

**“Their purpose is to teach people wisdom and discipline, to help them understand the insights of the wise.” (Proverbs 1:2)**

This next week I will be out of the office through Thursday to attend the national ELCA Leadership Conference in Phoenix. This is an event that occurs about every three years for all ELCA rostered leaders where we gather with the presiding Bishop, Elizabeth Eaton.

This year's theme is "Rekindle the gift within you" (2 Timothy 1:6). We all need to be reminded of the call to ministry and hear that we are needed even though we run in to all sorts of obstacles in our ministry settings that challenge our love in serving the Lord. It is good to hear that we are not alone in our struggles and it is also important that we share and celebrate the exciting "God moments" in our settings. Please pray for me and all your other clergy and rostered leaders from all over the country. The reality is... we are struggling!

This Triannual event is an opportunity for pastor's from around the country to remember, reclaim, rekindle and revive ourselves. We will gather with colleagues from across the church for fellowship, renewal, continuing education, worship, Bible study and refreshment for your spirit. This is not a vacation. It is an event where we network and share our stories of ministry.

Each day will begin in worship as we center ourselves around our theme. Each morning, we will offer Bible studies and keynote speakers. The afternoon hours will offer a variety of individual options from activity in the Interaction Center to workshops and caucus times. There will be professional presenters from around the world sharing with us what is happening in the Christian church from all denominations.

Barna research, a Christian research organization, show that pastors are struggling with burnout at unprecedented levels. In their reports, it shows that in March 2022, "the percentage of pastors who have considered quitting full-time ministry within the past year sits at 42 percent." This sharp rise was first seen in November 2021, with the number of pastors who reported that they were considering resignation up nine percentage points from January 2021.

Most pastors enter ministry because they love people and the Gospel and want to offer hope to other people. I know that is one reason why I still do this form of work. Pastors recognize that it is a great honor to walk with their church in good times and in bad. But after the past few years, pastors are exhausted and discouraged. In our weekly conference text studies we talk about this all the time.

The top reported reasons for clergy burnout were the same ones that people in the population at large face: stress, loneliness and political division. But these stressors affect pastors in a unique way. Pastors bear not only their own pain but also the weight of an entire community's grief, divisions and anxieties. We are charged with the task of continuing to love and care for even those within their church who disagree with them vehemently and vocally. These past years required us to make decisions many of us were not prepared for that affected the health

and spiritual formation of our communities, and the decisions we made would likely mean that someone in their church would feel hurt or marginalized. Some of the most recent difficulties include difficulties — the pandemic, church members getting sick and dying, political polarization, church members losing jobs and struggling financially, disputes over race, and the 2020 election.

I think what pastors need right now are events like the one this week to hear words of grace and kindness. **I thank you... Spirit of Hope** for the love and kindness you show for one another and for me. Yes.. times have been difficult for us too. It may be hard for you to understand what the life of a pastor is like, but please know we are truly human and ministry is one of the most difficult fields of work to be in these days. Our discouragement is also mirrored those of others in helping professions such as education and the medical field.

I hope that if we have learned anything through these years of the pandemic and afterward that all human beings are mortal and we all are made to live in community like the church. The Gospel of Jesus Christ gives us all a renewed vision for hospitality, grace and the realization that we all fall short for being perfect.

I will share with you some of the highlights of the week upon my return. God Bless you all this week!

Peace,

Pastor Tony