Working in ministry is both rewarding and stressful. In addition to full days toggling back and forth between diverse tasks all day, religious leaders have multiple leadership responsibilities internal and external to churches and therefore face public criticism – sometimes from the very people they have previously given emotional care to. They also grapple with both the best and the worst human experiences.

**WHAT IS RESILIENCE WRITING?**

Resilience writing is an expressive writing exercise which helps individuals process their emotions and thoughts in a productive way. It can help those affected by a harmful incident to move on with their lives. It is a simple and well-validated approach to healing after upsetting events. It is particularly helpful for incidents that are taboo, or difficult to talk about openly.

**HOW TO USE THIS TOOL:**

- Write on three separate occasions.
- Each session should be 20 minutes long.
- You can write more than three times if you wish (3–4 times is ideal).
- Continuous writing is key; don’t write fewer than 3 times.
- Ignore grammar, spelling, and sentence structure.
- If you run out of things to say, repeat previous content.
- Be aware that feeling sad immediately afterward is possible, but that your feelings generally improve over time.

**Acknowledgments:** This tool is adapted from Sexton and Sexton, 2001, and Bryan Sexton’s course. The wording has been changed from health care workers to clergy and religious leaders. There is substantial evidence that expressive writing improves psychological well-being, physical health, and general functioning.
Clergy and religious leaders often face burnout and stressors that are hard to discuss openly. In the next three sessions, write about a stressful event. Explore your deepest emotions and thoughts. You can write about one experience or multiple ones. Connect it to your career, relationship with God, other relationships, childhood, parents, identity, or aspirations. Delve into your feelings and reactions. Share significant experiences you haven’t discussed much with others. Each session should be 20 minutes and ideally you will write for 20 minutes today, tomorrow, and the next day.
How did your last session of writing go? Today, we want you to continue writing about a job-related stressful situation for 20 minutes. This is the story of your experience with emotional exhaustion. It could be the same topic that you wrote about during the last session or it could be something different. Again today, we really want you to explore your very deepest emotions and thoughts. Please write for 20 minutes.
Today marks the final day of writing. Delve deep into your personal burnout story – emotions, lessons, and how it influences your present and future. You have 20 minutes to capture your thoughts and feelings, so embrace this opportunity to wrap it up however feels right.
References:


WANT TO LEARN MORE ABOUT OUR RESOURCES FOR CLERGY WELL-BEING?

Since 2007, the Clergy Health Initiative has been gathering valuable data on the mental, spiritual, and physical well-being issues specific to United Methodist clergy in North Carolina. Our mission is simple but important: we’re here to support you and those who have your back, so you can do God’s work with energy, creativity, and insight. Our research-based recommendations are designed to help pastors like you maximize your health, so you can thrive in your ministry and in life - because we know that when you’re at your best, amazing things can happen. Remember, you are not alone - we advocate for your well-being alongside denominational officials and fellow clergy leaders. Let’s join forces to achieve wholeness together. Scan the barcode below to learn more: