

Seventh-day Adventist Pastor
in North American Division
HEALTH QUALITATIVE STUDY REPORT

What Can And Must Be Done
to save the health of Adventist pastors



Petr Činčala, René Drumm



INSTITUTE *of* CHURCH MINISTRY

Table of Content

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY	3
METHODOLOGY	5
Research Questions	5
Instruments	5
Sampling Procedures	5
Data Collection	6
ANALYSIS	6
Sample Demographics	7
FINDINGS BY RESEARCH QUESTION	8
Research Question #1: Current Stress Management Strategies	8
1.1 Emotional Stress Alleviators	8
1.2 Financial Stress Alleviators	14
1.3 Spiritual Stress Alleviators	17
1.4 Workplace Stress Alleviators	20
Research Question #2: Preferred Stress Management Interventions and Learning Formats	22
2.1 Counseling	23
2.2 Mentoring & Coaching	24
2.3 Peer Support Groups	26
2.4 Workshops	27
2.5 Self-help Materials	30
2.6 Therapist-led Groups	31
2.7 Multiple Approaches	32
2.8 Family Involvement	32
2.9 Level of Coordination Efforts	34

Research Question #3: Barriers to Stress Management	34
3.1 Confidentiality	35
3.2 Usefulness	35
3.3 Presenter Credibility	36
3.4 Finances	36
Research Question #4: Suggestions for Administrative Leadership	37
4.1 Build a Culture of Trust	37
4.2 Promote Financial Literacy	37
4.3 Be Proactive in Pastor Outreach and Response	39
4.4 Miscellaneous	40
RECOMMENDATIONS AND CONCLUSIONS	42
APPENDIX A	47

“No preacher is gonna raise his hand and say, ‘I need help.’” (FG 2)

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report highlights the findings from the Adventist Pastor Qualitative Health Study conducted January through December 2020 by the Institute for Church Ministry. The research objective was to discover the ways in which pastors engage in stress management activities and their perspectives on how to best help pastors alleviate emotional, financial, spiritual, and workplace stress. The research approach is spelled out step-by-step following this summary of findings. An in-depth, detailed description of the findings appears after the Methodology section of this report. Finally, we offer research conclusions and recommendations as a way to initiate thinking about and planning next steps to address pastor health.

The primary ways that pastors used to alleviate emotional stress included seeking social support, setting boundaries, developing self-awareness and self-acceptance, and through exercise. Pastors addressed financial stressors through improved financial literacy, careful budgeting, having a spouse who was employed, and trusting in God’s provision for their lives. In addressing spiritual stress, pastors shared several ways to help themselves in times of spiritual dryness. These included: prioritizing devotional time, going on spiritual retreats, and taking vacations and just having time away from their daily routines. To relieve workplace stress, the principle strategy participants used was setting boundaries. Other ways to alleviate workplace stress included having church member support, developing a flexible mindset about their daily work plan and keeping a local focus on their work versus focusing on the Church as an organization.

In general pastors reported being very open to learning additional ways of stress management. Specific strategies that the majority of focus groups reported having positive outcomes using included: getting counseling, working with a mentor or coach, engaging in peer support groups, attending workshops, and using self-help materials. However it is important to note that with each

approach, participants listed some cautions and reservations about its potential effectiveness. Ultimately, participants agreed that a multi-pronged approach was needed to address pastor stress in meaningful ways.

When asked about the level of Church organization that would be most effective in implementing stress management initiatives, participants agreed that the Conference that employed them would be have the most impact. Also, when possible, spouses should be included in these efforts.

Participants discussed the barriers that would impede learning about stress management. First, pastors need to be assured of confidentiality in any stress management interventions offered. Other considerations included the immediate usefulness of the materials/resources, presenter credibility, and the costs associated with the activities or interventions.

Participants offered a number of suggestions about how Church leadership might plan for improved stress management among their pastors. These ideas included: building a culture of trust, promoting financial literacy, and being proactive in pastor outreach.

Based on these findings, the research team recommends the following actions:

- Acknowledge the levels of stress that exist among Adventist pastors
- Understand how pastors' selflessness and self-sufficiency create barriers to health
- Recognize the limitations of a single approach or event for stress reduction
- Plan for intentional follow-up and ongoing support following any intervention
- Nurture and bolster social support
- Provide education on boundary setting skills
- Provide wide-ranging financial literacy opportunities
- Involve pastors in the development of interventions

METHODOLOGY

Research Questions

In conjunction with members from the NAD Pastor Health Committee, the ICM research team developed the following research questions for this qualitative inquiry:

1. What have pastors tried to alleviate their emotional, relational, financial, and spiritual stress?
2. In what types of interventions would pastors participate or not participate?
3. What types of learning formats do pastors prefer?
4. What are the barriers in addressing stress-related health, and how can these barriers be overcome?

How can the administrative leadership best use its resources to assist pastors to improved emotional, relational, spiritual, and financial wellness?

Instruments

Along with input from the NAD Pastor Health Committee, researchers developed a discussion guide to answer the research questions. The discussion guide can be found in Appendix A.

Sampling Procedures

Researchers conducted five focus groups. Three of the focus group sessions occurred face-to-face. Two of the focus groups were held via Zoom. The focus groups targeted various regions of the NAD territory with Eastern US (Baltimore & New York), Western US (Southeastern California Conference), Mid-western US (Michigan), and Canada (Toronto). Each focus group contained four to eight participants, for a total 30 of participants.

For each data collection site, the NAD Ministerial Department requested that the Conference Ministerial Directors in pre-determined geographical areas recruit focus group participants. The Conference Ministerial Directors were asked to recruit five to six participants with diversity in age, ethnicity, and gender. In addition, the Ministerial Directors were asked to set up the data collection sites, times, and dates for the focus groups.

Data Collection

Prior to collecting data, the study received IRB approval from both Andrews University and the University of Southern Mississippi to conduct the study. The original data collection plan called for seven in-person, face-to-face focus groups representing various constituents of the NAD.

Due to COVID-19 pandemic, the original plan was changed from all in-person focus groups to three in-person focus groups and two remote focus groups hosted by Zoom conferencing.

For the in-person focus group sessions, once researchers received information about when and where data collection was to occur, the designated ICM researcher made travel arrangements and prepared the documents needed for data collection. Once the informed consent forms and demographic forms were filled out and signed, the focus group discussions began.

For the remote focus groups, the times and dates were determined by the Conference Ministerial Department teams, and researchers sent a Zoom invitation link to either the participants or to the Ministerial Department team. For the Zoom focus groups, we asked that the informed consent forms and demographic forms were filled out and submitted to the researcher prior to the start of focus group.

The ICM researcher used a focus group guide to direct discussion about the participants' experiences with stress management and health practices. Focus group sessions lasted between 2 ½ to 3 ½ hours. All of the focus groups were audio-recorded in their entirety. Following the in-person focus groups, the researcher provided each participant with a \$50 gift card as a thank you for their time and information. The Zoom participants were mailed their gift cards following the focus group session.

ANALYSIS

The digital recordings were transcribed using a proscribed process designated by the lead qualitative researcher. The analysis followed the conventions of qualitative coding using the constant comparative method. The constant comparative method generates both descriptive and explanatory categories, leading to interpretive insights into the emerging themes. Researchers examined specific instances of the codes to clarify similarities and differences throughout the dataset.

Researchers reviewed each transcript for major themes, as well as subthemes and variant types. Major themes were those which emerged consistently across most or all of the focus groups. Researchers identified subthemes whenever major themes demonstrated discrete types within the category.

Sample Demographics

A total of 30 pastors participated in the focus groups, including 26 males and four females. Participants reported their ethnicity as Asian (3), White/Caucasian (9), African American (6), Hispanic/Latino (6), and other (6), which included the ethnicities of West Indian, African, African Canadian, and Jamaican Canadian. Age of participants was 21-30 (1), 31-40 (9), 41-50 (7), 51-60 (8), 61-70 (3), and 71+ (1); one respondent did not answer this question. Twenty-one participants were ordained pastors, eight were licensed/commissioned, and one was a pastoral assistant/spouse.

Pastoral participants self-ranked their health as excellent (6), very good (17), good (5), and fair (2). None of the participants ranked their health as poor.

Table 1

Participant Demographics

GENDER	Male	Female				
	87%	13%				
ETHNICITY	Asian	White/ Caucasian	African American	Hispanic/ Latino	Other	
	10%	30%	20%	20%	20%	
AGE	21-30	31-40	41-50	51-60	61-70	71+
	3%	31%	24%	28%	10%	3%
ORDINATION STATUS	Ordained	Licensed/ commissioned		Other		
	70%	27%		3%		
HEALTH	Excellent	Very good	Good	Fair	Poor	
	20%	57%	17%	7%	0%	

FINDINGS BY RESEARCH QUESTION

When reporting focus group data, the common standard for reporting is to first list and briefly describe the major themes. Following that description, the reader can review selected quotations from participants that illustrate those major themes. Using this approach, the reader relies on the expertise of the researchers to identify the themes and select the quotations that best represent those themes.

Research Question #1: Current Stress Management Strategies

What have pastors tried to alleviate their emotional, financial, spiritual, and workplace stress?

“There are so many good things in my life that I don't get by pursuing them. I don't get peace in my life by going after peace. I get peace in my life by going after other things; by having integrity, by knowing what it is to leave things at God's feet, and having other practices. That, then produces peace.” (FG 3)

1.1 Emotional Stress Alleviators

Participants discussed a number of strategies they used to alleviate emotional stress. Pastors in all five focus groups mentioned two strategies—seeking social support and setting boundaries—as primary ways to manage their stress.

1.1.1 Seeking Social Support

Participants recognized social support as crucially important to their success in ministry. In fact, one female participant credited having social support for staying in ministry: “I think if I didn't have a good support system, I'd probably have left ministry from year one” (FG 1).

Participants also discussed the importance of having multiple sources of social support. Social support came from spouses, family, friends, and other clergy members. The following quotes from participants illustrate the various sources of social support.

