



Guarding the Temple: Self Care for Clergy

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How our perspective can help....

- Saint John Vianney Center is a Behavioral Health Center that serves Ministers of the Church.
- Many find themselves needing help with Self Care/Wellness
- Holistic approach to care
 - Spirit
 - Mind
 - Body
- Providing tools to live a holy, happy and healthy ministry
- “ Self Care is KEY!”



Who takes care of You?



What is Self Care?

- Any activity we deliberately do to take care of our spiritual, mental, physical and emotional health.
- A simple concept in theory, but often overlooked.
- Good self care is key to improved mood, reduced anxiety and to a good relationship with yourself and others.
- “Something that refuels us, rather than takes from us.”
- Self care is key to living a balanced life the Lord called you to.



Self care needs to be an ACTIVE choice

- Create a NO list (set up your boundaries)....a day off.
- Prayer
- Nutritious healthy meals (your fuel!)
- Get enough sleep
- Physical Activity/Exercise
- Medical Care
- Relaxation/Meditation
- Spend time with others, explore hobbies, interests, avoid loneliness
- Look for opportunities to laugh
- SELF CARE TAKES PRACTICE....



You can't pour from an empty cup...



Who provides support in your life?

Self care may mean graciously allowing others to help us with our burdens.

Self care is proven to prevent health issues.



We know WHAT to do...so why don't we ??

What's holding us back?





One of the most commonly cited sources of concern for clergy:

Stress

- **Why?**
- **What types of Stress?**
- **What places clergy at risk?**
- **What can we do about it?**



***It is important to
note that the way
we perceive and
manage stress
matters a great
deal.***



Stress

- Stress is a normal physical response to events that make you feel threatened or upset your balance in some way.
- It is the body's defense; a way of protecting you.
- Stress can be positive or negative





Stress 101

What is healthy stress?

Stress is a normal and necessary part of life. Stress can be a good thing.

The right amount, well managed, can make us feel alive, increase productivity, energy, creativity, and happiness.

- **Examples:**
- **Rewarding work, positive life transitions and changes**
- **Being ordained**
- **Taking a new assignment**
- **First Pastorate**

Perception of the event is important



What is unhealthy stress?

Too much stress when poorly managed, can create:

- **Boredom**
- **Fatigue**
- **Restlessness**
- **Irritability**
- **Depression**

Too much stress and poor management can put you at risk for disease.

Examples: Death of loved one, too great a workload, dysfunctional relationships & unresolved grief



External Stressors

- ❖ **Pandemic – connection to parishioners, financial**
- ❖ **Priest/Deacon shortage and increasing demand**
- ❖ **Changing roles**
- ❖ **Investigations – historical and current**
- ❖ **Loss (of status, relevance, unprocessed losses)**
- ❖ **Isolation**
- ❖ **Authority**
- ❖ **Division in the Church**
- ❖ **Modern culture (counter cultural values)**

Changing Roles: Models of Leadership have changed.

*Loss is a major issue: Not the Church I was ordained into
A deep desire for the “good old days”*



Stress

Beyond a certain point, stress stops being helpful and starts causing major damage to:

- Your health
- Your mood
- Your productivity
- Your relationships
- Your quality of life

It becomes difficult to avoid.





Stress

The dangerous thing about stress is how easily it can creep up on you:

- You get used to it
- It starts to feel familiar, normal even
- You don't notice how much it's affecting you, even as it takes a heavy toll

Stress affects the mind, body, and behavior in many ways.

Everyone experiences stress differently.



Stress Doesn't Always Look Stressful

A simple driving analogy can best describe the three most common ways people respond when they're overwhelmed by stress:

Foot on the gas – An angry or agitated stress response. You're heated, keyed up, overly emotional, and unable to sit still.

Foot on the brake – A withdrawn or depressed stress response. You shut down, space out, and show very little energy or emotion.

Foot on both – A tense and frozen stress response. You "freeze" under pressure and can't do anything. You look paralyzed, but under the surface you're extremely agitated.



Symptoms of Stress

- **Irritability**
- **Fatigue**
- **Obsessive thoughts**
- **Rumination**
- **Difficulty with concentration and focus**
- **Weakening prayer life**
- **Anxiety and depression**
- **Sleep changes**
- **Eating changes (too much, too little)**



BEHAVIOR WARNING SIGNALS OF PROBLEMS WITH STRESS

- **Feeling tired and never really rested.**
- **Feeling disconnected from prayer or ministry.**
- **Arguing with others over minor things.**
- **Lack of patience. Lack of tolerance for others' mistakes and incompetence.**
- **Inability to feel relaxed.**
- **Constantly feeling under pressure because of ministry or personal life.**
- **Lack of desire or time to socialize.**
- **Not finding joy in ministry**
- **Absent-mindedness. Forgetting things.**
- **Feeling irritable and tired at the end of the day.**



Effects of Stress

Long term exposure leads to major health problems and disrupts every system in the body:

- Blood pressure
- Immune system
- Increase risk of heart attack and stroke
- Speed up aging process
- Sleep disruption
- Obesity
- Depression
- Anxiety
- **Leads to poor decisions regarding health management**



Reality for Clergy

- Not permitted to have a bad day
- Always have to be upbeat and positive
- Not affected by stressful situations
- Say No?...No way!
- Having all the answers
- Recognizing expectations
- Managing expectations



How does living healthy manage stress?

