

## ABSTRACT

### THE IMPACT OF SABBATICALS ON BURNOUT PRECURSORS AND TENURE AMONG NAZARENE CLERGY IN THE UNITED STATES

by

James Phillip Fuller

The Church confronts a dilemma. Parish ministers leave pastorates (and ministry) due to burnout and other factors. High pastoral turnover rates are counterproductive to church effectiveness. This qualitative study used a researcher-designed, semi-structured interview to gather data from thirty United States Nazarene pastors on a presumed positive impact by sabbaticals on burnout precursors and tenure.

The study finds that Nazarene sabbaticals have a positive reactive and preventative impact on tenure and minimize burnout precursors. Sabbaticals lengthen local parish tenure but occasionally help pastors prepare for new pastorates. Findings include the six components of an effective sabbatical.

DISSERTATION APPROVAL

This is to certify that the dissertation entitled  
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THE IMPACT OF SABBATICALS ON BURNOUT PRECUSORS  
AND TENURE AMONG NAZARENE CLERGY IN THE UNITED STATES

A Dissertation

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Asbury Theological Seminary

In Partial Fulfillment  
Of the Requirements for the Degree  
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by

James Phillip Fuller

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## CHAPTER 1

### UNDERSTANDING THE PROBLEM

#### Background

Troy Phelan is a most intriguing central character to the story of John Grisham's best-selling novel, The Testament. Phelan's last will and testament, and the family rivalry over it, drive the story. Phelan's legendary wealth has not satisfied his quest for meaning, and he finds himself now near the end of his life in the midst of dark despair deepened by the new knowledge of his terminal illness. He describes himself with these words: "Down to the last day, even the last hour now. I'm an old man, lonely and unloved, sick and hurting and tired of living. I am ready for the hereafter; it has to be better than this" (8). This evident and powerful despair sums up the experiences of his life.

What makes Grisham's story so compelling is that Phelan's described experience is not rare. Many can relate to such moments of dark despair. Sadly, even among those whose very job is to be purveyors of hope, such despair exists. As David Fisher indicates, "being a pastor today is more difficult than anytime in memory" (7). The reality of the challenges of ministry do not take long to surface.

I was asked to give the charge to a pastor at an installation service. Fresh from seminary and recently ordained, it was his first call. After the service he said to me, "Thanks, I needed that. During the morning service today, I was thinking that this is really a lousy job." (96)

Greg Asimakoupoulos writes, in Leadership, "Warning: the list of endangered species is growing. To bald eagles, koalas, and spotted owls, add another: ordained pastors energized by what they do," and claims that the majority of American ministers are suffering from burnout (123). Clergy, at an all too alarming rate, can identify with Phelan. Ministry can be particularly challenging, challenging enough that each year an

increasing number of ministers choose to leave ministry for other livelihoods. Ministry can produce burnout that can, in turn, force far too many to leave ministry despite the fact that burnout is preventable or at the very least manageable.

Ministry burnout is a particularly complex problem, but one tool in the burnout management toolbox is the intentional break from the work of ministry also known as sabbatical. An important, presumed link exists between burnout recovery and intentional sabbaticals. The study of this link is at the core of this research. This study is an attempt to answer the question, Are sabbaticals helpful in the prevention or management of burnout or burnout precursors thereby positively impacting tenure?

### **Problem Formulation**

Ministry can be a very rewarding vocation. It has significant high points and moments of great celebration, but the all-too-real human beings who invest their energy in the work of ministry expose themselves daily to a great risk. Since 1970 clergy have increasingly become susceptible to an emotional, physical, spiritual problem now commonly referred to as burnout. The resulting impact of burnout affects performance, energy levels, family relationships, overall ministry effectiveness, attitude, sinful behaviors, and even tenure. An increasing number of clergy are experiencing burnout to such a great degree that they are leaving local parish ministry. Burnout is effectively reducing the number of people who remain in local parish ministry settings for the duration of their ministry years. Burnout has a major negative impact on attitude toward ministry. The impact of burnout on clergy is obviously not in the best interest of the clergy nor in the best interest of the churches in which they serve, which lose trained and highly effective ministers to something preventable.

I served as pastor on the Maumee Valley Zone of the Northwestern Ohio District

of the Church of the Nazarene from 1991 until 2000. During this time, the pastors in the area typically reflected the kind of transition that is common among Nazarene clergy. I observed this problem firsthand in that context. Of the nine pastors serving nine congregations in the summer 1991, only two were still in pastoral service in the year 2000. Of the seven who were no longer in ministry only one had left ministry at an appropriate retirement age. Six (66 percent) left pastoral ministry before retirement age. Many factors influenced their reduced tenures, including burnout and its related symptoms. None of the six benefited from a sabbatical experience.

Burnout is a complex phenomenon. Methods of dealing effectively with burnout are as multifaceted as the problem itself. These methods must, by the very nature of the problem require a systemic approach to solve such burnout. The exact purpose of this dissertation was to study the relationship between a program of planned, personal sabbatical and attitudes toward pastoral retention from the perspective of the local pastor in a Nazarene church context. This study does not purport to review an entire system by which burnout either occurs or can be prevented or reversed, but its focus was to look at one specific burnout prevention and/or restoration tool about which little field research has been completed. The clear assumption in the literature is that sabbaticals are helpful, but such remains yet unproven. Burnout occurs, and it is a problem for clergy and churches. The reasons for it are complex. If sabbaticals help stem the negative impact burnout has on tenure, then by all means the church and its ministers should avail themselves of this tool.

Not all are convinced that sabbaticals are helpful. One telephone conversation with a Nazarene district superintendent in the Midwest revealed a bias that sabbaticals are guilt offerings for pastors who have committed some sin (probably sexual in nature) and

should thereby be discouraged. He explained that all pastors he had known who had taken sabbaticals had done so only to return to their parishes and be confronted with evidence of some sexual sin or simply to confess to some sexual sin. Sabbaticals, from his understanding, were bad news. Erroneous assumptions such as these that confuse the potential benefits of sabbaticals with loosely guarded anecdotal stories of sabbatical failures do little to advance the cause of appropriate clergy self-care. So despite such assumptions burnout remains a problem, career tenures are lower than in previous generations, and local parish tenure still hovers around three years. Sabbaticals, it is believed, can have a positive impact on clergy self-care, can extend future ministry tenure and can lengthen local parish tenures as well. The Church of the Nazarene, can proactively pursue the issue of a planned, personal sabbatical method, and thereby reduce the number of persons who step out of ministry assignments and shorten their career tenure due to burnout. The assertion of such benefits implied to sabbaticals is at the core of this study, which is a discovery of the value of sabbaticals for the Church, particularly for its ministers, but also for itself.

The assertion of the benefit of sabbaticals, however, remains largely unsubstantiated. Little study has been completed on ministerial sabbaticals. What literature does exist on the topic can generally be summarized as follows: ministry is tough and, on occasion, leads to burnout, which can have devastating consequences on the health and well-being of ministers and can ultimately cause them to leave parish ministry—conclusion that is best prevented if possible. Sabbaticals are one part of the solution.

More specifically, the beneficial impact of a sabbatical on future ministry tenure and on local parish tenure remain only a hypothesis. The general assumption in the

literature is that sabbaticals are, or at least can be, fruitful experiences for ministers and can thereby enhance ministers' attitudes about ministry. This assumption is precisely the focal point of this investigation. One intent of this study was to ground the theory that sabbaticals are helpful, particularly as they impact burnout and tenure. Several methods of research are helpful in grounding theory, however, a descriptive qualitative method was chosen for this study. This study is timely due to the increased interest in sabbaticals as evidenced by the increased number of recent publications on the topic by groups such as the Alban Institute and by specific examples such as the action of the 1997 and 2001 General Assemblies of the Church of the Nazarene (which adopted resolutions calling on churches to consider the possibility of sabbaticals for its ministers). Much of the current literature *assumes* that sabbaticals are helpful in restoring those who have experienced burnout and in burnout prevention but with little, if any, empirical evidence to this end. This study was an effort to reflect qualitatively on the impact a planned sabbaticals have on the ministers who take them and to discover in particular if a sabbatical aids the ministers' attitudes toward ministry, particularly the ministers' understanding of a lifelong call (career tenure) and in coping with burnout precursors and stress.

### **Supporting Literature**

While little in the literature addresses the specific issue at hand, a strong body of literature more generally addresses the themes related to this study. In particular, the literature addresses the topic of burnout, and reviews a significant number of sources and studies on sabbaticals. A few recent sources address the relationship between burnout and ministerial tenure. This study was an effort to delve further into that specific relationship.

### **Theological Foundation**

The theological foundations for this study relate to practical theology (particularly



leadership development) and biblical foundations.

### **Practical Theology**

The development of leadership skills and abilities along with such practical issues such as time management, resource management, and ministry effectiveness, serve a necessary foundation in this study.

### **Biblical Foundations**

The Bible does not specifically advocate the practice of a sabbatical. The term sabbatical is not a biblical term. The Scripture does, however, promote the concept of Sabbath rest. A strong relationship exists between the biblical concept of the Sabbath and the notion of a sabbatical. The Sabbath is characterized by a progressive revelation throughout the Old and New Testaments, starting as a non-specific seventh day of rest (Gen. 1-2), to various specific levitical Sabbath laws, to the liberating statement of Jesus that “[t]he Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath” (Mark 2:27). What a proper understanding of the Sabbath adds to this study is the notion that proper rest and regular periods of renewal are significant in the life of every human being and may be a particular need of every Christian minister.

Numerous biblical examples conceptually illustrate burnout. Paul writes about the danger of becoming weary in well doing (Gal. 6:9). Moses’ father-in-law, Jethro, noting Moses’ exhaustion and the evidence of burnout symptoms/precursors in his life, encourages Moses to create for himself a more sustainable workload by delegating to others the overload of his work (Exod. 18:13-27). Elijah is perhaps the quintessential example. After the challenges of Mt. Carmel, combined with the physical and emotional exhaustion he felt, Elijah plummets into a remarkable burnout experience. The most poignant phrase is Elijah’s: “I have had enough Lord. Take my life” (2 Kings 19:4).

The life of Jesus is replete with numerous examples of his emphasis on rest and renewal. Perhaps none is more obvious than the one recorded in Mark 6, which includes his plan for periodic times of renewal. Busy ministers often overlook this important component of ministry.

A proper understanding of Jesus' injunction in Mark 12:33, "To love him [God] with all your heart, with all your understanding and with all your strength, and to love your neighbor as *yourself* [emphasis mine] is more important than all burnt offerings and sacrifices," is critical for a proper understanding of the nature of the sabbatical and the role it can play in burnout prevention. Self-care through rest and renewal is, according to the example of Jesus, an important component of ministry.

### **Context of the Study**

The context of this study is the Church of the Nazarene in the United States. The Church of the Nazarene is a denomination within the Wesleyan-Arminian tradition that traces its formal beginnings to the late 1800s and early 1900s, the result of mergers of various holiness groups in 1907 and 1908. Nazarene pastors average career tenures of just ten years and have an average tenure of 3 ½ years in local congregations.

### **Purpose and Research Questions**

In view of the problem of diminished/shortened tenure among Nazarene clergy (due to burnout among other factors), the purpose of this dissertation was to study the impact of sabbaticals on burnout precursor factors and tenure (particularly future tenure and local parish tenure) from the perspective of the pastor in a Nazarene church context.

#### **Research Question #1**

In what ways does a sabbatical reduce ministerial burnout?

## **Research Question #2**

In what ways does a sabbatical enable Nazarene pastors to extend their future ministry tenure?

## **Research Question #3**

What particular elements of a sabbatical are essential to impact positively on tenure?

## **Definitions**

For the sake of clarity, the following definitions are helpful to the scope and purpose of this study.

### **Sabbatical**

For the purpose of this study sabbatical is defined as a plan for providing the minister with an intentional extended break from the responsibilities of ministry for the purpose of rest, worship, reflection, creativity, and study.

### **Sabbatical Plan**

For the purposes of this study, a sabbatical plan must include the following: (1) a minimum twenty-eight-day absence from all regular/routine ministry responsibilities, (2) intentional planning of the sabbatical prior to its inception, and (3) full participation in the sabbatical by the local church decision-making body.

### **Tenure**

Tenure is the period of time that ministers serve in their capacity as pastors in local congregations. Tenure is synonymous with career and on occasion helpful to refer to tenure as career tenure. By tenure I refer principally to the length of the career of a pastor. For example, pastors beginning ministry at age twenty-five would be expected to continue their career in ministry to age sixty-five, the typical age of retirement. This

would indicate a potential tenure of forty years in ministry. Many factors influence tenure: health, family issues, ministry needs, career opportunities, motivation, financial issues, and burnout. In an increasing number of cases, tenure is shortened by severe burnout experiences or by a confluence of burnout precursors. A focal point of this study was to describe the impact of sabbatical on tenure and specifically to answer the question of whether sabbaticals can lengthen the careers of Nazarene ministers. The impact of sabbaticals on tenure is reflected in two distinct understandings of tenure: future ministry tenure and local parish tenure.

### **Future Ministry Tenure**

For the purpose of this study, future ministry tenure refers specifically to the remaining potential portion of a minister's life that could reasonably be expected to be given to vocational ministry. This definition assumes that ministry is a lifetime calling. The obvious potential impact of sabbaticals is on *remaining* years of ministry tenure. These remaining years of career tenure are referred to by the phrase *future ministry tenure*.

### **Local Parish Tenure**

Another distinction in tenure is important. Some ministers spend an entire career in one local parish while others have spent their careers in a series of local parish tenures. This study reports the impact of sabbaticals on local parish tenure or the specific impact the sabbatical has on ministry in one particular parish context. Throughout this study the reader should take careful notice of these distinctions since the terms tenure, future ministry tenure, and local parish are not interchangeable and sabbaticals have different impacts on local parish tenure and future ministry tenure.

Burnout and its precursors obviously affect both kinds of tenure, and a goal of the

church is to increase both tenures since longer local parish tenures increase ministry effectiveness and longer future ministry tenures extend the overall ministry of the pastor.

The issue of future ministry tenure is more important than local parish tenure since the loss of ministers to the vocation has sounded an alarm for the church (Spaite 10). This does not, however, minimize the important issues associated with an appropriate lengthening of local parish tenures and the resulting impact of sabbaticals on both tenures.

### **Attitudes**

For the purpose of this study, attitude refers to the minister's emotional and intellectual mindset particularly as related to a future outlook on ministry. Attitude identifies the minister's positive (or negative) feelings, level of confidence, and degree of fulfillment in carrying out ministry. I purposefully studied the relationship between sabbaticals and attitudes toward tenure. The attitudes to which I am referring are those general dispositions of character that go to the well-being of ministers, their contentment, their ability to be people of vision and of experiencing positive human emotions. This includes, but is not limited to, the following emotional characteristics: happiness, contentment, joy, frustration, anger, and discouragement.

### **Burnout**

For the purpose of this study, burnout is defined as a progressive loss of idealism, energy, and purpose that can occur among individuals in ministry that results from an unreplenished emotional demand of helping troubled persons. Burnout results from the wide gap between personal, congregational, denominational, and family expectations and real time accomplishments. Burnout is a real and present ministry hazard.

Some measure of burnout is evident in every ministerial context. The very nature

of ministry often creates expectations that are larger than life. Ministers often complain about their inability to accomplish their tasks in any given week. The progressive nature of burnout means that while some may experience its symptoms, not all will experience its depth. In its mildest form, burnout is merely a nuisance to otherwise productive lives. In its worst cases, burnout wreaks havoc in the life of the minister, the minister's family, and the minister's parish. The burnout addressed by this study is the kind accompanied by exhaustion, cynicism, and ineffectiveness (Maslach and Leiter 17-18).

### **Description of the Project**

This project studied the relationship between a program of planned, personal sabbatical and attitudes toward pastoral retention from the perspective of the local pastor in a Nazarene church context.

### **Methodology**

This was a descriptive study using a semi-structured, researcher-designed interview. The method of this study includes the subjects selected for inclusion in this study, instruments, and means of data collection.

**Subjects.** The subjects of this study included thirty ministers from among eighty-three North American Nazarene districts ("The Church at Work" 38-39). Subjects were selected using five criteria (1) had at least ten years of ministry experience, (2) were ordained elders in the Church of the Nazarene, (3) were serving in an active role as senior pastors, (4) have completed a sabbatical of no less than twenty-eight days, and (5) have returned from the sabbatical to active ministry for at least ninety days. Subjects were identified using a snowballing technique, gathering information from colleagues and interviewees (Wiersma 300).

**Instruments and data collection.** This study used a researcher-designed, semi-

structured interview as the primary instrument for data collection (see Appendix A). The interviews elicited pertinent responses from the subjects on the research questions. The data was collected exclusively through prearranged telephone interviews. The subjects did not receive advance notice of the questions.

### **Variables**

A number of variables impacted this study. One important variable is the sabbatical. No uniform methodology for the actual practice of sabbaticals exists, including such variables as length and content. The literature records sabbaticals of varying lengths from several weeks to an entire year.

Other variables in this research project are the attitudes of the ministers toward ministry itself that resulted from their sabbatical experiences.

Other variables include organismic variables, particularly the age of each pastor. An obvious correlation exists between a pastor's proximity to retirement age and that same pastor's attitude toward continued ministry. Age is an important variable. No effort was made in this study to control the level to which each pastor had experienced burnout and to what degree. Each minister had experienced burnout or some of its symptoms in some measure. In addition, each congregation had varying degrees of support for the practice of sabbatical, and each congregation had unique expectations that influence a pastor's attitude toward ministry. Finally, in the same way that each person experiences different levels of pain at different thresholds, so too each minister's attitude is affected by personality style.

### **Delimitations and Generalizations**

A measure of control over the variables discussed above was achieved by limiting the study exclusively to North American Nazarene clergy and exclusively with senior

pastors who have taken a planned sabbatical of a minimum length of twenty-eight days and who have served in pastoral ministry for no less than ten years. Limiting the population of the study in this way provides important boundaries since theological persuasions (in this case Wesleyan-Arminian) affect ministers' outlooks particularly as they related to their sense of call (e.g., belief in a God-called ministry).

The study was motivated by an observed high rate of dropout from ministry among Nazarene clergy, hypothesizing that one element that could help reduce this rate of dropout from ministry is the practice of a planned sabbatical. This research was intentionally limited to senior pastors who have served in pastoral service for no less than ten years, whose sabbaticals were no less than twenty-eight days in length, and who have returned to active ministry for no less than ninety days after the conclusion of their sabbatical. I generalize similar outcomes if this study is conducted with a similar group of ministers.

The study did not take into account other variables that could have affected the subjects' attitudes toward ministry such as congregational strife, levels of pay, and specific length of tenure.

### **Overview of the Remaining Chapters**

Chapter 2 reviews precedents in the literature on the subjects of sabbaticals, burnout, tenure, a biblical view of the Sabbath and rest, a practical theological review of the literature on ministry, and a brief review of stress factors that affect attitudes toward ministry. Chapter 3 details the field research pursued, further identifying the instrumentation, its reliability and validity (with a detailed description of the interview questions), and a more detailed outline of the methods of data collection and data analysis. Chapter 4 focuses on the findings of the study organized around the research



hypothesis and research questions as stated in Chapter 1. Since this is predominantly a qualitative study, Chapter 4 provides a synthesis of the data analyzed. This chapter is a presentation of the findings provided by the interviews. Chapter 5 is a summary of the findings with added conclusions based on the field research. In this final chapter, I draw implications from this study on the current body of knowledge on the topic, present the limitations and unexpected findings/conclusions that resulted, and present practical applications of the findings related to the practice of sabbaticals by Nazarene pastors.

## CHAPTER 2

### PRECEDENTS IN THE LITERATURE

#### Personal Concern

This matter interests me particularly because I experienced severe burnout, and was unable to carry out the functions of pastoral ministry. Fortunately, I sought for and found help, resulting in my full return to active ministry with a fresh perspective and renewed attitude. I am a stronger pastor because of this experience (Tarjanyi 17-19). The challenges of that experience led me to hypothesize on the benefits of planned sabbatical for clergy, as opposed to my forced medical leave. I learned difficult lessons the hard way, and while the difficult lessons must be learned, a forced medical leave is not the best method. In particular, I would have preferred not to experience the clinical depression and the deep despair that accompanied it. My early presumption that the notion of the sabbatical as an effective tool in enhancing attitudes toward ministry was fully grounded in the literature was ill founded. What I discovered in the literature was that burnout and sabbaticals were seldom discussed together. A major assumption in the literature is that sabbaticals effectively treat burnout. Little if any foundation for this assumption was provided. This study attempted to redress that void.

In 1997 the General Assembly of the Church of the Nazarene adopted a resolution that encourages local churches to consider sabbaticals for their ministers. As a member of the Nazarene clergy, I found the action of the General Assembly of the Church of the Nazarene (the highest legislative body) to be encouraging and timely. While the action did not mandate clergy sabbaticals, they were strongly encouraged. This action by the General Assembly stemmed in part from a growing understanding of the pressures in ministry, particularly related to workload and value conflict (Maslach and Leiter 16).

During my sixteen years in ministry, I have noticed an observable increase in the interest in and practice of sabbaticals. Anecdotally, these sabbaticals have ranged from year-long educational ventures to shorter thirty-day respites. In some cases, pastors have taken medical leaves of absence due to fatigue and exhaustion and have referred to these as sabbaticals. Such leaves of absence have less planning attached to them than formally planned sabbaticals. Often such forced sabbaticals come too late for some pastors. Sabbaticals may be most helpful as a way to prevent such exhaustion-induced leaves, theoretically increasing the likelihood of a more productive sabbatical. Forced sabbaticals are reactive, not proactive, and part of the goal for the Church is to be more proactive on issues of ministerial health and well-being. The action of the General Assembly could move the question to the front burner for some congregations thereby providing an opportunity for the church and pastor to proactively plan for the minister's self-care.

The specific wording of the adopted resolution reads gives evidence of the Church's priorities with regard to sabbaticals.

In order to encourage the lifelong learning of the pastor in spiritual, emotional, and educational dimensions, the church board may consider supporting a sabbatical/study leave for the pastor during the seventh consecutive year of service in one congregation. (Manual 1997 76)

The wording changed slightly in the 2001 General Assembly. The force of the wording was slightly strengthened as a result of the action of the 2001 General Assembly, which changed one portion of the Manual statement from "the church board *may* [emphasis mine] consider" to "the church board, *in consultation with the district superintendent, should* [emphasis mine] consider" (Manual 2001 77). The effect was to encourage in local church boards, in even stronger language, to consider more seriously supporting a sabbatical/study leave for the pastor.

Several benefits of this resolution include

1. It raises the awareness of the issue of sabbatical for congregations to debate;
2. It shows general denominational support for the issue;
3. It connects sabbaticals to the concept of longer tenure;
4. It connects the question of lifelong learning to the sabbatical;
5. Its designed ambiguity will encourage congregations to develop their own specific plans; and,
6. It recognizes the spiritual, emotional, and educational components of the life of the minister.

The resolution also has some inherent weaknesses:

1. It lacks specificity;
2. It does not fully clarify the purpose of sabbaticals;
3. It seems primarily concerned with educational needs over emotional and family needs;
4. It lacks planning detail for local churches;
5. The seven-year period is without substantiation, and the resolution implies that only the planning begins in the seventh year;
6. It does not address the question of repeated sabbaticals or extended tenures of fourteen years or more; and,
7. It does not indicate the inherent value of the sabbatical for the church, only for the minister.

From my personal concern with this issue, I am certain that my own story is too common, that too many ministers are experiencing significant burnout, and too many are not involved in effective self-care. The result is that too many are considering leaving and

are leaving ministry.

In the first fourteen years, only once did I take a break from ministry longer than seven days. During those years I significantly increased my workload and nearly the entire time felt undervalued. I worked long and hard hours and drove myself to perceived personal and church success. I seldom took time for personal emotional needs, rarely read for pleasure, rarely took a day off, and rarely said no to any new demand given to me. When I did have slower moments, I felt the need to start new church projects, or I filled the gap in my time with a newly added denominational volunteer task. The gradual layering of these demanding responsibilities on my time, energy, and emotion eventually led to a deep despair and a painful journey back to wholeness. I am convinced that such despair and pain might have been prevented by a better self-care that included a sabbatical.

### **Themes in the Literature**

The nature of the problem concentrates on two particular themes in the literature: burnout affects ministers and congregations in primary ways; sabbaticals are increasingly sought after as a tool in the arsenal for ministers. Much of the secular literature on sabbaticals targets how to obtain a sabbatical (Rogak; Dlugozima, Scott, and Sharp) and outlines important available resources for those taking one. Little is written about the intersection of the two primary issues of this study: burnout and sabbaticals. Essentially the question of the direct benefit of sabbaticals on ministerial burnout remains, at best, an unproven hypothesis, particularly among Nazarene clergy. Some anecdotal information actually counters this hypothesis underscoring an opposite perspective that the sabbatical itself is to blame for early exits from ministry. This perception, however, is not supported by the literature, which presents burnout as something to be prevented and avoided and

sabbaticals as helpful to that end.

The issue of burnout and its impact on future ministry tenure is represented well in the literature. Burnout is recognized as a growing problem not only for the individual minister and the local congregation but also for the church at large because burnout is viewed as the culprit for a significant loss in leadership resources in the church (London and Wiseman, Pastors at Risk; Spaite). The burnout problem could be essentially summarized as follows: clergy experience ever increasing levels of dissonance between personal, denominational, family, and local church expectations versus the limitations of time and ability. This dissonance expresses itself eventually as burnout. In the most severe cases, ministers are forced to leave ministry, and, at best, burnout causes a significant reduction in productivity and effectiveness of the minister. By definition every minister suffers burnout to some degree, which may be also be true for other professions/jobs, but it is compounded by the fact that only a few natural boundaries exist around a minister's life (it is not a typical, Monday through Friday, nine to five job).

In this chapter of the study, I review the precedents in the literature on burnout, its complexity, and the complexity of burnout solutions. In particular I review the work of Christina Maslach and Frank Leiter and their identification of six influential factors (Maslach and Leiter Burnout Matrix). This study focuses its attention on the intersection of the Maslach and Leiter burnout matrix with Nazarene clergy sabbaticals in an effort to determine whether sabbaticals are helpful for ministers who suffer burnout. The second part of this chapter focuses on the literature related to the sabbatical, giving particular attention to the relationship between sabbatical and the biblical notion of the Sabbath.

### **Burnout**

This study is particularly timely because ministers, and particularly Nazarene

ministers, are experiencing burnout and stress at high levels. In the late 1990s Herb Ireland, in his dissertation for Fuller Theological Seminary, studied the spiritual, physical, and emotional health of Nazarene clergy pointing to alarming news and concluding that a need exists for “identifying and understanding the symptoms of burnout and how to minimize the damage this can bring to one’s ministry” (ii). His research demonstrates that Nazarene pastors, at the rate of 40.2 percent, experience high levels of stress in life (114). Ireland discovered that even though the respondents of his study indicated that they did not perceive burnout to be a problem in their lives, other questions from his survey instrument betrayed a markedly higher level of burnout than to that which they admitted. This observed duplicity led him to conclude that burnout “is an ever-present danger to those who care deeply for hurting people” (143). One conclusion he reaches is that a reasonable connection between burnout and sabbatical should be drawn:

It is significant to note that while denominational officials urge pastors to stay longer in their parishes, Oswald has found that 40 percent of ministers who have been in the same church for ten years or more score high on the burnout rating scale. This figure reveals the wisdom of a church granting its pastor a sabbatical in his or her seventh year as an antidote against “holy burnout.” (143)

Ireland did not lay a foundation for such a conclusion, but it does accurately reflect a perception in the church that sabbaticals are an important tool in combating burnout.

What I attempted in this study was to lay a foundation for just such a conclusion, which is the essential answer to the question: Is burnout preventable and or best managed by the practice of a sabbatical?

The late seventies and early eighties was a period of rapid increase in interest in burnout. Burnout was perceived as a new issue for the Christian community. Some

discounted it as a non-issue. Others, such as John Stanley, pointed out that burnout, even though perhaps not named as such, has been experienced visibly by past Christian leaders as well. He identifies three in particular: Georgia Harkness, H. Emerson Fosdick, and E. Stanley Jones. He takes a more holistic view of burnout:

Burnout is the body's way of reminding us that we cannot keep running, always steadily giving without regularly receiving from others and from God. We need to sit still occasionally in order to recoup our strength. Harkness, Fosdick and Jones broke down early in their ministries. Periods of rest then refueled them. But rest can not only heal us when we are already ill, it can also prevent us from becoming ill. Ministers need not feel guilty for setting aside times for relaxation in their daily, weekly and annual schedules. (23)

Even the use of the term burnout directly applied toward human beings was not commonplace until sometime in the 1980s.

To use the word "burnout" to refer to a human being's condition is a new usage of the word, and we may surmise that since the word is now used in this new way it refers to a recent social and psychological phenomenon. Not that people have not burned out at what they were doing at other times in history; that must surely have been the case. But evidently the problem is now becoming so widespread that a special word is used for the condition, a necessity that did not exist before. (3)

Notice the association of burnout with illness. Maslach and Leiter believe that a proper understanding of burnout is actually not to view it as a weakness of the individual (an illness) but rather a weakness in the structure of the organization for which that individual works. Sanford also identifies that while burnout may be a new term, it is not a new phenomenon (21). In summary, Sanford and Stanley both indicate that the experience of burnout has a significant historical presence.

Christina Maslach writes in her earliest work on burnout, Burnout: The Cost of Caring, that burnout is primarily a concern for those involved in people professions:

Burnout is a syndrome of emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and reduced personal accomplishment that can occur among individuals who



do “people work” of some kind. It is a response to the chronic emotional strain of dealing extensively with other human beings, particularly when they are troubled or having problems. Thus, it can be considered one type of job stress. (3)

In later work she expands this to include nearly all work environments (not just people work) identifying six key issues in the onset of burnout. In this later cooperative work with Frank Leiter, Maslach points out that burnout results from the interaction of people and expectations within the context of any work environment. The six factors that form a burnout matrix by which to measure the severity of the burnout experience are these: work overload, lack of control, insufficient reward, breakdown in community, absence of fairness, and conflicting values (38).

Maslach is not the only one to have worked extensively with burnout. After Sanford’s early standard on the subject, others such as Jerry Edelwich with Archie Brodsky have added their voice. Edelwich defines burnout:

[A] progressive loss of idealism, energy, and purpose experienced by people in the helping professions as a result of the conditions of their work. Those conditions range from insufficient training to client overload, from too many hours to too little pay, from inadequate funding to ungrateful clients, from bureaucratic or political constraints to the inherent gap between aspiration and accomplishment. (14)

Note the similar content in Edelwich’s definition and the later work of Maslach and Leiter. Edelwich’s definition appears to be a precursor of the Maslach and Leiter matrix. For the purpose of this study, burnout is a progressive loss of idealism, energy, and purpose that can occur among individuals in ministry. By definition, and for this study, burnout occurs as a response to work overload, lack of control, insufficient reward, breakdown in community, absence of fairness, and conflicting values. To experience some symptoms of burnout is nearly inevitable. Severe, debilitating burnout is not inevitable. The degree to which burnout is experienced is influenced by the six factors

listed above, which in turn are often influenced by additional factors such as length of tenure, personality styles, family issues and support, congregational expectations and others. Severe burnout can be accompanied by clinical depression and, in its worst scenarios, is completely debilitating.

**Burnout: complex problem.** Burnout is not exclusively a ministry hazard, nor does every minister experience burnout. The term was first used in the 1970s to describe the emotional disconnect one psychologist experienced in his own therapeutic setting. The helping professions are commonly perceived to be more vulnerable to burnout.

The issue of burnout has not had a ready hearing in the Church. The term itself carries with it negative theological baggage. For instance it raises the theological dissonance of how God-called ministers experience the equivalent of emotional weakness in performing their God-called duties. The biblical principle that God calls and equips ministers for their tasks (Eph. 4:11-13), on the surface, implies that burnout, as defined for this study, is an impossibility. For a period of time the term to “burn out” actually had a very deep and powerful positive spiritual application. For instance, the lyrics of Bessie Hatcher’s song, “Let Me Burn Out for Thee,” with a 1929 copyright, reflect a deeply spiritual use of the term. The essence of the lyrics is that all Christians, and perhaps most specifically ministers, should completely use their lives in ministry to others and service to God in the same way that a candle should be burned until it, too, is entirely spent (177). Sadly, dedication and complete consecration, hallmarks of ministry among Nazarene and other clergy, carry the added baggage that to care for oneself is something less than “burning out for Jesus.” To perceive burnout from this perspective makes burnout the problem of the individual, not the problem of an organization.

Today burnout is understood quite differently. The Church of the Nazarene no

longer speaks or sings of burnout as an objective of full spiritual devotion (as in the past). The Church now understands burnout as a problem directly impacting members of the clergy, local churches, and ministerial families. Burnout as it now understood impacts ministers causing them to be less than their effective best, and in too many cases, causing these ministers to shorten future ministry tenure.

Describing this problem long before the term burnout entered modern and postmodern vocabulary, the early Church fathers referred to the sin of *acedia*, or spiritual lethargy (Navone). This sin sounds remarkably like what is referred to today as burnout. The fact that it was regarded as a sin to be confessed (by the individual) raises interesting theological questions. To assume that every case of *acedia* resulted from burnout is far too simplistic, but to assume that no instance of *acedia* could ever be traced back to burnout is also simplistic. *Acedia*, at least in part, is the historical precursor to what we now commonly refer to as burnout. What I am demonstrating is the historical evidence for burnout long before the term itself existed.

Specific examples of burnout experiences among the clergy (even some of high profile) from the not-so-recent past, and particularly prior to the increased use of today's terminology beginning in the 1970s, include Harry Emerson Fosdick, E. Stanley Jones, and Georgia Harkness. About these three, John E. Stanley writes, "Recent attention to burnout has overlooked lessons learned by earlier ministers who suffered through it. Reflecting on their experiences can help us to prevent and overcome this problem" (21). Specifically Stanley writes insightfully about E. Stanley Jones' burnout experiences.

In his autobiography, *A Song of Ascents* Jones tells how the stress of missionary work produced his burnout. In India, Jones raised the money for the salaries and administered the work of 500 mission workers. He also worked at learning two new languages. Lingering physical illness reduced his stamina. Eight-and-a-half years into his first ten-year term in India,

Jones collapsed. He wrote, “When I looked at my resources—intellectual, spiritual, physical—there were question marks bordering on despair.” (37) His supervisors sent him home on an early furlough to recuperate. But even after a year’s leave his health shattered again when he returned to India. The strain of excessive work broke Jones. (22)

About these events, Stanley makes the interesting observation that burnout may actually serve as a way to positively measure personal well-being:

Burnout is the body’s way of reminding us that we cannot keep running, always steadily giving without regularly receiving from others and from God. We need to sit still occasionally in order to recoup our strength. Harkness, Fosdick and Jones broke down early in their ministries. Periods of rest then refueled them. But rest can not only heal us when we are already ill, it can also prevent us from becoming ill. Ministers need not feel guilty for setting aside times for relaxation in their daily, weekly and annual schedules. (23)

This understanding of burnout is in stark contrast to the early Church fathers’ view of *acedia*. This positive understanding of burnout as an indicator of health and as an indicator of spiritual well-being can serve a valuable purpose and can actually serve a major role in the process of restoration from severe burnout, certainly in the ongoing measures of prevention from debilitating burnout experiences. Stanley points out that Harry Emerson Fosdick never came close to burnout again, despite a full schedule, because “he took time for his family, for exercise and for rest. He spent the summers relaxing and writing on an island off of Maine” (23). Fosdick’s burnout management method included a significant increase in “down time” in his life, and of particular note is the new, regular pattern of a summer break. This regular and planned break seems to be even more than a vacation but the foundation of a regular sabbatical plan.

Stanley makes the following conclusions about these ministers, and their burnout experiences. Writing about Fosdick, Jones and Harkness, he underscores that for each of them, regular, consistent and intentional periods of rest restored them. They took time for

their individual needs, including spiritual needs for prayer, worship, and meditation. He concludes by saying, “those of us who feel threatened by clergy burnout can learn from their examples” (23).

Several key observations are important here:

1. While Fosdick, Jones, and Harkness never used the term burnout, their experiences reflect a working definition for burnout;
2. Key to their revitalization from burnout is significant rest marked by prayer, worship, family, and meditation; and,
3. Burnout may be a relatively new term, but the indicators point to the experience long before a term existed by which it could be properly defined.

Archibald Hart, professor at Fuller Theological Seminary and authority in the area of pastoral ministry and the emotional health of ministers, says, “‘Emotionally speaking, ministry is the most hazardous profession of all.’ He supported this statement by pointing out that about one out of five ministers will burn out by their fifth year of ministry, and by the tenth year of ministry this number increases to one out of three” (Scott 60). The problem is on the increase. The increase is due in part to the rapid change of pace of North American culture and the increased trend to a more secular (and postmodern culture) culture, both of which have increased the already existing pressures on ministers and have resulted in what Brockman calls a noticeable trend of “increasing instances of ‘burnout’ among leadership personnel” (809). With one out of three ministers facing burnout, the Church is facing a significant problem. Four in ten ministers in the Church of the Nazarene experience high levels of stress, a precursor to burnout (Ireland 113-14), and one in five Nazarene elders leaves the ministry before ten years of tenure is complete (210).

While burnout does not affect every person in the same way, the sheer number of ministers experiencing burnout is troublesome for the Church at large. Burnout results in a direct impact on ministers' effectiveness, family lives, well-being, and tenures. This issue of tenure is what may be most troubling. The pressures in ministry are so significant that Focus on the Family reports that 40 percent of pastors have considered leaving their pastorates in the last three months (London and Wiseman, Pastors at Risk 25).

In 1995, Wilbur Brannon, then director of the Office of the Ministry, Church of the Nazarene, reported in a conference speech, "In a seven year period, one third of [an evangelical denomination's] pastors had left the ministry (excluding retirement and death)" (qtd. in Spaite 10). This high turnover ratio in professional ministry is one of the most troubling results of burnout. Although the only result of burnout, it is probably one of the easiest impacts to measure.

Nazarene pastors are not exempt from this serious matter. Dan Spaite, a Nazarene lay leader and medical doctor, writes that Nazarene clergy are no exception to burnout and that the experience is likely far too common (10).

**Burnout: complex solutions.** Already I have hinted at the fact that one step in the burnout solution is that of finding regular and sustainable methods by which to absent oneself from the routines of ministry, creating healthy boundaries between the work of ministry and the life of the minister. The ability to create this kind of boundary is evident in the life of Jesus (see Mark 6) and in the life of Elijah (see 1 Kings 19) where each finds needed respite after periods of intense ministry. The work of a minister never ends, but this does not exempt ministers from the need for rest. A case can always be made that some work has been left unfinished, which can easily lead to unreasonable work overload. Gary Collins writes that the onset of burnout in Christian ministry results from

extended periods of time without significant detachment opportunity:

Burn-out occurs when we work closely with troubled human beings over long periods of time and with little opportunity to retreat. When a helper can leave his or her work at the office and return to a stable and relaxing home situation, burn-out is less likely to occur. But leaving the work behind is difficult, often impossible, for a church leader. The ministry is with us wherever we go. As a result, burn-out is a common—though often unrecognized—condition of Christian people-helpers. (12)

Anthony Headley points out that the resulting ministry of those experiencing the precursors to burnout means that the Church is receiving less than the best from its leadership:

To overextend ourselves means those in the pew get shortchanged. To quote a Doonesbury cartoon line, “Highly stressed, chronically fatigued employees cannot give their best.” That is especially true for ministers. Often the best gift a pastor can give a congregation is the gift of a balanced, rested, fully functioning redeemed human being—that authentic stewardship of ourselves. (60)

This need for intentional breaks from ministry in order to maintain a balanced and effective ministry often goes unheeded by ministers.

Since burnout is complex, its solution is complex. For ministers, managing burnout involves a significant measure of self-care, something often perceived as incongruent with a call to devote themselves to ministry to others. However, as Ray Anderson contends in Self Care, “Self care is care for the self as created in the image of God and valued by God for its own intrinsic worth” (8). This process of self care involves creating periods of rest and renewal in one’s schedule. Strong consideration must be given to a sabbatical plan that includes a healthy perspective of regular breaks from ministry, especially since severe burnout cases require a significant investment of time and energy to restore leaders from burnout experiences that could have reasonably been prevented.

While a strong sense in the literature and in the public knowledge that periodic sabbaticals can have a positive impact on future ministry tenure and in burnout management, and while such periodic breaks appear to be helpful, not much qualitative or quantitative data exists regarding the direct impact of sabbaticals on ministry, and particularly ministerial burnout. The lack of qualitative data on sabbaticals, and particularly among Nazarene clergy in North America is the focus of this study. Little, if any research data exists on Nazarene ministerial sabbaticals. This study adds significantly to the knowledge base on Nazarene sabbaticals, thereby providing important insight for the development of practical methods for effective and meaningful sabbatical experiences, with the particular hope of assisting in the reduction of burnout experiences, the proper management of burnout precursors and burnout symptoms, and an increase in tenure. The results of this study strengthen the purpose and usefulness of the sabbatical.

One more word is necessary on the complexity of burnout and its management. Welch, Medeiros, and Tate propose that the solution for clergy burnout revolves around five areas:

1. Physical changes (maintain physical well-being, physical exercise, sound nutrition, regular periods of rest and relaxation, maintain a forty-hour work week);
2. Intellectual changes (includes professional and non-professional reading, writing, other intellectual stimulation);
3. Emotional changes, (differentiate between selfishness and self-lovingness; be aware of and make use of resources for emotional help, accept the fact that ministers have emotions, often wide ranging, create boundaries between self and work;



4. Social changes (change personal patterns to increase personal interactions, involvements outside the “church” context, becoming intentional listeners, involvement in civic issues.); and,

5. Spiritual changes (development and maintenance of meaningful prayer and devotional life, rekindling one’s commitment to one’s call to ministry, building a fellowship with those who care for and cure souls) (172-76).

This simple summary outlines the complex nature of burnout management. One particular problem with burnout is that while it can be defined, it is not easily measured scientifically, and its direct causes are not readily visible. For instance, hypertension, or high blood pressure, is easily measured by systolic and diastolic numbers, and yet, as the Mayo Clinic’s website on health issues reports, the causes for hypertension are more difficult to discover. Typically the exact cause of hypertension is discovered in only one in twenty cases. The remaining cases are referred to as “essential” or “primary” hypertension since the cause cannot be readily determined. Although hypertension can be defined as blood pressure exceeding certain predetermined systolic and diastolic numbers, the causes for hypertension are not easily diagnosed (“High Blood Pressure”). The similarities to burnout here are remarkable: an acceptable definition, a complex of multiple factors that can lead to burnout, and the addition of multiple methods by which a burned out minister can be restored. To show the complexity in burnout, fatigue and lack of ambition are less easily measured than hypertension and are much more subjective in nature.

Everyone in the helping professions experiences the precursors to burnout, but not everyone who experiences burnout symptoms is ready to quit the ministry. Stanley’s prior examples of Jones, Fosdick, and Harkness are insightful here. All three experienced

severe burnout, but they did not step away from ministry, and they continued to have effective ministries after their burnout experiences. An intriguing question is the study of the impact of ministry before and after burnout experiences to determine if, despite bad press, ministers who have experienced more severe forms of burnout, wind up eventually having effective ministries after those experiences. Common sense indicates that prevention is preferable to burnout, especially for those burnout experiences that progress to clinical depression, but in some cases burnout experiences serve as a gateway to more effective ministry. Burnout may have some redemptive qualities.

A way to manage the issue of burnout is to find ways to manage its symptoms before it becomes a full-blown negative experience. Edelwich with Brodsky posits that “a positive approach to burn-out will be based not on the hope of preventing it (which is virtually impossible), but on the realization that it will happen—perhaps repeatedly—in a person’s career and must be dealt with on an ongoing basis” (14). His position leaves open the strong possibility, even probability, that a mild degree of burnout can actually be helpful in shaping one’s habits and patterns toward a more positive ministry. Edelwich cites the power of what he calls creative frustration:

Burn-out can even be turned to advantage in that it can energize a person to break out of a rut. When frustration is used creatively, it becomes a stimulus to the kind of enthusiasm that it normally erodes. (14-15)

The potential result of this creative frustration demonstrates itself when ministers “try implementing the first-things-first priorities of Jesus and demonstrate the importance of the Sabbath in [their] own lifestyle. Such stewardship of self will create balance for [them] and provide a wonderful pattern for [their] parishioners” (Headley 60). The literature establishes that sabbatical may have both preventative and restorative roles since intentional rest is a key element in prevention of burnout and restoration from

burnout.

The next section of this chapter outlines the precedents in the literature about sabbaticals and establishes a theological basis for them.

### **Tenure**

According to the Merriam-Webster Dictionary, tenure is “the act, right, manner, or term of holding something (as a landed property, a position, or an office)” (“Tenure”). For this study tenure is that total length of time a minister is vocationally engaged. Two components of tenure run concurrent and, yet, unique tracks: (1) future ministry tenure (longevity in ministry, or the number of years a minister serves vocationally regardless of assignment or location) and (2) local parish tenure (or the length of time a minister serves in one particular setting).

Effective ministry is a combination of both ministry and local parish tenure. Shortened ministry and/or local parish tenures are an issue of concern for the church at large. Both tenures are shorter today than in the past. George Barna suggests that pastors moving from one parish to another at an increasing rate. Parish tenures that once were seven years now average four (36). Both aspects of tenure are important to the church since a strong connection exists between effective ministry and longer parish/ministry tenures (37).

In addition to shortened local parish tenures, the church is coming to grips with the fact that ministers are leaving ministry entirely at an alarming rate, in some ranks as high as 33 percent in a seven-year period (Spaite 10).

The dual issues of shortened parish tenures coupled with shortened future ministry tenures sound a significant alarm for the church. While trends in the last couple of decades point to shortened tenures, the problem itself is not a new one to the church.

The early Church dealt with a similar problem. During the rise of monasticism, an interesting problem developed. Some monks developed a habit of travel from monastery to monastery in search of the perfect religious place of service. Their searches took them looking for a new abbot, a better discipline, different living conditions, all of which could proscribe a better call to vocational holiness (Peterson, Under 18-20). Along with the classic vows of poverty, chastity, and obedience, a new vow became necessary. The Rule of St. Benedict (likely first published between AD 510-580) called for monks to commit to a lifetime of stability (Chadwick 25). The rule specifically calls monks to the stability in this initial call to commitment (listed prior to the remainder of the rules):

If then we keep close to our school and the doctrine we learn in it, and persevere in the monastery till death, we shall here share by patience in the passion of Christ and hereafter deserve to be united with him in his kingdom. Amen. (293)

Peterson connects such a call to stability to pastors:

Somehow we American pastors, without really noticing what was happening, got our vocations redefined in the terms of American careerism. We quit thinking of the parish as a location for pastoral spirituality and started thinking of the parish as an opportunity for advancement. (Under 20)

He calls the congregation the pastor's place for "developing vocational holiness" (21).

The issue of future ministry tenure is the key subject of such works as Time Bomb in the Church and Pastors at Risk and the, as yet, unreleased Pastors at Greater Risk (Spaite; London and Wiseman).<sup>1</sup> The average tenure in pastoral ministry is ten years, in part because people start vocational ministry later in life (and thereby have a shorter tenure potential) but also because too many are opting out, possibly much too early.

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<sup>1</sup> For more information on the content of Pastors at Greater Risk see "Welcome to Wesley's Horse." Winter 2002 7. Mar. 2003 <[www.wesleyshorse.org](http://www.wesleyshorse.org)>.

The issue of local parish tenure is often addressed coequally with future ministry tenure, and in so many ways both are linked together. Longer local parish tenures are no longer the norm. Peterson, more bluntly than others, admits that “far too many pastors change parishes out of adolescent boredom, not as a consequence of mature wisdom” (Under, 29). To him, the cost to the Church of such immature decisions is reduced effectiveness and reduced well-being for the congregation, the minister, and the community. Congregations suffer by the lack of pastoral continuity (29).

Three stories illustrate the impact of longer tenures. The first story is of a personal friend and fellow seminarian Steve Rodeheaver. Upon graduation from seminary, Steve returned to his hometown of San Diego, accepted an inner city ministry assignment, and for more than sixteen years has made a significant impact on that community of faith and even more remarkably in southeast San Diego.

The second story is that of Taylor Reed, an inner city pastor in Manhattan, who went to a struggling neighborhood, faced all kinds of challenging situations. He chose to remain in Manhattan, focused his work, and has refused to run away from the challenges he faced. Based on the Old Testament image of Moses’ dedicated leadership, that stood strong despite a whining and grumbling people, Reed maintained his commitment to his Manhattan ministry. The example of Moses inspired Reed to longevity:

[T]hat convinced me that there are some kinds of ministry and evangelism that are generational. It requires a commitment of more than a year or two. We reach 600 people per week through our 26 ministries, the same people with the same problems week after week. But eventually, we see lives transformed. (6)

The final story is of John Ed Mathison, senior pastor of the Frazer Memorial United Methodist Church in Montgomery, Alabama. Mathison describes his long tenure as a result of his commitment to stay as long as the church would have him (a rare thing

in the United Methodist Church appointment system). Mathison recalls how his father's words, "If you're going to live in a house, you'll build it better" laid a foundation for his long tenure (qtd. in E. Reed 1). Mathison's attitude toward ministry is insightful:

Most of the church trauma God is going to work out, so I don't take the problems home. Not much, anyway. I've had something else that was more interesting waiting at home—my family, or sports. I don't want to sound flippant here: I love church, I'm more excited about the church today than ever, I can't wait until Sunday, but I don't take church too seriously. Now tennis, that's serious. (2)

The quintessential resource on future ministry tenure is Richard Brown's Restoring the Vow of Stability. At the time of the writing of his book, Brown had pastored three churches in seventeen years despite his personal lifetime commitment to each local congregation. He served two churches for seven years and one for three (10-13). His study, however, indicates that long-term pastorates begin in the ninth year of ministry (25).

Nonetheless, Brown validates the notion of longer parish tenures. He writes, "In the midst of a life filled with change and instability, people today are looking for stability, and one of the places they are looking for it is in the church" (4). Yet, long parish tenures are not the always necessary nor always beneficial. He rightfully recognizes different roles for different pastors at different times in the life of different congregations. God uses some in different roles. To use an analogy from the world of sports God uses sprinters, milers, starters and relievers (14).

The exact length of effective local parish tenure is not easily determined (13-14). Ultimately Brown argues that rather than aiming for *long* parish tenures (nine years plus), pastors should aim instead to at least lengthen parish tenure. He concludes that the church experiences far more short-term pastorates than ministry settings requiring them (14, 22).

The essence of Brown's conclusion is that while longevity is desirable it is not the *summum bonum* (highest goal) of ministry, that specific ministries do not require long term pastorates, but that nonetheless, ministers should be opting for longer tenures than area currently practiced (22-37).

Brown identifies the following important factors that influence parish tenure:

1. the cost of relocation expenses,
2. a surplus or shortage of clergy,
3. spouse careers,
4. home ownership,
5. sabbaticals,
6. salary parity, and
7. parishioner mobility (32-33).

About sabbaticals, he makes only this concession: "Sabbatical leaves provide a temporary break from the pastorate, giving the pastor time to renew himself through continuing education, rather than a move" (33).

Brown's study raises the important issue of biblical support for longer ministry and parish leadership tenures. Neither the Old nor New Testaments directly raises ministry and parish longevity as an issue, however, principles from the Scriptures inform the tenure issue (91). The Old Testament presents various leadership patterns for kings, priests, and prophets. Some tenures were short and others longer. Brown sees a striking resemblance between these Old Testament examples of tenure and current pastoral models of tenure (94-96).

The New Testament offers additional principles that inform ministry and parish tenure. These principles are (1) relationships and reconciliation (this principle most

certainly informs the issue of tenure, excellent examples are spelled out in 1 Thess. 1 and 2 as well as 2 Cor. 5:18-20); (2) shepherding imagery (see 1 Pet. 5:2-3, which implies longevity since sheep must get to know the voice of their shepherd); (3) the church as a family (evidenced by Paul's encouragement to Timothy to treat the church as one big happy family [see 1 Tim. 5:1-2] and how Paul likens the church to a household or a home [Eph 2:19 and Gal. 6:10]); and, (4) the church as a cultivated/tended field or a building (both of these images appear in 1 Cor. 3:9ff and imply stability in ministry for specific purposes) (Brown 105-20).

In addition to these principles, Brown gleans the following from the New Testament:

1. The longer a person knows the people among whom he ministers, the greater the potential for ministry (Rom. 1:12; 2 John 5).
2. A longer association between people and leader is a more meaningful setting for the application of the instructions about their relationship (Rom. 12:10; 1 Thess. 5:12-13; 1 Tim. 3:77; 5:17, 22; Titus 1:5; Jas. 3:1).
3. Principles about ministry gleaned from the ministry of Christ as our High Priest are enhanced in a longer term ministry (Heb. 5:2; 6:1).
4. Many of the leaders of local churches in the early church were chosen from among their own people who must have known these leaders for some time in order to accept them as leaders. Their longer relationship made their leadership more acceptable (2 Pet. 2:1; 1 John 1:3; 1 John 2:19; 2 John 10).
5. One of the benefits of a longer association with people is the opportunity to make comments about relationships with a greater degree of credibility (2 John 12; 3 John 13).
6. And finally, there is a place, on occasion, for shorter ministries! (3 John 8). (120)

Although the biblical record does not demand long tenures in pastoral ministry, the relational principles outlined in Scripture certainly lead toward increased parish tenures in the church today.

The list of seven obstacles to longer parish tenures is possibly the most beneficial



part of Brown's work for the purposes of this study on tenure. His list of seven includes

1. a lack of awareness by pastors, laypeople, and denominational leaders about the benefits of longer tenured pastorates;
2. a lack of personal growth by pastors who shortcut a challenging growth process by a premature move to a new assignment;
3. a lack of self-understanding;
4. the mismanagement of conflict often leads toward shortened tenures;
5. inadequate pastor/parish relationship and the development of an appropriate pastoral support system;
6. faulty early patterns of shortened ministry (sometimes at the hand of denominational leaders); and,
7. unsatisfactory pastoral transitions (125-67).

Accompanying each of these obstacles, Brown lists appropriate remedies. Among them he includes the usefulness of sabbaticals particularly on the issues of pastor's personal growth (176). However, several of these obstacles, this study shows, are directly impacted by the practice of sabbaticals by Nazarene clergy. Surprisingly, many of these principles can be, and are addressed by the sabbatical experiences reported later in the findings of this study.

### **Sabbatical**

The reason this study is so timely is that sabbaticals are receiving increasing attention in the Church. The action of the 1997 General Assembly of the Church of the Nazarene is illustrative of this. At that General Assembly, the highest legislative body of the Church of the Nazarene adopted a resolution encouraging the practice of sabbaticals for clergy.

Sabbaticals are not new. They have been practiced for centuries. Some believe that sabbaticals have their original foundation in the Church, but sabbaticals among clergy have become rare, and are usually thought of as something belonging to the world of academics:

The concept of the sabbatical is fundamentally important to higher education. Most American universities and colleges either have, or have thought about, initiating sabbatical programs. Yet, for a practice so widespread, so jealously preserved, and so expensive, astonishingly little has been written about this cornerstone of faculty and instructional development, and what has appeared in print typically has taken the form of either data-oriented studies, or of personal reminiscences based upon sabbatical diaries or journals. (Zahorski viii)

The same principle that Zahorski discovered in the world of academia is true even more so in the Church context. What has been written about sabbaticals is of a more cursory nature. Most of what has been written is similar to Richard Bullock's Sabbatical Planning for Clergy and Congregations and Richard Bullock and Richard Bruesehoff's Clergy Renewal: The Alban Guide to Sabbatical Planning, which include how to plan for and take a sabbatical. Most comments on sabbaticals simply assume them to be valid and helpful to ministers.

The Alban Institute offers a number of resources for ministers planning sabbaticals, none more complete than Richard Bullock's Sabbatical Planning. This systematic guide provides a step by step plan to secure an effective sabbatical. Six Months Off and Time off from Work are written for a secular target audience but are particularly helpful to secure funding and to increase the likelihood of an effective sabbatical. These works assume that a sabbatical is good and should be pursued (Rogak; Dlugozima, Scott, and Sharp). The books could be described as excuse over comers.

Henri Nouwen's last book is a journal of his sabbatical year. Nouwen died before

he completed the manuscript for final publishing, a duty that his assistants undertook.

The book is insightful on the issues of the sabbatical journey itself. For instance Nouwen identifies with great intensity the emotional journey of his sabbatical experience, the fatigue (Sabbatical Journey 13), and the multiplicity of joys experienced on his sabbatical journey (24).

Roy Oswald points out that sabbatical is an important tool in clergy self-care and helpful in finding an effective balance in ministry. He proposes that sabbaticals take an ongoing approach: “We need to take regular time for ourselves: on a daily basis, on a weekly basis, on a quarterly basis, on a yearly basis, on a sabbatical basis (every four years)” (121). Spaite and others suggest a similar pattern but with a sabbatical every seven years. Oswald insightfully points out that the sabbatical process should be more often than a seven-year period:

[C]lergy in long pastorates burn out because the longer they are in place, the more responsibility they seem to accumulate. A sabbatical is a way to break that pattern.... It’s almost as if you’re starting a new pastorate while remaining in the same place. (126)

Similarly, three authors, Pappas, Anderson and Peterson posit similar principles for sabbaticals. While this body of literature is not overabundant, it is all rather recent.

Abraham Heschel, in his excellent work The Sabbath, provides a well-rounded philosophical and theological treatise for the value of time and the value of rest. While he does not specifically endorse ministry sabbaticals, their function is directly related to the foundation he prepares. He argues the value of time over the value of space, and he makes an excellent point that the materialist culture of the community is primarily occupied with time only as it relates to space (his word for objects that can be acquired). The use of time to acquire space neglects the essential truth that time is a gift from God.

The Sabbath is the redemption of time. If a sabbatical can be constructed in any way to be connected to the Sabbath, then it, too, is a means of redeeming time over space.

The term sabbatical has a common and ordinary usage. It generally means “a leave often with pay granted usually every seventh year (as to a college professor) for rest, travel, or research—called also *sabbatical leave*” (“Sabbatical”). Both of these generally accepted definitions are helpful in formulating a specific definition in a ministry setting. For the purpose of this study, sabbatical is taken to mean a plan for providing a minister with a break from the routine of ministry, for a time greater than one month, and for the specific purposes of rest, worship, reflection, creativity, study, and renewal.

No agreed-upon standard of length for a sabbatical exists in the literature. In common parlance reference is often made to a sabbatical year; however, sabbaticals of such duration are rare, particularly among the clergy (none of the thirty subjects in the study had a full yearlong sabbatical). The range of sabbaticals among the population sample was from four weeks to three months. An assumption made in this study is that even a relatively short sabbatical of four weeks is helpful to ministers and their burnout management techniques. The stipulation of the four-week minimum is arbitrary but reasonably based on the literature. Common sense suggests that a significant break from the routines of ministry cannot be accomplished in less than a few weeks time. Limitations such as finances and church resources also affect the possible length of sabbaticals.

Often sabbaticals are connected to ministry covenants by which the local church and the pastor agree before the sabbatical to a guaranteed period of ministry following the sabbatical. The pastor also agrees not to seek another position of ministry for that

extended time.

For the purposes of this study, a sabbatical plan must include the following: (1) a minimum four-week absence from all regular/routine ministry responsibilities, (2) forethought and intentional planning of the sabbatical prior to its inception, and (3) full participation in the sabbatical by the local church decision-making body.

Very little specific literature on the practice of sabbaticals among Nazarene clergy exists. One publication produced by Point Loma Nazarene University (and designed primarily for the western United States region of the Church of the Nazarene) promotes the practice of sabbaticals as a means for renewal (Church Relations) and resulted from Herb Ireland's dissertation. In addition to this excellent tool for pastors and churches, some Nazarene districts in North America have implemented policies to provide pastors and churches guidelines for planning and executing sabbaticals. With the increased popularity of the World Wide Web as a resource, the Church of the Nazarene now includes numerous articles and resources on burnout and sabbaticals at its web site ("Welcome to Wesley's Horse").

No specific study of Nazarene sabbatical practice has taken place. Daniel Spaite's Time Bomb in the Church deals primarily with the issue of pastoral burnout and the high turnover rate of pastors in ministry. He proposes, that an explosive situation is at hand for churches. Although this work was written for a larger audience, Spaite is a Nazarene member and wrote the work from a Nazarene framework, and while most denominational references have been removed from the text, Spaite's bias toward the Nazarene situation is clear as is the fact that he is the son of Nazarene minister, and a member of a thriving Nazarene congregation in the southwestern United States city. As a medical doctor, Spaite brings another interesting perspective to this dialogue.

Spaite underscores the need for a comprehensive plan to diffuse the time bomb of pastoral burnout. One small part of this comprehensive burnout prevention/restoration plan includes the use of planned sabbaticals (158). Here he makes an astute observation that, particularly in Nazarene circles, a surrogate sabbatical exists, otherwise known as a premature pastoral move. The natural effects of a pastoral move do diffuse some burnout issues, but such a burnout management strategy is ultimately counterproductive. Spaite asks, “Could it be that when churches refuse to give pastors real sabbaticals as opposed to surrogate ones, they prevent effective ministry?” (159). Spaite argues that sabbaticals (along with other strategies) are already an integral part of ministry in one form or another (surrogate or intentional) and that churches must become more intentional about providing them to their ministers. The result will be an increase in future ministry tenure and ministry effectiveness (146-66). Sabbaticals form an integral part of any plan for developing significant long-term and potentially more effective ministries. This question of Spaite’s is at the heart of this research project.

Roy Oswald offers that long pastorates alone make the case for sabbaticals:

Alban Institute’s research on the Long Pastorate (ten years or more in one place) convinced me of the need for clergy sabbaticals. In this study, clergy interviewed members of their congregations on their chief concerns about long pastorates. The top concern was that the clergy person would become stale and “go to seed.” At the same time we discovered that the burnout scores for clergy in a long pastorate were considerably higher than for clergy who change pastorates more frequently. (126)

Based on the Alban Institute’s research, he claims that “clergy in long pastorates burn out because the longer they are in place, the more responsibility they seem to accumulate. A sabbatical is one way to break that pattern” (126). Ireland agrees with this assessment when he writes that as denomination executives encourage longer pastoral tenures, they should give serious consideration to the issue of sabbaticals (148).

The nature of a clergy sabbatical is one important factor in the literature. Some debate has ensued over its content. Eugene Peterson, himself a sabbatical veteran, writes that sabbaticals in the academic world are designed for the mind. He believes that sabbaticals for clergy should be designed as sabbaticals for the spirit. His insightful article for Leadership in 1988 demonstrated the particular need of clergy sabbaticals to be different in nature than those of the academic world, which are often driven by research and or writing projects. Peterson raises the point that pastoral sabbaticals should not reflect the model of the academic world where study and critical thinking are paramount . He calls the academic world “the life of the mind.” The pastoral sabbatical, however, is to be built around “the life of the spirit” and should not resemble either in style or effort the sabbatical of the academic world (“Sabbatical Is Not Study Leave” 74). It should have as its passion the pastor’s silence and stillness before God, focusing on prayer and worship, not program and preaching planning:

But pastors, committed to the life of the spirit, a life at least as strenuous, if not more so, than the life of the mind, rarely get sabbaticals. I wonder why, for the spirit also tires, grows stagnant, feigns to repeat itself. The weekly assembly of Christians, their hungry-and-thirsty-after-righteousness lives strangely mingled with sin and sloth, constitutes a formidable challenge to the pastor. The sanctuary exists to protect and develop holiness, but holiness is not a packaged attitude that can be sold to Sunday godshoppers. It is life at risk before God, dangerously and awesomely at risk, and it needs fully alive pastors to represent it. If the life of faith is reduced to a church program or into jargon, the gospel is betrayed and spirit dulled. Yet churches make little provision for renewal of spirit in those they set as overseers for the renewal of their spirits. (75)

The point he makes is that the academic world has usurped the rightful place of the sabbatical and changed it to reflect its own needs. Peterson strongly cautions the Church against considering the sabbatical as a study leave (74-75).

Sabbaticals, however, need not be devoid of study. Research published in 1994

reveals that a group of pastors who had taken sabbaticals reported the following four elements as nearly always part of their sabbatical experiences:

- 1) encounters with other cultures and with Christian communities in other countries, especially less developed ones; 2) research or writing on independent projects or as part of a formal seminar or academic program; 3) directed reflection on personal and spiritual issues; and 4) recreation and rest. (“Taking Leave” 302)

A clergy sabbatical, Peterson would argue, must primarily be about directed reflection on spiritual issues, worship, prayer, recreation and rest (“Sabbatical Is Not Study Leave” 75). These are the dimensions of the spiritual life that also require the attention of the clergy because these suffer from the effects of drained energies and drained emotions.

The notion of a sabbatical has not always been an important issue. For instance, Peterson’s perspective is in stark contrast to Thomas Oden’s Pastoral Theology, which makes no mention at all of pastoral burnout or sabbaticals. The expressed purpose of Oden’s work is to “develop an internally consistent grasp of classical Christian thinking about the pastor” (vii), and even though his work is subtitled Essentials of Ministry, it does not address the larger issue of pastoral self-care at all, much less the more specific issues of burnout or sabbaticals. He writes, “I have tried to distill the best ideas of the two millennia of ecumenical Christian thinking concerning what pastors are and do” (vii), which underscores the fact that ministerial self-care, burnout, and sabbaticals are issues that only more recently have gained a hearing.

The rapid pace of change in the culture and the Church, and the high rate of ministerial burnout and drop out make the issue of pastoral self-care all the more important. I estimate that less than half of those with whom I graduated at the seminary are still in active full-time, vocational ministry and this in only sixteen years.

The largest body of literature on the subject of sabbaticals is from the academic



world, where in academia it is well established, complete with a rich tradition and history. This established tradition, plus the vastly different nature of the academic institution over against the local church institution make any real comparisons between the two rather unreliable for the discussion at hand. The differences between the work of a minister and the work of a professor are too great for effective comparison.

Additionally, even the very process of securing a sabbatical is vastly different in academic and church settings. Often academic sabbaticals are awarded based on tenure and peer faculty review. Congregational decision-making structures are much more complicated or, at the least, dynamically different.

**Biblical underpinnings for sabbaticals.** Sabbatical is the common word used to describe intentional breaks in work routines for the purpose of rest, renewal, and academic study. The most common use of the term today in the vernacular has to do with academic sabbaticals. These are usually periods of time (three to six months or the equivalent of a semester/quarter) granted by academic institutions to faculty and administrators with specific intents, usually to provide optimal study time away from the institution and a break from the cyclical nature of teaching.

The term, sabbatical, is derived from the Hebrew word *Shabbat*, which itself may be a derivative of other Aramaic words. *Shabbat* at its simplest is a reference to the seven-day cycle of life as presented in the Genesis accounts of creation. Throughout its Old Testament usage, the term increasingly includes not only the notion of the seventh day as a day of rest, a break from the toil of human labor, but also the notion of the seventh day as a day of worship. The creation stories in Genesis provide significant groundwork for this pattern of work and rest and the sense of a divine notion to these rhythms of life.

In the Old Testament, this notion of the seventh day of rest is expanded into extended periods of time culminating in a Year of Jubilee (at the conclusion of seven periods of seven years) (see Lev. 25, 27 and Num. 36) at which time a radical restructuring of the social contract was called for (forgiveness of debts, restitution of land, release of prisoners). No evidence exists that the Jewish community ever experienced such a Year of Jubilee, and the general knowledge is that the promise of a Jubilee served primarily as a way to strengthen the existing social fabric. Essentially the Jubilee Year was never anything more than a dream, never expressing itself in full fruition. What does surface from this Jubilee Year is the notion of accumulated periods of time based on factors of the number seven indicating a clear pattern coinciding with the biblical principle of *Shabbat*.

The biblical record establishes

1. a clear pattern of work and rest from the beginning of creation;
2. that additional periods of time (usually in multiples of seven) have a significant role to play; and,
3. that the human race should take serious the need for rest and renewal, not so much for the sake of productivity, but simply for the sake of God and self (Heschel 10).

The biblical pattern for Sabbath rest and renewal is centered around the six-day creation pattern followed by a day of rest on the seventh. This pattern of rest and labor is clearly established in the Old Testament where it soon came to include not only rest but also regulations for rest and worship. Eventually the penalty for failure to comply included the death penalty (Exod. 35:2). The progressive revelation of the Sabbath concept and the distortion of the true nature of the Sabbath by pharisaical law led Jesus to state, “The Sabbath was made for man not man for the Sabbath” (Mark 2:27).

The biblical Sabbath does not include the notion of greater productivity. The motivation for rest is not so that greater productivity will ensue but rather points to a greater perspective of the relationship between time, which is made holy in the Sabbath, and things, which are sought after by our own efforts during the remaining days of the week (Heschel 3-10).

The biblical concept of a sabbatical year is found in Leviticus 25:2-4 and is directly linked to the land of promise:

Speak to the Israelites and say to them: “When you enter the land I am going to give you, the land itself must observe a sabbath to the Lord. For six years sow your fields, and for six years prune your vineyards and gather their crops. But in the seventh year the land is to have a sabbath of rest, a sabbath to the Lord. Do not sow your fields or prune your vineyards.”

Initially, this seventh year emphasis appears not to have a human component; however, the next verses (Lev. 25:8-17) describe how on the seventh series of such seven year periods, a jubilee year is proclaimed that has direct implications for the people, implications for social justice and national renewal. Within the context of the same pericope (Lev. 25:18ff), the Levitical record returns to the notion of the seventh year Sabbath for the land. The juxtaposition of this matter of the land and the people in these verses implies the interchangeability of the notion of the biblical Sabbath as applicable to the land, to the nation, and to individuals.

**Consequences of disregarding the Sabbath.** These are the biblical consequences of disregarding the Sabbath:

1. Death (Exod. 31:14, 15; 35:2; Num. 15:32) and
2. Being cut off from one’s own people (Exod. 31:15).

Eventually in the progressive nature of the revelation of God’s Sabbath plan, the penalty

for failing to observe the Sabbath is death (Exod. 35:2). Two additional references to this of death consequence are located in Exodus 31:14 and 15.

**The sabbatical as an extension of the Sabbath.** In the life of Jesus, a pattern of ministry followed by rest emerges. Examples include Luke 5:12 and Mark 6, both instances in which Jesus intentionally removes himself from the crowds and from his life's work after intense periods of ministry involvement. In these examples, Jesus withdraws from the crowd in order to be restored for ministry. The length of these withdrawals (and they seem to be no more than one-day retreats) is not as significant as the fact that Jesus is intentional about them. This remarkable pattern of work and rest is strikingly evident in the life of Jesus.

Another biblical example is Elijah, concerning a specific incident in which he appears to have symptoms of a burned out minister. In 1 Kings 19, Elijah is so despondent after an intense period of very public ministry (Mt. Carmel incident among others) that he despairs of life itself. The biblical prescription for his healing is that of a period of rest, food, and a forty-day journey in the desert (solitude).

Paul mentions in 1 Corinthians the significant pressure he experienced in ministry:

We do not want you to be uninformed, brothers, about the hardships we suffered in the province of Asia. We were under great pressure, far beyond our ability to endure, so that we despaired even of life. Indeed, in our hearts we felt the sentence of death. (2 Cor. 1:8-9)

Paul does not fully describe how he managed this particularly stressful period except to acknowledge that he was delivered by God who has power to raise the dead (v. 10).

Finally, Isaiah 58:13-14 contains a remarkable promise of God's blessing related to the keeping of the Sabbath:

“If you keep your feet from breaking the Sabbath and from doing as you please on my holy day, if you call the Sabbath a delight and the LORD’s holy day honorable, and if you honor it by not going your own way and not doing as you please or speaking idle words, then you will find your joy in the LORD, and I will cause you to ride on the heights of the land and to feast on the inheritance of your father Jacob.” The mouth of the LORD has spoken.

These powerful words provide a foundation for all who seek to follow God’s established Sabbath rhythm for life, whether in days, months, or years.

### **Research Methodology**

The qualitative nature of this study required an understanding of principles of social research. Important components included the development of an appropriate researcher-designed interview instrument, effective methods of telephone interview, and an understanding of content analysis methodologies.

The development of the researcher-designed interview instrument was completed by reviewing Wiersma, Miller, True, and Schuman and Pressler. Insight was gained into the appropriate use of a snowballing technique (Weirsma 300) for the creation of a list of subjects for the study. These works provided insight into the development of both close-ended and open-ended questions designed to elicit honest responses (True 210; Schuman and Presser 7-13). The semi-structured nature of the interview allowed me to probe for additional information beyond the written structure of the questions as deemed necessary in order to elicit helpful responses with careful attention not to lead the subject (True 205-08). The determination to conduct all interviews via telephone did not affect the quality of the data. Studies have proven that telephone interviews are as effective as face-to-face interviews, especially when the interviewer establishes an appropriate rapport with the subject (Miller 166). Appropriate handling of the data as well as effective content analysis makes for effective studies especially when the use of appropriate

encoding software enables the researcher to systematically analyze the data in question (True 154-58; Ethnograph). These resources led to the development of a seven step process for data collection described in Chapter 3.

### **Summary**

My own experience with burnout propelled me to investigate both burnout and sabbaticals. Burnout is not a new experience but has become more common in the last thirty-five years. Ministers are experiencing burnout at alarming rates. The Church cannot afford to continue losing ministers who opt out of ministry as a consequence of their burnout experiences. Prevailing wisdom argues that burnout can be prevented or at the very least managed so that the Church does not have such a significant loss of leaders.

Burnout is a complex problem. Not every minister experiences burnout, but all ministers have to learn to cope with burnout precursors, which unguarded can lead to burnout. Burnout negatively affects career tenure for ministers. Career tenure is affected by a host of other factors as well. Remaining future ministry tenure and local parish tenures are the primary concern of the Church by addressing the needs of its ministers and its churches.

Sabbatical, though not a biblical word, has deep roots in the biblical notion of Sabbath rest. Not much empirical evidence on the direct benefits of sabbaticals exists in the literature. The purpose of this dissertation was to observe the relationship between sabbaticals, burnout, and tenure and to study the impact of sabbaticals on burnout precursor factors and tenure (particularly future ministry tenure and local parish tenure) from the perspective of the local pastor in a Nazarene church context. This study provides grounding for the theory that sabbaticals are beneficial for ministers and churches.

## **CHAPTER 3**

### **RESEARCH DESIGN**

Too many Nazarene clergy experience too many burnout precursor factors. Too many Nazarene clergy experience burnout. Burnout is both manageable and preventable. A relatively new tool at the disposal of Nazarene clergy and churches to help combat the problem of burnout is the use of a planned sabbatical. Sabbaticals can significantly assist ministers in managing the inevitable experiences of burnout in ministry. That sabbaticals are helpful remains somewhat ungrounded. Anecdotal evidence even suggests that while some sabbaticals are helpful, some sabbaticals have only served as the first step in a minister's early exit from ministry.

This is a study of the impact of sabbaticals on burnout precursor factors and tenure (particularly future ministry tenure and local parish tenure) from the perspective of the local pastor in a Nazarene church context.

#### **Research Questions**

The following research questions channel the focus of this particular study.

##### **Research Question #1**

In what ways does a sabbatical reduce ministerial burnout?

Ministerial burnout can be positively impacted by a sabbatical that addresses the following burnout precursor factors: work overload, lack of control, insufficient reward, unfairness, breakdown of community, and value conflict. Sabbatical impact on ministerial burnout may be positive, negative or non-existent. Each factor has been observed and described.

##### **Research Question #2**

In what ways does a sabbatical enable Nazarene pastors to extend their future

ministry tenure?

While sabbaticals appear to be helpful to Nazarene pastors on several fronts, this question probes specifically the relationship sabbaticals and future ministry tenure. Sabbaticals directly impact tenure by increasing a pastor's understanding of his purpose and by providing him with an opportunity to reflect on ways to perform his duties in a more efficient manner. Sabbaticals impact minister's abilities to create and maintain workload limits lengthening a pastors ability to manage ministry issues for longer.

### **Research Question #3**

What particular elements of a sabbatical are essential to impact positively on tenure?

This question is designed to probe the specific events and details of the sabbatical that make it an effective tool in burnout prevention/management. Since work overload is a major precursor to burnout (Maslach and Leiter 26), the mere fact that a sabbatical is a break from the regular routine of work indicates it is helpful in burnout prevention and management. Specific sabbatical components will have a direct impact on sabbatical effectiveness. A number of important questions about the nature of sabbaticals and their effectiveness in managing burnout and its precursors were part of this study, including a review of the impact of sabbaticals against an established list of tenure obstacles.

### **Population**

The subjects of this study included a total of thirty ordained elders from among eighty-three North American Nazarene districts who completed a planned sabbatical of at least twenty-eight days in duration after a minimum of ten years in pastoral ministry and who served in ministry for at least ninety days following the conclusion of their planned sabbatical. These ministers were all serving in the capacity of senior pastor (or its



equivalent) of a local congregation both at the time of the sabbatical and at the time of the interviews.

This group was limited to ministers who served as senior pastors (or its equivalent) in their local church context at the time of their sabbatical in order to minimize an intervening variable of job description. While different churches have different sets of ministerial expectations, the workload of senior pastors in local churches is at least comparable. For instance, staff members in local churches are hired at the recommendation of the senior pastor to the local church board. The senior pastor, however, is elected by the congregation upon the recommendation of the church board and the district superintendent. Such differences in mandate and lines of authority generate entirely different sets of expectations.

The population was further limited to those ministers with a minimum of ten years experience. Since burnout has a gradual onset (Maslach and Leiter 17), few ministers would be expected to experience burnout any sooner. In addition, by limiting the population to those who have returned to ministry after their sabbaticals for ninety days, each minister has had enough time to return to or change long-established patterns of behavior. Most of the interviewees had returned to ministry for significantly longer periods of time.

In addition, the group was limited to those who continue to serve in a parish relationship (pastor, district superintendent, or missionary). Other ministry roles were eliminated from the study due to the significantly different nature of expectations connected with them. Examples include itinerant evangelists, chaplains, college/university faculty or administration, international headquarters staff, or local church associate positions. Many Nazarene elders serve in these roles and may have

participated in sabbaticals but were excluded from this study.

A snowballing technique (Weirisma 300) was used to collect names of potential interviewees. Names were collected from acquaintances, church leaders (lay and clergy), and as a closing request in each interview.

### **Methodology**

This project was a descriptive study utilizing a researcher-designed, semi-structured interview. Nazarene elders serving as local church pastors in North America served as the population. The number of elders estimated to have taken a sabbatical ranges from 2 to 5 percent.

The interview instrument itself was constructed with a combination of open-ended and close-ended questions (True 210), allowing the opportunity to probe for more specific detail as needed. Questions were constructed for relevance, clarity, and brevity (211).

Considering cost as one factor, a face-to-face interview with all subjects was deemed not feasible. I decided instead to conduct all interviews by telephone for the sake of consistency. Although face-to-face interviews might have been preferable, gathering the data by telephone was an efficient use of time and a choice that had a negligible effect on validity. Studies comparing the differences between face-to-face interviews and telephone interviews indicate that the quality of the data is not affected and this even in instances where the data relates to personally embarrassing events such as bankruptcy and drunken driving arrests (Miller 166).

The greatest concern in eliciting valid responses via telephone interviews is the ability of the interviewer to establish an appropriate rapport with the subject. Fortunately, all candidates were eager to participate and felt that their contributions could help the

church. Every clergy member with whom I spoke seemed eager to encourage the development of an appropriate sabbatical plan for clergy as a means to manage and or prevent burnout by the reduction of burnout precursors. The general spirit of camaraderie that exists among Nazarene clergy opened the door for me to establish an easy rapport with each interviewee.

One downside to telephone interviews is that they have consistently demonstrated to be shorter than personal modes of interview requiring me to be better prepared to probe for additional answers to open-ended questions. Interestingly though, “in spite of these differences, very few response discrepancies have been found between the two sets of data that were large enough to be considered statistically significant” (Miller 166).

### **Semi-Structured Interview**

The instrument was designed to allow me the ability to collect certain data while at the same time giving me the latitude to explore for more in-depth answers as the interview proceeded (True 206). This ability to probe for additional response was invaluable in securing helpful data though it was done with care by extension and echo to minimize interviewer bias (206; see Appendix A).

### **Variables**

A number of variables are part of this study. The key variable in this research project was the sabbatical. No uniform methodology for the actual practice of sabbaticals exists, including such variables as length and content. The literature records sabbaticals of varying lengths from several weeks to an entire year.

Other variables include attitude toward future ministry tenure and the six-point Maslach and Leiter burnout precursor matrix. Future ministry tenure is closely related to a number of factors, but the particular focus of this study was the intersection of tenure

attitudes as impacted by burnout and the ability of a planned sabbatical to influence burnout precursor factors in a positive way, thereby improving ministry attitudes toward tenure. These variables were measured based on the recollections of the interviewees with questions, such as, How would you describe your attitude toward ministry tenure prior to your sabbatical? Is your attitude toward ministry tenure improved since your sabbatical? To what degree was your sabbatical responsible for this improvement?

Another variable that impacted the study is the particular age of each pastor/subject of the study. An obvious correlation exists between a pastor's proximity to retirement age and that same pastor's attitude toward continued ministry.

No effort was made in this study to control the level to which each pastor experienced burnout and to what degree. The assumption is that all ministers have experienced at least some of the precursors of burnout in some measure. The same way that each person experiences different levels of pain at different thresholds, so too each minister's experiences with burnout and its symptoms is affected by personality style.

Congregations are also different. Some provide cocoon-like environments for ministers and laity alike. Some have extremely high levels of expectation. Some congregations are especially supportive of efforts to provide sabbaticals for their pastors while other congregations resist sabbaticals, or have provided them begrudgingly.

Some effort was taken to provide a control of these variables. This study was intentionally limited to North American clergy, which placed a limit on general cultural differences. The study was limited to senior pastors, which placed a general limit on the kinds of expectations that senior pastors face as compared to those of associate pastors. The study was limited to Nazarene clergy, which limited the study to a similar theological perspective on God's call to ministry (and additional theological issues that

relate to ministerial expectations). This study was limited to pastors who had taken a sabbatical of at least four-weeks duration (twenty-eight days), which provided a minimum measure of consistency. The study was limited to pastors who had returned to ministry for at least ninety days, which provided consistency of insight for post-sabbatical responses.

### **Interview Pretest**

An interview pretest was conducted with six ministers who had taken sabbaticals or extended vacation periods. Following the pretest, the interview instrument was refined and helpful feedback was received that enabled a better interview process. The pretesting process allowed me to gain expertise with the recording equipment and interview technique, and to refine the interview instrument.

### **Data Collection**

Data collection proceeded along the following guidelines:

1. Identifying potential subjects accomplished via a snowballing sampling method,
2. Enlisting the agreement of subjects to participate in an interview, usually via phone call but also occasionally through e-mail,
3. Conducting and recording the interview using an electronic recording device so that a transcript of the interview could be prepared later,
4. Making notes of impressions about the interview within an hour of its completion noting impressions and observations pertinent to the research,
5. Transcribing the interviews the electronic recording device into word processing documents,
6. Importing the word processing document files into an appropriate qualitative

data analysis software, (Ethnograph) and,

7. Encoding the transcripts.

In the process of collecting the data, I was careful to provide consistency by doing the following:

1. Participating in each interview;
2. Taking notes within an hour of each interview for later reflection, and
3. Transcribing and rereading each interview transcript, spending time in each

long enough to become thoroughly acquainted with data.

### **Confidentiality and Anonymity**

At the beginning of each interview subjects were assured of confidentiality and anonymity in the use of their interview responses in order to garner the best response possible. In addition each pastor was asked for permission to use the data collected for the purposes of the study. I used a simple numerical system in order to track responses by subject as needed.

### **Interviews**

Interviews were conducted over a period of three months by prearranged phone appointments. The responses I was seeking were those about which the respondents were most passionate. In my opinion, based on specific feedback during interview pretests, passionate responses would result from interviews regardless of whether I sent a set of preview questions to each subject. Originally I intended to forward questions to each subject prior to the subjects; however, all six of my pretest, subjects indicated either a difficulty in committing that much time to reading the questions in advance, difficulties in receiving the material easily (e.g., e-mail document attachment difficulties), and their genuinely expressed opinion that advance knowledge of the questions would not have

changed their answers. In addition, only one of the subjects of the study asked for the questions in advance, and after I explained that my method did not include advance notice of the questions, he accepted the explanation and was comfortable proceeding with the interview.

### **Delimitations**

This study cannot possibly measure all the factors associated with both burnout and sabbaticals, nor is it specifically designed to provide the solution for the problem of burnout among Nazarene clergy. It does, however, attempt to answer whether or not sabbaticals are helpful (as one part of an effective strategy) in the management of burnout precursor factors and in burnout recovery.

### **Limitations**

All interviews were collected from Nazarene clergy currently serving in ministry positions. Pastors included those who have served in both large and small church assignments. Since each church is unique, and the expectations of each local church vary and since individual burnout tolerances differ, no single clergy or any single congregation perfectly or completely represent the whole scope of the problem studied. To this end a significant number of clergy have been interviewed. A group of thirty subjects for such a study is deemed acceptable and reasonable by field research standards according to conversations with the directors of the Doctor of Ministry program at Asbury Theological Seminary.

Since the study was limited to active Nazarene senior pastors, this immediately limited the probability of including anyone other than Caucasian males. The number of women clergy and those of other ethnic and racial backgrounds is already limited in the Church of the Nazarene, and the number of them that have taken sabbaticals proved to be

greatly limited as well. In my study I learned of no woman or person of race other than Caucasian among Nazarene clergy who had taken a sabbatical. This finding personally saddens me.

Also, because the study was limited to active Nazarene senior pastors, I was unable to include results from those former pastors who may have taken sabbaticals but who are no longer in ministry today. This also meant that I did not speak with anyone who had completed their careers (retired ministers) or those in denominational leadership positions (presumably some of our best leaders) since they did not meet the participation criteria.

Each sabbatical is unique. In fact, sabbaticals are complex and different enough one from another to make drawing *de facto* conclusions from about all sabbaticals difficult. For instance, not every sabbatical was planned with burnout prevention as a key factor. For some pastors sabbatical was more intentionally about professional retooling than anything else. The result is that this study does not outline a complete solution for ministerial burnout but, rather, points the way to a better understanding of the interplay between sabbaticals and burnout recovery and management.

### **Summary**

The scope of this project was a qualitative description of the relationship between sabbatical, burnout precursor factors and the impact of both on future ministry tenure and local parish tenure. Through a semi-structured interview, I gleaned insights into the relationship between sabbatical experiences and attitudes toward tenure from thirty Nazarene clergy. The interviews were designed to elicit honest and meaningful responses to these specific questions with latitude to probe as the need arose. In particular this study shows the interconnectedness of sabbaticals with positive attitudes toward long-term



ministry tenure. The interviews generated several response patterns (i.e., “I found the sabbatical helpful in reconnecting with my call to ministry”) that provided insight into the dynamics of sabbaticals and future ministry tenure from which significant conclusions have been drawn. While widely presumed that sabbaticals are helpful to ministers who experience burnout and are effective even as a method for managing burnout precursor factors, this study adds to the body of knowledge gathered to date. This research also led to the development of additional questions for further study, particularly about the appropriate length and timing of sabbaticals.

## **CHAPTER 4**

### **FINDINGS OF THE STUDY**

Beginning in November 2002 through January 2003, thirty Nazarene ministers were interviewed by telephone to collect data for this study. Before the interviews began, I collected a list of potential participants using a snowballing technique (Weirisma 300). I asked my network of acquaintances, church leaders, and colleagues for the names of persons whom they believed might qualify for my study. These names were added to a list of potential participants along with contact information provided. Typically I received only a name, but thanks to Ron Blake, Clergy Services Director Church of the Nazarene, and more particularly to his administrative assistant, Darlene Friend, I was provided contact information in a timely manner.

The snowballing technique collected sixty-five potential names. As contact information was gathered some did not qualify for participation in the study by failing to meet one of the five eligibility criteria. The participation criteria were,

1. at least ten years of ministry experience;
2. ordination credentials in the Church of the Nazarene;
3. current active service as a Senior Pastor in the Church of the Nazarene;
4. having experience of a sabbatical of at least twenty-eight days in duration; and,
5. having returned to the pastoral ministry for at least ninety days.

