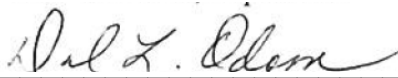


REVELANCE AT ALL COSTS:  
A THEOLOGICAL EXPLORATION OF BURNOUT  
AND A CALL FOR RELATIONAL LEADERSHIP  
IN A SECULAR AGE

by  
Marti Reed Hazelrigg

Date: March 29, 2023

Approved:



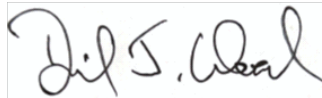
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Thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of  
the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Ministry  
in the Divinity School of Duke University

ABSTRACT

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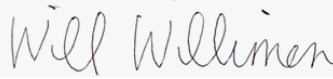
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2023

## ABSTRACT

This thesis explores the issue of burnout in congregational settings. Unmanaged stress in a system is a cause of burnout. Individuals can feel burnout, but a systemic approach is needed to prevent and address burnout. Christina Maslach and Michael P. Leiter believe burnout is a relationship problem. Requiring a relational solution<sup>1</sup> This thesis will examine a congregation's relationship to the world, work, and church. A relationship reset is needed to prevent and address burnout.

The thesis unfolds in five moves. The first move explores the relationship between burnout and the world. It seeks to answer the question, what cultural realities contribute to the experience of burnout? In conversation with Charles Taylor, Andy Root believes we live in a secular age when the drive to seek a distorted idea of the good life “the good life” is constant and overwhelming.<sup>2</sup> Root contends that the problem arises from the constant drive to seek the good life and from the speeding up of time itself. Root builds upon Taylor's theory of the secular age using the work of Hartmut Rosa; he claims congregations are living in an age of acceleration which produces an epidemic of “time-famine” in modernity.<sup>3</sup> Rosa concludes that acceleration causes alienation, experienced as isolation in many forms. Root concludes that the time-sickness

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<sup>1</sup> Maslach, Christina and Leiter, Michael P. *The Burnout Challenge: Managing People's Relationships with Their Jobs*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2022 p. 62.

<sup>2</sup> The first part of my argument builds upon the work of Dr. Andrew Root and Root's works on Charles Taylor's, *A Secular Age*, along with the more recent work of German Sociologist Hartmut Rosa, *Resonance: A Sociology of Our Relationship to the World*. -Root, Andrew. *The Congregation in a Secular Age: Keeping Sacred Time Against the Speed of Modern Life*. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2021. p. 195

<sup>3</sup> Rosa, Hartmut. *Social Acceleration: A New Theory of Modernity*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2015. p, 309-310.

of modernity causes depression. I conclude that times-sickness additionally causes burnout identified by exhaustion, disengagement, and ineffectiveness.<sup>4</sup>

The second move of the thesis explores burnout as a mismatch of relationships between people and their work. Christina Maslach and Michael P. Leiter suggest burnout is a systemic problem, not a personal one.<sup>5</sup> Maslach and Leiter's research defines burnout as a mismatch between people and work. The cost of caring can lead to exhaustion, disengagement, and ineffectiveness.

Maslach and Leiter not only diagnose the problem of burnout but suggest how organizations can prevent burnout through engagement and empathy. The third movement of the thesis explores burnout as a systemic issue in which better matches can be made between people and their relationship to work.

The fourth move explores the relationship between burnout and the church. Hartmut Rosa suggests *resonance* is the only antidote to the problem of the accelerated pace of modern life.<sup>6</sup> Rosa defines resonance as a connection involving meaning and transformation. Andrew Root concludes that a theological understanding of resonance involves waiting as action, as the church waits for an encounter with God.<sup>7</sup> I challenge Root's call for waiting and instead call for a current deepening of relationships in a congregational setting.

The fifth and final move explores the need to reclaim relationships in the church as canopies of community through resonant leadership to manage burnout in a congregation.

Sociologist Peter Berger wrote that religion provided a sacred canopy in the reality of a chaotic

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<sup>4</sup> Andrew Root using “depressed churches” from Steinke p. 8- Root, Andrew. *The Congregation in a Secular Age: Keeping Sacred Time Against the Speed of Modern Life*. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2021

<sup>5</sup> Maslach, Christina and Leiter, P. Michael. *The Truth About Burnout: How Organizations Cause Personal Stress and What to Do About It*. San Francisco: Jossey – Bass, 1997

<sup>6</sup> Root, *The Congregation in the Secular Age*, 195.

<sup>7</sup> Root, Andrew. *Churches and the Crisis of Decline: A Hopeful Ecclesiology for the Secular Age*. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2022. p. 161

and secular world.<sup>8</sup> How can congregations reclaim resonant relationships to prevent burnout as they work in the world?

The Bible never uses the word burnout, though scripture offers examples of congregations facing exhaustion, disengagement, and perhaps feeling ineffective. The Apostle Paul writes to the church at Rome, facing divisions and obstacles in a chaotic world. Paul appeals to the church at Rome to create new relationships with each other and the world. He points to the image of a body working in tandem, believing each part is vital for the work of the system.<sup>9</sup>

Ultimately, the Apostle Paul, called by God, knows the church's work is too exhausting to do solo. In the 16<sup>th</sup> chapter of Romans, Paul names parts of the body like Phoebe and Junia who assist him in the work of God. How can the church reclaim the necessity and importance of relational leadership to prevent burnout in congregations? How can congregations move from burnout to engagement?

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<sup>8</sup> Burger, Peter. *The Sacred Canopy: Elements of a Sociological Theory of Religion*. New York: Anchor Books, 1967.

<sup>9</sup> Romans 12-14:9

## **DEDICATION**

I am grateful to the faculty of the DMin 2020 cohort for their valuable teaching, my fellow students in the cohort for laughter and fellowship, and especially to the Dr. Will Willimon, for his guidance and direction of the DMin program. I learned valuable lessons from each of you. Thank you also to David Odom and David Wood for a close reading of my thesis and constructive feedback. Your insight and feedback improved my writing. Thank you to friends who supported me during the final days of thesis writing. I am also grateful to the church I serve Oak Ridge Presbyterian and the many ways your supported me during this process.

I am most grateful to my family whose love and support surrounded me not only during this process, but all my days. Thank you to my son and daughter, Jackson and Maggie, and my husband Peter. You bring love, laughter, and joy to my life daily. Thank you for your patience and generosity.

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## Introduction: A Relationship Reset

Congregations experienced significant stress during the Covid 19 pandemic while facing health and safety challenges beyond their control.<sup>10</sup> To control an uncontrollable situation, congregations had to figure out how to worship and survive. Congregations pivoted quickly to provide worship in new ways through technology or safely outside from a distance. Congregations created ways to stay connected when physically being together was dangerous. Congregations invented new ways to grieve when being together was not possible. While congregations were responding to the viral pandemic, a pandemic of racial injustice and growing mental health concerns started to rage. Pastors were exhausted.<sup>11</sup>

Are congregations exhausted too? Trying to schedule congregational events is difficult as everyone seems to be busy. Recruiting new congregational leaders is challenging, asking people to commit when they are already over-committed. Worship attendance varies. Even before the pandemic, studies showed a decline in religious attendance across the country.<sup>12</sup> Pastors and church professionals report high levels of burnout.<sup>13</sup> If pastors experience burnout, could congregations be burned out too?

Often burnout in the church is understood as an individual problem, emphasizing the pastor.<sup>14</sup> Church leaders are encouraged to take better care of themselves, pray more, and

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<sup>10</sup> Yonat Shimron, *Religious News Service*, October 14, 2021, <https://religionnews.com/2021/10/14/study-attendance-at-small-and-midsize-us-congregations-is-hemorrhaging/>

<sup>11</sup> Felicetti, Elizabeth. "My Church Doesn't Know What to Do Anymore," *Atlantic*, October 2021. <https://www.theatlantic.com/ideas/archive/2021/10/church-pandemic/620496/>

<sup>12</sup> Pew Research Center, In US: Decline of Christian Communities Continue at Rapid Pace: <https://www.pewforum.org/2019/10/17/in-u-s-decline-of-christianity-continues-at-rapid-pace/>

<sup>13</sup> Michelle Boorstein, The First Christmas as Lay Person: Many Clergy Quit Burned Out by the pandemic," *The Washington Post*, December 24, 2021, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/religion/2021/12/24/christmas-covid-pandemic-clergy-quit/>

<sup>14</sup> I took a three-month sabbatical to begin writing my thesis on burnout. The irony does not escape me.

develop better Spiritual disciplines. Though self-care and a disciplined spiritual life are vital for any church leader, burnout is not an individual problem, and burnout may affect the whole system of the church.<sup>15</sup>

In 2019, the World Health Organization included burnout in its International Classification of Diseases (ICD-10), describing burnout as “a syndrome conceptualized as resulting from chronic workplace stress that has not been successfully managed.”<sup>16</sup> If unmanaged stress in a workplace can cause burnout, can stress in congregations also lead to burnout? <sup>17</sup> Can examining the issue of burnout help congregations with a relationship reset?

### **Relationship with the World: Seeking the Good Life in a Secular Age**

Philosopher Charles Taylor believes we live in a secular age where we seek *the good life* through an immanent frame, void of divine action and transcendence, with pressure placed on human action.<sup>18</sup> In modernity, we assume a *good life* is a full life, so we fill it with things, and stuff we assume will bring us fullness. As Jesus reminds us in the Parable of the Rich Fool, a bigger barn of full crops can be devoid of what truly nourishes the soul. (Luke 12: 13-20)

Sociologist Hartmut Rosa, building upon Taylor, states that modern societies experience motion through continual growth, acceleration, and innovation, which he calls dynamic stabilization.<sup>19</sup> For Rosa, a modern society’s structure and status come only from what it can

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<sup>15</sup> Maslach, Christina and Leiter, P. Michael. *The Truth About Burnout: How Organizations Cause Personal Stress and What to Do About It*. San Francisco: Jossey – Bass, 1997. p. 18

<sup>16</sup> “Burnout-out an ‘Occupational Phenomenon: International Classification of Diseases,” World Health Organization, May 28, 2019. <https://www.who.int/news/item/28-05-2019-burnout-an-occupational-phenomenon-international-classification-of-diseases>.

<sup>17</sup> I believe lay leaders experience burnout in addition to only pastors. I will use the work of Christina Maslach and others to make my argument.

<sup>18</sup> Taylor, Charles, *The Secular Age*. Cambridge: Belknap, 2007.

<sup>19</sup> Rosa, Hartmut, *Resonance: A Sociology of Our Relationship to the World*. (Translated by James C. Wagner) Cambridge: Polity Press, 2021. p. 21

produce. In his book, *Resonance: A Sociology of Our Relationships to the World*, Rosa believes this constant state of striving and thus competing causes *acceleration* which thus becomes a problem of late modernity.<sup>20</sup>

Rosa reminds us that the drive to seek the good life not only speeds up our lives, but creates a tension-filled and competitive relationship with the world. We only succeed when we produce and must constantly compare ourselves with others to see who has the “good enough life.” We assume the filters of Instagram and Facebook tell us the truth, but they don’t and ultimately leave us yearning for more.

Within this narrative, the church (like other modern organizations) wants the good life, too, seeking to be relevant through innovation and growth. The church assumes if can fill its pews with more members, more young families, and more pledges, that the growth will fill the emptiness no one wants to talk about. Like society, the church thinks more work will save it.

Hartmut Rosa reminds us that the answer is not speed but connection. For Rosa, living accelerated lives causes alienation, a disconnection between the self and the world. He believes that the answer is not to slow down the acceleration (beyond our control), but rather, the antidote to the acceleration speed is resonance, a relationship beyond our control.

Theologian, Andrew Root, believes Taylor’s theory of a secular age and Rosa’s concepts of acceleration and resonance can help the church address mounting problems.<sup>21</sup> In modernity, congregations and pastors experience the fast pace of acceleration as they, too, seek the good life, wanting to be relevant to attract new people to be able to grow congregations. The work to

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<sup>20</sup> Root, Andrew, *Church and the Crisis of Decline: A Hopeful, Practical Ecclesiology for a Secular Age*. (Ministry In a Secular Age Book #4) Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2022. p. 159

<sup>21</sup> Practical Theologian Andrew Root brings more than clarity to the conversation, but the addition of valuable scholarship. Root has published four books exploring faith in a secular age, along with a fourth offering a hopeful practical ecclesiology for the church, with a fifth book coming in the fall of 2022. Hartmut Rosa wrote his dissertation on Charles Taylor's work, *A Secular Age*. Beyond the writing, the three have met in person at various times.

change and innovate their congregations never seems to end. And because we live in a secular age, seeking a full life must come from within. Who has time to wait on God to move? Will God move anyway?

For Root, this reality and predicament cause a speed sickness.<sup>22</sup> Root writes, “burnout is a depression imposed by the inability to keep pace.”<sup>23</sup> In *The Congregation in a Secular Age: Keeping Sacred Time Against the Speed of Modern Life*, Root suggests that constantly seeking change causes depression in churches.<sup>24</sup> Per Charles Taylor, the drive for change in the secular age comes from within rather than from divine action. The drive to seek the good life speeds up our lives.

