

Pastor Well-Being and Resilience

The elders' responsibility

Below is what should comprise a teaching elder (TE) wellbeing checklist. This stems from my role and involvement as ruling (RE), church/denominational staff executive, and presbytery moderator. Unfortunately, REs are too often unaware of pastor stress or have an incomplete or misguided (though sincere) view of the solution. When asked what to do, I think the approach must be kept simple: Healthy and flourishing churches (which REs must want) require healthy and resilient pastors, and it's the Session's essential duty to bolster the overall health and well-being of their pastor(s).

Components of pastor resilience and well-being. Three main buckets with separate items in each:

1. **Self-care** (RE decide to whom the pastor is accountable on these essentials):
 - a. *Pastor* – Ensure individual habits and schedule to sustain his ministry and spiritual/personal/family life.
 - b. *Family* – Prioritize marriage/spouse and children.
2. **Internal/Session** support:
 - a. *Financial*. Adequate compensation, both cash and non-cash benefits (retirement, medical, other insurance)
 - b. *Non-financial*. Weekly time off, vacation, study leave, and sabbatical policies; performance management (with goals, guidance, and feedback/reviews); professional development plan and resources (to strengthen personal, ministry, leadership, and management competencies)
 - c. *Organization*. Sufficient officer, staff, and volunteer support
3. **External** personal support systems (Not all may be available, needed, or desired, but some blend is essential and to be enabled and paid for by the Session. It is extremely rare that a church member or RE can or should provide any of these.)
 - a. *Presbytery* – formal committee or events
 - b. *Coaching* – Pastoral and/or executive
 - c. *Mentor* – someone with long-term strong personal ties
 - d. *Peers* – Group or cohort with deep long-lasting relationships
 - e. *Professional counseling*: Offered and used if interested/needed
 - f. *Financial planning* – through denomination resources or allowance with local trusted expert

More rationale: TEs rarely mention or highlight their needs with their ruling elders. Too many ruling elders don't perceive this situation and assume all is well until it's not, and something in the "system" cracks or breaks. In my experience as a RE, until I served on staff with pastors and helped lead a presbytery, I was quite oblivious to their need for wide-ranging care.

The above checklist is for RE's on a Session to use to evaluate, develop, or enhance their pastor care plan. Tap the following resources and others for deeper understanding.

Resources:

- [Pastoral Wellbeing Booklet](#) (free download)
- [Resilient Ministry: What Pastors Told Us About Surviving and Thriving](#)