



Wellness and Self-Care for Leaders of Religious Institutes

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How our perspective can help....

- Saint John Vianney Center is a Behavioral Health Center that serves Ministers of the Church.
- Many find themselves needing help with Self-Care/Wellness
- Holistic approach to care
 - Spirit
 - Mind
 - Body
- Providing tools to live a holy, happy and healthy ministry
- “ Self-Care is KEY!”

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Who takes care of You?

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What is Self-Care?

- Any activity we deliberately do to take care of our spiritual, mental, physical and emotional health.
- A simple concept in theory, but often overlooked.
- Good self-care is key to improved mood, reduced anxiety and to a good relationship with yourself and others.
- “Something that refuels us, rather than takes from us.”
- Self-care is key to living a balanced life the Lord called you to.
- **The dynamic that leadership and self care are not compatible.**

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Self-care needs to be an ACTIVE choice

- Create a NO list (set up your boundaries)....a day off.
- Prayer
- Nutritious healthy meals (your fuel!)
- Get enough sleep
- Physical Activity/Exercise
- Medical Care
- Relaxation/Meditation
- Spend time with others, explore hobbies, interests, avoid loneliness
- Look for opportunities to laugh
- SELF-CARE TAKES PRACTICE....

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You can't pour from an empty cup...

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Who provides support in your life?

Self-care may mean graciously allowing others to help us with our burdens.

Self-care is proven to prevent health issues.

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We know WHAT to do...so why don't we ??

What's holding us back?

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One of the most commonly cited sources of concern for Men Religious Leadership:



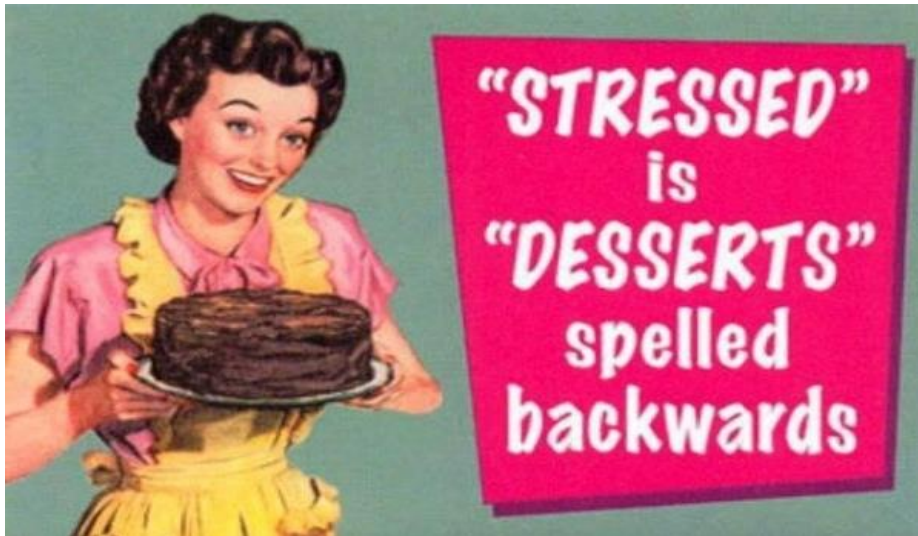
- Why?
 - What types of Stress?
 - What places you at risk?
 - What can we do about it?

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It is important to note that the way we perceive and manage stress matters a great deal.

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Stress

- Stress is a normal physical response to events that make you feel threatened or upset your balance in some way.
- It is the body's defense; a way of protecting you.
- Stress can be positive or negative



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Stress 101

What is healthy stress?

Stress is a normal and necessary part of life. Stress can be a good thing.

The right amount, well managed, can make us feel alive, increase productivity, energy, creativity, and happiness.

- **Examples:**
- **Rewarding leadership ministry, positive life transitions and changes**
- **Being ordained/final vows**
- **Taking a new assignment – being named to leadership!**
- **First Pastorate/leading a ministerial assignment**

Perception of the event is important

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What is unhealthy stress?

Too much stress when poorly managed, can create:

- Boredom
- Fatigue
- Restlessness
- Irritability
- Depression

Too much stress and poor management can put you at risk for disease.

Examples: Death of loved one, too great a workload, dysfunctional relationships & unresolved grief

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External Stressors

- ❖ Pandemic – connections, financial
- ❖ Demands of being the leader
- ❖ Men Religious shortage and increasing demand
- ❖ Changing roles
- ❖ Investigations – historical and current
- ❖ Loss (of status, relevance, unprocessed losses)
- ❖ Isolation
- ❖ Authority
- ❖ Division in the Church
- ❖ Modern culture (counter cultural values)

Changing Roles: Models of Leadership have changed.

*Loss is a major issue: Not the Church it was when I entered religious life
A deep desire for the “good old days”*

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Stress

Beyond a certain point, stress stops being helpful and starts causing major damage to:

- Your health
- Your mood
- Your productivity
- Your relationships
- Your quality of life

It becomes difficult to avoid.



