

Hello, pastor. Happy Clergy Appreciation Month. I think every month should be Clergy Appreciation Month. Connie Shelton here, Bishop of the North Carolina Conference. I know it's a tough season for you as you lead your extension ministry or your local church. I know in this season, with politics and the demands and expectations of parishioners, I know during this season of response to disasters around us as we care for our neighbors.

I know every day of your life, you live into people's expectations and then your own self-expectations. This past week, we were at Convocation and Pastor's School at Duke University. We met with the leaders of the Clergy Health Initiative, and it became very clear that we need to remind one another. I'm here to remind you of the importance of caring for your mental health, your physical health, and your spiritual health.

You know, those surveys we take every year for the Clergy Health Initiative, they have data every year since 2008, and what they do is they show us the data, which basically is holding up the mirror in front of our faces to remind us how to flourish. So, over these next few weeks, we want to remind you of all the resources that the North Carolina Conference already offers you, but sometimes, we don't remember that when we're in the middle of a crisis. So, we want to remind you of those resources over the next few weeks. But for today, I want to tell you the four things that the Clergy Health Initiative reminds us when clergy are attentive to, number one, intentional well-being practices. Intentional. I believe that's what Sabbath is about, right? Taking your day off, practicing every week things that are, as they say it, with backup plans. Are you doing that? Are you taking seriously these intentional plans? Flourishing clergy make those plans to care for themselves. The second one, some protected time each day. Not each week, not each month, but also, the second thing is, are you protecting time each day for stillness, for a bike ride, for a walk, for drinking water, for whatever it is that helps restore you every day?

It's important that you do it. That's number two. Number three, some social support. What does that mean? Do you have people that when something beautiful happens, you call and say, "Guess what?" If you don't, it's time to make some new connections, build some new holy friendships because social support makes the difference of whether you flourish or whether you're in distress. The fourth one is working in alignment with God, especially in response to criticism.

You know that you're called by God, right? Sometimes you need to be reminded. So, as you're living into discerning living into God's call as you lead your church or extension ministry, however you're serving, take joy. Live in hope that God is with you, and even in criticism, don't lose your center. Bear the fruit of the spirit, and may you know without a doubt you're flourishing because of God with you.

So, those four simple practices we have found help clergy to flourish. It is Clergy Appreciation Month and I hope today you'll know we celebrate you and you'll love yourself enough to do these practices and accept the resources we have to offer to support you.