The criteria excluded retired ministers and those still active but in ministry positions other than senior pastor (e.g., district superintendents, college/university administration roles, and denominational leadership roles). Additional exclusions resulted through preliminary telephone conversations by which one or more of the participation criteria were lacking. In at least three instances, persons recommended to my list had not yet

taken a sabbatical. Of the remaining names on the list, I secured the first thirty at random with whom I could establish an interview appointment to participate in my study.

All of the interviews were held by telephone appointment. An initial phone contact (sometimes more than one) with the prospective participant was required to explain the project and to request participation. During this phone call, I explained the participation criteria. Once a prospective subject agreed to participate, an appointment was established at a mutually convenient time. At the appointed time I initiated the phone call, with appropriate recording equipment at the ready. Permission from each participant was secured prior to recording. Each interview was recorded on individual microcassettes through a recording system connected directly to the telephone receiver. The quality of the recordings was quite good with only a couple of exceptions. In addition, during the interview I had access to a personal computer for additional note taking if necessary.

The interviews lasted on average about forty-five minutes each. The longest lasted just over an hour. The shortest was completed in just under thirty-five minutes. The interview process was a positive experience for me personally, not only from insights gained but also by broadening my network of colleagues in ministry.

The interviews provided a wealth of information about the Nazarene ministers' sabbatical experiences.

The findings of the study are organized as follows:

1. Observations and general findings,
2. Findings related to Research Question #1,
3. Findings related to Research Question #2,
4. Findings related to Research Question #3,
5. Additional findings, and

## 6. Summary of findings.

### **Observations and General Findings**

The study reveals significant insights about sabbaticals and their impact on burnout, tenure, and the essential elements for an effective sabbatical. A few observations and comments on general findings are appropriate and important to the more detailed findings that follow.

#### **Observations**

Study participants seemed eager to share their sabbatical experiences. Participants were not difficult to recruit as subjects of the study. I called promptly at the agreed appointment time. Only two were not immediately available to participate. One pastor had double booked his schedule, and one had been detained unavoidably. Both adjusted their schedules so that the interviews proceeded with only minor delay. Such a positive response demonstrates that the population believed they had something valuable to share, something they were willing to share.

On several occasions, participants asked questions, such as, “Is that what you are looking for?” I am not certain if this betrayed a sentiment that they wanted to answer the question in a way most beneficial to my study. On every occasion that I heard a similar comment to this one, I clarified that what I was seeking was their specific insight, which was correct only so long as it accurately reflected the pastor’s sabbatical experience.

The process of interviewing these pastors proved to be a highlight of this study process. I thoroughly enjoyed the connection with Nazarene pastors throughout the United States. I enjoyed the requirement imposed on me as the interviewer to listen carefully to each respondent.

The Church of the Nazarene is represented in all fifty of the United States of

America. The study population included pastors from the following twelve states (the number in parenthesis indicates the number of subjects in the study from each state listed): Ohio (7), Virginia (5), Tennessee (4), California (3), Illinois (2), Indiana (2), Kansas (2), Arizona (1), Florida (1), Michigan (1), Missouri (1), and Vermont (1).

### **General Findings**

Three findings of a general nature detail what I learned about the population as a group: their retirement/tenure plans, pre-and post-sabbatical burnout experience responses, and elapsed time from the conclusion of the sabbatical.

**Population demographics.** The population included an all-male study group whose average age was 49.5 years. Although not my intention to have only males participate in the study, the snowballing technique did not reveal any names of potential female study participants. The number of female senior pastors in the Church of the Nazarene in the United States is significantly small.

Each subject had been in ministry at least ten years prior to the sabbatical, and the average number of years in ministry of the population was slightly over twenty-three years. The oldest subject was 67 years of age, and the youngest was 33 years old.

The average length of the sabbatical itself was forty-six days (between six and seven weeks). The longest sabbatical was ninety-one days (three months) and the shortest (there were two of them) twenty-eight days (four weeks).

On average the participants had returned to their ministry assignments after the close of the sabbatical for more than twenty-four months. The longest period back in ministry since the sabbatical was ninety-six months (eight years). The shortest return period was three months (three participants).

Interestingly, of the thirty participants in the study only one reported having taken

more than one sabbatical, and he reported only two. This finding reflects the newness of the sabbatical concept in the denomination.

On average the population has vocational ministry of at least twenty-three years. The longest and shortest tenures among the population were forty and ten years respectively. Table 1 lists a number of details about the study population (see Table 1).

**Table 1. Population Demographics**

General Findings				
	Mean	Standard Deviation	Range	Time Period
Age of pastor subjects	49.4	8.0	33-67	Years
Time back from sabbatical	24.86	23.7	3-96	Months
Sabbatical duration	46.03	13.0	28-91	Days
Minimum remaining years in ministry	23.6	8.5	1-37	Years
Min. avg. years left	15.8	7.9		Years
Additional Findings				
Identity		Number		
Nazarene senior pastors		30		
Male		30		
Female		0		

**Tenure plans.** Each subject was asked to identify an age bracket during which he would likely complete his tenure as senior pastor. By a specific question in the interview, participants were asked to project an age range for retirement (see Table 2).

**Table 2. Subject Retirement/Career Tenure Plans**

Retirement age bracket	Responses	% of N
65-69	25	83.33
70-up	3	10.00
60-64	1	3.33
55-59	1	3.33
50-54	0	0.00

The stated retirement age range by nearly all ministers was the 65-69 age bracket. Conceivably, on average, these ministers have a twenty-year future ministry tenure remaining. Even using the most conservative measurement, these ministers have, on average, a fifteen-year future ministry tenure remaining.

**Burnout experience responses.** Participants were given a specific definition of burnout (a progressive loss of idealism, energy, and purpose that can occur among individuals in ministry, resulting from an unreplenished emotional demand of helping troubled persons) and were asked if they personally had experienced burnout prior to their sabbatical experiences. A follow-up question asked them if they had experienced burnout post-sabbatical (see Table 3).

**Table 3. Reported Burnout Experiences Pre- and Post-Sabbatical**

Reported Response	Yes	No
Experienced burnout prior to sabbatical	16 (53.3%)	14 (46.7%)
Experienced burnout post sabbatical	5 (16.7%)	25 (83.3%)

A majority (53.3 percent) of the population reported having experienced burnout prior to the sabbatical. Only 16.7 percent reported having experienced burnout post-sabbatical. The responses to these questions were typically one or two word answers, but on occasion more information was given that required interpretation. For example, pastor 125Y reported that prior to sabbatical “I don’t believe I experienced burnout, but maybe at least there are some symptoms, you know, that I certainly was experiencing, but I don’t believe I was in burnout *per se*.” This response is reported as a “No” in Table 3. Another similar example is from pastor 123W who reported the following pre-sabbatical response: “No, I don’t believe I experienced burnout, but I definitely saw myself going 100 m.p.h., and the wall was coming. I don’t think I was there yet, but I was heading that direction.” This response is also reported as a “No.” The “Yes” responses then indicate those who reported an unqualified “Yes” as their answer. Had those who reported a qualified “No” (see examples above) been included in the “Yes” category, the percentage of positive pre-sabbatical burnout responses would have dramatically increased. In either event, the post-sabbatical responses are remarkable for their contrast to the pre-sabbatical responses. The study finds that 83.3 percent of the population claims not to have experienced post-sabbatical burnout. This is a notable response.

A closer look at this finding reveals that of the sixteen who experienced burnout prior to sabbatical, only four experienced burnout post sabbatical (see Table 4).



**Table 4. Comparison of Pre-Sabbatical “Yes” Burnout Responses to Post-Sabbatical Responses**

Reported Response	Yes	No
Experienced burnout prior to sabbatical	16 (100%)	--
Experience burnout post sabbatical	4 (25%)	12 (75%)

The progressive nature of burnout implicates time as a factor. The elapsed post-sabbatical time period is another important finding of the study. Table 5 compares the average post-sabbatical elapsed time periods for all pastors to various population response categories.

**Table 5. Burnout Responses, Months Since Sabbatical and Sabbatical Duration**

Pre- and Post-Sabbatical Responses	N/30 (%)	Elapsed Time Since Sabbatical (months)			Sabbatical duration (days)		
		Mean	SD	Range	Mean	SD	Range
All responses	30 (100%)	24.86	23.7	3-96	46.03	13.0	28-91
No No	13 (43.3%)	25.31	21.4	5-84	45.77	16.3	28-91
Yes No	12 (40.0%)	23.08	26.4	3-96	48.58	11.0	30-70
Yes Yes	4 (13.3%)	18.50	20.8	3-48	42.00	5.7	35-49
No Yes	1 (3.3%)	66.00	--	--	35.00	--	--

The findings reported in Table 5 show the average elapsed time since the conclusion of the sabbatical for the entire population of the study and by pre- and post-sabbatical burnout experience response categories. What stands out is the short elapsed time for those who experienced burnout both pre- and post-sabbatical, a period of only

18.5 months. However, each of the four pastors who reported pre- and post-sabbatical burnout affirm a belief that sabbaticals are helpful in burnout restoration and burnout symptom management/prevention. When asked if sabbaticals are an effective way to prevent burnout symptoms and/or restore those who have experienced burnout, subject 119S (one of the pastors with both a pre- and post-sabbatical “Yes” response) reported an affirmative answer:

Yes, I do. Yes I think the longer someone has been in ministry without a time of refocusing time like that, the longer they are going to need. I can honestly say that my sabbatical of seven weeks (and you know some people in my congregation thought that was a horrendously long time) still did not get me all the way back to where I needed to be. I mean it helped me enormously. It got me about 80 percent back. You know if I had some other things to do I would have done some. I think I would have taken a longer sabbatical, and I also would have planned it a little bit better to do some other things.

Just as insightful is the response to the same question from pastor 102B:

I would probably speak to it with a qualified yes. I think we have to be careful that we don't see sabbaticals as a panacea for burnout. Because burnout is more complex, I believe, than simply running low on the fuel gauges. I think its source also comes in unrealistic expectations of what ministry is supposed to be, unrealistic expectations of ourselves in terms of effectiveness.

Responses such as these moderate the findings by identifying some of the limitations of sabbaticals.

### **Findings Related to Research Question #1**

Research Question #1 asks, In what ways does a sabbatical reduce ministerial burnout?

The findings to Research Question #1 are presented as

1. General findings related to Research Question #1,
2. Sabbatical impact on work overload and fatigue,

3. Sabbatical impact on lack of control over destiny,
4. Sabbatical impact on lack of job reward and/or satisfaction,
5. Sabbatical impact on lack of community,
6. Sabbatical impact on lack of fairness,
7. Sabbatical impact on value conflict, and
8. Summary of findings related to Research Question #1.

### **General Findings Related to Research Question #1**

The interview instrument asked the subjects specifically to do two things: first, to establish a baseline of response measuring the degree to which each of the six Maslach and Leiter matrix factors was experienced prior to sabbatical (see Table 6), and second, to give an opportunity in the interview to comment on the impact (if any) of the sabbatical on that particular factor. A summary follow-up question asked each respondent to identify if the sabbatical had no impact, or if it did have an impact if the impact was positive or negative (see Table 7).

After establishing a baseline, instead of asking for post-sabbatical numerical values to the same factors, pastors were asked instead to identify the impact of the sabbatical on the factor as either positive, negative or no impact (see Table 7).

**Table 6. Pre-Sabbatical Baseline Ratings of Maslach and Leiter Burnout Matrix Precursor Factors**

<b>Factor</b>	<b>Average Response</b>
Work overload and fatigue	4.03
Lack of job reward/satisfaction	2.60
Lack of community	2.53
Lack of control over your own destiny	2.50
Value conflict	2.50
Lack of fairness	2.30

Each participant was asked to rank each factor with a numeric value. The scale used the following descriptive values:

- 5 = the factor was strongly experienced;
- 4 = the factor was definitely experienced;
- 3 = the factor was mildly experienced;
- 2 = the factor was barely experienced; and,
- 1 = the factor was not experienced.

Table 6 reveals that, on average, work overload and fatigue as a burnout factor was definitely experienced prior to the sabbatical. All other factors were between mildly experienced and barely experienced. The fairness factor received the lowest rating.

**Table 7. Post-Sabbatical Impact Responses to Maslach and Leiter Burnout Matrix Precursor Factors**

Impact Factor	Responses			
	Positive	No Impact	Negative	Non given
Impact on work overload and fatigue	21	9	0	0
Impact on lack of job reward/satisfaction	18	11	0	1
Impact on value conflict	17	11	1	1
Impact on lack of control over your own destiny	17	12	0	1
Impact on lack of community	14	15	0	1
Impact on lack of fairness	10	17	3	0
<b>Total Responses</b>	<b>97</b>	<b>75</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>4</b>

The work overload and fatigue factor received the highest number of positive impact responses. The lowest number of positive impact responses was reported for the lack of fairness factor. The fairness factor is also the only factor that received multiple negative impact responses.

The frequency of positive, negative, and no impact responses is also indicative of the overall impact of the sabbatical. Table 8 shows the frequency of responses per pastor. Each pastor could give up to six impact responses. Table 8 records that twenty-one of the pastors (70 percent) report at least three factors positively impacted. Conversely, twenty-one (70 percent) report that the sabbatical had no impact on three or less factors. The post-sabbatical impact responses reveal a decidedly positive sabbatical impact on the Maslach and Leiter burnout matrix factors.

**Table 8. Per Subject Response Frequency For Positive, Negative, and No Impact Matrix Responses**

Impact Response	Response Frequency						
	1	2	3	4	5	6	Total
Positive	3	6	10	4	6	1	97
No Impact	6	6	9	5	2	0	75
Negative	4	0	0	0	0	0	4
<b>Total Impact Responses</b>	<b>13</b>	<b>24</b>	<b>57</b>	<b>36</b>	<b>40</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>176</b>

Table 8 reveals that out of the potential 180 responses 176 were recorded. Of these, ninety-seven (55.11 percent) were positive, and seventy-five (42.61 percent) were no impact. Only four (2.27 percent) of responses were negative. Overall the subjects reported that the sabbatical had a more favorable impact versus no impact.

To compare only the total number of positive, negative, and no impact responses, does not, however, tell the whole story. If the sabbatical only positively impacted one factor and was found to have no impact on the other matrix factors, it still could be considered to have had a positive overall impact. Every respondent had at least one positive response and, additionally, no respondent had an equal or higher number of negative impact responses compared to positive responses.

Furthermore, every respondent indicated that the sabbatical contributed positively to at least one factor and that 70 percent (21) indicated that it had a positive impact on three or more of the factors. A significant percentage (N=7; 23.3 percent) indicated that the sabbatical experience impacted five or six of the factors. One person indicated that the sabbatical impacted all six of the Maslach and Leiter Burnout matrix factors.

## **Sabbatical Impact on Work Overload and Fatigue**

The impact of the sabbatical on this matrix factor was revealed in three response categories: Changes in personal priorities, shared ministry, and commitment to a Sabbath practice. Responses were gleaned from specific answers to the direct question (interview section 2, question 7; see Appendix A) and other responses in the interview.

**Changes in personal priorities.** Responses in this category demonstrate that the sabbatical impacted pastors' priority choices, particularly related to time management ("I only work forty-two hours per week now instead of endless," said Pastor 121U) and to ministry priority choices (Pastor 116P spoke about no longer putting out "fires" at every turn). The changes were substantive and related to family, personal calendar scheduling, and more intentional planning for ministry (less reactive and more proactive).

**Shared ministry.** At least fifteen pastors (50 percent) reported a connection between the sabbatical and the biblical concept of shared ministry. In part because the church "made it without them," pastors were reminded that the church is larger than themselves. Despite pastors' important role they are not indispensable. God calls pastors to train others for ministry. A flavor of the responses is presented below:

Yes there have been changes made to my workload. They have been influenced by my sabbatical in that I came back with more determination to develop lay leadership. (101A)

I stopped running the business of the church and have given that to other people and focused much more on the core tasks, what I believe to be the core tasks, of pastoral ministry, of study and prayer and spiritual direction, pastoral care, visionary leadership—that kind of thing. (106F)

A great example is the response from Pastor 107G whose rather lengthy answer reveals a new attention to the issue of the priesthood of believers:

I've committed to get more people involved into the pastoral care. Making sure they understand,... (matter of fact I made this statement I think when

I came back we had a check up meeting with the congregation and I think I made this statement or something like this): “I can pray as effectively for you whether I’m standing there beside you, or whether I’m at home or at the office. It just seems different to you. My prayer is not affected by my presence. And on the other side of that, Christ in me is the same as Christ in the Sunday school teacher or small group leader or one of your friends, and Christ in me can minister to you as effectively through someone else as he can through me.” Trying to help people recognize that ministry is more than pastors.

The concept of the release of the priesthood of believers is a major finding of the study.

**Commitment to a Sabbath.** At least six pastors (20 percent) indicate that the sabbatical gave them a new (or in some cases renewed) ability to manage symptoms of burnout by a renewed commitment to a personal Sabbath or personal recommitment to the Sabbath principle. As Pastor 1150 said, sabbaticals are effective because they are biblical:

It is a principle God has set forth, and we don’t break God’s laws; they break us. And it becomes more acute in a high stressed intense vocation like local church pastoral ministry is today. But I think the principle is universal, and if you disregard the principle of the Sabbath in your life at some point you are going to pay the price.

Pastor 116P spoke of his personal recommitment to a Sabbath day in his weekly schedule, and one pastor spoke of a more comprehensive Sabbath rest plan, including weekly days off and periodic renewal times over the span of months (one week respites every seven months) and years (a sabbatical every five years; see Appendix D). In this context, a number of pastors spoke about the importance of appropriate self-care.

### **Sabbatical Impact on Lack of Control over Destiny**

Table 7 demonstrates that the lack of control factor was also favorably impacted by the sabbatical, although for many pastors the issue was only marginally experienced and not a major concern. Many pastors spoke of having resolved this issue long before sabbatical. Findings are direct answers to the specific impact of this factor (lack of



control over destiny) as well as gleaned responses from the entire interview. The themes are (1) confidence/leadership strengthening and (2) a better understanding of one's identity.

**Confidence/leadership strengthening.** Several respondents (N=18; 60 percent) indicated that the sabbatical resulted in a strengthening of their leadership, certainly in skill areas but more directly in confidence, a more intangible notion. Pastors expressed a new ability to face difficulties with greater confidence and conviction. The following samples illustrate the depth of impact on this point.

For instance, pastor 115O said that the sabbatical strengthened his confidence:

Well, I know I'm different after the sabbatical. Everyone says I am, and I've tried to listen to what they said. Sometimes the changes from the experience are more noticeable in others even [that] in ourselves. But the comments that I'm getting is that there is a maturity that I did not have before, there is a quiet confidence about, just less, more of a peace with where you are and what God has called of you.

He later adds that "the sabbatical ... may be at the core of where this quiet confidence that people are telling me about" is coming from. This same pastor also acknowledges a greater sense of clarity in his leadership role that resulted from the sabbatical experience.

Pastor 117Q said that the sabbatical changed his leadership and confidence in ministry by increasing his feeling of control:

I think there is a greater sense of feeling like, for example, prior to the sabbatical, feeling out of control, and the reading I did on my sabbatical to develop greater leadership skills allowed me to enhance my abilities to not feel overwhelmed and feel that I was losing control by better organizational skills and things like that.

In addition, 118R said, "After the sabbatical I faced some really critical things in the pastorate with some people after the sabbatical, though these things were not a [major] issue, because I knew the congregation supported me." This same pastor spoke of

the definite impact a cross-cultural ministry experience had on him during sabbatical:

Probably I was over-thinking things before the sabbatical, and I saw firsthand, “Stop thinking so much and just declare who God is” and you have to know our culture and all that, but it just gave me a new boldness.

Responses underscored the sabbatical’s impact on both the understanding and practice of leadership principles.

**A better understanding of one’s identity.** The data reveals that many ministers indicate that not only are their calls renewed but that in the process they had a better understanding of identity, purpose, and the role of pastor. Such a response takes the sense of calling to a more profound level, having direct impact on ways of doing and being. This study finds that a large number of respondents (N=14; 46.7 percent) indicate that the sabbatical helped them better understand their own identity either as a person, as a minister, or both. A composite answer of these responses is “The sabbatical helped me to better understand who I am in Christ, the purposes of my life, and to make outward application of those principles in my ministry.” Specifics responses from two pastors provide excellent examples:

As both a male and as someone who is called to this ministry, um, it’s very easy for me to define who I am by what I do and to base, to build my picture of success on outward, um, indicators that are common to church world, (success as attendance, finance growth pictures) and, um, I wanted to get away from those things and to get more biblical of an understanding of what defines success for me as a man. (101A)

I realize now that many of the things that were becoming crisis issues are almost irrelevant. I mean, there is a lot of heavy stuff that I made a big deal, and it just ain’t a big deal. [Sabbatical] changed the whole thing. Now I know that Jesus can handle most of this stuff, and if I just shut up most of it will go away. People will press you. They’ll come in and demand action right now. And now I think, “Well, you know, I know good and well three hours from now they’re gonna change,” so I better be careful how I answer this, cause they are going to come back, and I’m gonna answer the wrong question. (116P)

He also said, “I never thought that I could ever pastor another church, and I still don’t feel like I should, but I realize I could. I can walk out of here and still be satisfying to God.”

Pastor 123W said that the sabbatical revealed important things to him about himself:

I think that during sabbatical it revealed some things about me that I didn’t like, [a] competitive spirit. So there were some things there about the sabbatical that helped me to see a little bit deeper inside of me. I discovered some jealousies of people in bigger churches than you are, and you know, I had to do some confessing and things like that as well. But getting away long enough to do that was what caused that, and it was real healthy.

Pastor 125Y said that the sabbatical forced him to realize the hand of God on his life:

I think before, maybe just a thought, that maybe everything was dependent upon myself, or maybe not everything but a large amount of that, and it’s not a pulling away from responsibility as much as it is of a recognition of the God factor in all of this as well, and also of the ability of the church to be there whether I am here or not (in some measure, certainly there are limits to that and we are called to this, I guess more faith in “it’s God’s Church”).

The succinct words of pastor 129CC describe the tension between a minister’s call and the minister’s identity apart from a call, “There is my relationship to God, although connected to my ministry (very much so), and my call is not the end all, is not all there is to my life.”

### **Sabbatical Impact on Lack of Job Reward and/or Satisfaction**

Sabbaticals had an overall positive impact on this burnout matrix factor (see Table 7 p. 74). Pastors identified a significant positive impact of the sabbatical on this factor. Most pastors identified this issue as one related to a sense of call.

**Responses related to God’s call.** A major finding of this study is the large number of responses connecting the sabbatical with God’s call to ministry. The study

finds that twenty-eight respondents (93.3 percent) identified some factor in their sabbatical directly related to God's call to ministry. These responses were both direct responses to the job/reward satisfaction impact question and gleaned responses from throughout the interview. These responses fall into five major subcategories related to the issue of God's call upon the minister's life that resulted from the sabbatical: (1) affirmation/confirmation of God's call to ministry, (2) affirm to or release from place, and (3) a better understanding of circumstances or the sacrificial nature of the call to ministry.

The study finds that twenty-three pastors (76.7 percent) connected the sabbatical with the issue affirmation/confirmation of God's call upon their life for ministry. Responses generally indicated that the sabbatical itself was designed to seek such renewal. Some respondents made clear that while they had no doubts about their call they were genuinely affirmed through the sabbatical process (sometimes despite the fact that this had not been on their original intent for their sabbatical). Other responses clearly indicated that prior to the sabbatical they had begun to question their call to ministry in some fashion. Key words that revealed this finding were a sense of refocus or renewal of call or purpose. The key is that these ministers clearly sensed a renewed call of God to ministry. Typically these responses were shared emphatically and with great conviction. Here is a sample response, this one by 118R:

I found out that I really enjoy the role of the ministry and my role as a pastor. It was difficult for me to stay away for seven weeks, but I disciplined myself. I didn't show up at the church or call the church or anything like that. But I found out that I really enjoy what I am doing where before I took a sabbatical I was having a tendency to say, "Oh, poor me, sometimes it's all on my shoulders." But I really like this, what I am doing. And it kind of reaffirmed the call of God on my life and the excitement of doing the ministry for him.

Pastor 120T said that the sabbatical affirmed his call to ministry:

Another positive thing was I was ready to go back to work again and that includes counseling and dealing with conflict sermon preparation and helped me to realize that in a positive way I was called to preach, and without that something was missing. And so I wanted to hang in there and keep at it.

Many respondents indicated that while on their sabbatical they clearly sensed either a clear affirmation/confirmation of their current ministry role, but for at least a few (103C, 110J, 126Z, 130DD) the sabbatical revealed that God was preparing them for other places of senior pastor ministry or even different kinds of ministry and that the sabbatical served as a key to ministry release.

A small number (N=6; 20 percent) of responses identified in particular that the sabbatical enabled them to prepare to return to complicated ministry circumstances, because it helped them better understand their unique circumstances and the sacrificial nature of the call to ministry. They expressed a better understanding of the fact that they had a special role to play in their respective circumstances, such as pastor 110J:

I was still preaching and getting positive response in the midst of all this, with everything going on there. There was great reward in fulfilling that and that God is using you in the pulpit. There is definitely greater response to my leadership. Maybe that is because if I was a wounded warrior, I feel like it has made [a difference] because the things that I do sense, (like the whole process of growing close, and being restored, and clearing my head and all that stepping aside and working all that through) has definitely made a difference in how I am able to, positively able to, encourage committees and stuff like that, and people.

Speaking of his sabbatical experience, 119S said, “So that is really the best part of it, that I was able to regroup and get my head back on straight, so to speak.”

The following example from pastor 112L is quite indicative of the kind of impact the sabbatical had on his ministry:

Well, when you get away, you gain perspective over what you have been doing and you begin to see how God was at work even through the things

that seemed to be a mess. I think that is just invaluable, the chance to get a God's-eye view of all that you have been doing and what it is coming to and to realize that you are having a greater impact and that your work is actually counting for something.

### **Sabbatical Impact on Lack of Community**

Sabbaticals impacted the community burnout factor in a positive way (see Table 7 p. 74) although to a lesser degree than other factors. Answers related to the issue of community were not limited to the specific question that engaged this issue. Findings in this section include both specific responses to the lack of community question and gleaned responses from remaining portions of the interview. Pastors indicated a connection between the sabbatical and renewed or strengthened relationships of various kinds involving congregation, peers/colleagues, and family (particularly spouse but also the nuclear family unit).

**Congregational relationships.** The study did not ask a specific question about improved congregational relationships, nonetheless responses about the impact of the sabbatical on congregational relationships repeatedly (twenty responses from ten subjects). Typically the findings reveal a phrase similar to this: "As a result of the sabbatical, I realize that I appreciate my congregation more and that they appreciate me more now too." One specific example (110J) describes a difficult relationship (church in crisis) that nonetheless voted unanimously to grant him a sabbatical. This action helped renew the relationship between pastor and people. Even though he eventually moved from that congregation, he was able to leave on a high note and left the church in a better relationship with its pastor than how he found it.

Most congregational relationships were not under strain, yet the pastors report improved post-sabbatical congregational relationships and that the sabbatical was directly

responsible for the strengthened relationship between pastor and people. One notable exception is the pastor who reported that even though the church provides a sense of community to its members, he and his wife continue to feel isolated:

[J] and I, as far as a sense of community for ourselves? I don't sense that, but there is a sense of community within the church. But for [J] and I we feel like sometimes we are an island. (128AA)

Fourteen participants (46.7 percent) in the study expressed a sense of affirmation resulting from the sabbatical. The very fact that the congregation provided the sabbatical (especially without them having to ask for it or work the system to gain it) spoke volumes about the nature of each pastor's relationship with the congregation. The most simple expression of this improved relationship is evidenced by the thankfulness expressed by the pastors to their congregations for the gift of the sabbatical. This gift has a powerful affirming value to the pastor, and it underscores that the congregation is indeed interested in the pastor as a person, in his well-being and not just his contribution to the effectiveness of the local church. The responses generally follow a similar answer to 104D's:

It was wonderful that the people gave me this gift of sabbatical, and I think they would say that they benefited. And when I got back, they said my associate pastor had done a great job. They were glad I was back, and it wasn't just something they said. We actually had new people come to the church while I was gone, and I didn't drive them away when I came back.

**Relationships with peers and colleagues.** The findings reveal that ten responses from seven ministers (23.3 percent) indicate that the sabbatical positively impacted their relationships with their colleagues and peers. Pastor 101A reported that the sabbatical helped him learn whom he could trust in community and that "my relationships with my peers have been developed in a far greater way, but not with, necessarily, local church

people.” Another insightful example is pastor 115O who spoke of the benefits gained from an interdenominational pastors’ prayer group:

Those men became very, very important to me going through this burnout time. Because they were safe, I could just be totally free and honest and vulnerable with them without fear of being misunderstood or judged or criticized or whatever. And that was a valuable resource that I discovered through that process and have cherished even more on the other end of it.

**Family relationships.** Responses include the following two components:

marriage and family unity relationships.

Half of the respondents (N=15; 50 percent) report that the sabbatical played an important role in marriage relationships. The sabbatical was an opportunity to strengthen their marriage by an increase both in quality and quantity time spent with their spouses.

One pastor described the impact of the sabbatical on his marriage in glowing terms:

When my wife and I were together we did [devotions] together. Each morning walking through a routine of talking about how God was working in our lives together and separately. Being transparent and kind of working on some spiritual issues in our marriage, kind of things that had been left unsaid for years and ... pretty neat time! (121U)

Family Unit Relationships. A much smaller number of pastors (N=3; 10 percent) indicated that the sabbatical had an important role to play in relationship to the pastors’ children. Subject 122V actually described his sabbatical as an opportunity to create a once-in-a-lifetime family memory, which is the way he sold the idea of the sabbatical to his church leaders. He recounts that his children, to this day, recall with fondness the nine weeks spent on that sabbatical.

