the liturgical structure of this form of prayer when compared with the reflective, meditative form of contemplative prayer.

### *Prayer Walks and Prayer Journals*

The primary purpose of prayerful walking is to cultivate a contemplative presence to the world and to foster the ability to listen to God. The clergy spouse does not need a formal structure to utilize this form of prayer, but she can engage prayerful walking with a contemplative attitude open to listening to and hearing from God.

The prayer journal is another tool that clergy spouses can utilize to engage the spiritual discipline of prayer. The clergy spouse raises and records questions, concerns, praises, and thanks in addition to recording spiritual milestones. This technique can assist the clergy spouse in reflecting on the handiwork of God. Prayer journaling can also help with the call and discernment process which assists the clergy spouse in accepting her role in the life of the church.

## **Challenges to Utilizing Prayer as a Faith Practice**

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<sup>56</sup> Jones, *The Sacred Way*, 119.

As with Sabbath practice, the busyness of life is a challenge to engaging a prayerful life. However, when the clergy spouse fails to pray, she fails to be attuned to the workings of God and has more difficulty responding to the Holy Spirit. McCormick writes, “Failure to pray results in the unawareness of God’s presence as it meets the Christian in Jesus Christ.”<sup>57</sup> Prayer requires discipline to set aside time and space, in addition to the mental discipline to stay focused to prevent the mind from wandering. Busyness breeds distractibility, which creates problems in our spiritual lives.<sup>58</sup> The clergy spouse who is preoccupied will inevitably encounter frustration with contemplative prayer. Despite its passive appearance, prayer is active and requires intentionality, focus, and engagement. If the clergy spouse allows herself to be distracted by the busyness of the world, it may be challenging to immerse herself in the blessings that arise from a life of prayer.

Prayer can magnify the noise and discomfort of life that the clergy spouse tries to avoid. Ruth Haley Barton writes, “In the silence we become aware of inner dynamics we have been able to avoid by keeping ourselves noisy and busy.”<sup>59</sup> Dennis Billy adds,

Praying in truth involves opening our hearts and revealing ourselves to God as we really are. It means not being afraid of looking inside us and confronting the various masks and self-deceptions we find there. It means being willing to risk baring our souls to God so that God might bare his soul to us. Intimacy with the divine first requires intimacy with the self. We cannot communicate with God in truth if we are unwilling to know the truth about ourselves.<sup>60</sup>

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<sup>57</sup> McCormick, “Sabbath Rest,” 545.

<sup>58</sup> Foster, *Sanctuary of the Soul*, 104; Barry, 92, writes: “What hinders contemplation is self-preoccupation.”

<sup>59</sup> Ruth Haley Barton, *Invitation to Solitude and Silence: Experiencing God’s Transforming Presence*, (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Books, 2004), 31.

<sup>60</sup> Dennis Billy, “Spiritual Direction as Faith Seeking Understanding,” *Seminary Journal* 19, no. 1 (2013): 27.

Prayer often takes the clergy spouse into the depths of her darkness, which she struggles to avoid, and it takes courage and strength to confront her failings.<sup>61</sup>

Prayer enables the clergy spouse to move beyond spiritual blindness into a state of full sight. Paintner writes, “In the gospels, blindness is used as a metaphor for being unable to see truth.”<sup>62</sup> Prayer opens our eyes to God, others, ourselves, and creation, but sometimes this is a difficult task to entertain. Nouwen says, “In solitary prayer we become aware that our identity does not depend on what we have accomplished or possess, that our productivity does not define us, and that our worth is not the same as our usefulness.”<sup>63</sup> Prayer requires courage and a willingness to be transformed. Foster challenges clergy spouses to identify the importance of prayer: “If we are unwilling to change, we will abandon prayer as a noticeable characteristic of our lives. The closer we come to the heartbeat of God the more we see our need and the more we desire to be conformed to Christ.”<sup>64</sup> Therefore, a clergy spouse’s prayer life may be a reflection of her spiritual health.

Praying can turn egocentric if the pray-er stops responding to God and begins reacting to her own thoughts and beliefs. Altruistic prayer is in keeping with the biblical model for prayer and surrenders to the will of God. This is in contrast with prayer that

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<sup>61</sup> Sarah Pierson Kerrick, “Positive Coping Practices Among Wives of Male Christian Clergy” (PsyD diss., Wheaton College, March 2010), 89, writes, “Prayer has often been described in Christian literature as a transformation process. In other word, it may be impossible to interact with God without being changed. Therefore, to make a regular habit of praying requires courage and willingness to change.”

<sup>62</sup> Paintner, *Eyes of the Heart*, 12.

<sup>63</sup> Nouwen, *Spiritual Formation*, 19.

<sup>64</sup> Foster, *Celebration of Discipline*, 33.

attempts to manipulate God or uses prayer as a magical tool.<sup>65</sup> Simon Dein and Ronald Littlewood write, “Immature prayer begins as a wish fulfillment and asks God to provide what the pray-er perceives themselves to need. In contrast, mature prayer is increasingly dialogical and interactive....It is talking *at* rather than *with* God and is primarily petitionary.”<sup>66</sup> When the clergy spouse attempts to use prayer as a means to an end, then she has turned God into a vending machine with the desired goal of obtaining her wants at her command. The focus has turned inward instead of outward onto God and others. Fredrickson and Smith claimed: “Prayer is not about the concerns and joys of life, but about belonging to God; seeking God in prayer is seeking a presence more than an answer.”<sup>67</sup>

Lutheran clergy spouses may find it challenging to view prayer as a spiritual practice that fosters intimacy with God instead of merely a task or duty, particularly during periods of spiritual darkness. The way the clergy spouse prays speaks to her own self-understanding and how she relates to God. If the clergy spouse is struggling to relate with God, it tends to be reflected in her prayer life. The practice of prayer keeps the clergy spouse in relation with God despite the state of that relationship. By examining our manner of prayer with care and looking for ways to improve it, we demonstrate our love for God and our desire for wholeness. Nouwen warns, “One of the demonic ruses is to make us think of prayer primarily as an activity of the mind that involves above all else our intellectual capacities.”<sup>68</sup> When the clergy spouse moves prayer solely into the

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<sup>65</sup> Finney and Malony, “Contemplative Prayer,” 173.

<sup>66</sup> Dein and Littlewood, “The Psychology of Prayer,” 44. Emphasis mine.

<sup>67</sup> Fredrickson and Smith, *How the Other Half Lives*, 87.

<sup>68</sup> Nouwen, *The Way of the Heart*, 68.

cognitive realm she reduces prayer to speaking or thinking about God and removes the relationality from the faith process. Barry similarly warns Christians, “Prayer that proceeds solely from a sense of obligation or duty rarely leads to wholeness and life.”<sup>69</sup>

### **Benefits of Engaging Prayer**

Prayer builds strength and resilience in the clergy spouse. Maltby, Lewis, and Day discover in their research on prayer and well-being that “frequent quiet thinking about God, listening to God, and reflecting on the teachings of the Bible provide the self-regulation by which individuals are able to lessen their self-focus, worry, and stress.”<sup>70</sup> The clergy spouse and her family benefit by experiencing less stress and worry and strengthening their positive coping skills. Robert Plummer echoes this sentiment, “Time apart in silence and solitude stores up emotional and spiritual strength for times of great trial.”<sup>71</sup> Life in ministry is filled with challenges and blessings, and prayer offers the clergy spouse tools to help fortify her faith and family.

Prayer invites the clergy spouse to be fully attentive and present to God and the relationship with God. It is an intentional act of quieting the noise of life and withdrawing from the busyness of society to offer God our undivided attention. Through prayer, God

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<sup>69</sup> William Barry, “Prayer in Pastoral Care: A Contribution from the Tradition of Spiritual Direction,” *Journal of Pastoral Care* 31, no. 2 (June 1, 1977): 9, accessed October 27, 2013, ATLA Religion Database with ATLASerials.

<sup>70</sup> John Maltby, Christopher Alan Lewis, and Liza Day, “Prayer and Subjective Well-Being: The Application of a Cognitive-Behavioural Framework,” *Mental Health, Religion and Culture* 11, no. 1 (2008): 122, accessed March 1, 2014, PsycINFO.

<sup>71</sup> Robert Plummer, “Are the Spiritual Disciplines of ‘Silence and Solitude’ Really Biblical?” *Journal of Spiritual Formation and Soul Care* 2, no. 1 (2009): 111, accessed March 10, 2014, ATLA Religion Database with ATLASerials; Maltby et al., “Prayer and Subjective Well-Being,” 119, writes: “Prayer has a beneficial effect on subjective well-being, in terms of both mental-health and health variables. In terms of mental-health variables, prayer, as part of the measurement of a general religious faith, has been found to be related to better mental health.”



liberates us from our bondage into a state of spiritual freedom. Barton writes, “In solitude our thoughts and our mind, our will and our desires are reoriented Godward so we become less and less attracted by external forces and can be more deeply responsive to God’s desire and prayer in us.”<sup>72</sup> The spiritual discipline of prayer is an invitation into the presence of God. Through prayer, the clergy spouse experiences a deeper relationship with God, self, and others. When she reorients her life onto God, the clergy spouse discovers her prayers become all-consuming as her life is transformed into a prayerful state.

The spiritual discipline of prayer can be a powerful tool for clergy spouses as corporate practice. Discerning when, where, and with whom to divulge her prayer concerns is an integral part of maintaining healthy boundaries within a faith community. Prayer also builds community by joining us with others through God. Prayer is integral to spiritual formation in that it links the clergy spouse’s mind to the heart to deepen all of her relationships.<sup>73</sup> The Lutheran clergy spouse may use her gift of prayer within or apart from her own faith community. For the clergy spouse experiencing a sense of isolation, prayer can foster community both near and far. Copeland writes, “Daily personal prayer, examination of conscience, and participation in a faith-sharing group....they help us to understand, judge, and evaluate our daily choices and decisions in light of their relation to our ultimate happiness, as individuals and as human beings in community.”<sup>74</sup> For this reason, prayer is beneficial to clergy spouses.

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<sup>72</sup> Barton, *Invitation to Solitude and Silence*, 34.

<sup>73</sup> Nouwen, *Spiritual Formation*, xvi.

<sup>74</sup> Copeland, “Saying Yes and Saying No,” 72.

Prayer affirms and encourages the clergy spouse. Richard Rohr instructs, “Prayer is the ultimate empowerment of the people of God....Prayer gives us a sense of abundance and connectedness.”<sup>75</sup> Clergy spouses can offer their gifts of ministry when they feel connected with others, and prayer is transformational for the clergy spouse and all the persons she encounters. Nouwen writes in his beloved work, *The Wounded Healer*,

For people of prayer are, in the final analysis, people who are able to recognize in others the face of the Messiah. They are people who make visible what was hidden, who make touchable what was unreachable. People of prayer are leaders precisely because through their articulation of God’s work within themselves they can lead others away from confusion and towards clarification; through their compassion they can guide others out of the closed circuits of in-groups and towards the wider world of humanity; through their critical contemplation they can convert convulsive destructiveness into creative work for the new world to come.<sup>76</sup>

The spiritual discipline of prayer has the ability to bring truth into the light of life and frees the clergy spouse from the burdens of others’ expectations. “The prayer of the heart opens the eyes of our soul to the truth of ourselves as well as to the truth of God. The prayer of the heart challenges us to hide absolutely nothing.”<sup>77</sup> This is critical for the health and wholeness of the clergy spouse, since differentiation is important for the longevity and health of clergy families.<sup>78</sup>

The practice of prayer is also beneficial for the restoration of health and wellness. Second Corinthians 11:26-28 highlights that Paul sought a retreat of silence and solitude

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<sup>75</sup> Rohr, *Everything Belongs*, 147.

<sup>76</sup> Henri J. M. Nouwen, *The Wounded Healer: Ministry in Contemporary Society* (New York: Image Books, 1979), 52.

<sup>77</sup> Nouwen, *The Way of the Heart*, cover.

<sup>78</sup> Nouwen, *Spiritual Formation*, 19, writes, “To not be useful is to remind myself that if anything important or fruitful happens through prayer, it is God who achieves the result...I can let go of the illusion of control and be detached from the result.”

because he was tired and exhausted. Jesus also sought opportunities for silence and solitude throughout His ministry. The faith practice of prayer has been associated with increased emotional, physical, and spiritual well-being. Prayer is the most commonly used religious coping device to deal with stress and health problems.<sup>79</sup> Banziger and colleagues discover, “The person who prays attains a feeling of inner peace, of relief, and of power and support, and the resulting psychological effects can subsequently influence their physical health.”<sup>80</sup>

Prayer is also a form of positive coping by “creating a means of feeling in control, despite confronting adversities in life. It may also reframe negative events as opportunities for spiritual growth, asking for strength in the face of illness or engendering mental models of a loving God that provides meaning and purpose in life,” claims Dein and Littlewood.<sup>81</sup> Clergy spouses who turn to God through regular times of prayer and reflective Scripture reading cope better with the challenges of clergy family life. Kerrick cites in her research that most clergy spouses used prayer as a means to cope with stress. “It is a mark of maturity to recognize one’s limitations and to have the grace to embrace the help that is available from God and from others.”<sup>82</sup> The spiritual discipline of prayer leads to a love of God, self, and others.<sup>83</sup>

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<sup>79</sup> Banziger et al., “Prayer and Coping,” 103; Dein and Littlewood, “The Psychology of Prayer,” 43, write: “Prayer’s contribution to well-being may occur through a number of reasons: relaxation, increased self-esteem and provision of optimism.”

<sup>80</sup> Banziger et al., “Prayer and Coping,” 103.

<sup>81</sup> Dein and Littlewood, “The Psychology of Prayer,” 43.

<sup>82</sup> Kerrick, “Positive Coping Practices,” 89.

<sup>83</sup> Jones, *The Sacred Way*, 41.

Prayer helps clergy spouses concede control and the mirage of trying to be in charge of life by moving them into a realm where they are not in control. Barton writes, “But even as silence and solitude bring us face to face with our addiction to being in control, there is also an invitation: the invitation to let go and allow God to be in control.”<sup>84</sup> Says, Kerrick,

Partnering with God in prayer and action helps remove the unnecessary burden of feeling one has to micromanage everything. Releasing control of their circumstances and giving their worries over to God appears to be an important facet of the coping benefits these women experience in their relationship with God. Such relinquishing prayers also helped women direct their energies into activities that can be more effective than excessive worry.<sup>85</sup>

Clergy spouses tend to feel less worried and calmer after praying. The faith practice of prayer is beneficial to the clergy spouse, family, and ministry by helping her accept her role as a clergy spouse and embrace her identity as a child of God. Prayer also helps the clergy spouse manage other’s expectations and lean into the calling God has placed on her life instead of feeling burdened to meet the needs of what she perceives to be the needs of others. Finally, prayer helps address the sense of spiritual isolation that many clergy spouses experience by deepening her relationships with God, self, and others. Let us now turn to an intentional process for Lutheran clergy spouses to engage Sabbath practice, Scripture reading, and prayer.

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<sup>84</sup> Barton, *Invitation to Solitude and Silence*, 49.

<sup>85</sup> Kerrick, “Positive Coping Practices,” 90.

## CHAPTER SEVEN

### PROPOSED SOLUTION AND CONCLUSION

*The spiritual journey is not to be a solitary walk but a community pilgrimage.*  
Gordon Johnston<sup>1</sup>

#### Introduction

We have explored the Lutheran response to faith formation and the spiritual disciplines and examined tools and techniques to draw the clergy spouse closer to God and to foster the acceptance of her role as a clergy spouse. The faith practices of Sabbath practice, Scripture reading, and prayer help the clergy spouse manage others' expectations, reduce her sense of spiritual isolation, and identify and claim the call God places on her life. The first five years of ministry are critical for establishing healthy patterns and longevity in clergy family life, and we propose that the synodical ELCA first-call theological education events are natural forums to build supportive networks for clergy spouses and their families.<sup>2</sup> An important component of Lutheran theological education is the emphasis on "inviting and equipping people to participate in listening to God, each other and to the world" and to "love and serve our neighbor with a living, daring confidence in God's grace."<sup>3</sup> The priesthood of all believers supports the belief

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<sup>1</sup> Gordon Johnston, "Old Testament Community and Spiritual Formation," in *Foundations of Spiritual Formation: A Community Approach to Becoming Like Christ* (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Academic & Professional, 2008), 78.

