Like Aaron and Hur who lifted the arms of Moses during battle (Exodus 17), this book highlights the critical work of clergy care providers in America. These individuals and organizations support clergy by providing counseling, coaching, spiritual direction, funding, hospitality, education, and benefits upon which clergy rely. Their ministry strengthens congregations and has the capability to produce an exponential return for the kingdom of God. Yet, these providers are often disconnected.

Our groundbreaking national research reveals gaps in the training, qualifications, and formational experiences of clergy care providers. We note differences in language that hinder effective communication as well as significant disparities in the literature that informs clergy care. Addressing these disconnects has the potential to improve the lives of clergy and the congregations and communities clergy serve. Whether you are a clergy care provider, a clergyperson, or a lay leader, we invite you to respond. Working together, we envision a connected network of providers offering more effective support for clergy and improving the congregations and communities they serve.

"We have needed this book for a long time! Austin and Comeau have provided a much-needed rallying cry for those of us who work to support and care for clergy. Even more importantly, they offer an excellent road map that can help us achieve the kind of unified effort this book advocates for. I am eager to join their effort."

—**MATT BLOOM,** University of Notre Dame

"Founded upon the sound use of previous research into the topic of clergy self-care, this book goes on to offer not only recently obtained information, but more importantly, an examination of novel avenues for further investigation. Austin and Comeau add new and exciting areas for discussion and investigation that hold possibilities for the real and lasting improvement in the lives of the diverse body of Christian clergy."

—**MELINDA CONTRERAS-BYRD,** licensed psychologist, AME Church pastor

"Seismic changes are reshaping congregational life in America, leaving clergy anxious and vulnerable. In this timely and well-researched book, Austin and Comeau assess the quality of care offered by clergy service providers. Their findings are illuminating and sobering. This book is a wake-up call for the church to make clergy care a priority; for the sake of congregational life as well as the integrity of the Christian faith."

—**WILLIAM ENRIGHT,** founding director emeritus, Lake Institute on Faith & Giving

"*Caring for Clergy* is essential reading for all those who seek to contribute to creating the conditions for thriving pastoral ministry. This comprehensive look at programing from across the country sheds light on what is effective, what should be avoided, and how best to support the people that support an entire worshiping community. Austin and Comeau have gifted judicatories, divinity schools, and foundations with a wonderful resource for clergy formation."

—**ROBB WEBB,** director of Rural Church, The Duke Endowment

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Austin | Comeau

CARING *for* CLERGY

Thad S. Austin &
Katie R. Comeau

foreword by
Christopher J. Adams

CARING *for* CLERGY

UNDERSTANDING
A DISCONNECTED
NETWORK OF PROVIDERS

Caring for Clergy

Understanding a Disconnected Network of Providers

Thad S. Austin *and*
Katie R. Comeau

Foreword by Christopher J. Adams

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CARING FOR CLERGY
Understanding a Disconnected Network of Providers

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To all those who lift the arms of clergy

Whenever Moses held up his hand, Israel would start winning the battle. Whenever Moses lowered his hand, Amalek would start winning. But Moses' hands grew tired. So they took a stone and put it under Moses so he could sit down on it. Aaron and Hur held up his hands, one on each side of him so that his hands remained steady until sunset.

Exod 17:11–12, CEB

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List of Abbreviations

AACC	American Association of Christian Counselors
AAPC	American Association of Pastoral Counselors
ADME	Association for Doctor of Ministry Education
ALLLM	Association of Leaders in Lifelong Learning in Ministry
AME Zion	African Methodist Episcopal Church Zion
ARC	Association of Related Churches
ATS	Association of Theological Schools
CE	Common Era
COGIC	Church of God in Christ
COVID-19	Coronavirus Disease 2019
CTSD	Continuous Traumatic Stress Disorder
DMin	Doctor of Ministry
ESC	Ecumenical Stewardship Center
GLS	Global Leadership Summit
HBCU	Historically Black Colleges and Universities
IBCC	International Board of Christian Care

ICCI	International Christian Coaching Institute
ICF	International Coaching Federation
MDiv	Master of Divinity
MFI	Ministers Fellowship International
MMBB	Ministers and Missionaries Benefit Board
NAUMF	National Association of United Methodist Foundations
NCC	National Council of Churches
NGO	Nongovernmental Organization
PC(USA)	Presbyterian Church (USA)
SACEM	Society for the Advancement of Continuing Education for Ministry
TMF	Texas Methodist Foundation
WCA	Willow Creek Association

Foreword

As MY GRANDFATHER LAY in a hospital bed following a heart attack in midlife, he said to my father, "You are not much good to the kingdom of God lying flat on your back." I am a third-generation pastor's kid and have heard this story many times. My grandfather, called to vocational ministry in midlife, had to retire from pastoral ministry prematurely and move from Indiana to Florida for the sake of his health. He later died young of a second heart attack. My grandfather was an amazing pastor. At great sacrifice, he worked several jobs and went to Harvard for his MDiv. He faithfully and fruitfully served as the pastor of several small, what I might call "clergy-killing," congregations in New England. Eventually, he became the senior pastor of a fairly large church in the Midwest. He did it all. He cast vision, preached incredible sermons, led worship with his wonderful tenor voice, provided pastoral care and visitation, led board meetings, mowed the church lawn, ran off church bulletins on the mimeograph machine, and . . . and . . . and . . . . No one was researching clergy stress in those days. There was very little acknowledgment, if any, of the various stressors, many hidden and unrecognized by clergy themselves, or the cumulative impact of clergy stress on the health and well-being of pastors. I often wonder how my own grandfather's path might have been different if he had had the support and resources he needed.

My own father has been in music ministry my whole life, both in the local church and in itinerant concert ministry. As a result of his ministry, I was in hundreds of pastors' homes all over the U.S., across a large spectrum of denominational families. This was a wonderful exposure to many different ecclesiologies and philosophies of ministry—as well as to many joy-filled clergy who were flourishing in their lives and work. I also was exposed to a lot of common pain—isolation, church conflict, family difficulties, financial struggles, and so many other challenges. I began to realize at an early age that clergy need support. In retrospect, the Lord was shaping a burden in me that would later become the focus of my own vocation. I imagine you might have a similar story if you are reading this resource too.

