



Marsha Snulligan Haney\*

## INTRODUCING THE THEME: HEALTH, WHOLENESS, AND SPIRITUALITY OF PASTORS

This theme issue of the *JITC* focuses on how health, wholeness, and spirituality impact pastors, with contributors exploring these concerns from a variety of perspectives. The idea for the issue grew out of the experience of twenty pastors (ITC alumni/ae) who participated in the January 2006 Holy Land Pilgrimage sponsored by the Holy Land Institute for Pastoral Renewal. Representing various denominations, geographical settings, women and men, the twenty persons were selected to participate in a unique opportunity of rest, reflection, and renewal. The focus was mid-career pastors, and the goal was to renew their spiritual life and deepen their sense of calling. Dr. Temba Mafico, professor, Hebrew Bible/Old Testament Studies, served as the project director; Dr. David Rensberger, professor, New Testament Studies, served as spiritual advisor; and Dr. Marsha Snulligan Haney, associate professor of Missiology and Religions of the World, served as project missiologist—this body formed the leadership team. Dr. Fahed Abu Akel, a leading Palestinian church leader, served as guest presenter during the pre-travel orientation.

Searching for a season of rest and a time of spiritual renewal, the physical journey took the twenty pilgrims to the famil-

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iar places of Jerusalem, Bethany, Bethlehem, Nazareth, Qumran, Jericho, and Tiberius. Traveling to the Jordan River (some rededicated their faith here) and visiting ancient sites and ruins enabled us to reflect on this ancient biblical land and its complexities. Taking advantage of the opportunity to experience the people of this land—holy to Jews, Christians, Muslims, African-Hebrew Israelites, and many lesser known faith communities—was a profoundly rich experience.

During the daytime hours, the journey led to conversations and discussions with Palestinian Christians, Israeli human-right activists, Evangelical Christians, and Muslims. The opportunity to venture into the sacred space of others, where religious practices and worldviews continue to clash, and where lifestyles and value systems, religious assumptions and intentions, and scriptural authority have nurtured and shaped generations of religious leaders, was a great treasure. The synergy of vivid religious understandings and practices could not be encountered without the response of personal introspection and communal reflection.

The inward spiritual journey, however, took us to some unfamiliar spaces. Evening debriefing sessions encouraged honest sharing about attitudes and emotions impacting us and our ministries. By spending time with the biblical text and focusing on call narratives, we revisited our own call to ministry, particularly in light of present realities. Diverse problems were shared: changing health issues and serious illnesses, rekindling a sense of spiritual vocation, loss of faith in denominations, depression and mental-health concerns, and the challenge to sustain hope in the face of adversity. Congregational pastors, no matter how long they have been pastoring, need time and space to consider all the crucial aspects of pastoral

ministry that demand their attention<sup>1</sup> in order to create a community of internal cohesion by clarifying and consolidating their experience of self in the context of familial, vocational, ecclesiological, and societal roles. It is only in this manner that personal goals, values, and worldviews are integrated into purposes supporting a balanced life of health, wellness, and spirituality. We also discovered that simply having a trusting community within which to share spiritual problems and personal experiences was in itself a healing experience.

As pastors who often define themselves by the size of their congregational membership, the amount of money gained through tithes and offering, or how many speaking engagements accepted, it is not easy to confront those things essential to life. Those who are committed to and engaged in pastoral ministry often forget that fidelity to ministry includes taking time to nurture one's own body and spirit. While in Israel, the pastors heard anew the invitation of Jesus to his disciples to "come away to a deserted place and rest for a while." The consequence, as least for these twenty pilgrims, was actually a spiritual experience made up of many collective and individual journeys. The subject of this journal issue—"health, wholeness, and the spirituality of the pastor"—introduces an even broader conversation, including voices from spiritual facilitators, pastors, theologians, and health therapists. They invite theological education to broaden its view of excellence in ministry to encompass the components of our theme.

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<sup>1</sup>During the pilgrimage we identified pastoral roles that demand time, energy, and resources: (1) leader of worshipping community; (2) pastor of a local congregation; (3) involved denominational member; (4) ecumenical witness and participation; (5) participant and/or supporter in local interfaith and/or interreligious activities; (6) individuals with responsibilities to and for family members and friends; and (7) civic commitments and public theologian.

While spirituality has been included in theological education curricula for at least a decade now, we have a long way to grow in our understanding of how to shape ministry leaders who can live healthy lives and demonstrate a passion for health and spiritual well-being. Do theological educators promote, in word, deed, and lifestyle, models of health, wellness, and wholeness? In 1999, clergy had the highest rate of death from cardiovascular disease of any profession.<sup>2</sup> Why? Many factors contribute to this reality: poor work habits, messianic complex, stress, depression, low salaries, in some instances no health insurance, and poor lifestyles. Health statistics present a compelling picture for health and wellness, as far as clergy are concerned—especially among pastors; there is much-needed work. As educators of church leaders, professors should not be surprised by the alarming health statistics related to clergy because of negative lifestyle habits, which many students unfortunately embrace.

Congregations themselves are in various states of healthiness and are slowly recognizing this as they face the challenges of their future; many have a form of church that simply does not engage the postmodern generation, particularly those thirty-five and under. These congregations need pastors who are healthy and whole and who can help persons reclaim a vision of their Christian mission and calling. They need shepherds who are persons of health and spirituality, whose private lives and ministries reflect a concern for health and wholeness, and whose leadership demonstrates a concern for health, healing, and spiritual direction. So too does the world.

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<sup>2</sup>See Geoffrey M. Calvert, Jeffrey W. Merling, and Carol A. Burnett, "Ischemic Heart Disease Mortality and Occupation among 16- to 60-Year-Old Males," *Journal of Occupational and Environmental Medicine* 41, no. 11 (November 1999): 960-966.

As Shawchuck and Heuser in *Leading the Congregation* observe: "Many church leaders fall into the trap of equating ministry with spirituality. Ministry and spirituality are related, but they are not the same. Ministry consumes energy; spirituality restores energy. Ministry not supported by an appropriate spirituality is ultimately doomed to boredom, stagnation, disappointment, infirmity."<sup>3</sup> Pastors' role as spiritual congregational leaders is most helpful when the inward life of the spirit is nurtured. Today's clergypersons provide leadership in a society where the majority of Americans value religion and express a yearning for spiritual growth and development. The same is also true on a global scale; faith not only gives meaning and purpose to the lives of clergy but also to religious leaders throughout the world.

It is no wonder, then, that twenty pastors traveling throughout the religiously diverse context of Israel, where the associations between religious belief and practice and health and wholeness are so prominent, found themselves engaging issues of spirituality at the core of their being and identity. Christian spirituality, understood as dynamic human potential for awareness and response to God (as Trinity), is key in the life of the clergy, and the need for a balanced life of ministry and spirituality is evident when one considers the varying personal and social demands made on clergy.

The dimensions of a holistic spirituality that nurtures

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<sup>3</sup>Norman Shawchuck and Roger Heuser, *Leading the Congregation: Caring for Yourself While Serving Others* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1993), 121. The authors provide a helpful definition of spirituality: "Spirituality is the means by which we develop an awareness of the presence of the loving Lord in our lives, and the process by which we keep that awareness alive and vital, to the end that we become formed in the Spirit of Christ," 119.

pastors and, in turn, encourages personal and social transformation involves a three-fold trajectory: a desire to live in right relationship with God, a need for self-care and self-growth, and a commitment to love of neighbor. This is expressed in Luke 10:27 where the whole person—heart, soul, strength, and mind—is affirmed; the social responsibility to neighbor is valued. The importance of each component of the person, integrating each into the making of the complete person, is captured in the vision of wholeness. This suggests that a person's spirituality is grounded in relationship to self, others, and ultimately to God.

The outcomes of the Holy Land Pilgrimage, as revealed in the ninety-day follow-up session reports, were extremely encouraging: participants realized they were "running on empty" and in desperate need of a "spiritual refueling." Pastors had begun to make life-changing habits: building time in their weekly schedules for personal rest and to review their vocational experience. Others imaged fresh perspectives for themselves and their congregants related to how ministry is organized and implemented. Additionally, others had begun to implement better eating and exercise habits. They described their lives as more balanced and meaningful, not only for themselves, but also their spouses and children. Because of the richness of this Holy Land Pilgrimage experience through the *JITC*, we are inviting others to reflect and examine the spirituality undergirding our lives and ministries and to meaningfully reflect on what it means to be whole and healthy spiritual leaders.

What have we learned? We have discovered pastors spiritually in need of (1) a sense of self-worth, value, and vocational calling; (2) places and people that will honor,

recognize, and encourage healthy lifestyles and habits; (3) opportunities for rest and renewal; and (4) places and persons that promote openness and vulnerability. Health, wholeness, and spirituality is an on-going process, requiring constant revitalizing.

This issue of *JITC* attempts to inspire a broader dialogue, supporting the full development of health, wholeness, and spirituality of pastors. Our writers reflect a variety of perspectives of the theme:

- spirituality as place
- spirituality and happiness
- spirituality of the pastor
- call narratives and personal spirituality
- horizontal and vertical dimensions on health and health care
- spirituality and healing
- spirituality and Africa's past
- spirituality as poetry

It is our hope that this theme issue examines spirituality as undergirding ministry, rekindles a sense of spiritual vocation, promotes introspection and communal reflection, and understands how ministry is organized and implemented. It is in this manner that pastors' personal goals, values, and worldviews are integrated into meaning, nurturing a balanced life of health, wholeness, and spirituality.

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What have we learned? We have ...



## Falling

Falling is relative  
My mother loses  
Her grip, heaves  
Backward, cracks  
Her head against  
The wall

She argues  
With witnesses, says  
She did not fall,  
And who can contradict  
Her as she puts her hair  
Gingerly back in place

Falling into the world  
Within her head where  
We cannot enter,  
Recalling episodes  
That never were

She falls into  
The disease's grasp,  
Heaves backward  
Into her mind  
Cracks her life against  
The wall

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*Editor's note:* The poems of Valerie Davis, reflecting her spirituality, are interspersed throughout this issue and are used with permission.

# Falling

Falling is relative  
My mother says  
The way I see  
The world is  
The way I see it

With a heavy heart  
I see the world  
And when I can  
I see the way  
I see the world  
I see the way

I see the world  
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The world is a vast and beautiful place, full of wonder and mystery. It is a place of endless possibilities and infinite beauty. We are here to explore and discover, to learn and grow, and to enjoy every moment of our lives. Let us embrace the world with all its glory and grace, and let us live our lives to the fullest. For in the end, it is not the destination that matters, but the journey that we take.