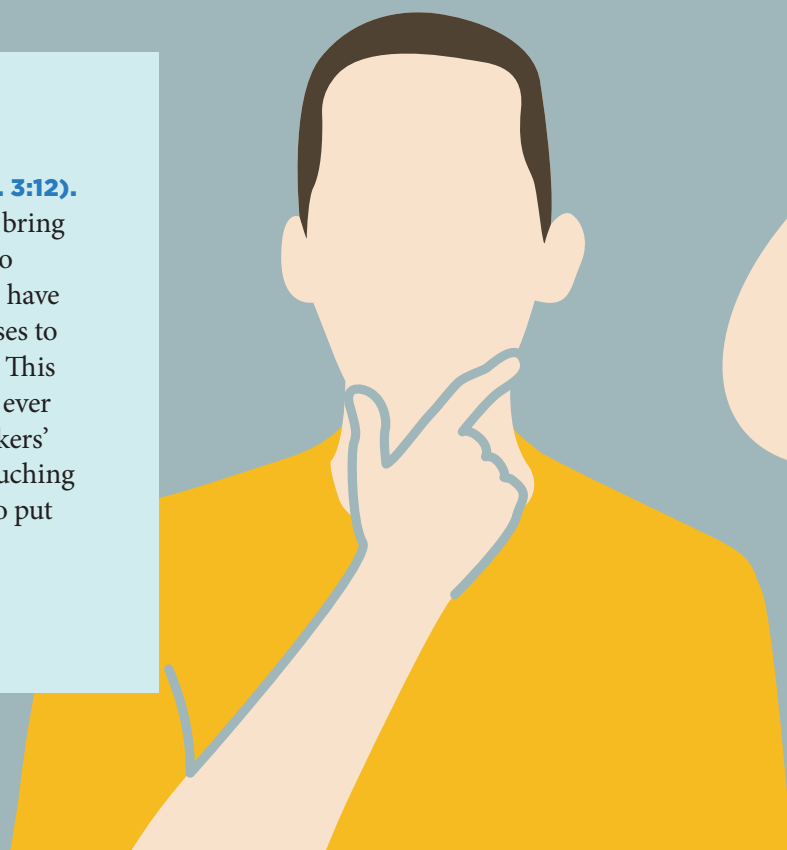


What We Heard: Church Workers Speak on Wellness

EVERY CHURCH WORKER SUFFERS (2 TIM. 3:12).

It can't be avoided. We want to be there to bring the Gospel of Christ and care for those who bear the cross (1 PETER 4:10). To that end, we have reached out to our workers and their spouses to find out what kind of help they need most. This has resulted in the largest study of its kind ever carried out by the LCMS. Our church workers' suggestions are godly, helpful and often touching and selfless. We are already hard at work to put their advice into practice.

- Rev. Dr. Matthew Harrison,
president of the LCMS



IMAGES: GETTY IMAGES, LIGHTSTOCK

WHY WE CARE

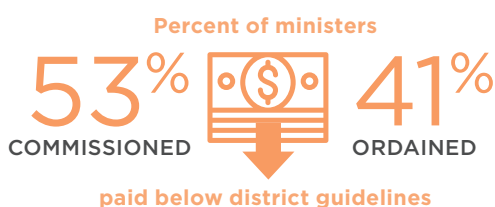
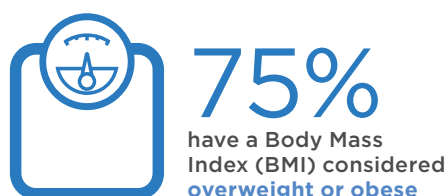
In 2016, THE SYNOD IN CONVENTION PASSED FIVE RESOLUTIONS

— including 2016 Res. 18-05, “To Encourage District Presidents, Circuit Visitors, and Congregations to Utilize Resources Already Established for Ministerial Wellness” — to address worker wellness.