### **Relationship with Work: The Problem of Burnout**

The second part of the project explores the problem of burnout, and the challenges burnout poses to organizations. Using the work of social psychologists Christina Maslach, Michael P. Leiter, Herbert Freudenberger, and others, the project explores the growing field of burnout research, focusing not only on individuals but also organizations beginning in the 1970s

Clergy and church professionals have tools to decrease burnout.<sup>25</sup> Clergy participate in sabbatical programs. Clergy apply for financial grants to support time away from their congregations or help with travel expenses. Clergy are encouraged to meet with other clergy for

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<sup>22</sup> Root, Andrew. *The Congregation in a Secular Age: Keeping Sacred Time Against the Speed of Modern Life*. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2021. p. 17

<sup>23</sup> Andrew Root is quoting William Willimon here, “Burnout-the word implies that our energy is gone. We cannot summon the energy to do what needs to be done,” William Willimon, *Clergy and Laity Burnout* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1989), 21- Root, *The Congregation in a Secular Age*, 17.

<sup>24</sup> Root, *The Congregation in a Secular Age*, p.13.

<sup>25</sup> Doolittle, Benjamin R. “The Impact of Behaviors upon Burnout Among Parish-Based Clergy.” *Journal of Religion and Health* 49, no. 1 (2010): 88–95. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/20685249>.

support, often forming groups during their theological education. Are congregational lay leaders burned out too? The pastor may become the “identified patient” of burnout in a congregation if there is not a systemic understanding of stress in the system.<sup>26</sup>

Burnout is often understood as an individual problem. Congregational leaders should take better care of themselves, pray more, and develop better spiritual disciples. Though self-care and a more disciplined spiritual life are vital for any church leader, social science tells us that self-care may not be the remedy.

Christina Maslach and Micheal P. Leiter define burnout syndrome in a workplace as the experience of *emotional exhaustion*, feelings of *disengagement*, and a sense of *ineffectiveness*.<sup>27</sup> Sisters Amelia Nagoski and Emily Nagoski write in, *Burnout: The Secret to Unlocking the Stress Cycle* that burnout happens when we get stuck in the biological stress system.<sup>28</sup> Burnout is addressed by moving through the stress cycle. Thus, wellness is not a state of being but a form of action.<sup>29</sup>

When we think of addressing burnout, we usually think of self-care. It is important for clergy to engage in self-care, which nourishes the body and soul. Clergy can maintain healthy spiritual lives by practicing sabbath, prayer, and studying scripture. As congregational leaders, we teach and equip church members to nourish their spiritual lives by engaging in these practices. But self-care will not address the root causes of burnout.

In *The Burnout Epidemic: The Rise of Chronic Stress and How We Can Fix It*, Jennifer Moss writes, “Self-care has been the prevention strategy for decades. And yet, burnout is on the

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<sup>26</sup> Friedman, Edwin. *Generation to Generation: Family Process in Church and Synagogue*. New York: Guilford Press, 1985.

<sup>27</sup> Maslach and Leiter, *The Burnout Challenge*, p. 3

<sup>28</sup> Maslach and Leiter, *The Burnout Challenge*, p. 4

<sup>29</sup> Maslach and Leiter, *The Burnout Challenge*, p.28

rise. Why? Because we're ignoring the systematic and institutional factors that cause burnout."<sup>30</sup>

Moss concludes that burnout is not about people but an organization.

The metaphor of a canary in a coal mine has been used to understand systematic burnout. Burnout researcher Christina Maslach asked Jennifer Moss to picture canaries in a coal mine. The healthy canaries sing as they enter the coal mine. But if the canaries come out, exposed to carbon monoxide, they are no longer singing and are sick. The birds did not make themselves sick; the coal mine made them sick.<sup>31</sup>

I propose that burnout is an issue in congregations as burnout is identified in other systems, such as workplaces. Once we've identified the why and the what of burnout, what is needed to address burnout in a congregation?

### **Managing Burnout: Creating Better Relationships with Work**

Maslach and Leiter contend that it is necessary to shift our framework from what may be wrong with the person to focus instead on what may be wrong with the relationship between the person and the situation.<sup>32</sup> They believe a workplace can create better matches to manage chronic stress through collaboration, customization, and commitment.<sup>33</sup> The three Cs (collaborate, customize, and commit) are not individual items to master, but rather the work of the entire system.

### **An Antidote to Burnout: Resonance**

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<sup>30</sup> Moss, Jennifer. *The Burnout Epidemic: The Rise of Chronic Stress and How We Can Fix It*. Boston: Harvard Business Review Press, 2021. p. 3.

<sup>31</sup> Moss, Jennifer. *The Burnout Epidemic* 4

<sup>32</sup> Maslach and Leiter, *The Burnout Challenge*, p. 70

<sup>33</sup> Maslach and Leiter, *The Burnout Challenge*, p. 81

Back to our accelerated culture seeking the good life at all costs, Hartmut Rosa concludes, "if acceleration is the problem, then resonance may well be the solution."<sup>34</sup> The obvious answer might be to slow down in a world where busyness and speed dominate. Andrew Root makes the point that acceleration cannot be avoided by doing less.<sup>35</sup>

Hartmut Rosa borrows the term *resonance* from physics, describing the relationship of a subject and object in a vibrating system in which both connect. For Rosa, the central question of what distinguishes a good life from a less good life and how this pursuit is lived through *relationships*.<sup>36</sup>

Root again connecting with Rosa says, "resonance is a relationship with someone outside yourself that you now find yourself related and connected to." Root continues: "The church cannot produce its own life. The triune God, and God alone, gives life to the church".<sup>37</sup>

For Root, understanding resonance in a Christian context is the sense of being in a relationship with something outside yourself, God.<sup>38</sup> Christians can only experience life given by a living God. Thus, for Root, resonance becomes a waiting action as the church opens space for an encounter with God.<sup>39</sup> "The church will keep trying to spend its way out of its decline until it recognizes that the propensity to spend its energy and speed up rests on a self-defeating form of action that has little room for divine action."<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> Hartmut Rosa, *Resonance: A Sociology of Our Relationships to the World* p. 1

<sup>35</sup> The Congregational in the Secular Age p. 169

<sup>36</sup> Rosa, *Resonance*, p. 5

<sup>37</sup> Rosa, *Resonance*, p. 13

<sup>38</sup> Root, Andrew *Church and the Crisis of Decline: A Hopeful, Practical Ecclesiology for a Secular Age*. (Ministry In a Secular Age Book #4) Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2022. p. 165

<sup>39</sup> Root, *Church and the Crisis of Decline* p.165

<sup>40</sup> Root, *Church and the Crisis of Decline* p.167



Though I believe God always moves first and relationships that give life come from God, I expand Root's theological understanding of resonance as affection, shared suffering, and conversation.<sup>41</sup>

### **Relationship within the Church: Creating Canopies of Community**

Suppose burnout is understood as a relationship problem. In that case, the thesis's fifth and final move explores relationships within the church and how we can manage chronic stress to create canopies of community.

Andy Crouch writing in his book, *The Life We're Looking For: Reclaiming Relationship in a Technological World*, believes people of faith need a place to manage the stress of the world where the self can be known and understood, contribute to understanding the chaos of the world, all while applying the strength of an individual to the growth of the whole body of Christ.<sup>42</sup> “Above all, we need a place where we can invest ourselves deeply in others, come to care about their flourishing, and give ourselves in mutual service and sacrifice in ways that secure our own identities instead of erasing them.”<sup>43</sup>

Crouch proposes the image of a household as the vehicle for creating such relationships of care and community. For Crouch, the household is a whole community working together to achieve a goal beyond individual needs. Crouch argues that household is a better metaphor than family (even admitting that household is an old and musty word), because the quality of a household is a place where every person can find a home, not only immediate family members.

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<sup>41</sup> Root, *Churches and the Crisis of Decline*. p. 167-174

<sup>42</sup> Crouch, Andy. *The Life We're Looking For: Reclaiming Relationship in a Technological World*. New York: Convergent, 2022. p. 150

<sup>43</sup> Crouch, *The Life We're Looking For* p. 150-151

To make his argument, Crouch uses the image of the sacred canopy from the sociologist of religion, Peter Berger. Peter Berger used the image of a sacred canopy to explain how religion can help people make sense of the world and understand shared meaning in the age of secularization.<sup>44</sup> For Crouch, the most vital contribution of a household of God is to prepare its members to live and work in the world by living under a canopy of trust. Crouch uses the Book of Romans, highlighting the relationship between Paul and Phoebe (Romans 16) to give an example of one such community of trust.

When we identify burnout in a congregation, caused by seeking relevance in the world, we can manage even the stressful work of the church through resonant relationships, which in turn create canopies of communities in the hope that congregations can flourish through God's transformation rather than conformity to the world's good life.

Self-care or a pause in work will not solve the problem of burnout in a congregation. To address burnout in congregations, we must examine our relationships with the world, work relationships, and church relationships. At the same time, we must proclaim that all three relationships are made possible through the ultimate trinitarian relationship of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit that has come to dwell with us.

**It is time the church examines the problem and prevention of burnout.**

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<sup>44</sup> Berger, Peter. *The Sacred Canopy: Elements of A Sociological Theory of Religio*. New York: Anchor Books, 1967

## **Chapter 1. The Relationship With the World: Seeking the Good Life in a Secular Age**

### *A Tale of Two Congregational Meetings: Reporting on the Good Life*

The polity of the Presbyterian Church USA requires a congregation to meet annually to elect new officers and report on the past year's ministry, mission, and financials. The congregation must vote on any changes made to a pastor's financial terms of call, and the Session presents the yearly financial, budget. The Annual Congregational meeting can produce anxious energy in a congregation.

In February 2021, I moderated an annual meeting we assumed would be rocky as we emerged from lockdown. The Session had voted to move worship online in mid-March 2020 during the first weeks of the Covid pandemic. Staff and congregational leaders sprang into action to connect safely while the congregation could not physically be together under one roof. From birthday party parades to outdoor food markets serving the food insecure in the community, to Zoom gatherings, to lawn worship and concerts, to porch visits, to a phone tree with bi-monthly calls- congregational leaders and staff tried to lead the church during an unprecedented time. Even as we tried to control an uncontrollable situation, there was uncertainty about the budget year ahead.

In early January 2021, due to lower pledges (amount and number), lay congregational leaders and I made the tough decision to eliminate one staff position for 2021. In addition, another staff member, after numerous dramatic episodes, also left the church. I felt like I was experiencing the opposite of the good life, it felt like a horrible life. Limited resources called for drastic decisions. The decisions were most likely were influenced because congregational leaders felt the actions of recently former staff members served to divide and loose trust rather than build it.

Many people in the congregation understood, but a few congregational members were angry. Everyone seemed to be angry about something or cynical at best in 2021. Did I sense exhaustion in the congregation, maybe even burnout? People were exhausted from living in a pandemic, tired from online school or work, tired from being a healthcare provider during a pandemic, tired from being a firefighter or police officer during a time of increased workload and decreased respect in the community. Even retired members of the congregation seemed exhausted. Adding to all that malaise, political divisions took hold in the congregation. I sensed exhaustion before the Covid pandemic, but the pandemic seemed to light the fuse for the fire.

The 2021 Annual meeting began on a cold Sunday in February, directly after worship. The weather didn't matter since all congregational members connected from their devices at home while the staff and a high school AV volunteer were in the sanctuary. It would be our first annual meeting using an online platform to gather virtually. We were praying this new way to "connect" would work. Due to a technical glitch, I couldn't see congregational members on the screen during the meeting, but they could see me.

The meeting began with prayer and a video presentation of ministry and mission highlights from the unprecedented year. My goal at the time was to assure the congregation that God was still at work. In the first part of the meeting, we shared how "busy" our church had been in the pandemic. Though framed theologically, it felt more like, "look what we did last year!"

Then the Finance Committee and Session presented the 2021 budget. Due to a lower number of pledges and expected pledge income, the Finance committee proposed a lower 2021 budget than the year prior. The Personnel committee discussed the difficult decision to eliminate a staff position for one year. Two members of the congregation started asking questions and making accusations. They dominated the meeting for the next thirty minutes or more. As the

meeting moderator, I should have called the meeting back to order. I allowed the two congregational members to spew their grievances for too long. I had met personally with the two members and others to listen to their concerns privately before the meeting. I hoped to avoid a public display of grievance, but I couldn't control it in the end. Finally, one of the wise sages of the congregation interrupted the rants by suggesting we needed to trust our pastor and leaders. We closed the meeting in prayer. I wondered if it would be the last congregational meeting I would moderate at the church.

My sleepless nights continued, but the repercussions from that poisonous meeting grew beyond me. In 2021, the chair of the Personnel committee (a healthy man in his late 50s) was diagnosed with a heart condition. Other congregational leaders continued their work but with less enthusiasm. The staff seemed to lack the energy for the uncertain road ahead. I dug in and tried to lead in a time of uncertainty. I read and reread books on congregational conflict and change.<sup>45</sup> Yes, the congregation was experiencing change. Yes, there was some conflict, but I sensed something else was going on too.

The second Annual meeting took place in February 2022. There was still a bit of uncertainty in the congregation, but we saw glimpses of light after returning to in-person worship and gladly getting vaccinated for Covid. After approving a fiscally conservative 2021 church budget, congregational giving exceeded budgeted expectations. The congregation had just hired a new music staff person and was actively looking for a second position to work with children and youth. Two families had loudly left the church in 2021, but things seemed to be moving more positively. Due to schedule conflicts, we combined the 2022 Annual meeting with the youth ministry Souper Bowl lunch.

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<sup>45</sup> I read Gil Rendle's *Quietly Courageous: Leading the Church in a Changing World*. Todd Bolsinger's, *Canoeing the Mountains*. Gregory Jones, *Christian Social Innovation* and many more.

The Souper Bowl lunch was an annual youth ministry fundraiser to raise money for local non-profits that addressed hunger in our county.<sup>46</sup> It is a unique event! Members of the congregation brought homemade soup to share after worship on Super Bowl Sunday in early February. Before the event, Middle School and High School Youth painted pottery soup bowls marking each bowl with a unique personality. The personalized soup bowls are auctioned off to raise money for hunger- a twist on the materialism of Super Bowl Sunday. In February 2022, young people painted more than one bowl so congregational members besides their parents could bid on the bowls and raise more money.

Our congregation worships in a multi-use space- so smells of soup and anticipation filled the sanctuary that morning. Something felt different, and I sensed a joy in the room that had not been the year before. We blessed the food and opened the 2022 Annual Congregational meeting with prayer.

I moderated many congregational annual meetings focusing on resources- budget, salaries, and accomplishments. The February 2022 annual meeting felt different. Of course, the congregation was grateful to be meeting in person, but the goal of the meeting seemed different. Yes, the congregation heard financial and ministry reports, but the focus was on relationships rather than resources. The congregational leaders and I shared the budget and mission reports with the congregation, but everyone was eager to move on with the program. Instead of feeling distrust or heaviness in the air, people laughed, and broke bread gathered at tables. At the end of

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<sup>46</sup> The Souper Bowl of Caring began in 1990, with a simple prayer: "Lord, even as we enjoy the Super Bowl football game, help us be mindful of those who are without a bowl of soup to eat" was delivered to a small youth group at Spring Valley Presbyterian Church in Columbia, SC led by Brad Smith, who was serving as a seminary intern. Since 1990 the movement has grown with the help of other youth groups. Over 170 million dollars has been raised to tackle hunger in local communities. Accessed- September 8, 2022 <https://tacklehunger.org>

the meal, the middle school and high school youth announced that we had raised the most money to help fund the work of two local non-profits in our community whose mission was to feed the food insecure. As we were cleaning up, one of the leaders on the Finance committee pulled me aside, saying- let's combine these two events every year. *Today was not only a success, but it was fun too!*

Our congregation moved the event's focus from resources (even the lack of resources) to relationships and serving others. Instead of focusing on ourselves, we raised money to serve others. In 2021, had we sought the good life instead of following Jesus' call to live an abundant life together? In 2021, we focused on what we could produce or, rather not produce since the meeting was full of bad news, fewer pledges, less money, thus, hard decisions had to be made. In 2022, we reported again on numbers, although the report showed growth in pledges and people. More importantly, in addition to giving God the glory for the good news, the focus was on relationships and serving others through the Souper Bowl of Caring,

These two events are among many occasions I could share. As a pastor in the Presbyterian Church USA for over twenty years, I believe deeply in the priesthood of all believers. I constantly discern ways to equip people of all ages to serve Jesus Christ through the church. Often, I have focused on the conflict or change we see in front of us, and I sense something else is happening. I feel people are burned out from the work of the church but also the work of life. Join me on this journey as I try to explain.

### **Seeking the Good Life in a Secular Age**

The Scotsman Adam Lord Gifford, in his 1885 will, bequeathed the financial funds for four Scottish universities to establish a series of lectures on natural religion. Gifford believed that

true and felt knowledge of God could enhance human well-being and progress. His bequest established the Gifford Lectures. The lectures, which began in 1888, except for the years of World War Two, have produced over a hundred years of scholarship discerning the existence of God and divine purpose in a life lived in the natural world. The 1998 lecture by Canadian Philosopher Charles Taylor, *Living in a Secular Age*, has made a distinctive mark on scholarship— theological, sociological, and philosophical in the years since.<sup>47</sup> More than a scholar’s mark on the academy, Taylor’s writing and those writing in response to Taylor may help congregations understand the cultural landscape they currently inhabit.

In Taylor's lecture and his book, *A Secular Age*, he describes a nagging illness in the modern world in which is not easily identified.<sup>48</sup> The nagging sickness of modernity may be linked to three possibilities: “(1) the sense of the fragility of meaning and search for an overarching significance, (2) a felt flatness of our attempts to solemnize the crucial moments of passage in our lives, (3) the utter emptiness of the ordinary.”<sup>49</sup> Charles Taylor describes this nagging illness as the “malaise of immanence.”<sup>50</sup> For Taylor, as advancements in science and social transformation grew in modernity, they pushed concern for God and faith to the margins. "It is as though living in a world free of transcendence, enchantment, and organization around divine action has given us a freedom that leaves us with a discomfort we can’t pinpoint, a dull boredom we can’t shake.”<sup>51</sup>

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<sup>47</sup> In addition to Andrew Roots' five volumes of reflection on Taylor's work, others have also reflected James K. A. Smith's, *How (Not) To Be Secular: Reading Charles Taylor*. Grand Rapids: Erdmans, 2017. Charles Taylor won the Templeton Prize in 2007. As we read later, the German Sociologist Hartmut Rosa wrote his Ph.D. dissertation on Taylor and would go on to continue the academic dialogue in his academic writing.

<sup>48</sup> Root, *The Pastor in the Secular Age*, p. 5.

<sup>49</sup> Root, *The Pastor in the Secular Age*, p. 5 (Charles Taylor, *A Secular Age* (Cambridge: Belknap Press, 2017) p. 309

<sup>50</sup> Root, *The Pastor in the Secular Age*, p. 4.

<sup>51</sup> Root quoting Taylor, *The Pastor in the Secular Age*, p. 5.



Taylor believes religious belief started to recede in the 1500s during the Reformation. For Taylor, a division began to grow between the secular and spiritual—from a time when almost everyone believed in God or the divine to our current cultural reality, where belief in God, is one option among many options. In the last five hundred years, the role of religion has lost its prominence and ability to make meaning of the world. The move from faith to the secular was from *transcendence* to *immanence*, from a social reality where God was perceived to be active in life to a social reality where all actions depend on the self. If action is thus dependent on the self, what is the goal of the self?<sup>52</sup> In a *secular age*, divine action is thus almost unbelievable.<sup>53</sup> In a *secular age*, weight on the self can be almost unbearable. The move from transcendence to immanence didn't happen overnight.<sup>54</sup>

Charles Taylor designates the move from transcendence to immanence as the progression of secular 1, secular 2, and secular 3, highlighting each cultural and religious division. I find his designations of the age of mobilization (1800's- 1960s) and the age of authenticity (late 1960s-present) to be more important for our conversation.

Taylor's *age of mobilization* occurred as institutions helped to shape a modern moral order. This was a period of time when people sought participation in institutions to give moral guidance. People looked to the institutions for advice and identity from religious institutions, civic organizations, or social groups. Ted Smith, professor at Candler School of Theology in the 2021 Sprunt lectures at Union Theological Seminary in Richmond, uses the term the *age of association* to describe this period. For Smith, it was a time when your association with an

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<sup>52</sup> Some of these thoughts are from notes from a presentation by Scott Black Johnson at First Presbyterian Greensboro, NC in February of 2017.

<sup>53</sup> Root, *The Pastor in the Secular Age*. p. xxi

<sup>54</sup> Charles Taylor describes the move in three stages- Secular 1, Secular 2, and Secular 3.

institution provided purpose, identity, and meaning.<sup>55</sup> As congregational participation declines and religious identity wavers, the age of association is dwindling, if not completely over.

For Taylor, beginning most likely in the late 1960's congregations found themselves in the *age of authenticity* where personal faith is understood primarily as an expression of "what speaks to me" and distinct from the institution of the church.<sup>56</sup> In the age of authenticity, religious belief has decreased, and doubt has risen. In the age of authenticity, the real work is in trying to discern what is good. For Taylor, the age of authenticity declares that "everything human being has the right to define for himself or herself what it means to be human."<sup>57</sup> Within this ethic comes freedom for each human being to define what makes for a good life. This new *freedom* calls for constant motion as the only way for the individual to discern the good life is to perform and compare their life with the lives of others. Tools such as social media have allowed these comparisons to be instant and marked by how many followers one can get.

Andrew Root notes the shadow side of the age of authenticity is depression; though the freedom of self can be exciting, it can also be daunting.<sup>58</sup> In addition to the weight of personal freedom comes the restraint of time. To help explain the time restraint on the self, Root points to the work of the German sociologist, Hartmut Rosa, who himself writes in response to Charles Taylor's idea of the secular age. For Rosa, the freedom of the self to pursue a good life (what the self determines good to be) requires continual progress toward the good.

### **Time- Sickness in the Age of Acceleration**

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<sup>55</sup> Smith, Ted. 2021 Sprunt Lectures Union Theological Seminary, No Longer Shall They Teach One Another: The End of Theological Education." Viewed on youtube September 12, 2022

<sup>56</sup> Smith, How Not to Be Secular- Glossary

<sup>57</sup> Root, *The Congregation in the Secular Age*, p.1 0-11.

<sup>58</sup> Root, *The Congregation in the SecularAge*, p. 11.

Hartmut Rosa describes another vicious circle of modernity through the idea of time-famine.<sup>59</sup> For Rosa, the more innovation is created through technology, and the more our social norms shift toward our free identities, the more we find ourselves needing time rather than living with an abundance of time.<sup>60</sup> Rosa calls this vicious circle "time-famine." This "time-famine" is the reality for people living in modernity who feel that they are running out of time or are short on time.<sup>61</sup>

For Rosa, time-famine is not the most precarious part of living in an age of acceleration. The greatest challenge of living in an age of acceleration is alienation, a fundamental disconnect from the world itself. In modernity, time speeds us up so much that it disconnects us from the world. "Alienation is a relationship marked by the absence of a true, vibrant exchange and connection: between a silent and grey world and a 'dry' subject where there is no life. Hence, the state alienation happens when the self and world appear to be related in utterly indifferent or even hostile ways."<sup>62</sup> Rosa's theory of social acceleration attempts to name the societal and structural realities which cause stress for individuals and organizations in modernity.

I see direct connections between Rosa's theory of social acceleration, which leads to alienation, and Christina Maslach's theory of burnout which leads to exhaustion, cynicism, and ineffectiveness. These theories, I believe, help us identify and name organizational stress that congregations currently experience. I see connections between Rosa's social acceleration theory and Maslach's burnout theory. Using Rosa's theory of resonance, I see potential ways to address organizational stress. The Apostle Paul's relationship to Phoebe and other church leaders

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<sup>59</sup> Root, *The Congregation in the Secular Age*, p. 153.

<sup>60</sup> Root, *The Congregation in the Secular Age*, p. 153.

<sup>61</sup> Root, *The congregation in a Secular Age*, 154- Rosa, Alienation, and Acceleration: Towards a Critical p. 20

<sup>62</sup> Root quoting Hartmut Rosa, "The Mindset of Growth and the Resonance Conception of the Good Life," in *The Good Life Beyond Growth*, ed. Hartmut Rosa and Christopher Henning (London: Routledge, 2019) p. 46

illustrate resonance. Before we get there, it is important to understand Hartmut Rosa's theory of social acceleration.

### **Dimensions of Acceleration: Technology, Social Change, and the Pace of Life**

Rosa believes that modern societies are only capable of dynamic stabilization.<sup>63</sup> Modern societies seek the good life (to be relevant), which calls for continual progress through growth, acceleration, and innovation.<sup>64</sup> This constant motion doesn't speed up our clocks as much as it speeds up the feeling of time. Who hasn't felt like they need more time? Rosa points to three dimensions of social acceleration: technology, social change, and the pace of life. Andrew Root comments that it is in the chase of the good life in an accelerated age where ministry can feel flat.<sup>65</sup> As a congregation seeks the latest and newest technological advances, a congregation can feel a fullness through greater connectivity and reach, but ultimately, does the reach produce real and lasting relationships?

### **Technological Acceleration**

On March 15, 2020, I started preaching on a cell phone. On March 8, church leaders and I met to discern how to proceed with this new virus called Covid 19. The congregation's relationship with technology had to change quickly. Within days, we pivoted to a virtual live worship service, viewed through Facebook live, using my husband's cell phone. We relied on older technology (the telephone) to stay connected, our staff, elders and deacons called the congregation using a phone tree during the first six months of the pandemic. We realized the

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<sup>63</sup> Rosa, Hartmut. *Resonance: Our Relationship to the World*. (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2021) p. 21

<sup>64</sup> Rosa, *Resonance*, 21.

<sup>65</sup> Root, *Congregation in a Secular Age*.

phone tree was not the optimal way of contacting all members, and some people just requested a quick text.

Financial gifts made it possible to install new cameras and live stream equipment in the sanctuary, helping to enhance the production of our Sunday morning service. We soon learned that one camera was not enough, so we had to install a second moving camera for worship as the word spread about the new technology to other groups who met in our sanctuary/ multi-use space. After a year of a new camera and live stream equipment, we needed new and better quality microphones. We were able to connect and worship in new virtual ways, but it seemed like every few months, we had to update or add something. These technological pieces were only for live streaming our once-a-week Sunday service. It did help the congregation's reach as family members, and other visitors watched our Sunday service from across the United States. We continue to figure out how to be "connected" to new online worshippers.

During this time, we also revamped our church website and started to use more short videos on social media platforms. Even with all this change, we fell behind, knowing that bigger and larger churches had a full-time staff person dedicated to technology. We made improvements all the time, but continued to feel like something was lacking. Did we need to add more videos? Should we be present on other social media platforms such as Tik Tok? Not only did leaders and staff feel like we could do more with technology, but some congregation members would also ask about upgrades to our technology. At the same time, a few members weren't engaging at all with our additional technological efforts.

Hartmut Rosa defines technological acceleration as “the intentional speeding up of the goal-directed processes of transport, communication, and production.”<sup>66</sup> Often this speeding up

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<sup>66</sup> Root, *The Congregation in the Secular Age*, p. 65.

is visible through innovation. Root citing Rosa discusses an example of the history of innovation. "The period from the invention of the radio at the end of the nineteenth century to its distribution to 50 million listeners lasted 38 years; the television, introduced a quarter century later, needed only 13 years to achieve this, while the Internet went from the first to the 50-millionth connection in barely 4 years."<sup>67</sup>

### **Acceleration of Social Change**

Hartmut Rosa introduces an intriguing term, *decay rates*, to describe the amount of time it takes something to dissolve in relation to the environmental conditions.<sup>68</sup> Or in other words, how quickly does something move from being part of the present to part of the past. Rosa uses the term decay rate to describe realities in both technological acceleration and acceleration of social change. A decay rate for my first-generation iPod shuffle (yes, they don't make them anymore) might be easier to grasp than the decay rate of social norms.

Social norms are tied to an understanding of morality and the speed of social media has been one vehicle of what is allowed and what is policed, notes Andrew Root.<sup>69</sup> In the past, a congregation may have taken months, if not years to discuss a moral issue. These days videos posted online and on social media may prompt quicker discussions. As a local pastor, I often feel caught in the speed of changing social norms. Do I post something on the church website or social media declaring a moral side before discussing it with congregational leaders? I have not managed these dilemmas well and, in many ways, most likely, have left both political sides yearning for greater communication.

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<sup>67</sup> Root, *The Congregation in the Secular Age*, p. 66 (Rosa, *Social Acceleration: A New Theory of Modernity*)

<sup>68</sup> Root, *The Congregational in the Secular Age*, p. 82.

<sup>69</sup> Root, *The Congregational in the Secular Age*, p. 85.

I have served my current congregation for ten years. Within the first five years, congregational leaders and I discussed and discerned the moral issues of ordination and marriage for all persons regardless of sexual orientation, supporting transgendered individuals and families with young people transitioning, facing the reality of systemic racism, the need for security and guns at church, and welcoming immigrant families. These are more than moral issues. They are theological issues grounded in a call for all God's people to flourish in the world. For some of my clergy colleagues, I have not gone far enough to discuss or call out these issues in society. As someone who began serving a congregation in 1993, I can see the speeding up of these conversations.

When I started in ministry in 1993, I worked in the congregation for five years who discussed the ordination of LGBTQ individuals. The congregation would continue to discuss the issue and finally leave the Presbyterian Church USA in 2016.

Andrew Root points to the decay rate of religious denominations. The denomination is in crisis when the good life is sped up. "The denomination is built for speed that our cultural conception of the good life has surpassed, leaving us susceptible to church-wide depression."<sup>70</sup> Denominations were built to experience the loyalty of a single life-time. Your grandfather was Methodist, your dad was Methodist and so of course you are Methodist too. Speed has exceeded generational tradition here. Root points out that many mainline denominations often have progressive social statements (PCUSA, ELCA, Copperative Baptist), but only with few young progressive people in the pews.

### **Acceleration of the Pace of Life**

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<sup>70</sup> Root, *The Congregation in a Secular Age*, 117.

Sometime around 2006, a member of a congregation invited me to coffee to discuss Confirmation. In this particular congregation, Confirmation was still an honored tradition. It was a large congregation in the Northeast who in 2006 still confirmed around thirty young people in each yearly class. Over coffee the congregational member wanted to share an idea- what if Confirmation was compressed into a retreat in the summer? The mother had the best intentions, she wanted her daughter to do it all, but life was just very busy for her and her family. If I choose to have weekly Confirmation classes, the mother wanted me to know, her daughter would not be able to be at each one, but definitely wanted to be confirmed because it was important to the family.

I have had a form of this conversation numerous times in the years prior and since that specific conversation about compressing a yearlong Confirmation class commitment into just a few days. It seems not only in congregations, but most people feel that life is busy. Though I have not been able to condense confirmation education into just a few days, I have experimented with mini-retreats, more emphasis on the relationship between confirmation student and mentor, adding mission projects and other creative ways to help young people accept the call to be lifelong disciples of Jesus Christ.

Rosa points out that seeking relevance (the good life) in an accelerating pace of life pushes the individual and communities toward innovation of doing more in less time. Root contends that in accelerated modernity, the pace of life increases, asking us to do more inside our units of time.<sup>71</sup> Just do more with less time.

Rosa and Root also talk about the pressure of “the reach” of innovation in the accelerating pace of our lives. Innovation asks a congregation to seek the good life increasing the

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<sup>71</sup> Root, *The Congregation in the Secular Age*, p. 131.



pace to get more out of the little time available. Think of the innovation of email or social media. The innovations have helped the reach of communication, but also can have risks. Root points out that it can also cause burnout and further alienation from any sense of transcendence.<sup>72</sup> The risk of falling behind (or not answering the email or text in a timely manner) can disconnect the leader from the present reality.

### **The Busy Church**

Andy Root believes that in this accelerated age many see the busy congregation as a congregation that can offer fullness.<sup>73</sup> Perhaps other clergy and I have assumed the church needs to maintain the attention of busy congregational members by being relevant. We might even say, "yes the church is relevant to your lives- look how busy we are doing God's work" For Root, congregations try to meet this moral (even if flawed) imagination of busyness by doubling down on its resources.

First, a congregation must be busy in what it offers to members and visitors: programs, activities, groups, and lots of options and a full calendar.<sup>74</sup> People seeking fullness from busyness want to attend a busy church, even if they don't have time to participate. "Thus parents might not have time to get their thirteen-year-old to youth group, missing every week from October to March because of basketball tournaments; nevertheless they expect the youth group to be a vibrant and exciting, complaining by email if it wanes."<sup>75</sup>

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<sup>72</sup> Root, *The Congregation in the Secular Age*, 132.

<sup>73</sup> Root, *The Congregation in the Secular Age*, 39.

<sup>74</sup> Root, *The Congregation in a Secular Age*, 39.

<sup>75</sup> Root, *The Congregation in a Secular Age*, 39.

Second, the congregation must be busy, helping busy people find the resources they need to get more fullness out of their busyness.<sup>76</sup> People seek resources to help them manage the speed of time. These resources are often found in the increasing focus on the “self” in preaching and other church education.

Whether I want to admit or not, I have assumed the busyness of a congregation as a measure of involvement. Upon reflection, I wonder if counting participation or worship attendance the best measure of engagement? I think not. Congregations place emphasis on numbers- worship attendance, youth group participation, or small group involvement. As I reflect on how I have trained congregational leaders, I have asked them to do more with less.

In an accelerated age when we feel caught in the speed of seeking the good life which can alienate us to others and God, can understanding organizational burnout help pave a new road of leadership? Does burnout correlate to the dimensions of acceleration? Can we train congregational leaders to avoid burnout and create deep relationships which offer abundant life rather than corrode life?

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<sup>76</sup> Root, *The Congregation in a Secular Age*, 40.

## **Chapter 2. The Relationship with Work: The Problem of Burnout**

There is plenty of conversation about burnout in 2022. From recent articles, to books, to podcasts, even the World Health Organization designated burnout as a syndrome in 2019, it seems burnout is an issue that must be addressed. As I shared my thesis topic with non-clergy church friends and acquaintances from congregations, almost everyone said- can I share my burnout story with you.<sup>77</sup> I believe people living in a secular (Taylor) and accelerated (Rosa) age experience burnout not only in their work and personal lives, but also in the life of the church.

Self-care and spiritual renewal are often cited as the answer to the problem of burnout.<sup>78</sup> A deep spiritual life can help to sustain the work of discipleship, but addressing the systemic issue of burnout in congregations must include additional work. Before we can address burnout, we need to define and understand burnout.

### **Burnout: The Cost of Caring**

In the summer of 1971 at Stanford, Phillip Zimbardo and colleagues began their infamous Prison Experiment.<sup>79</sup> Zimbardo and his fellow researchers wanted to understand if brutality among American Prison guards was due to the cruel personalities of prison guards or had more to do with the environment of the prison. Zimbardo recalls that on the fifth night of his experiment, he and other researchers were caught up in the escalation of power. The experiment

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<sup>77</sup> I did not go through the IRB process to listen to these stories, but I definitely see the need for a conversation about burnout in a congregation that reaches beyond the pastor.

<sup>78</sup> Chandler, D.J. Pastoral Burnout and the Impact of Personal Spiritual Renewal, Rest-taking, and Support System Practices. *Pastoral Psychol* **58**, 273 (2009). <https://doi-org.proxy.lib.duke.edu/10.1007/s11089-008-0184-4>

<sup>79</sup> Malesic, Jonathan. *The End of Burnout: Why Work Drains Us and How To Build Better Lives*, (Oakland: University of California Press), p. 53.

showed the worst of the participants as evil gradually overwhelmed the good people who were acting in a role.

On the fifth night of the Zimbardo Prison experiment, Christina Maslach, Zimbardo's then-girlfriend and research assistant (now wife) came to review the experiment. Maslach couldn't hold back her disgust of how the experiment was proceeding, "It's awful what you are doing to those boys."<sup>80</sup> Zimbardo recalls that Maslach was the first voice to break through the reality of the prison experiment gone wrong. Maslach dared to challenge the broken system she witnessed. Zimbardo ended the prison experiment the next day, a week before the intended conclusion of the experiment.

I see value in this story. Even before Maslach's official research into burnout, she understood that positive relationships add value to a system, even in a pretend prison. Maslach's burnout research focuses on the importance of the mismatch between relationships, relationships between workers and work, and relationships between workers those they work with.

In New York also in the early 1970s, Herbert Freudenberger, a psychologist in New York City would work ten hours a day seeing clients in his private practice. After work, Freudenberger would volunteer at a free clinic in the East Village serving the medical needs of young people from everything to drug addiction to pregnancy.<sup>81</sup> Of course he could not maintain this schedule, not to mention his relationships with his wife and children. The work took its toll and soon, Freudenberger used a term that was beginning to mentioned in professional circles, "burn-out." In 1980, Freudenberger compared his state of burnout to burned out buildings: "

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<sup>80</sup> Maslach, The Cost of Caring, Foreward

<sup>81</sup> Malesic, Jonathan. *The End of Burnout: Why Work Drains Us and How to Build Better Lives*. Oakland: University of California Press, 2022. p. 50.

What had once been a throbbing, vital structure is now deserted. Where there had once been activity, there are now only crumbling reminders of energy and life.”<sup>82</sup>

It would be the work of Christina Maslach and her research partner, Michael P. Leiter who would transform the field of burnout from focusing on the individual to understanding burnout as a systemic problem.

To describe the problem of burnout, Maslach used the metaphor of a canary in the coal mine, a practice commonplace in coal mines throughout the United States until the 1990s.<sup>83</sup> Coal miners would take canaries into the coalmines to test the air quality. The canaries were sensitive to toxic gases such as carbon monoxide. The caged canaries would either sing or slump, warning coalminers to seek higher and safer ground. As Maslach has stretched the effective metaphor if the goal is to keep more birds singing in the mines, do you fix the bird or the mines? Or, in other words, is burnout a problem of the individual or the system?

As I ponder the topic of burnout in the church, for years, I have assumed the goal was to become a tough old bird. When I graduated from seminary twenty years ago, there seemed to be a clear line between “us and them” between the pastor and the congregation. Yes, there were toxic churches, but perhaps a strong canary could become a tough old bird and survive even in the most toxic environment. Though I know now that was just foolish thinking, the church has spent time and money trying to fix canaries into tough old birds.

### **The Burnout Syndrome: Exhaustion, Disengagement, Ineffectiveness**

Maslach and Leiter’s research point not to the canary, but the toxicity of the coal mine. “Burnout is not a problem of the people themselves but of the social environments in which

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<sup>82</sup> Malesic, *The End of Burnout*, p. 51

<sup>83</sup> Malsach & Leiter, *The Burnout Challenge*. Introduction

people work. The structure and functioning of the workplace shape how people interact with one another and carry out their work.”<sup>84</sup> When people experience burnout in work relationships at home, or with friends. I wonder if people experience burnout from work and other relational structures such as school or a congregation.

Maslach and Leiter have identified three dimensions of burnout: exhaustion, disengagement, and ineffectiveness. When there is a disconnect between one’s relationship with work, these factors can negatively impact the person. Burnout happens when people feel *chronically exhausted*, have *withdrawn mentally and emotionally* from their work, and have *lost confidence in their capacity to have a meaningful impact*.<sup>85</sup>

As a pastor, I have heard and witnessed many stories of exhaustion, disengagement, and ineffectiveness in the church in the past twenty years. Whether the stories are from a congregation I lead as pastor or from a tired colleague or a member of another church; often we believe these stories are caused by lack of leadership, moral failing, or in perhaps our lowest moments as punishment from God. We assume something is wrong with another individual or us. What if an exhausted and weary congregation, a withdrawn community of the faithful, or even a church that can’t remember the last time they made an impact- is about a mismatch of relationships between workers and the workplace?

### **Mismatches Between People and Work**

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<sup>84</sup> Maslach and Leiter, *The Truth About Burnout*. p. 18

<sup>85</sup> Maslach and Leiter, *The Burnout Challenge*. p. 3

Maslach and Leiter identify six forms of mismatch: work overload, lack of control, insufficient rewards, breakdown of community, absence of fairness, and value conflicts.<sup>86</sup> They believe poor alignment in any one of these areas can increase the risk of burnout.

