

AN IMPACT REPORT

Resourcing Today's Clergy and Church for Resilience

2024

CLERGY HEALTH
INITIATIVE

Duke

RELIGION *and* SOCIAL
CHANGE LAB

**Leaders who are formed for
change can change the world.**



Like many bedrock institutions of American life, churches have undergone seismic shifts, not just in the last fifty years but the last five. This has left clergy and church leaders vulnerable to overwhelm and feeling, in the words of one pastor, like “chaplains to the apocalypse.”

There may be no new normal. Instead, what’s emerging, through both research and story, is an ancient call: adapt. Leaders who are formed for change can change the world—and sustain their faith through the next shake up. But only if they and the institutions who shape them have the data, tools, and resilience to respond.

Since 2007, the Duke Clergy Health Initiative has existed to do just that: collect data, test tools, and resource United Methodist clergy in North Carolina for resilience in their vocation. Now, a new partnership with the Duke Religion and Social Change Lab is helping us understand

and resource seminarians, too. Together, we’re providing the most substantial longitudinal data sets to date on trends affecting pastors from seminary through retirement.

In other words, we’re answering the call to adapt for the common good, just like many of you. This guide is meant to introduce you to the story behind our evolution, share the rich resources that have resulted from it, and point you to where you can receive our latest data-informed insights in the (seismic or not) years to come.





A Letter from Our Directors

Change in academia often comes as slow as molasses—and then pours in hot and fast all at once. (Do you know the feeling?) For the Duke Clergy Health Initiative (CHI) and Duke Religion and Social Change Lab (RaSCL), it's been a hot and fast kind of year.

Looking back, you might say the change began taking shape almost a decade ago when David came to work with Rae Jean as a post-doctoral associate with CHI. After six years in pastoral ministry in Canada, David had arrived at Duke seeking new models for ministry. Here, he became an expert on the health of religious clergy, the changing role of churches in North America, and the implications of these trends for the professional training of ministers, always returning to the question, What does faithful witness look like in the 21st century? Out of that inquiry came the idea for the Seminary to Early Ministry (SEM) Study.

Launched in 2019 with a generous grant from The Duke Endowment, the SEM Study was designed to understand the upstream factors

that help the United Methodist Church in North Carolina thrive by taking a closer look at where many of its clergy start: Duke Divinity School.

To do so, we set out to follow three cohorts of students (and ultimately added another to account for COVID) from matriculation into their first five years of ministry. The goal is simple but grand: to enhance Duke Divinity School's core mission of forming clergy who can faithfully witness to the Gospel amidst today's challenges.

Since its inception, SEM has greatly enhanced Rae Jean and CHI's original vision, too: a pastorate with the permission, support, and resources to engage in evidence-based practices that sustain body, mind, and spirit.

For example, with data from the SEM Study we're better able to understand the pressures that face future clergy starting in seminary and the desire of seminarians to initiate well-being practices from the start.

In 2023, CHI was honored to receive another generous grant from The Duke Endowment to conduct our Statewide Clergy Health Survey in 2023 and 2025 (which many of you have generously contributed to over the last fifteen years). In these next two surveys, we're focused on determining trends in clergy well-being amidst the shifting sands of the pandemic and the United Methodist Church. Ultimately, our charge is to identify helpful, evidence-based factors and practices for ministerial flourishing and to communicate those findings widely.

As the work (and our engagement team) grew rapidly over the course of the year, we saw the need to honor the distinct but connected nature of our research. David formed his own umbrella organization under which SEM now lives and called it the Religion and Social Change Lab, while Rae Jean continues to direct the longtime research efforts of the Clergy Health Initiative.

We still share data, nerd out on its implications, and collaborate closely in its communication. But we're also trying, like many of you, to live into our own emerging future as people called to adapt and evolve rather than predict and control.

The long arc of change may be slow as molasses (and sticky at times too), but, thank God, there's sweetness to be savored along the way.

Rae Jean Proeschold-Bell, Ph.D.




David Eagle, Ph.D.





Resources from the Clergy Health Initiative



Since 2007, the Clergy Health Initiative has been gathering valuable data on the mental, spiritual, and physical well-being of United Methodist clergy in North Carolina.

Our research-based recommendations are designed to enhance pastors' well-being so that they can thrive in ministry and in life. To that end, we've been busy creating resources to support clergy and their congregations and want to share this good work with you. So, take a look at the pages that follow, and discover how the Clergy Health Initiative is participating in the healing and wholeness of God's faithful shepherds as they lead the Church into a promising future.



KEEPING THE FAITH

Where the common wisdom is that we shouldn't talk religion, politics, or money (at least not in polite company!), we're asserting that congregational leaders and pastors need to be discussing exactly these things.

Keeping the Faith: Conversations to Strengthen the Bond Between Pastors and Church Leaders offers the tools needed to come together in conversation about topics that may be difficult to consider together. Informed by our data on pastoral well-being (and how that well-being is supported by healthy relationships in the congregation), conversation topics include:

- **Building a Covenant for Our Work Together**
- **The Importance of Human Connection**
- **The Impact of Congregational Culture and Morale**
- **The Impact of Perceived Differences in Worldview**
- **The Importance of a Sense of Agency**
- **The Importance of a Healthy Spiritual Life**

To download the resource, scan here:



STRESS MANAGEMENT FOR CLERGY

When stressed, clergy have less emotional and creative bandwidth for what *really* matters.

From 2018–2022, CHI conducted the ***Selah Stress Management*** trial with nearly 400 UMC clergy to evaluate three stress management practices: Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction (MBSR), Daily Examen, and Stress Proofing. Our key takeaway? While all three practices helped reduce stress and anxiety symptoms in participants relative to a control group, only MBSR significantly changed the body's ability to cope. You can download a summary of the research here, which we've been honored to share far and wide, from students at Duke Divinity School's Field Education Orientation to clergy at UMC District gatherings.

To view the full report,
scan here:



The Selah practice came with perfect timing for me. With ongoing pandemic and political unrest, even in the church, I was able to use some of the practices to stay calm and collected in the midst of these chaotic situations.



Ronnie Roseboro, UMC Pastor





CLERGY WELL-BEING PRACTICES

Engaging with clergy and their supervisors in North Carolina and across the United Methodist connection has given us the opportunity to develop and share additional evidence-based resources.

Working with the Cabinets of the NC and Western NC Conference at Convocation & Pastors' School led to the creation of a [**List of Well-Being Practices for Clergy**](#), which can be integrated into your daily life or used in your group gatherings to grow awareness of the sacred present.

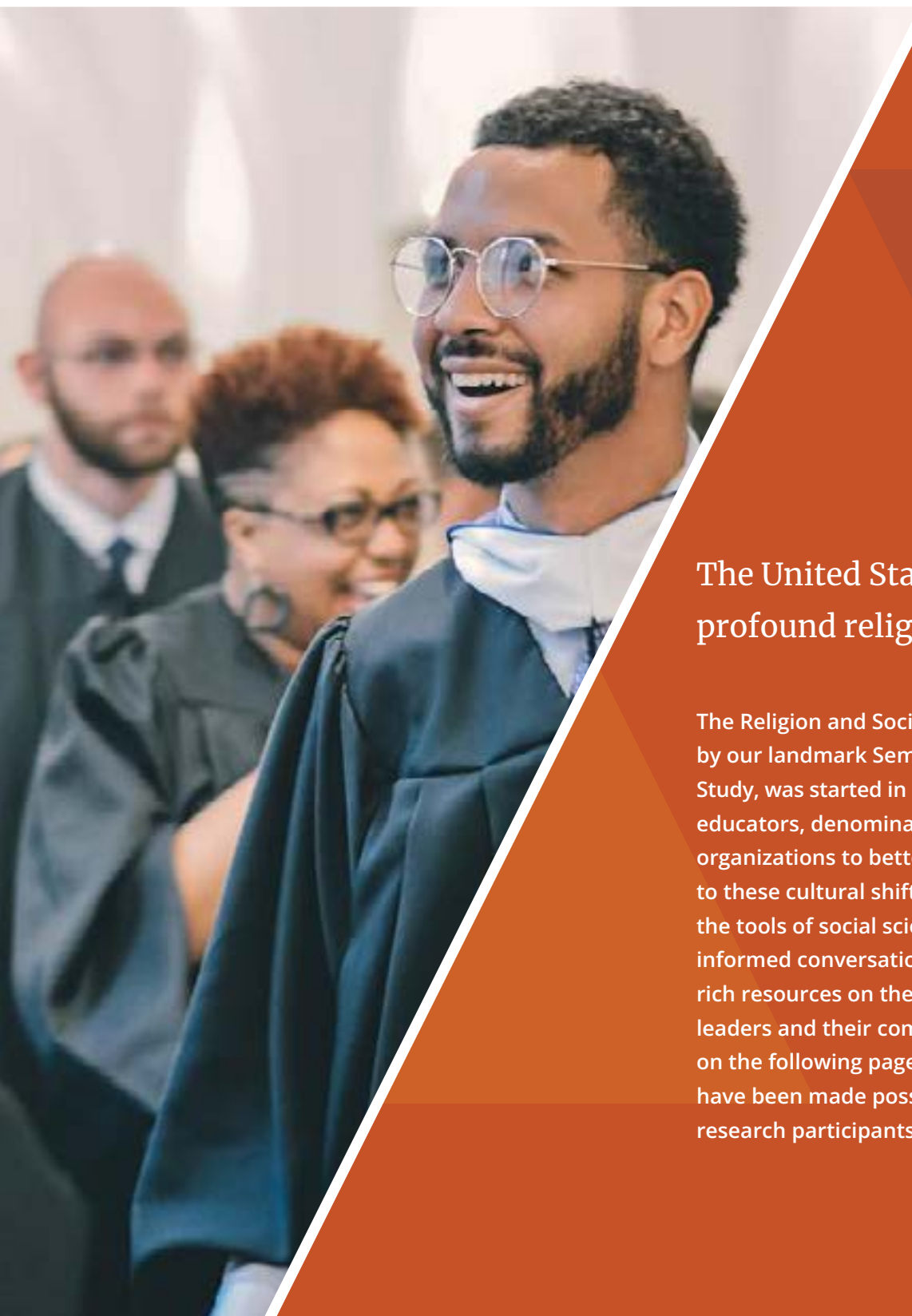
These include:

- **Expressive (Resilience) Writing**
- **Cyclic Sighing**
- **Walking Meditation**
- **Daily Examen**
- **Loving Kindness Meditation**

For a list of all our
resources for clergy,
scan here:



Resources from the Religion and Social Change Lab



The United States is undergoing profound religious changes.

The Religion and Social Change Lab, anchored by our landmark Seminary to Early Ministry Study, was started in 2023 to equip seminarians, educators, denominations, and allied organizations to better understand and adapt to these cultural shifts. To that end, we use the tools of social science to spark data-informed conversations and make research-rich resources on the formation of faith leaders and their communities. Take a peek on the following pages at what resources have been made possible because of our research participants.



RESEARCH SUMMARIES

We know time is sacred for ministry-types. In these one-page research summaries, we highlight headlines and key findings from journal articles drawing on the Seminary to Early Ministry Study.

Nearly half of seminary students say someone else suggested ministry before they ever seriously considered it. Delve into this research summary to learn about the six types of people who showed up most often in call stories, as well as how men and women narrated the influence of others differently.

Room for conversation? Seminarians across diverse viewpoints invoke similar authorities on questions of sexuality.