In 2017, LCMS RESEARCH CONDUCTED A SURVEY

of the well-being of church workers and their spouses.

NOTE: Many of these statistics were also made available in the January 2019 worker wellness insert to *Reporter*, but we are providing them again to reiterate the need for this discussion with our church workers. Please visit blogs.lcms.org/2018/reporter-insert-church-worker-wellness to view the January insert for more detail and other statistics not included here.



In 2019, CHURCH WORKERS WERE INVITED to sign up for worker wellness focus groups.



* Of married church workers.

THE WORKERS SPOKE ...

... AND WE LISTENED. The nine themes below were mentioned often among the workers and their spouses throughout worker wellness focus group discussions. Nearly every one of the 25 groups repeatedly touched on these needs without being prompted by the facilitators. Since these themes are obviously heavy on church workers' minds, ministry leaders now have a clearer guide for how best to care for workers and their family members.

WE NEED to be in each other's lives ... eating together ... talking ... listening ... praying.



WORKERS IMAGINE a culture in the Synod composed of mutual support and encouragement, where workers care for one another. Rather than competing with one another, church workers want to rally around each other, leave behind judgmental attitudes and make sure no one is isolated.

NOT ONLY THAT, but workers ask that those in the Synod rework their definition of "normal," so that workers are more comfortable seeking care without fear or shame that they aren't meeting their church body's expectations.

I CONSTANTLY FIGHT the lie that I should not be in this position. The thought of admitting I need help is just one more thing to make me feel unqualified.

1 A CHANGE IN THE CULTURE OF THE SYNOD

'WE NEED...'

2

CARE PROVIDED AT THE LOCAL LEVEL

WE WANT someone who walks alongside us and understands, not someone who just occasionally checks in.

WORKERS ALL AGREE that they do need care. They also agree that it's best done at the local level, with care and support available from the people around them. Who best to be

responsible for the care of the worker than the church or ministry to which they're called and the other church workers around them?



WE NEED recommendations for trustworthy resources that we can access in our own neck of the woods!

SINCE WORKERS often care for themselves last, they need help finding local resources so they can access the right kind of care from the right provider at the right time, on their own. Most helpful would be vetted, updated lists that are easily and readily available anytime.

3

RELATIONSHIPS MORE THAN PROGRAMS



RELATIONSHIPS last over time, but programs lack stability and come and go quickly! We need more supportive mentoring relationships.

WE ARE ALL CREATED to be in relationship. It's no surprise, then, that when it comes to care and support, the workers clamored for personal, relational care from fellow workers and trusted professionals, rather than generic programs that are intended for a broad audience.

BUT WE LOVE highly relational programs like PALS, DOXOLOGY, Grace Place and even Concordia Plan Services. We need more like this!

OF COURSE, not all programs are bad. Several were praised in the focus groups for their mentoring/coaching model, local opportunities, and high quality of care and services. The workers hope that these kinds of programs and experiences can be made even more accessible to all workers, not just those new to the field.

4

NON-REPORTING CAREGIVERS

IN ORDER TO FEEL comfortable sharing or admitting that I have a need, I have to know with certainty that the caregiver is trustworthy and that my call won't be jeopardized.

MANY WORKERS EXPRESSED a great need to have someone whose role is to provide personal, attentive care to them and their families. Unfortunately, there's a high level of distrust between church workers and a lot of fear that, by talking to someone about their challenges, they might lose their call.

HOW ABOUT a person that could serve as a 'worker chaplain,' providing pastoral care and counseling especially for spiritual and emotional issues among workers? But seriously, only if they don't report to my district president!

CHURCH WORKERS WANT to be at their best in order to serve their congregations and ministries well. This is why so many in the focus groups stressed that care for workers needs to be proactive to ensure that all church workers and spouses meet with someone regularly. The groups repeatedly mentioned ideas for district or even more local chaplains/deaconesses — perhaps a team of them — that can offer a high level of personal care to workers without the burden of reporting to the district president about the worker.