“I think for me it would be very challenging to be single in pastoral ministry. So, just being married and then just having . . . a spouse to rant with or whatever, you know, it has been a blessing.” (FG 5)

“I have family; they're not in town. When I take the time to go see them, that's the time I could unwind, I could be myself, you know. I could be open and that has helped a lot.” (FG 3)

“A big factor that helps me is my fellow colleagues that I can trust . . . I have friends in the ministry, in [this] conference and in other conferences. It's a small group, but they are there, you know, to talk to. I know that I can talk to them about my frustrations. They give me sound advice.” (FG 4)

Although spouses were most often cited as a source of support, one participant offered this caution about overusing an understanding spouse:

“I think one of the things that I have found that decreases my stress is not taking advantage of an understanding spouse. She might not complain, but it's a burden on her, and then when she gets to breaking point, then it becomes stressful on me . . . Don't get to the point where she starts complaining because, then that's going to be a stressful situation.” (FG 2)

1.1.2 Setting Boundaries

Besides seeking social support, participants discussed how setting good boundaries lowered their stress levels. Boundary-setting included activities such as having distinct work times and family times, informing congregants about their availability, and limiting the sharing of information about church politics with family members. The following quotes from participants illustrate the various ways pastors set boundaries for stress reduction.

“I told my church, the first day I started there, that the most important thing to me is my family and you will never get ahead of them. While I enjoy wanting to be available, if you call me late at night, you call me past ten, I'm not calling you until the morning. Seven o'clock in the morning is when my phone is available. I started out with my boundary set. I tried to set those up early.” (FG 3)

“One thing that I do, I keep her [my wife] outside of a lot of the dirty work at the church. I don't tell her what's happening. And she is oblivious to that because I choose that. She has her work. She has stress at her work or the kids. When they were young and I had a multi-church district, my family did not follow me to all the churches. They had one church and they went to their Sabbath School in their church. And the other churches were not

happy with me with that. But I said, “Sorry, my wife doesn't work for the church. My kids, they have their own church and they had a good Sabbath.” (FG 5)

1.1.3 Self-awareness and Self-acceptance

In four of the five focus groups, participants talked about how gaining self-awareness and self-acceptance helped reduce emotional stress. Participants did not make a great distinction between self-awareness and self-acceptance; however, the analysis reveals that when pastors engaged in efforts to understand and affirm themselves, it helped them ward off criticism, accept human limitations, and avoid hurtful comparisons with other ministers. The following quotes from participants exemplify how becoming more self-aware and accepting helped them alleviate emotional stress.

“A lot of us also have gotten to a point where we believe strongly in what we do and why we do it and hold ourselves to that standard. And it's not necessarily other people's voices that get to determine [what success looks like]. And I think that for me, how I've been able to cope with it [stress] is by being able to look myself in the eyes and I can honestly say I've done what I believe to do best. And that allows me to not internalize other people's critiques.” (FG 5)

“I believe pastors have become aware that we are not superheroes, that we are human beings. I believe especially that we have to pay way more attention. (And I talk about myself.) Because I really realized that we are vulnerable. And we realize that we are just pastors on Saturdays. But on Sunday, you are a human being. On Monday, you are another human being facing different situations, close to your family. I believe I am more aware now.”(FG 4)

“You can be able to deal with emotional issues if you be yourself. What do I mean by that? Don't compare yourself with other ministers because in this work you're not in competition. If you're good at one thing, be good at that thing. If you're not a powerful preacher, but you have the gift of ministry of presence, being there for your members, visiting them, praying for them. It [is better than] preaching for 45 minutes or two hours and sweating on the pulpit. So be yourself. And being yourself will erase the emotional stress that you put on yourself because you want to be like others.” (FG 1)

One tool to help with self-awareness that participants mentioned in two focus groups was Clinical Pastoral Education (CPE). Although CPE was not widely

discussed, it was enthusiastically endorsed by each participant who engaged in the training.

“[When I graduated from the seminary] I didn’t know that I needed a CPE (Clinical Pastoral Education) class, so I took my CPE about four or five years ago, and that was an ‘ah ha’ moment for me to realize, ‘Wow, if this was offered earlier it would have been helpful to know myself,’ [to get] that self-awareness.” (FG 1)

“As a man, we have problems. That’s how God created us. And to admit something? CPE caused me to want to . . . recognize that there are certain things in my life [and] that I need to look [at myself] straight in the eye, and say, ‘Hey, this is what you’re doing, you idiot.’ And, and recognize it.” (FG 2)

1.1.4 Exercise

In four of the five focus groups, participants mentioned exercise as a helpful strategy to alleviate emotional stress. The types of exercise that participants offered as helpful included hiking, biking, going to the gym, backpacking, and running. One participant shared, “I’m depressed at times, but after a working out, you know you feel much better, you see things differently” (FG 1).

1.1.5 Therapy or Professional Counseling

Participants in three of the five focus groups discussed engaging in mental health therapy or counseling as a way to help with emotional stress. None of the focus group participants spoke negatively about therapy or counseling. However, participants shared an underlying concern about the expense of counseling and the importance of maintaining confidentiality. Some conferences have addressed these issues through the use of a voucher system. By offering pastors a certain number of vouchers/coupons to use with any qualified therapist per year, pastors were able to get the help they (or their family) needed, eliminating these concerns. The following quotes from participants reveal the importance of therapy/counseling for stress relief.

“I was pastoring in out in [another state] before I came here and they did a fantastic job of providing counseling for pastors which was really helpful for me. I went through a divorce there. And having that [system] to fall back on so I didn’t have to think about the cost, that is completely paid for by the conference . . . having those tools so that . . . as we are struggling with

things, you don't have to . . . they figure that out . . . And I think to me, that's what the conference leadership, I need them for to provide that." (FG 5)

"But this [therapy] is something I feel like especially as a pastor that I would want to have because it's been so helpful. We have friends that can help us, that can listen to us, but to have someone who's a professional that can really direct my thoughts of where I should be going, and I think that should be really mandatory." (FG 2)

1.1.6 Time Off

Participants in three of the five focus groups discussed being intentional with taking time off as a way to reduce and manage emotional stress. The two primary ways of taking time off were through using vacation time and having a designated a day off during the week. These quotes from participants offer a bit more context for being intentional about time off.

"That's where vacation I feel is so important. And again, not vacation to go and keep working somewhere else. But, literally to take time off now. And just be able to recharge . . . So, that's been very helpful for me honestly, just to be able to take vacation days during the weekend, not during the week. Literally being intentional where I'm taking a day off from not preaching. And maybe sometimes even just go and visiting a friend's church, another colleague's church, or just sitting there. And just let me receive and be blessed for once in the entire year. So, it's something that I feel has helped." (FG 3)

"[I am] trying to be intentional about [taking your day off a week]. Because I get grumpier and grumpier, and more and more overwhelmed, and just like those two things. Stresses come from all different places. But, just sometimes just even a day away or taking vacation and, just to get away as hard as [it is in] a cell phone world." (FG 2)

One focus group participant suggested that his conference has a sabbatical policy that would allow for extended time away.

"[My] conference . . . offers a sabbatical, a month and a half, besides our vacation. They do offer a sabbatical for families to get away if they're allowed that kind of thing. It's once every seven years." (FG 1)

1.1.7 Miscellaneous

Participants in two of the focus groups shared many different ideas about how they alleviated emotional stress. Their suggestions, while not mentioned in the majority of focus groups, could be useful and are listed in a bulleted list with a single quote for illustration.

- Variety in work venue

“I think a change of functioning helps me. So, I volunteer with the one of the hospital systems in my region, and just a shift from one function to the next for a little bit, helps me. Just going and helping a different set of people deal with their issues, helped me. It gives me satisfaction.” (FG 2)

- Life experience

“After you are in the work about twenty thirty years, you’re still under stress, but you know how to deal with it. [If] it comes down from above with the brethren, you know how to deal with that. It comes from your fellow minister; you know how to deal with that. It comes from the church board; you know how to deal with that. Just dealing with it is stressful, but at least you know how to deal with it.” (FG 1)

- Spiritual self-care

“I think personal spirituality and faith in God is a huge stress reliever. It takes away a lot of stress.” (FG 5)

- Supportive conference

“I think for me the conferences that have been most effective for me were ones where I knew I could talk. So, while the conference that I was in did not really help me with my pornography [addiction], I knew that I could trust them with what was going on in my life. And so, that was supportive. And they checked in on me [and] they allowed me to find a pathway [to healing].” (FG 3)

Other emotional stress alleviating strategies that pastors mentioned included being honest and transparent, engaging in emotional coaching, attending pastor family retreats, and socializing with people outside the Church.

1.2 Financial Stress Alleviators

1.2.1 Financial Literacy

In four of the five focus groups, participants discussed how learning about managing money more effectively helped reduce the stress they experienced regarding finances. Participants mentioned how clarifying values to guide spending, engaging in established programs such as Dave Ramsey's Financial Peace University, and receiving information from mentors helped them learn about how to handle personal finances and reduce stress around money matters.

“One thing that my wife and I have been doing was, just to learn more, I guess, about retirement. It helped us to focus what our plans are, and how we should be living now, kind of thing. It just makes us a little bit more at peace, knowing that this is what we want for the future, and this is what we have to do right now. A lot of the stress that we had was the uncertainty about the future. So, the more we educated ourselves, the more it [stress] lessened.” (FG 2)

“About a year and a half ago, I joined the Dave Ramsey's course, which I had to pay for, but it was great. I was able to learn a lot about taxes, finances, being able to cut a lot. But at the same time, just figure out a plan on how I can be debt free, which is going to be in a very long time, but that's as far as what I've been able to do.” (FG 3)

“When I was an undergraduate, the department chair in a practical course talked to us about how to save money. So, education about buying a car, learning to be a thrift shopper, [going to] garage sales or whatever it is . . . [There is a] mentality going into it on how to economize . . . which can take it from being distressful to just being manageable. Buying a house and buying a car, being taught how to do that, I think that really is needed. And so, the practicality of some of these things and an educational element have somewhere along the line, it's what's helpful.” (FG 5)

1.2.2 Careful Budgeting

Participants in four of the five focus groups shared many ways they engaged in careful budgeting as a way to guard against financial stress. Pastors stressed their strategies of living within their means, adjusting their thinking about budgeting, doing without, and living frugally.

“What has helped for us, pretty much I think two things: living within our means, you know just simple personal finance discipline and the support of

family and our congregation. You know I'm part of a congregation that's very pastoral positive, very supportive. We are thriving as a church and so when those special days come, you know we don't ask for it, but you know they give us gifts and tokens of appreciation and that helps out a lot. So, a loving church that is willing to express their love in both words and deeds has been helpful. And just trying to live within our means." (FG 1)

"And so, when denying yourself or denying sometimes the children, or certain things that you know could help in their development. You deny those, and those are sometimes the difficult part. But it comes to a point where you settle, you understand that I have to probably deny myself certain professional development [opportunities] as well." (FG 2)

"I lived with resentment, I think, for a while at the beginning of my ministry. Because we weren't doing the kinds of vacations that our friends were doing. We weren't living in the kinds of houses they were living in. And while I was very clear about my calling, there's a part of me that said that this isn't fair. I was able to come to terms with that, when I realized that the frugality that we were doing was a choice, not something that we were forced into. At this point in my life, I'm so glad that we lived frugally. But that change in mindset was a really important thing for me to appreciate the sacrifices that my members were making so that I could benefit from tithe; to be willing to trust to not take everything on my shoulders while it required diligence at the same time." (FG 3)

1.2.3 Spouse Employed

Three of the five focus groups mentioned the importance of having a spouse who is fully employed as a way to alleviate financial stress. Several participants could not imagine what their family's financial situation would be without that support.

"One thing that I know that I feel blessed with is that my wife works as well. My question would be what would happen if my wife wasn't working." (FG 3)

"When there is a spouse, do they have to work to make this work? And in my case, the answer is 'yes.' If my spouse is not working, I don't think I can pay for the mortgage. I don't think I can pay for my kids. And on top of that, if I want them to go into Adventist education, that's going to be another big problem, which we're going to figure out. But again, thankfully my spouse works." (FG 3)

"With my wife's salary being greater than my salary . . . that's how we managed." (FG 5)

"My wife definitely needs to work without that [we would] go under." (FG 2)

1.2.4 Trust in God's Provision

Three of the five focus groups shared that trusting in God's provision helped them cope with financial stress and uncertainty. This shift in focus proved an effective shield from ongoing worry about money shortages.

"I really believe that God takes care of us, and I don't believe that means I will get a million dollars tomorrow. I would love it, go out and spend it, but I'm a person who's just grateful to have a roof over my head, food to eat, and basic needs taken care of." (FG 1)

"[Speaking to her husband] 'Babe, I know it's really stressful, but I still believe that in God's time it's going to all balance out.' That's my peace and my comfort and that's why I don't feel the personal stress that he [my husband] feels." (FG 1)

"[I say to my wife,] 'I don't want to deal with it [financial problems] now. So, let's leave it for God's leading.' We depend on the hope, the blessed hope, keeps us going every day." (FG 2)

Other strategies pastors used to alleviate financial stress included taking on extra preaching appointments, receiving congregational gifts, and giving to others.

1.2.5 Miscellaneous

Along with sharing ways that they alleviated their financial stress, participants discussed many ways that they experienced financial stress. The key stressors are presented here as a way that might help inform Church administrators about how to help pastors with financial stress. One participant summed up several such stressors, "And there are those expenses like education for your children, but also expectations in your church that you help fund things. And you need to be generous, not just, you know, returning faithful tithe, but also general offerings. And then a lot of expenses of ministry" (FG 5).

- Cost of Adventist education

"At my stage, we have three young children, ages 10, 8, and 6, and I think currently one of the biggest sources of stress has been they're all in Adventist education. And we are extremely thankful for the church's subsidy, but it's a big chunk nonetheless." (FG 5)

- Tax issues

“And recently tax changes impacted pastors. And . . . [in one] conference your taxes increase from \$3,000 to \$6,000 dollars in one year. And there was hit.” (FG 5)

- Unplanned expenses

“I think some financial stress that we go through as pastors is connected with health expenses, unplanned health expenses, unplanned mechanical expenses, unplanned home maintenance expenses, unplanned children’s needs expenses, unplanned clothing expenses, unplanned extended family financial expenses, unplanned travel expenses, these are cumbersome.” (FG 1)

Other financial stressors included congregational expectations, living in high-cost areas, costs associated with immigration, and having an unemployed or under-employed, or not eligible to work, spouse.

1.3 Spiritual Stress Alleviators

When pastors experience times of spiritual dryness, or even alienation from their spiritual lives, they experience spiritual stress. Participants shared a number of ways they used to reduce their stress about their spiritual lives. The most frequently mentioned approaches included prioritizing devotional time, going on spiritual retreats, and using vacation time and days off.

1.3.1 Prioritizing Devotional Time

Participants in four of the five focus groups discussed the importance of prioritizing devotional time as a way to bolster their spiritual lives. Specifically, participants scheduling and guarding their devotional time, involving family members in their practices, and being constant in prayer helped with this practice.

“I just want to emphasize what I’ve found helpful for me is in those moments with me and God, where they’re scheduled, just for me and God, or God, my family, and me. I don’t pick up the phone. You just have to be jealous for that time, you know you just have to be jealous for that time.” (FG 1)

“For me, it's been a regular devotional time every day and inviting my family to do it also. That's how to keep accountable with devotional time . . . I have one devotional that I do with my family. Actually, before that, I'd like to do by myself.” (FG 3)

“My prayer life has never suffered. I feel like that is one [practice] that I just have to keep coming back to 'cuz that's what gets me through.” (FG 5)

1.3.2 Spiritual Retreats

In four of the five focus groups, participants discussed the experiences of going on spiritual retreats as a way to reconnect spiritually. In some cases, the pastors' spiritual retreats were organized and paid for by their employing conference, and in other cases, pastors sought out these experiences by themselves. The quotes from participants illustrate the various ways that spiritual retreats were helpful to these pastors.

“I think spiritual retreats we do that at [my] conference, it's really one of the most awesome [experiences]. I've done it on my own, just going to a monastery place where they just let you come, and you be on their beautiful 500 acres for two days in silence. And it is just life-changing to take a couple days, to get away with no one else, or you can get away with your spouse, either way, just to decompress, read a few spiritual books for you, like, nothing about the church. And our conference does it spring and fall. And we can go up to our summer camp, and they pay for the food—it's wonderful. But it's just three days, and most of its silent, and then we have sometimes with group activities, but just getting away.” (FG 1)

“But the pastors involved in that really cherished that mentoring in spiritual retreats that we went on and getting away from ministry—no internet, no phone calls, nothing just alone and together for two or three days to just recharge.” (FG 5)

Interviewer: We are talking about rejuvenating your spiritual life, what might be helpful?

Participant: So, that's where the retreat comes in, you know. I think a good retreat, a nice place, quietness . . . I think retreat works. (FG 4)

1.3.3 Vacation and Time Away

Similar to taking time off as an emotional stress alleviator, taking vacation time and using time away were mentioned in three focus groups as ways to improve participants' spiritual lives.

“For me is just, going out and making sure that you put it [vacation time] within your year schedule to kind of reset yourself. For me, it's definitely more experiential, retreats, vacation.” (FG 3)

“When I was spiritually dry, I never had that burning bush experience, when something big thing happened, or expecting it to happen. It came to me in small things. Just like song service, a day off, taking a day off, [having] conversations with [another] pastor, just some small things . . . And if you recognize the small moment, you get that ‘Aha’ moment. That works for me. As I said, a day off, just something relaxed.” (FG 2)

“For me, going away for some time from the congregation is very helpful.” (FG 4)

1.3.4 Miscellaneous

Participants in two of the five focus groups mentioned several other spiritual stress alleviators illustrated with one representative quote per each bullet point.

- Connecting with your calling

“I know that I struggle sometimes, and I'm not interested sometimes. But just to know that God is expecting me to be there for his people. That He's the reason I'm in this thing. Because He wants to use me to help His people. It's not all about me. It's for me to be there to help his people. That kind of shocks me, [that God is saying], ‘Hey, come on, you're letting Me down here, so you need to get it together.’” (FG 2)

- Being ministered to by others

“Sometimes you need to sit back and then let others minister to you. Because that is so crucial. They have been placed there to also help you to journey through your pain, or your circumstances. And so [how do I do] it in my church? I preach twice, maximum, a month and the rest I distribute, because I want the other ministers to do it.” (FG 2)

- Sensing God’s presence

“But I also recognize that when I have personal challenges, God does something to kinda pull me. A few days ago, my neighbors who [goes] to church somewhere else, a Sunday church . . . we started chatting. And he said, ‘You know, I’ve been going back to the Bible recently.’ And then he started talking about his own spiritual matters. And just to hear someone come and God using me to bless them in ministry, that was just a good affirmation. And over my time in almost 40 years of ministry, I’ve asked God

a number of times to take me out of ministry. I said, 'I am done. Take me out.' And he doesn't release me. I can't get out of it. And so those things keep you going, and they offer affirmation from God." (FG 5)

- Using crisis to reconnect with God

"I feel like ministry hasn't always been easy. But I am thankful for that because the difficult times are the times where my spiritual life is easier. It's when things are going smooth and feel like you got it, but you're going down." (FG 5)

Other strategies participants mentioned that helped keep their spiritual lives strong included having a dedicated personal devotional Bible, establishing a family altar, knowing people are praying for them, having a special place for Bible study, having a spiritual accountability partner, being able to talk openly about spiritual dryness, and being out in nature.