Explore this research summary for insights into how students describe and account for their attitudes toward same-sex relationships—and where common ground may be found.

More than 7 in 10 students enter divinity school with at least one Adverse Childhood Experience, highlighting the need for trauma-informed care in seminary.

Read this research summary for more on why the upstream factors of mental health matter for theological education.



For a list of all our journal articles to date, scan here:



FIELD EDUCATION REPORT

Experiential learning is one of the best discernment tools for would-be clergy.

Using survey and interview data from over 175 SEM participants, our [Field Education Report: Student Experiences and Reflections](#) uncovers the vital role field education plays in helping students navigate their calling, as well as the impact of supervisor-mentor relationships on the success of the experience and future ministry plans. In fact, due to our data findings, the Office of Field Education at Duke Divinity School now trains its supervisor-mentors differently.

For a list of all our public reports to date, scan here:



Using data from the SEM report, we launched a Community of Practice program where our supervisor-mentors can grow together through peer support and learning under the facilitation of experienced practitioners and experts in the field. We are also using the data to help us refine our process for selecting, training, and evaluating supervisor-mentors. The study has been such a gift to our work.



Daniel Corpening
Director of Field Education





DUKE DIVINITY EVENTS

Research was never meant to sit on shelves but to spark imaginative encounters. With a dedicated engagement team, we've been able to offer in-person and recorded events, like the ones below, that take what we've learned in the lab to the people it's meant to impact the most.

Addressing Childhood Trauma in Seminary & Ministry. In this recorded presentation, we share new SEM data on the prevalence of Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) among Duke Divinity students and how the DDS community might normalize, attend to, and process these experiences for future ministerial health.

Top Ten Recommendations for New Duke Divinity Students. Using advice provided by SEM interviewees, we presented this handout at New Student Orientation for both residential and hybrid students. Insights include how to build meaningful relationships with professors, the importance of readings and discussions, and broadening perspectives through diverse courses.

For a list of all our presentations to date, scan here:





Making Research Matter

We couldn't do what we do without the trust and time of our research participants which, to date, include 2,956 individuals from the Statewide Clergy Health Survey and 568 from the Seminary to Early Ministry Study.

Because of their commitment, we've been able to serve others in serving well. Some additional highlights of impact from the last year include:

WE GAINED NATIONAL ATTENTION

for our work at the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services Center for Faith-Based and Neighborhood Partnerships where we were invited to present data on clergy and seminarian well-being to an audience of influential faith leaders.

WE HELD THREE RETREATS for Black, Latinx, Asian American, and Indigenous clergy from the UMC, as well as other Methodist traditions. These were the final retreats in a series co-led with Duke Divinity School's Office of Black Church Studies for the *To Heal the Wounded Soul* project.

OUR WORK SUPPORTING CLERGY through the *Selah* Stress Management trial was featured in a *Duke Magazine* article called "Ministering to Ministers."

WE CO-HOSTED THE FIRST TWO IN-PERSON RETREATS

of the North Carolina UM Clergy Well-Being Council, a group of stakeholders formed by the two NC Annual Conferences, CHI, and The Duke Endowment in 2022. The group began working on three pressing areas to support clergy well-being: cross-cultural and cross-racial appointments, spiritual renewal: leave and growth, and pastoral flourishing.

WE LAUNCHED A NEW COLLABORATIVE WEBSITE

where visitors can now find a comprehensive list of our research publications, presentations, and resources—including this impact report.



How to Stay Resourced for Resilience



**Ministry can be a satisfying
and complex profession.**

To stay resourced amidst shifting life stages and landscapes, visit our new collaborative website. Through it, you'll receive the latest data-informed insights, recommendations, and reality checks.

It's true; the reality of our ever-changing world may be overwhelming at times, but we can shoulder it together in hope-filled ways.

To visit our website,
scan here:



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James B. Duke
THE DUKE ENDOWMENT



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<https://clergyreligionresearch.duke.edu/>