

Pre-Conference Survey Report

We take this opportunity to thank everyone who took the pre-conference survey geared toward furnishing more tangible information on our patterns of self-care as clergy and laity in the Great Plains Conference. We received a wonderful response with 261 clergy members and 148 laity taking the survey, for a total of 409 respondents. Because of your excellent response, the fact that there was no incentive offered and that the survey was randomly offered to any willing respondents, we can confidently say that the results of the survey are a true sample, representative of general patterns of clergy and laity in our conference. Once again thank you.

Some general initial findings were presented as part of the *Self Care as a Spiritual Discipline* workshop at the annual conference, offered by Rev. Dr. Anne Kiome-Gatobu. The following document presents a more robust analysis of the findings, followed by a brief summary of implications and recommendations.

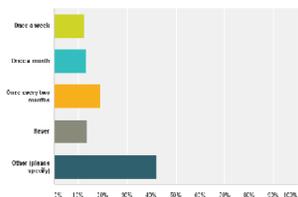
Survey report:

The first question asked; “How often do you worship in community without leading?” The assumption is that when you are leading worship, you are not worshipping because you are more invested in the good experience of those you are leading in worship than your own worship. The survey revealed that about 25% of pastors get to worship between once a week and a month. 13.5% do not worship in community at all.

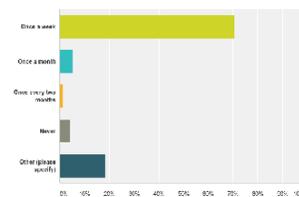
Figure 1: Clergy

Figure 2: Laity

Q1: How often do you worship in community without leading
Answered: 259 Skipped: 2



Q1: How often do you worship in community without leading
Answered: 147 Skipped: 1



Among the 42% clergy who responded with “other,” 20% indicated that they worship during vacation, 12% worship quarterly, 5% at annual conference, 5.5% worship twice a year, 5.5% worship occasionally, and 2% worship at funerals.

Conversely, 75% of laity worship between once a week and once a month. Responses under “other” 18% (27 people) would have added another 10% to the 75% for a total of 85% of laity who worship once or several times a week or month. The “other” field also revealed some genuine reasons why some laity do not consider themselves as being in worship, for instance those who serve as choir directors, worship leaders, and other Certified Lay Ministers (CLMs). This appears as an obvious figure since most laity do not lead worship often, as is the case with pastors. It is important however, to credit the commitment embedded in the discipline of regular worship by laity. Most interesting in the laity statistics under this question is the response “Never” and “couple of times a year,” which was 4% and 4%, respectively. One must question the effectiveness of a lay leader who does not participate in worship. Having said that, the researchers give the benefit of doubt that this combined 8% must have come from laity who are very involved in the life of the church and who participate in worship but also lead so often that they do not regard it as worship time for themselves. If this is the case, the encouragement to

these persons is to find a different venue in addition to their current congregation, where they can worship without leading, or dedicate a number of services a year to worship without leading.

The second question asked, “**What scripture(s) anchors and/or informs your call to ministry (clergy) service in lay ministry (laity)?** Of pertinent note is that only 21 clergy and 48 laity skipped this question, implying that about 83% of all respondents (79% clergy and 52% laity) have anchored their ministries in scriptures! That is great news as it points to where clergy and laity find their passion, what informs their ministries and who empowers them to do ministry. We further categorized all the scriptures listed by respondents into 11 categories with the following findings:

Category	Clergy	Laity
a) To connect (evangelize) people to God	= 32%	21%
b) With God as the source	= 16%	14%
c) Response to His faithfulness	= 23%	7%
d) Do God’s will for me	= 21%	19%
e) None	= 12%	17%
f) Call to Social justice	= 9%	8%
g) Serve God by serving others	= 9%	9%
h) To serve God and Jesus Christ	= 9%	4%
i) Serve & love to others	= 4%	11%
j) Stewardship of our gifts	= 2 %	3%
k) Obligation to God	= 0%	1%

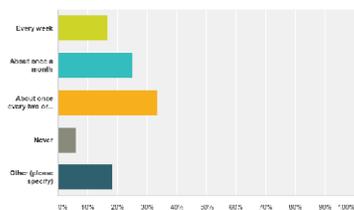
A correlation of scriptures that inform our ministries and our goals in ministry would have been an interesting endeavor, but is beyond the scope of this survey. What is pertinent is that the majority of people’s ministries in the Great Plains Conference are in one way or another anchored in scriptures.