To return to Maslach's metaphor, the canary in the coal mine, understanding the burnout experience forces us to focus on three essential pieces: the individual, the context, and the relationship between the two. To prevent work mismatches, we must attend to our relationship with work.

## **Workload**

Even before the Covid pandemic, the boundary lines of work and life were blurred. Maslach and Leiter contend that increasing workloads demand people's time and effort beyond the traditional boundaries of the workday.<sup>87</sup> A culture of working long hours assumes that people are more productive; the tasks of just checking one more work email blurs the boundaries between work and home. Even workers without the luxury of working from home have been asked to do more with less, as hourly worker pay has remained stagnant while executive compensation has increased.\*

It is not just the work hours that can burden workers; the emotional toll of work overload can also cause undue stress. If a workplace does not offer opportunities to manage work stress, it can negatively affect physical and emotional health.<sup>88</sup>

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<sup>86</sup> The Burnout Challenge. 7

<sup>87</sup> The Burnout Challenge. 13

<sup>88</sup> McGonigal, Kelly. *The Upside of Stress: Why Stress is Good for You and How to Get Good at It*. New York: Penguin Random House, 2015.

In the church, I have laughed with other leaders about the 80/20 rule, that 20 percent of the congregation will do 80 percent of the work. The church must address the problem of work overload. Most vividly, I have seen this play out in congregational leaders who serve a three-year term of service, only to disappear from the church after their term is complete.

### **Lack of Control**

Maslach and Leiter write that people are often denied the necessary autonomy to do their jobs well.<sup>89</sup> Their research concludes that feeling ignored, limited, manipulated, distrusted, and undermined brings more significant uncertainty to daily work life. Though some work may seem to offer more freedom than others, it is not only the freedom to decide which tasks to complete, but the mindset of doing the tasks.

The Health Humanities Lab at Duke University's Franklin Humanities Institution produced a short documentary titled *Keepers of the House*, which offers another way to understand the role of a hospital environmental service worker.<sup>90</sup> Though the work of a hospital environmental service worker is to clean hospital rooms; the documentary explores how their work can bring dignity and connection to sick and vulnerable people. *Keepers of the House* offers examples of ways to see work from another perspective rather than limited to defined tasks.

### **Insufficient Rewards**

Maslach and Leiter report that workers who experience burnout often feel that they do not receive adequate financial, social, or emotional rewards for their hard work.<sup>91</sup> Workers feel unrecognized and underappreciated, especially when they have excelled at their work. Research

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<sup>89</sup> The Burnout Challenge. 16

<sup>90</sup> <https://sites.fhi.duke.edu/healthhumanitieslab/portfolio/keepers-of-the-house/>

<sup>91</sup> The Burnout Challenge. 18



gleans that workers desire positive feedback, while negative feedback from supervisors, clients, or customers can be plentiful.

The church can improve the practice of feedback for employees and congregational leaders. Congregations often hear news from the extremes- from great to the worst. Practicing consistent specific feedback is vital for those who supervise staff or lead volunteers. People need to know when they have done an excellent job and when growth is possible.

### **Breakdown of Community**

Feelings of isolation can poison people's relationships with their coworkers or connection to any system. Maslach and Leiter point out that work environments designed to succeed and innovate can undermine collaboration and teamwork if harmful behavior persists in any system.<sup>92</sup> At times, harmful behavior is identified as selfish actions at the expense of others or ignoring a colleague. Destructive behavior such as racism, sexism, and other aggregations in the workplace have been called horizontal violence.<sup>93</sup> When people are stressed or feel oppressed at work without the security of physical or emotional safety, workers may strike out at members of their own group.

If the church understands the Apostle Paul's call to be the body of Christ in the world (Romans 12), then a sense of community should be the foundation of any congregation. Congregations are made up of humans who experience burnout as well. Attention to the need for deeper community and relationships is vital for any congregation's health.

### **Absence of Fairness**

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<sup>92</sup> *The Burnout Challenge*. 20

<sup>93</sup> Purpora, C., Blegen, M.A., and Stotts, N.A. *Horizontal Violence Among Hospital Staff Nurses Related to Oppressed Self or Oppressed Groups*. *Journal of Professional Nursing* 28, no. 5 2012, p. 306-314

Systems experiencing burnout are unfair places where decisions feel unjust, people are not respected, and outcomes are biased and discriminatory.<sup>94</sup> An absence of fairness can cause high levels of cynicism in any system.

Maslach and Leiter highlight the injustice of systemic bias often that has been built into the structure of a workplace. Though in some workplaces race and sex discrimination is outlawed, there can still be a sense of implicit biases among those who make decisions. They use the example of the famous study of “blind auditions” for symphony orchestras. When screens were installed to listen to performances without seeing the players, the number of female musicians advancing in auditions and ultimately being hired by orchestras increased significantly.<sup>95</sup>

Beyond bias, workplaces must address inequities in pay and promotion. Congregations must work to pay female and male clergy equally, a fact I have yet to experience. Congregations must also address the absence of fairness regarding volunteers or leaders striving to nominate and equip leaders of all ages, gender, and identities.

### **Values Conflict**

People experience burnout in the workplace when their values clash with job requirements. A simple example is when someone feels compelled to do something unethical to gain a client or achieve a company goal. The more complicated situation involves challenging a systemic value system that is antithetical to a personal value system. A mismatch between worker and workplace can arise when there is a difference of understanding in work-life balance or commitment to an organization.

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<sup>94</sup> *The Burnout Challenge*. 21

<sup>95</sup> *The Burnout Challenge*, p.23

Maslach and Leiter offer an example of a values conflict between an emergency room physician who chose to leave her job at a community hospital.<sup>96</sup> The physician had previously spent a six-month deployment in an Afghanistan combat zone. Despite the long hours and horrific injuries she attended to daily, she felt her work was meaningful and necessary. It was only when she returned to work at the local community hospital that she experienced burnout.

Values conflict can arise in a congregational setting when specific values are assumed and not clearly defined and identified. God's love can look and feel different in various congregational settings. Determining how a congregation should live out God's love in a particular context takes specificity and clear goals.

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<sup>96</sup> *The Burnout Challenge*, p 25

### **Chapter 3. Managing Burnout: Creating Better Relationships with Work**

Whether to be the chair of a committee or not be the chair of the committee is the question. When I arrived at the current church I lead, a debate was brewing in the Session with the elders who lead the church with me. For many years, the tradition had been for elders to chair church committees such as Mission, Personnel, Finance, etc. One of the elders whom I greatly respect told me that elders have been and should always be the chairs of the committees. I listened patiently even while I wondered if this was the best fit for our particular congregation, a “young” congregation in church years around twenty-five years old who was still living into its own identity. A particular situation would force me to rethink my initial reluctance to change.

A couple of years into my tenure, I sensed the Mission Committee needed new leadership. Members of the Mission Committee came to me asking for help and guidance. I assumed they just needed a new leader. I asked and then appointed a new chair of the Mission Committee. A new faithful elder who possessed excellent leadership skills. The elder had recently retired from a government position where she managed several groups of people. I assumed she could manage the Mission Committee as well. I was wrong. She could manage the committee, but ultimately the group didn’t want to be managed. They wanted collaboration and new ideas. The elder spent three frustrating years trying to help a committee that didn’t want the help. I had made a terrible mismatch between an elder and a leadership position. I most likely spent more time trying to manage the problem I created with the terrible mismatch. I felt bad that I had frustrated a gifted leader in the congregation. At the end of three years, the Mission Committee was still stuck, and the elder ended her term a bit frustrated.

As the elder finished her three-year term, a new need arose in the congregation. We needed someone to lead a new Hospitality team. The congregation was trying to define what the Hospitality Team would do, such as provide meals for congregational members during birth or death in the family. The congregation valued hospitality, but we needed someone to organize our efforts.

Around the same time, the congregation was rethinking committees (called *core ministries* at the time) to become ministry teams. The goal of the ministry teams would be to create a greater sense of community and spiritual growth in addition to the service each ministry team provides.

So literally, days after the elder ended her frustrating three-year team as the Chair of the Mission, I asked her to become the new Chair of the Hospitality team. *Yes!*, she immediately said. *I love hospitality and have lots of ideas of how we can strengthen hospitality at our church*, she shared.

I learned a valuable lesson that day. Managing teams of people begin with collaboration and working directly with those teams.

Paula Davis believes teams hold the secret to beating burnout at work.<sup>97</sup> Paula Davis is the Founder and CEO of the Stress and Resilience Institute. She trains and consults with organizations to reduce burnout and build resistance at the team, leader and organizational level. Davis is a graduate of the positive psychology program at the University of Pennsylvania led by Dr. Martin Seligman.<sup>98</sup>

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<sup>97</sup> Davis, Paula. *Beating Burnout At Work: Why Teams Hold The Secret to Well-Being and Resilience*. Philadelphia: Wharton School Press, 2021.

<sup>98</sup> Martin Seligman began his work in positive psychology and became the President of the American Psychological Association in 1998. While Charles Taylor was giving the Gifford Lectures in 1998 about the secular age, Seligman was lecturing about the need to study positive emotions and psychology. Seligman's research and work have been funded by the John Templeton Foundation. Though not a direct connection between Taylor and

One of Davis' first assignments after graduation was with the Comprehensive Soldier and Family Fitness (CSF2) program created to develop resilience and well-being in soldiers, their families, and the US Army's civilian workforce. The CSF2 program included an online assessment to identify resilience strengths and areas to improve, online self-help modules, courses to teach Master Resilience Training (MRT) to senior officers, and MRT training at every US Army leader school.<sup>99</sup> General George Casey Jr's vision for the program is that it would create psychological fitness for soldiers much like that of professional athletes.<sup>100</sup> Casey's vision was that the learning would not end with the soldiers. He wanted soldiers to take back the training and train other soldiers.

Davis notes that the CSF2 program incorporated systematic solutions to address burnout and build resilience within soldiers and their families.<sup>101</sup> It was a team approach with team success. She notes three examples of the success of CSF2. First, there was an acknowledgment and assessment of the problem of burnout in the army. She notes that burnout exists in your organization whether you measure it or not. Secondly, leaders were involved early and was strategic in promoting the program to their colleagues to embrace change. Thirdly, the science and the stories of CSF2 were vital. General Casey initially approached Martin Seligman and his team at the University of Pennsylvania because of their type of training and the extensive peer-reviewed research in the area. One soldier, during a training session, shared a personal story. He had been at the Pentagon during the September 11 terrorist attack. Following September 11, he experienced intense emotions for weeks and months, so much so that he attempted to take his

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Seligman, I wonder if the congregational engagement would be at higher levels had Taylor prompted scholars to study faith engagement rather than disengagement. This is a topic for another paper.

<sup>99</sup> Davis, *Beating Burnout at Work* p. 17

<sup>100</sup> Casey, George W. *Comprehensive Soldier Fitness: A Vision for Psychological Resilience in the US Army*. *American Psychologist* 1-3, 66(1)

<sup>101</sup> Davis, *Beating Burnout at Work*. P. 19

own life. Fortunately, a relative found him in his car in time, saving his life. Through tears, he recounted, had I had these skills earlier, I would have been able to deal with my intense emotion and burnout more productively.

### **Collaborate, Customize, and Commit**

How do we create better relationships matches with work? In addition to addressing the six mismatches of work as listed above, Maslach and Leiter believe there are three vital cores of change to improve participation and create meaningful improvements in a system: collaborate, customize, and commit.<sup>102</sup>

To collaborate is to ask members of the system or workplace to improve things. Just as mismatches are shared problems requiring share solutions, so is sharing the responsibility of collaboration. Maslach and Leiter believe all affected people should have a role to play in the entire change process- from recognizing problems to understanding problems, generating solutions, implementing solutions, to evaluating outcomes. Everyone has a part to play in a fair system.

In the context of the congregation I currently serve, the committee predicament I mentioned above is still brewing. The congregation has some committees that do productive work and some that are just stuck. This year we will address the committee problem. Instead of having a quick fix or solution, we will address the topic at our joint elder, deacon, and staff spring retreat. How can we do the church's work more effectively while creating deeper engagement with the committees and congregation? I prefer a quick fix, but I doubt it would have any lasting effect.

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<sup>102</sup> *The Burnout Challenge*, p. 174

The second way to address burnout and change is to customize a solution for the particular system. Maslach and Leiter note that “best practices” might not fit every situation. “The unique qualities of the workplace and of the people who work there point toward creating matches that resonate with the local environment.”<sup>103</sup> To customize a solution for burnout, you must understand the system's identity and purpose.

We worship in a multi-use space in the church I serve. Instead of a traditional sanctuary, we worship in a room with chairs that can easily be moved. We worship in the space where we also have fellowship dinners, the Scout Pinewood derby, and other congregational and community functions.

Several families with young children attend and are members of our congregation. A few years ago, we noticed a decline in families wanting children to stay in the nursery, opting instead to stay in worship during the service. Included in our families were children with neurodivergent needs, children whose families wanted them to experience worship. The staff and our Education Committee decided to put up Children’s tables in the sanctuary during worship. We spoke directly to the families of young children about what would be helpful at the tables to engage the children. Families were grateful to be included in the conversation. The conversation created a larger conversation about worship being the work of all people, even the youngest among us. Recently, I have noticed the relationships forming with families at our Children’s tables especially between a young family who recently adopted a nine year old and grandparents raising their six year-old grandson. Both children have neurodivergent needs. As both families are new to the church, I don’t know the complete stories of both families. I experience loving interactions between both families at the Children’s tables in worship most Sundays.

