

Be the calm within the storm.

The *Selah* Stress Management Trial, a three-year research study conducted by the Duke Clergy Health Initiative, identified three scalable, low-cost interventions that support pastors in managing the challenges of ministry.

Often, the expectation for clergy is that we are the calm in the center of the storm. Learning practices that help me connect with the calm center and destress has been invaluable. I have been sharing them with people in my parish so that they too can better deal with our chaotic world.

Amy Rio

Pastor, WNCCUMC

WHAT WE STUDIED

We engaged nearly 300 United Methodist clergy from across the state of North Carolina and rigorously tested three separate practices: the Daily Examen, Mindfulness Based Stress Reduction (MBSR), and Stress Proofing.

WHAT WE FOUND

After six months, all three practices helped reduce stress and anxiety symptoms relative to a control group. Additionally, both Daily Examen and MBSR participants experienced an increased sense of spiritual well-being in ministry.

WHY IT MATTERS

Clergy experience a vast array of stressors. When stressed, clergy have less emotional and creative bandwidth for what really matters. We hope these research findings will support pastors, and those who advocate for them, to engage in God's work with increased energy, creativity and insight.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

MBSR was the only intervention that significantly changed the physiology of participants, as measured by an increase in Heart Rate Variability or the body's ability to recover well after a stressor.

MBSR

- Participants experienced improvements with an average of 28 minutes of practice per day.
- Improved anxiety symptoms by 45% at 3 months and 55% at 6 months.
- Improved spiritual well-being by 14% at 6 months.
- Improved Heart Rate Variability by 14% at 3 months.

The Daily Examen

- Participants experienced improvements with an average of 12-15 minutes per day.
- Improved anxiety symptoms by 31% at 6 months.
- Improved spiritual well-being by 15% at 6 months.
- Phone app, book, and video training available.



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the full research report

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HEALTH INITIATIVE

The Duke Clergy Health Initiative identifies, tests, and promotes evidence-based practices to support the wellbeing of United Methodist clergy in North Carolina.



THE GOAL OF MINDFULNESS IS TO WAKE UP TO THE INNER WORKINGS OF OUR MENTAL, EMOTIONAL, AND PHYSICAL PROCESSES.

PRACTICE:

- Observe the present moment as it is. The aim is not quieting the mind, or attempting to achieve calm. Pay attention to the present moment, without judgment.
- Let your judgments roll by. Make a mental note of them, and let them pass.
- Return to observing the present moment as it is. Your mind will get carried away in thought. That's ok. Just practice returning, again and again, to the present moment.
- Be kind to your wandering mind. Don't judge yourself for whatever thoughts crop up, just practice recognizing when your mind has wandered off, and gently bring it back.
- MBSR is simple, but not necessarily easy. The work is to just keep doing it. Results will accrue.

CREDIT/CITATION: mindful.org/meditation/mindfulness-getting-started

THE DAILY EXAMEN IS DESIGNED TO BE A SIMPLE IN-THE-MOMENT CHECK-IN THAT REMINDS US OF GOD'S PRESENCE, REORIENTING AND CENTERING US IN SACRED PRESENCE.

The prayer practice aims to increase the awareness of God's presence in the nitty gritty details of our moment-to-moment lives – a bite into a crunchy apple, the dumb thing we just said to our boss, or something surprising we noticed on our way to work. It's designed to be a short check-in, once a day or more, for about 15 minutes.

PRACTICE THE EXAMEN

1. **BECOME AWARE OF GOD'S PRESENCE**– Look back on the events of the day in the company of the Holy Spirit. .
2. **REVIEW THE DAY WITH GRATITUDE** – Walk through your day in the presence of God and note its joys and delights..
3. **PAY ATTENTION TO YOUR EMOTIONS**– Reflect on the feelings you experienced during the day.day.
4. **CHOOSE ONE FEATURE OF THE DAY AND PRAY FROM IT**– Ask the Holy Spirit to direct you to something during the day that God thinks is particularly important.
5. **LOOK TOWARD TOMORROW** – Ask God to give you light for tomorrow's challenges.

CREDIT: ignatianspirituality.com/