1.4 Workplace Stress Alleviators

Workplace stress includes issues associated with workload, pressure, and conflicts that occur in the local church or within the Church organization. The way that participants most often discussed to ward off workplace stress was to set boundaries between work life and home life. It may be important to note that while the pastors talked about setting boundaries, they also revealed that setting boundaries remained an area of growth for them.

1.4.1 Boundary Setting

Participants in four of the five focus groups discussed boundary setting as a way to alleviate workplace stress.

"I think for sure like Mondays . . . (even though yesterday I did end up working), usually I take that Monday, and I'm just like, 'No. Nothing. I don't answer it.' But then sometimes I do feel guilty when I get the text message late. And it's like, 'Oh what do I do with this?' But I think with time, knowing the boundaries between when to shut off and when not to. But at least for me because I am someone who is anxious. I am someone who feels like, if I don't solve it now, it's going to be an issue, even though I know it's not. That's just my personality. It's something that I've had to deal with in therapy in terms of just telling myself, 'it's not the end of the world.' And also, just putting my phone away. On that day that I take, which has been hard, but I do it now." (FG 3)

“And I have to admit . . . I didn't know how to take care of myself, and I'm still struggling with that. I mean, I believe pastors, we need to learn how to protect ourselves in an environment, where we don't feel guilty. For example, there's nothing wrong with saying, ‘I don't want to answer the phone call right now.’ Well, I need to take that day off. But if I was doing it, I feel like I was guilty. Like, I was not being faithful to my calling. That confusion [about] not being faithful to my calling, was what exposed me to that kind of environment with the church. It was not like these people were difficult because I was called to minister then. But it was like, I don't know how to protect myself and I was not in a position where to serve them better. I realized that the problem was me, because I am the pastor. I cannot blame the members. I am the pastor.” (FG 4)

“Sometimes just have to say, ‘There is so much I can do [about] this, and there's so much of this that I can't, I can't make this all right.’ So, I'm going to do what I can, and I don't do that very well, but at some point, you just have to allow yourself to say that you can't carry it all in your shoulders.” (FG 2)

1.4.2 Miscellaneous

Two of the five focus groups shared several other workplace stress alleviation strategies. These included getting church member support, having a flexible mindset, and developing a local focus versus staying focused on the larger church organization. These themes are bulleted with a single participant quote to illustrate the strategy.

- Church member support

“It's really helpful at those times to have somebody to talk to. To have individuals within the church to, to be able to talk and pray with. Because we're in the church together.” (FG3)

- Flexible mindset

“This is something that I personally have had to learn and tell myself every day like this, ‘Even though you planned it out, it may go different.’ So, just telling myself that all the time has been helpful. Um, I think that's a tool that I learned in therapy. Because before, it just used to consume me, and I used to get stressed. And I used to say, ‘Oh, what I had on my plan didn't get done because I got, it got interrupted.’” (FG 3)

- Local focus vs. organizational focus

“I relate to what [the last participant] was saying, in terms of focusing on what's in front of me. That the world church can kind of do what it wants to do. There are some things that motivate me to be clear on what my personal position is. But unless I'm a voted delegate, then I will let other processes take care of those things. And typically, I have plenty to do in my own sphere to keep me busy. And generally speaking, the world church can go on doing what it's going to do. I think when it impacts me more is when I want to be proud of what my churches. And the decisions and actions may cause me stress there. And I can sometimes wonder if we are on the same page. And so, I think something that is a greater challenge. I try to ensure that the relationships I have with my immediate superiors are clear and open, that I have cultivated those relationships. And that has been a benefit to me, so that I know who I can turn to, who will be trusted. And what I can expect in that. That has been helpful, at least organizational relationships for me.” (FG 3)

Other workplace stress alleviators included having confidence in God's leading, developing conflict resolution skills, creating operating protocols (e.g., processes for board meeting, etc.), having symbolic reminders (e.g., punching bag to fight the good fight), and working in teams.

Research Question #2: Preferred Stress Management Interventions and Learning Formats

In what types of interventions would pastors participate or not participate? What types of learning formats do pastors prefer? Who should be involved in the trainings? What level of Church organization should deliver/be responsible for the trainings/interventions?

This section offers findings concerning various approaches to learning about or engaging in stress management, what family members (if any) should be invited to be involved in these efforts, and which Church organizational level should be leading out in these endeavors.

The answers to questions about preferred approaches to developing stress management skills varied greatly among participants. In general, pastors voiced that they would very open to learning about and engaging in interventions targeting stress reduction. However, for nearly every intervention, participants

also mentioned misgivings or cautions to each approach. Therefore, the cautions are listed along with the specific intervention throughout this section.

2.1 Counseling

Participants in three of the five focus groups shared that they have used professional health counseling (therapy) with positive outcomes (see section above on emotional stress alleviators). In each focus group, participants spoke favorably about having professional counseling available under certain conditions. The quotes below illustrate participants' positive views of counseling.

“I think that it [professional counseling] is definitely very useful and something that I think conferences should definitely implement more. I was privileged enough that the conference before [and] right now where I'm in also was very open to counseling. They had actually a therapist on staff, like in addition to free counseling as well. To any therapist you wanted . . . but I would like to say, ‘You need to make this available.’” (FG 3)

Interviewer: How about this one, having more counseling available to pastors and their families at low cost or no cost? Pros and cons of that?

Participant 1: Positive.

Participant 2: I see no cons.

Participant 3: No cons.

Participant 4: No, no negative. (FG 2)

2.1.1 Cautions About Counseling/Therapy Services

Participants voiced a number of suggestions to make counseling more useful to pastors.

First, recognize that although pastors who have tried counseling have benefitted from it and even pastors who have not experienced counseling for themselves view counseling positively, in various ways, participants revealed pastors' reticence to ask for help. The participant quotes below illustrates this perspective.

“When a conference comes along and separates the marriage and the family, that only gives more credence to the devil's whisperings. And many a family, marriage, family situation is divided down that line. Perhaps the truth of the matter is there is not a ministerial marriage and family that does not need professional counseling at this point to deal with this matter. There is not one, in one man's opinion, there is not one. It's just that

critical. But we know how to hide it, it's part of our professional façade, [chuckling] we're paid by the conference to hide it, to hide the pain." (FG 1)

"I've never taken advantage of any counseling; we've always had access to Kettering. But that doesn't mean it doesn't have value. I think being available is good. I think most of us find our counsel in some kind of trusted relationship with someone." (FG 5)

Second, participants voiced that the reluctance to engage in counseling may be reduced if some well-respected pastors talked about their own counseling experiences.

"We need more people talking about actually using it. That's usually the thing that works, you know. It's important that we normalize going to a therapist. The challenge too often is that unless they've actually done it, they will not talk about sending people to it . . . Many people fall into going to therapy versus being encouraged to be in therapy. You've got to be at the brink of losing your job, or have lost your job. You've got to be at the brink of losing your family, or have lost your family, before people are engaging in the resource that was available to them all the time. And among pastors, even in the workshops we go to, there's always someone that says you should go. But there's no one that got there. Very few that get up and say, 'I've been going. I'm successful, you know, I've been able to get through this or over that, or prevent these things from happening in my life, family, ministry, because of my going to see a therapist.' So, if there is something that I would suggest, more people who are in leadership, or who have tenure need to be talking about going to therapy. If [a well-known minister] got up and said, 'I've been going to a therapist for the last five years because of whatever' a lot more people will be going . . . The assumption is that everything is going great for him, which is not true. But if unless we hear from voices like his . . . more people [would] go." (FG3)

2.2 Mentoring & Coaching

In four of the five focus groups, participants discussed mentoring and coaching favorably as possible interventions for various kinds of stress. Mentoring and coaching, although different, were used synonymously by study participants. From participant responses, we recognize these terms to mean developing a relationship with someone more experienced in ministry, from whom they can seek advice. The following quotes from participants reveal the kind of relationship that would be most appealing.

“I would say definitely mentoring and coaching. I think that's just what I go towards. We tend to get a lot of emails with information and different resources. And for me, I think email is also a stressor. But if I were paired with someone who is older than me, and then with someone who's just coming into ministry, I think that in itself is a great relationship where we can just help each other out personally.” (FG 3)

“I've been very open to mentoring for the minimization of detrimental effects to ministry. But probably more where I'd be looking for these things is not in the class or seminar. It probably more into kind of communication from an experienced person that has embodied the entirety of ministry life that I think I hear you're talking about.” (FG 5)

“I think that's one of the most appealing in terms of coaching. Because you are dealing with somebody that has experience that ‘I've walked that path,’ or ‘have traveled, maybe a little further than you,’ or ‘have been on it for several times.’ So, they are familiar with this area. So, as long as the mentor makes himself available and the mentee can do the same and they respect the relationship. You know, they are very professional. I think that I find that to be best.” (FG 4)

2.2.1 Cautions About Mentoring and Coaching

While discussing mentoring and coaching as an intervention strategy, participants offered some cautions about taking this approach to stress reduction.

Participants mentioned that the type of relationship they are seeking would not be one that was required, but rather voluntary. A second concern centered on the fear that there may be too few individuals willing to serve as mentors.

“As long as it's not forced, right? If you try to force a mentor upon someone, I think that's very difficult. Sometimes I feel like the best mentoring relationships happen naturally as opposed to an assignment, right? ‘Hey, you have to meet up with so-and-so at this time’ . . . I've had trouble seeing that work . . . it's always better when it's something that happens naturally with someone who knows you, and who truly genuinely takes an interest, not out of looking for something, but just simply says, ‘Hey, let me help.’” (FG 3)

“I look forward to mentoring relationships. Unfortunately, we just don't have enough valid ones. There are a lot of people who claim [to want to help]. As a matter of fact, I remember coming here, 15 years ago and someone said, ‘Man, if you need anything, I can mentor you.’ I'm still waiting for our first meeting.” (FG 3)

2.3 Peer Support Groups

Participants in four of the five focus groups spoke favorably about engaging in peer support groups. In fact, one participant, towards the end of the focus group meeting summed up his experience by offering, “A little bit of what seems to be coming out of this dialogue is the idea of a deeper interconnectivity pastor to pastor” (FG 5). Some participants shared their own experiences with peer groups or some form of that venue as a way to reduce pastoral stress.

