

SOUND THE ALARM



Breaking the Code of Silence
Clergy, Burnout and Suicide

REACHING OUT

to save ourselves and others



Burnout by the Numbers

- ▣ According to the New York Times (August 1, 2010) "Members of the clergy now suffer from obesity, hypertension and depression at rates higher than most Americans. In the last decade, their use of antidepressants has risen, while their life expectancy has fallen. Many would change jobs if they could."

Pastoral Burnout by the Numbers

- ▣ 13% of active pastors are divorced.
- ▣ 23% have been fired or pressured to resign at least once in their careers.
- ▣ 25% don't know where to turn when they have a family or personal conflict or issue.
- ▣ 25% of pastors' wives see their husband's work schedule as a source of conflict.
- ▣ 33% felt burned out within their first five years of ministry.
- ▣ 33% say that being in ministry is an outright hazard to their family.
- ▣ 40% of pastors and 47% of spouses are suffering from burnout, frantic schedules, and/or unrealistic expectations.
- ▣ 45% of pastors' wives say the greatest danger to them and their family is physical, emotional, mental, and spiritual burnout.
- ▣ 45% of pastors say that they've experienced depression or burnout to the extent that they needed to take a leave of absence from ministry.
- ▣ 50% feel unable to meet the needs of the job.
- ▣ 52% of pastors say they and their spouses believe that being in pastoral ministry is hazardous to their family's well-being and health.
- ▣ 56% of pastors' wives say that they have no close friends.
- ▣ 57% would leave the pastorate if they had somewhere else to go or some other vocation they could do.
- ▣ 70% don't have any close friends.
- ▣ 75% report severe stress causing anguish, worry, bewilderment, anger, depression, fear, and alienation.
- ▣ 80% of pastors say they have insufficient time with their spouse.
- ▣ 90% feel unqualified or poorly prepared for ministry.
- ▣ 90% work more than 50 hours a week.
- ▣ 94% feel under pressure to have a perfect family.

Pastoral Burnout

- ▣ **Burnout is a state of physical, mental, spiritual and emotional exhaustion caused by extended and intense levels of stress, causing the body to over-produce adrenaline. It leads to the questioning of one's abilities and/or the value of one's work.**

Signs and Symptoms

- ▣ Did you know that progression along the stress - burnout - depression continuum is slow and insidious? There is no clear delineation between one stage and another.....so burnout can sneak up on you. This slow and insidious nature is the reason why many people 'hit the wall of burnout' without ever realizing that they were burning out. That is why it is important to be aware of and watch for the three main symptoms of burnout.

Let's start with some general burnout symptoms that will be common to everyone. These include:

- ❑ **Emotional and physical exhaustion:** You feel worn out physically and emotionally. You have no energy; feel depleted, debilitated and fatigued.
- ❑ **Depersonalized response toward others:** You find yourself displaying negative or inappropriate attitudes toward people. Your sense of idealism disappears. You are irritated by others much more easily.
- ❑ **Reduced sense of personal accomplishment:** You experience reduced productivity and low morale. You find yourself withdrawing from your responsibilities and from others. Your ability to cope with day to day stress is significantly decreased.

Personal Checklist

- ❑ **Physical Symptoms:** Some of the more common physical symptoms of burnout are physical fatigue that is not fixed by a good night's sleep; muscle tension, weight loss or gain, anxiety attacks, flare up of preexisting medical conditions like hypertension or new health issues such as ulcers, migraines and gastrointestinal upset.
- ❑ **Behavioral Symptoms:** can include loss of creativity, dread of going to work, increased alcohol and drug use, escapist behavior and loss of emotional control.
- ❑ **Attitudinal Symptoms:** Attitudes include feelings of inadequacy, negativity, feelings of meaninglessness, a sense of entrapment at work or in relationships and a desire to leave ministry or change positions.
- ❑ **Interpersonal Symptoms:** Some of the interpersonal signs of burnout include increased marital and family conflicts, trust issues, withdrawal from family, loneliness and decreased interest in intimacy or sex with your spouse.

Clinical Depression vs. Burnout

- ▣ Since burnout facilitates the development of emotional distress (anger, frustration, lack of compassion, etc.) it has a close relationship to mood disorders such as depression. **They are not the same.** Burnout is not a form of depression. But if burnout goes unchecked it can lead to clinical depression.
- ▣ What is clinical depression? It's a mood disorder that can begin with burnout. A mood disorder relates to the way people feel inside. It has to do with a person's emotions. A mood disorder occurs when this mood is significantly disrupted for an extended period of time. Therefore, depression has to do with a person's emotions and mood.

Pastors and Suicide

- ▣ "The likelihood is that one out of every four pastors is depressed," said Matthew Stanford, a professor of psychology and neuroscience at Baylor University in Waco, Texas.
- ▣ *Isaac Hunter, Ed Montgomery, Teddy Parker Jr*
- ▣ Why the sudden rash of pastors committing **suicide**? Suicide is not a new problem among clergy, but three known suicides in less than two months begs a deeper look at the issue.

Why Clergy Suffer in Silence

- ▣ Clergy do not talk about it (depression) because it violates their understanding of their faith. Clergy believe they are not supposed to have those kinds of thoughts.
- ▣ Society still places a stigma on mental illness, but Christians make it worse, by "over-spiritualizing" depression and other disorders – dismissing them as a lack of faith or a sign of weakness.

Recovery Strategies

- ▣ Burnout recovery strategy #1: Slow down

When you've reached the end stage of burnout, adjusting your attitude or looking after your health isn't going to solve the problem. You need to force yourself to slow down or take a break. Cut back whatever commitments and activities you can. Give yourself time to rest, reflect, and heal.

Recovery Strategies cont...

- ▣ Burnout recovery strategy #2: Get support

When you're burned out, the natural tendency is to protect what little energy you have left by isolating yourself. But your friends and family are more important than ever during difficult times. Turn to your loved ones for support. Simply sharing your feelings with another person can relieve some of the burden. Another form of support could be talking with a trained professional.

Burnout Strategies cont...

- ▣ Burnout recovery strategy #3: Reevaluate your goals and priorities

Burnout is an undeniable sign that something important in your life is not working. Take time to think about your hopes, goals, and dreams. Are you neglecting something that is truly important to you? Burnout can be an opportunity to rediscover what really makes you happy and to change course accordingly.

Branching Out

- ▣ *Create support systems with other clergy*
- ▣ *Transparency and Vulnerability*
- ▣ *Recognize warning signs and respond appropriately*
- ▣ *Encourage and validate other clergy members*

But I have prayed for thee, that thy faith fail not: and when thou art converted, strengthen thy brethren.

Luke 22:32