

Bishop's Commission on Clergy Wellness - An Update - March 2005

In November of 2003, the Task Force on Clergy Wellness submitted its report to the Right Reverend Fred Hiltz, Bishop of Nova Scotia and Prince Edward Island. In the report, relevant literature concerning problems with clergy support systems was reviewed and key areas of concern were outlined. A number of recommendations followed from this report, emphasizing the importance of developing self-care and support systems within the diocese and parish communities. Of particular concern was the difficulty that clergy often have in setting and maintaining boundaries concerning time off and setting realistic expectations for themselves and their parishes. Another key area focused on the responsibility of clergy to take responsibility for their own wellness.

In the October 2004 Clergy Gathering, small group discussion was again held around wellness issues. Once more, maintaining time and space boundaries and limits was listed as a primary issue by the vast majority of those present. Some clergy had successfully addressed this concern through taking sabbatical leave, more intentionally organizing time off, and/or reducing weekly work hours. Other clergy spoke of re-focusing personal attitude, of engaging in hobbies/interests outside the church and of improving self-care. Parish honoring of time/space boundaries was listed as the single most important thing congregations could do to support clergy wellness.

Responses to the issues being raised by clergy include (not necessarily in order of priority):

1. Regional workshops on clergy wellness that draw together clergy and laity for education, dialogue and action (held on request by region).
2. Incorporation of a tested support/educational program, *Fresh Start*, for those in the first 2 years of a new incumbency (facilitators being trained in April 2005).
3. Exploration/improvement of EAP and other benefits for maximum support of clergy/clergy families.
4. Recommendations re revision of episcopal expectations of clergy and parishes (suggestion that these be revised as episcopal guidelines for healthy parish life - being forwarded to clergy for input).
5. Seminars for target groups (already held - seminar for those 5-7 years post ordination, planned retirement seminar, parish workshops on governance).
6. Assistance through improved guidelines/information re study leave, sabbaticals.

In addition to the initiatives by the Bishop's Commission on Clergy Wellness, a separate group have been working of the establishment of a clergy professional association. It has as its goals - mutual and personal responsibility for wellness, collegiality, professional development, advocacy and public and stakeholder education.