“I like the peer groups . . . [Earlier in my career] I was used to ministerial meetings where we got together, ‘What’s going on? Hey, you have this problem? I did this.’ It was very much a peer mentoring thing. And I came here, and it was so formal. I’m like, ‘Oh, it’s just another meeting.’ So, I like the peer mentoring, because it’s real, it’s real, you know, it’s real-world experiences of what helped or what didn’t help.” (FG 2)

“Every month, a group of pastors would meet and we would have lunch. And it was just to discuss ministry, discuss how we’re feeling. But it wasn’t catered towards mental health other than, ‘Hey, we’re here. Let’s share what we’re going through together.’ And I can be very upfront. I think once the group became younger and more millennial, and us being more transparent, some people in the group couldn’t handle it, and went to other groups. Because we were just being upfront about ministry, about how there’s certain things we don’t know, how can we help each other. And so, it became like a support group, literally every month. And we would just share how we can do ministry better whether or not they’re going to therapy. So, I definitely see the benefits to having peer groups.” (FG 3)

“I think a [good] model would be where every pastor was paired with another pastor that's in the field, right? And where once a week you have a sacred appointment where you speak to each other and you ask each other two or three simple type coaching questions and where you can unburden yourself in that way, right? Just like, you know, talk shop and complain or whatever might be. Because I know for me, the times in which I have enjoyed conversations the most, they've been with friends of mine that are pastors who know how to listen well, right? . . . So, yah, I think that model of coaching could do a good job in helping to mitigate stress.” (FG 5)

2.3.1 Cautions About Peer Groups

Although focus group participants reviewed peer groups and peer support positively, they offered several cautions or concerns of which administrators should be aware. These cautions included a lack of interest in having peers come

together, a possible lack of trust and confidentiality, and lack of individuals who could facilitate peer group interactions. The following quotes from participants note these cautions.

“When I'm calling some guys and [saying], ‘We need to have these monthly meetings, so we can support one another.’ And they were like, ‘I'm not really interested in doing that.’” (FG 3)

“About peer-to-peer, my only hesitation when sometimes getting together with a bunch of peers is that . . . will someone grab something that you say and use it against you? I don't know, you know . . . But it happens. And I think it's happened more often than not.” (FG 3)

“One of the cons that I've seen is . . . when it's just a peer without someone professionally that actually knows how to facilitate, is that there are people who will just talk, and then someone who isn't so inclined to talk won't talk, not because they don't have anything to say, but because everyone's just talking and they don't want to insert themselves . . . for example . . . like four years ago, we had a . . . meeting. All the pastors, we had to talk within our table. And it was about youth. And then me and the other young pastors, we don't say a single thing. Because all the older pastors have their ideas why the youth are leaving. They're saying everything and we didn't say a single thing in the whole conversation.” (FG 2)

“I just feel like in a peer group, it's a good thing because . . . most people kind of understand the same types of challenges that you're facing and so there's one more understanding, you know. That's comforting, knowing that other people are understanding what . . . you're going through. On the other hand . . . for me, I always take whatever type of counsel I get from my close friends with a grain of salt, only because I know they're not professionals, right? . . . I can apply it, or maybe not. You know, I mean, but . . . in a group setting . . . we have a whole bunch of experience, pastoral experience, you know . . . I guess there's just that professional element that maybe missing, where professionals may be able to kind of pick up on certain things where, maybe this individual is suffering from depression and it's just never been diagnosed, or maybe they have anxiety, or something else . . . and it gets swept under the rug, and the, the issues that . . . that they're facing . . . they're not properly addressed in that setting.” (FG 2)

2.4 Workshops

When discussing attending workshops as a way to learn about stress reduction, participants raised more cautions than endorsements. One participant shared his experience with attending a workshop that energized him. The quote below

reveals that the primary benefit was not the transfer of information as much as the participant exchange:

“I just came last night. It was good four days. It was a very good learning experience. What I concentrated [on was] . . . how to coach the church planters, which is awesome. Another guy did do that before, but it was a good, refreshing. And especially the networking, talking [to people] from different parts of the world.” (FG 2)

One participant suggested that workshops’ primary value was in stimulating thinking about a particular issue and that follow-up was needed to help the learning take hold.

Interviewer: What are the pros and cons of getting your stress reduction information from workshops?

Participant: Well, it's, this is a stimulator . . . It just stimulates you. If there's no follow up, then that's it. It's, it's dead. (FG 4)

Besides participant interaction, exchange, and follow-up, one participant noted that he found workshops more beneficial in the earlier part of his ministry, but under certain conditions: “In the first half of my ministry a workshop can be good if it's not too long and it's done well” (FG 5).

2.4.1 Cautions About Workshops On Stress Reduction

The cautions/concerns that participants offered about workshops varied greatly and did not provide coherent, identifiable themes. However, they are offered here in bulleted format to inform administrative decision-making.

- Workshop fatigue

“I think they're accessible to us. There are plenty of workshops. So, for me personally, another one, wouldn't necessarily help as much.” (FG 3)

“I probably wouldn't go to a workshop, honestly.” (FG5)

- Confidentiality issues in interactive workshops

“We do a lot of workshops. I think that is something that happens. But I do think that workshops do limit you. Sometimes things that you want to open up about, but when you have a number of people around you, that limits what you feel you are free to say.” (FG 3)

- Workshop quality

“It depends how good the workshop is.” (FG5)

- Must address challenges of ministerial life

“I think for me to be interested in attending the stress workshop, it's gonna' either have to be required by the conference . . . or actually substantively taking on the real challenges of ministerial life.” (FG 5)

“What happens is that (I love those seminars we've been having, or will be having in these camp meetings, and so forth on relational, family, and so forth), there's not too many workshops, I think that maybe a few, [on] the reality of the challenges that the ministers face are when you have a problematic congregation . . . You hear a lot of different topics whatever the case is, but to really deal with that topic is not one that is a very popular one, that is reoccurring over and over, as you talk about dealing with difficult congregations.” (FG 4)

“I believe that those seminars should focus more on mental health, mental assistance on the pastors and the family, because we are too ecclesiastical.” (FG 4)

- Address systematic challenges

“A stress management class would have to find some real traction in dialogue with the people who shape my life which includes the conference . . . They're not little tweak. They're not little adjustment things that can happen. So, the programmatic recommendations are more helpful in the beginning of your journey, less desired farther into, I think.” (FG 5)

- Must offer interaction and processing opportunities

“I like practical things. So, if somebody is giving a presentation, thinking will be, ‘Okay, what is your experience?’ And ‘You don't understand my experience.’ So, can we connect in an intersection, where we engage each other, and then we engage the material that is being presented? I prefer that.” (FG 2)

Participant: I find a lot of . . . our workshops are purely informational. We don't have a lot of relational aspects. So, sometimes we just need to let folk exhale at meetings. A lot of our stuff is informational. We have a whole day of information, like a whole week, two or three days of information. Information overload, right? And the people you are talking to are bottled up, ready to explode, with emotional stuff that does not get dealt with.

Interviewer: So, you need a way to process that?

Participant: Yes. (FG 2)

2.5 Self-help Materials

In three of the five focus groups, participants endorsed a self-help learning approach; for example, having books or videos available that pastors could seek out on their own. However, only a few participants shared that they actually engaged with self-help educational materials (beyond purchasing, but not reading books).

“I like to be able to research it myself, and understand it myself, and even to some degree, make investing choices myself. I know that I'm going to live with that at the end of the day.” (FG 2)

“I do like on-demand models. That stands out to me, you know, like Adventist Learning Communities. And . . . to be honest, because our conference never references it, I never go on it, so I don't really know what is going on there to be honest. But I think in theory the idea seems good where if I wanna learn more about a certain subject, I could go to a resource library to learn more about it.” (FG 5)

Participant 1: Webinars, they work, but have them maybe twice so that it fits every schedule . . . so maybe one in the morning, one in the afternoon on different days . . . but webinars by far are easier to attend.

Participant 2: Have relevant um have relevant content there that it does not end, does not have a deadline to it. (FG 1)

2.5.1 Cautions About Self-Help Materials

Participants offered many and varied cautions about using self-help materials as a primary way to help pastors with stress.

- Materials must be relevant, high quality

“If it's not, like 2020 relevant, I think I'm just skim through it. And then I'll do my own research . . . Maybe it's the millennial in me, but if the videos are not on point . . . it's just not gonna help me. But I do a lot of self-help myself. So, . . . [if] the conference . . . were to have like a tab that has that, I think that would be great.” (FG 3)

“All I need to see is a typo, and I'm not paying any more attention to it . . . No, I'm not millennial, I'm a X-er. So, I'm like, ‘Forget about it. You guys aren't serious about what this is supposed to be.’ That's usually my

challenge with a lot of things that we put out, unfortunately. I have an expectation that they'll be able to lead me. And when I feel like that's not being met, I'm just, I go on my own try to figure it out.” (FG 3)

- Consider limitations of time, motivation, and implementation

“I feel like self-help comes along with spending time by yourself. And if you don't have that time, it becomes difficult, which is why I see advantages with workshops and things . . . You actually have to plan for and make time for it. [With] self-help, you may run into the tendency of saying, ‘Well, I'll just [do it] later.’ Right? Or when I have time. And, it depends too much, I think on whether or not you even feel like you need to help.” (FG 3)

“Self-help is good. Because it's always good to read yourself into stuff, but sometimes you're not highly motivated based on what you're going through to do that.” (FG 2)

“For me personally, self-help books, I see how they can be beneficial to some people. But realistically I don't have time to sit down and read that book, knowing that I have sermon prep to do, and I have to pick up my daughter, or do something with my wife. I don't have the time to sit down and read a book. I rarely even have time to listen to an audiobook on my way somewhere. And then there's also the putting into practice. For me, what's in theory what I'm reading, right? I find that a lot of the material is, it's nice in theory, but when you start trying to put some of these things into practice, it doesn't really prepare you how to encounter people's personalities that are not receptive to what's in the book.” (FG 2)

2.6 Therapist-led Groups

Participants in two of the five focus groups spoke positively of therapist-led groups for stress reduction. However, no participants revealed that they had actually been part of a therapy group, therefore the observations are theoretical rather than experiential.

