



University of  
**Southern  
Queensland**

**WHY DO CLERGY STAY?  
INVESTIGATING THE NATURE OF CONTEMPORARY  
CLERGY WORK AND RETENTION WITH A FOCUS  
ON MAINSTREAM AND CHURCH-SPECIFIC  
RESILIENCE TRAINING**

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## ABSTRACT

This study examines the persistent phenomenon of clergy retention within Australia, interrogating the multifaceted nature of contemporary clergy work. The research re-frames that discourse by exploring clergy resilience as a dynamic, context-dependent process and seeks to understand why frontline clergy sustain their vocational commitment. Adopting a constructivist, work-based learning paradigm, this phenomenological inquiry relies on purposive sampling and semi-structured interviews to elicit rich, contextual data. Thematic analysis bridges existing literature with the lived experiences of participating clergy. Three principal findings emerge: First, the literature's prevailing economic conceptualisation of work as employment, remuneration, and productivity does not reflect the intrinsic, relational, and purpose-driven dimensions articulated by clergy, whose well-being is integrally linked to their vocational activities. Second, while clergy often perceive their vocation as a Calling, their ongoing engagement is dependent upon the development of spiritual and professional competencies that foster resilience and enable fulfilment of this Calling. Third, operational paradigms within the Church, which traditionally distinguish vocation from employment, may inadvertently limit opportunities for competency-based training. Expanding clergy training beyond liturgical functions to encompass broader resilience-building strategies would better support long-term retention and vocational efficacy. These conclusions call for a reconsideration of prevailing frameworks regarding work, purpose, and identity, highlighting the insufficiency of remuneration-based models for understanding vocational motivation among clergy. The study advocates for integrating mainstream resilience literature and targeted professional development into clergy preparation to enhance career longevity and support. While not positioned to reverse attrition among former clergy, this research underscores the necessity of systemic change to both acknowledge past service and better equip current and future clergy for sustainable ministry.

## CERTIFICATION OF THESIS

I, John Cheyne declare the HDR thesis entitled, *Why do clergy stay? Investigating the nature of contemporary clergy work and retention with a focus on mainstream and church-specific resilience training* is not more than 100,000 words in length including quotes and exclusive of tables, figures, appendices, bibliography, references, and footnotes. The thesis contains no material that has been submitted previously, in whole or in part, for the award of any other academic degree or diploma. Except where otherwise indicated, this thesis is my own work.

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Student and supervisors' signatures of endorsement are held at the University.

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*Non nobis, Domine, non nobis, sed nomini tuo da gloriam*

To my family.

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# CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

## Why do Clergy Stay?

### Investigating the Nature of Contemporary Clergy Work and Retention, with a Focus on Mainstream and Church-Specific Resilience Training

*The researcher is a frontline pastor with extended service in both Australia and Canada. As both a practitioner and a critically reflective professional, he has found that the Doctor of Professional Studies (DPRS) with UniSQ has provided him with the opportunity to consolidate his lived professional experience and to make a scholarly contribution in support of frontline clergy to the mission of local churches and the communities they serve.*

*This empirical study provides an opportunity for the whole profession to review, analyse and act upon credible research designed to give new impetus to professional practice related to clergy longevity.*

A phenomenon persists amongst frontline clergy who continue to resign in significant numbers (Barna, 2022; Fee, 2018; Spenser et al, 2012).

Churches, charities and faith-based organisations contribute significantly to the social cohesion of our society (Barna, 2019; Brownlee et al, 2005; Cnaan & An, 2018; Cnaan & Curtis, 2013; Daly, 2016; Kennedy, 2018).

Churches rely upon their strategic leaders to manage and advance the mission of their organisation. These frontline community-based leaders in a Christian context are commonly called clergy. The terms clergy and pastor are often used interchangeably. The work of the clergy is also known as ministry. Clergy consider a ministry vocation to be a life calling. Connecting the work of the clergy as a calling with a tangible, pro-socially orientated purpose rather than a career is relevant to the nature of their work and wellbeing (van der Laan et al., 2023).

The debate around the admission of women to the ministry has focused a number of issues. Findings present no significant differences between clergymen and clergywomen with regard to function and orientation (Robbins, 2015).

Vocation is understood to be a strong conviction to engage in a worthy profession in the service of others. Frontline community-based vocational leaders require a particular dedication to their chosen profession. Other caring professions will recognise this response to a given profession to be a vocation (Blustein, 2010, 2013a; Blustein, 2013b).

### **1.1. The local church has a vital role**

The social and spiritual value of local churches has long been understood, but local faith communities are also economic contributors to the social capital and common good of all (Daly, 2016). They are integral to the social fabric of our communities (Cnaan & An, 2018; Cnaan & Curtis, 2013).

In the non-profit and voluntary sector, virtually all churches and religious organisations are registered charities. Much comes from little as local churches support the social order and provide products and vital services for the welfare of the whole community (Cnaan & An, 2018). Our communities are diminished when a local church declines, and are enriched when a healthy local church thrives (Brownlee et al., 2005; Daly, 2016).

Consequently, the clergy are more than casual employees. They are to be mentors and problem solvers – to direct, supervise, improvise, adapt, inspire, equip, comfort and counsel – while keeping the church safe, legal, relevant and financially sound. To develop such leadership brings with it the need to provide adequate training and the related support to sustain their role both now and for the future (Burton & Burton, 2009; Hendron et al., 2012a).

An anticipated benefit with this study is its positive contribution to the welfare of the whole community made by healthy local churches (Cnaan & An, 2018; Cnaan & Curtis, 2013; Daly, 2016; Kennedy, 2018; Slauenwhite, 2018; Stiller & Metzger, 2010).

## **1.2. Frontline clergy**

However, the phenomenon persists amongst frontline clergy who continue to resign in significant numbers (Barna, 2022; Fee, 2018; Spenser et al., 2012), provoking a concern for their individual welfare and posing a significant loss of human capital for their organisations (Hendron et al., 2012a).

In addition, there are the broader implications as they relate to the vitality of the communities they serve (Gray, 2012) and the substantial social and economic value beyond their immediate religious functions. This impact includes direct spending, support for local business and community programmes. Offering spaces for gatherings and contributing to a sense of place and belonging. Where churches act as community hubs, fostering social connection and providing services like childcare and education (Cnaan & An, 2018; Daly, 2016; Kennedy, 2018).

Despite this recognition, research has not focused on what might moderate the potential trauma experienced by the clergy, nor has it explored why one may resign while another continues to survive, even thrive, in ministry (Schaufeli & Salanova, 2011; Spenser et al., 2012).

A core assumption underpinning this study is that actionable insight into what causes clergy to stay their course while others resign their vocation is missing from current literature.

This study seeks to contribute insights towards a workable, real-world strategy that may enable clergy to thrive in ministry, and assist communities to facilitate resilient local church leadership more effectively (Guba & Lincoln, 1994; Heelas, 2017; Schon, 1995).

As such, the study is problem-centred – acknowledging that valid findings related to the clergy seek to relieve the negative effects of their resignation.

### **1.3. Background**

In any era, it is an unsettling and anxious time for a church when their pastor resigns abruptly. Suddenly and seemingly out of nowhere, the congregation are left without their shepherd. The pastor in whom they had placed their trust and loyalty has gone. The church and the community can feel abandoned or even betrayed. The staff can get caught in a whirlwind of outside interference without any time to grieve. The pastor's family face an uncertain future. The organisation loses mental capital, and the pastor loses their professional identity, reputation, income and support (Gray, 2012; Hendron et al., 2012a; Hoge & Wenger, 2005; Lane, 2004).

The challenges facing the clergy has been investigated as an issue for some time (Hoge & Wenger, 2005; Krejcir, 2007, 2016; Lane, 2004; Reimer, 2010; Taylor, 1997). The role of the clergy can be a hazardous journey. Stress, burnout and emotional exhaustion are recurring issues that are increasingly reported by clerics (Hendron et al., 2012a).

Nonetheless, the resignation of clergy remains a global challenge (Barna, 2022; Krejcir, 2007, 2016). The Schaeffer Institute of Church Development offers us some startling statistics (Krejcir, 2007). They tell us that the majority of clergy feel overworked, underpaid, unprepared and overwhelmed, and struggle with depression and discouragement. They report that 50% of clergy will not last five years, 60-80% will be gone from church leadership in 10 years and only 1 in 10 will retire as a church leader. Even so, many clergy do survive, even thrive, in their vocation (Barna, 2017, 2022; Bledsoe & Setterlund, 2015; Dockins, 2015; Fee, 2018; Krejcir, 2007, 2016).

The prevailing literature asks the clergy to what extent and under what circumstances they are leaving their vocation (Dockins, 2015; Fee, 2018) and what churches must do to retain them (Dockins, 2015; Joynt & Dreyer, 2013; Spenser et al., 2012).

However, measuring clergy perception of their own competencies is itself fraught with ambiguity (Nesbit, 2012). Not all clergy have the same combination of behaviours, skills or competencies to function objectively in their chosen liturgy or have the same capacity to measure their own limitations in doing so. Rather, the

plethora of literature would suggest that any future studies concerning clergy resignation should remain cautious about assuming that what is already known is absolute (Camillus, 2008; Grint, 2010; Jarry, 2020; Lester & Costley, 2010; Peters, 2017).

Such previous studies focused upon clergy wellbeing, expectations, the work environment, engagement, stress levels, conflict and the like – all of which are synonymous across the caring professions (Hakanen et al., 2006; McDonald et al., 2016; Perez et al., 2015; Reimer, 2010), suggesting further research of clergy resilience, vision conflict and compassion fatigue (Jackson-Jordan, 2013; Noullet et al., 2018; Spenser et al., 2012). However, the problem persists and may be a consequence of the unique occupational challenges associated with the work of the clergy (Price, 2001).

Whatever the suggested cause, despite abundant studies spawning a myriad of consultancy reports, little has changed in our approach. The phenomenon persists, and the resignation of clergy remains a global challenge (Barna, 2022; Krejcir, 2007, 2016), and clergy remain the most susceptible to burnout (Fee, 2018). The problem is evidently not being resolved by conventional leadership thinking or denominational training (Fee, 2018).

#### **1.4. Context of the problem**

The opportunities, contradictions, expectations, challenges, mass media, call-out culture, social chaos and clashing ideologies of our contemporary world are taking its toll on the clergy (Barna, 2022; Grint, 2010).

As at March 2022, Barna reported a sharp rise in clergy burnout, with 42% of all fulltime senior clergy having considered resigning their vocation in the previous year (2021-2022). They cited the immense stress of the job, loneliness and political division (*in their churches*) as reasons why they considered stepping down for good (Barna, 2022).

In contrast, Barna (2022) also quotes the reasons why clergy do not leave full-time ministry despite their facing the same stressors as those clergy who are leaving the

profession. Their reasons to continue include a belief in the value of their ministry, feeling a duty to stay and fulfil their ministry, being satisfied in their work, and being well supported by their family and community (Barna, 2022).

These reasons given for why clergy are retained in the church highlight the shared relevance of the psychology of working (Blustein, 2013a) and the centrality of strong and supportive relationships in the lives of those in caring professions (Barna, 2017, 2022; Blustein, 2010).

These results would suggest that most clergy are confronting the same pressures and stressors, but perhaps not having access to the same equipping and support network to enable the resilience required to lead their church in a rapidly changing world (Barna, 2017; Packiam, 2022).

As such, while it can be concluded that many clergy are in crisis precipitating resignation, others facing similar challenges are continuing in their ministry (Barna, 2019, 2022; Packiam, 2022).

Indeed, McKenna (2020) makes the case that, instead of focusing on the negative experiences of those who are struggling to cope or are experiencing burnout, resilience researchers should shift their focus to the positive experiences of those who succeed and so highlight possible ways forward (McKenna, 2020) and constitutes the focus of the study thereby addressing the gap in the literature and responding to suggestions for future research as noted by the author.

#### **1.4.1. *Unprecedented complexity in the mission landscape***

What is more, the clergy are witnessing dramatic change in the religious landscape.

Leading a local church is more complex than ever. The societal changes and expectations are unpredictable and affect churches of all sizes. Staffing norms have changed, and advancement in an organisation is to establish new churches.

Technology has upped the ante. Trends and styles of worship are shifting, and traditional patterns of church attendance have changed (Fletcher, 2019).

“The world’s newest religion is not “no religion.” This phrase is a play on words that explores the changing landscape of belief and spirituality in modern society. In recent years a growing number of people around the world identify as having no designated religion. These people are often called the “nones” meaning they don’t affiliate with organised religion. This group is now so large that in some countries “no religion” is sometimes described as the fastest growing religion.

However, a lack of any declared religious affiliation does not necessarily mean an absence of individual beliefs or spirituality. Religion is not required to lead a moral or purposeful life. Nevertheless, the world is far from godless. Many are spiritual, just not religious (*SBNR – Spiritual But Not Religious*) (Sherwood, 2016; Viola, 2014).

The researcher represents the position of missional community churches who define themselves as having a commitment to justice, mercy and forgiveness over bitterness, resentment and evil. But, even if these churches are on the right track, they can still get run over if they do not remain relevant and contributing to the communities they serve around them (Schwarz, 2016; Sherwood, 2016).

The common factor for all is the one multi-ethnic, multicultural planet we inhabit. Men and women of goodwill from every creed, colour and ethnicity continue to serve the cause of peace and the needs of all humankind. The critical difference is seen only in what we each contribute to that change process (Kennedy, 2018; Rainer, 2005).

Consequently, the wider community needs the benefit of healthy, effective local churches that are willing to contribute their share to serving the global communities of which we are all a part (Kennedy, 2018; Rainer, 2005). Resilient, stable clergy, especially in times of social need, are an essential resource for local churches to contribute their part to embrace their local mission fully (Abernethy et al., 2016; Packiam, 2022).

#### **1.4.2.      *The contribution of churches to society – the halo effect***

Central to a healthy, civil society are the connections that individuals encounter in the numerous societies in which they live: families, schools, workplaces, faith communities, sports teams, music groups, associations, social clubs, online

communities and charitable ventures (Kennedy, 2018). In particular, this includes the cultural, spiritual and social contribution made by church communities to our collective common lives by faith groups (Cnaan & An, 2018), and the significant role of the clergy to enable that mission (Packiam, 2022).

However, this recognition is more often limited to an anecdotal conceptual qualitative appreciation. Few studies have considered the economic halo effect that congregations provide to their urban communities (Cnaan & An, 2018).

For example, Kenney (2018) says that the real value of the meals served to the poor is the social connection, the personal touch, the bond of solidarity that comes with that meal (Kennedy, 2018), acknowledging that we need more than human government to flourish truly as human beings together. He argues persuasively that urban planning needs to take account of the institutions of human society to include the simplicity of a mission of love made by faith groups (Kennedy, 2018).

Yet, faith congregations are central to most American communities (Cnaan & An, 2018). Cnaan and Curtis (2013) showed that local religious congregations are the most ubiquitous of all local institutions. There are more local religious congregations than any other social organisation, including bars, supermarkets, petrol stations and even McDonalds (Cnaan & Curtis, 2013). However, the economic value that individual religious congregations contribute directly to their urban communities has never been fully assessed (Cnaan & An, 2018).

Based on their empirical data from a random sampling of 90 congregations across three different regional US cities, Cnaan and An (2018) provided the first large-scale multi-city study of the fiscal valuation of urban religious congregations to the communities that surround them beyond the spiritual contribution and direct spending: employment, charity, volunteerism, community care, social programmes and support services such as AA meetings, welfare support, especially to low income and the needy, mediation and advocacy, cultural hubs, friendships, personal and family counselling, and more (Cnaan & An, 2018; Cnaan & Curtis, 2013).

The annual monetary value to their respective urban ecologies per congregation was estimated to be between \$1.2 and \$2.5 million USD (Cnaan & An, 2018).

In similar fashion in Canada, the social, spiritual and communal value of church congregations has long been accepted (Daly, 2016; Kennedy, 2018). However, the economic value of local church congregations to their localities is less well understood. Using a quantitative approach, 10 local church congregations in Toronto were assessed for their influence on local economies in several areas, including open space, direct spending, community development, helping people gain employment, social development and social care programmes, as well as promoting youth, suicide prevention, supporting immigrant families and in-kind support (Daly, 2016).

A cumulative estimated annual economic impact of \$45 million CAD on Toronto was revealed (Daly, 2016).

These studies show that local church congregations can be viewed as critical economic engines that not only support local economies, but also contribute to the social vitality of their respective communities and the common good of all (Cnaan & An, 2018; Daly, 2016).

To acknowledge the halo impact of local religious congregations and identify their previously hidden economic contribution is to enable the capacity of city planners and elected officials to recognise their economic value, strengthen investment, reduce duplication of services and integrate creative partnerships to serve the needs of all city residents better (Daly, 2016).

### **1.5. Terminological use**

As this thesis includes an investigation of contemporary clergy work, the researcher uses the term 'work' in two forms: capitalised as 'Work' and in lower case as 'work.'

- The capitalised form, 'Work' used in this thesis refers broadly to a mainstream definition of Work.
- The lower case, 'work' used in this thesis refers to the specific nature of contemporary clergy work also known as ministry.

In this thesis, the researcher uses the term 'church' in two forms: capitalised as 'Church' and in lowercase as 'church.'

- The capitalised form, 'Church' used in this thesis refers broadly to the global organisational structures of beliefs, practices, shared heritage, and theological traditions found across major Christian denominations that also provide a framework for oversight and training of clergy.
- The lower case, 'church' used in this thesis refers to local Christian congregations who engage in various forms of service both within their church community and in the wider world. These local churches typically have leadership structures which include frontline clergy and are part of larger denominations.

In this thesis, the term "wicked" specifically denotes a conceptual term used to describe the complexity surrounding certain problems, distinguishing it from the common usage of wicked to mean evil.

## 1.6. What is a "wicked" problem?

What is a "wicked problem" and how might it help to frame an approach to this study?

Design theorists Horst Rittel & Melvin Webber introduced the term, "wicked problem" in the 1970s to capture the complexities and challenges of addressing planning and social policy problems (Rittel & Webber, 1973).

This design language would later expand to include "tame" and "critical" problems, as well as "elegant" and "clumsy" solutions (Grint, 2010).

- **Tame problems** are known problems with known solutions.
- **Critical problems** require immediate action and command decisions to resolve.
- **Clumsy solutions** are harnessing all available resources hopefully to help resolve an otherwise intractable problem.

- **Elegant solutions** are found when known resources are available and the problem is easily solved.

Unlike the benign “tame” problems of mathematics and chess, “wicked problems” are complex and subject to real-world constraints in both goals and solutions, and requiring holistic and collaborative reasoning in search of long-term, future-focused solutions (Rittel & Webber, 1973).

Not all problems are “wicked.” “Wicked-ness” is not a degree of difficulty. “Wicked problems” are difficult because they have multiple causes, are difficult even to describe and defy traditional processes to solve them (Rittel & Webber, 1973).

“Wicked problems” hold a multitude of other problems within them. Sometimes these need to be accepted or adapted rather than overcome. These problems need leadership that involves everyone, and an approach that looks into everything and at every possibility.

A “wicked problem” does not have a single right answer. In fact, it is the social complexity of “wicked problems” as much as their technical difficulties that makes them difficult to manage (Camillus, 2008). Examples of “wicked problems” include climate change, education, public health and clergy resignation. Consequently, “wicked problems” cannot be solved, but they can be tamed (Camillus, 2008).

Taming a “wicked problem” involves exploring all available opinions and perspectives that boost collective wisdom, counteract groupthink and cognitive bias, and expand the potential for creativity and buy-in for stakeholders to get onboard (Camillus, 2008).

By adopting a “wicked” approach to this study, the researcher engages in a wider enquiry of related traditional and mainstream research and explore new strategies to help tame the otherwise intractable problem of clergy resignation in order to inform future development and provide new impetus to professional practice.

### **1.6.1.     *Resignation of clergy as a “wicked problem”***

The phenomenon of clergy resignation has defied resolution. Like mercury on a desk, one can clearly see the problem but cannot easily pick it up. The resignation of clergy is complex, fomenting multiple cause and effect relationships that are inherently difficult to define (Barna, 2022; Fee, 2018; Hoge & Wenger, 2005; Joynt & Dreyer, 2013; Spenser et al., 2012; Tanner et al., 2013).

We know that the work of the clergy is changing – and that rate of change is projected only to increase (Grint, 2010; Hamel, 2008). To engage these circumstances precipitating clergy resignation, we need an increased awareness of this complexity surrounding the work of the clergy and local church ministry (Peters, 2017).

In local church ministry, it is impossible for clergy to avoid the real-life adversity precipitating human crisis. Their task is to meet the psychosocial challenge of their unique work environment in order to flourish within the community in which they are placed (Noullet et al., 2018).

Clergy are an essential resource in the effort to rebuild lives and communities in the wake of trauma and disaster (Everly, 2007). Yet those who take the lead and those they serve face the same accelerated social, emotional, spiritual and economic upheaval that currently typifies the complexity of our modern world (Noullet et al., 2018).

Whatever strategies were proffered in support of the clergy in the past have evidently failed us in this modern era. In this, the Church can no longer simply expect the clergy by force of character in some triumphal march through time to “just go out there and do it” without regard for the complexity and casualties of their work (Fee, 2018).

It is rare for a problem to have a single cause (Peters, 2017). While the world loves a simple answer, the researcher is not looking for a simple fix because there evidently is not one to be found (Camillus, 2008; Grint, 2010; Illeris, 2008; Peters, 2017; Spenser et al., 2012).

Not all problems are “wicked.” “Wicked problems” are not defined by their degree of difficulty, but are problems fraught with multiple causes that defy traditional processes to resolve, but they can be tamed (Camillus, 2008; Grint, 2010; Peters, 2017).

Taming the problem of clergy resignation is not just relabelling (Camillus, 2008). We first need to admit that there is a complex problem and adopt an accepted need to change our approach: to ask better questions, and to consider if we are adequately preparing the clergy for the changing environment, the changing community and the changing world in which they serve (Grint, 2010).

“Wicked problems” are complex and tangled, have multiple causes, have clashing values and priorities, are difficult to define and describe, have no simple answer and continue to evolve with every further attempt to address them (Camillus, 2008).

Consequently, the intent of the researcher is to engage in a wider enquiry to suggest an innovative, “wicked” approach to help tame clergy resignation, rather than attempting another reworking of known processes to solve what has already proven to be an otherwise intractable problem (Grint, 2010).

## **1.7. Purpose and scope**

A phenomenon persists amongst frontline clergy who continue to resign in significant numbers (Barna, 2022; Fee, 2018; Spenser et al., 2012).

This academic study provides the opportunity for the whole profession to review, analyse and act upon credible research that can give new impetus to professional practice related to clergy longevity.

Numerous previous studies have identified several causes precipitating clergy resignation, including compassion fatigue (Jakel et al., 2016; Kapoulitsas & Corcoran, 2015; Noullet et al., 2018; Potter et al., 2015; Spenser et al., 2012), stress (Beavis, 2015; Clarke et al., 2022b; Hendron et al., 2012a; Lewis et al., 2007), and burn-out (Barna, 2022; Beavis, 2015; Elkington, 2013; Fee, 2018; Jackson-Jordan, 2013).

Some later studies suggested reasons why other clergy facing the same stressors did not leave the ministry, including resilience, mentorship, relational support, spiritual direction and organisational practices (Barna, 2022; Bledsoe & Setterlund, 2015; Clarke et al., 2022b; Noullet et al., 2018).

Still other studies suggest that clergy resignation may, in part, be due to the unique constellation of occupational challenges associated with the profession (Price, 2001), and how Christian beliefs about suffering, self-sacrifice and purpose may inadvertently glorify hardship and challenge a resilient response to adversity and work-related stress (Allain-Chapman, 2012; Clarke et al., 2022b; Titus, 2011).

Collectively, these studies demonstrate an acute awareness of the phenomenon, but there is an apathy accompanying that awareness owing to the complexity of the phenomenon and the system that contains it. Indeed, there appears to have been a focus on an adaptation to the problem rather than a sustained resolve to address it (Price, 2001; Schoenherr & Young, 1990).

The problem is evidently not being resolved by conventional leadership thinking or denominational training.

A core assumption of this study is that actionable insight into what causes clergy to stay their course while others resign their vocation is missing from current literature.

The purpose of this study is to develop a qualitative narrative in order to help church groups understand their seemingly apathetic response to clergy resignation and to trigger meaningful action in response to what has proved to be an otherwise intractable problem.

There are many examples that describe the phenomenon as “wicked” and there is enough practice to link it to frontline clergy. A “wicked” approach recognises the complexities and challenges of addressing a real-world problem subject to the system that contains it. While it is impossible ever to solve this problem in a way that is simple and final, it can be tamed (Camillus, 2008; Grint, 2010; Rittel & Webber, 1973).

The scope of this study relates to engaging in a wider enquiry in order to gain awareness of the complexity surrounding the work of the clergy, and to develop a

narrative account enabling a deeper understanding of the phenomenon of clergy resignation in an Australian context.

Anticipated benefits of this study include assisting churches to facilitate more resilient local church leadership, and recognition of the positive contribution made by healthy local churches to the welfare of their wider community and our society as a whole.

## **CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **Why do Clergy Stay?**

#### **Investigating the Nature of Contemporary Clergy Work and Retention, with a Focus on Mainstream and Church-Specific Resilience Training**

A core assumption of this study is that actionable insight into what causes clergy to stay their course while others resign their vocation is missing from current literature.

Chapter 1 highlighted the vital role of local churches and clergy in Australian society not only as spiritual leaders but contributors to social cohesion, economic value and community wellbeing and identified the purpose and scope of this study to explore the nature of contemporary clergy work and the potential for integrating mainstream training that supports clergy longevity and wellbeing. Ultimately benefiting the wider community. And how this thesis frames clergy resignation as a “wicked problem.” A term from design and social policy that describes issues which are complex, multifaceted, and resistant to straightforward solutions.”

This Chapter 2 scoping literature review is undertaken to explore the range of related literature feeding into the work of the clergy, paralleling the changes and developments within the sector. The study aims to shape our present understanding and allow for the examination of a broad area of related research that can potentially inform future development and practice (Lee et al., 2010; Munn et al., 2018; Peters et al., 2015).

#### **2.1. Prior studies - the life of the clergy**

Colleges are training clergy for effective, contributing ministry in the modern world. We get some thoughts from the research that the world is rapidly changing and to survive, the clergy need to be prepared to adapt, improvise, and serve within the complexity of the community into which they are placed (Barna, 2019).

The profession of the clergy as a whole is very broad, representing conflicting doctrine, prescriptive institutional knowledge, dissimilar liturgies, shifting strategic initiatives, different organisational structures, and diverse communities of practice (Bruce, 2017; Dougherty et al., 2015; Schwarz, 2016; Stiller & Paddy, 2015). However, the resignation of trained clergy remains a universal problem across the profession (Hendron et al., 2012a; Hoge & Wenger, 2005; Robbins, 2015; Tanner et al., 2013).

## **2.2. Clergy – an essential community resource**

Clergy are witnessing a dramatic change in the religious landscape. The world's newest religion is not no religion. A lack of any declared religious affiliation does not necessarily mean an absence of individual beliefs or spirituality. Religion is not required to lead a moral or purposeful life. Nevertheless, the world is far from godless. Many are spiritual just not religious (*SBNR – Spiritual But Not Religious*) (Sherwood, 2016; Viola, 2014).

People of goodwill from every creed, colour and race continue to serve the cause of peace, justice, mercy, and forgiveness. The essential difference is only seen in what we each contribute to that change process (Kennedy, 2018; Rainer, 2005).

Consequently, the wider community needs the benefit from healthy, effective local churches that are willing to contribute their share to serve the global communities of which we are all a part (Kennedy, 2018; Rainer, 2005). Resilient, stable clergy - especially in times of social need and individual crisis - are an essential resource for local churches to contribute effectively to the wider communities around them (Abernethy et al., 2016; Packiam, 2022; Schwarz, 2016).

## **2.3. Factors associated with clergy resignations**

The resignation of clergy remains a global challenge (Barna, 2022; Krejcir, 2007, 2016), with its attendant loss of human capital for their organisations and the community as a whole (Cnaan & An, 2018; Daly, 2016; Fee, 2018; Gray, 2012;

Hendron et al., 2012a; Kennedy, 2018). Despite this reality, little has changed in our approach (Fee, 2018).

Common reasons proffered for clergy resignation include conflict with their congregation or with denominational leadership (Hoge & Wenger, 2005), in addition to dissatisfaction and burnout (Reimer, 2010). Others may simply have chosen the vocation of clergy life and unwittingly embarked on a hazardous journey of poor work-related psychological health (Hendron et al., 2012a). Still others, their reason for resignation is a crisis of conscience – concluding that the present form of their pastoral role is one they never intended to fill (Viola, 2014).

The stresses which extract their physical, emotional and spiritual toll emerge from diverse sources including being ‘on call’ seven days a week, unrealistic expectations, isolation, frequent moving, learning new roles and skills, feelings of failure, and dealing with the pain of others (Burton & Burton, 2009).

#### **2.4. Stress, burnout and church dysfunction**

Since Francis A. Schaeffer Institute of Church Leadership Development carried out first studies of pastors (clergy) in the late 1980s, it has continued to update their research (Krejcir, 2007) and conducted several major studies in 2015-16 involving 8,150 participants using randomly selected clergy from 21 U.S states and 20 countries. Their 2016 update reports seeing a significant shift in how clergy view their calling and how churches see them (Krejcir, 2016).

There remain many challenges, issues, and setbacks while work hours are still long and the pay below a living wage. Nevertheless, clergy are comparatively happier with their congregations and their marriages looking stronger. Churches for the most part treat their pastors better than previous studies (Krejcir, 2007, 2016).

The data collected pointed to motivations of stress, burnout, and church dysfunction. Some of these include misguided notions from laity and church leadership, due to a lack of awareness of what the work and duties of the clergy entail. Clergy in turn are overworking themselves to appease congregational expectations while facing volunteer apathy, criticism, and a fear of change (Krejcir, 2007, 2016).

## **2.5. Vision conflict and compassion fatigue**

Clergy resignation can appear to be sudden and seemingly out of nowhere (Gray, 2012).

In an attempt to predict the likelihood of resignation for local church clergy, a study was conducted by Spenser et al. (2012), using a Likert scale of 42 items developed from 20 years of qualitative practitioner experience working amongst the clergy. This survey of 285 evangelical clergy identified two areas of concern for clergy to sustain a sense of positive ministry; vision conflict and compassion fatigue (Spenser et al., 2012). Yet extant literature does not proffer these as precipitating factors in clergy resignation or continuance. Spenser et al. (2012) suggested both these areas of vision conflict and compassion fatigue to provide an opportunity for prevention and remediation, and informs the premise of this study.

## **2.6. Unique occupational challenges**

Price (2001) asks the question as to whether clergy are any more troubled than their fellow professionals, and in reply reports that while every profession share some of the stresses that beset the clergy, for each stress that clergy share with a particular profession that profession has compensating aspects which clergy do not share (Price, 2001).

For example, long and sometimes unsocial hours that conflict with family life are shared by doctors and those who work in the financial sector, but median levels of compensation for these occupations are far above that of the clergy (Price, 2001).

Like clergy, teachers and social workers may feel relatively underpaid in comparison to other professions, but both these professions tend to have more flexible hours and their contact between themselves and those they serve is more clearly defined (Price, 2001).

For clergy, the boundaries between their personal lives and work lives are limited, and they have an accountability for their personal lives to those they serve that is

unequaled by any other profession. While other professionals work on a freelance basis, they have a far higher level of autonomy in terms of their work lives and do not have the authority structures of bishops or vestries to whom they must answer (Price, 2001).

## **2.7. Role complexity**

What is more, clergy roles have fallen in status and become increasingly complex in modern society. Role complexity for the clergy is associated with a great deal of ambiguity and confusion, highlighting the two sides of congregational organisations – the spiritual and administrative. Clergy roles now entail a great deal more than preaching (Ershova & Hermelink, 2013). Requiring different professional competencies (Clarke et al., 2022a; Clarke et al., 2022b).

Consequently, the clergy are increasingly judged on their administrative proficiency, their technical abilities, and their appearance of spirituality. All the while they are expected to be attuned to the culture and values of both the church and local community while remaining faithful to ecclesiastical tradition (Clarke et al., 2022a).

These stressors combined with limited resources, manifold roles and responsibilities, high expectations, low appreciation, modest salaries, social isolation and their being seen to be the cause of the problem not the solution has placed the clergy at considerable risk of burnout (Abernethy et al., 2016; Clarke et al., 2022a).

## **2.8. Stress, burnout and secondary trauma**

Hendron et al. (2012) recognise that the vocation of the clergy can be a hazardous journey. Stress and burnout are issues increasingly reported by clerics, with emotional exhaustion recognised as a core component. Despite this recognition, research has not focused on factors precipitating this state of emotional exhaustion or aligned clergy and trauma work, nor examined the emotional and physical toll upon clergy from this aspect of their work (Hendron et al., 2012a).

Hendron et al. (2012) concludes that clergy are being exposed to traumatic events similar to other professions that have been identified as being affected by secondary traumatisation. In light of this argument, it appears that there is an ethical and moral obligation to investigate the extent to which clergy are experiencing the vicarious trauma of being exposed to the traumatic material of others (Hendron et al., 2012a).

## **2.9. Mental health and job satisfaction**

Burnout factors inherent to the role of clergy are significant. These involve the pressure arising from the sacred nature of their vocation and may entail an unreasonable sense of calling, an expectation of personal and professional perfection, the expectation to be skilled in biblical and theological knowledge, the expectation that they personally exemplify transformative spiritually, and a perceived responsibility to save the world (Grudem, 2016; Proeschold-Bell et al., 2015).

While an understanding of burnout risk factors is central, the absence of stress alone does not equate to clergy wellness (Malcolm et al., 2022). It is necessary to understand the factors associated with clergy mental health (Proeschold-Bell et al., 2015) that bring satisfaction in vocational ministry as these are separate dimensions – often described as life-giving, satisfying, meaningful and fulfilling (Clarke et al., 2022a; Malcolm et al., 2022).

Core stressors that are considered by clergy to be aspects of ministry life are experienced as unsatisfying, meaningless, discouraging, life-eroding or frustrating (Clarke et al., 2022a; Malcolm et al., 2022).

Reimer (2010) looked at pastoral stress, job satisfaction, and whether the pastor works in their areas of strength or weakness. Differentiating between stress and burnout. Burnout, which is marked by emotional exhaustion – fatigue caused by extensive interaction with others. Stress refers to the environmental factors perceived as straining or exceeding the adaptive capacities of an individual and threatening their wellbeing (Reimer, 2010).

However, in spite of reporting moderate to high levels of work-related stress, clergy rated their job satisfaction fairly high. Here Reimer (2010) identified the possibility

that the most important predictor of job satisfaction is the pastor's opinion of his/her own congregation. The more critical of their churches – and maybe they are justified to be so – the less their job satisfaction (Reimer, 2010).

Also making the possible connection between age and job satisfaction. Offering that the dysfunction of the congregation might be the problem and not the pastor, and the older pastor of the same congregation may simply be more experienced and less idealistic. Or perhaps, the healthiest churches already have pastors in place and the younger pastors get whatever is available (Reimer, 2010).

## **2.10. A move to specialised ministry**

In order to gather meaningful information on the state of pastoral leadership at the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century and why pastors leave local church ministry, Hoge & Wenger (2005) conducted research across several denominations on changes that have occurred since the 60s and 70s in church life, seminaries, and candidates. (Hoge & Wenger, 2005).

Hoge & Wenger's (2005) findings provide an informative perspective for those responsible for the provision of pastoral leadership for the local church, and on how policies can be updated to retain the clergy it already has, who are leaving in increasing numbers.

Polity and collegiality matter. Clergy feel lonely or isolated and unsupported. Conflict looms large – organisational and interpersonal rather than doctrinal. Also, burnout, discouragement, and divorce or marital problems (Hoge & Wenger, 2005).

However, Hoge & Wenger (2005) effective use of clergy exit interviews in their study ousts much of what passes for conventional wisdom. Discovering that the most common reason for clergy voluntarily leaving local church ministry is their move into specialised ministry. And that conflict with one's congregation or with denominational leadership represent the second and third most common reasons for clergy leaving local church ministry (Hoge & Wenger, 2005).

While Hoge & Wenger (2005) are quick to point out that motivations are frequently complex, with no single reason driving local clergy from local church ministry, their conclusion is that many pastors exit local church ministry for preventable reasons and that denominations can learn a good deal from those who have already left (Hoge & Wenger, 2005).

For the majority of clergy leaving the ministry voluntarily, their preference is to move into a specialised ministry separate from local church work. This might suggest that one simple way to predict clergy dissatisfaction, and possibly future pastoral burnout is simply to ask clergy about their perceptions of the vitality and effective functioning of the congregation they presently serve (Reimer, 2010).

## **2.11. Not equipped for the task**

Joynt & Dreyer (2013) ask why do the clergy abandon their congregations, and the church for that matter despite the huge investment made in their training?

Interesting from their research is that while the cost of ministry can be high – particularly for clergy marriages and families – and a lack of finances and unclear job descriptions add pressure to clergy – their study found these are not the reasons for clergy to leave the ministry.

Amongst the reasons drawn from their research are secularisation, pace of life, duality of vocation, conflict with leadership, and a frustration with ecclesiastical structures and policies (Joynt & Dreyer, 2013):

- **Secularisation** is changing the identity of the clergy from a traditional pastoral role to the gaining of results.
- The increase in **the pace of life**, with many new activities being added to the role of clergy, changes the order of importance being afforded to traditional ministerial responsibilities.

- **Duality of vocation**, in which clergy act as both specialists performing specific ministry functions, and generalists meeting members' needs as they arise.
- **Conflict with leadership** when clergy are left feeling they have no control over their own lives, no control in fulfilling their own calling or even influence in a particular situation.
- A **frustration with ecclesiastical structures and policies** that is perceived negatively by respondents as a 'game with rules' and a system that 'hammers people'.

They conclude **there is need to better equip the next generation of clergy for the task** (Joynt & Dreyer, 2013).

## **2.12. Forced resignation**

Tanner et al. (2013) point to the forced resignation (termination) of clergy as demeaning and psychologically distressing. Clergy who experience a forced termination are subjected to mobbing (psychological harassment) and other activities meant to publicly or privately demean a minister in such a way that they resign their ministry position (Tanner et al., 2013).

The chronic stress of working with demanding people takes its toll on clergy and may result in ministry burnout. ("Clergy Who Experience Trauma as a Result of Forced Termination - Springer"). Additionally, clergy who do not meet the arbitrary demands of a local church may face forced termination which has long-term implications for family wellbeing and physical health. Clergy who have been forcibly terminated in such a way scored above the known cut-off score for post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and scored high on measures of burnout and generalised anxiety disorder (GAD), raising concern for the long-term mental health of clergy who have been forcibly terminated (Tanner et al., 2013).

### **2.13. Employee turnover**

Employee turnover is a term widely used in business circles. Studies on this topic more often focus on the causes of employee turnover. Examining the source of employee turnover, effects, and informing organisational strategies that can be used by managers in various organisations to ensure employee continuity to enhance organisational competitiveness (Ongori, 2007).

Employee turnover is expensive from an organisational perspective. Research indicates that hiring and training a replacement worker for a lost employee costs approximately 50% of the worker's annual salary. And, each time an employee leaves the organisation, productivity drops due to the learning curve involved in understanding the job and the organisation (Ongori, 2007).

Ongori (2007) concludes that to survive in a dynamic work environment, organisations need to treat their employees as one of their assets needing a lot of attention. Employees are the backbone of any business success and need to be motivated and maintained in an organisation. Management should encourage task autonomy, task significance, task identity, and empowerment of employees. Recruitment and selection must be done with the objective of retaining employees, and adequately compensating employees based on their performance (Ongori, 2007).

### **2.14. Denominational response**

The prevailing denominational literature is focused on the prevention and retention of clergy (Spenser et al., 2012). Consequently, the common denominational response when clergy resign is more often directed towards supporting the church, not the exiting clergy (Gray, 2012; Hendron et al., 2012a).

Recommendations offered by denominational leadership for what local churches can do in support of their present clergy are to have realistic expectations of clergy and their families, afford paid vacation and time away, give spiritual support, make counselling available, provide a clergy support group, and pay their pastor adequately (Dockins, 2015).

In the broad context of Christian denominations and organisations, Weaver et al. (2002) report there are 353,000 Christian and Jewish clergy serving congregations in the United States (4,000 Jewish rabbis; 49,000 Catholic clergy; and 300,000 Protestant clergy (Weaver et al., 2002).

Amongst these groups, Protestant clergy had the highest overall work-related stress and were amongst the lowest in personal resources to cope with the occupational strain. In contrast to the Protestant clergy and Rabbis, the Roman Catholic clergy reported having less vocational strain and a stronger supportive community (Weaver et al., 2002).

Schoenherr & Young (1990) report comparative studies conducted among Catholic and three comparable Protestant denominations. The findings show that as the Roman Catholic church continues to grow in membership its internal political economy suffers through the sustained loss of clergy manpower. Resignations from the Catholic clergy presents as a major concern (Schoenherr & Young, 1990).

In the Catholic church, clergy resignations are understood against the backdrop of ordinations because of the close relationship between recruitment and retention – as high rates of resignation negate gains to fill vacancies created by resignations. Unique within this construct is the impact of modern values on younger priests who prefer marriage over celibacy, and they are the more likely to resign than older clergy who hold to traditional beliefs, values, and a celibate lifestyle (Schoenherr & Young, 1990).

Of 59 possible stressors listed by clergypersons in the Protestant Church of New Zealand, the top three listed were: (1) difficulties involving parish commitment, (2) congregational conflict and church conservatism, and (3) the emotional and time demands of crisis counselling (Weaver et al., 2002).

The desire of Episcopal clergy to leave parish ministry correlates highly with measures of stress and wellbeing. That is, 80% of those who regularly thought about dropping out of parish ministry scored below average on the composite wellness measure (Price, 2001).

The challenge is understood as the ability of the Episcopal church to recruit more persons who possess extraordinary skills with deep reserves of emotional strength who can thrive in this ecclesial environment (Price, 2001).

#### **2.14.1. *Lack of centralised leadership***

The adversity and challenges clergy face along with burnout risk factors are significant (Clarke et al., 2022a; Grudem, 2016).

Beavis's (2015) study of the Restoration Movement identifies its clergy as particularly susceptible to experiencing burnout due to prolonged exposure to ministry stressors.

With no centralised leadership over this collection of 5,320 churches and 9,033 pastors, there is no designated protocol for providing psychological support to clergy who are burned out or trending towards burnout (Beavis, 2015).

Data revealed that the anxiety associated with pastoral stress and burnout is self-moderated by a broad spectrum of self-care responses ranging from leaving the ministry to finding help through counselling (Beavis, 2015).

This when appropriate psychological support has been shown to revive these capable clergy and refresh their leadership potency (Beavis, 2015).

#### **2.14.2. *Perception and provision of support***

On the other hand, research has examined whether denominational support services were being provided to serving clergy and their spouses in an organised, systematic way, and how various denominational perceptions of stresses and demands in the lives of their clergy influenced the types of support services being provided to clergy families (Morris & Blanton, 1995).

The population of this study included 33 denominations (USA), each reported more than 200,000 members (Morris & Blanton, 1994, 1995).

Descriptive and inferential statistical procedures indicated that a majority of denominations have some awareness of the stresses and demands that clergy and

their families are facing. However, only a minority of denominations are providing support services that might help clergy effectively manage the resultant stress (Morris & Blanton, 1994).

Critics of the services provided have suggested that denominational leaders have lost touch, are inaccessible, and are failing to adequately acknowledge the demands faced by their clergy. Findings indicated that a majority of clergy and their spouses perceived that their sponsoring denominations were not making available those services that they perceived were important (Morris & Blanton, 1994).

This distinction between perceived and actual support focuses on the quantity and quality of social support received. Higher levels of social support are linked to better health outcomes for the clergy and their families. This perception of clergy social support is far more consequential than the perception of actual support, and a measure of how individual clergy appraise their situation rather than a true reflection of how much support they might receive (Eagle et al., 2019).

Support systems and self-care practices can enable clergy to face the numerous challenges of their work environment. What is clear is that the entire clergy family shares the endemic stressors of others' systems: concerns about the need for predictable time as a family, the unrealistic expectations of the congregation, the lack of privacy in the home, and financial pressures (Morris & Blanton, 1994). Their ability to obtain adequate support and self-care is vital to the success of long-term vocation (Bledsoe & Setterlund, 2015).

Clergy and their supervisors may be wise to turn to interventions that boost perceived social support. That is, clergy with a more positive psychosocial profile are more apt to evaluate any form of received support in a more positive manner (Eagle et al., 2019).

### **2.14.3. *A different approach involving the whole church***

In 2019, the Church of England (Anglican Church) produced a discussion document to foster greater awareness for the care and wellbeing of clergy across the whole Church (Cantuar et al., 2019). Their strategy was intended as a new way of

improving the lot of clergy by encouraging an open dialogue within the wider Church community, and not just with the clergy themselves.

This document included guiding principles and shared commitments for consideration. It included the relational, collegial, and professional accountability of the clergy as a public figure – and the shared discipleship, empowering and encouraging of the community. It also included the impact on clergy households, and how local church communities can best support clergy spouses, partners, children, and others with whom they share household lives (Cantuar et al., 2019).

The Anglican Church of Australia produced two further articles endorsing what they considered good sense to take simple and practical steps to care for, appreciate and collaboratively work alongside clergy for the whole Church to flourish (Harrison, 2020, 2023).

These articles targeting Australian churches encouraged local congregations, parish councils and staff to initiate and facilitate conversations around the care and wellbeing of their clergy. They also asked bishops and others with oversight responsibilities to reflect and model the importance of clergy care and wellbeing (Harrison, 2023). The situation was underscored by quoting statistics from studies in the UK and USA: 71% of clergy had experienced burnout, 70% constantly fight depression, 65% wrestle with anxiety, and 63% are so discouraged that they would leave the work of the clergy if they could provide for their family without working at a church (Harrison, 2020).

These documents also encouraged the clergy themselves to consider how their conduct in ministry is perceived and experienced within and beyond the church and to establish and observe appropriate personal and professional boundaries in pastoral care and safeguarding, to respecting the office of lay leaders, and to exercise care in all forms of communication including social media (Harrison, 2023).

The goal is for clergy to grow in awareness of their own pastoral ability and vulnerability, and to acknowledge that limit in their care of others (Harrison, 2020, 2023).

#### **2.14.4. *Defaulting to a clergy focused response***

Other denominations seek to improve the lives of their clergy by testing a new measure of health for Christian leaders. For example, Queensland Baptist (Australia) is collaborating with Rosemead School of Psychology (La Mirada, CA) which is surveying 2,500 clergy. The hope is to develop a faster, more effective tool capable of identifying warning signs of unhealth to empower clergy to respond before “disaster strikes” (QB, 2024).

That is, asking clergy to measure how well they withstand daily challenges and crisis, and how they individually control their own emotions, respond to change, evaluate their contribution to others, all the while attending to their own needs and prioritising their own spiritual renewal (QB, 2024).

#### **2.14.5. *To shape a culture of building clergy resilience***

Regarding clergy health and wellbeing, Australian Christian Churches (ACC) seek to shape a culture that intentionally builds clergy resilience and urges seeking help before a crisis occurs. They provided an online webpage that identifies a reading list and provides resources across key areas of Health and Wellbeing. This they define as not only about longevity and sustainability, but also effectiveness in personal life and ministry (ACC, 2023).

### **2.15. *Factors identified with clergy continuance***

While the resignation of clergy remains a global challenge, other clergy do survive, even thrive in their chosen vocation (Barna, 2022; Bledsoe & Setterlund, 2015; Dockins, 2015; Krejcir, 2016) and constitutes a main focus of this research.

Extant literature would suggest that most clergy are confronting the same pressures and stressors, but perhaps not the same equipping and support network to enable the resilience demanded to lead their churches in a rapidly changing world (Barna, 2017, 2022; Packiam, 2022).

Barna (2022) quotes reasons why clergy do not leave fulltime local church ministry despite facing these same stressors as those who are leaving the profession. Their reasons to continue include...

- a belief in the value of their ministry
- feeling a duty to stay and fulfil their ministry
- being satisfied in their work and
- being well supported by their family and community (Barna, 2022)

Indeed, McKenna (2020) makes the case that instead of focusing on the negative experiences of those who are struggling to cope or are experiencing burnout, that resilience researchers shift their focus to the positive experiences of those who succeed and so highlight possible ways forward. Reporting the views and opinions of clergy themselves to gain an in-depth understanding of resilience as captured by the experience and understanding of practicing clergy (McKenna, 2020).

This study seeks to contribute insights towards a workable real-world strategy that may enable clergy to thrive in ministry, and assist communities to better facilitate resilient local church leadership (Guba & Lincoln, 1994; Heelas, 2017; Schon, 1995).

## **2.16. New focus of study**

While there are many challenges associated with the work of the clergy, there are also similarities across the caring professions (Schaufeli & Salanova, 2011; Schaufeli et al., 2002; Zuber-Skerritt, 2007).

Equally, in many ways what the church is going through is reflected in other industries. For example, even Kodak who invented the digital camera failed to recognise that the whole nature of photography was changing and ultimately filed for bankruptcy. (Fletcher, 2019; Fletcher & Sarkar, 2013).

So, this researcher also suggests that it is not good enough to identify the unprecedented complexity surrounding the work of the clergy without accepting the need to embrace an innovative response and the necessity to change (Camillus, 2008; Fletcher, 2019; Grint, 2010; Peters, 2017).

Consequently, the focus of this study will also include a review of mainstream literature beyond a traditional interpretation of only that literature directly related to clergy resignation. In order to provide the opportunity to admit outdated and redundant assumptions of the nature of clergy work (van der Laan et al., 2023).

The main reference article associated with this discussion in this review includes references to contemporary contexts providing a more detailed engagement with international comparative literature on questions relating to leadership, authority, and the nature of Work. This article identifies that traditional definitions of Work are outdated and proposes a contemporary conceptualisation (van der Laan et al., 2023),

The contemporary contexts referenced in the article include:

- **Digital and remote work environments** – The rise of technology-enable workspaces and virtual collaboration.
- **Gig and platform economy** – Non-traditional, flexible, and freelance work arrangements that challenge older employment models.
- **Knowledge and creative work** – Emphasis on intellectual and creative contributions rather than purely physical labour.
- **Globalisation and cultural diversity** – Work occurring across borders and within multicultural teams.
- **Automation and AI integration** – The impact of technological disruption on tasks, roles, and the meaning of Work.
- **Work-life integration** – Blurring boundaries between personal and professional life due to flexible arrangements.
- **Social and ethical dimensions** – Considerations of sustainability, equity, and purpose-driven work.
- **Multi-disciplinary perspectives** – Incorporating insights from sociology, psychology, economics, and management to redefine Work.
- **Changing organisational structures** – From hierarchical models to agile, networked forms of organising (van der Laan et al., 2023).

### **2.16.1. Revisiting the nature of clergy work**

Emerging literature within the context of rapid technological and social change in this post-pandemic era has provided the opportunity to revisit the nature of work in general and develop an updated conceptualisation of the nature of clergy work and the system that contains it (van der Laan et al., 2023).

Mainstream literature has identified “work” to be a pivotal and a fundamental component of people’s lives. It is of profound importance to them, embedded in their family and personal lives – contributing to one’s inner life, development, life satisfaction, and vocational identity. The means by which we form our character and complete ourselves as persons. A central aspect of our very lives, providing structure, a means of survival, connection to others, and a means of self-determination (van der Laan et al., 2023).

Specifically, van der Laan et al. (2023) identifies five dimensions of work from extant mainstream literature that equally apply to clergy in their role and may help develop a more accurate understanding of the meaning and nature of clergy work (van der Laan et al., 2023). These are:

- work is **an innate human function that informs one’s life purpose and role**
- work **effects and influences our wellbeing**
- work is **relational and manifest through socialisation**
- work **is identity**, driven by **personal and societal codes** expressed through **our professional or vocational identity**
- work **is learning** as a result of **subjective experience** from within the context of work (van der Laan et al., 2023).

These findings offer a multi-dimensional and spatial conceptualisation of the nature and practice associated with the work of the clergy. Enabling an innovative response to the persistent phenomenon of clergy resignation.

### **2.16.2. Factors impacting clergy retention**

Those who genuinely care about the loss of the clergy through resignation, but lack the insight to respond to such an apparently intractable problem can more easily default to the old, ineffective answers available – more recruitment, more money, and

more resources (Dockins, 2015; Harrison, 2023; Morris & Blanton, 1994; Price, 2001; Schoenherr & Young, 1990).

These solutions may have interim success, but they mask the root cause and advance the notion that a solution can only come from the outside. Conveying to those clergy on the inside that they are powerless, ineffective and not capable of success. Inducing within them a fatalism and apathy towards meeting the challenges of local church ministry (Grint, 2010).

Our need is not to find better answers to our old questions, but to ask better questions for us to answer. What if the purported “causes” for which we seek answers are but the physical symptoms of something else? What if we have been focusing on the results of a broken system? (Blustein, 2010; Lane, 2004; Schaufeli et al., 2002; Spenser et al., 2012).

This study is to facilitate the construction of an innovative response, rather than rolling out an outdated response to a previously experienced problem (Grint, 2010).

Consequently, the examination of related mainstream research can better enhance our understanding of the problem and provide opportunity for the whole profession to review, analyse, and act upon credible research that offers new impetus to professional practices related to clergy longevity.

## **2.17. Motives, traits, relationships**

Spenser et al. (2012) acknowledges that little attention is given by extant literature to the psychological dynamics involved with the clergy role. Individual motives and personal traits appear to be disregarded or overshadowed by the expectations or false hopes of what the work of the clergy supposedly entails (Spenser et al., 2012).

Schaufeli (2012) and Blustein (2010) focus our attention on the image that emerges from existing literature of clergy interacting with their work and managing work-related decisions in a relational vacuum (Blustein, 2010; Schaufeli, 2012; Schaufeli & Salanova, 2011).

Blustein (2010) proposes a radical shift in our thinking about work that more accurately and comprehensively portrays vocational behaviour as an inherently relational act. He builds upon critical perspectives from vocational psychology and relational theory, conceptualising work as a relational act where each decision, experience, and interaction with the world is understood, influenced, and shaped by relationships (Blustein, 2010, 2013a).

Moreover, Blustein (2010) observes that the majority of scholarship related to work, career, and vocational behaviour has given little attention to care work. Taken together, existing theoretical frameworks are limited in their capacity to explicate the complex, interrelated aspects of work life that characterise the role of clergy in the 21st century (Blustein, 2010).

Blustein (2013) advances a new conceptual framework for understanding the psychological nature and role of work as the majority of people experience it (Blustein, 2013a).

Blustein (2013) shows evidence that working is a fundamental aspect of life, and optimally a means of self-determination. People devote considerable time and effort preparing for and adjusting to their work lives, and a lack of work can prove a significant cause of social and economic disruption (Blustein, 2013a).

At the same time, work, when it is dignified and meaningful, can create a foundation for a satisfying life that allows people to care for themselves and their families and find an outlet for their values and interests (Blustein, 2013a). (“The Oxford Handbook of the Psychology of Working. - APA PsycNet”)

Blustein (2013) acknowledges that the importance of work did not escape the attention of psychologists. However, studies of work-related issues as a context for human behaviour became increasingly compartmentalised within psychology. For example, working is not seen as a central part of most psychotherapy or personality theories (Blustein, 2013a).

This new psychology-of-working has potential to transform how psychologists, social scientists, and counselling professionals understand and intervene in the work lives of people across the full spectrum of power, privilege and social location, with

organisational implications for the context of working, community-based interventions, and public policy (Blustein, 2013a). It also advocates for a more inclusive perspective of the role of work in clergy psychological wellbeing.

## **2.18. Burnout**

Regarding burnout, the prevailing view is that emotional exhaustion leading to burnout is to be found exclusively in the human services, such as social work, health care, and teaching. However, the stressors that may lead to burnout can be found in different occupational groups; physical and cognitive exhaustion as a consequence of prolonged exposure to job demands, and disengagement (Demerouti et al., 2001).

Demerouti et al. (2001) found similar differential patterns of burnout across three occupational groups; human services, industry, and transport. The conclusion is that burnout is determined by a specific pattern of working conditions related to job demands, and job resources. Where both exhaustion and disengagement are simultaneously present in any occupation, there is potential for burnout (Demerouti et al., 2001) .

Hakanen, Bakker (2006) acknowledge that teaching is stressful. In Finland where their study was conducted, educators have the highest burnout levels amongst all human service professionals. At the same time, the vast majority of Finnish teachers are content, enthusiastic and find their work satisfying and rewarding. Nevertheless, the observation is that, in occupational health psychology literature, the negative aspects of teaching that have dominated investigation (Hakanen et al., 2006).

Hakanen, Bakker and Schaufeli (2017) use the example of Demands-Control Model (DCM) to expose the notion that burnout can simply be reduced to a limited number of fixed variables in the complex reality of working organisations. In certain work situations, totally different resources prevail, rendering Demands-Control Model (DCM) too general a starting point for improving working conditions and promoting wellbeing in most organisations (Hakanen et al., 2006; Schaufeli 2017).

Alternatively, the Job Demands-Resources (JD-R) model proposes that high job demands, and a lack of job resources form the breeding ground for burnout and

reduced work engagement. Their study shows how working conditions are related through work-related wellbeing to their health and organisational commitment (Hakanen et al., 2006).

## **2.19. Motivation, engagement and those who thrive**

Regarding the very nature of work, after ten years of 'burnout' research (1988 –1999) Schaufeli asked, "Is that all there is?" "But what about those who thrive?" (Schaufeli, 2012).

Schaufeli determined that it was time to change our understanding of operational burnout and began a conceptual study on work engagement. Psychologising the scientific study of optimal human behaviour. Burnout is anger, anxiety, depression, cynicism, exhaustion. Engagement, in contrast, is joy, happiness, vigour, dedication, satisfaction in a contagious upward spiral of increased health and performance (Schaufeli, 2012; Schaufeli & Salanova, 2011; Schaufeli et al., 2002).

Schaufeli discovered that engaged workers are active agents who believe in themselves, generate their own feedback, have values that match with the organisation, are sometimes tired but satisfied (Schaufeli, 2012).

Modern organisations do not need a merely healthy workforce but a motivated workforce that is "engaged." His aim is to discover and promote factors that allow employees and organisations to thrive. He offers work engagement as a promising concept for establishing a truly occupational health psychology (Bakker et al., 2011; Schaufeli & Salanova, 2011; Schaufeli et al., 2002).

Consequently, motivation, engagement and those who thrive are a key focus of this research project.

### **2.19.1. A positive focus on work engagement**

Using an organisational development project, Schaufeli (2017) makes the case that Job Demands-Resources (JD-R) is particularly suited as an integrative conceptual

framework for monitoring employee wellbeing as it does not exclusively focus on negative aspects of the job or contain a limited predefined set of job characteristics.

Instead, it (1) integrates a positive focus on work engagement with a negative focus on burnout into a comprehensive balanced approach; (2) it has broad scope that allows to include all relevant job characteristics; (3) it is flexible and can be tailored to the needs of any organisation; and (4) it acts as a common communication tool for all stakeholders (Schaufeli, 2017).

Schaufeli (2017) does mention two extensions of the Job Demands-Resources (JD-R). While it is unclear what place these should occupy, these are; (1) personal resources linked to resiliency, and (2) engaged, transformational leadership (Schaufeli, 2017).

As the Schaufeli's (2017) study shows, job demands and motivational processes lead to engagement and proper assessment is paramount. Schaufeli (2017) concludes that Job Demands-Resources (JD-R) is a validated model that specifies the relationship between job characteristics and employee wellbeing. As a result, less negative and more positive outcomes are achieved for both employees and organisations (Schaufeli, 2017).

There is evidence that the Job Demands-Resources (JD-R) framework has been tested with clergy members and JD-R studies provide an effective theoretical model of understanding the incremental validity of spiritual resources in work engagement (Bickerton et al., 2015; Hart, 2015).

## **2.20. Clergy resilience as a helpful construct**

From a faith perspective, resilience is developed in the active struggle to grow in the face of adversity, rather than acquiesce (Allain-Chapman, 2012). Although clergy resignation is a critical factor in advocating for support of resilience, there is no reported direct correlation between a professional's resilience status and their staying or leaving their profession (Clarke et al., 2022b).

One concerning assumption that arises is the view that clergy staying equals resilience, and their leaving is seen as succumbing to adversity (Clarke et al., 2022b). This assumption is not valid as some may leave as an expression of their individual resilience and others may stay, even though they are not experiencing resilience, but because they have no other place to go (Traynor, 2018, 2017b, 2017a; Clarke et al., 2022b).

Nevertheless, resilience is considered a helpful construct when considering how to support clergy wellbeing (Clarke, 2023; Clarke et al., 2022b).

Members of the clergy serve on the frontlines as caregivers for those individuals whose lives have been forever changed by life-threatening traumatic events, or by the sudden deaths of loved ones (Drescher & Foy, 2010). Indeed, Clergy are frequently the first, and sometimes the only help sought by those experiencing significant distress that cannot be remedied by using familiar coping strategies (Drescher & Foy, 2010; Weaver et al., 2002; Weaver et al., 1996).

For the clergy, their Christian beliefs about suffering, self-sacrifice, purpose, and trusting God may inadvertently glorify hardship and challenge a resilient response to adversity (Allain-Chapman, 2012), calling for a spiritual response that uses religious resources to resist the destruction of one's own spiritual competencies, and to construct a positive response in line with larger theological goals (Clarke et al., 2022a; Clarke et al., 2022b; Meek et al., 2003; Titus, 2011).

On the other hand, current mainstream research views resilience as a professional competence and focuses on identifying protective factors which may help clergy resist the work related stress and burnout precipitating resignation (Clarke et al., 2022b).

Although there is a considerable body of mainstream literature examining stress and burnout, there has been limited published research that has investigated the role-related effectiveness of these supportive theories impacting clergy resilience in the aftermath of complex disasters or other challenging contexts (Abernethy et al., 2016; Meek et al., 2003).

While such resilience principles have been extended from overall resilience research to other caring professions, there is limited discourse on how these principles might result in positive application by the clergy. Accordingly, there is limited literature on the nature of clergy resilience as a professional competence, or the specific variables that may enable clergy to positively adapt to the challenges and adversity they face as a dynamic process (Clarke, 2023; Clarke et al., 2022b).

Consequently, while clergy have reported experiencing emotional difficulties, such as compassion fatigue, secondary traumatic stress, and burnout related to the repetitive nature of responding to critical incidents (Hendron et al., 2012b; Lewis et al., 2007), many clergy have not received any formal training in crisis intervention beyond that of providing spiritual support (Everly, 2000; Wang et al., 2003; Weaver et al., 1996).

## **2.21. What is resilience?**

Resilience is a main focus of this research study.

Resilience is typically conceptualised as successful adaption to serious negative life events (Seery & Quinton, 2016). It is a helpful construct when considering how to support clergy wellbeing (Clarke et al., 2022b).

It is vital that individuals and organisations do not consider resilience as the ability of professionals to adapt to never-ending adversity. Resilience theory is not an appropriate reason to ignore organisational issues that lead to extrinsic adversity (Clarke et al., 2022b).

Nor should interventions focused on resilience be viewed as a solution for performance issues or mental health needs. Resilience programmes may prevent burnout, but are not treatments for those experiencing burnout. If a professional is ineffective due to burnout, then mental health support should be considered (Clarke et al., 2022b).

Role-related stress and burnout are significant concerns for the clergy. The development of specific skills to address the complex needs of church ministry

include aspects of mental health, suicide assessment, interpersonal skills, conflict management, leadership and technology (Clarke et al., 2022b).

While resilience research began around 1970 with pioneering investigators studying the ability of children at risk of psychopathology to return to pre-crisis status quickly, the research has since been applied to a variety of professions including health care, education, social work, post-secondary, and private industry (Greenfield, 2015; Griffiths & Edwards, 2014; Jakel et al., 2016; Kapoulitsas & Corcoran, 2015; McDonald et al., 2016; Meek et al., 2003; Perez et al., 2015; Potter et al., 2015; Stephens et al., 2013; Weidlich & Ugarriza, 2015).

Although clergy resignation is a critical factor in advocating for support of resilience, there is no reported direct correlation between a professional's resilience status and their staying or leaving their profession (Clarke et al., 2022b). Nonetheless, the curvilinear relationship with adversity and resilience does suggest that high levels of adversity can impede resilience (Seery & Quinton, 2016), calling for a nuanced relationship between resilience and resignation rather than one of direct cause and effect (Mansfield et al., 2014).

Resilience is framed to be a developmental process that arises from a combination of individual, relational, and contextual variables including cognitive appraisal and a positive adaptation to adversity and stress (Clarke et al., 2022a; Clarke et al., 2022b; Fletcher & Sarkar, 2013; Gu & Day, 2007; Masten, 2001; Masten & Obradovic, 2006; Noullet et al., 2018; Windle, 2011). It should not be confused with other distinct constructs often associated with resilience such as coping, grit and hardiness. That is, resilience is a cognitive process that involves appraisal of a situation whereas coping is a behavioural response to a stressful experience (Clarke et al., 2022b; Fletcher & Sarkar, 2013).

This calls for an approach that respects spiritual beliefs when engaging clergy to explore resilience strategies to promote wellness in this population (Allain-Chapman, 2012).

## **2.22. PCI training in crisis intervention**

Noullet et al (2018) purposed a longitudinal pilot study to assess the effects of a formal Pastoral Crisis Intervention (PCI) training for clergy which integrates faith-based resources with recognised techniques of crisis intervention (Noullet et al., 2018). Teaching the clergy crisis communication skills; crisis assessment and psychological triage; cognitively based crisis intervention tactics; awareness of differentiating spiritual from religious interventions and when to apply each; and finally, personal self-care and stress management techniques (Everly, 2007).

The results revealed that clergy who received the Pastoral Crisis Intervention (PCI) training evidenced significantly higher resilience score, and decreased burnout and secondary traumatic stress (Noullet et al., 2018). Providing preliminary support and initial evidence that formal PCI training might serve to enhance resilience and mitigate the impact of compassion fatigue in those clergy responding to repetitive critical incidents.

## **2.23. Effective leadership**

Hougaard and Carter (2018) tells us that change is good, when it is in the right direction. Based on years of extensive research including a survey of more than 35,000 leaders and interviews with 250 C-level executives, Hougaard (2018) concludes that the world is facing a global leadership crisis, and that the top-down leadership doesn't work anymore (Hougaard & Carter, 2018).

There is a high level of suffering in the workplace. While 77% of leaders think they do a good job, 88% of employees say their leaders don't engage enough, and 35% would forgo a pay rise to see their leaders fired. This represents an enormous waste of human talent despite the fact that \$46 billion is spent each year (2018) on leadership development (Hougaard & Carter, 2018).

To solve this leadership crisis, Hougaard & Carter (2018) offers a radical redefinition of what makes an effective leader. Organisations should not appoint leaders for their technical abilities, but for their ability to lead with three core mental qualities; mindfulness, selflessness and compassion. He shows how this new kind of

leadership turns conventional leadership thinking upside down when it comes to every organisation's engagement and execution problems (Hougaard & Carter, 2018).

#### **2.24. Structures and policies**

Regarding organisational structures and policies, organisational theory considers how organisations operate, and how the people within them perform and are treated. Traditional and contemporary theories help us understand where organisations have been, and the rationale behind the structures within them. It is a social science discipline that historically had its intellectual home in business schools. The concern is, first, with the behaviour and nature of people within organisations, and second, with the behaviour and nature of organisations within their environments (Miner, 2007).

We all participate in various organisations such as schools, companies, and hospitals throughout our lives. Most people would like to function more effectively in organisations and contribute to more effective functioning of the organisation. The more organisations know about the way they work, the better their chances of coping with and achieving their goals. Providing this knowledge is what organisational theory attempts to do (Miner, 2007).

The problem here is that any insight gained as we decipher the way we work can be a source of anxiety and discouragement that destroys the mystique of what we thought we have as an organisation and may have difficulty controlling. That is, when we come to realise the discrepancy between what we say we intend to do as an organisation, and what we actually do. This is known to be the gap between our espoused theory and theory-in-use (Schein, 1990).

Beyond theory is practical application. Practical applications to human resource and areas of management derive from two major sources. One is simply a response to a practical problem. The second approach is that a theory is developed, not so much to solve a practical problem as to solve a scholarly one (Miner, 2007).

## **2.25. Organisational intervention**

Deci & Ryan (2004) investigated motivational issues underlying the self-regulation of behaviour. They suggested that the field of psychology remains divided on issues of inherent tendencies toward psychological growth, unified self, and autonomous responsible behaviour.

Consequently, organisations who believe people have an endogenous (internal) tendency toward growth will orientate their interventions accordingly. In contrast, organisations who believe people to have no such tendency will orientate their exogenous (external) interventions to training, shaping, controlling, and directing behaviour towards ends deemed to be of value (Deci & Ryan, 2004).