<sup>2</sup> David Cecil Baker, "Predictors of Well-Being among Wives of Lutheran Parish Pastors" (PhD diss., Texas Tech University, 1988), 139, accessed January 5, 2015, <http://hdl.handle.net/georgefox.idm.oclc.org/2346/8800>, echoes the reality that new clergy wives experience adjustment challenges during the first five years after their partners' ordinations. Historically, the ELCA requires three years of continuing education for first-call candidates, whether ordained or lay rostered. These events are coordinated and managed by each synodical staff and gather all new rostered persons one time a year for community building and education.

<sup>3</sup> "Seminaries," Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, accessed March 10, 2015, <http://www.elca.org/Our-Work/Leadership/Seminaries>.

that the Church is called to be a conduit through which all persons are formed into Christlikeness.<sup>4</sup> Christians are formed, not born, and clergy spouses must be formed, too. We propose that clergy spouses are called into safe and nurturing faith communities where they can experience spiritual growth and transformation through Sabbath practice, Scripture reading, and prayer.

### **Mentors and Communities of Faith**

Life as a clergy spouse is filled with joys and challenges, yet it is often without community support or spiritual guidance.<sup>5</sup> A faith community and mentor relationship offers the clergy spouse an orientation to reality comprised of a supportive yet challenging relationship.<sup>6</sup> A faith community loves the clergy spouse as she is but challenges her to grow into the people God calls her to be. Authentic community is essential throughout a life of ministry, but it is integral during the first five years of ministry when the clergy spouse is being formed alongside her partner.

In her research on clergy marriages, Linda Hileman unveils, “Spiritual hunger runs deep, and a spiritual need can become a spiritual crisis when there is no one to

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<sup>4</sup> Sophia R. G. Steibel, “Christian Education and Spiritual Formation: One and the Same?” *Christian Education Journal* 7, no. 2 (September 2010): 343, accessed November 10, 2013, ATLASerials, Religion Collection, echoes this sentiment.

<sup>5</sup> Mark R. McMinn et al., “Care for Pastors: Learning from Clergy and Their Spouses,” *Pastoral Psychology* 53, no. 6 (July 2005): 577, accessed November 1, 2013, Academic Search Premier, unveiled that almost all (94 percent) Protestant clergy in the United States are married, and unlike most other professions, the pastor’s family is often involved in his/her work.

<sup>6</sup> Henry A. Corcoran, “Biblical Narratives and Life Transformation: An Apology for the Narrative Teaching of Bible Stories,” *Christian Education Journal* 40, no. 1 (2007): 41, accessed October 1, 2015, ATLASerials, Religion Collection; Carol Anderson Darling, E. Wayne Hill, and Lenore M. McWey, “Understanding Stress and Quality of Life for Clergy and Clergy Spouses,” *Stress and Health: Journal of International Society for the Investigation of Stress* 20, no. 5 (December 2004): 275, accessed November 1, 2013, DOI: 10.1002.smi1031275, write: “Seminaries should be intentional in identifying and training mentors and fostering relationships between inexperienced seminarians and successful and well-balanced pastors, who can encourage flexibility and discernment.”

whom they can turn for guidance.”<sup>7</sup> Whereas the newly ordained pastor engages a Christian spiritual formation process through the seminary process, the clergy spouse is often left to traverse the faith journey alone. Mark McMinn writes,

Social support is important to wives of male clergy, but is a difficult endeavor. In one survey 56 percent of clergy wives reported having no close friends, and one-fifth of the women believed that people shy away from them because they are married to a pastor. Many clergy wives see self-disclosure as a danger, something that might jeopardize their husband’s career.<sup>8</sup>

This experience heightens the clergy spouse’s sense of spiritual isolation, but mentors and a faith community help counter the spiritual loneliness and isolation. In the research on stress and coping among clergy, Cameron Lee writes “the higher the number of supportive family and denominational relationships, as well as the total number of such relationships overall, the greater the reported well-being.”<sup>9</sup> Clergy spouses experience a similar reality. God created us to be in relationship with one another, and everyone needs persons who will speak truth and love into our lives. Mentors and safe faith communities are part of the support network for clergy spouses that contribute to greater well-being.

John Cattich identifies the interrelatedness of ministry and clergy family life as it is embedded in the context of a local congregation. He names three models of clergy

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<sup>7</sup> Linda Hileman, “The Unique Needs of Protestant Clergy Families: Implications for Marriage and Family Counseling,” *Journal of Spirituality in Mental Health* 10, no. 2 (October 11, 2008): 140, accessed November 13, 2014, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/19349630802081152>.

<sup>8</sup> Mark R. McMinn et al., “Care for Pastors,” 567; Roy Oswald, *How to Build a Support System for Your Ministry* (n.p.: Alban Institute, 1991), 10, wrote: “For many persons, the relationship with a marital partner is the most profound support base.” John Cattich, “Three Models of Clergy Systems: Analysis of Couple Processes and Spiritual Meaning,” *Pastoral Psychology* 61, no. 2 (2012): 180, accessed November 1, 2013, Academic Search Premier. The travesty is that “Spouses of clergy, despite suffering from intense periods of loneliness, may hesitate to share their needs with their spouses because they feel it would be ‘selfish’ to ask them to take time away from ‘the Lord’s work’.”

<sup>9</sup> Cameron Lee, “Patterns of Stress and Support Among Adventist Clergy: Do Pastors and Their Spouses Differ?” *Pastoral Psychology* 55, no. 6 (2007): 767, accessed October 28, 2014, Psychology and Behavioral Sciences Collection.

systems and their subsequent responses to those expectations and stress that can impact the clergy spouse's acceptance of her role as clergy spouse:

1. Living sacrifice model – emphasizes service to the congregation at the expense of personal and familial needs.
2. Faithful spouse and parent model – focuses on family needs over the congregation and practices several disciplines to maintain such a focus
3. Peacemaker – seeks as much as possible to satisfy their congregation and their family by intentionally juggling their demands.<sup>10</sup>

Each of these models develops out of a desire for preservation of the spouse, family, or congregation. However, these models appear to fail to honor all parties in clergy family life with the perception that either the clergy, family, or congregation's needs will suffer when trying to manage the others' expectations. We propose an alternative model that can balance self, family, and church while empowering the clergy spouse to embrace her call as a child of God and to accept her role as a clergy spouse with healthy boundaries intact. The Cattich models foster a lack of clarity regarding rules, procedures, and expectations in clergy families, which leads to confusion, unhealthy boundaries, and emotional exhaustion. However, when a clergy family has increased support and clarity regarding roles and expectations, "it correlates positively with marital adjustment and sentiment, negatively with depressive symptoms and perceived stress, and moderates the link between wives' role strain and marital decline."<sup>11</sup> This is where the role of mentor comes into play.

Mentor relationships offer clergy spouses a source of safety wherein growth, maturity and accountability can occur. Sheryl Trefsgar states in her research on clergy spouses, "The presence of a mentor or accountability partner has been identified by many

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<sup>10</sup> Cattich, "Three Models of Clergy Systems," 179.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid., 181; Oswald, *How to Build a Support System*, 37, writes: "Our general effectiveness in ministry is directly proportional to the quality of support we have in our lives."



pastors' wives as a key to 'staying power' in the ministry, particularly in light of the fact that these women often feel that they have no close friends and are fearful of spiritual, emotional, and physical burn-out."<sup>12</sup> Mentoring is a relationship of mutual exchange whereby someone who is more experienced at a given skill teaches, models, and imparts essential knowledge, skills, and strategies to someone less experienced.<sup>13</sup> Healthy mentoring is based on transparency, confidentiality, and prayerful discernment.