### **Sabbatical Impact on Lack of Fairness**

Answers related to the issue of lack of fairness were not limited to the specific question that engaged this factor. Findings in this section include both specific responses to the lack of fairness factor and responses gleaned from other portions of the interview.



The study reveals that fairness is not the primary issue with which pastors deal. First, as is shown in Table 7 (p. 74) fairness ranked the lowest of the six burnout matrix factors. Second, it received the lowest number of positive responses and the highest number of “no impact” responses. Only a few pastors provided a direct response to this question in the interview, but the answer in each case could be summed up in these words, “ministry is not fair and the sabbatical had no impact on this factor.” However, the sabbatical did engender a sense of fairness for a few pastors because it underscored the fairness of the congregation’s concern for the pastor as a person. An excellent example is the response given by pastor 124X:

It was encouraging to me that the church just wasn’t wanting to take, take, take from me but yet wanted to replenish me, and in a very real sense there was a positive sense of fairness with the sabbatical itself.

Later he adds, “It was encouraging for me to know that there were people who cared more about me and me being healthy and at my best than they cared about me being available to them for a period of time.”

Additionally, out of 176 responses, only four negatives were reported (see Table 7 p. 74) yet three of those negatives were for this factor, meaning that 75 percent of the negative impact responses had to do with this issue of fairness. In addition, one pastor, though reporting a positive sabbatical experience on this issue factor, also reported similar problems as the other negative responses (post-sabbatical vacation related complications). A closer look at these four pastors’ responses indicates that all of them reported little planning and little congregational pre-sabbatical communication (in a couple of cases the sabbaticals were more crisis oriented (which limited the time for preparation), while in other cases the issue of communicating with the congregation simply was not a primary pre-sabbatical concern.

### **Sabbatical Impact on Value Conflict**

The sabbatical experience did impact pastors positively on this factor (see Table 7 p. 74). Answers related to the issue of value conflict were not limited to the specific question that engaged this factor. Findings in this section include both specific responses to the value conflict impact question and responses gleaned from other portions of the interview. Responses were in three major categories:

1. no real impact on value conflicts,
2. strengthened leadership, and
3. increased ability to manage conflict.

**No real impact on value conflict.** Many pastors indicated that the sabbatical had no real impact on value conflict, mostly because value conflict issues had been essentially non-existent pre-sabbatical or were long resolved pre-sabbatical.

**Strengthened leadership.** Several pastors indicated that through the sabbatical experience their local church leadership role was strengthened. The pastors' absences created a leadership vacuum that strengthened the congregations' understanding of the role of a visionary leader and shepherd. The results were congregations with a better grasp of the role of the pastor and the necessity of a pastor. Retooling efforts by the pastors on sabbatical also strengthened their skill set and abilities as leaders.

**The ability to manage conflict.** One leadership skill that the sabbatical enhances is the pastor's ability to manage conflict. The sabbatical provides the emotional reserve and the leadership insight necessary to tackle conflict situations upon their return. Often these conflicts were staff related but not exclusively. One pastor indicated his belief that without the replenishment of the sabbatical he would not have had the energy to tackle conflict situations with such aplomb as he managed upon his return. The sabbatical was

credited with strengthening the pastor and preparing him for conflict resolution (109I and 124X are excellent examples).

### **Summary of Findings Related to Research Question #1**

The study reveals that the sabbaticals provided different kinds of benefits for different pastors in different situations. This finding is expected. What the study shows is that as regards the reduction of ministerial burnout, pastors reported positive and potentially long-lasting impact on burnout reduction. On each of the Maslach and Leiter factors, the sabbaticals positively impacted the pastors. The findings reveal an interesting set of issues associated with the six factors. These include the fact that work overload and fatigue is a major issue for Nazarene clergy and the most challenging factor. The lack of fairness factor scored lowest on the factor baseline scale, and yet nearly all negative impact responses were for this factor (by a large margin). Pastors reported that the sabbatical reduced burnout precursor factors by helping them to make changes in their personal priorities, to release ministry to others by sharing the load of their work, and to make personal (re)commitments to the practice of a regular Sabbath of rest.

The sabbatical additionally impacted their leadership confidence and provided a better understanding of the pastors' identities. With regards to job satisfaction and reward, pastors clearly identified the sabbatical playing a significantly positive role by allowing them to engage the reaffirmation of the call of God upon their lives for ministry, by allowing them to engage the question of their current tenure, and by helping them to better understand the sacrificial nature of their call.

The sabbatical deeply impacted the pastors' sense of community. It positively impacted congregational, peer, spouse, and family unity relationships.

The study reveals that pastors appear to have a great ability to deal with the issue

of fairness, yet not surprisingly the greatest number of negative impact responses appeared in this context. Pastors reported that the sabbatical itself created some tensions for them with the congregation particularly at the point of taking additional vacation time beyond the sabbatical during the same fiscal year.

The study reveals that the sabbatical had a very positive effect on value conflict, providing ministers who encountered major conflict situations upon their return with the ability to engage and manage the issues.

### **Findings Related to Research Question #2**

Research Question #2 asks, “In what ways does a sabbatical enable Nazarene pastors to extend their future ministry tenure?” The findings on this question reveal that sabbaticals have the ability to impact positively upon and increase tenure. Sabbaticals impact the attitude of the pastors, the reality of the pastors’ circumstances and the pastors’ perceptions of those circumstances. A minister with a negative attitude toward ministry will eventually step out of ministry. Sabbaticals impact attitudes and, thereby, impact tenure. Sabbaticals also remove obstacles to longer tenures.

These responses fall into six broader categories:

1. The mere prospect of another sabbatical,
2. A sense of refreshment,
3. A new vision of the future,
4. Renewed call to ministry,
5. A passion to finish well,
6. Attitude changes, and
7. Obstacles to longer tenure.

### **The Mere Prospect of Another Sabbatical**

A noteworthy finding of the study is that 43.3 percent of the pastors (N=13) indicated that the mere prospect of another sabbatical has a positive impact on their tenure. Some pastors, aware of a specific timetable, were already planning the next leave of absence and were appropriately relishing the plans for that period of renewal. Others, though not certain even of an offer of sabbatical, underscore that having experienced a sabbatical, knowing its beneficial impact, and believing that another sabbatical is a conceivable future option, consider the mere thought of another sabbatical an impetus for continued ministry. Pastor 124X stated his opinion about the prospect of another sabbatical quite well:

As most sabbaticals would be designed I'm a long ways off from ever having one here. And I'm guessing before I'm here six or seven years I would be greatly helped by being able to pull away in such a way.

The same pastor also clearly connects the sabbatical experience to a regular practice of a weekly Sabbath:

For the same reason that religiously taking a day off every week helps me keep rolling and be at my best, to periodically have those times thinking long haul of ministry to envision those times when for a period of time you could pull away from all the responsibilities of ministry and I would think would do a lot to help you persevere.

The mere prospect of another sabbatical provides a glimpse of hope for the future and the ability to do ministry well and to sustain tenure. This finding is interestingly similar to the Old Testament notion of the year of Jubilee (Lev. 25:2-4), which is clearly promised but for which no proof exists that such a year ever came to pass.

### **A Sense of Refreshment**

Attitude-related responses were expressed in five categories: energy; health, sense of fun, ministry-saving impact, and renewal of hope.

**Energy.** The study shows that a key word used to describe the sabbatical experience is the word energize. At least nine (30 percent) of the population indicated that their sabbaticals had an impact on their energy levels. For some the impact was delayed (i.e., they did not see immediate results). Responses in this category are best exemplified by 122V:

Yes, I do believe that because I see the positive results of my being away even though it wasn't as a solution to or recovery from burnout in my personal life, I see the positive benefit of having a change of venue, having a break in that routine and coming back kind of *revitalized*, [emphasis mine] and kind of ready to get back in *energetically* [emphasis mine] and passionately in what God has called me to do.

Directly related to this issue physical rest. A large number (N=21; 70 percent) identified this as an important component of the sabbatical and the direct attitude implication is of increased energy, not being so tired, and having strength to work effectively, efficiently, and with good attitude. Pastor 114N specifically addressed energy renewal as a benefit of the sabbatical:

Basically one of the value added[sic] for me on this sabbatical was that it gave me the emotional energy so that when I came back from my sabbatical (and some things that were already existing, I came back [to] and were, kind of, heightened and exacerbated), it gave me a store of emotional *energy* [emphasis mine] to jump in and tackle it and hit it head on. And in my mind, I had a definite sense that there was a renewal and reparation of my emotional *energy* [emphasis mine] to jump into a difficult situation with staff. I don't know that if I had not had my sabbatical that I would have been able to do it. I think I would have had more of an inclination to run than to hit it head on perhaps.

**Fun.** Four respondents (13.3 percent) indicated that the sabbatical provided a sense of fun and one pastor described his return to ministry in terms of fun.

No. I am having a lot more fun in the ministry. I experienced burnout probably about the seven-year mark of my ministry at this church, and I didn't take a sabbatical until ten-and-a-half years, and I really needed it at seven [years]. But by the time I took sabbatical I wasn't totally in burnout, I was pretty tired and worn out but not burned out. I had kind of recovered

from that.

**Ministry-saving impact.** At least five (16.7 percent) spoke of their sabbaticals as ministry-saving experiences. These pastors clearly identified that the sabbatical kept them in active Christian ministry. Pre-sabbatical they were prepared to leave, or seriously considered leaving ministry altogether. The sabbatical prevented such shortened tenures.

When asked about how he would plan for future sabbaticals, 1150 answered, “I’m not sure I can be that much help to you on this because it [the sabbatical] was more survival. I limped in to my sabbatical.” Pastor 107G was specific about the reasons he considered leaving ministry:

The last two years I’d been physically depleted and emotionally depleted, too, and have given serious consideration to relocating, had interviewed at another situation. Had even considered the prospect of leaving ministry and felt like a matter of having some time was really essential for continued ministry.

Pastor 110J’s response is remarkably similar to 1150, “My situation was that I was going to resign, and the church was in crisis but it was really shaken, so my sabbatical was survival.”

**Renewal of hope.** Several respondents indicated that the sabbatical gave them renewed hope, a hope that had suffered at the hands of the stresses and routines of ministry.

### **A New Vision of the Future**

The study reveals that sabbaticals helped pastors capture a new vision of the future and to think new and more positive thoughts about ministry. At least sixteen pastors (53.3 percent) indicated this kind of sabbatical impact. One pastor in particular noted that while his difficult ministry context did not significantly change upon his return from sabbatical, that his sabbatical experience helped him have a new vision of the

future, one not limited by the difficulty of his ministry context. Another pastor (124X) said: “I think it probably (as anytime you back away from what you are doing and can look at a bigger picture), it gave me a fresh picture of what my, of what the future might be.”

### **Renewed Call to Ministry**

Another finding related to Research Question #2 is the renewed sense of call that pastors indicate was a part of the sabbatical experience. The distinguishing character of responses related to tenure is that the sabbatical reminds pastors of a lifetime calling to ministry and helps extend tenure. Since the sabbatical engages this issue for most pastors, a correlation exists between a sense of God’s call and tenure. As one pastor said:, “There really is no retirement; you just do ministry differently” (additional examples from 123W and 130DD).

### **A Passion to Finish Well**

When asked if the sabbatical extends ministry tenure, a number of pastors (N=11; 33.3 percent) expressed the sentiment that while the sabbatical may not directly contribute to extended tenures, it certainly contributes to a passion to finish well (not limping to the finish line but running through the finish line tape). Pastor 107G indicates that the sabbatical was directly responsible for this passion:

One of the issues I discussed with some friends is this matter of finishing well. My dad was a pastor and died still as a full-time pastor still at the age of 69. And one of his motivations for continuing in ministry was purely financial, but he didn’t retire while he was still working. He kept at it! My anticipation is that I want to come to a point where I terminate what I’m doing with my full-time work, but I want to go strong to that point. I don’t want to start tapering off, and I feel like the Sabbath rest this time and next time are going to be instrumental in providing the points of renewal along the way that will allow me to finish well.

Pastor 115O also articulated the same sentiment well:



A long distance runner does not prepare to finish the race, he prepares for when he hits the wall, 'cause if you can make it through that, you will finish the race. And I think that hitting the wall and coming out the other side, gives you a sense of "however long," "whatever." There is an assurance that God is going to give me whatever I need, and I know that, without a question.

Other pastors attribute increased future ministry tenure directly to the sabbatical. These two factors, a passion to finish well and increased future ministry tenure, are the strong evidence of the desired positive impact of sabbaticals on ministry.

### **Broad Attitude Changes**

At least eight of the twenty-six questions in the interview attempted to elicit answers to the question of the impact of the sabbatical on ministry attitudes. One question (section two, question one; see Appendix A) asked directly: "How has your sabbatical impacted your attitude toward ministry?" In addition, although the Maslach and Leiter matrix factor questions (section two, questions seven through twelve; see Appendix A) directly raise burnout as the primary issue, responses often tilted toward attitude issues instead of burnout factors. The final interview question, though intended to elicit responses on the topic of ministry tenure, also evoked attitude-related responses.

Since ministers' attitudes can deeply affect their perceptions of what is important (and thereby impact their perceptions of what is real), a decision to understand the attitudes that informed their realities became all the more essential.

An overwhelming majority (N=28; 93.3 percent) indicated an increased positive attitude toward ministry resulting from the sabbatical. This response was often gleaned from a follow-up question to the final interview question itself, but in some cases the respondents had already stated the answer previously.

Stated another way, only two pastors (6.7 percent) did not report that the

sabbatical had an overall positive impact on their attitude toward ministry. Both pastors have special circumstances. Pastor 110 clearly indicated that he may seek a different kind of ministry in the near future. God had not released him from ministry but potentially from the role of senior pastor. The other pastor, at age 67, did not believe his recent sabbatical had any direct impact on his attitude toward future ministry tenure.

When asked if the sabbatical provided a more positive attitude about tenure, three categories of response emerged: (1) affirmative responses with a likely extended future ministry tenure (N=11; 33.3 percent), (2) affirmative responses with an unlikely extension of tenure (N=15; 50 percent), and (3) affirmative response with a likely shortened tenure (N=1; 3.3 percent).

Affirmative responses with a likely extended future ministry tenure were reported by eleven pastors. An excellent example is pastor 105E who said, “Phil, you know, I had pretty much decided that I would go until age 61-62, but after the sabbatical I have decided that I am aiming for a retirement age of 70, and I directly attribute that to the sabbatical.”

Affirmative responses with an unlikely extension of tenure were reported by fifteen pastors. At least seven of these pastors (23.3 percent) indicated a concern for finishing well as opposed to going longer. Pastor 107G expressed the thought quite well:

My anticipation is that I want to come to a point where I terminate what I’m doing with my full-time work, but I want to go strong to that point. I don’t want to start tapering off, and I feel like the Sabbath rest this time, and next time are going to be instrumental in providing the points of renewal along the way that will allow me to finish well.

Affirmative response with a likely shortened tenure was specifically reported by pastor 129CC who credits the sabbatical as encouraging him to an earlier planned retirement between the ages of 50 and 55. Such an early retirement, he said, would be the

sabbatical of life, a time to rest and enjoy the hard work of his youth.

### **Obstacles to Longer Tenure**

Findings demonstrate that sabbaticals impact tenure by engaging some of the obstacles to longer tenures. Richard Brown's list of obstacles is helpful as a guide for these findings (125-67).

The first obstacle is a lack of awareness by pastors, laypeople and denominational leaders about the benefits of longer tenured pastorates. This factor was not directly addressed by the study. Churches that develop sabbatical policies understand the importance of longer future ministry tenures (see Appendix D for two specific examples). The study, however, can only speculate on the impact of the sabbatical on this factor.

A second obstacle to longer tenures is a lack of personal growth by pastors who may move to a new assignment rather than stick with a challenging growth process. This obstacle was also not directly addressed; however, many pastors identify retooling as an important component of the sabbatical. In addition, pastors report significant spiritual growth and development. The sabbatical is a stretching experience for most pastors and challenges them to various areas of personal growth.

A third obstacle to longer tenures is a lack of self-understanding. Improvement in self-understanding is clearly a part of the findings. As reported elsewhere in Chapter 4, ministers learn to better identify their ministry roles through the sabbatical process. The result is a better understanding of their position in the congregation and a better sense of their standing with God. Sabbaticals directly and positively impact this obstacle.

A fourth obstacle to longer tenure is the mismanagement of conflict that often leads toward shortened tenures. The sabbaticals enabled several pastors to manage conflict better. Two pastors specifically reported with confidence that the sabbatical

enabled them to manage a particularly difficult conflict situation upon their return to ministry. They both believe that the sabbaticals provided them with the emotional resource to manage properly what could have otherwise been an explosive situation.

A fifth obstacle to longer tenure is inadequate pastor/parish relationship and the development of an appropriate pastoral support system. Pastors report that the relationship between them and people is significantly strengthened through the sabbatical. The sabbatical is affirming, the sabbatical strengthens the bond between the pastor and congregation and their mutual appreciation and respect for each other. One pastor said that the sabbatical reminded him that “the grass isn’t always greener.”

A sixth obstacle to longer tenure is a faulty early pattern of shortened ministry (sometimes at the hand of denominational leaders). This obstacle was not addressed by the study since the subjects of the study were veteran pastors (all at least ten years in ministry). However, a large percentage of the respondents indicated that the church should consider providing sabbaticals for pastors early in their ministries to help them learn to pace themselves and to establish an appropriate balance and rhythm to the challenges of ministry.

A seventh obstacle to longer tenure is a history of unsatisfactory pastoral transitions. One pastor demonstrates that an interview question helped him process a thought about previous transitions, a revelation which he acknowledges, surprised him:

The sabbatical has helped me to feel better about staying in my current church longer because I was at a point, and you know, it’s interesting what you raise here, because I’m thinking if in some other places where I’d been if I had had a sabbatical, maybe I would have stayed there longer too, and maybe in moving it was an attempt to run away from, not necessarily to run away, but to get out, to get away from all the pressure and whatever was there and just kind of like find a new girlfriend.

### **Negative Impacts of the Sabbatical**

The interview instrument gave ample opportunities for the population to report negative impacts of the sabbatical. Only four negative impacts of the sabbatical were reported:

1. uninformed congregations punished their ministers upon their return (reported by four pastors: 103C, 105E, 109I and 123W);
2. undesired changes occurred during the sabbatical that were not excepted by the pastor (116P);
3. the sabbatical was perceived by one pastor as a catalyst for some people who chose to leave the church (122V); and,
4. the church did not continue to grow numerically during the sabbatical (105E).

The pastors did not indicate a direct connection between these negative responses and tenure.

### **Summary of Findings Related to Research Question #2**

Research Question #2 seeks to uncover the sabbatical's role in ministry and local parish tenure. The sabbatical positively impacts tenure for nearly all the population because it directly impacts the attitude of the pastor. Not only is the pastor's attitude impacted but the realities of ministry are also affected including personal priorities, a sense of renewal in call to ministry, and a sense of refreshment including a new vision for the future. Even the prospect of another sabbatical has a beneficial impact on tenure. Such a finding only underscores the important attitudinal component of the sabbatical's impact on tenure.

### **Findings Related to Research Question #3**

Research Question #3 asks, "What particular elements of a sabbatical are essential to impact positively on tenure?" In the study an overall emphasis emerged that a

sabbatical is but one part of the well-being of a minister. Interestingly twenty-nine pastors (96.7 percent) indicated that they perceived the sabbatical as “a tool” and not “the tool” for restoring ministers from burnout, for preventing burnout, and for the management of burnout precursors. Typically, the responses were qualified by key elements of the sabbatical that make it an effective tool.

Six categories of sabbatical elements emerged from the interviews including the following: spiritual renewal, physical rest, emotional recovery, relationship reconnecting, sabbatical planning considerations, and engaging ministry calling. Findings related to this research question are organized around this rubric.

### **Spiritual Renewal**

Nearly every respondent (N=25; 83.3 percent) identified some components of spiritual renewal as an essential element of the sabbatical. Responses ranged from broad references to spiritual renewal to more specific spiritual disciplines. The routines of ministry may drain the vibrancy of spiritual relationships with God, and the sabbatical is a catalyst for spiritual renewal. For example, pastor 102B said the sabbatical allowed him to escape his routines long enough to engage in spiritual renewal:

That particular component of myself, I've never seen myself in being extraordinarily into personal worship and personal devotion. It's always a place for me to feel guilty. One of the reasons why I fail to do that is the fireman's mentality. I'm so busy putting out fires I don't have time to do the really solid stuff sometimes personally, devotionally and even leadership-wise that needs to be done. I would probably include some good solid resourcing in spiritual formation that was more than just fluff.... Sometimes I think that spiritual formation stuff is, I am so much of a left-brain dominant person, that a lot of spiritual formation stuff just bores me to death.

Responses generally identified the pastors desire to reconnect and/or further develop their connection to God. Spiritual renewal was a key objective of the sabbatical

for some, and the findings reveal significant details of what these components can and should look like. The following major subcategories emerge from the data: God-time, spiritual formation, and corporate worship.

**God time.** One category of response is simply identified as time with God, (hereafter God-time). Pastor 101A simply states that an objective of the sabbatical was “spending time alone with God.” Another pastor (103C) said even more simply: He desired “spiritual renewal.” God-time is often expressed as an objective of the sabbatical as “spending time alone with God” (101A) or even more simply as “spiritual renewal” (103C). God-time identifies the broadest category of spiritual renewal responses. Responses in this subcategory generally lack specificity about the nature of God-time. However, the lack of specificity from these pastors (N=9; 30 percent) should not lessen the importance of this factor. The very commitment to God-time makes these responses significant.

God-time appears to be an intentional effort on the part of the respondents to identify an effort on their part to connect with God through formal and informal, personal and corporate means. One example is from 103C who stated, “The last three weeks was more of the spiritual renewal time of prayer, and I was at home and everybody was gone. It was strictly a good time for me to read and pray and just be able to rest my mind.” However, the response of 130DD reveals that God-time for him was certainly less formal, and possibly less intentional, although perhaps equally as important. He said that a major activity of his sabbatical was “recreational, outdoors hunting and fishing to find a place and do a lot of fishing. I rented a cabin in the [mountains] by myself and with God.” He went on to characterize this time in the following ways:

Every morning at the rock outside the cabin I had a devotional time and

purposefully began to look at some of the promises that were in God's word and "veg" on them, think about them and focus on who God was in the midst of the things I had been through in the building period [at church].

He continued with a most unique description of his motorcycle rides through the woods on which he had conversations with God "inside the helmet" that only he and God could hear and that these specific God-times proved invaluable to him.

In contrast to these God-time responses the response from pastor 1150 readily admits that possibly the most significant God-time experienced on his sabbatical was not preplanned:

I had not planned on doing that [prayer retreat] in advance, but about in the middle of the sabbatical period I felt compulsion from the Holy Spirit to get away for about three days. I just took my Bible and spent that time in prayer and reflection alone. It was prompted by a deep anxiety that began to come over me anticipating that I would have to get back in the saddle and have to do it all again in about three and a half weeks. And that thought was not exciting to me.... I just knew I couldn't address that until I had spent some time really intensely focusing on God. I had already received a physical recuperation that I needed and emotionally was feeling up and strengthened again, so it was time to spend some significant time with God alone and in that process he really reconfirmed everything to me and that is where the spiritual renewal really took form.

A clear overlap between this God-time category and the spiritual formation category that follows exists. This is evidenced in the contrast and comparison of the last two examples above (130DD and 1150). In the first example, the pastor's recreation and motorcycle God-times hardly seem to fit a traditional understanding of spiritual formation in the spiritual disciplines understanding, yet his regular morning devotional experiences at the "rock" have a stronger link to traditional spiritual formation experiences (meditation, Scripture reading and prayer). In the second case, respondent 1150 clearly identifies a prayer retreat (spiritual formation elements such as solitude, meditation, and silence), and yet the nature of the activity is not clearly defined other than "significant time with God



alone.”

**Spiritual formation elements.** Many pastors (N=12; 40 percent) identified specific spiritual formation elements they practiced during the sabbatical experience (personal retreats, readings/meditations, use of various curricula times spent with spiritual directors at monasteries, intentional Bible study, journaling, meditation, solitude, silence, fasting, and prayer). A couple of the pastors indicated that they spent several hours (as much as four or five) per day during the sabbatical in the spiritual disciplines, in reading, prayer, and meditation (108H and 112L).

**Corporate worship.** Some of the respondents (N=7; 23.3 percent) specifically identified corporate worship as a key element of the sabbatical. A larger number than this identified participating in local churches for the purpose of retooling. Conceivably, and in many ways probable, that the church visiting component of the sabbatical was both about retooling (observing and learning about ministry) as well as an opportunity to experience corporate worship. Nonetheless, seven pastors specifically indicate that a key element of the sabbatical was the ability to worship in a context without the responsibilities of leading and, thereby, being given the privilege of participation. Pastor 119S sums up well the responses received in this category by saying, “When I was away I went to church and observed worship services and soaked things in. It was very nice to just be a participant in worship, and that was a big factor.”

### **Physical Rest**

Nearly all of the respondents identified physical rest in some form as an important aspect of the sabbatical (see Table 9 p. 112). The responses varied from the simplest “rest” (as an objective of the sabbatical) to more specific responses about ensuring a schedule that permitted rest and plenty of sleep. The categories of responses are (1)

plenty of rest, (2) re-creation through recreation, (3) vacationing and travel, (4) not overscheduling, and (5) unrecognized need for rest. These will not be reviewed in detail.

**Plenty of rest.** Rest was a primary objective of the sabbatical for most of the pastors (N=26; 86.7 percent). Rest was needed and was sought. The effort to ensure rest appears to be a direct attempt to engage the full biblical Sabbath concept.

One pastor (109I) described an informal study he completed to justify his sabbatical time. Since the primary activity of his sabbatical was recreation (although not exclusively) he compared the number days he worked in a typical year to the number worked by the typical layperson in his congregation. His assessment was that most years he had less than one-hundred days of rest (counting days off per week, holidays, and vacations). This he compared to the typical layperson who might have two days off per week plus holidays and vacation. He concluded that in the year in which he took his sabbatical that his time off only barely equaled the typical amount of time off taken by his laypeople.

**Re-creation through recreation.** Many answers (N=14; 46.7 percent) to the interview reveal that recreation was a key component of sabbaticals. Many, but by no means all, pastors identified recreation as an important component of their sabbatical experience. One pastor clearly identified recreation as the primary way in which he spent his time on sabbatical, which consisted primarily of a sailing trip for a number of weeks.

**Vacationing and travel.** Many of the respondents (N=26; 86.7 percent) indicated that as a key part of their sabbatical plans, the ministers (and often their families) took part in vacation-type travel or sightseeing experiences.

**Not overscheduling.** The data reveals that a key to a successful sabbatical experience includes not overscheduling. Pastor 106F describes the impact his sabbatical

committee had on his pre-sabbatical schedule planning by essentially cutting his initial plans for the sabbatical in half. He attributes his over planning to a penchant for overachieving and the need to justify the sabbatical to his committee. Post-sabbatical reflection showed him that their assessment was correct. Other responses include pastor 115O who stressed the importance of “slack time” built into the fiber of the sabbatical or pastor 123W who was also talked out of much his original sabbatical plan because his objectives for the sabbatical left little room for rest (in the opinion of his district superintendent).

One aspect of over scheduling evidences itself in responses related to the duration of the sabbatical. Part of the reasoning for at least a four-week long duration of the sabbatical (see section below and Table 10 p. 114 for more on sabbatical duration) stems from the fact that sabbatical participants required some period of time to break from the routines of ministry. To overschedule the sabbatical could make it “feel” like the busyness of ministry. The effective sabbatical downplays productivity *per se* in favor of physical rest and a much more relaxed schedule than usual.

**Unrecognized need for rest.** The above notion of over scheduling is even more important when combined with the findings that a period of days (even weeks) transpired into the sabbatical before pastors felt relaxed and comfortable with the sabbatical experience. The data shows an unrecognized need for rest that surprised some pastors. For instance, pastor 121U said, “I just kind of felt like, it took me a couple of weeks just to get away from the church. I was gone two or three weeks before I felt like, ‘Wow, I’m away, and I like it.’” Another pastor expressed an initial period of guilt for leaving his congregation during a difficult time:

What a wonderful thing.... It took me about four and a half weeks to

really get to the point where I was rested and caught my breath. I didn't realize how much I needed it, until I got to about that far into it. (105E)

Other pastors echoed these sentiments.

### **Emotional Recovery**

Many of the pastors (N=23; 76.7 percent) indicated that emotional recovery was a key ingredient in the effectiveness of the sabbatical. The disengagement of the pastor from the ministry and the ensuing freedom from the expenditure of the mental energy required to do the creative, visionary, and people aspects of ministry significantly strengthened the sabbatical experience. The issues of emotional recovery were expressed in the following more detailed categories:

1. Doing something different,
2. Distance,
3. Break provided from stress, and
4. Healing.

**Doing something different.** A few pastors (N=8; 26.7 percent) indicated that the sabbatical experience was beneficial by their intentional participation in something different than their normal ministry routine. Examples included, *Work and Witness* trips to other countries and different kinds of ministry opportunities during the sabbatical (including ministries such as preaching and teaching), all of which were with people other than those connected to their local churches.

