

REDUCING WORKLOAD NOT ANSWER TO CLERGY BURNOUT



Tue 5 February 2013

The answer to clergy burnout is not simply to reduce workload, a PhD student who has been researching clergy well-being has told the Diocese of Canberra & Goulburn One Day Clergy Conference on February 5.

Grant Bickerton, who is studying at the University of Western Sydney, interviewed local Anglican clergy as part of his qualitative research project.

“The goal is not reduction of work demands but the rekindling of motivation and engagement”, he said, explaining that feelings of cynicism and low personal accomplishment are key indicators of burnout not just exhaustion. Reducing workload doesn’t tackle the real issue and may lead to boredom.

“Building both job resources and spiritual-personal resources is key”, he said. (Some key tips are listed at the end of the article.)

Some of the spiritual resources linked to resilience in the research are: a secure attachment to God, with the studies showing that having a Spiritual Director can assist help address a lack of intimacy with God; collaborative religious coping style as endorsed in Scriptural models; a perceived sense of “call to the work... this is what I am meant to do”.

Mr Bickerton said that clergy were particularly vulnerable to burnout because they feel on-call 24/7 and experience “workload without recovery”. They also experience “an ambiguous separation between professional and private lives”, often feeling they are expected to be a pastor even when socializing.

“On average people leave ministry between three to eight years after entering”, he said.

The afternoon session of the Clergy Conference focused on standards and compliance issues. Archdeacon Matt Brain explained the SRE authorisation requirements in NSW. Celia Irving, Professional Standards Director, provided clergy with a briefing regarding the preparations the Diocese is making for the Royal Commission into institutional responses to child abuse.

GRANT BICKERTON'S TIPS ON AVOIDING BURNOUT

1. Change abstract, highly ambitious work expectations into concrete, meaningful short-term goals.
2. Don't just have a "day off" but find a way to detach from work every day.
3. Take care of yourself. Five essentials are: adequate diet, regular exercise, relaxation time, 8 hours sleep, watch your thinking habits.
4. Establish aspects of home life that are a haven of rest from work.
5. Practice consciously involving God. Develop habits of collaborating with God in your daily situations.
6. Focus on improving your work environment. Get to know what extra resources are out there provided by your organization (or Diocese). Identify resources that would aid, and put a proposal to your leadership.