

**Sabbatical Project Summary: *It is Well with My Soul...or Is It?*
James Bradshaw, Kansas District – LCMS
April-June, 2013**

Do full-time church workers take time to rest, renew, and be restored? So many Lutheran Pastors and educators become workaholics. I am one of them! This is easily done because there is so much to do and so many demands on our time. As a result of experiencing high levels of stress in my life, I set out to explore congregational best practices that foster healthier spiritual wellness for church workers and their families.

Consider the following:

- In 2001, 4,600 LCMS church leaders (pastors, teachers, Directors of Christian Education (DCE), Deaconesses and the Concordia University System faculty) participated in the Summex Health Monitor's health study, which was released in a report titled, *Aggregate Report for Lutherans*. The study revealed:
 - 14.4% report stress and depression (U.S. 9.5%)
 - 60.4% overweight/obese (U.S. 55.5%)
 - 75.8% inactive (U.S. 60%)
 - 34.1% high cholesterol (U.S. 29 %)
- In the book, *The Right Road: Life Choices for Clergy* (Minneapolis, Augsburg/Fortress, 2004), Dr. Gwen Halaas states that many clergy are in startlingly bad health. Not only do they regularly report depression, stress, and serious family and financial problems, they also exhibit higher than normal incidences of obesity, high cholesterol levels, inactivity, high blood pressure, and heart disease. How effective can professionals in ministry be with such debilities and vulnerabilities? Are clergy too busy helping others to take care of themselves? Halaas addresses clergy health directly: clergy have a spiritual as well as physical need to care for themselves; to live to the fullest; and, to ensure that they enjoy the life and gifts God gave them. The book focuses on the "wellness wheel" (*note: a key model amplified in this project*). Halaas emphasizes not just healthy eating, but a whole array of life-affirming choices for clergy. Halaas provides the tools for clergy to choose growth and well-being over burnout and decline. Clergy can begin to put their own lives in perspective and "keep [themselves] in training for a godly life" (1 Timothy 4:7).

Here is a summary of what I discovered along the way of my sabbatical, through interviews with key church leaders and various readings:

Best Practices

1. Take care of your soul! **Daily remember your baptism** – remember who you are and WHOSE you are! Remember the Sabbath Day to keep it holy. Bathe in God's grace!
2. **Establish a congregational sabbatical policy and employ this practice for all church workers of your congregation/school.** This sabbatical has afforded me the opportunity to rest, renew, and rediscover the depth of God's grace in my life. Through spiritual, physical, emotional, educational, family, financial, and vocational exercises, I have been able to address a variety of challenges in my life. To that end, **budget for it!**
3. The journey of spiritual wellness is in Christ. **Attend a Grace Place Retreat and be spiritually renewed!** (They are available for single workers of the church as well as for married workers and their spouse). The retreat will focus on the employment of healthy living practices using the "Wellness Wheel" as the teaching model. Once again, financially support this – it's affordable!

4. Create a **"Rule of Life"** for yourself, other staff members (if applicable), and leaders in your church/school. By cultivating an intentional life with Christ, you embrace intentionally focused time for silence, prayer, meditation on Scripture, and reading. It includes a rhythm of stopping – morning, Noon, and evening. *"Slow down and lead with integrity."* (Scazzerro)
5. Ask your congregational/school leaders to identify a **Worker Support Team (WST)** for each of your workers. These care teams/individuals can offer regular prayer support and provide on-going encouragement for each worker. They can also serve as an advocate in encouraging your congregation/school leaders in putting into place appropriate wellness policies for the worker, including a sabbatical policy! Accountability is KEY to maintaining on-going healthy habits!
6. Finally, some basic reminders from the *National Institute of Health*, as they pertain to **physical renewal** (diet AND exercise):
 - Eat breakfast every day. People who eat breakfast are less likely to overeat later in the day.
 - Choose whole grains more often. Select a mix of colorful fruits and vegetables each day. Vegetables of different colors provide different nutrients.
 - Have low-fat, low-sugar snacks on hand at home, at work, or on the go, to combat hunger and prevent overeating.
 - At restaurants, eat only half your meal and take the rest home.
 - For *iPhone* users, install the **My Fitness Pal** app. This is a GREAT accountability tool that helps track daily caloric intake; monitors a prescribed balance of carbohydrates, protein, and fat in the diet; and, records cardio and exercise activity.
 - Walk for thirty minutes after dinner instead of watching TV.
 - Get plenty of sleep.

What will Lutheran Pastors, educators, congregations and schools do to make this a reality? Will you say that this is too much of a dream; it will never happen? Or will you accept the challenge to change what is happening now and present a plan to your congregation/school? Having completed this sabbatical experience, I can boldly proclaim today: "It IS well with my soul!"

Resources:

Dawn, Marva. *Keeping the Sabbath Wholly*. Grand Rapids, MI., Eerdmans, 1989.
 Halaas, Gwen. *The Right Road: Life Choices for Clergy*. Minneapolis, Augsburg/Fortress, 2004.
 Hartung, Bruce. *Holding Up the Prophet's Hand: Supporting Church Workers*. St. Louis, CPH, 2011.
 Scazzerro, Peter. *The Emotionally Healthy Church*. Grand Rapids, MI, Zondervan, 2010.

Grace Place Lutheran Wellness Ministries – www.graceplacewellness.org
"Be Well-Serve Well" – www.concordiaplans.org

Jim Bradshaw is the Assistant to the Kansas District President for Education. He was conferred the Bachelor of Science in Education degree and Director of Christian Education certification in May, 1982. Jim completed the Master of Science – Family Life at Concordia University, Seward, NE in May, 2001. Jim served as a parish DCE for twenty three years and was conferred the title "Master DCE" LEA DCEnet in 2003. Jim was called to the Kansas District staff in March, 2005. He recently completed a three month sabbatical. He is married, has three grown children, and one grandson.