

Enhancing Clergy Well-Being Through Resilience Writing

Working in ministry is both rewarding and stressful. The work often requires leaders to be present in emotionally charged situations, which can trigger emotions in the leader as well. When we experience a stressful event, it's easy to ruminate over that experience. Unfortunately, rumination is bad for our mental health and rarely leads to good ideas. Fortunately, there is a way to process and work through those strong emotions that improves mental and physical well-being with outcomes as good as therapy, and yet is free and more convenient.

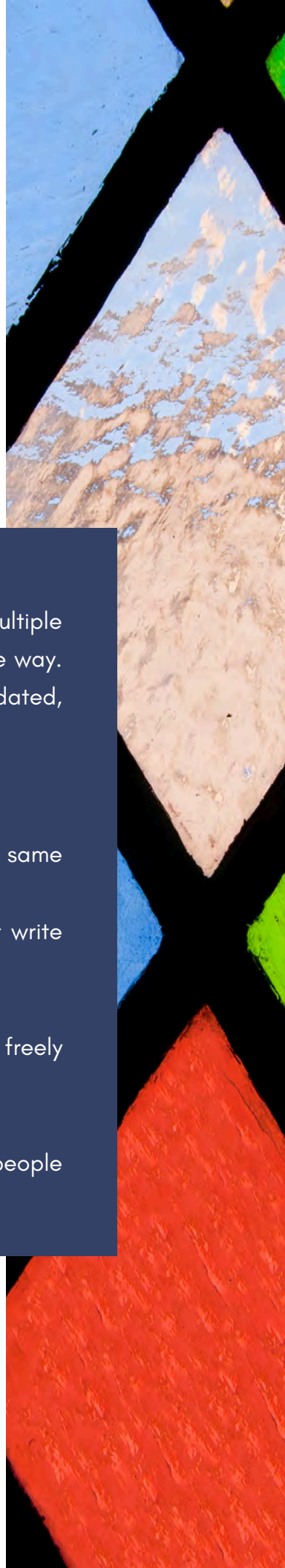
WHAT IS RESILIENCE WRITING?

Resilience writing is a 20-minute expressive writing exercise conducted across multiple days which helps individuals process their emotions and thoughts in a productive way. It can help those affected by a harmful incident to move on. It's simple, well-validated, and even works for situations that are difficult to talk about openly.

HOW TO USE THIS TOOL:

- Choose an event or situation that is on your heart. You can write about the same experience on all three days or about different experiences each day.
- Write on 3 to 4 consecutive days. You can write more if you wish, but don't write fewer than 3 times.
- Each session should be 20 minutes long.
- Ignore grammar, spelling, and sentence structure. Really let go and write freely whatever comes to your mind.
- If you run out of things to say, repeat previous content.
- Be aware that feeling sad immediately afterward is possible, but that most people feel better after their second or third day of writing.

Acknowledgments: This tool is adapted from Sexton and Sexton, 2001, and Bryan Sexton's Duke Resilience course.



DAY 1 INSTRUCTIONS

Write about an event or situation that is on your heart. Whatever you write about, it is important to really delve into your deepest emotions and thoughts. Feel free to give details of the event or to simply focus on your feelings and reactions to the event.

DAY 2 INSTRUCTIONS

Today, continue writing about the event or situation that is on your heart. Writing about the same event as on Day 1 is helpful, but feel free to follow your heart. Continue to explore your deepest emotions and thoughts.

DAY 3 INSTRUCTIONS

On this final day of writing, keep exploring your deepest thoughts and emotions related to the event or situation that is on your heart. Embrace this opportunity to wrap it up however feels right. If you wish to write for a fourth day, studies have found that to be beneficial.

References:

- Baikie K. A., Wilhelm K. (2005). Emotional and physical health benefits of expressive writing. *Advances in Psychiatric Treatment*, 11, 338-346.
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- Smyth J. M. (1998). Written emotional expression: Effect sizes, outcome types, and moderating variables. *Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology*, 66, 174-184.

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