A spirit of collegiality and mutuality is central to healthy mentoring. It is not a time of power holding, but a time of mutual support and guidance. Steven Bechtold describes the role of a mentor this way:

The guide does not provide set answers or offer a single path, but rather walks with a person, helping and encouraging them to pay attention to God and to recognize his or her responses to the love of God in all of life. The guide is a co-journeyer with the seeker, one who 'is simultaneously a learner and teacher of discernment.'<sup>14</sup>

The mentor journeys with the clergy spouse, but she does not dictate or control her path. She partners with God and the clergy spouse in her formative experiences. A hospitable, safe, and welcoming environment is a vital component of the mentor process. In many ways, the environment is as crucial as the relationship itself, and the clergy spouse may need to look beyond her prescribed faith community to garner the necessary support.

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<sup>12</sup> Sheryl Trefsgar, "Ministering to the Minister's Wife: Preparation for Life in the Pastorate" (DMin diss., Westminster Theological Seminary, 2010), 194.

<sup>13</sup> James C. Wilhoit, *Spiritual Formation as If the Church Mattered: Growing in Christ through Community* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2008), 188, writes: "The spirit of the mentoring relationship is that the mentor imparts these things freely, in order to help the protégés attain goals that are their own. It is not mentoring, but something else, if we try to re-create people in our own image, or to accomplish goals that are ours, not theirs."

<sup>14</sup> Steven George Bechtold, "The Discernment of a Spiritual Foundation for Ministry through the Use of Spiritual Disciplines in Small Groups" (DMin diss., Drew University, 1995), 3-4.

Little is written about the role of mentors in ministry, especially for clergy spouses and about the issues around identity formation and the faith journey.<sup>15</sup> Robert Wuthnow claims, “If faith is a journey, it helps to have a fellow traveler. The presence of this person makes it possible to go forward.”<sup>16</sup> Mentors support clergy spouses in what can be a difficult and challenging role. It is essential that clergy spouses reach out to other clergy spouses to receive and to offer mentoring, for it is in the mentoring process that we experience God’s grace.<sup>17</sup> Bouma echoes this sentiment in her writing about clergy spouses: “A basic psychological tenet is that everyone needs at least one person who knows him very well, including his weaknesses, and still loves him with no strings attached.”<sup>18</sup>

Mentoring based in spiritual friendship is a foundational spiritual discipline with friends supporting, encouraging, and praying for one another. While Sheryl Kujawa-Holbrook focused her research on mentoring girls, her discoveries are applicable to clergy spouses as well. She writes, “A healthy mentoring relationship should encourage a girl to claim her emerging sense of self, and see that it is holy and reflective of the image of God.”<sup>19</sup> The clergy spouse is encouraged to embrace her spirituality and evolving identity through the mentor process.

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<sup>15</sup> Oswald, *How to Build a Support System*, 4, echoes this sentiment.

<sup>16</sup> Robert Wuthnow, *Sharing the Journey: Support Groups and America’s New Quest for Community* (New York: Free Press, 1996), 273.

<sup>17</sup> Trefsgar, “Ministering to the Minister’s Wife,” 18, writes: “Not only are mentors desperately needed to encourage pastors’ wives and stem the flow of couples exiting church ministry, but pastors’ wives need to see their own need and responsibility to reach out to other women.”

<sup>18</sup> Mary LaGrand Bouma, “Ministers’ Wives: The Walking Wounded,” *Leadership* (1980), 67.

<sup>19</sup> Sheryl Kujawa-Holbrook, “Courage and Resistance: Spiritual Formation and Mentoring Girls for Religious Leadership,” *International Journal of Children’s Spirituality* 6, no. 3 (2001): 307, ATLA Religion Database with ATLASerials.

Caring, supportive environments that invite authenticity and transparency also result in safe faith communities. Henri Nouwen's writing is an apt reminder: "Christian spirituality not only flows from community but creates community. It nurtures the life of the Spirit in us, within us, and among us. The Spirit of God dwells in the center of our heart and is the center of our life together."<sup>20</sup> Johnston discovered Christian communities that offer authentic community and accountability groups within an intentional formation process provide wisdom, honing, accountability, and support.<sup>21</sup> Accountability groups provide the impetus and encouragement for growth and transformation, particularly since "authentic community is essential for ministry preparation."<sup>22</sup> Authentic relationships when fostered in Christian community offer support, which counters the loneliness and isolation that often plague clergy spouses and their marriages. Johnston identifies two types of communities:

1. Geographic or territorial communities build a sense of community through physical rootedness.
2. Relational communities build a sense of community through social bonding.<sup>23</sup>

Faith communities may not be the prescribed community within a geographic context, but they may be a relational community the clergy spouse has found to be safe and authentic. Ultimately it is within a community of practice that I believe a clergy spouse

<sup>20</sup> Henri J.M. Nouwen, *Spiritual Formation: Following the Movements of the Spirit* (New York: HarperOne, 2010), xxvii.

<sup>21</sup> Gordon Johnston, "Old Testament Community," 83.

<sup>22</sup> Howard Hendricks, "Introduction," in *Foundations of Spiritual Formation: A Community Approach to Becoming Like Christ*, ed. Paul Pettit (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Academic & Professional, 2008), 10; Darling et al. "Understanding Stress," 273, echoes the sentiment that clergy families need other clergy family groups to share their faith journeys.

<sup>23</sup> Gordon Johnston, "Old Testament Community," 90; Thomas R. Hawkins, "From the 3rs to the 3ws," 175, writes: "Ultimately, community is more about what people do together than where they are physically."

formation can occur and thrive since a spiritual formation group is a relational community of practice.

We are created to be in relationship with one another, and the spiritual disciplines are meant to be practiced individually and communally.<sup>24</sup> In mentor relationships, the clergy spouse develops a sense of safety and security, which helps her thrive emotionally, physically, and spiritually. Corcoran notes,

Biblical narratives transform lives. They offer narrative resources for the re-storying of lives. Narratives provide an underlying structure for the plotting of our lives into the life-giving core metanarrative of the life and ministry, suffering and crucifixion, resurrection and glorification of Christ Jesus. They woo us into a new community, a new life, a new relationship with the Lord of the universe....Narratives mold communities into outposts of grace.<sup>25</sup>

Mentor relationships foster spiritual development when clergy spouses discover they embrace a shared biblical narrative that offers life and hope through the story of the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ.<sup>26</sup>

Despite the American claim that we can be completely self-sufficient and independent, Christian spiritual formation can only be fully realized in community. In his dissertation on spiritual formation and the role of the community, Phillip Carnes writes: “Community completes us because of how humans are designed by their Creator. To be fully human is to be whole relationally, both as an individual related to God and to fellow

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<sup>24</sup> Jonathan Morrow, “Introducing Spiritual Formation,” in *Foundations of Spiritual Formation: A Community Approach to Becoming Like Christ* (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Academic & Professional, 2008), 47, writes: “We are individuals created to function within a community (Ro 12:4-5). And that entails that we practice both individual and corporate disciplines.”

<sup>25</sup> Corcoran, “Biblical Narratives,” 46.

<sup>26</sup> Thomas R. Hawkins, “From the 3rs to the 3ws: Continuing Education in a Digital Age,” *Quarterly Review: A Journal of Theological Resources for Ministry* 24, no. 2 (Summer 2004): 175, accessed March 18, 2014, Academic Search Premier, writes, “A relationship is the creation of a narrative or a telling. Community occurs as people gather stories together. We create community through the stories we share.”

humans.”<sup>27</sup> He went on to write, “Community at its most basic is a collection of mutually beneficial relationships that provide a sense of meaning, belonging, and bonds of commonality. Authentic community is characterized by a high degree of connectivity.”<sup>28</sup>

McMillan and Chavis describe community as inclusive of four basic elements:

1. Membership: a sense that members have of belonging, safety, and shared goals
2. Influence: a sense that individual members can influence and be influenced by others
3. Integration and fulfillment of needs: a shared confidence that members’ needs will be met through their commitment to be together
4. Shared emotional connection.<sup>29</sup>

Health clergy spouse mentor relationships are comprised of each of these elements.