As a pastor and psychologist, I have had the incredible privilege to be invited into circles of clergy and denominations across mainline, Evangelical (denominational and nondenominational), Catholic, and Eastern Orthodox groups. One of the many incredible gifts of my years in researching, consulting, and providing care for clergy has been to realize that there are many wonderful people doing parallel, amazing work to support clergy in different denominations, academic institutions, and organizations—but they often do not know about the work of one another. I began to wonder: what might be possible if we were to network the networks? Researchers and providers could learn from one another without having to recreate resources that may have already been well-developed. What might happen if researchers and practitioners were in continual conversation, in a virtuous cycle of translational research? How would clergy benefit if resources were vetted with professional criteria and best practices? What if there were a way to find out what research, resources, and relationships currently exist? I believe that this book and the Common Table Collaborative (https://commontable.network/) will move us forward toward a burgeoning professionalism and integration of the field of clergy care.

Many years ago, I had the wonderful opportunity to go to Italy with a friend of mine who is also a pastor. He is Italian-American and had been to Italy several times before—so he knew the best places to visit. Having an interest in archaeology and church history, I marveled at the ruins of ancient Rome in the Forum. I was captivated by the century upon century of historically and culturally significant sites. Even the hotel where we stayed was more than five hundred years old. Then, we went to the Vatican. I was deeply moved by the Colonnade in St. Peter's Square, built to symbolize the arms of the church reaching out to embrace the world. I stood in awe of the sheer scope and majesty of St. Peter's Basilica. I remember experiencing a deep sense that I am a part of a story that is much bigger and much older than I am.

I also vividly remember my favorite room in the Vatican Museum—the map room. The hallway after hallway of sculpture and paintings by the great masters of the ages was incredible, but the map room intrigued me. There, in chronological order, hung maps of the world created by explorers as they discovered more and more of planet Earth. You could see the early, crude, partial outlines of continents in the early maps. Perusing the maps through the centuries, I could see how the picture of the world began to fill out with more and more details, more complete accuracy. Building on the work of their predecessors, later explorers would refine the details as mapmaking and exploring technologies advanced.

Explorers began to have access to one another's maps and realized that, in some cases, they were exploring the same parts of the world. Consequently, by coordinating efforts, they were able to be more strategic in their adventures over time, working together to explore and map out new territory. Of course, eventually, humankind developed the ability to fly, and the maps became even more accurate due to additional perspective from above. Then, we created satellite technology, which gave even greater perspective. We now have GPS capability, so a handheld device can locate us on a map anywhere in the world with pinpoint accuracy. And yet during the centuries of technological development, the coastlines also changed. Sea levels rose. Islands formed and others disappeared. Earthquakes, hurricanes, volcanoes, and other natural disasters changed the landscape. So, the maps had to be redrawn, edited, and kept up-to-date in a continual process of rediscovery and shared knowledge.

What we hope to provide in this book is a bit of an early map of the current state of all of those entities that are investing in caring for clergy. Since we are relatively early explorers in mapping out this territory, some pieces of the map are more accurate than others. Over time we will have a more complete, detailed, and accurate picture of the landscape—even as the landscape of ministry leadership changes. We hope that the picture that begins to emerge for you is one that is based in hope.

After my friend and I had spent time at the Vatican Museum, we went to the catacombs outside of Rome. The catacombs were created by early Christians as a place to bury their loved ones. The Romans cremated everyone because it was more efficient and sanitary. However, Christians wanted to preserve the bodies of their loved ones, due to a deep belief in an embodied faith. We had a passionate, Christian tour guide. She pointed out the Christian symbolism carved into the architecture of the catacombs, such as the Greek letters chi and rho (the symbols for Christ) and the fish symbol that you sometimes see on bumper stickers in our own time. Most powerfully, she pointed out that the early Christians intentionally used the Roman arch within the architecture of the catacombs. The Roman arch had come to symbolize victory. When a Roman emperor conquered yet another territory, an arch was often built in celebration. For example, the Arch of Titus in Rome was built after Jerusalem was conquered in 70 CE. Early Christians took the Roman arch and Christianized it as a reminder of the victory of Jesus Christ over all powers, even as they held worship services among the catacombs in order to avoid persecution. We then went to the Circus Maximus. The Circus Maximus is a giant stadium, much like a modern racetrack, that held up to three hundred thousand people. The palace of the Emperor Nero overlooks the stadium. Historians believe this may have been the place where more Christians were martyred than even the famed Coliseum.

As we stood on a small rise in the middle of the Circus Maximus, contemplating the weight and significance of this location for Christians, we caught a view of the dome of St. Peter's Basilica, a powerful reminder that while the Roman Empire, and other empires, have come and gone, the church of Jesus Christ is still here. There is still an arch of victory over the church, as the most resilient movement in history. And Christian leaders have always had and needed support. Moses had Aaron and Hur to hold up his arms. Jesus had the twelve disciples, Mary and Martha, Mary Magdalene, and others. Paul had Barnabas.

Our deep hope as you read this resource is that you will be inspired to know and take your place in the grand story of those who have been encouragers of God's shepherds down through the centuries. We invite you to join the adventure as we discover, map, and engineer, together, the best research and practices to help clergy and other kinds of ministry leaders flourish.

I would like to thank Dr. Thad Austin and Dr. Katie Comeau at Duke for their friendship and leadership in this endeavor as well as my friends at the Duke Clergy Health Initiative. I would also like to express deep gratitude to Rev. Russ Gunsalus and Dr. David Higle from The Wesleyan Church, whose vision and leadership gave birth to what is now the Common Table Collaborative.

Rev. Christopher J. Adams, PhD

Acknowledgments

From the outset of this project, we have been touched by the ministry of those who care for clergy. Their work makes a tremendous impact, not only in the lives of clergy but also in the congregations and communities those clergy serve. They are the inspiration for this book, and we count many of them as friends. We thank the hundreds of clergy care providers who completed our survey or participated in one of our interviews or focus groups, and all who allowed us the opportunity to visit their ministry in person. We have been moved by your passion, perseverance, and commitment.