Interviewer: Therapist-led groups, pros and cons?

Participant: Oh, I love that one. I'm a pro for that. (FG 2)

“I like the therapist-led group, because we know the person will be a professional and I'm partial to peer-led groups, but I'm more [favorable] toward the therapist or counselor. Because . . . they're expert, or becoming an expert in what they're doing, versus somebody who's pretty good at it with the peer lead group . . . that would be something that's awesome if every conference . . . had a [therapist] . . . for people to just go in, and sit

down or have group sessions with, and actual someone trained to do that. I think that would be a great thing.” (FG 3)

2.6.1 Cautions About Therapist-led Groups

Since so few (if any) participants had experience with therapist-led groups, the only caution about this approach was that the participant did not want to be forced to be a part of such a group. Several participants in one focus group voiced this concern:

Participant 1: I don't wanna be forced to go . . . yah.

Participant 2: So am I.

Participant 3: That'd be torture. (FG 5)

2.7 Multiple Approaches

In most focus groups, participants voiced that to be most effective, multiple approaches to stress reduction are needed. The reasoning included the need to appeal to various personality and working styles, to reinforce and build on prior learning, and to accomplish varied learning goals. The following quotes from participants illustrate these suggestions.

“Actually, it's a sum of all [the approaches] that is the best . . . it depends on the character of each one of us. We choose one that is best for us . . . You cannot have everything for one source.” (FG 2)

“But let's say, there's a set up where you say, in a two-year span we are gonna have like, one retreat, one follow-up. I like one workshop, and another retreat . . . It should be more of a process. Because I think sometimes we try to get it in, just, just for the one hit wonder, type of mentality. You know, like just trying to hit a home run. You know. But I'm sure you know that if you zooming for home run every time, that's gonna happen.” (FG 4)

“There's a place for didactic transfer of information, you know. And there's a place for this and the conference could help create facilitate this as well. So, I mean, there's . . . there's different structures for different goals.” (FG 5)

2.8 Family Involvement

When asked about who (such as spouses and family members) should be involved in learning about stress reduction, participants views varied. However, in

each focus group, pastors advocated for their spouses to be involved in some way in these efforts.

Interviewer: How much do family members, including spouses, need to be involved with this issue and allow the education to absorb into the family system?

Participant 1: 100% the spouse has to be invited.

Interviewer: 100% for the spouse?

Participant 2: If not 100% a 1000%. (FG 1)

Interviewer: How much do family members or spouses need to be involved in learning about emotional health or relationship health?

Participant 1: A hundred and ten percent.

Participant 2: Because I pour a lot of stress on my wife, so I think it's only fair that she is exposed to handling this. (FG 2)

“We all kind of agree, I think, that our wives don't get the attention from our employers as probably would be better for them . . . But if I should compare North America with Inter-America where I'm coming from, these spouses see each other regularly and they meet in peer group sessions regularly . . . I mean . . . we would meet on some weekends at somebody's house and three or four couples are there. And we are pouring out what our families are going through together. And we're getting therapy going. We're getting accountability going. We're getting help from our peers going. Because we're sharing across. We still do that by phone sometimes. So, our spouses need that too.” (FG 2)

“I don't think that everything would apply to somebody outside of my context. But, I think there are things where I would like to have my wife sitting right next to me, even if it was directed towards me . . . Because she would hold me accountable to some of these things. In fact, if there's anyone at all that I probably would lend my ear to more than anyone else, it's my wife. And there have been moments where she's told me, ‘Hey, you know what? Don't forget this. Remember what was said that day.’ And it helps now. I do think that there could be a benefit presenting things for the spouses.” (FG 3)

“I think that my wife . . . probably wouldn't want to get involved . . . But there are some ways in which if she could receive some kind of benefit, that would be a blessing in her life. I'm sure she'll welcome it.” (FG 5)

When speaking about involving their children in planned activities, participants emphasized the need for family members to have fun at educational events. One participant offered:

They [the conference] were having these PK trips, fun days, you know. It was awesome . . . Because they paid for my kids . . . It was fun. It was really a fun day . . . To be in that kind of setting and to show that kind of love for the pastor's family . . . it went a long way, you know . . . Because what happened, it helps to get all of us on the same page . . . And the social aspect of it really goes a long way to help reduce stress even at home.” (FG 4)

2.9 Level of Coordination Efforts

Participants were quite clear and unified in their responses about which organizational level should be primarily responsible for implementing these stress-reducing efforts—the local conferences. Although participants had positive views of the North American Division, the organizational level that had the most influence on the participants was their local conferences. One participant encapsulated several discussions by sharing:

“It has to be the Conference. I like the idea of the GC, or even the NAD. But the conference is going to be the one that has the most impact because they know their field. Now there are some things like right now, the black lives matter [movement], or the racial unrest in our country, the GC could do something overarching, a letter or whatever, a video. But it's only at the conference level that you're gonna know whether or not pastors are protesting or not protesting, what's happening. So, I think it's at the conference level that the work, the real impact can be done.” (FG 3)

In terms of how other levels of Church organization can help, one participant suggested:

“But I think at broader level, what the NAD can do is to think through these fundamental questions of discipleship and evangelism and best practices, and really invest in them and hone them.” (FG 5)

Research Question #3: Barriers to Stress Management

What are the barriers in addressing stress-related health and how can these barriers be overcome?

The barriers to engaging in stress management interventions included concerns about confidentiality, usefulness of the materials/resources, presenter credibility, and the costs associated with the activities or interventions.

3.1 Confidentiality

The primary barrier to seeking help for stress management is the issue of confidentiality. If the pastors do not sense that the stressors they share will be kept in confidence, they will not participate in that endeavor. Participants in each focus group concurred with the importance of confidentiality when considering stress management reduction efforts of any type. The quotes from participants below illustrate the importance of explicitly offering confidentiality as a provision of stress management activities.

“I think one other barrier [of participating] could be confidentiality. If it is something that would get into your personal finances, I think most of us would be very shy about sharing that with conference leadership.” (FG 1)

“If it involves some personal revelation of how we’re doing, I think it needs to be confidential without knowledge of our leadership for fear we would be judged.” (FG 1)

“Can I trust the process? That when I go for counseling, is it going to be professionally done where confidentiality is kept? Because you don't want your leaders to know stuff. Will they hear back?” (FG 2)

“At some point, it becomes a part of our thinking that I cannot be as open as I think I want to be. Because . . . if this gets out, you'll never get another pastoral job. If this gets out, you're gonna lose your position, or ministry's done for you. You'll never be able to do whatever.” (FG 3)

“In the minds of some individuals when they say, ‘Oh, you're going through that challenge.’ And they're not, you know, they may use that as something against you in the future.” (FG 4)

3.2 Usefulness

A second barrier to engaging in stress reduction actions is the participants' evaluation of how immediately useful the endeavor or information appears to be. The quotes below illustrate what participants view as useful.

“I think another barrier is value. I think at this point . . . in the ministerial vocation, I think far too many pastors are not trying to be pastors anymore, they're trying to be brands and ministries. And if they don't see added value to their ministry to what their next phase of ministry is going to be, they're probably not going to want to be a part of it.” (FG 3)

Interviewer: How open would you say you were to learning stress reduction?

Participant 1: On the scale of one to ten? Ten.

Participant 2: Eleven.

Participant 1: I was thinking that . . . especially . . . if it's not trivial. Something [that] comes from a real professional who understands what the pastor is going through, and all that entails . . . the reality that we are dealing with. (FG 4)

3.3 Presenter Credibility

A third barrier to participating in stress management activities occurs when the presenter lacks credibility. Credibility includes having an understanding of pastor stress, possessing appropriate educational credentials, and conveying an attitude of genuine helpfulness.

“[My question is,] ‘Is a person . . . doing it [offering to help or present] to better their own brand?’ Because, look, we see through that. And then it doesn't become genuine anymore, right? And as soon as it doesn't become genuine, a lot of us tune out, and just say, ‘Why would I keep listening to this? This is about you, it's not about helping others.’ ... It should be who is gonna be the person that's gonna help out the most. Who's gonna have the best message for the pastors?” (FG 3)

3.4 Finances

If educational or stress reduction events or activities come with a monetary cost, finances could present barriers to pastors participation. One participant shared:

“I think the point I made earlier about the NAD meetings which we have to cover a lot of the cost even though they subsidized some, you know the financial barrier.... I know now for the NAD meetings, the whole cost is not covered so that in itself becomes a barrier to trying to help you with something.” (FG 1)

Other barriers to learning included scheduling considerations and time involvement. One participant stated, “I don't want to be dictated to. ‘Okay, you have to go to this thing.’ Because I might not be dealing with that, and

it's a complete waste time for me. I hate wasting time above all else” (FG 5).

Research Question #4: Suggestions for Administrative Leadership

How can the administrative leadership best use its resources to assist pastors to improved emotional, relational, spiritual, and financial wellness?

Participants offered a number of suggestions about how Church leadership might encourage and promote emotional, relational, spiritual, and financial wellness for their pastors. Suggestions emerging in at least three of the five focus groups included: building a culture of trust, promoting financial literacy, and being proactive in pastor outreach.

4.1 Build a Culture of Trust

Participants shared that they are most open to new ideas, trying out skills, and dealing with emotional vulnerabilities within an environment of trust. Participants from some conferences enjoyed trusting relationships with conference leadership, while others did not. The quotes below illustrate the pastors’ need for a safe environment in which to learn and grow.