- First, we need to define health...

The World Health Organization's *definition of Health:*

Health is a state of complete physical, mental and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity.



Ministerial toll...

- Physical ability to provide ministry
 - More than 76% of clergy are overweight and 40% of clergy are obese
 - Illness, disease, decreased energy, decreased mobility
 - Physical decline in health can be a warning sign for concerns with emotional well-being



Living Healthy in mind,
body, and spirit leads to
Wellness



Reducing your risk

- Routine visits to the physician
 - Not “sick” visits
 - Return as the doctor directs you
- Routine visits to the dentist
- Early identification of medical issues lead to desirable outcomes
- Properly managing chronic physical health problems
- Specialists as needed
- Medication reconciliation



Men: Stay Healthy

Get the Screenings You Need

- **Colon Cancer.** If you are 75 or younger, get a screening test for colorectal cancer. Several different tests—for example, a stool test or a colonoscopy—can detect this cancer
- **Depression.** Your emotional health is as important as your physical health. Talk to your doctor or nurse about being screened for depression
- **Diabetes.** Get screened for diabetes (high blood sugar) with a blood test if you have high blood pressure or take medication for high blood pressure.
 - *Diabetes can cause problems with your heart, brain, eyes, feet, kidneys, nerves, and other body parts*
- **High Blood Cholesterol.** Have your blood cholesterol checked regularly with a blood test. High blood cholesterol increases your chance of heart disease, stroke, and poor circulation.
- **High Blood Pressure.** Have your blood pressure checked at least every 2 years. High blood pressure can cause strokes, heart attacks, kidney and eye problems, and heart failure.
- **Lung Cancer:** Talk to your doctor or nurse about getting screened for lung cancer if you smoke now or have quit within the past 15 years
- **Overweight and Obesity.** The best way to learn if you are overweight or obese is your BMI.



Why do we need Physical Activity?

- Sedentary lifestyles count as a major risk factor in chronic illnesses such as heart disease, diabetes and osteoporosis.
- Sitting Disease is a real disease!





Physical Activity

Physical Activity in any form can act as a stress reliever

Being active can:

- Boost your mood
- Act as a distraction
- Increase your resiliency to the ill effects of stress





Physical Activity

- Pumps up your endorphins (your brain's feel-good neurotransmitters)
- “Meditation in motion” - helps you get away from the days stresses and concentrate
- Helps you get refocused - it's like a time out for grown ups
- Enhances mood
- Increases self-confidence
- Lowers symptoms of depression and anxiety
- Improves sleep - exercise offsets stress which leads to sleep disruption



Physical Activity Research

Columbia University identified that 2.5 to 4.5 hours per week of exercise/activity leads to prevention of mental health disorders, primarily depression and anxiety.

- You don't have to be an elite athlete to be active
- Find something you enjoy doing
- Develop a plan
- Use the buddy system or groups
- Being accountable to others helps to stay motivated
- findings support: *"the notion that regular activity may lead to prevention of mental health disorders."*

Be reasonable – Consult your doctor if you wish to exercise seriously and are just starting out



Physical Activity

Time Management:

- Make time every day to be active
- Set a goal each day and stick to it
- Low cost (pair of shoes, pedometer)
 - Built in your smart phone!
- Break up your activity into manageable times if needed (3- 10 min walks)

Any form of activity works:

- Running
- Sports
- Gardening
- Walking definitely counts!





Smoking & Alcohol

- Smoking is not a stress reliever, diet alternative, or energy producing option
 - It raises heart and blood pressure, reduces oxygen exchange without the positive effects of exercise
- Avoid Alcohol- though it may seem to help with stress
 - Long term effects compound or create new emotional and physical health issues



Sleep Hygiene

Sleep is your body's chance to re-fuel, as well as your mind

- Know your needs, it varies from person to person
- Keep a regular sleep schedule
- When you get up, stay up
- Avoid naps - unless taking a power nap helps your routine
- Practice breathing/meditation techniques before bed time
- Exercise in the morning
- Avoid caffeine and nicotine after dinner
- Avoid large meals after dinner - a light snack is ok
- Use bedroom for sleep only – read and watch TV elsewhere



Until next time...

- Attempt to get 30 minutes of physical activity per day
- Review your sleep patterns
 - Look for areas of improvement
- Consider taking a stress inventory
 - List out things in your life/ministry
 - Naming them is the first step!
- Spend quiet time in prayer
- You will be in my prayers for safety, health, and happiness.