5

RECOGNITION AND CONNECTION

WE DON'T WANT to feel lonely, forgotten and disconnected anymore. Sometimes we feel that we're only cared about for the sake of our call, but we want to know we're cared about because we're human.

CHURCH WORK IS a lonely profession for many, but workers of all kinds desire quality social interactions. Sadly, it is difficult for most workers to develop friendships within their churches and ministries due to the nature of the one-way relationship. Spouses of workers are often quite lonely as well and feel they have very few options for personal friends or even spiritual support.

BEING A commissioned worker often means feeling second class and left out.



WHILE MOST WORKERS seem to struggle with feelings of isolation, commissioned workers in particular stressed that they feel less appreciated and recognized both in their congregations and at the Synod level. Many times, they automatically assume that resources or programs from the Synod are intended only for pastors, unless it explicitly includes a mention of commissioned workers.

6

TO BUILD HEALTHY CHURCHES, SCHOOLS, MINISTRIES

MY WELL-BEING may affect my church, but even more the health of my church affects my own well-being — we're one and the same!



CHURCH WORKERS put their all into their vocation, so it's typical to see that the health of a church worker's congregation or ministry directly relates to their sense of vocational well-being. The focus groups also noted that a church or ministry's health also greatly impacts how well that ministry can care for its workers — so it's easy to see the connection. Especially for many pastors, if their church is doing well, they feel they are healthy, too. *And vice versa.*

I REALLY BELIEVE the people in my church and ministry have good intentions — they just perhaps lack the awareness or knowledge needed to support me. Can the Synod teach and train our lay leaders?

MOST WORKERS put the best construction on the intentions of those for whom they care. They believe that the people want to love and support those they've called, but they just don't know quite how to show it. Still, there are many other church workers who don't feel secure or cared for in their current call, perhaps because of unrealistic expectations (time, duties, results), demanding or burdensome individuals, or the tendency to treat the pastor as a scapegoat for the church's problems.

7

COMMUNICATION: AWARENESS AND ADVOCACY

WE NOW KNOW that it's important to care for ourselves even as we care for those in our churches and ministries, but how can this information be shared with our people?

THROUGHOUT the focus group discussions, workers reiterated that the Synod is doing well in raising awareness among workers, but it's the ministries and congregations that truly need to know how to care for their workers. Some of the workers explained that it may be helpful to remind ministries that worker care is a stewardship issue.

IT CAN BE AWKWARD for workers to discuss their needs with their churches and ministries. They need someone else to speak up for them, both generally and specifically. Focus group participants wondered if the Synod and districts might provide training for ministry leaders and direct them to helpful resources for their church workers. Not only that, but workers are hopeful that those entities might also advocate for workers, especially when it comes to compensation, time off and access to resources.

IF WORKERS SPEAK up for themselves, it comes off as self-serving — and we certainly don't want to come across that way!



8

FINANCIAL ASSISTANCE

MANY OF US just find ourselves in mathematically impossible financial situations, and we are in need of financial assistance to help us get our footing.

FINANCES CAN BE A CHALLENGE, church worker or not. Workers realize that many churches and ministries cannot afford to offer them better salaries, health care, retirement and so on. Financial well-being, however, is unique among church-worker needs in that the major problems are beyond the worker's ability to change. In most situations, they are unable to "take on more hours" or get a second job in order to make ends meet. Most workers are underpaid for their skill level and workload, and the problem is being compounded as costs for health care are being pushed onto the workers while young workers are burdened with significant student debt.

THE TOUGHEST WORK is often being done in the places that can pay the least, like dying congregations, inner-city churches, immigrant ministry, etc.

THE WORKERS largely realize that the Synod itself is not full of money, but they believe that the most effective way to care for workers is to invest in the workers themselves, regardless of their location and ministry. Many churches and ministries are not able to pay their workers what they fully need, so workers mentioned several ideas and options for closing the gap, like helping to alleviate student loan debt, providing salary assistance for ministries that can't afford to pay their church workers what they need, and helping church workers with high health-care deductibles and premiums.



