

## Five Things Clergy can do to Avoid Burnout

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### 1. Honor Thy Body

Staying fit through regular exercise and a healthy diet is smart for anyone, but especially for pastors who can wind up spending much of their time in sedentary, mentally intensive work. St. Benedict was no fool: His rule mandates that part of each monk's day be given over to manual labor, and that's still a good idea for clergy.

### 2. Thou Shalt Take a Break

Even God rested on the seventh day. Clergy should do at least that and might try to take one weekend off per month. Regular vacations are a must, but an extended sabbatical every few years is an even better idea.

### 3. Thou Shalt Be a Team Player

The "Messiah complex" is one of the biggest pitfalls. Even clergy who are the most humble of servants can wind up convinced they must inject their holiness into every single meeting and event. You are not as necessary as you think you are. Trust others, and delegate. You can't fix everything.

### 4. Thou Shalt Get a Life

Developing a social circle outside of the congregation is critical. Clergy tend to root their lives in the congregation, so that can leave them stranded when they need to lean on someone. Finding support groups, other clergy friends, and even clergy in other denominations are popular options.

### 5. Thou Shalt Not Delay

When the going gets tough, the smart ones get help. Clergy often have a visceral distaste for psychotherapy - for themselves, not necessarily for others - but religion and psychiatry have found enough common ground in recent years that clergy can get on the couch without checking their faith at the door.

## ... And five things congregants can do to help

### 6. Honor Thy Father

Pastors can be parents, too. And even celibate priests have families, believe it or not. Allow time to be with their families. Recognize that more families have two working parents, and that means clergy families, too. The old-time "pastor's wife" - or husband - may not be around to serve tea and pick up the slack.

### 7. Thou Shalt Not Play Politics

It's amazing how nasty "religious" folk can be toward their own pastor. Congregations can be breeding grounds for cliques, at least one of which usually targets the spiritual leader. Don't pile on, and do what you can to discourage such behavior.

### 8. Thou Shalt Give Thanks

It's also amazing how few worshippers even bother to say "Thanks" to the pastor. Everyone has a complaint about something - the music wasn't good, the flowers weren't right, and most of all, things were always better in the old days. The past is past. This is today. Find something nice to say.

### 9. Honor His/Her Time Off

Better yet, start an effort to make sure the pastor takes a vacation or schedules a sabbatical. There are a

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growing number of programs that provide grants to help congregations hire a temporary fill-in. Or why not a fund-raiser to send the pastor (and spouse?) on a lengthy pilgrimage of study and relaxation?

## 10. Thou Shalt Pray

This goes for both congregants and their clergy. Remember, a central function of religion is to nurture the soul, and congregants who make an effort to live up to the tenets of their faith will probably make their pastors happier. And clergy who lose sight of their vocation and their spiritual center are courting trouble.