**Distance.** Distance from ministry is all about creating space between one's life and one's work. This was accomplished by a two-fold emphasis: emotional and physical distance. Both are beneficial and contribute potentially one to the other. One pastor reported that most of his sabbatical was spent at home with a healthy emotional distance

from his job, but that a couple of weeks spent out of town helping a family member relocate proved to be greatly beneficial to him, creating a powerful emotional and physical distance between his life and his work. Pastor 117Q talked about distancing himself by going away to a cabin, as did pastor 130DD. In both cases they spoke of the benefit of a significant physical distance far from their situations in life. Pastor 106F spoke of “going away” as did several others. Sabbaticals are more effective as the pastors create emotional and physical distance. One pastor reports that living in a parsonage on church property in close proximity to the church meant that he had to spend most of his sabbatical away from his home to create enough distance. Not every pastor enjoyed a geographical distance from his ministry. Many did take their sabbaticals while staying at home. One pastor described how the people of the church respected the sabbatical by creating distance from them by not calling them or dropping by their home.

**Break provided from stresses.** The sabbatical also provided emotional restoration by creating an intentional break in the relentless stresses of ministry. One pastor said, “When I came back home I didn’t mind hearing the phone ring; before I dreaded hearing the phone ring. [When I came back I] didn’t mind interruptions as much. I was able to handle interruptions without a bad attitude” (120T).

**Healing.** Only a couple of responses addressed the issue of healing directly. One pastor indicated that the sabbatical was a necessary healing balm. Past, somewhat repressed emotional issues surfaced, and healing took place.

Another spoke of how on his sabbatical, or shortly thereafter yet resulting from it, he experienced a miracle of physical and emotional healing.

### **Relationship Reconnecting**

The interview findings reveal that relationships are an important part of an

effective sabbatical. I have grouped these responses in this fashion: reconnect with spouse, reconnect with family members, and an improved congregational relationship.

**Reconnect with spouse.** At least seven (23.3 percent) identified that spending time with their spouse was important to the sabbatical experience. For example, pastor 124X said succinctly that he did not need a sabbatical from his family and remained conflicted about being away from them during his sabbatical. He vowed that on subsequent sabbaticals he would be more intentional about including his spouse in a greater way in the experience. Pastor 127AA spoke of the importance of having his wife with him on the sabbatical. Since his wife is also a member of the staff of the church he pastors, the congregation offered the sabbatical to her as well. He saw this as both affirming and a benefit to the effectiveness of the sabbatical.

**Reconnect with family.** Pastor 122V spoke of the sabbatical in terms of family reconnection. He described the sabbatical experience this way: “A family memory time that would be something to bond [us] in a way we wouldn’t otherwise have.” The entire sabbatical emphasis for him was the creation of a family memory since burnout or tenure were not issues for him. Pastor 106F also indicated that the connections established with his family on sabbatical were beneficial to him:

I think a lot of it has to do with family dynamic also. I think a lot of the good things that I experienced in my sabbatical was [sic] very much related to the dynamic of my immediate family and what we experienced as a nuclear family during that time.

Family reconnection may not have been an issue for some pastors. Questions were not asked about family members still living at home during the time of the sabbatical.

**Better congregational relationships.** One key component of the sabbatical for several (N=7; 23.3 percent) was the significant improvement of congregational

relationships. One part of this had to do with affirmation received on the sabbatical.

Pastor 127AA said that the very act of giving him a sabbatical was deeply affirming:

First of all, one of the things it impacted was that I didn't ask for the sabbatical. They offered it to me. So that communicated to me from this congregation, from the leadership, their care and concern for me as their pastor and as an individual. So that meant a lot to me, that I didn't have to go to them and to be quite frank I probably needed it six months before maybe. But it was really nice for them to do that and to offer that time.

This pastor further describes an increasingly improved sense of community between himself and the congregation through increased appreciation:

I have more of an appreciation for the people I serve with. This is true because they gave me the sabbatical but also from meeting with and speaking with others in other churches. It caused me to appreciate our people.

He added, "The grass isn't greener somewhere else."

### **Sabbatical Planning Considerations**

Nazarene pastors plan their sabbaticals. At least fifteen (50 percent) specifically identified the importance of advance planning to make the sabbatical effective. All gave evidence of some sabbatical planning. Sabbatical planning consideration data is divided into two categories: (1) advance planning and (2) schedule planning. Advance planning refers to important pre-sabbatical planning elements that do not directly impact the sabbatical schedule. Schedule planning refers to planning elements that impact the sabbatical schedule but are not addressed elsewhere in Chapter 4.

**Advance planning.** Advance planning refers to those findings that identify important pre-sabbatical planning elements. The findings revealed the following categories of advance planning responses:

1. Time to plan and establish objectives,
2. Financial plans,

3. Congregation informed,
4. Sabbatical frequency, and
5. Clear sabbatical objectives.

These response categories merit a more detailed review.

Appropriate advance planning necessitates *time to plan and establish clear objectives*. A few pastors indicate that they rushed into their sabbaticals without much planning and that upon reflection (though they still valued the sabbaticals they experienced) and wished that they could have been more intentional with their plans. Most pastors clearly identify planning as a key component of their sabbatical preparation. More will be said later in this chapter about the particulars of established objectives, how clearly the issue of established prior objectives of the sabbatical was a key component of the process. No pastor entered into the sabbatical without some pre-planning. Some pastors planned more than others. A few indicated that they were satisfied with their plans so much so that on a chance to do a sabbatical again they would change little of their plans. A few clearly indicate they will plan differently and with more intention the next time around.

Appropriate advance planning involves the development of adequate *financial plans*. No question in the study specifically raised any financial issue including whether or not the church continued the pastors' full or partial salaries throughout the sabbatical. Nonetheless, responses included financial issues. Planning for the financial costs of the sabbatical is important. One pastor suggests that a church start a fund by setting aside \$25 per week for future sabbaticals. Several mentioned love-offering gifts by the congregation, which were helpful but often insufficient to cover all related expenses. One pastor claimed that the sabbatical experience added significantly to his personal debt.



Appropriate advance planning includes a *congregation fully informed* on the sabbatical. The congregation participates in the sabbatical and must be informed. The degree to which the congregation is informed affects the potentially positive impact of the sabbatical itself. Pastor 117Q describes how his sabbatical committee attempted to answer (in advance) all conceivable questions the congregation could ask.

Communication with the congregation was accomplished through intentional research by the committee, the printing and mailing of a series of sabbatical newsletters, and a series of public presentations at regularly scheduled worship times. Other pastors describe similarly intentional plans for congregational involvement. At least one included a specific congregation report upon the pastor's return. One pastor spoke of his congregation's daily prayer commitment to him by a large percentage of the congregation. A large banner with each person's signature was presented to him prior to his leave of absence.

However, at least three pastors report instances in which communication with the congregation was not a high priority. In each case the sabbaticals were planned quickly and taken on short notice with little opportunity to inform the congregation fully. One pastor described leaving the communication piece to key lay leaders who failed to fully answer the congregation's questions. Unanswered questions surfaced upon the pastor's return with comments like, "I don't get a paid sabbatical from my job so why did you?" Later, when these pastors tried to take vacation during the same year as the sabbatical, they met with some resistance. These pastors felt a bit punished by some in their congregations for taking the sabbatical (e.g., responses by 103C, 105E, 109I, 122V, 123W).

Appropriate advance planning addresses the issue of *sabbatical frequency*. Pastors

were asked to address the ideal frequency of sabbaticals. A couple of pastors indicated that frequency should not be linked to a specific time frame but rather should be responsive to the specific need for a sabbatical as determined by the pastor in communication with church leadership (board and district superintendent). However, nearly all the pastors established a sabbatical frequency between three to ten years with a determined preference for a seven-year frequency. Some insisted that sabbaticals should be mandated; others said they should not. Frequency also is directly connected to future ministry tenure for about half of the pastors. The other half believed that it should be connected to parish tenure. Another issue related to frequency is the age of the minister. Fewer pastors held strongly that sabbaticals are beneficial for all pastors at any age and that the demands of the ministry are the same if not more intense early on in ministry, and the likelihood of having developed significant coping skills is less. A few pastors were not sure that younger pastors could fully appreciate the sabbatical.

Appropriate advance planning includes establishing *clear sabbatical objectives*. Every pastor stated at least two objectives for his sabbatical. Most indicated three; a few indicated more than three. Table 9 lists the frequency of sabbatical objectives responses.

**Table 9. Sabbatical Objectives**

Stated Objectives	Frequency
<b>Physical rest</b> (rest, relax, refresh, break from the routines of ministry)	25
<b>Spiritual renewal</b> (spiritual renewal, getting alone with God)	13
<b>Emotional recovery</b> (distance from negative experiences, emotional rest, mental rest, healing)	12
<b>Retooling for ministry</b> (retooling for ministry, studying, reading, visiting other churches)	11
<b>Significant family time</b> (time with family, marriage renewal, family memory making)	10
<b>Doing something different</b> (doing something different ministry or otherwise, sightseeing)	8
<b>Refocus</b> (refocus, renewal of call)	7
<b>Renewed vision</b> (renewed vision, reflection, ability to gain new perspective)	5

**Schedule planning.** The study finds five categories of responses to schedule planning that have not otherwise been addressed including (1) sabbatical duration, (2) professional retooling, (3) reading, (4) visiting churches, and (5) other ministry/work.

Schedule planning responses included the issue of sabbatical duration.

Respondents were asked to identify an ideal duration for sabbatical based on their understanding of it as a tool for ministers to use in combating burnout symptoms and for the purpose of extending tenure. For ease of comparison, all responses were translated into days, even though responses were typically given as weeks or months. Duration was often linked to tenure (pastor 123W, for instance, contended that one sabbatical week per

year of ministry since the last sabbatical was an appropriate length).

Only five responses indicated that an ideal sabbatical duration is shorter than the sabbatical that pastor took. For instance 116P took a sabbatical of ninety-one days but indicated that an ideal time was sixty to ninety-one days. Three other pastors similarly reported that their sabbaticals were at the high end of ideal sabbatical duration. One notable exception of the five was 112L who indicated that the ideal sabbatical duration is between thirty and forty-two days. His sabbatical lasted fifty-six days “because we had been in ministry for twelve years in the same place, and we had never been provided one. And I haven’t mentioned that it was right after our building project, so it was very timely.”

Not all pastors gave explanation for an ideal length of sabbatical, but among those that did, a composite answer reveals this sentiment:

One month is nothing more than a vacation; a few weeks are required to disengage from ministry. A minimum of six weeks permits the development of new routines and new thought patterns enough to renew a pastor for the tasks of local parish ministry.

**Table 10. Ideal Sabbatical Duration Responses**

Ideal Sabbatical Duration Responses		
Duration (days)	Frequency of Response (N=57)	% of N
42	12	21.05
49	11	19.30
70	6	10.53
56	6	10.53
63	5	8.77
35	5	8.77
91	4	7.02
84	3	5.26
77	3	5.26
30	1	1.75
28	1	1.75
<b>Total</b>	<b>57</b>	<b>99.99</b>

On average the sabbatical duration of the population was forty-six days. The mean duration of the sabbatical was between forty-two and forty-nine days with eighteen of the sabbaticals (60 percent) falling in this range. The sabbaticals ranged from twenty-eight day (minimum) to ninety-one days (maximum) (see Table 11).

**Table 11. Actual Sabbatical Duration Responses**

Actual Sabbatical Duration Responses	
Duration (days)	Frequency of response N=30
42	10
49	8
35	4
63	2
28	2
91	1
70	1
56	1
30	1

*Professional retooling* was also a key response in sabbatical planning. Many respondents (N=8; 60 percent) indicated the need to retool professionally as an important component of an effective sabbatical. For instance, pastor 106F used the time on his sabbatical to speak with sixty-one Nazarene pastors whose parish tenure exceeded fifteen years, specifically to gain insight from them on the issues of ministry and parish tenure.

*Reading* played an important part of the sabbatical for many. Pastor 117Q indicated that he carefully selected twenty-five books to read on his sabbatical. Pastor 106F indicated he carefully chose about a dozen books to read on his sabbatical although his list was significantly pared down on the advice of his church leaders and friends. Reading itself was a key ingredient in the sabbatical. From Scripture reading to the reading of a Grisham novel to readings related to ministry, the responses indicated that reading played a key role in an effective sabbatical experience. One vivid example is

pastor 126Z who indicated that reading was the key instrument for retooling during his sabbatical. His emphasis on reading emphasis gave him greater confidence and extended his future ministry tenure. He specifically identified the acquisition of new insights and tools gained by reading Rick Warren's The Purpose Driven Church, enabling him to better understand his culture and his ministry context. Although he had previously read the book, he identified the rereading of it as a key for him to understand his ministry context better. The lessons learned brought greater satisfaction to him in ministry.

Sabbatical planning also included *visiting churches*. Many pastors (N=13; 43.3 percent) indicated that on sabbaticals they visited other churches, evidently for two purposes: corporate worship and to gain ministry insights through observation. Several pastors indicated that their observations extended beyond mere worship experiences (pastor 127AA met with the staff/leaders of a large church; pastor 126Z met with key leaders of a local congregation; pastors 129CC and 106F interviewed a number of church leaders). Others indicated intentional efforts on their part at the very least to engage leaders in the churches they visited on some level beyond mere observation of worship services (meals together, interview sessions, etc.). The key components of these meetings were encouragement and ministry retooling.

Sabbatical planning also included *doing other kinds of work*. An intriguing component is that several pastors (N=5; 26.7 percent) indicated that they invested sabbatical time doing very different kinds of work or ministry. At least three pastors participated in *Work and Witness* trips. One pastor chose a cross-cultural ministry trip to a South American country in which he was involved in teaching and preaching ministries. The trip gave him fresh insight into ministry. He spoke of the boldness of Christians in that country and the impact of their boldness on his dedication to ministry.

Other pastors, speaking more generally, described intentional ministries in which they were engaged beyond local church pastoral ministry (marriage enrichment retreat leader, speaker, etc.).

Others pastors took other work and ministry a step further, describing a positive impact derived from doing other kinds of work (assisting a family member's relocation, working through a list of house-related projects). One pastor plans to do work similar to that of his laypeople on his next sabbatical (he specifically mentioned McDonalds or Home Depot as considerations).

### **Engaging Ministry Calling**

As demonstrated in findings related to Research Question #1, the issue of a refocused or renewed call to ministry plays an important part in the effectiveness of the sabbatical.

For many pastors the issue of refocus was a primary objective of the sabbatical. For others, though not intentionally part of the core objectives, the issue was engaged during the sabbatical. Findings included in Table 9 (p. 112) show that the issue of a refocused ministry was not one stated with highest frequency as one of the primary objectives of the sabbatical.

Pastors spoke of refocused ministry as an objective but also expressed the sentiment that the sabbatical helped them understand that "this [ministry] is what I am supposed to be doing." The responses were in these key categories: (1) a renewal or confirmation of call to ministry, (2) a renewal or release of call to a specific parish, and (3) better ministerial identity.

**A renewal or confirmation of call to ministry.** A key finding of this study is that nearly all pastors (N=28; 93.3 percent) in the study engaged the issue of their



renewal or confirmation of call to ministry on the sabbatical. Either through intentional planning or by happenstance, this issue played significantly into the equation. Pastors identified the sabbatical as a time when they re-engaged their call to ministry, were reminded of the purpose of their lives, and came back from the sabbaticals with a clear sense that ministry is what they were intended to do. God's call to ministry is clearly and directly related to the issue of longevity in ministry.

**Renewal or release of call to a specific parish.** The reconfirmation or renewal of call to ministry had an interesting influence on local parish tenure. Several identified they were certain that sabbatical had extended their future ministry tenure in their current pastoral assignments (101A, 105E, 106F, 107G, 109I, 114N, 115O, 117Q, 119S, 121U, 123W, 128BB). One pastor reported that the sabbatical directly impacted his tenure in his congregation the very week I interviewed him:

Despite a call this week to a church twice the size, I don't have much interest in it because I don't know where they are on all this [sabbatical policy] stuff. I would rather be in a safety zone right now with this part of my emotional well-being taken care of. This is more important than even going to that next step. (117Q)

Some pastors, however, indicate a certainty that through the sabbatical process God released them from their local parish ministry assignments (103C, 130DD, 124X, 110J) though no one identified a release from ministry.

**Better ministerial identity.** Interesting responses related to better ministerial identity are grouped together here. Many pastors (N=14; 46.7 percent) indicated they attribute to the sabbatical a better identity in ministry and role clarification. For example, pastor 128BB indicated that upon his return he realized that throughout his ministry he should have been taking his yearly allotted vacations. He says, "I describe myself as a caregiver, and the classic definition is a rescuer who wants to save people from distress,

and I realize that I can't save the world. I've got to save myself, too, so I've set limits.”

Some pastors acknowledge a broadened perspective that the sabbatical reminded them, or reinforced to them, or even taught them, life is more than ministry (101A, 106F, 114N and 116P to list a few). Such sentiment is ironically juxtaposed with others (such as pastor 123W) who credits the sabbatical with helping him understand a similar concept that ministry is not just about what he does, but it is an integral part of who he is and possibly even the very reason for his creation.

In either case, however, the sabbatical helped differentiate for the pastor the basic issues of his identity in Christ and to know that his life is greater than the sum of his work. This understanding leads to a more rounded ministry and a more balanced life.

### **Summary of Findings Related to Research Question #3**

The study reveals six major components of an effective sabbatical, which include spiritual renewal, physical rest, emotional recovery, relationship reconnecting, sabbatical planning, and engaging ministry calling. Not all of these components were present in every sabbatical, but each sabbatical contained most, if not all, of these components. The degree to which each component was a part of the sabbatical was determined by the pastor, church leaders, and sometimes by God who often engaged the issue of ministry calling with the pastor even if that issue was not on the pastor's original set of objectives for the sabbatical.

### **Other Findings**

Two findings of the study did not neatly fit into the previous sections but are important nonetheless to the study. These findings are congregational sabbatical benefits and beneficial sabbatical statements.

### **Congregational Sabbatical Benefits**

The sabbatical is not just about what it can do for the minister. A sabbatical is also for the church. One pastor reported that the sabbatical was beneficial for the congregation as well. He described the congregation's careful selection of the replacement preacher during the pastor's absence as a catalyst for significant congregational growth. Pastor 106F was quite clear about the benefits of the sabbatical on his congregation:

The great blessing we had was [name omitted] [who] took the pulpit for Sunday morning for almost all the Sundays (maybe one he did not). And his teaching, and what he focused that time on, "Well who are we as a church?" "When our pastor is not here, what does it mean for us to be the congregation, that community of faith together?" and he was just very intentional as he could be about that. And that was hugely, hugely positive, for creating the right kind of atmosphere. So I know that not everybody has [name omitted] in their church, but that piece of it, to really work at how could we make this happen in such a way that something significant happens for the people during this time when I am gone; that they are not just biding their time till I get back. This was a whole body experience, which he formed that way.

Additionally, in that congregation, the entire community of faith was intentional about a period of rest and renewal, reflected by the internationality of the preaching and the more relaxed church calendar schedule, which coincided with the pastor's sabbatical. This combined effort exhibited a joint effort at participating in a biblical pattern of rest and renewal.

### **Beneficial Sabbatical Statements**

While I expected to hear affirmation for the sabbatical process by the pastors, I did not expect such an overwhelmingly positive response. Nearly every pastor interviewed expressed a key thought about the impact of the sabbatical for himself. I have included here a sampling of these statements. Some, or portions of some, appear elsewhere in the study. A complete list of these select sabbatical impact responses

appears in Appendix C:

I think that at least from my perspective the sabbatical period was not only good for me it was good, it was good for my people, so it helped. Since then it has helped my people in their attitude toward me and their attitude toward ministry, and their care for me. So that has prevented a lot of the symptoms of burnout. (117Q)

The sabbatical, it was a time without making closure in ministry or in my present assignment that gave me an opportunity for that call of God to be renewed and the freshness of touching lives. And so I think probably the sabbatical increased my tenure, although I probably today would still be in the ministry, but I would be thinking pretty seriously about “when am I going to retire?” And now people ask me, “What are you doing for retirement?” My response is, “I don’t really care, I don’t really want to retire, I’m enjoying what I am doing!” So it gave me a new sense of enjoyment and affirmation and just my own personal satisfaction of ministry and I think more effective, too. Prior to sabbatical I would have been hanging on with my fingertips, and I’ll make it through somehow, but now I’m enjoying the journey. (118R)

So I think the sabbatical helped my perception of longevity. I think that is what you are asking, do I see longevity as a real factor. You know, I guess again, I’ve never been a guy that doubted it. I always figured I would just be in the ministry until either I couldn’t do it anymore or whatever. But there are definitely moments when you wonder, “What am I doing? Can I make it that long?” And the sabbatical helped me to realize that I probably need to build in more safeguards in my life so that I can survive. And so yeah, it was a very good factor in helping my perception of longevity. (119S)

My sabbatical experiences have kept me in the ministry and kept my marriage in the ministry. My wife doesn’t feel like some wives do, or spouses do, that I’m married to my ministry. (120T)

Yes, I think they are very important. I can’t wait for seven more years. I just think, it just kind of gave me a whole new focus, I came back really refocused, recharged, and kind of in the groove again because I had a real passion to get back into doing things that I had gotten tired of doing. When I came back, I just had this new energy for moving the church forward. I was excited about the kind of things that maybe I had gotten a little bored with. I had a new excitement for all of those kinds of things, kind of taken for granted. (121U)

### **Conclusion**

The field research for this study provides a wealth of information on the Nazarene

practice of sabbaticals with particular insight to burnout precursors, tenure, and components of an effective sabbatical. The findings show that sabbaticals reduce ministerial burnout precursors and that they do so in specific and tangible ways. The findings show that sabbaticals lengthen future ministry tenure and that they do so by strengthening the minister's perception of reality and by changing that reality as well. The findings of this study reveal six major components of effective Nazarene sabbaticals. An evaluation of these findings, along with a summary of their impact on the future of Nazarene sabbaticals is reserved for Chapter 5.

## CHAPTER 5

### SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

#### **Evaluation and Interpretation of the Data**

Conclusions drawn from the interviews of the sabbatical experiences of thirty Nazarene pastors validate many of the hypotheses of this study. Sabbaticals positively impact ministers by addressing burnout and helping to manage its precursors and symptoms. Sabbaticals positively impact tenure. Sabbaticals include key elements that increase their effectiveness. If the Church of the Nazarene would even more aggressively pursue planned sabbaticals for all pastors (even more than it already does), the number of persons who step out of ministry would decrease and local parish tenures would significantly increase.

#### **Sabbatical Impact on Pastors: Burnout Issues**

Sabbaticals positively impact ministers by addressing burnout precursors. The study indicates even by this relatively small population sample that pastors are significantly less likely to report burnout post-sabbatical compared to pre-sabbatical. Prior to sabbaticals 50 percent of pastors reported burnout. Post-sabbatical burnout was reported by less than 17 percent of the pastors (see Table 3 p. 68). Although not all pastors in the study population experienced burnout, the data shows positive differences between pre- and post-sabbatical burnout responses. Pastors report burnout less frequently in post-sabbatical responses compared to pre-sabbatical responses. The data reveals a substantially positive impact of the sabbatical on the six Maslach and Leiter burnout matrix factors. All factors scored either positive or no-impact responses. Only two factors scored negative impact responses, and only one factor among them all reported multiple negative impact responses. By a substantial margin, pastors report an

overall positive impact of the sabbatical on the burnout matrix factors.

The factor most impacted was work overload and fatigue. This factor, by a considerable margin, was the most significant pre-sabbatical burnout factor and the most positively impacted (twenty-one of thirty pastors were positively impacted by the sabbatical on this factor) of all the factors post-sabbatical.

Sabbaticals provided relief from work overload and fatigue issues by establishing new priorities, new methodologies, and renewed commitments to biblical leadership, the priesthood of believers, and the personal practice of a Sabbath. Many indicate personal changes in behavior post-sabbatical that have had long lasting, beneficial effects on their ministry and church alike. In addition, physical rest and emotional recovery positively impact the work overload and fatigue factor.

Another Maslach and Leiter burnout matrix factor impacted by the sabbatical experience was the issue of lack of control over one's own destiny. This factor was impacted positively by the sabbatical experiences although to a lesser degree than the previous factor. Pastors discovered a better understanding of their identities and demonstrated renewed confidence in their leadership skills.

Another Maslach and Leiter burnout matrix factor impact by the sabbatical experience was the issue of lack of job reward and satisfaction. This factor was quite positively impacted by the sabbatical experience. The sabbatical nearly always engaged the question of a renewal of a call to ministry, a call that enables a pastor to work through occasionally turbulent situations and the pastor's ability to deal with this burnout factor. The sabbatical engages the questions surrounding the specifics of a divine call, an issue that engages the pastors' ability to lengthen tenure and perform:

The call to pastoral ministry, however, must be even more specific. While

a vague call to Christian ministry may lead to the pastorate, it will not sustain a pastor through the harsh realities of church life. My call to ministry needed specific pastoral content. (Fisher 93)

The lack of community burnout factor was positively impacted by the sabbatical experience by many pastors. Sabbaticals helped pastors better identify a community with which they could personally share life, where they could be transparent, and where they could perhaps more easily engage the spiritual disciplines of community prayer and confession. Many pastors spoke of a new appreciation for the congregation, for peers (in whom they can confide the burdens of ministry) and for family (in particular their spouses).

The lack of fairness burnout factor was a double-edged sword for pastors. They know that life and ministry are not fair. Many learned this lesson outside the context of the sabbatical experience. However, the sabbatical itself and the way the congregation plans for and provides the sabbatical have a significant impact (both positive and negative) on the pastor. Congregations that willingly provide a sabbatical communicate fairness. Uninformed congregations and congregations that participate only to a limited degree in the planning of the sabbatical can create perceptions of unfairness. While most sabbaticals engendered feelings of fairness, on occasion, sabbaticals contributed to feelings of unfairness.

The value conflict burnout factor was impacted positively by the practice of sabbaticals, however, not to the degree that I originally expected. Sabbaticals helped pastors manage conflict by encouraging personal leadership growth, encouraging a better understanding of identity (and therefore of purpose), and providing the ability to prepare emotionally for conflict, which is often a staple of the ministry.

As noted in Chapter 2, Welch, Medeiros, and Tate propose that burnout is best



managed by proactive development of five distinct areas: (1) physical changes, (2) intellectual changes, (3) emotional changes, (4) social changes, and (5) spiritual changes. Sabbaticals engage the minister in each of these categories and are, therefore, an excellent tool for the management of burnout precursors and symptoms.

The Church cannot afford to passively allow ministers to burn out and lifetime tenures to be reduced to a mere decade. The call of the kingdom is more noble than burnout and more enduring than a decade. While God uses special leaders in special places and for special times (e.g., Haggai), the biblical record on leadership is modeled on longevity (e.g., Moses, Joshua, David, Solomon, and John the disciple). Though Jesus' ministry is short-term (three years) and Paul's ministry is essentially a series of short-term pastorates, plenty of biblical principles underscore the benefits of a vow of stability. Pastors in the Church of the Nazarene need to avail themselves of all the tools that will strengthen, protect, and provide for a lifetime of effective ministry. Sabbatical is a significant tool in the minister's toolbox that engages vocational holiness despite cautions to its usefulness.

The quest for physical and emotional wholeness is not found in formulas but in the mind of Christ. Sleep more, recreate more, exercise more, get away more—all may be helpful imperatives. But these suggestions may serve as mere self-help guides for a society taking its cues from the goddess Nike rather than the God Yahweh. (Salter 37)

Sabbaticals are an effective tool in the minister's self-care toolbox, and the denomination must do more to encourage a culture of acceptance for appropriate sabbaticals that benefit not only pastors but also the congregations themselves. With Salter's admonition clearly in mind, sabbaticals that properly focus on God and the mind of Christ will be most effective to counter the challenges posed by today's culture.

### **Sabbatical Impact on Pastors: Tenure Issues**

Sabbaticals do positively impact future ministry tenure. Sabbaticals help keep ministers in ministry longer. This happens because the sabbatical engages, often without pre-planning, the issue of one's call to ministry, not unlike the reinstatement of Peter in John 21. Peter, after his forfeiture of ministry by his triple denials of Christ, was reinstated to his pastoral role by Jesus' clear renewal of call to ministry ("Feed my lambs," "Take care of my sheep," "Feed my sheep" John 21:15, 16, 17). Pastors report that sabbaticals impact their attitudes toward ministry and directly impact their plans for ministry and local parish tenure. The sabbaticals strengthen pastors emotionally, spiritually, and physically for the tasks of ministry.

Pastors report that sabbaticals positively impact their individual spiritual developments and particularly their better understanding of their identities, the ability to manage conflict well. The study reports strong evidence of increased pastor/parish relationships. Since Nazarene pastors encourage the practice of sabbaticals, and they do so for all pastors at all ages, the increased use of them may encourage changes in early ministry patterns of shortened tenures.

Sabbaticals strengthen tenure because they engage the call of the minister. William Willimon is correct: "We must find opportunity periodically to refurbish our sense of being summoned, commissioned, called and ordained to be here in the pastoral ministry" (73). Sabbatical provides for this, often even among those who did not initially intend to engage the issue. The call to a specific parish ministry is guided by an even deeper, broader calling.

Over time, the call from a congregation may fade or be replaced by another call to serve a different congregation. I have been "called" by five congregations. But that inner call, the inescapable conviction that I am

called by God to pastor his people, remains. (Fisher 95)

Fisher distinguishes between an inner call (the call of God upon your life for ministry (future ministry tenure) and an outer call (a specific call to place).