The presence of healthy mentor relationships is vital for clergy spouses particularly in a vocational and familial call that can naturally be isolating. Sadly, clergy spouses lose their pastors since a partner cannot be clergy and spouse at the same time, contributing to her sense of spiritual loneliness and isolation. Feelings of loneliness and isolation are epidemic among church workers and their families particularly when they are lacking a safe faith community or mentors. Carnes echoes this concern: “One obvious reason for pastors’ loneliness and isolation is that fully 70 percent of them do not have someone in their lives they consider a close friend.”<sup>30</sup> This can stem from the clergy

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<sup>27</sup> Phillip Carnes, “That They May One: Spiritual Formation and Its Locus in Community” (DMin diss., George Fox Evangelical Seminary, 2009), 15.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid., 74; Steve Bohus, Robert H. Woods, and K. Caleb Chan, “Psychological Sense of Community Among Students On Religious Collegiate Campuses in the Christian Evangelical Tradition,” *Christian Higher Education* 4 (January 2005): 19-20, accessed November 1, 2014, Christian Periodical Index, describe their concept as a Psychological Sense of Community (PSC). It is “a readily available network of one’s relationships that one can call on for support at any time, and is characterized by a sense of belonging, dependence of members on one another, needing each other, and each identifying with common overarching values.”

<sup>29</sup> Bohus et al., “Psychological Sense of Community,” 20; Gordon Johnston, “Old Testament Community,” 97.

<sup>30</sup> Carnes, “That They May Be One,” 64.

spouse's reticence to burden her partner with her spiritual struggles or her struggles with her faith community.

Mentor groups are places where faith narratives are shared and discipleship is deepened through the power of community. Sharing stories is a powerful means of connecting people to a shared biblical vision. Neil McBride writes,

We are able to do many hard things, tolerate many conflicts, overcome many obstacles, and persevere under many pressures, but when we no longer experience ourselves as part of a caring, supporting, praying community, we quickly lose faith. This is because faith in God's compassionate presence can never be separated from experiencing God's presence in the community to which we belong.<sup>31</sup>

A community of practice shares a common biblical narrative; it is a group of people who engage in collective learning and skill development, resulting in supportive and challenging relationships. Johnston explains, "Members of a community of practice develop a shared repertoire of resources: experiences, stories, tools, ways of addressing recurring problems—in short, a shared practice."<sup>32</sup> Clergy spouses share a common framework simply by the role they play, and this can be enhanced by intentionally fostering these relationships and a set of skills (i.e. faith practices) to enhance their ministry.

### **Clergy Spouse Retreats with Co-Travelers (Mentors)**

One of the tasks a clergy spouse is invited to engage is claiming and clarifying her faith. Hanson writes, "One's true faith is determined not by membership in a religious organization, but by identifying what is one's highest commitment and in what one places

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<sup>31</sup> Neal McBride, "What's the Big Deal About Small Groups?" *Discipleship Journal* 10, no. 59 (1990): 17.

<sup>32</sup> Gordon Johnston, "Old Testament Community," 90.

one's ultimate trust. The relevant beliefs constitute a worldview within which this ultimate commitment and trust make sense."<sup>33</sup> We suggest the clergy spouse is invited to clarify her identity as a child of God and accept her role as a clergy spouse as part of her formative journey. While the ELCA does not promote the necessity of a personal decision in faith, the Pietist movement gifts the Lutheran clergy spouse with encouraging her to intentionally engage her faith. When a clergy spouse identifies, names, and claims her faith, she is able to move into a state of acceptance of her identity as a child of God and her role as a clergy spouse. In turn, this frees her to embrace the challenges and joys that accompany this named role.

The spiritual journey invites the clergy spouse to discover her identity, define her relationships to her communities, identify meaning in her life, and discover the possibility of hope. It is incumbent upon the clergy spouse to embrace the faith journey and discern these components. The clergy spouse is encouraged to accept her giftedness from God.

Bechtold writes,

Acceptance of this giftedness will enable a person to claim their true identity and to find their genuine relationship to others in community which has its source in Christ. Accepting the gifts, tasks and demands of the Holy Spirit moves persons away from having to find acceptance based on what they can do for others. It shifts their search for meaning to one major focus: Who God wants me to be in and for the world?<sup>34</sup>

For clergy spouses, this shift is empowering, liberating and freeing for it is life-giving and grace-filled.

I long for clergy spouses to recognize the blessings that accompany a life filled with intentionality and purpose. I long to invite clergy spouses into a life of Christian

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<sup>33</sup> Bradley Hanson, *A Graceful Life: Lutheran Spirituality for Today* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress Publishers, 2000), 11.

<sup>34</sup> Bechtold, "The Discernment of a Spiritual Foundation," 35.

formation that will undoubtedly move them beyond their comfort zones into a foreign world of discomfort and transformation. In order to do this, we propose a restorative retreat that will undoubtedly be spiritually and emotionally challenging. This resistance appears to be in line with David Benner's observation when he stated, "Despite the rhetoric, transformation is seldom truly desired by most Christians or welcomed by most churches."<sup>35</sup> Transformation is challenging and difficult and seldom smooth or easy, and clergy families are no different than the rest of the Christian population in their desire to avoid pain and discomfort. Carlson and Lueken note, "[W]e (in the dominant form of church life today) have trained Christians to be demanding consumers, not disciples."<sup>36</sup> By doing so, we have made it more difficult for clergy spouses to participate with Christ in the process of transformation since we tend to hold a strong desire to control and dictate the process. This proposal invites clergy spouses to enter in and to participate in a life of authenticity and vulnerability with God, with themselves, and with others.

### **Practical Application**

We maintain that one way to address the struggles clergy spouses experience is through a weekend retreat focusing on the spiritual disciplines of Sabbath practice, Scripture reading, and prayer with clergy spouses in the first three years of ministry. We propose this is an investment in the Lutheran Church which offers preventative measures the clergy spouse can employ to foster healthy coping skills. The retreat can be a component of the ELCA First Call Theological education process by inviting first call spouses of rostered leaders to participate in a minimum of one weekend retreat and one

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<sup>35</sup> Ibid.

<sup>36</sup> Kent Carlson and Mike Lueken, *Renovation of the Church: What Happens When a Seeker Church Discovers Spiritual Formation* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Books, 2011), 9.



year of monthly faith practice groups with an assigned mentor. We propose that mentors journey with new clergy spouses during the retreat and commit to intentional relationships through at least one year but preferably the first three years of ministry. Interested clergy spouses have the option of engaging the formative process for an additional two years beyond the initial year with two more retreats and ongoing monthly faith groups. A three-year process offers time for new patterns and beliefs to be established and prepares the clergy spouse to embrace her call alongside her partner. It also helps the clergy spouse integrate the biblical narrative—the Sacred Story—into her identity, which heightens her role acceptance and spiritual formation. The program can also be implemented during the seminary experience with the internship year as a year of practical experience and application.

Mentors offer a safe, faith community for the clergy spouse, and the ideal mentor will be a healthy clergy spouse who has been in the life of ministry for five or more years.<sup>37</sup> This formative process will naturally develop mentors and guides so third- (even second-year) participants can serve as mentors for new clergy spouses and/or seminary spouses. This process also allows clergy spouses to offer their gifts and experiences to other clergy spouses. M. Shawn Copeland identifies some of the benefits of a faith group: “When an honest sharing of faith is at a group’s center, it can provide a very helpful setting as we seek to be more deliberate in saying yes and saying no. Small faith-sharing groups can provide the support and challenge we need to examine and strengthen our

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<sup>37</sup> Donna Bordelon Alder, *When the Pastor Is Your Husband: The Joy and Pain of Ministry Wives* (Kansas City: Beacon Hill Press of Kansas City, 2011), 84, writes: “It takes four or five years to develop such a support network.”

lives with God.”<sup>38</sup> One of the most effective ways of equipping a group for spiritual formation and discipleship is to offer experiential learning opportunities, and the spiritual disciplines are experiential at their core. Within this pedagogical realm lies a variety of learning and teaching strategies, but there appear to be certain consistent practices that evoke change.