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I (Katie) thank the many people who participated in our research project. Your care and concern for clergy and the church continues to inspire me. My deepest gratitude to my family, friends, and community who supported and encouraged me during the research and writing.

1

Who Cares for Clergy?

EXODUS 17 DESCRIBES A decisive battle between the Israelites and the Amalekites, a semi-nomadic tribe who occupied the central hills and valleys of the Sinai.[1] As Joshua took command of the Hebrew forces for the first time, Moses ascended a hill overlooking the battlefield. Whenever Moses raised his arms, the Israelites prevailed. Scholars speculate that Moses could have been providing encouragement to the troops, petitioning God in prayer, or offering battle instructions for Joshua's forces.[2] Regardless, his actions had a direct and immediate impact on the war that raged. Weary as the sun set, Moses's arms lowered, and the tide began to turn. In need of support, two of Moses's advisors, Aaron and Hur, upheld his hands, and the Israelites defeated the Amalekites that day.

The efforts of Aaron and Hur did more than uphold Moses. They provided support for the entire community of faith. Like Aaron and Hur, such supporters fill the pages of Scripture. Joseph offered grain to his family. Ruth vowed to remain with Naomi. Nathan confronted King David. Martha served the needs of Jesus. Jesus washed the disciples' feet. Barnabas traveled with Paul. Among a great cloud of other witnesses, these supporters offered compassion, mended wounds, upheld spirits, and served others. Their efforts did not skirt the requirement of individual responsibility and did not fully eliminate the struggles that others faced. Yet, their actions pointed to the presence and provision of God. Together, they display the interconnected power and beauty of the body of Christ.

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[1] See Gen 36:12–15.

[2] Hamilton, *Handbook on the Pentateuch*, 189; Exod 17:8, in Matthews et al., *IVP Bible Background Commentary*.

Why Does Clergy Care Matter?

While leadership is important for any organization, clergy leadership is critical for religious communities. The support clergy receive (or do not receive) has a direct impact upon their effectiveness and overall well-being. In turn, their well-being impacts the flourishing and sustainability of congregations and communities. Although the quantitative and qualitative data we outline in this book certainly underscore the need for and importance of clergy care, we want to address the importance of such support in the first place. There are plenty of other ongoing needs inside and outside the church that also require attention. So, why does supporting clergy matter?

On one hand, we acknowledge the experiences of clergy do not matter more than the experiences of other professionals like medical doctors, teachers, or first responders. Protestantism has long maintained a "cultural egalitarianism" with regard to religious leaders.[3] Martin Luther included clergy in the priesthood of *all* believers because clergy are no different than any other people created in the image of God. However, there are unique demands and expectations for clergy that warrant consideration. We contend that clergy are not meant to labor alone. Their care matters to God, to the church, and to society as a whole.

God cares about clergy support because God cares about all people. Drawing on the command to "Feed my sheep" (John 21:15–17), Flora Slosson Wuellner notes that if God cares about sheep being fed, then God also cares about shepherds being fed.[4] Just as Jesus's ministry focused on restoring the well-being of individuals as a sign of the coming reign of God, clergy support and well-being display an important sign of God's wholeness manifested within the church.

God calls clergy to care for the mission of the church. Their support and well-being matters to God because of the incarnational nature of ministry. Early church father St. Jerome once said, "There can be no church community without a leader or team of leaders."[5] Just as the Hebrew Scriptures reveal special provisions for the priests and Levites, Christian clergy have a special role within the church.[6] God's kingdom grows more fully when clergy are healthy and whole, and, by contrast, unhealthy and unsupported clergy hinder the mission of God.

---

[3] Ferguson et al., *New Dictionary of Theology*, 531. See also Eastwood, *Priesthood of All Believers*; Carroll, "Toward 2000," 294.

[4] Wuelleer, *Feed My Shepherds*, 11–12.

Clergy occupy an important and distinctive role through their ministerial office. The well-being of clergy impacts the church's ability to fulfill its mission. Unhealthy clergy distort and potentially damage the way others see and understand the gospel. Consider the example of pastor Mark Driscoll where the elders of Mars Hill Church asked Driscoll to resign because of his abusive and unhealthy behaviors. Mike Cosper, the host of a podcast covering the aftermath of Driscoll's resignation, said, "Many former Mars Hill members in Seattle were so shattered by their experience they left Christianity altogether."[7] Unhealthy leaders jeopardize ministries and contribute to unstable institutions.[8]

By contrast, healthy clergy contribute to healthy congregations and church systems. Supported leaders carry a greater capacity to encourage morale, endure hardships, and bounce back after setbacks. But what is the witness of an unhealthy clergyperson? The actions of leaders are more important than the messages they preach. When faith-based organizations intended for good are led by clergy who are not well, they hurt people. Consider the impact of the sex abuse scandals that have rocked the Roman Catholic Church or the Southern Baptist Convention.[9]

Unsupported clergy produce real and hidden costs for the church. Real costs include higher insurance premiums, damaged reputations, squandered financial resources, and fewer clergy in ministry. Hidden costs include a decrease in trust, innovation, and creativity. Caring for the well-being of clergy must be a priority, not only to avoid the prospect of bad effects but also to optimize the church's potential to bless the lives of individuals and communities.

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[5] Quoted in Schillebeeckx, *Ministry*, 1.

[6] Consider Mal 3:2–4.

[7] Tong and Hagan, "Rise and Fall."

[8] Organizations may prosper under the leadership of an unhealthy clergyperson. However, this growth is seldom sustainable, can be unhealthy, and may lead to other issues for the clergyperson, the clergyperson's family, the local community, or the institution.

[9] "Roman Catholic Church"; Nadolny, "Tongue Is a Fire"; Shellnutt, "Southern Baptists Refused."

Healthy clergy are better equipped to engage society in good works and contribute to the flourishing of the world. Under the leadership of healthy clergy, laity learn how to love people and how to serve others. Along with other members of the body of Christ, clergy help heal and repair our world. Communities often process tragedy and find moral direction within congregations. For example, many people looked to the church to provide a safe space after 9/11.