The third question asked, “**How often do you experience periods of mental exhaustion/stress?**” The assumption is that experiencing mental exhaustion “every week” or “once a month” is frequent enough to warrant some attention. The figurative depiction of the findings are as follows:

Figure 3: Clergy

Q3: How often do you experience periods of mental exhaustion/stress?

Answered: 201 Skipped: 0

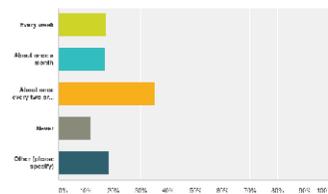


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Figure 4: Laity

Q3: How often do you experience periods of mental exhaustion/stress?

Answered: 142 Skipped: 6



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The actual percentages indicating mental exhaustion with the frequency of weekly to three months was as follows:

	Clergy	Laity
Every week	17%	18%
Every month	25%	17%
Every two or three times a month	33%	35%

It is apparent from these figures that there is a considerable difference when “every week” and “every month” is combined, between clergy (42%) and laity (35%). The figures become when the period is extended to a span of three months at 75% clergy and 70% laity. It is apparent that mental exhaustion is a collective concern for both clergy and laity. Might the three-month frequency be a good indicator of the threshold to begin making changes in one’s lifestyle or find help so as not to advance to the weekly or a monthly frequency?

A greater scrutiny for what “other” entailed reveals interesting statistic as follows:

Other categories:	18% of Clergy	18% of Laity
a) Every other week	2%	4%
b) Occasional	56%	15%
c) Often	10%	19%
d) Rarely	29%	58%
e) Uncategorized	4%	0%

It may be noted that there is an enormous difference between clergy (56%) and laity (15%) for “occasional,” especially against the “rarely,” which is almost an inverse percentage at clergy 29% and laity 58%. Mental exhaustion is a major factor in the measure of healthy balance of self-care. Frequent mental exhaustion curbs one’s capacity for creativity, awareness, empathy, conceptualization and good intentional listening, five of the 10 characteristics named by Larry C. Spears in his 10 characteristics of effective servant leadership¹.

Question 4 inquired **of participants’ main goal in their ministries or volunteer work.**

The great news is that of the 261 clergy and 148 laity participants, only 11 and 13 persons, respectively, skipped this question, suggesting the possibility that 96% of clergy and 88% of laity actually have articulated their goals in ministry! This is great because it keeps one focused on why they do what they do and can actually lead to greater effectiveness and satisfaction in ministry. Analysis of the various themes that emerged from the goals stated by both clergy and laity revealed the following themes in order of frequency:

Table 1: Goals categorized in themes

CLERGY			LAITY		
		%			%
1.	Discipleship/ grow faith	42%	1	Discipleship/ grow faith	22
2.	Outreach/evangelism	32%	2	Serve God/Christ	14
3	Love God & Others	8%	3	Outreach	11
4.	God’s call/ compelled	8%	4	Keep church vibrant	11
5.	Care/encourage/heal others	8%	5	Use my gifts	9
6.	Social justice/transform world	5%	6	Love God & neighbor	7%
7.	Equip others	5%	7	God’s call/ Fulfill responsibility	4%
8.	Serve God/Christ	4%	8	Relieve Pastor	4%
9.	Other	2%	9	Encourage / heal others	4%
10	Keep church going vital	1%	10	Brings fulfilment to me	3%
11	Brings fulfillment to me	>1%	11	Be in community	3%
12	Meet Needs	>1%	12	Call to Social justice	2%
13	Be in community	0	13	Meet needs	2%

¹ Spears, Larry C., “Character and Servant Leadership: Ten Characteristics of Effective, Caring Leaders” *Journal of Virtues and Leadership*, Vol 1 Iss. 1, 2010, 25-30