## Components

Spiritual formation is comprised of ordinary activities that take on the sacred when they are received from God. It is these ordinary activities that are used throughout the retreat to establish a sacred space and to foster transformative opportunities. It is critical to focus on creating a hospitable environment and a sacred space throughout the retreat. Ruth Haley Barton describes a sacred space as:

1. A space designated for God and God alone
2. A place in time set apart to give God our undivided attention
3. A place in our soul.<sup>39</sup>

Helping the clergy spouses feel welcome and comfortable in their new surroundings by caring for their physical, emotional, and spiritual needs fosters a safe and secure environment. Identifying mentors to journey with the clergy spouses will ease some of their discomfort through the knowledge that this is not a solitary journey.

Once the clergy spouses complete the initial pleasantries at the retreat, they are invited to engage in deeper conversations. It is in this place that Sabbath practice is introduced. Sabbath practice is introduced first because it helps establish healthy

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<sup>38</sup> M. Shawn Copeland, “Saying Yes and Saying No,” in *Practicing Our Faith: A Way of Life for a Searching People*, ed. Dorothy C. Bass (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1997), 71.

<sup>39</sup> Ruth Haley Barton, *Invitation to Solitude and Silence: Experiencing God’s Transforming Presence*, (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Books, 2004), 37-38.

boundaries on a spiritual, emotional, and physical level. What does it mean to honor the Sabbath as individuals and as clergy families? Sabbath practice is countercultural, but it is vital for the health and longevity of clergy families and their ministries. Walter Brueggemann writes, “In our contemporary context of the rat race of anxiety, the celebration of Sabbath is an act of both resistance and alternative.”<sup>40</sup> It goes against the societal fabric of multitasking which is deeply ingrained in many of us. When a clergy spouse practices Sabbath, she is more apt to be present in the now instead of worrying about the past or the future. Although there are numerous reasons to practice the Sabbath apart from the biblical mandate, Sabbath practice is rarely acknowledged or followed by clergy families. Sabbath practice is foundational for a life in ministry, and this retreat is an opportunity to practice this spiritual discipline.

Following an evening session of Sabbath practice, the group participates in a vespers service filled with opportunities to engage the spiritual disciplines of Scripture reading and prayer. Following vespers, the clergy spouses are invited to remain and build community with the other participants through food, fellowship, and fun, or they may choose to return to their rooms for an evening of Sabbath rest.

After an evening of hospitality and rest, the clergy spouses are invited to share breakfast and participate in morning prayer. They are encouraged to participate in a prayer walk or meditatively walk the labyrinth. Following this prayerful time, the clergy spouses are offered a glass of hot tea and warm baked goods which enhances the feeling of intimacy and security within this group of persons. Lutheran clergy spouses are typically well-versed in the process of reading the Bible, but not as comfortable

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<sup>40</sup> Walter Brueggemann, *Sabbath as Resistance: Saying No to the Culture of Now* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2014), xiii.

‘listening’ to the Lord through biblical passages. Scripture reading is offered next as it is another foundational faith practice. The clergy spouses are instructed on the processes of *Lectio divina* and *visio divina*, encouraging them to engage the Bible and to listen to God in a new manner.

A critical component of the retreat is table time or small-group discussions with assigned mentors. This encourages the development of safe communities that will be sustained through the ongoing monthly faith groups. The mentor challenges and supports the clergy spouse through her faith journey walking beside her but never defining or dictating her journey. The clergy spouses are offered a Scripture journal where they can read and reflect on assigned biblical texts. After lunch, the clergy spouses are invited to practice Sabbath, Scripture reading, and prayer during the unscheduled time. It is important that the location of the retreat has options for the clergy spouse to be outside in nature, to have conversation with others, to rest, and/or to reflect.

The evening session of the retreat challenges the clergy spouse to begin the process of self-reflection through the spiritual discipline of prayer. Prayer is all encompassing. The clergy spouse explores how prayer can be used throughout her daily life and how it is incorporated into the other spiritual disciplines. Having a mentor available for small group discussion fosters a sense of safety and security to step forth into the state of discomfort while allowing God to work on each clergy spouse. Journeying with a friend provides the accountability necessary for authentic transformation to occur. Nouwen describes the spiritual life in this manner:

Anyone who takes the spiritual life seriously and wants to enter more deeply into the encounter with God realizes immediately the need for formation and direction. Taking this inward journey demands looking at the movements of the heart with all its polarities, but taken in a time-and tradition-honored way. We can’t expect

to be formed in faith without committing to living a spiritual life with regular spiritual disciplines or practices.<sup>41</sup>

The evening concludes with vespers and another opportunity to practice the spiritual discipline of prayer and Scripture reading through the practice of evening prayer.

Following vespers, the clergy spouses are invited to continue building community with one another or seek rest.

The final morning starts with breakfast and a review of the spiritual disciplines that were introduced throughout the weekend. The mentors take time to explain the ongoing faith groups and offer their small groups their first assigned biblical texts to read and reflect for the initial monthly meeting, whether the group is geographic or relational in nature. The mentors and clergy spouses choose how to remain connected whether through an online forum, face-to-face meetings, or a combination thereof. The mentors remind the clergy spouses to follow the lectionary and reflect on a biblical text each week, and they educate the clergy spouses on Richard Foster's four-step process for meditative Scripture reading with an additional step added to the end of the process.

1. Repetition
2. Concentration
3. Comprehension
4. Reflection.<sup>42</sup>
5. What is God telling me or asking of me through this passage?

The clergy spouses are charged with setting goals for each spiritual discipline that will guide them on their faith journey and encourage them to be disciplined with each faith practice. For example:

1. Sabbath Practice – spend one day a week, one weekend a month, one week a year in intentional Sabbath practice.

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<sup>41</sup> Nouwen, *Spiritual Formation*, xxi.

<sup>42</sup> Richard Foster, *Celebration of Discipline: The Path to Spiritual Growth*, 20th ed. (New York: Harper San Francisco, 1998), 64-66.

2. Scripture Reading – increase the time reading the Word; set a personal goal from one day a week to daily reading and journaling
3. Prayer Goal – increase the time in conversation with God; daily, ongoing, conversations with God

The morning concludes with Holy Communion where the clergy spouses pray, worship, and revel in God's Word within their newly formed faith community.

Following a year of monthly faith-group meetings, the clergy spouses are invited to return to participate in another retreat. The three retreats will focus on Sabbath practice, Scripture reading, and prayer. Although it may be advantageous to offer a separate retreat for each spiritual discipline, we propose the faith practices be intertwined; a separate retreat will merely segment them instead of honoring their interconnectedness. Additional retreats provide opportunities to further explore the complexities of these faith practices and offer clergy spouses additional techniques to employ in their faith journeys. With the influx of new clergy spouses in each retreat, the faith community will naturally grow as the participants delve deeper in their faith and become experienced in practicing the spiritual disciplines. The three-year cycle will allow each spiritual discipline to be emphasized in a new light.

Engaging a life of discipleship requires discipline in order to sustain the challenges and struggles that inevitably arise. As Lutherans, we tend to resist practices or disciplines that resemble works righteousness, and the Christian disciplines can appear like acts to perform in order to achieve God's transforming mercy. The spiritual disciplines offer the clergy spouse a transformative gift. Struggles are a normative component of the Christian formation process, and as the clergy spouse embraces the spiritual journey and practices the spiritual disciplines, she becomes more in tune with the

music of God's voice. Through the discipleship process, she practices essential Christian beliefs that help form lifelong patterns of Christian formation and direction.

### **Challenges and Assessment Tools**

It is important to acknowledge the inherent challenges that lie within this proposal. One of the initial challenges is getting clergy spouses participation. If the synod offices encourage a one-year commitment, I believe the clergy spouse will experience the benefits of the faith practices and request additional retreats. Another challenge is more clergy spouses are rejecting their clergy spouse role. As couples marry later or marry from different faith backgrounds, clergy couples are seeking clearer separation between their family and their partner's jobs. Finally, unless donations or a grant can be obtained, the financial cost of running this program may be a deterrent for some clergy spouses.

As with any new project or ministry, it is important to implement a process to assess its effectiveness. Several inventories and assessments have been developed to examine the health and vitality of clergy families but few address clergy spouses specifically. We propose the use of two primary assessment tools to be used annually throughout the three-year process to assess the clergy spouse's functioning and the impact of regularly practicing the spiritual disciplines. They are:

1. Clergy Family Life Inventory<sup>43</sup>
2. The Hassles Scale<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>43</sup> Priscilla White Blanton and M Lane Morris, "Work-Related Predictors of Physical Symptomatology and Emotional Well-Being among Clergy and Spouses," *Review of Religious Research* 40, no. 4 (1999): 331-48, accessed November 2, 2014, ATLA Religion Database with ATLASerials;

Polly S. Roberts, Hildy G. Getz, and Gary E. Skaggs, "Alleviating Stress in Clergy Wives," *Journal of Spirituality in Mental Health* 9, no. 1 (2006): 44, accessed November 14, 2013, [http://dx.doi.org/10.1300/J515v09n01\\_03](http://dx.doi.org/10.1300/J515v09n01_03), read for further details about this assessment tool.

<sup>44</sup> Annemarie Huebner, "The Contribution of Normative Expectations to Chronic Stress: A Focus on Stress in Clergy and Seminary Students' Wives" (PhD diss., Marquette University, 1999), 125, 131-133,

### **For Further Study**

Although I have focused primarily on female clergy spouses due to the available research, male clergy spouses offer a unique population that deserves to be studied with more intentionality. I hope someone pursues a process for supporting male clergy spouses in their formative journeys and explores whether and how the male clergy spouse experience differs from the female clergy spouse. I am also interested to learn whether male clergy spouses experience different stressors than the ones noted in this study. Another noteworthy topic of further study is the impact of the stages of faith development on a clergy spouse's ability to embrace her role as a clergy spouse and the integration of her identity as a child of God. The question remains as to how the church can best assess the faith stage of the clergy family members and support them through seminary and the first five years of ministry. It appears that Stages 4-6 may be the most applicable to the current set of clergy spouses, but this may change quickly as the clergy family demographic changes.<sup>45</sup> Does this play a role in the resistance she experiences in her ability to view her partner's call as something other than a job to perform? I think both of these questions offer important insight into healthy clergy family functioning and deserve an opportunity to be examined further. Finally, I wonder if Bradley Hanson's four patterns of spirituality impact a clergy spouse's decision to be involved in ministry and claim her own call to ministry. The patterns are identified as Loyal Members, Loving

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accessed November 3, 2015, ProQuest Dissertations and Theses Global. Huebner discusses her collected data in the form of the "Normative Stress Scale for Clergy Wives". Roberts et al., "Alleviating Stress in Clergy Wives," 44, offer further details about this assessment.

<sup>45</sup> Hanson, *A Graceful Life*, 105-108, offers valuable information on this topic. Stage 4: Synthetic-Conventional Faith; Stage 5: Individuative-Reflective Faith; Stage 6: Conjunctive Faith.



Critics, Spiritual Shoppers, and Independent Seekers. From first glance, the Loyal Member would appear to accept her role as clergy spouse with more ease, but our society is evolving in its acceptance and integration of faith and religion. ”<sup>46</sup>

### **Concluding Remarks**

Let us take a moment to revisit the couples from the first chapter. Jane willingly entered a mentor relationship that was fostered through a clergy spouse retreat during Bob’s first year of ordained ministry. She discovered that she felt empowered to seek her own faith community where she could be authentic and vulnerable when her given faith community was unable to do so. Jane grew spiritually and emotionally during her three-year formative process, and she volunteered to be a mentor to other new clergy spouses journeying with them to help and vitality. Joe and Carrie are struggling in their marriage, and Carrie is struggling in her call as an ordained pastor without a spiritual partner to journey with her. Joe has decided to view Carrie’s work as a job and attends worship semi-regularly. He feels this is adequate with his other life responsibilities, but his marriage is beginning to experience the strain of this couple’s inability to connect spiritually.

The reality is that this is a mere mark on an expansive research area that deserves more energy and examination. I hope it encourages other persons to offer clergy spouses and their families the time and energy they deserve to discover and identify new ways to support and empower them. I also hope it will help clergy spouses navigate a life filled with ministry. I pray all clergy spouses find clergy family life to be a place of blessing

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<sup>46</sup> Ibid., 5-6.

despite the challenges they may endure for clergy family life affords plenty of opportunities for self-differentiation, spiritual growth, and transformation.

## APPENDIX A

### SPIRITUAL FORMATION RESOURCES FOR THE JOURNEY

AbbeyoftheArts.com

- Virtual global monastery offering pilgrimages, online classes and retreats, and resources. Integrates contemplative faith practices with creative expressions.
- Sponsors “Holy Disorder of Dancing Monks” facebook group

<http://www.bookoffaith.org/>

- ELCA resource to encourage all persons to delve deeper in the Holy Scriptures.

[elca.org/ELCA%20Resource%20Repository/Story\\_Matters\\_Final.pdf?\\_ga=1.152928319.784556154.1390412114](http://elca.org/ELCA%20Resource%20Repository/Story_Matters_Final.pdf?_ga=1.152928319.784556154.1390412114)

- ELCA resource to assist in claiming and living out our biblical identity

<http://www.elca.org/Our-Work/Congregations-and-Synods/Faith-Practices>

- ELCA resource for the faith practices initiative.

<http://episcopalfocus.org>

- Families of Clergy United in Support (FOCUS) – support for clergy spouses and family members; a ministry of the Episcopal Church

[www.pastorcare.org](http://www.pastorcare.org)

- Pastor Care Network - resources and a listing of counselors willing to see clergy for lowered fees or even free of charge

[www.sacredspace.ie](http://www.sacredspace.ie)

- A hybrid of Ignatian prayer and *lectio divina* based on the lectionary-assigned Scripture passage of the day

<http://www.veriditas.labyrinthsociety.org>

- A resource for those persons seeking information on how to use a labyrinth and where to find labyrinths.

## APPENDIX B

### OUTLINE FOR CLERGY SPOUSE RETREAT

- I. Friday Evening
  - a. 7:00 p.m. – Introductions and Covenant Time Overview of the retreat
    - i. Introduce the guide for the retreat
    - ii. Discuss and agree to the Covenant for the weekend
  - b. 7:05 p.m. – Introduction to the spiritual disciplines
  - c. 7:10 p.m. – Table Time/Small Groups with Mentors
    - i. Name
    - ii. Where do you serve?
    - iii. How long have you been a clergy spouse?
    - iv. Who has been a spiritual role model for you?
  - d. 7:20 p.m. - Spiritual disciplines/Christian spiritual formation
    - i. Historical relevance
    - ii. Why practice the spiritual disciplines?
  - e. 7:30 p.m. – Table Time/Small Groups with Mentors
    - i. Do you practice spiritual disciplines currently?
    - ii. What have you experienced through the spiritual disciplines?
    - iii. What was the most difficult aspect of that process?
    - iv. Which discipline do you feel God is inviting you to practice at this time of your life?
  - f. 7:50 p.m. – Growing deeper through the Spiritual Discipline of Sabbath practice
    - i. Practical spiritual discipline that invites Christians to respond to God’s call to love and care for self and creation through intentional rest
    - ii. Examples of Sabbath practice
  - g. 8:10 p.m. Table Time/Small Groups with Mentors
    - i. Do you practice Sabbath?
    - ii. What are some of the barriers for Sabbath practice?
    - iii. What benefits have you experienced from practicing Sabbath?
  - h. 8:30 p.m. – Evening prayer/Vespers

- i. 9:00 p.m. – Evening hospitality
  - i. Practical application of the spiritual discipline of hospitality
  - ii. Creating a space for food, spiritual conversation, and warmth of acceptance are important for emotional and spiritual formation.
    - 1. Food
    - 2. Spiritual conversation
    - 3. Warmth of acceptance
    - 4. Act of serving one another opens our hearts to the work God is doing in those around us