Continued on Page 4

9

TO BE REMINDED OF OUR IDENTITY IN CHRIST

MANY OF US FEEL inadequate in our call to ministry due to our various struggles, while others of us find self-worth in our calling and accomplishments. In both cases, we need regular reminders that our identity is in Christ alone.

WE NEED TIME away — truly away — to lose our identity in our call and find it in Christ again.

AS THE EARLIER STATISTICS INDICATE, many church workers and their spouses do not have someone providing them with spiritual care. This means they are not regularly offered pastoral reminders of their identity in Christ. Part of spiritual well-being for workers and their families means being connected with personal pastoral care that includes confession and absolution.



FOCUS GROUP participants explained why so many church workers don't take regular breaks, days off or vacations. They noted that many find their worth in their ability to perform without taking a break, while others pointed to a lack of financial or time resources as a reason not to rest or spend time away from their work. Many workers only have one day off per week, and they often don't even take it. Vacations usually center on visiting family members who live far away. Some workers fear they won't have a job when they return. Regardless of the reason, workers agree that time away to refresh in the Gospel and reconnect with their Lord in worship and prayer is of utmost importance.

Meeting Worker Needs

WE'VE HEARD FROM CHURCH WORKERS and continue to consider how to add and improve resources to better serve our precious pastors, teachers, deaconesses, musicians, DCEs and others. Many resources are already available at

lcms.org/wellness, and more are being added all the time. Continue to check the worker wellness website regularly for updates, as well as concordiaplans.org. Below is a sample of some of the resources listed on lcms.org/wellness:



SPIRITUAL WELL-BEING

- Devotional videos to strengthen and encourage *Lutheran Hour Ministries*
- Video devotions by LCMS President Rev. Dr. Matthew C. Harrison
- Pastoral devotional life *DOXOLOGY*
- Worker-to-worker devotions lcms.org/wellness

CONGREGATIONAL WELL-BEING

- VisionPath, a program that helps congregations align ministry purpose *Lutheran Church Extension Fund*
- Worker's compensation tool *Concordia Plan Services*
- Video courses on stress, worry, mentoring and conflict *Lutheran Hour Ministries*

CONTACT INFORMATION
Worker Wellness
workerwellness@lcms.org
 888-843-5267

EMOTIONAL WELL-BEING

- Dealing with pornography *DOXOLOGY*
- Helpful questions when seeking a counselor
- "I Trust When Dark My Road: A Lutheran View of Depression" by Rev. Todd Peperkorn

PHYSICAL WELL-BEING

- Church Worker Wellness Series: Vacation *KFUO Radio*
- Recipes and fitness *Concordia Plan Services*
- Women's health videos *Grace Place Wellness Ministries*

INTELLECTUAL WELL-BEING

- Sermon on mental health by Rev. Dr. Herbert C. Mueller Jr.
- "Four Faces of a Mentor" *LCMS Pacific Southwest District*
- Additional resources *Concordia Theological Seminary, Fort Wayne, and Concordia Seminary, St. Louis*

RELATIONAL WELL-BEING

- Writings about relational well-being by Deaconess Heidi Goehmann
- "Relational well-being and Romans 1" *Grace Place Wellness Ministries*
- Articles and resources *Ambassadors of Reconciliation*

FINANCIAL WELL-BEING

- Rostered church worker mortgage loans *Lutheran Federal Credit Union*
- Serving church workers *Soldiers and Veterans of the Cross*
- Online learning video lessons on financial basics *Lutheran Church Extension Fund*

VOCATIONAL WELL-BEING

- "Church Workers in Mission: Pastor to Pastor" videos *Lutheran Women's Missionary League*
- Sabbatical resources *Ministry Sabbatical Resources*
- Ways of nurturing church workers *Concordia University, Nebraska*

lcms.org/wellness