“If there is not a safe environment where trust and relationships are built before coming to a meeting . . . if there are some bitter feelings, unresolved issues, that we may have toward the conference, and then we come to our meeting, then that meeting is not as productive because there’s a barrier of mistrust . . .” (FG 1)

“When pastors start talking about feelings, they're with somebody they feel very, very comfortable with. It’s not constructed any other way.” (FG 5)

4.2 Promote Financial Literacy

Participants recalled with appreciation incidences where their leaders promoted financial literacy. In fact, one participant shared an important intervention that occurred while in the seminary:

“I do have to applaud the seminary . . . [because] every semester they would share with us the importance of not maxing out when it comes to our

student loans . . . They explained to us, ‘We’re not saying don’t do it, that’s your decision’ but they told us and warned us if you max out and you have this much debt, this is the expected average salary for a pastor, this is how much debt you’re gonna leave, and this is how long it’s going to take to you [to pay it off] . . . So, I think that was just very good because it was right for that context.” (FG 1)

Beyond seminary training, participants expressed gratitude for times when conference employees proactively reached out to them about financial issues. One participant recalled:

“Last year when they had re-enrollment [for health insurance], I filled out the thing and there was something that I didn’t get an option on, so I just assumed that it was implied that we would all be enrolled in insurance. I felt really grateful that our H.R. person at the conference office said, “Hey Allison, I just wanna confirm you're not insured, but do you not want to be insured?” (FG1)

However, in general, participants shared a sense that they needed more information, support, and resources about financial matters. The quotes from these participants illustrate the pastors’ perspectives:

“My challenge, when it comes to financial things, is that . . . no one tells you everything up front. You have to figure it out as you're going through. And that is my chief frustration with ministry.” (FG 3)

“It's also an emotional thing. Because here you are, giving your life for the cause, the cause we all love. But at the end of the day, you could be going to one of the government houses after 40 years. And then, what you're hearing sometimes is ‘the onus is on you’, ‘the onus is on you’, ‘the onus is on you’. For sure you have personal responsibility in your life. But of course, you are employed by an organization that you're giving your whole life for.” (FG 2)

“[It would help] if the administration keeps [its] focus on the pastors and not the congregation. We focus on the congregation. They need to support us.” (FG 5)

Particularly when the financial issues pertain to taxes, pastors in the majority of focus groups shared that they needed much more guidance. One participant shared, “I wish that conferences would take more responsibility in setting up pastors appropriately as pertaining to tax issues” (FG 5).

The consequences of not understanding tax laws proved dire for several focus group participants across focus groups. To illustrate, one participant shared, “I didn’t learn anything about taxes until I was hit by IRS. I paid out \$38,000 back to the IRS, and here I am. Those are the financial stresses that we go through because we are not well-educated about it” (FG 1).

Participants also recognized that financial literacy issues can be more important during certain seasons of ministry, especially among pastors with young families. One participant recalled with regret not understanding the importance of what church administrators were offering in terms of financial literacy.

“[When] I was younger and I looked at this [retirement planning], ‘Oh man, retirement. These guys. What’s wrong with you?’ But now, I’m getting to a point that if only I had paid attention at that time, 19, 20 years’ time. If I was putting away some money, compound interest would have done me well.” (FG 2)

4.3 Be Proactive in Pastor Outreach and Response

Not pervasively, but rather consistently, participants shared a sense of feeling invisible or neglected by their administrators. Participants would welcome an administrative approach that proactively supports their needs and goals. The quotes from participants demonstrate these desires.

Participant 1: So, they need to converse with us more, to make sure that we are motivated to do what we are committed to doing, you know. Rather than just leaving us out there in the wilderness. “So you figure it out, and give us 40 years of your life.”

Participant 2: It’s about investing in your employees.

Participant 1: That’s the word. (FG 2)

“The conference is dialoging with us, so they know what we need. And when we verbalize, ‘Hey,’ you know, ‘This is where I’m stressed.’ Instead of them just being like, ‘Good luck with that’ which is what we often get, taking it seriously . . . The NAD is really struggling right now, ‘How do we get more people interested in ministry?’ But at the same time how many of us seeing the people that we started out ministry with, find that we’re the only ones left?” (FG 5)

“There’s a reason why Jesus sent His disciples out two-by-two. If you have a friend you can talk to, and this friend will not be able to resolve your issues, at least you have somebody to talk to. It comes out, this catharsis, it can help if you want to be helped. If you have a relationship with Jesus,

you can be helped. The conference, recognizing this Achilles' heel should make room for this to happen. To actually address it, publicize it, because no preacher's gonna raise his hand and say, 'I need help.'" (FG 1)

4.4 Miscellaneous

Minor, yet still potentially important, suggestions for Church administrators include: engaging in strategic placement of pastors, being aware of the ministry lifecycle, and recognizing the critically important role of pastor spouses. These themes are bulleted followed by supporting quotes from participants.

- Place pastors strategically

"I think conferences [should] take into consideration, you know, being more strategic in placing pastors, how long they place them there and even with making sure that churches have adequate pastoral staff." (FG 1)

"You know, in my case for example, I'm, I'm fully bilingual. So, my argument is, put me in a bilingual church, or a church that is open to bilingual ministry. And then I go to a church that is not open to that. And all of a sudden, now my stress level has shot up to a point where it shouldn't be. So, I think that's something . . . that should be looked into. Perhaps doing a little bit more in-depth study to what the church and what the congregation needs before placing a pastor." (FG 3)

- Be aware of the ministry lifecycle

"I was gonna say that I feel like all of them are good that you have there on the list. I think they're good in different seasons of your ministry." (FG 1)

"I think when you're first starting off pastoral ministry, . . . it's so disorienting because I know, for me anyway, I got picked up. . . by [X] conference my last year at [an Adventist University], got sponsored to go to seminary, went seminary, and then literally just got thrown into two churches and just like, 'Good luck kid', you know, a little slap on the shoulder and you have no idea what you're doing and it's so disorienting and it's very stressful." (FG 5)

"And then another thing, timing is also . . . important. Because at some point when you are younger, some of these things don't really . . . need it, but at some point, as I said when you hit the 5-0, or when you're going further out, you realize, 'Oh, what am I doing?' So, I think it depends on the age brackets, as well . . . So, the timing, life, you know, the life cycle issue." (FG 2)

“I think what you said especially about different stages, different needs is really, really good observation.” (FG 5)

- Recognize the role of pastor spouses

“No consideration is given to the contribution that a minister's wife cuts into, into the work of Christ . . . when you, when you read Spirit of Prophecy, she says a lot about a minister's wife which would translate very well to the minister's husband. There is no inclusion professionally. Why should it be? It would cost money and our church leadership is not sensitive to recognize it. It is worth the money because the minister's wife or husband, says the spirit of prophecy, has a work to do that God himself has assigned her or him. Obviously, that implies financial investment to be certain that we get the most out of this couple that is rendering a service to Christ. And because the minister's wife does so at her expense, or his expense, that's that hidden cost of what it means to be a minister that is not factored into the service by our denomination thus tension arises from that.” (FG 1)

I've been here [many years] . . . [when] I first came here, the workers' meeting, the families were invited. The first workers' meeting I was invited to was the workers [and their families]. After that, family was not invited. If the spouse or the kids wanted [to go], they'd have to pay. They had to pay to come to workers' meetings, so the meeting itself was not geared for the family or the felt needs and stuff. I think that needs to be back where there's family meetings. That's where there's an opportunity for the spouses to be [a part of the ministry] . . . In our conference, we are losing that opportunity for building teams. Instead of building teams, we are dividing up... I think that should be somewhere in the recommendations that if we're gonna have it, we should have a joint family workers' meeting or retreat we used to call it, once a year, but our conference does not have that.” (FG 1)

- Recognize and value diversity

“You know universities have diversity awareness, but where is the denominational [diversity] awareness in our conferences? Because it's predominantly by Anglo.” (FG 1)

RECOMMENDATIONS AND CONCLUSIONS

- **Acknowledge the levels of stress that exist among Adventist pastors**

This study focused on the ways in which SDA pastors alleviated their stressors in specified areas. However, the advantage of qualitative research is that the open-ended question format allows participants to share their experiences beyond the original research purpose. During the focus group sessions, pastors referred to their stresses in about equal portions as to their strategies for alleviating their stress. Participants across the board shared their high levels of emotional, relational, and financial stress, along with spiritual dryness. If the sample were representative of pastors across the NAD (which qualitative work cannot claim), then our pastors need careful, thoughtful, and timely interventions to bring them to a place of health and calm. Two selected quotes from participants illustrate this call to action.

“Adventist ministry, ministry in general, is painful. Preaching is painful. Chairing a church board: painful. There’s no work that we do [pause] where there is no pain involved. But the worse thing about it is there is no cure. There is no cure for it.” (FG 1)

“I think after that president . . . the pastor of the local church is the most stressful office that not only is the United States, but in every possible country who has a church in it.” (FG 2)

- **Understand how pastors’ selflessness and self-sufficiency create barriers to health**

Participants in this study offered insights into the unrecognized forces that keep them from engaging in self-care. Two of the most predominant included selflessness and self-sufficiency. These traits keep pastors in denial about their real needs and prevent them from recognizing their condition as requiring intervention and help. One pastor recounted a time when he nearly lost his life as a result of wanting to help a couple in crisis rather than seeking immediate medical attention:

“A couple visited my home and they were in trouble, in crisis. We had just come from my family doctor [visit]. And . . . the doctor called my wife and said, ‘Listen, make sure that [your husband] gets to the hospital, ASAP. As

soon as he gets home, drops the car, get him to go to the hospital.' . . . So, my wife left work, came home. And this couple . . . were sitting there, talking. And I was trying to say something. Physically, I wasn't well. And so, my wife at some point, said, 'Excuse me, he has to get to the hospital as soon as possible. So, can we pray so that he can meet you at another time?' And I said 'No.' And she said, 'No, no, no, he has to go to the hospital.' [The husband of the couple] said, 'Oh Pastor, but . . . ' My wife said, 'No.' . . . So she shut the meeting down . . . As soon as I was at the hospital, I was admitted for five days . . . I was physically sick, you know, what I was thinking was that I can handle this." (FG 2)

"Our job is never done. And so, this creates a situation where . . . we sometimes have trouble convincing ourselves, we've done a great job or we've done enough." (FG 5)

In addition to their inner sense of devotion to their duties, some pastors believe that the system requires such stoicism. One pastor shared, "But we know how to hide it, it's part of our professional façade, we're paid by the conference to hide it, to hide the pain." (FG 1)

- **Recognize the limitations of a single approach or event for stress reduction**

Pastors were clear that although they share similar goals, their needs, likes, and desires differ. A one-size-fits-all approach to helping pastors decrease stress will likely fail. Likewise, if the goal is to please or satisfy every pastor with the interventions administrators initiate, that goal will not be realized. Even within our small sample (appropriate for qualitative work), the diverse views about what might help reduce pastor stress were evident and abundant.