Unhealthy clergy affect the church's ability to recruit, train, and retain healthy members and leaders. A participant in our research named Bob said that after his congregation dismissed an unhealthy pastor, his congregation did not trust the pastor that followed. The suspicion and mistrust of the new pastor continued for more than seven years. This sentiment impaired the congregation and constrained the leadership of the new pastor, influencing his perception of the congregation and of ministry overall. The whole body of Christ is affected by the health of its leaders.

Clergy well-being matters to society at large because, as shepherds, clergy model behavior for their congregations and contribute to the well-being of their followers. From small, rural towns to large cities, the local pastor provides leadership that brings people together. They have expansive networks reaching almost every community in North America.[10] They gather more people on a regular basis than any other institutional form.[11] Their actions build or erode trust in institutions. People listen to what they say and follow where they go.

The congregations clergy lead possess incredible resources and contribute to the pro-social behavior of their members.[12] They receive almost a third of all charitable donations made in America and oversee diverse resources including land, buildings, and investment holdings.[13] Along with other similar religious entities, congregations are collectively the most common and numerous form of nonprofit organization in America.[14] Healthy, supported clergy contribute to a robust civil society. Clergy have the ears of the well-connected. They stand up for the uncounted, welcome the poor and strangers, speak at city council meetings, and march in demonstrations. Healthy clergy can build bridges across areas of difference and stitch communities together.

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[10] Chaves et al., *Congregations in 21st Century America*; Chaves, *Congregations in America*.

[11] King et al., "National Study."

[12] Bekkers and Wiepking, "Who Gives?"; Showers et al., "Charitable Giving Expenditures."

[13] Lilly Family School of Philanthropy, *Giving USA 2021*; Austin, *Giving USA Special Report*.

[14] Fulton, "26. Religious Organizations," 581.

A Brief History of Clergy Care and Support

The care and support available to clergy has long been considered by communities of faith. Within the Judeo-Christian tradition, the care of clergy stretches back at least to the time of Moses and Aaron, the first high priest.[15] As the Jewish people left bondage in Egypt, the Israelites established rules and regulations that governed their shared religious life, including expectations regarding clergy leadership that were codified primarily in the books of Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy.

In those days, priests and Levites functioned as professional religious leaders, first among local places of worship and then—with the establishment of the monarchy—in a more centralized role at the temple in Jerusalem.[16] Clergy were set apart from the general population and supported by the community.[17] Unlike the twelve tribes of Israel, priests did not own land (Num 18:20, Deut 10:9).[18] As Walter Elwell and Philip Comfort note:

> The absence of land . . . meant that [religious leaders] could not support and feed themselves as could other men and women. Consequently, the law specified that they could be supported for their services by the people as a whole. They were to receive, from worshipers, portions of animals that were brought to the tabernacle, as well as corn, wine, oil, and wool.[19]

As a result, support for religious leaders was centralized. Priests and Levites received food and provisions through the worship, offerings, and sacrifices of the community of faith (Neh 10:37–39). Directly, support included material income from tithes, offerings, and sacrifices. Indirectly, taxes supported the ministry of the religious leaders and the operations of the temple.[20] Additionally, the ministry of priests and Levites was interconnected.[21] The Levites, who had lower social standing than the priests, received the tithe and gave a portion to the priests.[22] Here we begin to see some of the first evidence of clergy caring for other clergy, a theme that continues until modern times.

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[15] Although there is no formal or direct connection between the Jewish priesthood and Christian clerical practice, comparing these two groups has long been part of a conceptual framework to understand the evolution of religious leaders. See Bradshaw, *Rites of Ordination*, 1.

[16] Bradshaw, *Rites of Ordination*, 2–3; Elwell and Comfort, *Tyndale Bible Dictionary*, 1073–74; The distinction between priests and Levites remains until the New Testament. See John 1:19, Luke 10:31–32.

[17] Ryken et al., *Dictionary of Biblical Imagery*, 662.

[18] At some point, this tradition was abandoned. See Acts 4:36–37. Also, some cities were set aside for Levites (Josh 21; Num 35:1–8).

[19] Elwell and Comfort, *Tyndale Bible Dictionary*, 1075.

Prior to the Babylonian exile, priests received modest provisions primarily offered during the act of worship through the sacrificial system.[23] However, the majority of material income that priests received was from tithes of crops, spices, wine, oil, animals, and dough.[24] Following the exile, the income, allowances, and sociopolitical power of priests and Levites increased substantially.[25] The increase in support for clergy corresponded with an increase in position, power, and prestige of their position within Jewish society.[26] In the absence of a king, the religious leaders became an aristocratic class.[27] By the time of Jesus, clergy were given portions of meat from regular offerings.[28] They obtained grain from grain offerings.[29] Bread was given from food offerings,[30] and clergy received material possessions from offerings of consecration and restitution.[31]

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[20] These included the half-shekel tax and wood offering for the temple's sacrificial system. See Schürer et al., *History of Jewish People*, 271–73.

[21] Scholars debate the precise relationship between priests and Levites. See Elwell and Comfort, *Tyndale Bible Dictionary*, 1074.

[22] Numbers 18:20; Neh 10:38–40. See also Schürer et al., *History of Jewish People*, 263. The explanation for the differing status between priests and Levites can be found in Ezek 44:10–31.

[23] Schürer et al., *History of Jewish People*, 257. Deuteronomy specifies that the Levites and the poor receive provision from sacrificial worship every three years (Deut 14:22–29; 26:12–15; 12:6; 11:17–19). Priests received only a portion of the worshiper's sacrifice. The portion was to be the best of the fields, the firstborn of animals (Num 18:15–18), certain portions of animals (Deut 18:3; Lev 7:30–34), the first fleece from sheep (Deut 18:4), and the first of the dough (Ezek 44:28–30). However, material income was primarily generated through the introduction of the tithe, requiring the Jewish people to give from their first fruits (see Num 18:8–32).

[24] Schürer et al., *History of Jewish People*, 262.

[25] J. Green and Hurst, "Priest, Priesthood." Also, as influential members of society, priests and some Levites were deported to Babylon where formalized religious practice was forbidden (Jer 29:1). The Persian Empire allowed the Jews to return to their homes. Among those who were permitted to return, more than 4,000 were priests (or part of their families) and 341 were Levites (Ezra 2:36–42). Once at home, they helped restore the temple and resume religious practice.