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<sup>103</sup> *The Burnout Challenge*.p. 175



Maslach and Leiter point to the third effort in creating better matches in the workplace or any system are to commit to the effort. They note that mismatches may not resolve quickly, so solutions require a long-term commitment. “It takes time to learn a new way of doing things and then adopt it and put it into regular practice. Expect bumps and glitches along the way. Time and effort can develop a new value system that can serve everyone.

Sometimes I feel like the church requires a longer time commitment than most. I have served my current congregation for nine years. I began my work in the congregation as their interim pastor, asking hard questions, challenging them to make difficult decisions, and committing to long-term solutions. The most challenging decision came in the first six months of my service. The congregation has two worship services on Sunday mornings. Like many churches, they had a contemporary service and a traditional service. Participation at both services varied, but the contemporary service had higher attendance. It was a low point for the congregation, as the choir director was beloved by some, hated by others, and was released from her duties. The Personnel Committee’s solution was to hire a talented young musician who leaned on the contemporary side.

Led by the Holy Spirit, I challenged the elders to decide whether the congregation needed one or two worship services on Sunday morning. The two services divided the congregation into two different communities. The congregation needed to grow to support two services. So, the elders entered a summer season of discernment during my first six months. They talked to members of the congregation about worship preferences. They prayed, discussed, and discerned the decision. When the Session voted on that hot August day it was unanimous that the church would combine into one worship service. I was humbled and surprised. I truly didn’t know how

the elders would vote. After the vote, I told them they had made a decision and would have to commit to it. They did, but it would take time.

After several choir directors, the Christmas Lessons and Carols service in 2022 seemed to hit the right note. The newest choir director, beloved by all, put together a Christmas program that included children, adults, singers, musicians, dancers, and many genres of Christmas music. After ten years, the commitment to one worship service fit everyone. Of course, there were moments before Christmas 2022, but the commitment to unity felt more precious than before. It took time, but the commitment has been an amazing gift to the church's life.

## Chapter 4. An Antidote to Burnout: Resonance, Relationships Beyond Our Control

What makes a good life? In 1938, amid a desperate time in the United States during the Great Depression, Harvard University began to study to examine factors that helped human beings thrive rather than fail.<sup>104</sup> As the United States was trying to fight its way out of the Great Depression with New Deal projects like Social Security, there was a growing interest in what allowed people to flourish in the face of challenge.<sup>105</sup> The new Harvard Study of Adult Development was the vehicle implemented to study what makes a good life.

In 1938, the Harvard Study of Adult Development began with two unrelated groups of researchers studying two different groups of boys. The first group included 268 sophomores at Harvard College. They were selected because researchers assumed they would grow into healthy men. Determination rather than wealth might have defined the group of 268 Harvard men. Over half of the men received scholarships and held down jobs to pay for tuition. Around 13 percent of men had parents who had immigrated to the United States.

The second group of the Harvard Study of Adult Development included 456 boys from inner-city Boston. These boys, even at a young age, had experienced hardships in life. Many boys grew up in disadvantaged neighborhoods but avoided their peers' delinquent paths. Over 60 percent of this second group of boys had a least one parent who immigrated to the United States. Their immigrant parents were often from some of the poorest areas in Eastern and Western Europe and the Middle East. Researchers chose these boys to study which life factors prevented delinquency, which up to this point, the boys had avoided.

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<sup>104</sup> <https://news.harvard.edu/gazette/story/2017/04/over-nearly-80-years-harvard-study-has-been-showing-how-to-live-a-healthy-and-happy-life/>

<sup>105</sup> Waldinger, Robert and Schultz, Marc. *The Good Life*. New York: Simon and Schuster, 2023 p, 25

The Harvard Study of Adult Development would merge these two groups of boys and add women to the study. The goal of the research was to study what made a good life, and in time the study would become one the world's longest longitudinal studies of adult life.<sup>106</sup> For more than eighty years since the study began, participants were given medical exams and assessments to complete. Researchers went into participants' homes for in-depth interviews with their parents and, in years to come, with their children.

Robert Walding and Marc Schultz report on the study's findings in their book, *The Good Life: Lessons from the World's Longest Scientific Study of Happiness*. The study discovered one crucial factor which helped people create healthy and happy lives. It was not career achievement, or exercise, or even a healthy diet. These factors matter, but the one consistent factor which was most crucial was good *relationships*.<sup>107</sup> Eighty-four years of research pointed to the most vital single principle of living: *good relationships keep us healthier and happier. Period.*<sup>108</sup>

This thesis began with the philosopher Charles Taylor reminding us that seeking the *good life* in a modern, secular age seeks authenticity, which assumes the individual makes the sole determination of what is authentic. In the age of authenticity, the disconnect happens, notes Andy Root, because seeking the good life depends solely on the individual and what the individual can create. "We live in a secular age because we cannot imagine living, as though there is no transcendent quality to life at all."<sup>109</sup> Root reminds us, individuals and thus the church cannot produce its own life. Life, especially the good life, for the church and followers of Christ is a transcendent experience, meaning that life cannot be produced, but rather received.

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<sup>106</sup> *The Good Life*, p. ix

<sup>107</sup> *The Good Life*, p. 24

<sup>108</sup> *The Good Life*, p. 24

<sup>109</sup> *Churches and the Crisis of Decline*, p. 8

Hartmut Rosa reminds us that as late modern human beings we are uncomfortable with waiting to receive that which we cannot produce. Instead, we aim to make life and the world controllable at each level. This desire to control our own lives and the world creates *points of aggression* as human beings attempt to know, conquer, master, or even exploit the objects which we assume hold the key to happiness and fulfillment.<sup>110</sup> For Rosa, by seeking constant growth, we become alienated from the world because the world is made into a thing, an object to be conquered.<sup>111</sup> In modernity's accelerated speed, time sickness or burnout becomes a reality of everyday life, whether at work, home, or even church. Rosa believes human beings need a different form of action. Humanity needs to shift from expending energy to *have* the world to a waiting action of *being* in relationship with the world. For Rosa, the only antidote to alienation is resonance, being in an uncontrollable relationship beyond ourselves.

Hartmut Rosa believes that living accelerated lives in modernity causes this disconnection, which he calls alienation, thus leading to burnout. For Rosa, the lure of making the world more available, attainable, and accessible creates the disconnect. In an interview for his book, *Resonance*, he uses the example of the lure of technology.

“As a child, riding a bike increases the horizon of our world to the end of a town and beyond. When we turn 18 and get a car, the horizons of availability and accessibility increase, allowing us to drive many miles. The airplane then brings other continents in reach. However, enlarging our scope has an ugly side, we destroy the world when we want to make it available... We increase our hold over nature, life, and the world. Self and world turn pale, cold,

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<sup>110</sup> Rosa, Hartmut, *The Uncontrollability of the World*. Medford: Polity Press, 2021. P. 4.

<sup>111</sup> Root, *Church and the Crisis of Decline* p. 160

and indifferent. This, of course, is the state of burnout. So, what is the opposite of burnout? And my answer is the concept of resonance.”<sup>112</sup>

For people of faith and the church, Andy Root writes that resonance is a form of action bound in relationships that cannot be controlled. “Resonance is a form of action that centers on connection, solely for the sake of connection.”<sup>113</sup> The connection of resonance can never be fully controlled; instead, it is received as a gift. Rosa writes, “Humans are supposed to listen to God or hear God’s word, and God, in turn, can be reached through prayer, although this does not mean that God can in any way be controlled.”<sup>114</sup>

If resonance, a relationship beyond ourselves, is the antidote to alienation and this burnout, we must gain a greater understanding of resonance. Root believes resonance is best understood as a mode of relations: resonance as affection, suffering, and conversation.

### **Resonance of Affection**

If resonance is a relationship beyond ourselves, it is obvious that it will involve emotion.<sup>115</sup> Resonance must involve more than a feeling. Root notes that resonance is form of action that is moved by affection.<sup>116</sup> Like a parent with a child, the first moment of the relationship is full of affection, but that affection will grow and deepen as the child grows. For Root, the greatest example of God’s own affection for the world was sending the Son. God so loved the world that God acts in the world by sending the Son to be in the world. (John 3: 16) The action of sending the Son to the world creates an attentiveness and affection that produces action. It is in response to this affection for the world by God through the Son, that the church

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<sup>112</sup> [https://journals.sagepub.com/pb-assets/cmscontent/ASJ/Acceleration\\_and\\_Resonance.pdf](https://journals.sagepub.com/pb-assets/cmscontent/ASJ/Acceleration_and_Resonance.pdf)

<sup>113</sup> Root, *Churches and the Crisis of Decline* p, 167

<sup>114</sup> Rosa Harmtmut, (Translated by James C. Wagner), *The Uncontrollability of the World* Cambridge: Polity Press, 2021.. p. 58.

<sup>115</sup> Root, *Church and the Crisis of Decline* p, 167

<sup>116</sup> Root, *Church and Decline* p. 167

thus is prompted to show affection to the world in service. This affection thus moves you outside yourself to recognize a relationship or connection with the world.<sup>117</sup> The source of connection is not self-created but in the action of the *encounter* itself.

As a pastor, I have often experienced this relationship of resonance of affection in the encounter of acts of service, in my own, but perhaps more profoundly through the act of others. The church I serve has recently established a deeper relationship with a non-profit in our community whose purpose is to provide nourishment for the food insecure. The nonprofit began ten years ago with a family providing six to ten families with food at their children's elementary school. Today over 800 volunteers work monthly to provide nourishment for the food insecure in the county. Members of our congregation serve weekly stocking pallets for food mobile markets and monthly distributing food at a local elementary school. The monthly mobile market has become a highlight of my month, offering needed food in brief experiences of connection. Hearing about the impact on the lives of the church members who volunteer alongside of me is perhaps a more significant gift. In the rain, in the cold, in the heat, recovering from surgery or even tearful from recent personal grief, volunteers show up monthly because something happens to them beyond themselves when they offer eggs, milk, meat, bread, or vegetables to someone who needs it. The volunteers have an affection for these families and children, which comes from beyond themselves. The volunteers are not experiencing pity. In the almost two years the volunteers have served at the mobile market, they recognize and speak to regular faces. Often the volunteers leave filled with an affection that was not present before they arrived.

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<sup>117</sup> Root, *Churches and Decline* p. 168

## Resonance as Suffering

Andy Root says it is a mistake to understand resonance as utopian or naively optimistic relationship that cannot tolerate suffering.<sup>118</sup> Actually, concrete suffering and negative emotions don't destroy resonance but can actually help create it. "Resonance is a form of action that can directly accompany suffering and bear negative emotion," writes Root.<sup>119</sup> Root builds upon Rosa's belief that negative emotions such as sadness or loneliness can lead to positive resonant experiences.<sup>120</sup> The acts of shared suffering can produce a deep sense of connection and, at times, a greater love for the world. Often we see the outgrowth of love and care for others during a time of shared suffering as experienced in tragedy or horrific weather events.

A paradox of joy can emerge from the experience of shared suffering, a resonant relation to the world. Theologian Willie James Jennings, in his lecture, *Gathering Joy*, at Yale Center for Faith and Culture, discusses joy as oppositional joy. Exegeting Hebrews 12:2 in reference to the crucifixion of Christ, Jennings makes the point that "pain can be productive, without justifying or glorifying suffering."<sup>121</sup> Jennings is describing the role of joy in the midst of pain.

One of Jennings's students at Yale Divinity School, Angel Gorrell has written a book on the topic of joy in the midst of suffering. In *The Gravity of Joy, A Story of Being Lost and Found*, Gorrell writes about her own discovery of Christian joy in depths of personal pain while she was working on the Joy project at Yale.<sup>122</sup> Shortly after being hired by Yale to study joy, three of Gorrell's family members died within four weeks: a cousin's husband by suicide, her sister's

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<sup>118</sup> Root, *Churches and Decline* p. 168-167

<sup>119</sup> *Churches in Decline* p. 169

<sup>120</sup> Rosa, Hartmut, *Resonance: A Sociology of Our Relationship to the World*. Cambridge: Polity Press, 2019.

<sup>121</sup> Dr. Willie James Jennings lecture, *Gathering Joy*, at the Yale Center for Faith and Culture in 2018.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7jGG5ZtABH0> (accessed 12.31.2022)

<sup>122</sup> Gorrell, Angela. *The Gravity of Joy: A Story of Being Lost and Found*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2021.



young son of sudden cardiac arrest, and her own father after years of opioid use. The book is an honest and heartfelt journey of Gorrell finding joy in the depths of personal grief and pain.

The book also shares the resonant ways Gorrell participates in the suffering and joy of others. Gorrell writes about teaching a Bible study in the Women's prison.<sup>123</sup> On Gorrell's first night at the prison she met Gloria, who had had a baby three months earlier in her cell with her roommate watching because the corrections officers kept telling her the doctor would not be in until later. The baby was soon taken from her. In those early weeks Gloria would cry from the trauma and missing her baby so much. She had even mentioned suicide to escape the depth of her grief.