- **Plan for intentional follow-up and ongoing support following any intervention**

Participants revealed that their good intentions for self-care activities did not often translate to good follow-through. To make lasting change in stress reducing activities, caring and nurturing follow-up by Church leadership is needed.

"I think, once I go to a seminar, sometimes, I'm very excited. I get all that [good] stuff while I'm there. I enjoy it. Once I get home . . . I don't have time. It's not gonna get back to the real-world kind of mentality. It's like, I had a great time, it's good that I was there, but now I gonna get back." (FG 4)

“Bill Hybels wrote a book. I never read it, but just leaving it around for me to see was good. Well, . . . the title was good and it was, Too Busy Not to Pray.” (FG 5)

- **Nurture and bolster social support**

Participants recognized the need for social support in their lives. They talked about what a positive difference social support makes for reducing stress. Summing up what he heard from fellow participants, one pastor noted, “And I think one of the things we've heard over and over here today is that bonded relationships with other people is a form of stress reduction” (FG 5). And one participant voiced an awareness that pastors are seldom intentional about seeking out social support, “Now I think I'm okay emotionally, you know, but we don't do a very good job as pastors . . . to connect with each other in a way that's life giving and community building” (FG 3). These two perspectives help clarify that although pastors recognize a need for social support, they may need direction and encouragement to seek and garner supportive relationships in their own lives.

- **Provide education on boundary setting skills**

Participants discussed boundary setting as one of the primary strategies that helped them manage emotional stress. At the same time, participants recognized that they struggled to set appropriate boundaries around their work. One participant noted, “A pastor that is committed to what they're doing, they're never off the clock easily” (FG 5).

Setting boundaries proved difficult for focus group members, even when they received help and encouragement from a spouse. One participant shared, “So she's like, you know, ‘When we're eating, just let the phone be, right?’ And I'm like, ‘Yeah, that's true, I will.’ [But the] phone was on its side, and then I see, ‘Pastor, I need some help.’ And it's, you know, what do you do?” (FG 3). This pull on the pastor's time became intrusive enough that their family life suffered as a result. “My experience was painful. I was at a point I almost lost my family because of not having that balance” (FG 2).

- **Provide wide-ranging financial literacy opportunities**

Some of the most painful and difficult to overcome issues centered on the issue of financial illiteracy. When pastors found themselves owing money to the IRS, or with sudden and unexpected medical bills, for example, they did not have the resources to draw on to live much above subsistence level. One participant shared, “My wife [went] through a health issue [cancer] where the equipment she needed was \$12,000. Insurance doesn’t cover it....How do you adjust?” (FG 1).

Beyond being able to budget for unexpected expenses, participants discussed their limited salaries and the resulting despair that comes with not having enough money to meet monthly expenses. “When you get to the point when you realize that, ‘Wait, there's more month than money. What can I buy with this?’... and I think that's a big... discouraging factor that when you ... see it on paper, it increases the stress level. When you realize, ‘Oh my goodness,’ and then you see no way out.” (FG 2)

Finally, saving money for retirement seemed an impossibility for many participants. A participant in FG 2 noted, “I haven't even really have an opportunity to think about retirement, to be honest, because I can't. If I start thinking about retirement, then it's one less thing that I can get, so that my daughter can have something to eat. My wife, myself, or whatever the case is. So it's tough... it's tough.”

- **Involve pastors in the development of interventions**

Throughout the data gathering process, participants expressed their gratitude for being included in this important endeavor. The participants’ willingness to be vulnerable, the amount of information they offered, the enthusiastic ways in which they engaged in the focus group process offer evidence of their desires to contribute to the solution of pastor stress. The following dialog occurred at the end of one of the focus group sessions:

Participant 1: But I just wanted to thank you for, for this session. For me, personally, it has been therapeutic.

Participant 2: And just, just hearing your thoughtful questions and processing them has been, has been very, very helpful to me personally. So, thank you so much.

Participant 3: I want to echo the same sentiment also, as well. Thank you, just, just for the calm, your tranquil manner and just very open mindedness. Very thoughtful. Just want to say “Thank you” also. (FG 4)

In conclusion, research participants revealed a picture of simultaneous strength, wisdom, endurance, integrity, and dedication, along with their experience of a sense of being “stuck,” overlooked, burdened, overwhelmed, and alone. Church administrators at every level of Adventist organization have every reason to be proud of their pastors and should be encouraged that in spite of the current state of stress and distress, there is hope and healing that pastors desire and can obtain with appropriate and timely interventions.

APPENDIX A

Adventist Pastors' Health Studies

Focus Group Protocol

Introduction

Thank you for joining us today. We look forward to hearing a range of ideas from you. First, we need to go over our research consent form. (Also provide demographic sheets)

I will ask a series of questions about the health of pastors intended to start a discussion about that topic. Anyone is free to get the discussion going. Ideally, everyone will participate during our time together. It is fine to pass if you don't have something to say about particular question. However, I may call on you if I haven't heard from you in a while.

It is important to remember that there are no right or wrong answers and that everyone's experience and opinion is important. The beauty of this type of research is that we get to hear a wide range of opinions.

In order to make best use of the information that you share, we will be tape recording the group discussion. We want to capture everything you have to say. But keep in mind; we will not identify anyone by name in our report. Your identity will remain private.

One more important point before we get started. We ask that each of you respect the privacy of your fellow focus group participants by keeping the comments made today confidential and by not sharing them with anyone outside this group.

Do you have any questions before we get started?

Focus Group Questions

We will be talking about several types of stress today: financial, emotional and relational, stressors in the workplace, and spiritual stressors. We will ask what you have tried that helped (or didn't help or even hurt the situation), how open you are about learning more about managing or reducing these stressors, the

types of learning formats that work best for you, obstacles to participating in programs designed to lessen stress, family member involvement, and recommendations for administrative levels (conference, union or NAD).

1. Let's start with financial stress. If you have experienced financial stress, what have you tried that has helped even a little bit? You could also talk about anything that have you tried that was not at all helpful or even hurtful.

A. Emotional and relational stress

Studies on SDA and non-SDA pastors find that pastors experience high levels of emotional stress, particularly loneliness & isolation, anxiety, depression and feeling overwhelmed.

B. Stressors in the workplace

Being a pastor is a demanding job which brings many stressors in and of itself. Pastors report that it is easy to become all-absorbed in their work. In addition, conflicts that occur in the local church, or conflicts that happen in the Church organization can bring workplace stress. If you have experienced workplace stress what have you tried that has helped even a little bit?

1. How does the state of the congregation one is leading affect the workplace stress of the pastor?

2. What could be done to improve the state of congregations, in order to ultimately lessen the workplace of pastors?

C. Spiritual stressors

Research also shows that pastors suffer from spiritual dryness from time to time. Specifically, studies note that pastors have difficulty making time for personal devotions, have difficulty with personal prayer and have trouble maintaining a personal connection with God. If you have experienced spiritual stress what have you tried that has helped even a little bit?

2. How would you describe your openness to learning more about stress reduction in any of these areas? Where are you most motivated to put energy into stress reduction? (financial, emotional/relational, workplace, spiritual)?

3. There are several ways to get information and develop skills in stress reduction. What appeals to you most of these types of formats for dealing with different types of stress?
 - A. In-person workshops
 - B. Online education
 - C. Individual study and application
 - D. Coaching or mentoring
4. Managing your emotions and relationships in healthier ways
 - A. What are the pros and cons of the following?
 1. Workshops on relationship topics like healthy boundaries, marriage enrichment, parenting, managing difficult congregants, etc.
 2. Having more counseling available to pastors and their families (low or no cost)
 3. Self-help materials (free or at low cost)
 4. Having mentoring or professional emotional coaching available
 5. Therapist-led groups
 6. Peer support groups
 1. Have you ever participated in a peer-to-peer program or series of meetings?
 2. What did you like or dislike about these peer-to-peer experiences?
 3. If you never attended a peer-to-peer program, tell us why.
5. Rejuvenating spiritual life
 - B. Workshops on spiritual practices for pastor
 - C. Workshops on boundary setting (in order to make more space for spiritual practices)
 - D. Self-help materials (free or at low cost)
 - E. Spiritual accountability partners
 - F. Peer support groups

6. What might prevent you from either participating in a stress reduction program or by following a recommended plan of action?
 - A. How might these barriers be overcome?
7. How much do family members need to be involved in stress reduction initiatives?
 - A. Who might that involve for you? And how should they be involved?
8. What are your thoughts on how involved the NAD, your Union, or Conference should be in leading pastors to higher levels of spiritual health?

Wrap-up

Thank you for all your feedback today. You've been really helpful. Before we leave:

We wanted your feedback to help us make this program as valuable as possible to pastors. Is there anything we missed? What should I have asked that I did not ask?