14	Use my gifts	0	14	People may see Christ in me	1%
15	Relieve Pastor	0	15	Equip others	.75%

It is very encouraging to note that “Discipleship/ Growth of faith” and “Outreach/Evangelism” are among the top three ministry goals for both clergy and laity. While these two appropriately go hand in hand, we wonder if as a denomination we are great at discipleship and need to rev up our call to evangelism in order to truly reach more people with discipleship. It is also interesting that while “Serving God/Christ” is No. 2 for laity at 14%, it only places at eighthth position with a 4% for clergy. While the percentages for the field, “Gods’ call/ Compelled/ Fulfill responsibility” may not seem significantly different at 8% for clergy and 4% for laity, the actual number of clergy and laity who marked this field are 20 and 5 respectively. There was also a marked difference in the way these were expressed: Clergy voiced their ministry as a conviction of God’s call, while laity expressed it as responsibility they felt they had to fulfill. Also, one would expect that the numbers in this field for clergy would be much higher than the 8% since they are used to being asked to articulate their call.

It is noteworthy that though our denominational mission and slogan is to “transform the world,” that mission was not expressed by laity at all and only fell at No. 6 at 5% among clergy. Furthermore, the fields, “Loving God and neighbor” (clergy 8%; laity 7%) and “social justice” (clergy 5%; laity 2%) have much lower scores compared to outreach/ evangelism and discipleship. We wonder if as a conference we can find ways to cast the denominational vision and link it to Jesus’ commandment to “love God and neighbor” in ways that relate them to evangelism and discipleship.

Of pertinent to our subject of self-care, is that two of the goal categories that could help balance the pastor’s work while acting out our Wesleyan belief of a priesthood of all believers, namely to “relieve the pastor” and to “equip others” fell at eighth (4%) and 15th (0.75%) position for laity and at 15th (0%) and seventh (5%) position for clergy. If more laity would perceive their ministry as a call to relieve their pastor’s load and help equip others to do so, and if pastors would also view as part of their call to equip saints for the service of God, it could transform the mentality of pastoral leadership from being centralized on the pastor to a communal call. A good resource that could be helpful in this regard is Melvin Steinbron’s book “The Lay Driven Church.”²

Question 5 asked, “**What fun /social thing do you do with your spouse/significant other/family/close friends?**” Responses indicate that those who are engaged in activities other than ministry have a wide variety of activities that foster great relationships with family and friends. Categories of activities clergy and laity engage in for fun and recreation ranged from (clergy/laity): Eat out/ date night (41%/ 32%); Movies (25% / 14%); Sports/ games/ walking (23% / 18%); Family/ Friends (18%/ 17%) Travel/museum (8% / 11%); Hiking/ camping/ fishing (4% /10%); Music, concert, theater (7% / 6%); Gardening / projects (5%/ 3%) Shop/ hangout (3% / 2%); Other (2%/2%); Social gatherings (0.4% / 14%). The survey also indicates that about 20% of clergy and laity, respectively, do not have a significant other/ family or close friend. This is noteworthy as one must wonder how they meet their emotional and relational human needs.

Though our basic survey could not correlate between involvement in activities that foster growth of relationships as shown in the above categories, we can imply that the fact that a very high percentage of both clergy and laity identify significant others and have a wide and healthy

² Steinbron, Melvin J. *The Lay-Driven Church*, Wipf & Stock, 2004

variety of recreational activities has, in effect, led to some very good statistics for questions No. 6. and 7. The following figures are self-explanatory for each of these questions:

Question 6. ***How do you characterize your communication (meaningful times spent) with your spouse/significant other?***

	Clergy	Laity
a. Very open	59%	59%
b. Guarded & need improvement	18%	15%
c. Poor = 1 person	>1%	2%

Question 7. ***How would you characterize your relationship with your children?***

	Clergy	Laity
a. Very close	56%	33%
b. Somewhat close	17%	22%
c. Distant & poor	3%	0%

As a conference, clergy and laity are generally doing very well with familial relationships. Anyone who marked “*other*” on these three questions simply highlighted the normal variation of relationships with some specific members or children.