I have doubted every outer call I have received. The pressure of ministry tends to deafen the soul, and quite often I wonder if God really called me to a certain place.... Sometimes I have begged God to move me. The only reason I stay in this work is the call of God that grips my soul and won't let go. When the outer call is in doubt, this calling sustains my heart and mind. (95-96)

The sabbatical must engage the issue of a pastor's call to ministry. The effectiveness of the sabbatical seems to be directly related to the ability of that sabbatical to engage the minister's sense of call to ministry. Darius Salter is on target by cautioning the reduction of the ministry to work overload and fatigue:

The plight of Francis Asbury was hardly singular. He was quite representative of the hundreds of Methodist itinerants (as well as Baptists) who tamed the frontier by enduring dire circumstances. The historical irony is that these men who modeled the martyr's life of poverty, chastity, and obedience lived longer than the average population of the late 18th century. This cautions us against singling out pastoring as an overworked, burned-out profession. The problem for today's pastor is not so much his or her uniqueness; it is nondifferentiation with the prevailing zeitgeist (spirit of the times). Pastors have not allowed God to mold them into the prophet/priests who question the world's definition of blessedness and model Kingdom living. Kingdom dwellers exemplify that relationships are more important than accomplishments, community takes precedent over individualism, and families demand significant investment of time and energy if they are to become agents of construction rather than destruction. (36)

Additionally, sabbaticals address at least five of the eight obstacles to longevity cited by Richard Brown's Restoring the Vow of Stability. Specifically, sabbaticals address the obstacles of lack of personal growth because ministers use the time to retool for ministry and to grow spiritually. Sabbaticals address the obstacle of lack of self-understanding because pastors gain a clearer identity through the sabbatical. Sabbaticals

address the obstacle of the mismanagement of conflict by creating distance from the circumstance long enough to gain perspective and to gird the pastor with the emotional energy required to engage effectively the larger conflicts in the local church. Sabbaticals address the obstacle of inadequate pastor/parish relationships by strengthening the congregational relationship between pastor and people. The process of providing the sabbatical and the sabbatical absence strengthen the pastor/parish relationship resulting in a new respect for and value of each other. Sabbaticals can address the obstacle of faulty tenure patterns early in ministry if sabbaticals are encouraged among all ministers at the appropriate times in ministers careers.

### **An Effective Sabbatical**

The study finds that an effective sabbatical includes two major components: sabbatical principles and key sabbatical elements.

**Sabbatical principles.** The sabbatical experiences of Nazarene pastors outline eight specific principles that comprise an effective sabbatical.

First, sabbaticals must not be viewed as *the answer* to the self-care needs of the pastor. At best they are but one tool in the pastor's and the congregation's arsenal for pastoral self-care. A strategy for pastoral self-care and well-being cannot depend exclusively on sabbatical experiences. Pastors should use other important tools for self-care between sabbatical periods. Congregations benefit from sabbaticals, too. Sabbaticals are not the be-all and end-all of pastoral self-care. The reduction of burnout and its symptoms and increased longevity in ministry are positively impacted by factors other than sabbaticals so sabbatical is but one part of the whole measure of self-care.

The second principle is that effective sabbaticals include well-stated objectives including a clear emphasis on physical rest and recreation, specific spiritual formation

components, and elements of professional ministry retooling. They typically engage the pastor's call to ministry and are targeted to strengthen the pastor's family relationships. The study demonstrates that Nazarene pastors took sabbaticals with great intention to accomplish specific objectives. The depth of preparation about which many pastors spoke pleasantly surprised me. Nazarene pastors understand the seriousness of the sabbatical process and willingly submitted themselves to it.

Third, sabbaticals require a well-informed congregation since congregations that shortchange this key element, due to either poor planning or limited planning time, usually place additional reentry burdens on the pastor. Congregations will support the practice of sabbaticals if well educated on the concept and particularly if they are made aware of the testimonial evidence as found in Appendix C. Informed congregations are supportive congregations.

Fourth, effective sabbaticals are at least forty-two to ninety-one days in length. Anything shorter than a month does not typically provide enough respite or down time. The average length of sabbaticals among the pastors studied was slightly over forty-five days. The ability to create a significant break or distance from the routines of ministry is important. A four-week sabbatical is better than none, but the cost of an additional two or three weeks is minimal with the benefits outweighing the costs. Most pastors wish they could have taken additional time, not less. Many pastors failed to appreciate the amount of stress under which they labored and often described the first weeks of the sabbatical as a much needed time to relax and unwind. To shorten the sabbatical to less than forty-two days risks reducing the very benefit of the sabbatical itself.

The fifth principle is that effective sabbaticals are not overscheduled. Pastors leave plenty of room for downtime thereby reducing the focus on productivity in favor of

the benefits that come from extended under-scheduled periods of time.

Another key principle is that effective sabbaticals do not impose a financial challenge on the pastor. Adequate financial planning is essential for effective sabbaticals. The congregations of the pastors in my study seemed diligent in their financial support of their pastors. A few congregations could have been more generous. Most important is that all involved have a clear understanding of the financial elements involved in an effective sabbatical. Some pastors volunteered that their churches continued to provide not only full salary and benefits but additional love offerings and expense coverage for their pastoral sabbaticals.

The seventh principle is that effective sabbaticals are connected to local parish tenure, although not exclusively. In fairness to local churches, sabbaticals are a direct consequence of extended local parish tenure.

The eighth principle of effective Nazarene sabbaticals is that because sabbaticals are appropriately connected to the biblical pattern of Sabbath rest they are not a once-in-a-lifetime event. The number of sabbaticals is evidently on the increase among Nazarene pastors. As more pastors take them, more churches are providing for them. The sabbatical is a way to be faithful to the biblical call to Sabbath, to rest, to set aside productivity in favor of worship, intimacy with God, and renewal of personal spiritual priorities. Sabbaticals should follow the biblical pattern of seven years and should last approximately seven weeks.

**Key sabbatical elements.** The study reveals six major components of an effective Nazarene minister's sabbatical.

*Spiritual renewal* elements including, but not limited to, the spiritual disciplines of worship, prayer, solitude, Scripture, and meditation. Every sabbatical should contain a

component of spiritual renewal. Modestly, this could involve a simple plan for personal and corporate worship on the sabbatical. More creative options include the instruction of spiritual directors and highly intentional and disciplined spiritual formation experiences.

*Physical rest* elements involve plenty of opportunity for physical rest, re-creation through recreation, vacation and travel, and an intentional under-scheduling the sabbatical. Pastors and congregations can easily underestimate the pastor's unrecognized need for rest. Pastors often need weeks, not days, to decompress enough to engage the full value of the sabbatical experience.

*Emotional recovery* elements include the intentional creation of space (physically and emotionally) from one's ministry routine. This is often accomplished by doing tasks of a different nature than pastoral ministry. These can often still be ministry related (mission trips, even preaching or teaching but in contexts other than one's local parish setting).

*Relationship reconnecting* elements include allowing the sabbatical to renew key personal and professional relationships. Pastors report that relationships with peers and colleagues, family (particularly spouse), and the congregation are significantly strengthened through the sabbatical process.

*Sabbatical planning consideration* elements include two distinct areas: *advance planning* and *schedule planning*. *Advance planning* elements include specific sabbatical planning details. Effective sabbaticals are well-planned sabbaticals. Pastors and churches are intentional about creating experiences that are beneficial to all. For this to happen effectively, advance planning is necessary. This includes establishing clear objectives for the sabbatical, overseeing financial issues (salary and expenses), and clearly informing the congregation of the intent, purpose, and plan of the pastor's sabbatical. Churches

would do well to establish a clear sabbatical policy, which incorporates the issue of sabbatical frequency. The mere prospect of a sabbatical has a tremendously powerful impact on pastors' attitudes toward ministry. *Schedule planning* elements includes the plan for the sabbatical's duration, which should be no less than forty-two days and should likely not exceed ninety-one days. Sabbaticals should be in addition to regularly scheduled vacations and professional training experiences. Pastors also stated that professional retooling is an important part of the sabbatical experience by a plan that includes intentional reading, visiting other churches for the purposes of learning more about ministry, and learning from others in ministry.

*Engaging the Call to Ministry* was often an unexpected benefit of the sabbatical. The sabbatical experiences condition pastors to engage the issue of their call to ministry. Pastors discover that a lifetime call to ministry is renewed by the sabbatical. Often sabbaticals lead pastors to discover a renewed passion and divine direction that extends the vitality if not even the length of future ministry tenure. On a few occasions, the sabbaticals helped pastors discover that their ministry in a specific parish may be coming to a close. Because pastors engage the issue of a call to ministry, their identities are strengthened, directly impacting their ministry skills and leadership in the local church.

The study reveals categories of important sabbatical elements. While no two sabbaticals are alike, sabbatical patterns clearly emerged. As pastors and their congregations prepare for sabbaticals, each would do well to use the list as a guide for the careful planning of an appropriate sabbatical experience.

### **Implications of the Findings**

These findings have numerous implications.



### **Impact on the Pastor**

Pastors should be proactive in their self-care. Pastors should not consider sabbaticals as the only method of self-care but see it as one important tool in the minister's self-care toolbox.

### **Impact on the Local Church and the Denomination**

While pastors must be proactive about their self-care, churches have a stated duty to provide a culture in which the pastor's well-being is understood by church leaders and parishioners alike.

Sabbaticals rightfully belong to the church and to its leaders. The very notion of a Sabbath rest is a biblical, not an academic or secular, concept. If any group should lead the way to depth of understanding, it should be the church and its ministers. Ministers should, by example, reflect the sense of balance in ministry that Jesus exuded. Congregations do well to learn how the role of the pastor differs from any other position in that community of faith or the community at large. Clergy and laity alike will do well to understand that the minister and the divine call that engages the ministry require a renewal of spirit that is gained in quietness with God. Eugene Peterson wrote about the unique purpose of ministerial sabbaticals in an article that appeared over twenty-five years ago.

If we are going to take sabbaticals, let them be real sabbaticals: a willed passivity in order to be restored to alert receptivity to spirit—prayer, silence, solitude, worship. It is outrageous that we acquiesce to the world's definition of our word and let our unique, biblical sabbatical be put to the use of career advancement, psychological adjustment, and intellectual polish—with all the prayer and contemplation laundered out. The original intent of sabbath is a time to be silent and listen to God, not attend lectures; a time to be in solitude and be with God, not “interact” with fatigued peers. If help is to be given to the pastor in midcourse, it is not going to come by infusion of intellect but by renewal of spirit. (“Sabbatical Is Not Study Leave” 74-75)

Sabbaticals must be fair, not only for the minister but also for the congregation. The congregation often understands fairness in terms of parish tenure. Ministers typically understand fairness as future ministry tenure. However, even on this issue a middle way can be found. The policies of one church give some guidance. Tenure is measured two ways. A pastor is given a sabbatical for every seven years of ministry provided that at least five of them have been spent in that local church. Additionally, any expenses to provide the sabbatical must be paid back to the congregation on a pro-rata basis throughout the first nine months of the pastor's return to local parish ministry.

The church must understand that even the very notion of a future sabbatical has beneficial impact. Pastors who know that in a few short years that they will again experience such times of renewal report a better sense of future ministry tenure and local parish tenure. Both the local church and the denomination can take proactive steps to provide this increased attitude positive attitude toward tenure by developing appropriate sabbatical policies, by keeping policies active and encouraging pastors to plan for sabbaticals. Pastors report that merely knowing that a sabbatical is a future probability during which they can recoup, renew, and retool, thereby, loosening the stranglehold of burnout precursors and thereby increasing future ministry tenure and positively impacting local parish tenure. This may be a particularly North American cultural problem alone. My friend, Gianni Cereda, is a Nazarene pastor in the Italian city of Catania. There, the culture provides for an annual summer break for nearly everyone, at nearly the same time. The mid-August holiday, known as *ferragosto*, provides an opportunity for this pastor to experience a short, intentional reprieve from the duties of ministry as the church closes its doors for a few weeks in the same way that the entire community takes a healthy summer break. Our North American cultural pace instead demands year-long

productivity (schools are increasingly year round; summer vacation periods are shrinking). Year-round productivity, coupled with increased personal and professional expectations, critically emphasize the role the Church plays in recognizing its responsibility to its ministers for their well-being, for that of their families, and for the sake of the kingdom of God.

### **Impact on the Denomination**

The Church of the Nazarene would do well to encourage the further development of sabbatical practices for its pastors by its churches. The Church should actively consider strengthening the practice during the earliest years of ministry, so that younger ministers are exposed to the sabbatical rhythm early. The benefit of the early practice of sabbaticals may help stem the negative effects of crises that tend to development in midlife and beyond. This proactive stance may genuinely benefit that Church by teaching its younger ministers options other than leaving ministry exist when inevitable crises arise.

The Church of the Nazarene should adopt an increasingly proactive strategy for educating the church on sabbatical issues. This strategy could include an increased website presence, increased literature production, increased articles in denominational publications, and an increased exposure to beneficial stories to counter the negative, anecdotal stereotypes in existence. Both clergy and laity must be educated on the sabbatical process.

The Church of the Nazarene should consider a revised sabbatical statement in the manual to read as follows:

In order to strengthen a pastor's lifelong call to ministry, to increase the well-being of the minister, and to strengthen the congregation, the church board will consider supporting a planned sabbatical of no less than forty-

two nor more than ninety-one days during the pastor's seventh year of ministry (at least four in that local church) and in multiples of seven years thereafter. The board is responsible for adequate planning to ensure that the sabbatical can occur in the minister's seventh year of ministry. This

includes, but is not limited to, financial planning, appropriately informing the congregation, and appointing a committee of three persons to work in harmony with the pastor in the establishment of specific sabbatical objectives. Financial planning covers the minister's salary and benefits throughout the sabbatical period and provides assistance (possibly full coverage) of all expenses incurred during the sabbatical. On occasion church boards may be called upon (in consultation with the district superintendent) to provide sabbaticals outside the scope of this resolution.

Additionally, the denomination can continue to encourage a change in culture that reflects what Maslach and Leiter correctly point out: burnout is less a personal problem and more an organizational problem. Pastors do not burnout because they are weak individuals but because the demands placed on them are often too high, and every individual has only a limited coping skill.

The current job description list for a Nazarene pastor in the 2001 Manual lists twenty-six distinct responsibilities. Each item on its own has merit. Individually the items are manageable. The synergy of the list establishes the potential for burnout. In addition to this written list, pastors also add (over time) the often unwritten expectations of the local church as well as added family or personal responsibilities. The church can benefit by restating the list according to the highest priorities of ministry for pastors. The rewritten list then can be accompanied by a list of administrative duties (a large part of the list of twenty-six). Sabbaticals engage ministry priorities, and ministry priorities engage the issue of work overload and fatigue. The denomination will be strengthened as it, too, prioritizes its list for ministry. Additionally, the church at large must proactively reduce the list to fully reflect a biblical pastoral role. The church bears with the minister a responsibility to guard the priorities of the minister and of the ministry. The best interests

of the Church of the Nazarene and the future of its pastors is served by the continued clarification of the priorities of ministry.

A recent conversation with a Nazarene district superintendent about the current Nazarene pastor's job description indicates that even among the leaders of the denomination an unwritten prioritization of the job descriptions exists. "Some are listed first with good reason," he said. This informal understanding of the prioritization of job description's list should be included in the official documents of the Church, and reflected in subsequent Manuals. To help stem the tide of burnout, denominational leaders are encouraged to give clarity to the range of ministerial duties and to guide their priorities with wisdom.

Conflict is often a reason for shortened local parish and future ministry tenure. The sabbatical strengthens a pastor's ability to manage conflict in positive ways.

### **Relation of Results to Previously Published Studies**

Since little has been written regarding Nazarene sabbaticals, this study stands alone as grounded theory material; however, it does connect with the work of Herb Ireland's 1999 study through Fuller Theological Seminary on the emotional, physical and spiritual well-being of Nazarene clergy. Ireland's study led to a symposium at Point Loma Nazarene University and the development of training materials, particularly those for pastors and congregations seeking sabbaticals. Ireland makes the case for sabbaticals with support from various experts in the field but without the substantial grounded theory provided by this research.

### **Limitations of the Study**

This study has a few significant limitations. First, the study only interviewed active, male Nazarene senior pastors. This group does not fully represent a cross section

of ministers in the Church of the Nazarene. Additionally, the study does not include the insights of former pastors who took sabbaticals and are no longer active as senior pastors. The benefit of limiting the study to only active Nazarene senior pastors highlights the strong positive effect of the sabbatical on those who are still in ministry. However, by excluding pastors who are no longer in active senior pastor roles, their perspectives do not inform this study. The responses by former clergy who no longer in active pastoral ministry and a comparison of their answers to those of this study would be most insightful. The absence of their insights does limit the value of this work only if one presupposes negative sabbatical impact responses. Since a host of factors beyond burnout contribute to shortened future ministry tenures it is presumptive to presuppose any specific responses to the questions of this study by those former pastors. Additionally, it cannot be forgotten that a host of other factors also contribute to the lengthening of both future ministry and local parish tenure.

Effective learning happens through modeling. Paul wrote to the Corinthian Christians: “Follow my example as I follow the example of Christ” (1 Cor. 11:1). Since the goal of the denomination is to help pastors deal more effectively with burnout precursors and symptoms, and to lengthen ministry and local parish tenures, this study provides a teaching model. This collection of the insights of thirty pastors who are still in ministry is valid. This study is focused on those who do sabbaticals well, those whose future ministry tenure is strong, and those who have learned how to manage the symptoms of burnout and stress. These pastors have developed an ability to cope and to thrive. Actually the study is strengthened by presenting a favorable image of what the Church of the Nazarene needs and wants: effective long-tenured pastorates by ministers whose entire lives are an example of vocational holiness.

The absence of even a single female voice in this study is regrettable, unintentional, but also nearly unavoidable. The number of Nazarene senior pastors who have taken a sabbatical is estimated to be between 2 and 5 percent of all active pastors. Richard Houseal's study, entitled "Women Clergy in the Church of the Nazarene: An Analysis of Change from 1908 to 1995," reveals that the percentage of United States Nazarene women pastors in 1995 was 1.7 percent, for a total of seventy-six women pastors (22). That same year statistics report 4,439 male senior pastors. Houseal's numbers are still generally valid since even his own study showed no significant change in the number of women clergy since the 1960s (and since then the number has only significantly decreased from over 3 percent to less than 2 percent of the total of all pastors). Janine Metcalf's study reveals that by 2001 the percentages presented in Houseal's study remain essentially unchanged (122). The basic fact remains that few women serve as Nazarene senior pastors. Limiting the study to Nazarene senior pastors in North America who have taken a sabbatical, presupposing the limited number of Nazarene pastors to have experienced sabbatical, and taking into account the small percentage of women pastors meant that I could have expected to gather no more than three names of women potentially eligible for the study. My research did not uncover a single instance of an active female Nazarene senior pastor who has taken a sabbatical. Women simply do not currently comprise a significant percentage of Nazarene clergy. Since many personality factors impact burnout and tenure, one can reasonably assume that differences between men and women could be significant (see Brown 15).

Another limitation of the study is the emphasis on the role of senior pastor versus other ministry roles. However, since many factors discussed in the study apply with equal measure to senior pastors and to staff pastors, much if not all of the data and conclusions

can be generalized to apply to staff positions as well.

The study is also limited by a few questions that were not asked that might have been provided useful information but were not a part of the original design of the interview. These include the addition of a brief description of the family/home life of the pastor. Family and marital factors emerged as important to some pastors. Without data on each subject's family status (and the status of children still living at home), further evaluation of this factor was not fully possible.

The study is limited by another unasked question. While pastors were asked to identify the length of their careers to date, each pastor was not asked specifically to identify the current length of local parish tenure. A few pastors indicated recent changes in their local parish tenures between the sabbatical and the interview. This was an added variable that could have been more directly addressed by the study.

### **Unexpected Findings and Conclusions**

The study created six unexpected conclusions:

1. I did not expect to that the issue of the renewal of call to ministry to be such an important component of the sabbatical for so many of the subjects;
2. I was surprised to discover the depth to which congregational affirmation plays in the life of pastors;
3. I was surprised that even though marriages were strengthened by sabbaticals that relatively little was said about the nuclear family unit;
4. I was surprised by the impact sabbaticals had on leadership skill development;
5. I was surprised to discover that the Maslach and Leiter burnout matrix factors were not more widely and strongly experienced; and,
6. I expected a larger percentage of pastors to have experienced burnout and to



attribute to the sabbatical alone an important restorative benefit.

### **Practical Applications**

This study identifies a number of practical applications for pastors, churches, and for me as the researcher.

#### **Practical Applications for Pastors**

Ministers should take more responsibility to ensure their well-being in ministry. Pastors cannot and should not entrust the issue of self-care to either the denomination or the local church. Self-care on the part of the pastor is biblical and right. Ministers should proactively and effectively plan for effective sabbaticals.

#### **Practical Applications for the Local Church**

Not everyone agrees that sabbaticals are an important part of the self-care plan for ministers. On the contrary, some believe that sabbaticals have a negative impact on future ministry tenure. These beliefs are, in my opinion, the result of a few sabbatical horror stories that have made the rounds. Sadly, the more beneficial stories have not circulated as much. Evidently bad news travels farther and faster than good news. To countermand this negativity, a series of positive sabbatical stories must find their way into the culture of church leadership and laity. The dynamic revitalization and renewal of call that resulted in most of the pastors in this study are excellent resources for a change in church culture. Stories could be distributed through denominational publications, through pastors' professional journals, and by word of mouth. Additional symposiums on the issue can be presented at leadership conferences.

Part of the culture of the Church these days is to see a sabbatical as reaction rather than as a proactive initiative. Biblical foundation for the Sabbath rest concept is clearly evident and the church can lead the way. Sabbaticals need not be limited to restoration of

the ministers in crisis. Sabbaticals must be seen for the value of strengthening a minister's remaining years. This study shows that sabbaticals lengthen future ministry tenure. The benefit to the church at large is difficult to calculate and not the original intent of this study, but it directly addresses the problem as outlined in Chapter 1. The church would do well to include, in ever-increasing measure, sabbatical as an important component of minister's self-care. Organizationally the church should begin to look at changing the culture of the overloaded/overworked pastor.

### **Other Practical Applications**

The benefits of this study for the Church will be multiplied by a personal commitment by myself to

1. complete an appropriate article for publication (see Appendix E),
2. provide consultation to pastors and churches preparing for sabbaticals,
3. personally create and maintain a web site with sabbatical guidelines,
4. create a forty-five to ninety minute seminar that can be presented in various teaching settings, and
5. continue to talk with pastors who have taken sabbaticals to discover new findings related to sabbaticals.

### **Speculations for Further Study**

Good research engenders additional research questions. Below are speculations for further study that emerge from this research. For example, this study might be repeated using additional statistical methods by the creation of an instrument that asks for less descriptive responses in favor of responses that lend themselves to greater statistical analysis

A great follow-up to this study would be to track the pastors interviewed and to

determine (in fifteen or twenty years) what transpired for them with their remaining tenure. Did they continue to serve as senior pastors? Did they complete their stated retirement/tenure objectives? Did they take additional sabbaticals and what elements of the sabbaticals continued to impact them favorably? For instance, did the issue of one's call to ministry reengage the pastor on subsequent sabbaticals?

Another study would be to engage a similar group of pastors, or perhaps the same group with a different study, asking about other self-care tools. What other burnout symptom reduction tools do these pastors personally use? This could include a survey on the use of the spiritual disciplines as an antidote to burnout.

Additional study is warranted on the differences between crisis and planned sabbaticals. What makes them different? What trigger factors are important components of crisis sabbaticals? Does the pastor or does another leader initiate the decision for a crisis-oriented sabbatical?

What kind of congregational leadership provides for a sabbatical to the senior pastor? What obstacles are in the way for local church leaders to provide sabbaticals to their pastors, and what strategies could be engaged to help local churches overcome these obstacles? To what degree do sabbaticals also apply for staff associates in ministry?

How does personality impact the effectiveness of a sabbatical? What personality types gain the most from sabbatical experiences, or what could various personality types expect to gain from sabbaticals?

The population of the study was quite evenly divided on the issue related to granting sabbaticals with or without local parish tenure. Further study could analyze a number of local church sabbatical policies and attempt to establish a more uniform understanding (or a compromise position) on the issue of local parish tenure and the

granting of sabbatical.

This study did not engage the financial issues surrounding sabbaticals. Further study could attempt to measure the cost to the church of granting a sabbatical versus the cost of not granting one. Since many local church decisions are driven, unfortunately, by the bottom line of economic realities, further financial analysis could clarify the case for sabbaticals.

## **APPENDIX A**

### **RESEACHER-DESIGNED, SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEW**

Thank you for being willing to participate in this interview. As you know my study aims to identify the benefit of a sabbatical to deal with a particular aspect of ministry referred to as burnout. Thank you for your willingness to participate.

I expect that this interview will conclude in 60 minutes or less. I would like to ask that, as much as possible, you could remain uninterrupted during the duration of this interview.

I am asking for your consent to use the data collected from our interview today as part of my study. You have my promise of confidentiality, and while I may use specific language from our interview, your identity will be protected at every turn. Do I have your permission to use the data collected in this interview? Thank you.

The interview is divided into two sections of approximately thirteen questions each. Section one is preliminary in nature and asks for basic demographic, and logistic information about you and your sabbatical. Section two is directed to the heart of this study: your insights pertaining to sabbaticals, ministerial tenure, and burnout. Section one is simple and straightforward. Section two requires more involved responses. I encourage your full response. I do fully expect that this interview will require a minimum of 20 minutes of your time but no more than 40 minutes. Please allow me to express to you in advance my thanks for your participation in this interview and especially for your time. Do you have any questions before I proceed to section one?

Let's begin then with section one.

## Section One: Subject Demographics and Sabbatical Logistics

### A. Name

Let me assure you that your responses will remain confidential. Your responses will be coded with an alpha-numeric system. This unique code will identify any of your responses included in the study.

### B. Age

### C. Years in full-time ministry as of Jan. 1, 2002

### D. Age at which you started in full-time ministry:

- a. 20-29
- b. 30-39
- c. 40-49
- d. 50-59

### E. Age at which you expect to complete your full-time ministry tenure:

- a. 50-54
- b. 55-59
- c. 60-64
- d. 65-69
- e. 70 and up

### F. How many sabbaticals have you taken from any pastoral (local parish) assignment?

### G. What was the length of the most recent sabbatical? And how long have you been back to your ministry position?

### H. Did the sabbatical provide a complete break from local church pastoral routines?

### I. What planning, if any, was completed in advance of your sabbatical?

### J. What were three primary objectives of the sabbatical?

### K. What activities formed the major portion of your sabbatical?

### L. What is your current ministry role?

Thank you for those responses to my preliminary questions. The next section of 13 questions will require a more involved response. I expect we will complete these questions within thirty minutes. Do you have any questions for me before we proceed?

## Section Two: Sabbatical Insights

1. Please describe for me how your participation in a sabbatical has affected your

attitude toward ministry in specific ways?

2. Allow me to give you a definition of burnout as “a progressive loss of idealism, energy, and purpose that can occur among individuals in ministry, resulting from an unreplenished emotional demand of helping troubled persons.” Given this definition do you believe you experienced burnout in ministry prior to your sabbatical? After your sabbatical?
3. Are sabbaticals an effective way to prevent burnout, to minimize burnout symptoms, and/or restore those who have experienced burnout? Please expand.
4. What key elements of planning will you include in a future sabbatical should you take one?
5. I will now list 6 factors for you to evaluate. The scale ranges from 5 to 1. A 5 means the factor was strongly experienced; 4 means definitely experienced; 3 mildly experienced; 2 barely experienced; and 1 did not experience. I am interested in knowing the degree to which you have experienced these factors in relationship to ministry prior to your sabbatical experience. Allow me to list the 6 factors first, clarify any if necessary. Then I'll ask for your specific response to each.
  - a. Work overload and fatigue
  - b. Lack of control over your own destiny
  - c. Lack of job reward and/or satisfaction
  - d. Lack of community
  - e. Lack of fairness
  - f. Value conflict
6. Should the use of sabbaticals be used as
  - a. a tool or
  - b. the tool, or
  - c. not a tool
 for management of burnout symptoms?

If the answer is either a tool or the tool, then

- d. At what age and tenure should they begin?
- e. How frequently should they be taken?
- f. What length of duration should the sabbatical be?

*The next six questions ask you to compare by your own judgment your attitude prior to your sabbatical and your current attitude toward the same issue.*

7. Please compare the issue of work overload and fatigue prior to your sabbatical to the issue of work overload and fatigue now. Are there changes, and if there are changes in what way were those changes influenced by your sabbatical?  
Follow-up: Was the sabbatical experience related to this factor (a) positive; (b) negative; (c) no impact?

8. Please compare any lack of control over your own destiny prior to your sabbatical to your sense of control now. Are there changes in your sense of control, and if there are changes, in what way were those changes influenced by your sabbatical? Follow-up: Was the sabbatical experience related to this factor (a) positive; (b) negative; (c) no impact?
9. Please compare any lack of job reward/satisfaction prior to your sabbatical to any lack of job reward/satisfaction now. Are there changes in your sense of job reward/satisfaction, and if there are changes, in what way were those changes influenced by your sabbatical? Follow-up: Was the sabbatical experience related to this factor (a) positive; (b) negative; (c) no impact?
10. Please compare any lack of community you experienced prior to your sabbatical to any lack of community now. Are there changes in your sense of job community, and if there are changes, in what way were those changes influenced by your sabbatical? Follow-up: Was the sabbatical experience related to this factor (a) positive; (b) negative; (c) no impact?
11. Please compare any lack of fairness in your work prior to your sabbatical to any lack of fairness now. Are there changes, and if there are changes, in what way were those changes influenced by your sabbatical? Follow-up: Was the sabbatical experience related to this factor (a) positive; (b) negative; (c) no impact?
12. Please compare your sense of value conflict prior to your sabbatical to your sense of value conflict now. Are there changes in your sense of job value conflict and if there are changes, in what way were those changes influenced by your sabbatical? Follow-up: Was the sabbatical experience related to this factor (a) positive; (b) negative; (c) no impact?
13. My next question addresses ministry tenure, or your longevity in ministry. What impact (positive or negative), if any, has your sabbatical had on your sense of ministry tenure?
  - a. On local parish tenure? (if not already answered elsewhere)
  - b. Specifically is your attitude toward longevity in ministry more positive after your sabbatical than before? (if not already answered elsewhere)

I do have one final favor to ask of you, but before I do I would like to thank you for taking this time to participate today. I expect to complete the collection of data by the end of the year and to complete my study and a synopsis by the spring. If you would like for me to send you a copy of the synopsis, I would be glad to e-mail a copy to you upon completion if you provide me with your an address. The final favor is to ask if you know of anyone whom you believe I should ask to participate in this study, I am prepared to receive names now or via e-mail later if you prefer.