[26] Schürer et al, *History of Jewish People*, 257. Reinstitution of the practices of giving are specified in Neh 10:36–40. Also, the number of religious leaders grew such that they would serve at the temple only for a week at a time, residing at home during the other times and supplementing their income in other ways. Bradshaw, *Rites of Ordination*, 4.

Like the religious leaders of the Hebrew Scriptures, Jesus and his disciples received support directly and indirectly. However, their support was not centralized. Instead, small groups of supporters provided for their needs. Jesus and the disciples relied on the direct support of voluntary donations from patrons, notably from both men and women (Luke 8:1–3). These supporters included prominent officials such as Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus and those without position or authority, like Mary Magdalene.

Individuals like Zacchaeus (Luke 19) and families like Mary and Martha (Luke 10) offered hospitality by welcoming Jesus and his disciples into their homes and providing meals for them. In the time leading up to and including his death, supporters provided a donkey for Jesus's triumphant entry into Jerusalem (Matt 21), carried his cross (Matt 27), secured a tomb (Mark 15:43–47), and anointed his body for burial (Luke 23:55–56, John 19:38–41). In addition to these direct and indirect forms of external support, Jesus and his disciples may have also participated in what we would now call bivocational work to support their own needs (Mark 6:3).

Through the death and resurrection of Jesus (Heb 9:12, 14, 26; 10:10), the New Testament church ceased the practice of animal sacrifice and thereby abandoned the Hebrew notion of the priesthood.[32] Since that time, the ministry of Jesus—our High Priest (Heb 4:14)—has been the model for Christian ministry.[33] Jesus cared for his disciples by instructing them, calling them away on retreat (Mark 6:30–34), washing their feet (John 13:1–17), praying for them (John 17:9), and commissioning them (Matt 28:18).

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[27] Bradshaw, *Rites of Ordination*, 3–4.

[28] These included sin, guilt, burnt, and thank offerings. Only the most sacred of offerings were for priests only. All others could be enjoyed by members of the priest's household. Thank offerings are also referred to as "communion sacrifices."

[29] These were offered frequently in conjunction with animal sacrifice. For matters of frequency, see Lev 11–15; Num 19. Elwell and Comfort, *Tyndale Bible Dictionary*, 972.

[30] See Lev 24.

[31] These include votive offerings (Lev 27; Deut 23:22–24; Matt 15:5; Mark 7:11) and anathema offerings (Lev 27:28; Num 18:14; Ezek 44:29). Examples of offerings of restitution may be found in Num 5:5–8.

[32] Davies, "Sacrifice, Offerings, Gifts."

[33] Osborne, *Orders and Ministry*, 41–53.

Alluding to the way Hebrew priests and Levites were supported directly through the sacrificial system, the apostle Paul asserts that those “who proclaim the gospel should get their living by the gospel” (1 Cor 9:9–14). Indeed, Paul accepted support from churches (e.g., Phil 4:15–18, 2 Cor 11:8–9) and individuals (e.g., Acts 16:15, 40). However, he was careful to note that while he had a right to be fully supported in his ministry, he did not take advantage of that right (1 Cor 9:14; 2 Cor 11:7). Like Jesus, Paul worked with his hands supporting himself as a tentmaker (Acts 18:3; 1 Cor 4:12; 2 Thess 3:8).

In the book of Ephesians, Paul describes the offices of ministry, which include apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors, and teachers (4:11). However, there was no uniform expression of religious leadership in the early New Testament house churches.[34] Although the early church had begun to define some ministerial offices (e.g., Acts 6:2–4), a formalization of clericalism (and specifically the notion of “ordination”) did not begin until after the year 200 CE when the Christian notion of the “priesthood” developed.[35] At that time, the church established an ecclesiastical structure with an understanding of clergy as set apart from laity through sacred orders.[36]

Early Christian leaders such as Cyprian drew upon the Hebrew Scriptures (e.g., Num 18) to defend the financial support of clergy and argued that religious leaders should not be forced into employment outside of the church.[37] Similarly, the *Didache*—an early Christian treatise on ethics, worship, and church administration—notes that religious leaders are “worthy of support” and calls upon believers to show hospitality to their clerics and to provide for their leaders out of their first fruits (12, 13.1–3).[38] As with Jesus, religious leaders relied on the gifts of laity.

In 325 CE, when Constantine installed Christianity as the official state religion, a seismic shift took place in the relationship between the church and society.[39] This revolutionary political change had implications for the way that clergy were supported. Clergy were given a status previously afforded to pagan priests. Namely, they were exempt from taxes and free from public service.[40] As T. G. Elliott states:

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[34] Bradshaw, *Rites of Ordination*, 17, 24.

[35] Rearden, “Priesthood, High and Low?,” 541; Bradshaw, *Rites of Ordination*, 41.

[36] Osborne, *Orders and Ministry*, 42–43. Early Christian theologian and philosopher Clement of Alexandria may have been the first to use the term *clergy*. See Bradshaw, *Rites of Ordination*, 40.

[37] Bradshaw, *Rites of Ordination*, 17, 43.

[38] Believers, however, are encouraged to be discerning. According to the *Didache*, one of the signs of a false prophet is if they focus exclusively on their need for money (11.10).

[39] See Lenski, *Cambridge Companion*.

> There was no sense in having someone become a cleric in order to starve while working for people too poor to support him, nor in having him spend time at his business in order to pay the tax collector if the imperial policy was to have the poor supported by the churches.[41]

This period was marked both by centralization of civic power and continued support of local communities. Although some clergy continued to practice other trades in addition to their ministry, other clergy took on full-time Christian service.[42] The government issued financial grants to support clergy, many of whom were on payroll.[43] Most income gained by the church came from voluntary donations and rental income from church owned property. Other support came through gifts of food, textiles, furniture, flowers, and animals. Some clerics received substantial income, although those in rural areas were paid poorly.[44]

By the early Middle Ages, clerical ministry had become a formalized vocation with rites of ordination and an established career path.[45] Although some clergy were educated in secular or religious schools (like Alexandria and Edessa), there is no evidence of formal education, exclusively for clergy, prior to the time of St. Augustine.[46] At that time, the bishop of Hippo established a *monasterium clericorum* in his home for the training of priests. This model was later replicated throughout the Christian world. In 529 CE, the Council of Vaison encouraged local priests also to adopt this practice of opening their homes and training future ministers. Additionally, cathedral schools and monasteries began offering training.