Question 8. ***How would you characterize your relationship with your parishioners/fellow congregants?*** Great news from this statistic is that 80% of clergy and 83% of laity marked “close” or “cordial,” while 1% clergy and 4% laity marked distant/conflicted & guarded. The first option of “very, very close” was an option to raise awareness that for clergy, congregations are not the place to meet their emotional and relational needs. Congregants can be friends but are not meant to be their primary resources to meet their emotional and relational needs as that creates dual relationships that can become enmeshed, messy and triangulated when there are issues in the church. It can also set them up to crossing boundaries with adverse implications for both clergy and the church. It is possible that those who marked “very, very close” are not implying that they have crossed boundaries with their parishioners but rather that they feel a good connection. Only 5% of clergy and 8% of laity marked this field. Once again, the marking of “*other*” highlighted the variations of relationship with our parishioner and fellow congregants.

Question 9 asked, “***How often do you intentionally meet with your colleagues in ministry to encourage one another?***” Once again the results of this question reveal very good news in that 63% of clergy and 60% of laity meet at least once a week/month with colleagues or fellow congregants to encourage one another. Indeed, this percentage might be much higher because 62% of the 37 clergy and 50% of the 26 laity that filled the field “*other*,” made statements that implied that they meet “often.” If these groups added to the 63% and 60% respectively, the new percentage of clergy that meet weekly, monthly or more often is 71% clergy and 66% laity. While for clergy this has to be an intentional effort possibly outside of their congregation, for laity it may happen in Bible study, Sunday school or other small groups.

As noted at the workshop, it seems that as a conference we are doing very well in terms of accountability and encouraging one another. We believe such intentional meetings that meet emotional and relational needs have influenced the great numbers revealed above in questions 6, 7 and 8. However, there are many variations that could not be captured in this question when you consider that some of the meetings accounted for here are conference or district superintendent mandated and may, therefore, not provide a safe space that would encourage clergy to genuinely share their challenges and personal struggles, without fear of being used

against them in the future. Such mandated meetings might include, mentor/supervisor relationships, pastor/associate relationships, district meetings, etc.

A quick synopsis of Question 10, which asked participants to mark all that apply from a menu of 15 fields, reveal the following interesting information:

Table 2: Top three most encouraging fields for clergy and Laity

Clergy		Laity	
Statement	%	Statement	%
I consistently take a day off	63%	I intentionally do physical exercise at least twice every week	58%
I intentionally do physical exercise at least twice every week	57%	I consistently take a day off	25%
I cannot wait for Sunday to come around so I can preach and lead worship	46%	I cannot wait for Sunday (or any other day) to lead worship, small group, Bible study	19%

It is interesting that the top three most encouraging or positive statements marked by clergy are the same ones marked by laity even though the percentages and order of frequency is different. While there is a significant difference between clergy and laity on the two fields of “taking a day off” and “passion for their ministry,” their level of engagement in physical exercise seem to be comparatively similar. The higher percentage of clergy’s passion for ministry at 46% over laity’s 19% is not a surprise because for clergy, this is their call and livelihood. However, the difference between clergy’s discipline to take a day off (63%) and Laity’s (25%) is a little disconcerting. Might this give us insight as to why a considerable percentage of clergy (20%) feel guilty when they take time off and or take time away to nourish their spirit through prayer, meditation and devotions? Might this disparity also give us insight into the uphill battle that it seems to be to educate our congregations for the need for pastor’s to take time off to recharge so they can be more effective? Might this be tied to why there seems to be very few “Jethros” in our congregations who can hold pastors accountable to balancing their call to ministry with call to family and God? (refer to Exodus 18:12-27).

Table 3: Top three most discouraging fields for clergy and Laity

Clergy		Laity	
Statement	%	Statement	%
I often wonder if I am making a difference in the life of parishioner	48%	I wonder if I am making a difference in the life of people	54%
I often worry about my finances and future financial stability	39%	I sometimes do not feel like praying	30%
I sometimes do not feel like praying	29%	I often worry about my finances and future financial stability	27%

Once again the same items were marked by both clergy and laity Even though there is nothing wrong in either clergy or laity wondering if they are making a difference in the life of those they serve, when this happens so often that it becomes part of one’s worldview, it might imply feelings of inadequacy that could lead to discouragement.