Once again let me say thank you for the time you have given to me, as well as the insights you have shared from your sabbatical experience. Thank you.



## APPENDIX B

### SABBATICAL IS NOT STUDY LEAVE

The sabbatical is an entrenched tradition in academia. University professors, committed to the life of the mind, get them regularly every seventh year. And well they should. The life of the mind, teaching and thinking, is strenuous. The mind tires, grows stagnant, tends to repeat itself. The annual invasion of students, their curious and questing minds strangely mingled with ignorance and sloth, constitutes a formidable challenge to a professor.

Academia exists to protect and develop knowledge, but knowledge is not a dead thing in a book. It's a living dialectic; it requires fully alive professors to maintain it. If knowledge disintegrates into cliché or soddens into data, intelligence is betrayed and the mind dulled. And so the schools provide for regular renewal of the professorial brain cells by providing sabbaticals.

But pastors, committed to the life of the spirit, a life at least as strenuous, if not more so, than the life of the mind, rarely get sabbaticals. I wonder why, for the spirit also tires, grows stagnant, feigns to repeat itself. The weekly assembly of Christians, their hungry-and-thirsty-after-righteousness lives strangely mingled with sin and sloth, constitutes a formidable challenge to the pastor. The sanctuary exists to protect and develop holiness, but holiness is not a packaged attitude that can be sold to Sunday godshoppers. It is life at risk before God, dangerously and awesomely at risk, and it needs fully alive pastors to represent it. If the life of faith is reduced to a church program or into jargon, the gospel is betrayed and spirit dulled. Yet churches make little provision for renewal of spirit in those they set as overseers for the renewal of their spirits.

The omission impoverishes the church's spiritual vitality. Pastors enter their ordained work centered in prayer and alive to grace; after ten, twelve, thirteen years they find they simply don't have the energy for a life of prayer, of spirit. One after another and year after year, they abandon the terms of their ordination and settle for running churches.

A curious irony has occurred in the midst of this. Churches have, of late, been giving pastors *study leave* [emphasis in original]. In my denomination it is required—two weeks each year. But why “study”? That, surely, is not my central work. I stand before a congregation each week not as a lecturer in dogmatics but to lead them in prayer, bring them the sacraments, and guide them in listening to God. Intelligence, and the cultivation of intelligence by study, is not to be slighted in this work, but it is the life of spirit that is my forte. It is the prayer, contemplation, and proclamation to which I am guardian. The sanctuary, not the classroom, is my domain.

I think I know what happened. Several centuries ago, the university took the practice of the sabbatical from the church and then altered it to suit its purposes. Recently, the church glanced over at the university and noticed this wonderful practice and thought a sabbatical might be a good idea for pastors, too. And so we started taking it back. But instead of taking back what they took from us, a time for renewal of spirit, we are taking back what they turned it into—a renewal of mind. The all-but-universal practice is for pastors to go to universities and seminaries for these bastard sabbaticals and take academic courses. They return to their congregations with starched and in-fashion ideas, but their spirits as baggy as ever.

If we are going to take sabbaticals, let them be real sabbaticals: a willed passivity

in order to be restored to alert receptivity to spirit—prayer, silence, solitude, worship. It is outrageous that we acquiesce to the world’s definition of our word and let our unique, biblical sabbatical be put to the use of career advancement, psychological adjustment, and intellectual polish—with all the prayer and contemplation laundered out. The original intent of sabbath is a time to be silent and listen to God, not attend lectures; a time to be in solitude and be with God, not “interact” with fatigued peers. If help is to be given to the pastor in midcourse, it is not going to come by infusion of intellect but by renewal of spirit.” (Peterson, “Sabbatical is Not Study Leave” 74-75)

## APPENDIX C

### SELECT SABBATICAL IMPACT RESPONSES

In this appendix I have collected select sabbatical impact responses from twenty-two of the thirty subjects who participated in the study. These responses or statements clearly demonstrate the overall perceived benefit of the sabbatical. Great importance must be placed on the witness of these pastors to the benefits of sabbatical. Preserving their statements in this context provides a method to underscore the importance of the statements. Further study at a later date may find such statements beneficial for comparison and/or review. No attempt has been made to organize these statements other than to categorize them in this rubric and to present them in the order in which they were received.

It's had an incredibly positive impact. I am just totally confident, Phil, that this sabbatical lengthened my tenure not only in [location name omitted] but in the ministry period. (101A)

I think it comes sometimes also because we tend to, in ministry, accept too much of the responsibility of the growth of the ministry of the church on our own shoulders, and going on a sabbatical by itself is not going to solve or prevent those tendencies. So I think that sabbatical is a tool to assist in that, but it has to be a tool that you know what you are doing with it, as opposed to just saying, "Well, here is something to do to prevent burnout."... Going on a sabbatical, its much more than that, and I think I've learned something on that issue myself. (102B)

I've been here, just celebrated 19 years [in ministry in one parish tenure]. The last two years I've been physically depleted and emotionally depleted, too, and have given serious consideration to relocating, had interviewed at another situation. Had even considered the prospect of leaving ministry and felt like the matter of having some time [the sabbatical] was really essential for continued ministry period, and continued ministry [in my current assignment]. But the thing, I think, that happened for me on the sabbatical as far as affecting continued ministry was, I think, one of the primary things that God did, was give me an awareness of the lostness of people and the importance of seeking to bring salvation to the lives of those who were lost. (107G)

My sabbatical was very, very needed, and we will always look to it as a highlight. (108H)

It [the sabbatical] really caused me, by the end of that time, to know that I was doing what the Lord wanted me to do, and that I needed to continue on. (110J)

That was the first one I had ever taken, so there was no way to evaluate that over against something else. I thought it was excellent. I was very appreciative to the church for allowing that to happen. In all my 40 years, I had never had anything like that to happen. (111K)

Well, it allowed me to see a possibility for myself being used in ministry for a long time in the future. It allowed me to see the possibility of my own development and growth and what God was doing. What I did was, I identified how God has been moving in my life all through my life to the very point that I was at when I took the sabbatical. And by doing that it helped me to get perspective on the possibilities of the future. I could see like a pattern developing of how God was preparing me through all those experiences, the hard ones, to become a man that he could use, to be a servant leader for others. (112L)

The fruit of the sabbatical experience showed me the depth of His hand in my life and how easy it would have been for my people to say, “We need somebody to help us because you can’t.” And the faithfulness of God in that, working through the people into the whole experience, and he brought things together out of that has showed me how much in control he is. (113M)

It is hard to say that one eight-week period over a life span of ministry would have such a major impact, but having had that experience I can definitely see the value of it because if it continues as kind of a rhythm of ministry life, I can see it definitely playing into the longevity of ministry at that point. It is a time to spiritually renew. It is a time to get some focus back and to restore mental and emotional energy, and that absolutely has to figure into the equation of a long-term ministry. (114 N)

And I think the reason is, that it [the sabbatical] is effective because it is biblical. It is a principle God has set forth and we don’t break God’s laws, they break us. And it becomes more acute in a high stressed intense vocation like local church pastoral ministry is today. But I think the principle is universal, and if you disregard the principle of the Sabbath in your life at some point you are going to pay the price. (115O)

I think that at least from my perspective the sabbatical period was not only good for me it was good, it was good for my people, so it helped. Since then it has helped my people in their attitude toward me and their attitude

toward ministry, and their care for me. So that has prevented a lot of the symptoms of burnout. (117Q)

The sabbatical, it was a time without making closure in ministry or in my present assignment that gave me an opportunity for that call of God to be renewed and the freshness of touching lives. And so I think probably the sabbatical increased my tenure, although I probably today would still be in the ministry, but I would be thinking pretty seriously about “When am I going to retire?” And now people ask me, “What are you doing for retirement?” My response is, “I don’t really care, I don’t really want to retire, I’m enjoying what I am doing!” So it gave me a new sense of enjoyment and affirmation and just my own personal satisfaction of ministry, and I think more effective, too. Prior to sabbatical I would have been hanging on with my fingertips and I’ll make it through somehow, but now I’m enjoying the journey. (118R)

So I think the sabbatical helped my perception of longevity. I think that is what you are asking, do I see longevity as a real factor. You know, I guess again, I’ve never been a guy that doubted it. I always figured I would just be in the ministry until either I couldn’t do it anymore or whatever. But there are definitely moments when you wonder, “What am I doing? Can I make it that long?” And the sabbatical helped me to realize that I probably need to build in more safeguards in my life so that I can survive. And so, yeah, it was a very good factor in helping my perception of longevity. (119S)

My sabbatical experiences have kept me in the ministry and kept my marriage in the ministry. My wife doesn’t feel like some wives do, or spouses do, that I’m married to my ministry. (120T)

Yes, I think they are very important. I can’t wait for seven more years. I just think, it just kind of gave me a whole new focus. I came back really refocused, recharged, and kind of in the groove again because I had a real passion to get back, into doing things that I had gotten tired of doing. When I came back I just had this new energy for moving the church forward. I was excited about the kind of things that maybe I had gotten a little bored with. I had a new excitement for all of those kinds of things, kind of taken for granted. (121U)

Positive impact! I think that maybe before [the sabbatical] I would say, “You know, I’m glad when this is over.” I found myself thinking, “I think I’ll just go back to my company.” I don’t think that was during the sabbatical. Something happened, however, during the sabbatical at the district assembly, that I kind of got that renewed during the ordination service, when the GS [general superintendent] talked about this ordination is for a lifetime. And [wife’s name withheld] kind of nudged me and said, “I guess there goes your plan.” That was at the end of my sabbatical. This

process probably extended my years in ministry, now that I have talked that out with you. (121U)

The sabbatical reshaped my answer [about tenure in ministry] by making me more adamant about the fact that this is who I am. But I've always pretty much felt that way, but it was a real good reminder to me, that this is not something I do, this is who I am. And because of that, I don't buy into American mentality of retirement, it's like I'm called. I'm not doing it because I have to, it's because it is who I am. (123W)

For me I would say very much so, I highly recommend it [a sabbatical]. Well, I don't believe I had reached a point of burnout, but there were some of those symptoms in early stages perhaps, and I really think it prevented moving towards a sense of burnout because I came back refreshed, and retooled and excited about ministry and anxious to do ministry. And, you know, I still carry that. (125Y)

Well, I can't speak for other people, but I know what it did for me. Actually, I had told the board I felt like I really needed one. I've been pastoring here 16-plus years, but it really did more for me than what I thought it would do, it really did. I expected it to be a good thing, but I feel like it did even more for me than what I would have imagined it would have. (126Z)

Positive in the sense that, again, I think it breathed new life into your vision for ministry for you, in that I would like to think that is not going to be my first and only sabbatical. I think that I'll obviously need some more down the road which will help me in regards to the longevity of my ministry I'm sure. Even the hope of another sabbatical in the future helps me. I would say absolutely that the sabbatical has helped me with my well-being in ministry and is critical in that regard to the future. (127AA)

Yes, very positive. I think the sense of refreshment and renewal coming back was like I'm just starting again and ready to roll, wake up in the morning and wanting to go to work. So it was very positive. I had made a commitment to my church that I had no desire to move. I love my people and there is a sense that they love me and they just share that and show it, but I just wanted to be with them. I have pastored some other churches where I have prayed, "Dear God, please get me out of here as soon as you can." And this prayer is, "Dear God, please let me stay there as long as you want me." The sabbatical has helped me to feel better about staying in my current church longer because I was at a point, and you know, it is interesting what you raise here, because I'm thinking if in some other places where I'd been, if I had had a sabbatical, maybe I would have stayed there longer, too. And maybe in moving it was an attempt to run away from, not necessarily to run away, but to get out, to get away from all the pressure and whatever was there, and just kind of like, find a new

girlfriend. Someone in my church in [location name omitted] said, “Love is that tickling sensation around the heart, and you can’t scratch it,” and I was looking for that tickling sensation. (128BB)

I guess what I’m thinking is, I think it actually encouraged me to shorten the tenure and recognized that there is a point when you need to stop, slow down, move on, and that does not mean in God’s eyes that I am no longer valuable to him, but actually on the contrary, to be very valuable to God in different ways. (129CC)

I remember leaving that church and coming to this present one, and I went to that first church with the idea that I would retire there unless God moved me. I came to this new place refreshed saying, “I have come here, and I’m doing what God asked me to do, and I’m going to stay here until I retire, unless God moves me.” The sabbatical helped me to understand that. I’ve had calls to move since I’ve been here. One of the things the sabbatical did for me is it gave me a fresh start, and just say to God, “I’m staying put until you release me.” And I remember going back to the church [after the sabbatical], and a couple of months later (matter of fact in a Sunday morning worship service, and as sure as I’m talking to you) God released me. And this is what God said to me, not in an audible voice, but just about might as well. I am not sure before the sabbatical I don’t think I could have come to that realization. I am getting ready for another sabbatical; I’m going to just get in the truck and go. (130DD)

## **APPENDIX D**

### **SAMPLE LOCAL CHURCH SABBATICAL POLICIES**

Sabbatical policies are new to the Church of the Nazarene. No official sabbatical policy has been drafted for all Nazarene churches nor will one likely be drafted (it is not the standard operating procedure of the church). The 2001 Manual statement on sabbatical is, by design, limited to the church board's general responsibility of providing for sabbatical for its ministers and is limited on specific, implementation details. I included two well-written, but slightly different sabbatical policies adopted by the church boards of Churches of the Nazarene, in Cuyahoga Falls, Ohio, and Springfield, Illinois.

#### **SABBATH REST POLICY**

Cuyahoga Falls Church of the Nazarene, Cuyahoga Falls, Ohio  
Adopted by the Church Board, June 2002

Recognizing the importance of maintaining strong, effective, and long-term pastoral leadership, it is the desire of Cuyahoga Falls Church of the Nazarene to provide a time of personal and spiritual refreshment and professional growth for the pastoral staff.

#### **Sabbath Rest Defined**

An extended time away from routine ministry for the purpose of renewal, retooling, and receiving a fresh vision. During this time the Pastor is relieved of all routine and emergency duties.

It is a time of special renewal for the Pastor that will bring personal nourishment to his/her soul, a deeper relationship with the Lord and a clearer understanding of God's vision for the church. A Sabbath Rest helps to prevent ministry burnout and may give the Pastor a fresh perspective for his/her ministry.

The benefits of the Sabbath Rest for the pastoral staff member and congregation are to:

1. Express gratitude and high value to the pastoral staff member.
2. Share in the building of the spiritual life of the pastoral staff for continued service.
3. Strengthen the relationship between pastoral staff and congregation.

#### **Policy on Pastoral Sabbath Rest**

1. A Sabbath Rest shall be available to all full-time paid (thirty-two hours per week or greater) pastoral staff. Eligibility shall begin after five years of continuous, full-time ministerial service.
2. Time off for a Sabbath Rest shall accrue as follows:



- Seven weeks after five years of continual pastoral service in this church.
  - One week for each additional year after five years.
  - The maximum length of a Sabbath Rest is nine weeks.
3. After taking a Sabbath Rest, a Pastor shall again begin to accumulate Sabbath Rest time, as outlined above, which shall not be taken prior to five years after the previous Sabbath Rest.
  4. Accumulated Sabbath Rest time shall not be used in small amounts to extend or replace vacation time. In most cases, the full amount accumulated will be taken at one time. However, if the staff member's approved Sabbath Rest does not utilize the entire accrued amount, the balance may be carried forward to the next approved Sabbath Rest, provided the length of the leave does not exceed nine weeks.
  5. A Pastor Parish Committee will be formed, with the compositions determined by the Pastor and church board.
  6. It is recommended that a written proposal shall be presented to the Pastor Parish Committee for review at least three months prior to the beginning of the desired Sabbath Rest. The proposal shall then be presented to the Church Board for final approval. The proposal shall include the expectations of the leave, focus of the leave, travel plans, and the amount of time requested. The proposal shall describe how the staff member's normal duties will be conducted and by whom during the Sabbath Rest absence.
  7. A Sabbath Rest leave is separate and distinct from continuing education and vacation, which shall be granted as in any other year.
  8. The timing of the Sabbath Rest shall take into consideration the needs of the congregation; the scheduling needs from the Pastor's proposal; and other pertinent concerns as may be established.
  9. The financial support of the Pastor during the Sabbath Rest period will continue as normal including full salary and retirement benefits, housing allowance, insurance and social security reimbursement. Mileage and hospitality allowance will be suspended during this period. Budgeted continuing education funds may be applied to Sabbath Rest expenses. A stipend will also be provided to help assist with the pastoral staff member's Sabbath Rest expenses such as travel and tuition. The amount of the stipend and method of funding is to be determined by the church board after the consideration of the application and proposal.
  10. During the time of the Senior Pastor's Sabbath Rest it is assumed that the Associate Pastor will take on the majority of the Senior Pastor's duties and responsibilities. In consideration of the added workload, the Associate Pastor's compensation will be increased by the amount of one hundred dollars per week during this period.
  11. To allow for congregational and pastoral benefit from the leave, the Pastor will be expected to remain in employment with this congregation for a period of at least twelve months plus the amount of time of the Sabbath Rest after the conclusion of the leave. Financial arrangements for repayment of expenditures to the church will be made between the church board and the Pastor if a shorter period than this is considered.
  12. No two members of the pastoral staff may be on Sabbath Rest in the same church year.
  13. Mutual communication between the Pastor and the pastoral staff during the leave period will be on a regular basis occurring as needed.

14. An evaluation of the Sabbath Rest will be viewed in terms of the ministerial impact and of the congregational impact. The Pastor and the Pastor Parish Committee will each prepare an initial written review about one month after the completion of the leave period. Topics will address the favorable as well as any unfavorable aspects of this period. An additional written report will be prepared by both about six months after the leave. A copy of each of the reviews will be forwarded to the district superintendent for him to review along with a copy of the evaluation.
15. Sabbath Rest procedures are to be considered flexible so as to accommodate surprises and unusual opportunities that may develop.
16. Proposed exceptions shall be reviewed by the Pastor Parish Committee and, if approved, submitted to the church board for approval.

### **Sabbath Day of Rest & Sabbath Week of Rest**

1. Every seven days, full time pastoral staff shall be entitled to and encouraged to take a Sabbath Day of Rest.
2. Every seven months, full time pastoral staff shall be entitled to and encouraged to take a Sabbath Week of Rest.

### **Important Sabbath Rest Preparations**

1. Lines of authority while Pastor is gone.
2. Pastor's responsibilities cared for.
3. Procedures for dealing with any crisis (conflicts, counseling, etc.).
4. If an interim or supply pastor is brought in, a love offering will be given when assignment is completed.
5. Methods of communicating to and educating the congregation regarding the Sabbath Rest.
6. The church should be challenged to a special time of renewal and enlarged vision as well as the Pastor.

## **SABBATICAL POLICY**

Springfield First Church of the Nazarene, Springfield, Illinois  
*Adopted by the Church Board, July 1999*

### **PURPOSE OF SABBATICAL**

We, the congregation of Springfield First Church of the Nazarene, wish to provide long-term pastoral staff and their family the opportunity of a sabbatical leave for the purpose of professional development, personal and spiritual renewal, rest, and visioning. By means of a sabbatical leave, the congregation wishes to express gratitude and affirmation to our pastors and their families.

At the same time, it is the intent that the church will be challenged to a special time of renewal as well as an enlarged vision of its ministry.

In June of 1997, the General Assembly of the Church of the Nazarene adopted a resolution stating that the congregations were encouraged to offer their pastors sabbatical leaves. The underlying purpose of this action is to encourage long-term pastoral tenure

among Nazarene churches and encouragement to families. By means of a sabbatical leave, we wish to express our gratitude and affirmation to our pastor and family.

### **SABBATICAL TIME FRAME FOR THE SENIOR PASTOR**

A sabbatical leave of six weeks will be provided to the senior pastor after the completion of each four years of consecutive full-time employment with Springfield First Church of the Nazarene.

It is preferred that the sabbatical be taken in consecutive weeks. However, a two-session sabbatical of three weeks will be considered by the church board if the pastor so desires.

The scheduling of the sabbatical leave shall take into consideration the needs of the congregation, the scheduling needs from the pastor's proposal, and other pertinent concerns as may be established.

### **SABBATICAL TIME FRAME FOR ASSOCIATE PASTORS**

A sabbatical leave may be provided to full-time associate pastors at the discretion of the senior pastor and church board. A sabbatical leave provided for an associate pastor shall follow the same guidelines as for the senior pastor and as set forth in this outline.

### **SABBATICAL PLANNING**

The use of the sabbatical will be primarily planned by the pastor and shall require church board approval. It is recommended and preferred that the sabbatical include activities and events that will carry out the purpose of the sabbatical as stated above.

The Sabbatical Committee shall help establish a specific Full Sabbatical Policy for all pastoral staff for the future to provide healthy, long-term pastorates. They shall establish expectations of the sabbatical and present the plan to the church board for review and approval. It shall help develop a plan for implementing the sabbatical leave and carrying on the ministry of the church in the pastor's absence.

### **PROCEDURE FOR CONTINUING THE MINISTRY OF THE CHURCH DURING THE PASTOR'S SABBATICAL LEAVE**

The pastor will provide a proposed plan for the continuing ministry of the church during the sabbatical. The pastor will be responsible for appointing persons from the pastoral staff or arranging for interim leadership to carry out the administrative duties, congregational care ministries, and pulpit responsibilities.

It is recommended that only normal activities and regularly scheduled events in the ministry of the church (i.e., Sunday morning, Sunday evening, and Wednesday evening services, regularly scheduled board meetings, regularly scheduled meetings) are to be carried out. It is recommended that special events and programs or fellowship gatherings be limited during the sabbatical.

During the sabbatical, contact with the senior pastor should be limited to the following:

1. Serious illness or death of a member of the congregation;
2. Any event that the Sabbatical Committee and the interim pastor jointly determine to be an emergency situation; and/or
3. A specific prearranged request by the senior pastor.

### **FINANCING OF SABBATICAL LEAVE**

The church shall make the following financial commitment during the pastor's sabbatical leave:

1. The pastor's full salary and benefits will continue. There will be no reduction of salary or benefits during the duration of the sabbatical.
2. Guest speakers and/or expenses for the ongoing ministry and pulpit supply will be taken care of by the church.
3. All funding necessary for the sabbatical leave shall be provided for by the church. A line item will be added to the church budget for the expenses of the sabbatical. These expenses would be related to the extra professional expenses of the sabbatical itself, including housing, mileage/transportation, meals, etc.

### **THE PASTOR'S FAMILY DURING SABBATICAL LEAVE**

The pastor and his or her spouse shall determine the role family members will take in the sabbatical leave. That role shall be included in the proposed plan for sabbatical that the pastor submits to the Sabbatical Committee for board approval.

The pastor's immediate family members may, but are not expected to, attend regularly scheduled services and/or activities. The pastor and family members shall be free to communicate with the church community as they desire.

However, to enable the sabbatical to accomplish the intended purpose, it will be requested of the congregation and the board that no direct communication be made with the pastor or the pastor's family members.

### **RETURN FROM SABBATICAL**

Upon return from sabbatical leave, the pastor shall first meet with the Sabbatical Committee before reentering his duties of ministry. A date shall be scheduled for this meeting prior to the commencement of the sabbatical leave. The purpose of the meeting shall be twofold. First, the committee will inform the pastor of all issues that have arisen in his absence, bring him up to date on all activities, and discuss the effect the sabbatical

has had on the church. Second, the pastor may in turn give a brief oral report to the Sabbatical Committee on his activities and what he feels transpired with regard to carrying out the goals of the sabbatical.

The pastor and the Sabbatical Committee shall each prepare a written report at approximately one month following the pastor's return.

### **STIPULATIONS**

1. Sabbatical leave will not negate any of the pastor's earned vacation. Vacation days may not be used to extend the length of sabbatical leave.
2. Sabbatical leave will be in addition to board approved events or seminars throughout the sabbatical year.
3. No personnel shall be hired or terminated while the senior pastor is on sabbatical, unless approval is given by the senior pastor.
4. No board meetings will be held without the prior approval of the senior pastor or the District Superintendent.

The purpose of this policy is for direction and is not intended to be all inclusive. Proposed changes or additions in the above policy may be submitted to the Sabbatical Committee and presented to the church board for approval.

## APPENDIX E

### REMEMBER THE SABBATICAL TO KEEP IT

Tim Stevens<sup>1</sup> successfully pastored a number of churches. His gifts for ministry were clearly evident; great leadership skills, effective communication abilities, and an unrelenting drive for excellence effectively describe him. After twenty years of pastoral ministry Tim no longer pastors. No, he hasn't lost his faith. He is a devoted Christian. No, he didn't leave his wife. He is a faithful husband and father. After years of dedicated and effective pastoral leadership ministry, today he has a successful secular job and preaches occasionally.

Fred Jones<sup>1</sup> pastored a small, rural congregation for three years. His call to ministry came a bit later in life. He took theology classes while he was pastoring. The pay wasn't much—a parsonage provided and all utilities paid in full. His full-time secular employment kept him extremely busy. All went well for the first four years, but then a few problems kept him from being his creative best. Eventually he resigned, returning to full-time secular employment. He still preaches occasionally. He has twenty years to go before retirement.

Stories just like these reflect a difficult challenge for the Church: pastors, good pastors, leave ministry to pursue other lines of work. The special calling of God is diminished, and faith wavers. Often the unwritten expectations of a church imply that pastors don't really need much rest. The uniquely recognized divine call on a pastor's life is a two-edged sword. If God calls a pastor, will God not also equip a pastor to do everything expected without a need of extended periods of rest? Such unrealistic

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<sup>1</sup> Names are fictitious and represent a composite image of ministers.

expectations are the reason why the minister has been called a most endangered species (Asimakoupolos 123).

Overlooked for years, the Church is only now rediscovering the biblical injunction to rest. Elijah rested after Mt. Carmel and was renewed. Jesus rested after intense ministry periods and was renewed. Churches increasingly understand the power of rest for ministers. The creative, emotional, relational, written, and unwritten demands of ministry make pastors vulnerable to the precursors of burnout and threaten to reduce tenure in ministry.

One important component of the solution is to recognize the potential of sabbaticals. A six to seven-week sabbatical every seven years has a major positive impact on ministers, on their families, and on their congregations. Most importantly a sabbatical revitalizes a pastor's call to ministry. More than 70 percent of active Nazarene clergy who took a sabbatical report just such renewal. The sabbatical becomes for them what Will Willimon calls a periodic opportunity "to refurbish [the] sense of being summoned, commissioned, called and ordained to be ... in the pastoral ministry" (73). The sabbatical enables pastors to gain a long view of ministry. Sabbaticals help pastors finish their ministry careers in strong fashion and, in some cases, even extend career tenures. Effective sabbaticals are well planned by pastor and congregation. Effective sabbaticals include spiritual renewal, physical rest, emotional recovery, reconnecting relationships, and engaging the call to ministry.

In a driven age, rest seems anachronistic, but even rest is part of God's creative plan. A sabbatical is deeply connected to the biblical notion of Sabbath, and as such it should not be confused as a method of enabling greater productivity from pastors but rather as a way for pastors and churches alike to be more obedient. In a driven age, we

neglect rest at the very cost of our obedience. For all pastors, including those whose stories are just like Tim Stevens and Fred Jones, the Church would do well to say, “Remember the sabbatical to keep it.”



## **APPENDIX F**

### **INTERVIEW PRETEST DATA**

In order to increase the effectiveness of the interview process, I completed six pretest interviews. The pretest interviews impacted the study by improving my skills as an interviewer and by leading to specific changes in the interview protocol.

First, the pretests helped generate a better interview introduction. Subjects in the study required enough context prior to the interview to elicit full responses. Through the pretest process, an introduction evolved, which is included in Appendix A.

The pretest process helped clarify the division among the questions by identifying them as demographic questions (simple questions with shorter responses) and insight questions (more involved responses required). The pretest process helped me to identify the difference between questions. The result was to indicate the distinction to the interview subjects, differentiating for them the level of involvement required in each section of questions in the interview.

The pretest process also helped create a specific introduction to certain questions, particularly for questions in section 2 (questions 5 and 7-12, see Appendix A). The introductions proved helpful in streamlining the interview and in ensuring the kinds of responses the study was eliciting. The introductions are included in the interview instrument in Appendix A.

The pretest process also helped clarify a few questions. For instance, question 6 in section 2 was clarified by adding an option. Instead of asking if sabbatical was a tool or the tool, the question was rephrased to ask if it was “a tool, the tool or not a tool” in the effective management of burnout symptoms. A similar change was added to question 13 of section 2. Other similar editorial changes were made to other questions, all of which

were relatively minor but helped clarify the questions for the subjects.

The pretest process also helped redesign questions 7-12 of section 2 by fostering a rewrite of the questions to ensure a more parallel grammatical construction. Each of these six questions attempted to elicit similar kinds of responses to distinct burnout precursors. The use of parallel construction strengthened the interview by reducing confusion for the interview subjects.

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