It was a few months later after Gorrell had gotten to know Gloria when Gloria shared one evening at their Bible Study that it was her 21st birthday. After all the women had signed in, Gorrell invited the women to sing Happy Birthday to Gloria. Then Gorrell asked if Gloria had a special song request, it would be their gift to her. Gloria chose the song "I Know I've Been Changed." One of the women in the group had a beautiful voice and sang the song to Gloria. All the women, especially Gloria started dancing and playing the drums on the windowsill. Nearly everyone in the room was clapping or dancing. As the song finished, Gloria sat in her chair and cried uncontrollably. Women began acknowledging her tears and Gorrell became worried and prayed out loud that sorrow would leave Gloria. Near the end of the prayer, Gloria catching her breath was finally able to speak. "I'm not sad. I'm overwhelmed with joy."

Gorrell writes, "Joy is an experience of connectedness to others, to God, and to meaning that both roots us and transcends us, so it is both orienting and disorienting. There were no balloons. We did not have a cake or candles. But we had each other. We were not alone. We

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<sup>123</sup> *The Grativity of Joy*, p. 94

were not defenseless. And for the moment, we were not sad either. It was in the prison, listening to and looking on at the women's strength and resilience, that I began to grasp the work of joy."<sup>124</sup>

### **Resonance as Conversation**

In 2006, a group of British church songwriters and musicians began a conversation about local church music and combined their efforts to create Resound Worship.<sup>125</sup> Resound Worship's goal is collaboration and peer critique through local church songwriting groups to share as many resources as possible, some even free. The church musicians and songwriters gathered to address problems they often felt in local churches, with little training, feedback, or encouragement. Working together in collaboration, Resound Worship seeks to offer resources to the church. They offer podcasts, retreats, songwriting workshops, and sheet music and cords. They believe their combined talent and work equip local churches with songs that engage hearts, minds, and souls.

Root points to Rosa's explanation of the Latin etymology of "resonance as an acoustic phenomenon, re-sonare meaning to *resound*."<sup>126</sup> For Root, this understanding of resonance leads to the understanding that resonance is a form of action shaped by a word, such as a conversation. This conversation produces a connection through a relationship beyond ourselves. Using the Latin etymology of *resound*, Rosa proposes the tuning fork as an example. As one tuning fork is vibrating and meets another fork, the sound will cause the other fork to vibrate as well, but at its own frequency. Root notes that it is this act of harmony (one tuning fork to another) where

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<sup>124</sup> *The Gravity of Joy* p. 96

<sup>125</sup> [https://www.resoundworship.org/page/About\\_Resound\\_Worship](https://www.resoundworship.org/page/About_Resound_Worship) (Accessed 1.1.2023)

<sup>126</sup> *Churches and Crisis of Decline*, p. 172

resonance produces its transformational power. Energy, thus life, is produced within the encounter with another. Harmony is something the individual cannot produce alone but arises from the gift of otherness. Root reminds us, that for the church, the echo of the *resound* comes from God's gift of the Word event made known in Jesus Christ. (John 1).

## **Chapter 5. Relationships within the Church: Creating Canopies of Trust**

I began this project by understanding that burnout is a relationship problem. (Maslach and Leiter). Thus, a solution to the problem of burnout is a relationship reset. For my project, I have proposed a relationship reset with the world, with work, and in this final section, with the church. Guided by the work of Hartmut Rosa, we began noting that in modernity, the goal is to seek a good life. For Rosa, this search for a good life is best understood in an age of acceleration where the speed of everything is increased- news cycles, financial markets, technology, dating, etc. This speed of life creates time-sickness and causes alienation as the cycle of speed and production isolates us. An alternate way to relate to the world is through resonance, a relationship beyond our control.

Andrew Root reminds us that the church is not immune to this time-sickness in an accelerated age. Concerned by lower worship numbers or decreasing budgets, churches find themselves depressed, assuming the only answer to decline is to try to be relevant in the world at any cost. For some, the cost has taken a toll. Root says this shouldn't surprise us as Charles Taylor notes we live in a secular age, where God plays a minor role in the background of our lives, and transcendence is all but a myth that even Christians have a hard time believing.

Rosa's time-sickness might best be understood as burnout in this complicated relationship with the world. Everyone seems to be talking about burnout; even the World Health Organization acknowledged the reality of burnout in 2019. Burnout has often been understood as a problem in the workplace, but in 2023 burnout seems to be affecting parents, teenagers, families, and individuals, and I have proposed even churches.

Churches have addressed burnout, putting resources into clergy experiencing burnout.<sup>127</sup> The focus of clergy and burnout may have inadvertently made pastors the “identified patients” of the church system, assuming if the pastor took a sabbatical or developed better spiritual practices, the burnout would disappear.

Christina Maslach notes that assuming burnout is a personal problem rather than a systemic one is not new. For over fifty years, Christina Maslach and her research partner, Michael Leiter have concluded that burnout is a systemic problem that doesn’t affect one worker but the whole workplace. Maslach’s fitting metaphor is the canary in the coal mine. To address burnout, you have to address the toxicity of the mine rather than an attempt to create a more resilient canary who can sing and stay alive in any environment.

The second and third moves of my project sought to define the problem of burnout and, with the burnout research from Maslach, Leiter, and others, looking at ways we could reset or better manage our relationships with work. The overarching theme of addressing burnout assumes we must create more effective relationships that offer collaboration, customization, and commitment.

With the echoes of Charles Taylor in the secular age, writing as a pastor to the church, we alone cannot create more effective relationships. Rather than seeking the good life, as people of faith our search desires abundance life, which can only come from God. (John 10)

It is this move from the *good life* to *abundant life*, that we make our last stop on this journey. Though the Bible does not discuss burnout, scripture gives evidence to communities

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<sup>127</sup> Hills, Peter, Leslie J. Francis, and Christopher J. F. Rutledge. “The Factor Structure of a Measure of Burnout Specific to Clergy, and Its Trial Application with Respect to Some Individual Personal Differences.” *Review of Religious Research* 46, no. 1 (2004): 27–42. <https://doi.org/10.2307/3512251>.

needing a reset of relationships. Paul's letter to the church at Rome is one example of a community needing to reset relationships between each other and God.

Beverly Gaventa writes in *When in Romans: An Invitation to Linger with Gospel according to Paul*, it would be a mistake to read Romans as if it were a collection of isolated theological statements to be *plucked* from context.<sup>128</sup> Gaventa notes it might be tempting to highlight key verses, “I am not ashamed of the gospel; it is the power of God for salvation” (1:16) “We know that all things work together for good for those who love God.” (8:28) This temptation choosing selected verses might assume salvation is personal endeavor between the individual and God. Gaventa would warn against this thesis. She would argue that salvation “in Romans turns out to involve not just individuals or groups of people, but the liberation of the whole of the created world from the grasp of sin and death.”<sup>129</sup>

For our purposes, I am interested in not only the message of Romans but the example it gives as a community of believers searching for a reset of faith through the value of relationships. For Gaventa to understand the audience of Romans, one must begin at the end at chapter 16. Paul has not yet been to Rome (1:8-15, 15:22-24), so he cannot connect to his relationships with Roman Christians as in other Pauline letters, I Thessalonians or Galatians. In Romans, Paul must rely on the community of believers named explicitly at the end Romans in chapter 16.

Gaventa notes that we can glean three important pieces about Paul's audience from Romans Chapter 16. First, Romans is best understood not as a single “Roman church,” but as several small groups of believers.<sup>130</sup> Romans 16:5 uses the word, *ekklisa* (congregation or

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<sup>128</sup> Gaventa, Beverly. *When in Romans: An Invitation to Linger with the Gospel according to Paul*. Grand Rapids: Baker, 2016. P. 19.

<sup>129</sup> *When in Romans*: p. 3

<sup>130</sup> Gaventa, *When in Romans*, p. 7

church) in the house of Prisca and Aquila, but then Paul goes onto to name others adding the phrase “and the brothers and sisters with them.” (v.14b)

Secondly, in Romans Paul is addressing groups that are experiencing stress such as the divisions caused by table fellowship in Romans 14. Many of the names Paul uses in Romans 16 were names used for slaves, such as Persis (v.12), Hermes (v.14), and Nereus (v.15). Some names are those of immigrants to the Roman East.<sup>131</sup>

Thirdly, Gaventa notes Romans 16 highlights a high proportion of women’s names. Prisca (v. 3), Mary (v.6), Tryphaena, Tryphosa, and Persis (v.12.), which stands in conflict with assumptions by some that Paul’s letters seek to silence women.<sup>132</sup> I will give more attention to the relationship between Paul and Phoebe below.

These points help us understand that Paul’s work with the churches in Rome did not rest solely upon himself. First, Paul notes that it is Jesus Christ from whom he received grace and apostleship to bring about his obedience of faith. (1:5) Aside from the divine gift of faith, Paul needs a community, a system of support to share the gospel's good news. Paul cannot do the work alone.

### **The Sacred Canopy**

In 1967, Peter Berger, born in Austria but came to prominence as an American sociologist and theologian, wrote the pivotal book, *The Sacred Canopy: Elements of a Sociological Theory of Religion*.<sup>133</sup> The book’s premise is that religion is a type of sacred canopy to shelter individuals from the chaos of the world. Berger makes a distinction between the sacred and religion. Berger defines religion as, “the establishment, through human activity, of

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<sup>131</sup> Gaventa, *When in Romans*. P. 8

<sup>132</sup> Gaventa, *When in Romans*. P. 8

<sup>133</sup> Berger, Peter. *The Sacred Canopy: Elements of a Sociological Theory of Religion*. New York: Random House, 1967.

an all-embracing sacred order, that is, of a sacred cosmos that will be capable of maintaining itself in the ever-present face of chaos.”<sup>134</sup> The sacred is thus something beyond human creation. Berger writes, “By sacred is meant here a quality of mysterious and awesome power, other than man and yet related to him, which is believed to reside in certain objects of experience.”<sup>135</sup> For Berger, religious people, create meaning and plausibility structures in which to shield the chaos of everyday life. “The power of religion depends, in the last resort, upon the credibility of the banners it puts in the hands of men, as they stand before death, or more accurately, as they walk, inevitably, toward it.”<sup>136</sup>

Years before Charles Taylor or Hartmut Rosa would write about alienation, Berger himself, working with Brigitte Berger and Hansfried Keller wrote about the alienation that happens during modernity. In their book, *The Homeless Mind*, they note that the economic development and technological advances of modernity produce a “homeless mind” in which a person doubts the purpose of life, loses a sense of identity or connection, and thus experiences a collective and individual loss of meaning. <sup>137</sup>

Under this *sacred canopy*, the relationship reset with the church needs to occur. For Andy Crouch, in *The Life We’re Looking For: Reclaiming Relationships in a Technological World*, living under a sacred canopy provides a type of shelter that allows one to let down their guard.

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<sup>134</sup> *The Sacred Canopy* p. 51

<sup>135</sup> *The Sacred Canopy* p. 25.

<sup>136</sup> *The Sacred Canopy* p. 51

<sup>137</sup> Kunkel, John H. *American Journal of Sociology* 80, no. 2 (1974): 543–45. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/2777521>. Accessed 1.7.2023



Crouch believes it is vital for the sacred canopy to become a canopy of trust. “Trust is the heart of life together in community because it is the heart of creativity.”<sup>138</sup>

Trust is a risky proposition. It is much easier to do the work of the church solo, whether you are a pastor or lay leader. If one works alone, there is a better chance of controlling the outcome or the quality. To engage in the risky work of trust in the church, to rely not only on other leaders but, most importantly God, the burned out pastor or lay leader, must trust that the work of the church is not a solo endeavor. No matter the skill, faith, or experience, the church's work in modernity takes a community of people seeking to serve God creatively. Hopefully, the church's work provides a more abundant life rather than taking life.

This is not often the case in informal conversations with church lay leaders. In the Presbyterian Church USA context, elders often serve a three-year or six-year term only to take “a break” from the church after their service. How can serving a leader in a congregation create more life than toxicity? How can a sacred canopy be built where trust in God and other leaders may flourish?

### **From Family to Household?**

I have often used the image of a church family when describing the work church leaders do together. Perhaps a *family* is not the best metaphor for how church leaders work together.

Andy Crouch wants to reclaim the term *household*. For Crouch, creating a community that lives under a sacred canopy of trust, a place where we can invest in deep relationships with

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<sup>138</sup> Crouch, Andy. *The Life We're Looking For: Reclaiming Relationships In a Technological World*. New York: Convergent Books/Random House. 2022.p. 164

others and care about their flourishing while serving and sacrificing in ways to support our own identities rather than erasing them, calls to the church to reclaim an old, musty word:

*household*.<sup>139</sup> For Crouch, a *household* is a group of people who may reside under the same roof, but also, and more importantly, a group of people who take shelter under one's care and concern.<sup>140</sup>

Families in modernity live in different states and often do not see each other regularly. Crouch notes that in the Greco-Roman world, households would extend beyond family. A household would include those not directly related by marriage or blood. Not all persons in Greco-Roman households lived there freely. When discussing the term *household*, not all households are or were positive environments. We must acknowledge that historically, and even today, in parts of the world, patriarchy, enslavement, and abuse happen in some households. These realities should be addressed, but never be replicated.<sup>141</sup>

Though I am not convinced enough by Crouch's argument to invite the congregation or its leaders to move from single-family homes into communal living, I am moved by Crouch's ideal of the household as a community of recognition.<sup>142</sup> A community of recognition is a place where people can be seen, known, and invited to flourish. Trust is the lifeline of a community of recognition. The household practices of noticing, caring and building up with humble hearts create canopies of trust. For Crouch, these canopies of trust can be small and temporary like a

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<sup>139</sup> Crouch, *The Life We're Looking For* p. 151

<sup>140</sup> Crouch, *The Life We're Looking For* p. 151

<sup>141</sup> Crouch, *The Life We're Looking For* p. 152

<sup>142</sup> Crouch, *The Life We're Looking For* p. 154.

long conversation over coffee with a friend. We work under other temporary canopies of trust, canopies of employment where we create meaning.