The worry about finances for both clergy and laity reveals that this is an area of concern that needs to be addressed in practical ways by the church either through financial education and tangible benefits for pastors. If financial worry becomes habitual, it can very easily derail well-meaning pastors as well as missional goals of a church. Many times people tend to budget, and steward church funds from their own relationship with money and can adversely stifle God's work by having a scarcity mentality.

An even more troubling finding, is the field, "I sometimes do not feel like praying" which surprisingly scored about the same for both clergy and laity at 29% and 30%, respectively. John 14: 1-10 and Philippians 4:13, among many other scriptures, cited by a number of people as the scriptures that anchors their ministry, speak to the importance of being connected to God as the source of all that we do. Philippians 4: 13 states, "I can do all this through him who strengthens me." John 14:5 states, "I am the vine; you are the branches. If you remain in me and I in you, you will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing." Connection to God has direct relationship to effectiveness. Greatest model of connection involves prayer, worship and reading of scriptures as a way of life because in such is the complete oneness with God, the Son Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit. Feelings of not wanting to pray are usually associated with stress, anger toward God or experience of being in crisis – all of which if not addressed can lead to burnout and greater distance from God.

Implications & Recommendations

- This survey reveals a number of areas of strength for both clergy and laity in the Great Plains Conference, including, great healthy familial relationships as well as healthy boundaries that allow greater effectiveness in ministry; the fact that the majority percentage of people have carved safe space to find encouragement and accountability; and the intentional efforts by both clergy and laity to fulfill emotional and relational needs through fun activities with family and friends. Though the survey was not set to make any correlations, we can imply that the above factors positively impact the overall experience of most clergy and laity in their ministries. We would like to credit these celebratory findings to the office of clergy excellence, which has been very intentional in training clergy and laity on healthy boundaries, and the Transition into Ministry (TiM) program that addresses issues of self-care at entry level of ministry.
- Of concern is the percentages marked especially by clergy on a number of statements, one which made the top three most discouraging fields, (I sometimes do not feel like praying) and three others that did not. We have commented on the prayer field on question 10. The other three that are pertinent to self-care include the following:
 - a. "I often feel guilty when taking time from my ministry to nourish my spirit through prayer, meditation, and devotions" (20% clergy, 9% laity). If we are not spiritually grounded in Christ, then our priorities will be out of sync.
 - b. "I have thought about taking a personal leave just to recharge" (30% clergy, 22% laity). This is an important indication that 30% of pastors are feeling signs of stress and burnout usually directly related to ministry. While 22% of laity experiencing similar signs of burnout is also significant, their stress may be emanating from a wider variety of sources than that of ministry.
 - c. "I often wonder why I am in ministry" (11% clergy, 10% laity) This might seem like a negligible number but it is significant because it points to the fact that more than 10% of Great Plains Conference pastors and laity question their call and

express discontent in being in ministry. If the survey is truly representative of clergy and laity in the conference, that is a significant number of discontented church workers.

- The findings around worship as already discussed in question 1 are disconcerting and require an intentional discipline of worship without leading by pastors.
- A more robust study that takes to consideration different variations of clergy and laity age, gender, experience and longevity in ministry would yield interesting insights. Taking into consideration these variations would give more correlated data that can further our insight for better self-care. Such a study would also harvest clergy and laity insight into self-care. These capacities were beyond the scope of this survey.
- On a similar note, a comparative study with several other conferences or even across denominations in the United States would be more indicative of where we collectively place as the Great Plains Conference in terms of self-care.
- As suggested by some of the participants of the “Self-Care as a Spiritual Discipline” workshop, the conference and district meetings can begin to emulate self-care practices that are built into their schedules.
- We would also recommend that pastors pay attention to their own emotional health and seek help when needed. We also encourage them to be aware of signs of unhealthy symptoms in any of the six areas of holistic health namely: mental, intellectual emotional, relational, spiritual and financial, and seek help or preventive measures as necessary.

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