## II. Saturday

- a. 8:30 a.m. – Breakfast
- b. 9:30 a.m. – Morning worship
  - i. Outside at the labyrinth or on a prayer walk
  - ii. Meditative or Contemplative Prayer
- c. 10:30 a.m. – Growing deeper through the Spiritual Discipline of Scripture Reading
  - i. Why read Scripture?
    - 1. Deeper understanding of God, self, and others
    - 2. Opportunity to hear God in a new manner
  - ii. Challenges of reading Scripture
- d. 11:00 a.m. – Table Time/Small Groups with Mentors
  - i. What has been your experience with Scripture reading?
  - ii. What role has it played in your life?
  - iii. Have you ever experienced silence when reading Scripture?
  - iv. What did you do then?
- e. 11:30 a.m. – *Lectio Divina* – Sacred Reading
  - i. *Lectio* – Reading slowly
  - ii. *Meditatio* – Ruminare
  - iii. *Oratio* – Pray and listen
  - iv. *Contemplatio* – Listening and Rest
    - 1. Read. Reflect. Respond. Remain.
  - v. Practice with Psalm 86:11-12
    - 1. How was the experience?
    - 2. What was uncomfortable?
    - 3. What was comforting?
- f. 12:00 p.m. – Lunch

- g. 1:00 p.m. – Free time
  - i. Practice the spiritual disciplines of Sabbath practice, Scripture reading, and prayer
  - ii. Rest, relaxation, meditation
  - iii. Canoe, hike, spend time in nature
  - iv. Build community with other clergy spouses and mentors
- h. 6:00 p.m. – Dinner
- i. 7:00 p.m. – Growing deeper through the Spiritual Discipline of Prayer
  - i. What is prayer?
    - 1. Conversation with God
    - 2. Challenges of Prayer
- j. 7:15 p.m. – Table Time/Small Groups with Mentors
  - i. What has been your experience with prayer?
  - ii. What role has it played in your life?
  - iii. Have you ever experienced silence in your prayer life?
  - iv. What did you do then?
  - v. Have you ever heard God speaking through Scripture?
- k. 7:45 p.m. - *Lectio Visio* – Divine Seeing
  - i. The Saint John's Bible
    - 1. Welsh calligrapher
    - 2. Benedictine monks from Minnesota
- l. 7:50 p.m. – Ways to integrate prayer into your life
  - i. Silence
  - ii. Solitude
  - iii. Sabbath
- m. 8:00 p.m. – Practical application of the spiritual discipline of prayer
  - i. Prayer Journal
  - ii. Centering/Contemplative Prayer
    - 1. Silent prayer
    - 2. Facilitates the movement from more active forms of prayer – verbal, mental, or affective prayer – into a receptive prayer of resting in God
    - 3. Centering Prayer moves us from conversation with God to communion with God

- iii. Pray with another person
      - 1. Group listening prayer
      - 2. Colored pencils/marker/crayons available for artistic praying
  - n. 8:30 p.m. – Evening Prayer/Vespers
    - i. Practical application of the spiritual disciplines of prayer and Scripture reading
    - ii. Example of individual and communal spiritual discipline
  - o. 9:00 p.m. – Evening hospitality
    - i. Practical application of the spiritual discipline of hospitality
    - ii. Time to nourish body, mind, and spirit
- III. Sunday
  - a. 8:30 a.m. – Breakfast
  - b. 10:00 a.m. – Recap of the weekend
    - i. Review the Spiritual Disciplines
      - 1. Sabbath practice
      - 2. Scripture reading
      - 3. Prayer
  - c. 10:15 a.m. - Discuss the role of mentors and ongoing faith groups
    - i. Relationship of mutual exchange whereby someone who is more experienced at a given skill teaches, models, and imparts essential knowledge, skills, and strategies to someone less experienced.
    - ii. Based in spiritual friendship
    - iii. Build authenticity and community
    - iv. Create mutual love and support
  - d. 10:30 a.m. – questions for reflection
    - i. How did Jesus’ relationships with the disciples strengthen him?
    - ii. How has God used mentors in your life?
    - iii. How have you been a mentor to others?
    - iv. Consider this quote: “If faith is a journey, it helps to have a fellow traveler. The presence of this person makes it possible to go forward.” – James Wilhoit

- e. 10:45 a.m. – Table time/Small groups with Mentors
  - i. What did you learn about yourself this weekend?
  - ii. Do you feel God is inviting you to participate in a spiritual discipline?
  - iii. How will you implement it?
  - iv. What will be the barriers?
  - v. What do you need to continue moving forward in your spiritual journey?
  - vi. Feedback form
- f. 11:15 a.m. – Closing Worship with Holy Communion



## APPENDIX C

### FAITH PRACTICES FOR THE THREE-YEAR JOURNEY

The following techniques are introduced and practiced during the three-year retreat and monthly group cycle.

#### 1. Sabbath Practice

- a. Lighting Sabbath Candles<sup>1</sup>
  - i. This is the beginning of sacred time.
  - ii. Opportunity to ground self in the act of setting apart time for God
- b. Creating Time and Space
  - i. Relinquish the use of at least one appliance or device that is heavily used and let it rest for a designated Sabbath period.
  - ii. Be mindful how you respond to the absence of the appliance or device.<sup>2</sup>
- c. Begin Again
  - i. Choose one common act during the day to serve as a Sabbath pause.
  - ii. Whenever the pause arises (for example, turning on light, hearing the phone ring, or receiving an email prompt), stop, take three breaths, and then proceed with the activity. Be mindful of how this practice changes you to take small Sabbath moments each day<sup>3</sup>
- d. The Sabbath Box
  - i. Make a box to hold all the equipment you do not need on the Sabbath – pens, car keys, wallets, phones, Ipads – whatever distracts you from being present on the Sabbath.<sup>4</sup>
  - ii. Place those items in the Sabbath box as a reminder that God is the focus

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<sup>1</sup> Wayne Muller, *Sabbath: Restoring the Sacred Rhythm of Rest* (New York: Bantam Books, 1999), 21, writes: “Sabbath time (Jewish Sabbath) begins with the lighting of the candles. Those who celebrate Sabbath find that in this moment, the stopping truly begins.”

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., 27.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., 39.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid., 60.

## 2. Scripture Reading

- a. Informational vs. Formational Scripture reading
- b. Meditative Scripture reading
  - i. Richard Foster's four step process for studying Scripture
    - 1. *Repetition*
    - 2. *Concentration*
    - 3. *Comprehension*
    - 4. *Reflection*.<sup>5</sup>
  - ii. Add one more step: What is God telling me or asking of me through this passage?
- c. Scripture Journal
- d. Lectionary or other assigned biblical texts
- e. *Visio divina*

## 3. Prayer

- a. Meditative Prayer
- b. Group Prayer
- c. Intercessory Prayer
- d. *The Book of Hours*
  - i. The Liturgy of the Hours – collection of prayers that mark each passing hour, day, week, month, and year
  - ii. Muller writes: "Prayer is like a portable Sabbath, when we close our eyes for just a moment and let the mind rest in the heart."<sup>6</sup>

## 4. Combinations of Faith Practices

- a. The Sabbath/Prayer Walk
  - i. "It is a walk without any purpose, no need for insight or revelation. Simply let your soul catch up with you."<sup>7</sup>
  - ii. Walk for 30 minutes slowly and silently
  - iii. Let your senses guide you

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<sup>5</sup> Richard Foster, *Celebration of Discipline: The Path to Spiritual Growth*, 20th ed. (New York: Harper San Francisco, 1998), 64-66.

<sup>6</sup> Muller, *Sabbath*, 86.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid., 70.

- iv. Do not hurry
  - v. At the end of a 30-minute period notice what happens to your body, your mind, and your sense of time
- b. Scripture/Prayer Journal
- c. *Lectio Divina*
  - i. Submit to the biblical text
  - ii. Reflect on the biblical text
  - iii. Pray the biblical text
  - iv. Identify how the Scripture is speaking to you
  - v. Obey and yield to the biblical text<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Richard J. Foster, *Sanctuary of the Soul: Journey into Meditative Prayer* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Books, 2011), 40-41.

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