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Stress

The dangerous thing about stress is how easily it can creep up on you:

- You get used to it
- It starts to feel familiar, normal even
- You don't notice how much it's affecting you, even as it takes a heavy toll

Stress affects the mind, body, and behavior in many ways.

Everyone experiences stress differently.

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Stress Doesn't Always Look Stressful

A simple driving analogy can best describe the three most common ways people respond when they're overwhelmed by stress:

Foot on the gas – An angry or agitated stress response. You're heated, keyed up, overly emotional, and unable to sit still.

Foot on the brake – A withdrawn or depressed stress response. You shut down, space out, and show very little energy or emotion.

Foot on both – A tense and frozen stress response. You "freeze" under pressure and can't do anything. You look paralyzed, but under the surface you're extremely agitated.

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Symptoms of Stress

- **Irritability**
- **Fatigue**
- **Obsessive thoughts**
- **Rumination**
- **Difficulty with concentration and focus**
- **Weakening prayer life**
- **Anxiety and depression**
- **Sleep changes**
- **Eating changes (too much, too little)**

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BEHAVIOR WARNING SIGNALS OF PROBLEMS WITH STRESS

- **Feeling tired and never really rested.**
- **Feeling disconnected from prayer or ministry.**
- **Arguing with others over minor things.**
- **Lack of patience. Lack of tolerance for others' mistakes and incompetence.**
- **Inability to feel relaxed.**
- **Constantly feeling under pressure because of ministry or personal life.**
- **Lack of desire or time to socialize.**
- **Not finding joy in ministry**
- **Absent-mindedness. Forgetting things.**
- **Feeling irritable and tired at the end of the day.**

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Effects of Stress

Long term exposure leads to major health problems and disrupts every system in the body:

- Blood pressure
- Immune system
- Increase risk of heart attack and stroke
- Speed up aging process
- Sleep disruption
- Obesity
- Depression
- Anxiety
- **Leads to poor decisions regarding health management**

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Reality for Men Religious Leadership

- Not permitted to have a bad day
- Always have to be upbeat and positive
- Not affected by stressful situations
- Say No?...No way!
- Having all the answers
- Recognizing expectations
- Managing expectations

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How does living healthy manage stress?

- First, we need to define health...

The World Health Organization's *definition of Health:*

**Health is a state of complete physical, mental and social well-being
and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity.**

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Living Healthy in mind, body, and spirit leads to Wellness

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Ministerial toll...

- Physical health challenges affect ability to provide ministry
 - More than 76% of clergy are overweight and 40% of clergy are obese
 - Illness, disease, decreased energy, decreased mobility
 - Physical decline in health can be a warning sign for concerns with emotional well-being

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Reducing your risk

- Routine visits to the physician
 - Not “sick” visits
 - Return as the doctor directs you
- Routine visits to the dentist
- Early identification of medical issues lead to desirable outcomes
- Properly managing chronic physical health problems
- Specialists as needed
- Medication reconciliation

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Men: Stay Healthy

Get the Screenings You Need

- **Colon Cancer.** If you are 75 or younger, get a screening test for colorectal cancer. Several different tests—for example, a stool test or a colonoscopy—can detect this cancer
- **Depression.** Your emotional health is as important as your physical health. Talk to your doctor or nurse about being screened for depression
- **Diabetes.** Get screened for diabetes (high blood sugar) with a blood test if you have high blood pressure or take medication for high blood pressure.
 - *Diabetes can cause problems with your heart, brain, eyes, feet, kidneys, nerves, and other body parts*
- **High Blood Cholesterol.** Have your blood cholesterol checked regularly with a blood test. High blood cholesterol increases your chance of heart disease, stroke, and poor circulation.
- **High Blood Pressure.** Have your blood pressure checked at least every 2 years. High blood pressure can cause strokes, heart attacks, kidney and eye problems, and heart failure.
- **Lung Cancer:** Talk to your doctor or nurse about getting screened for lung cancer if you smoke now or have quit within the past 15 years
- **Overweight and Obesity.** The best way to learn if you are overweight or obese is your BMI.

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Why do we need Physical Activity?

- Sedentary lifestyles count as a major risk factor in chronic illnesses such as heart disease, diabetes and osteoporosis.
- Sitting Disease is a real disease!



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Physical Activity

- Physical Activity in any form can act as a stress reliever
- Being active can:
 - Boost your mood
 - Act as a distraction
 - Increase your resiliency to the ill effects of stress



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Physical Activity

- Pumps up your endorphins (your brain's feel-good neurotransmitters)
- "Meditation in motion" - helps you get away from the day's stresses and concentrate
- Helps you get refocused - it's like a time out for grown ups
- Enhances mood
- Increases self-confidence
- Lowers symptoms of depression and anxiety
- Improves sleep - exercise offsets stress which leads to sleep disruption



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Physical Activity Research

Columbia University identified that 2.5 to 4.5 hours per week of exercise/activity leads to prevention of mental health disorders, primarily depression and anxiety.