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40. Rubenstein, *When Jesus Became God*, 71.

41. T. Elliott, "Tax Exemptions Granted," 329.

42. In the eastern Mediterranean, clergy were salaried at rates determined by the bishop. In the western Mediterranean, clergy were compensated by receiving a share of offerings and rental income. Serfass, "Church Finances," 18, 23, 30–32, 61. See also T. Elliott, "Tax Exemptions Granted," 335.

43. Serfass, "Church Finances," 18, 23, 31–32.

44. Serfass, "Church Finances," 1, 6, 7, 33.

45. Bradshaw, *Rites of Ordination*, 17, 133.

46. Viéban, "Ecclesiastical Seminary."

With time, cathedral schools grew into universities that trained the most elite in the disciplines of theology, philosophy, and canon law. However, these courses had little to no emphasis on spiritual formation. Anthony Viéban estimates that fewer than 1 percent of priests during this period benefited from a university education.[47] In fact, it was not until after the Reformation at the Council of Trent in 1545 that formalized requirements for clergy education were set forth by the Roman Catholic Church and required every diocese to have a seminary.[48]

Prior to the Protestant Reformation, clergy care was simpler. The institutional church attended to the care of clergy, and most priests did not marry. With the Reformation, the structure of the church and the family units of clergy changed dramatically. Protestant churches decentralized the institutional church, and many clergy married and started families. The support of clergy now included other family members.

During this period of tremendous ecclesiastical change, the laity assumed more direct responsibility for the care of clergy. As church historian Esther Chung-Kim notes:

> Since Protestants had allowed and even encouraged clergy to marry, the families of married clergy needed additional support. Mindful of their wives' and children's vulnerability, married clergy emphasized their concern for widows and orphans. . . . The needs of the poor were not a distant theoretical problem, but rather an imminent danger for educated ministers who found themselves struggling to support themselves and their families. As this situation became a persistent problem, [Johannes] Bugenhagen would advocate more strenuously in his later church orders for the provision of pastors and preachers struggling with inadequate resources.[49]

This moment in history marks a shift in how the church regarded its responsibility to care for clergy. Since that time, we have seen the church continue to ebb and flow in how it views its responsibility for clergy support, ultimately impacting the allocation of resources in the church and programs offered for clergy.

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47. Viéban, "Ecclesiastical Seminary."
48. Kirsch, "Council of Trent"; Cross and Livingstone, "Seminary."
49. Chung-Kim, *Economics of Faith*, 61.

How We Examined the Network of Clergy Care Providers

Despite the importance of clergy to God, the church, and to society, there has never before been a systematic review of the multi-sector support network upon which clergy rely. This book examines the organizations and individuals who support clergy on a daily basis. This broad system of supporters, whom we will refer to as "clergy care providers," consists of five sectors: (1) denominations, networks, and associations; (2) funders and granting organizations; (3) pension, benefit, and insurance organizations; (4) frontline providers (counselors, coaches, therapists, spiritual directors, licensed clinical social workers, and retreat center hosts); and (5) continuing education institutions. We will expand on each of these sectors in chapter 2.

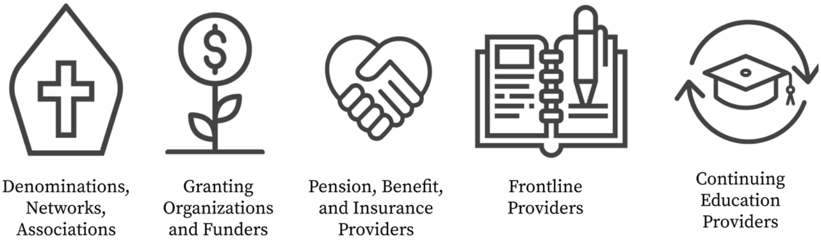
Denominations, Networks, Associations
Granting Organizations and Funders
Pension, Benefit, and Insurance Providers
Frontline Providers
Continuing Education Providers

Figure 1–1: Clergy Care Sectors

While we recognize that some of the most meaningful support that clergy receive occurs at the local level, we chose to examine the institutions and individuals caring for clergy in large numbers because collectively they have the ability to systemically impact pastors across North America.

Our efforts began with a survey of 740 senior-level individuals from within the five sector networks identified above who provide support to clergy. Our survey garnered a 47 percent response rate. Beyond surveying these individuals, we also got to know many of them. We conducted in-depth interviews and focus groups with these providers and made site visits to where they conduct their ministry.

The following map (figure 1–2) reveals where our participants are located.[50] We believe our database serves as the most comprehensive and up-to-date directory of senior-level clergy care providers in North America.

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[50] Our database provides us with the most comprehensive count of clergy care organizations that exists. The database was constructed by incorporating various lists that organizations and networks maintain of their providers and also by snowball sampling.

The following map was color coded to indicate the completion rate from our survey. Our participants provide care across the United States and Canada.

