# Resources in Support of Sabbath

(This is a dynamic document and a living resource. If you have additional resources to suggest, please be in touch with Alliance of ACMs or Council of Conference Ministers leadership.)

*Oh, feed me this day, Holy Spirit, with*
*the fragrance of the fields and the*
*freshness of the oceans which you have*
*made, and help me to hear and to hold*
*in all dearness those exacting and wonderful*
*words of our Lord Jesus Christ, saying:*
*"Follow me.*[1]

## Worship Resources

UCC Worship Ways and Sermon Seeds are available for local church use:

Worship Ways provides original liturgies written in English and in Spanish. Sermon Seeds is an exegetical reflection to spark a sermon that lay leaders often use when asked to fill in for their pastor on vacation.

Rev. Dr. Cheryl Lindsay, UCC Minister for Worship and Theology, suggests reliving your pastor's "greatest hits!" In other words, you might reuse sermons from the pastor that really resonated with the congregation. That way, it's still a good message, contextualized for your particular community, and it reinforces the connection between your pastor and the congregation

## Devotionals and Online Retreats

Sign up for Abolition Advent Reflection Emails
For many of us, the word "abolition" might have mostly historical connotations. We think of Abolition as the movement to free enslaved Africans, brought into life with the Emancipation Proclamation. But, if we take seriously Rev. Dr. Wil Gafney's insight that,"we are still trying to do Church in the midst of enslaving paradigms," then we also have the opportunity to explore what abolition can mean to us here and now.

Jan Richardson's Illuminated Advent Online Retreat
In a chaotic time, the Illuminated retreat will offer a space of elegant simplicity. Intertwining reflection, art, music, and community, this four-week online retreat provides a distinctive opportunity to journey through Advent and Christmas in contemplation and conversation with others along the way. This online retreat is not about adding one more thing to your holiday

[1] [i] Mary Oliver, "Six Recognitions of the Lord," *Thirst*, 2006

schedule. It is about helping you find spaces for reflection that draw you deep into a season that shimmers with mystery and possibility.

## Well-Being Assessment

Rev. Elizabeth Dilley, Minister and Team Leader for the UCC MESA Team, recently shared this **well-being assessment.** Rev. Laura Stephens-Reed of Searching for the Called developed it based on Martin Seligman's PERMA model (positive emotions, sense of engagement, health of relationships, overarching sense of meaning, and feelings of accomplishment). MESA was given permission to share it broadly. We invite you to take the assessment and consider what steps you might take to increase your well-being. Dilley writes, *We know many of the things that help advance well-being (rest and sabbath, communities of practice, spiritual direction, coaching, therapy, art/music/sports/nature, more rest and sabbath, prayer).* Please let your ACM know if there are ways we can support you in accessing more of those resources.

## Counseling

Individuals enrolled in the UCC Pension Boards Health Care Plan have access to the Member Assistance Program + Work/Life Program, or MAP+Work/Life, offered through West Health Advocate Solutions. This is a no-cost benefit that provides confidential access to a Licensed Professional Counselor or Work/Life Specialist. Through in-person visits, and unlimited, confidential phone consultations, these specialists can walk members through life's temporary setbacks.

## Financial Aid

Eligible congregations may apply to the Lilly Endowment Clergy Renewal Program for grants of up to $50,000 each to support a renewal program for their pastor. Up to $15,000 of the grant may be used for congregational expenses associated with the renewal program. Details and application materials for the 2023 programs are now available.

Emergency financial assistance may be available through the UCC Pension Boards as one-time grants to assist with unforeseen circumstances that create financial demands. To apply for an Emergency Grant, contact your Area Converence Minister,Conference Minister, or the Director of Ministerial Assistance at the Pension Boards by email at ministerialassistance@pbucc.org or by calling 1.800.642.6543, ext. 2716.

# Books and Resources

Rest as Resistance book recommended by Rev. Dr. Chris Davies.

Excerpt:

*Our collective rest will not be easy. All of culture is collaborating for us not to rest. I understand this deeply. We are sleep-deprived because the systems view us as machines, but bodies are not machines. Our bodies are a site of liberation. We are divine and our rest is divine. There is synergy, interconnectedness, and deep communal healing within our rest movement. I believe rest, sleep, naps, daydreaming, and slowing down can help us all wake up to see the truth of ourselves. Rest is a healing portal to our deepest selves. Rest is care. Rest is radical.*

*We must stand and lay firmly in the space of creating a life filled with rest and radical care, even amid oppression. Rest Is Resistance is our tagline and mantra. Our call. Rest is a form of resistance because it disrupts and pushes back against capitalism and white supremacy. Both these toxic systems refuse to see the inherent divinity in human beings and have used bodies as a tool for production, evil, and destruction for centuries. Grind culture has made us all human machines, willing and ready to donate our lives to a capitalist system that thrives by placing profits over people. The Rest Is Resistance movement is a connection and a path back to our true nature. We are stripped down to who we really were before the terror of capitalism and white supremacy. We are enough. We are divine.*

*If we are not resting, we will not make it. I need us to make it. We must thrive.* (pp.7-8)

Living the Sabbath book by Norman Wirzba and Wendell Berry (foreward)

Excerpt:

*From a scriptural point of view, Sabbath observance is a matter of life and death. …[If we fast forward in Exodus,] we are told that Sabbath observance reflects a covenant between the nation and God, a covenant testifying to God's creative and refreshing power.*[2] *…Indeed, Sabbath observance is one of the key practices that will set Israel apart from all other nations.* (p. 30)

Burnout: The Secret to Unlocking the Stress Cycle, by Drs. Emily and Amelia Nagoski

In their books, Drs. Nagoski explain that stress is our bodies' psychological and neurological reaction to threats. When the brain activates a stress response, it sets off hormonal and neurological changes that affect our entire body, in order to help us survive. While this is an effective evolutionary strategy for dealing with rampaging wild animals, it is much less helpful in

[2] Exodus 31:12-17

dealing with the chronic stressors of the modern era. Interestingly, their research found that simply removing the stressor is not enough to solve the problem. (That is, renewal leave alone is important, but not sufficient.) The body needs to physically process the stress – what the Nagoskis call "completing the stress cycle" – before it can be fully released. They found that there are 7 ways our bodies process stress and move back into health: physical activity, breath work, deep connection with friends and loved ones, belly laughter, crying, affectionate touch, and creative expression.[3]

## Other Conference's Approaches

From **Alexis Fuller Wright,** Designated ACM, Maine Conference:

*A year ago [from November 2022] we sent a similar letter to churches asking for up to 4 weeks of consecutive leave for their pastors, and made Clergy Pandemic Renewal (CPR) grants available to pastors to help fund their healing. The grants were paid for out of our share of Strengthen the Church offerings and they were shaped by the research from the book "Burnout: The Secret to Unlocking the Stress Cycle." Of our 30 grantees, 28 indicated that they were on the verge of quitting, only 2 have ended up departing.*

Text of the Maine Conference's Clergy Pandemic Renewal Grant Application is as follows:

**Clergy Pandemic Renewal (CPR) Grants**
**A Gift from the Maine Conference**

The last 18 months have presented extraordinary challenges for us all. You may have read about the resulting phenomenon of "The Great Resignation," the growing number of people who are burned out from the pandemic, overwhelmed by decision fatigue, and resigning from their jobs. This is not just a corporate phenomenon; it's happening among our clergy.

Throughout the pandemic, our clergy have offered front-line spiritual care and led our communities through massive adaptive change, often while trying to meet the complex needs of their own families. The resulting level of burnout among our clergy is deeply concerning.

We in the Maine Conference want to support our clergy in finding the support and renewal they need to sustain their critical leadership.

**The Science**

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[3] Text credit: Maine Conference, UCC

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**How can we respond?**

*Churches*

Not all pastors are experiencing burnout, but many are. Our hope is that each minister will be granted 4 weeks of additional, one-time, paid renewal leave between now and the end of 2021. The burnout caused by this pandemic points to the reality that our ministers are not under a standard level of stress and therefore they need more than the standard amount of leave to maintain a healthy, long-term pastorate. Church leadership can support their pastor by:

- Checking in with their pastor to see how they are doing emotionally and spiritually.
- Offering additional paid leave and encouraging their pastor to take it. (Pastors are notorious for prioritizing everyone else's needs over their own.)
- Inviting lay members to preach in their pastor's absence or joining another church's livestreamed worship, if funds for a guest preacher are not available.
- Continuing the work of the church in their pastor's absence.

*The Maine Conference*

Effective immediately, the Maine Conference is offering Clergy Pandemic Renewal (CPR) grants of up to $800 per authorized minister. These grants are to help fund opportunities for healing and restoration, with priority given to those whose proposal includes activities that correspond to the 7 ways to complete the stress cycle, listed above. Possibilities for these funds could include:

- Travel and lodging for a retreat.
- Time with a coach, spiritual director, or therapist.
- Bodywork, such as massage, reiki, or reflexology.
- Help becoming physically active, like a gym membership, online yoga, new hiking gear, or SUPing lessons.
- Creative classes, such painting, gardening, stained-glass window making, or cooking.
- Tickets to an improv show or a Netflix subscription to watch your favorite comedian.
- Additional childcare to free up quiet space.
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Since deep connection with friends is one of the ways to complete the stress cycle, it would be appropriate, and is in fact encouraged, for people to pool their grant funding to finance a group experience, if in keeping with Covid safety protocols.

CPR grants are meant to offer immediate relief to those who are suffering burnout, and additional burnout prevention resources will be made available as soon as possible.
Clergy, please use the following form to apply for a Clergy Pandemic Renewal (CPR) Grant.

**Maine Conference Clergy Pandemic Renewal Grant Application**

Name: Ministry Setting:

Association: Email:

Home Address:

City/Town: Zip Code:

1. How would you describe your current level of stress/burnout?

2. Please share your renewal plan, and include how it will utilize any of the 7 ways to complete the stress cycle identified by Drs. Amelia and Emily Nagoski. (Physical activity, breath work, deep connection with friends and loved ones, belly laughter, crying, affectionate touch, and creative expression)

3. What is the projected cost (itemized) of your plan? Please note that the maximum grant amount is $800.

4. If your plan exceeds the grant maximum ($800), do you need information about other possible resources?

We are grateful for the opportunity to collaborate with you in the holy work of restoration. If you feel called to partner with us in offering gifts to support other pastors and congregations, your gifts can be sent to the Maine Conference and designated for the “Strengthen the Church” offering.

Please email this form to_____*x*_____. All responses will be kept confidential.