- You don't have to be an elite athlete to be active
- Find something you enjoy doing
- Develop a plan
- Use the buddy system or groups
- Being accountable to others helps to stay motivated
- findings support: *"the notion that regular activity may lead to prevention of mental health disorders."*

Be reasonable – Consult your doctor if you wish to exercise seriously and are just starting out

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Physical Activity

- Time Management:
 - Make time every day to be active
 - Set a goal each day and stick to it
 - Low cost (pair of shoes, pedometer)
 - Built in your smart phone!
 - Break up your activity into manageable times if needed (3- 10 min walks)
- Any form of activity works:
 - Running
 - Sports
 - Gardening
 - Walking definitely counts!



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Smoking & Alcohol

Smoking is not a stress reliever, diet alternative, or energy producing option

- It raises heart and blood pressure, reduces oxygen exchange without the positive effects of exercise

Avoid Alcohol- though it may seem to help with stress

- Long term effects compound or create new emotional and physical health issues

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Sleep Hygiene

- Sleep is your body's chance to re-fuel, as well as your mind
 - Know your needs, it varies from person to person
 - Keep a regular sleep schedule
 - When you get up, stay up
 - Avoid naps - unless taking a power nap helps your routine
 - Practice breathing/meditation techniques before bedtime
 - Exercise in the morning
 - Avoid caffeine and nicotine after dinner
 - Avoid large meals after dinner - a light snack is ok
 - Use bedroom for sleep only – read and watch TV elsewhere

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What is Self-Compassion?

• What is Compassion?

A "suffering with" another person; kindness, companionship, empathy in action

• What is Self-compassion?

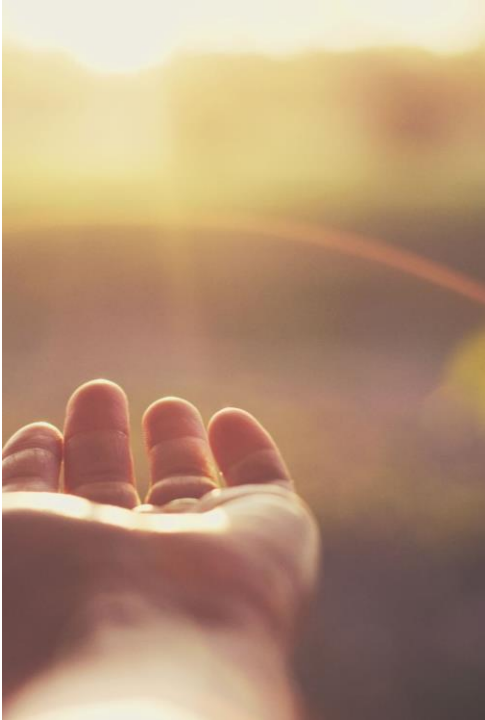
Self-compassion is practicing compassion toward oneself.

We find it easier to be compassionate toward another than to be compassionate toward ourselves.

Find Self-compassion in prayer!



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The five ***Myths*** of Self-Compassion have been identified by Dr. Kristin Neff as:

-
- **1. Self-compassion is a form of self-pity.**
 - **2. Self-compassion means weakness.**
 - **3. Self-compassion will make me complacent.**
 - **4. Self-compassion is narcissistic.**
 - **5. Self-compassion is selfish.**

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Does one or more of these myths resonate with you?

-
- There is significant research that proves these are myths and not reality.
 - In fact, it has been proven through psychological testing that Self-Compassion supports the development of resilience, strength, creativity in problem-solving and a sustained out-pouring of compassion for others.

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These are the three elements of Self-Compassion:

- **1. Self-kindness vs. Self-judgment**
- (Being gentle with oneself vs. harsh criticism or imposing perfectionism.)

- **2. Common humanity vs. Isolation**
- (There are others who are suffering similarly vs. being the only one.)

- **3. Mindfulness vs. Over-identification**
- (Tuning in to our emotional awareness vs. augmenting or ignoring the challenges.)

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Self-compassion Practice

[Considering ourselves...]

Inhale: I allow myself
Exhale: to make mistakes.

Inhale: I allow myself
Exhale: to be imperfect.

Inhale: I allow myself
Exhale: to be a learner in life.

Inhale: I forgive myself
Exhale: And for now, I am free.

[Considering others...]

Inhale: I allow you
Exhale: to make mistakes.

Inhale: I allow you
Exhale: to be imperfect.

Inhale: I allow you
Exhale: to be a learner in life.

Inhale: I forgive you
Exhale: And for now, we are free.

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Challenge yourself...

Attempt	Review	Consider	Spend	Support
Attempt to get 30 minutes of physical activity per day	Review your sleep patterns <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Look for areas of improvement 	Consider taking a stress inventory <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • List out things in your life/ministry • Naming them is the first step! 	Spend quiet time in prayer	You will be in my prayers. And know, I am here for you always.

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Resources

- Health and Wellness – videos, podcasts, print material ([Wellness Series Pamphlets](#))
 - <https://www.sjvcenter.org/resources/>
- Leadership Portal – email me for access to valuable resources!
- Call or email – **Confidential**
 - David Shellenberger
 - +1-888- 993-8885 – toll free
 - dshellenberger@sjvcenter.org

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