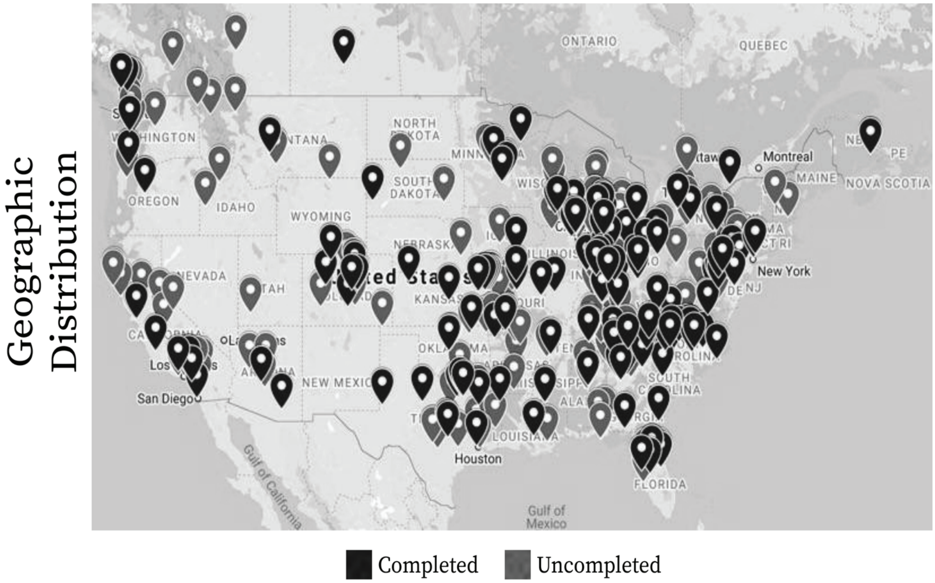
Geographic Distribution
ONTARIO
QUEBEC
WASHINGTON
MONTANA
NORTH DAKOTA
MINNESOTA
Montreal
MAINE
NOVA SCOTIA
PE
OREGON
IDAHO
SOUTH DAKOTA
WISCONSIN
WYOMING
NEBRASKA
United States
NEVADA
UTAH
KANSAS
MISSOURI
New York
NJ
DE
CALIFORNIA
OKLAHOMA
NORTH CAROLINA
SOUTH CAROLINA
Los Angeles
San Diego
ARIZONA
NEW MEXICO
MISSISSIPPI
ALABAMA
GEORGIA
LOUISIANA
Houston
FLORIDA
Gulf of California
Gulf of Mexico
■ Completed
■ Uncompleted

Figure 1–2: Geographic Distribution of Providers

In a typical year, the total number of clergy served by our participants approaches 222,000.[51] While there is likely overlap from the same clergy accessing services from multiple providers, the substantial size of the total clergy population served indicates that our participants likely care for a majority of Protestant clergy in the United States and parts of Canada. Even by conservative estimates, the providers we sampled collectively support more than half of the Protestant clergy in America.[52]

[51] We acknowledge that the global pandemic may have had a dramatic impact on the care our participants provide, either increasing or decreasing their normal programs or services. Therefore, we asked our participants to specify the total number of clergy served pre-COVID to ensure that we represented a more normal time. On average, organizations represented in our study cared for 82 clergy pre-COVID.

[52] As of 2019, the United States Census Bureau estimates that there are 348,811 clergy in America. According to the National Study of Religious Leaders, Protestant clergy represent 60 percent of this total (209,287 clergy). Collectively, our providers support 221,980. We believe that there is likely substantial overlap in the clergy served by our participants. Assuming a 50 percent overlap, however, our participants support half

Additionally, our participants represent a variety of organizations across the field of clergy caregiving. Some participants serve clients from many professions while others only care for clergy. We have large, complex multi-million-dollar organizations in our sample as well as small practices of one or two people. Some participants provide support for clergy of varying denominational backgrounds and theological traditions while others serve only a single denomination or theological tradition.

Despite this variation, 100 percent of our participants care for clergy in some capacity.[53] Therefore, we are confident that our participants have knowledge and experience supporting and meeting the needs of clergy. We have further evidence of their authority to speak on behalf of their ministries based on the positions they occupy as senior leaders of their organizations. We asked each participant to share their job title within their organization. The most common job titles are leadership roles such as executive, director, and president.[54]

Our participants come from varying theological traditions, divided almost equally between mainline Protestant and evangelical/conservative Protestant traditions.[55] They represent a wide range of theological traditions, denominational polities, and contexts. Although not all sectors contain the same number of organizations,[56] the proportion of organizations is representative of the proportions in the field of clergy caregiving (figure 1–3). The pension, benefit, and insurance sector, while less than 10 percent of our sample overall, includes representation from half of

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of Protestant clergy in America. For reference, see United States Census Bureau, "American Community Survey"; National Congregations Study, "National Survey of Religious Leaders."

[53] Ninety-one percent provide care directly (they personally interact with and oversee the care of clergy), and 9 percent of our participants care for clergy indirectly (work with others who care for clergy or conduct research). At the beginning of our survey, we asked participants if they are directly responsible for overseeing or providing programs or services for clergy. If they are not directly responsible, we then ask if they are indirectly responsible for caring for clergy. Participants were not able to continue the survey if they did not either directly or indirectly care for clergy.

[54] A number of academics who serve resource centers and continuing education institutions are also included.

[55] There are a few Roman Catholics and Orthodox in our sample. We did not intentionally reach out to them, but several took the survey as representatives of their organization.

[56] For instance, there are more frontline provider organizations in North America than pension, benefit, and insurance organizations in North America.

the organizations providing insurance services to Protestant clergy in the United States and Canada.[57]

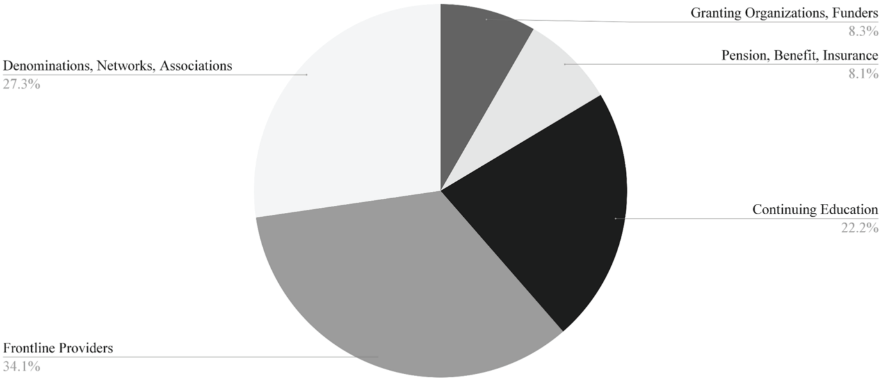

Figure 1–3: Participants by Sector

In addition to our survey, we conducted more than forty interviews, held nine focus groups, and made six site visits to ministry locations in four regions of the United States. We utilized these interviews, focus groups, and site visits to better understand the key themes that emerged from our survey responses. This led us to interviewing clergy care providers in the very beginning stages of providing care as well as those who had been in their role for decades. The themes that emerged from our survey also guided us to interview leaders who provide care for bivocational clergy, women clergy, and clergy of color.