Crouch's suggestion of the household as a canopy of trust reminds me of the many youth group trips I have led, especially those when I, along with the youth and adult chaperones, lived under the same roof for a week. Those weeks are filled with cherished memories, but trust was a necessity. Amid the group meals, late-night talks, and candlelight devotions, the best of trips were bound by trust and care for one another. I led trips when the leaders did not trust each other and they were disastrous and painful. The trips when trust laid a foundation, the week seemed to fly by, and the last night was always the hardest because you didn't want to go home.

Inviting congregational leaders to create households is most likely a bold and improbable step. Perhaps, the church should begin by building canopies of trust with leaders, canopies created and held in place by the hope that each person will flourish and thrive rather than burnout.

### **Paul and Phoebe**

The book of Romans, with its universal message of God's work in Christ offering hope to all peoples, has been impactful for Christian thinkers from early church fathers such as Augustine to Reformers Martin Luther and John Calvin to modern theologians like Karl Barth.<sup>143</sup> Romans is foundational in a systematic theological understanding of God's work in Christ. Romans is crucial in understanding the value of relationships or, in Crouch's words, a canopy of community.

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<sup>143</sup> The Discipleship Study Bible, p. 1923

If I were to ask any member of the congregation I serve who wrote Romans, most would answer (if they knew at all) the Apostle Paul. Yes, Paul is the undisputed author of Romans. The letter of Romans was shared and possibly interpreted through a web of relationships. Paul did not do the work alone. Paul relied on a community to spread God's good news.

Andy Crouch reminds us that delivering a letter in the ancient world of Rome was not easy.<sup>144</sup> If you were wealthy, you might send your slave or rely on ships or other means of transportation that were not always effective. The letters of the New Testament were sent and shared by friends and the community of the letter writer.

Crouch writes, “ In all probability, these friends did not just deliver the written letter but were present to interpret and explain it, to anchor the bare words of the page in the living web of household membership that was the essence of ‘the way.’ And in the case of Romans, we almost certainly know who that friend was. Her name was Phoebe.”<sup>145</sup>

Paul's personal greetings beginning in Romans 16:1, are the longest set of greetings in the Pauline letters. Paul names Phoebe first. Paul “commends’ Phoebe to the church at Roman. Or in other words, Paul says, “you can trust Phoebe, I’ve worked with her, and you can too.”

*I present to you Phoebe, our sister, who is also deacon of the congregation at Cenchreae, so that you may welcome her in the Lord as is appropriate for the saints, and assist her in whatever she may need from you. She has been a benefactor of many people and of myself as well. (16:1-2)*

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<sup>144</sup> Crouch, *The Life We're Looking For* p. 117

<sup>145</sup> Crouch, *The Life We're Looking For* p. 117

Paul packs a lot into these two verses. Paul claims Phoebe as “our sister,” which claims her a follower of Christ. Phoebe is from the congregation at Cenchræ, a port city of Corinth.<sup>146</sup> Most importantly, Paul names Phoebe as a *diakomos* (deacon), and *prostatis* (benefactor.)

Gaventa notes that we should conflate a modern understanding of a church deacon with that of Paul’s designation. Phoebe did not just help in the kitchen.<sup>147</sup> For Paul, the term deacon must point to a significant role. Paul uses the term in Romans 15:8, referencing Jesus Christ and referring to Paul, himself in I Corinthians 3:5. For Paul, a deacon provided leadership in the community and faith in the body of believers.

Phoebe serving as a leader is supported by the use of Paul’s second term describing Phoebe, *prostatis* or benefactor. *Prostatis* has been translated as helper or servant. Perhaps, benefactor or patron is a better translation. Carolyn Osick and Margaret Y. MacDonald in *A Woman’s Place: House Churches in Earliest Christianity* note that we assume that women held a low place in Roman public life; women were among patrons.<sup>148</sup> Women were a part of the Roman patron system, where wealthy individuals gave money and gifts to needy individuals, sometimes in exchange for loyalty or honor. Phoebe supported Paul and the work of others. The fact that Phoebe had the means to travel to Rome, also makes the assumption that she had the resources to do so. Gaventa notes that Phoebe may have hosted Christian gatherings in her own home. “The home was itself a much more public place than is typically the case in the

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<sup>146</sup> Beverly Gaventa notes that the fact that Phoebe is from Cenchræ may suggest that she is gentile. No evidence has been found in Cenchræ for Jewish settlements in this period. Gaventa, *When in Romans*, p. 9- referencing Robert Jewett, *Romans: A Commentary*, 2007.

<sup>147</sup> Gaventa, *When in Romans*, p. 10

<sup>148</sup> Osick, Carolyn and MacDonald, Margaret Y, *A Woman’s Place: House Churches in Earliest Christianity* Minneapolis: Fortress, 2006. p. 194-196

contemporary West, and householders received business associates and clients in their homes.”<sup>149</sup>

Beyond her wealth or status, more importantly, Phoebe, as the carrier of Paul’s letter to Rome, most certainly would have understood theologically the weight of Paul’s argument. Beverly Gaventa suggests that Phoebe may have even had a hand in shaping the content of Romans.<sup>150</sup> In ancient Rome and in Paul’s world, writing was not done alone. Paul was a guest in Gaius’s home (Rom. 16:23) and Tertius his scribe (Rom.16:22.)

Paul goes on to name other women and helpers of his mission. Paul names Prisca and Aquilla (Rom. 16:3) as those who risked something for him and hosted a house church. Paul names Mary, Andronicus, and Junia, the last two who spent time in prison with Paul. (Rom. 16:6-7.) Paul continues with more introductions, Tryphaena, Tryphosa, Peris, and Rufus, to name only a few more. (16:12-13.) Or in other words, Paul didn’t do his work alone. Paul worked within a community. Though we don’t have historical evidence that the community experienced burnout, I assume from the challenges of prison, persecution, and conflict in churches, Paul and his team experienced some of the same symptoms.

For Paul, every sinner and saint has fallen short of the glory of God and is justified by God’s grace as a gift through the redemption of Jesus Christ. (Rom. 3:23-24) Also, for Paul, the word of faith, the work of a congregation is not a solo endeavor. Relationships are vital to serving Christ in the world and functioning as the people of God.

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<sup>149</sup> Gaventa, *When In Rome* p, 11

<sup>150</sup> Gaventa, *When in Rome* p. 13

## The Relationship between Divine and Human Agency: Worship as Resonance

I began this project, noting my need for a sabbatical from ten years of service in my current congregation. Thanks to my congregation, my sabbatical in the summer of 2022 was a gift. Yes, I rested and reconnected with friends and family. I tried to finish this project, though not complete by the end of my sabbatical, it was well on its way. I didn't miss the meetings or urgent calls about minor problems. I did miss the relationships with my staff and congregation. I knew God would work through them as God did when I was present.

My first day back to the church after my sabbatical was a Sunday. I now know that was a mistake. I don't think I slept more than a few hours that night. Yes, I was rehearsing my sermon in my head. I also forgot I wouldn't be the only one leading worship that day. In addition to me, as the preacher, the musicians, and the staff, God would be there.

John D. Witvliet, in *What is Jesus Doing? God's Activity in the Life and Work of the Church*, points to a famous trinitarian understanding of what happens in Christian worship from Thomas F Torrance, "In our worship the Holy Spirit comes forth from God, uniting us to the response and obedience and faith and prayer of Jesus, and returns to God, raising us up in Jesus to participate in the worship of heaven and in the eternal communion of the Holy Trinity."<sup>151</sup> Witvliet reminds us that even if we do not understand how God's trinitarian grace works through our ordinary elements of human words, gestures, water, bread, wine, and art, in worship, we are

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<sup>151</sup> van Driel, Edwin Chr., ed. *What Is Jesus Doing?: God's Activity in the Life and Work of the Church*. Westmont: InterVarsity Press, 2020. Accessed March 3, 2023. ProQuest Ebook Central. P. 224

drawn into communion with God. Our human agency combines with divine agency to offer a worship experience that fills us with that we cannot produce by human effort alone.

I felt God filling me that first Sunday back, but more importantly, I gleaned that the congregation felt it too. Often, for our congregation, we experience the intimacy of God connecting us in relationships through worship. I preached a series of Mental Health, sharing my family's mental health struggles. Beyond their attentiveness in those three services, people shared that God was calling us to continue discussing how we can openly and authentically talk about mental health, especially with young people.

I usually can't get through an Ash Wednesday without shedding tears. When I touch the foreheads of my church members, knowing the struggles and pain they carry, and say, "you are dust, and to dust you will return," we both feel God's agency in the ashes. In a piece of music that moves us powerfully, in an honest message by a high school senior on Youth Sunday, in a personal story from a volunteer from NAMI (National Alliance of Mental Health), for spoken prayers of joy and concern each week, to an extended time for passing the peace of Christ- we (the congregation, staff, and myself) feel God's triune presence. We know we are filled with something we cannot produce ourselves.

When we rethink of resetting our relationships to prevent burnout, we should begin with worship. Though we may write the sermon, or print the bulletin, or show up for choir practice, our relationships with each other can take on a resonant quality when the Holy Spirit moves through our earthly offerings to offer praise to God that touches our soul. Worship is an offering to God, but in the holiest of moments, we know that God moves, speaks, and fills us with something earthly hands can never produce.



## **In Conclusion: A Call to Relational Leadership**

Our relationship with the world, work, and church needs a reset. In an attempt to be relevant, clergy and church leaders are exhausted and burned out, seeking the good life at all costs by doing everything in their power to have a full and busy church. As the Rich Fool did in Luke 12, we forget there are different types of fullness. The Rich Fool is not alone in reaching for that which will not truly nourish us. We work and work and work some more, trying to produce that which will nourish us.

This project has attempted to name why we experience burnout in our congregations using the work of Hartmut Rosa's notion of "time sickness," which permeates the modern world in which we live, causing alienation as we try to control that uncontrollable. The answer will not come from speeding up, but only from experiencing resonant relationships that are a gift. Adding to this valuable conversation is Andrew Root's belief that churches seek to be relevant through busyness and programming. The busy church assumes the path to a good and, full life is to do more rather than put energy into deeper relationships with God and others. Churches must reset relationships to seek abundant life rather than the good life.

Christian Maslach, Michael P. Leiter, and others helped unpack the problem of burnout in the workplace. Burnout is not an individual problem, but the issue of the whole organization, whether it be a workplace or a congregation. Per Maslach's famous burnout metaphor of the canary in the coal mine, building resilience in a canary that flies into a toxic mine still means death, it just means the process of dying may take longer. The toxicity of the whole mine must be addressed. The same goes for a congregation. You can equip a pastor with more spiritual

disciples, a sabbatical, or even a raise, but if burnout is not addressed with all the leaders, the rested pastor is still no match for a toxic system.

The good news is that there are steps congregations can take to address burnout within their systems. First, they can understand the mismatches between the work and leaders, such as a breakdown of community, lack of control, or insufficient rewards, to name a few. Secondly, congregations can create better matches through core change experienced through collaboration, customization, and commitment. Thirdly, through worship, congregations can be filled by the Holy Spirit, which ultimately can reset our relationships in powerful, meaningful, and, most importantly, resonant ways from beyond ourselves.

The work of resetting relationships only can occur under a canopy of trust. Thankfully, Christian congregations have examples of such relationships in Paul's letter to the church at Roman. Specifically, it was Paul's relationship with Phoebe and others that required trust, collaboration, and, most of all, the understanding that it is only through the gift of God's grace made known in Jesus Christ that abundant life is possible.

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## **Biography**

Marti Reed Hazelrigg was raised in the United Methodist Church, which became solid footing as a teenager when her parents divorced and both struggled with mental health challenges.

After graduating from the University of Southern Mississippi in 1993 with a degree in Sociology, she became the Director of Youth Ministry at a Presbyterian Church (USA) congregation in Mississippi. The Presbyterians welcomed her with open arms, and her love of working with young people began. She spent five years learning the facets of ministry. The seeds of her calling to ordained ministry started to sprout.

She became a student at Princeton Theological Seminary in 1998 and graduated in 2002 with both an MDiv and MA in Youth Ministry. She was challenged academically and thrived under academic rigor grateful that her prior practical church experience offered great wisdom to her theological studies.

In 2002, Marti was called to be an associate pastor at Nassau Presbyterian Church in Princeton, NJ. She graduated from seminary, married her husband Peter Hazelrigg, and began her first ordained call. Nassau Presbyterian was an ideal setting to learn and work with an esteemed and supportive staff.

Marti loved her work at Nassau Presbyterian Princeton, but with twins on the way, she and her husband, Peter moved to North Carolina to be closer to family. They welcomed their son and daughter soon after.

Navigating family life with two young children, Marti worked as a consultant with Ministry Architects and as a transitional pastor at Westminster Presbyterian Church in Greensboro. In 2014, she began as a transitional pastor head of staff at Oak Ridge Presbyterian Church and was called as the installed head of staff in 2017. She currently is serving Oak Ridge Presbyterian Church.

In 2020, Marti with a desire for vocational growth, academic challenge, and theological reflection, enrolled as a Doctorate of Ministry student at Duke Divinity School. Marti has a particular interest in burnout as a systematic and congregational challenge.