Because our survey primarily asked about organization-level data, it did not ask for demographic information from our participants. Therefore, we do not know the race, ethnicity, or gender of our participants. However, we intentionally reached out to those who primarily care for clergy of color, those who represent Black Protestant denominations, and those who serve women clergy. We hosted focus groups to specifically learn from and discuss the unique concerns associated with these often-underrepresented populations.

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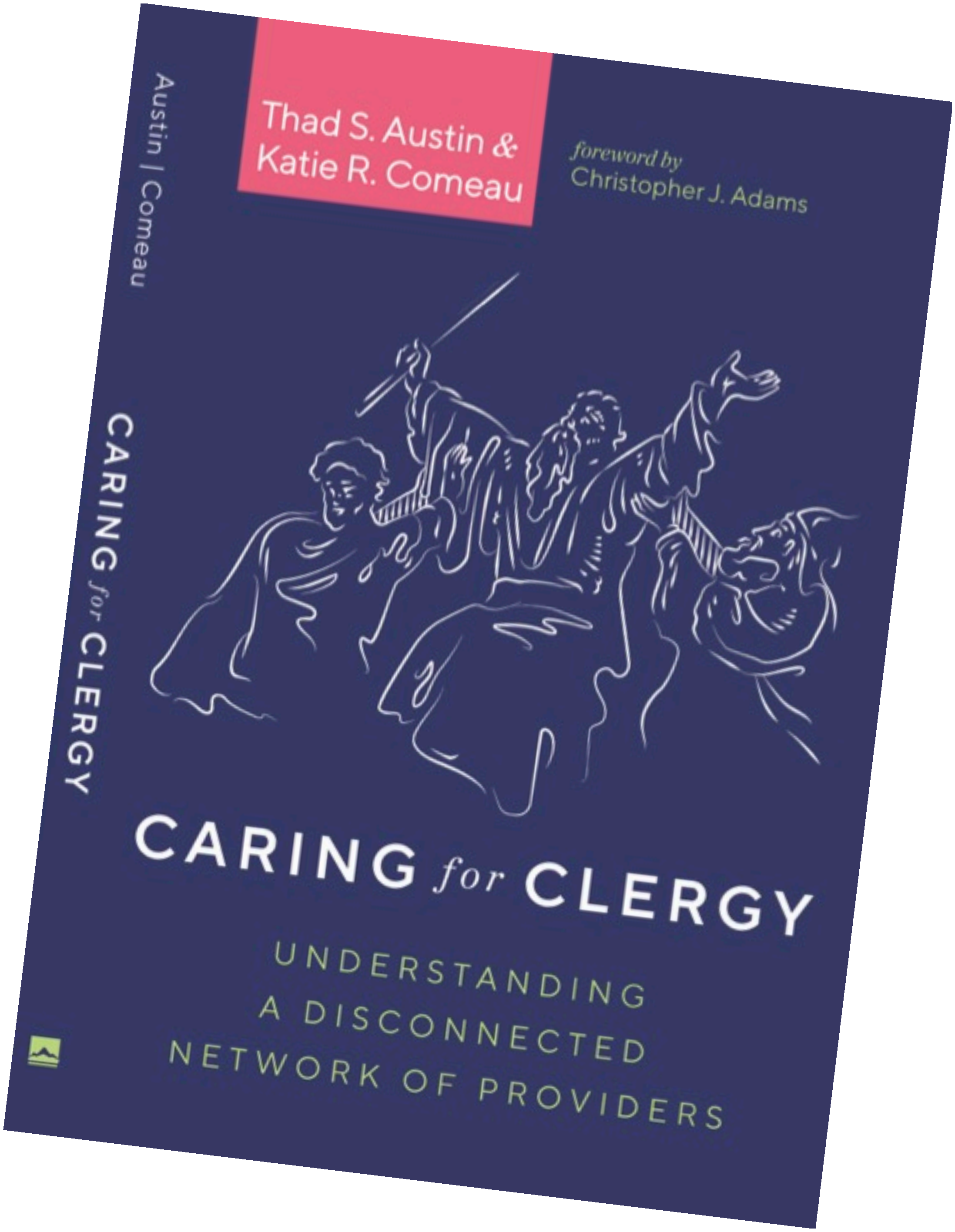
[57] Our sample has representation from half of the members of the Church Benefits Association and organizations that are not associated with the Church Benefits Association but provide insurance and benefits services for clergy.

Conclusion

In the pages that follow, we will detail the findings of the first comprehensive study of Protestant clergy care providers and the life-changing work they do. These individuals and organizations offer programs and services that provide counsel, direction, funding, hospitality, education, and benefits upon which clergy rely. Many serve selflessly and generously.

Unfortunately, our findings uncover significant challenges that restrict the ability of providers to offer full and appropriate support. We find a disconnected network of providers with deep silos and little coordination. The network has little to no common standards, goals, training, language, or measures to evaluate the care provided. There is little empirical grounding in providers' resources as well as substantive gaps between their sources and academic research. We find significant differences in the care that underserved populations of clergy receive compared to the majority population. Furthermore, most of our participants were clergy themselves. Some providers still carry open wounds from their own time in local church ministry and need healing and support themselves.

This book tells the story of clergy care providers and the challenging, yet important and necessary work they do to advance God's kingdom. It also tells the story of a disconnected network. With concerted effort, prayer, resources, and willingness among diverse stakeholders to collaborate, we can address and potentially overcome some of the challenges the network faces. If you are one of these providers, our hope is that this book will enlighten and encourage you in the care you provide. If you are a clergyperson, we hope that this resource will be of help as you navigate the complex and often disconnected support network available to you. Finally, if you are a layperson, we hope this book will give you fresh insight into the needs of clergy and prompt you to consider how you might be uniquely positioned to care for them in your local congregation.



Thad S. Austin &
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