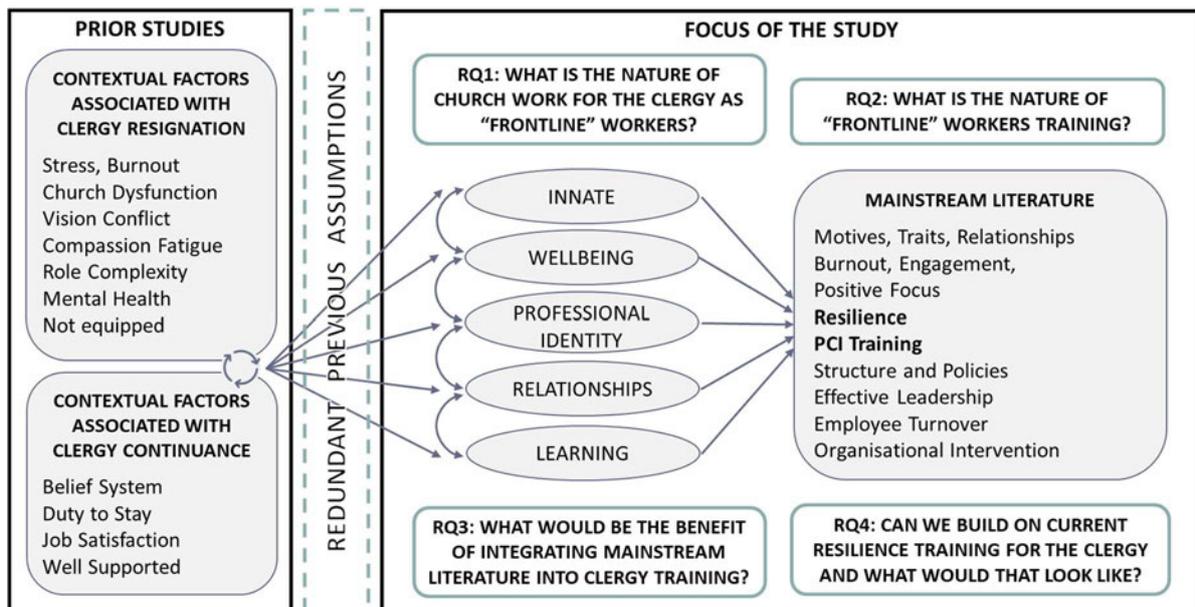
Rickard et al. (2012) evaluated the impact of an organisational intervention aimed at reducing occupational stress and turnover rates of 55% among hospital nurses. The intervention included strategies such as a workload assessment, duty rosters, staff numbers, clinical supervision, professional development, and a recruitment campaign.

Rickard et al. (2012) used an extended Job Demands-Resources (JD-R) framework to evaluate the interventions canvassing psychological distress, emotional exhaustion, work engagement, satisfaction, demands, resources, and system factors such as psychological safety climate. This approach was very successful on a range of health, work outcomes, and job design indicators. Results demonstrated a significant reduction in psychological distress and emotional exhaustion, and a significant improvement in job satisfaction.

The organisational interventions also led to a significant improvement in system capacity, a reduction in job demands, and an increase in resources. Long-term impact, particularly the influence on turnover is still to be assessed. The conclusion was that while stress levels for the nurses remained high, improvements for the nurses could be attributed to the organisational intervention of the Northern Territory Department of Health. (Rickard et al., 2012).

Taken together, organisational intervention may improve the organisation's functioning, but may not be viewed by clergy and their families to be what they

perceive is the organisational intervention needed to reduce frontline burnout or help agencies retain workers (Dockins, 2015; Eagle et al., 2019; Elkington, 2013; Linos et al., 2021; Schoenherr & Young, 1990; Taylor, 1997).



**Figure 1: Conceptual Model - A diagram of the study**

### Why do Clergy Stay?

#### Investigating the Nature of Contemporary Clergy Work and Retention, with a Focus on Mainstream and Church-Specific Resilience Training

Research Questions: 1-4

**RQ1:** What is the nature of Church work or clergy as “frontline” workers?

**RQ2:** What is the nature of frontline workers’ training?

**RQ3:** What would be the benefit of integrating mainstream literature into clergy training?

- Is there bandwidth within the Church to be able to take on mainstream approaches?

**RQ4:** Can we build on current resilience training for the clergy and what would that look like?

- Agreeing that clergy training in resilience would benefit - can we build on that?
- And if so - what would that look like?

## **2.26. Resilience: Clergy vs mainstream**

Fletcher & Sarkar (2013) concluded that a substantial body of evidence suggests resilience is required in response to different adversities. They presented the adaptation and conceptualisation of resilience as either a trait or a process – dynamic processes by which some people can withstand and even thrive amid experiences of adversity, with implications for policy, practice, and research.

### **2.26.1. *What resilience training looks like in the Church***

Although clergy resignation is a critical factor in advocating for support of resilience, there is no reported direct correlation between a professional's resilience status and their staying or leaving their profession (Clarke et al., 2022b).

From a faith perspective, resilience is developed in the active struggle to grow in the face of adversity rather than acquiescence (Allain-Chapman, 2012).

Published research on clergy resilience is limited. Christian beliefs about suffering, self-sacrifice, purpose, and trust in God can idealise hardship instead of fostering a resilient response (Allain-Chapman, 2012). Instead, spiritual responses and religious resources are often used to maintain spiritual competencies and promote positive outcomes aligned with theological goals (Clarke et al., 2022a; Clarke et al., 2022b; Meek et al., 2003; Titus, 2011).

Clarke (2023) describes how beliefs related to ministry calling act as interpretative filters for the experience of adverse events and determine spiritual coping resources, influencing the resilience of clergy. That a cleric's belief system can significantly influence how they interpret adversity and how they view resources. Consequently, a clear calling to ministry is identified as an important aspect of clergy resilience (Clarke, 2023).

The Clergy Resilience Model (CRM) is a theoretical framework responding to the adversity they face, supporting clergy resilience as a dynamic process – a balancing of the available resources to support their resilience including categories of spiritual life, relational supports, personal aspects, and organisational practices (Clarke, 2023).

The Pastors Empowerment Program (PEP) was initially developed to enhance the self-care and psychological resilience of clergy, drawing on a range of psycho-educational and therapeutic components in the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina (August 2005). Resilience is connoted as the stress-response system within persons, conceptualised as the capacity of a dynamic system to survive significant challenges that threaten its stability, viability, and development (Abernethy et al., 2016).

PEP is designed as an annual three-year programme for clergy and their families, structured as a three-day retreat over three phases: (1) self-care, (2) resilience, and (3) cultivating relationships. Each phase accommodates the central role of faith and spirituality for clergy by incorporating components of spiritual practices – corporate singing, participatory prayer, worship services with sermons, and the cultivation of inner peace (Abernethy et al., 2016).

Lingle's 2023 review of forging flexible clergy offers a resource to mental health professionals for presenting psycho education and resilience building to clergy beyond their "window of tolerance." These self-care methods are mindfulness, contemplative practices, and centering prayer (Lingle, 2023).

What resilience training looks like...	
...in the church	...in the mainstream
<p>A faith perspective  A spiritual response  Religious resources  Larger theological goals  Clerics belief system  A clear calling to ministry</p> <p><b>Clergy Resilience Model (CRM)</b>  Balancing available resources  Spiritual life  Relational supports  Personal aspects  Organisational practices</p> <p><b>Pastors Empowerment Programme (PEP)</b>  Psycho-education  Therapeutic components <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Self-care</li> <li>- Resilience</li> <li>- Cultivating relationships</li> </ul> Spiritual practices <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Corporate singing</li> <li>- Participatory prayer</li> <li>- Worship services</li> <li>- Sermons</li> <li>- Inner peace</li> </ul> <b>Forging flexible clergy</b>  Psycho education  Resilience building <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Mindfulness</li> <li>- Contemplative practices</li> <li>- Centering Prayer</li> </ul> </p>	<p>Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT)  Mindfulness</p> <p><b>Community Resilience Model (CRM)</b>  Self-stabilisation</p> <p><b>Organisational context</b>  Biofeedback  Stress-management  Mindfulness  Positive psychology  Cognitive approach  Mindfulness</p> <p><b>Training programmes include...</b>  Relaxation techniques  Problem-solving  Meditation  Coaching  Feedback  Psycho-education  Reflective thinking  Critical thinking</p> <p><b>Building resilience...</b>  Selfcare <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Exercise</li> <li>- Sleep hygiene</li> <li>- Social Support</li> </ul> Meaningful work <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Small group discussions</li> <li>- Reflective counselling</li> </ul> Emotional health <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Mindfulness practice</li> <li>- Stress management</li> </ul> Organisational justice  Effective leadership  Competency training  Computer based resilience training</p>

What integrated resilience training looks like
<p><b>Pastoral Crisis Intervention Training</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Crisis communication skills</li> <li>- Crisis assessment</li> <li>- Psychological triage</li> <li>- Cognitively based crisis intervention tactics</li> <li>- Differentiating spiritual from religious interventions and when to apply each</li> <li>- Personal self-care</li> <li>- Stress management techniques</li> </ul>

**Table 1: What resilience training looks like**

### **2.26.2. What resilience training looks like in the mainstream**

Mainstream research attests to the importance of resilience in the workplace to support individual wellbeing and organisational productivity. Yet there appears to have been no systemic attempt to synthesise the evidence for the efficacy of resilience training (Robertson et al., 2015).

Despite conceptual and theoretical support for resilience training, the empirical evidence remains tentative except for effecting mental health and subjective wellbeing outcomes. There is a need to identify how resilience is defined, conceptualised, developed, and assessed (Joyce et al., 2018; Robertson et al., 2015).

At this stage there is no definitive evidence for the most effective training content or format, but it would appear reasonable to consider whether those entering careers such as medicine, nursing, policing, paramedicine or firefighting should be provided with resilience training (Joyce et al., 2018; Robertson et al., 2015).

Such programmes as are available use a cognitive approach to developing individual resilience. Resilience interventions based on a combination of cognitive behavioural therapy (CBT) and mindfulness techniques appear to have a positive impact on individual resilience (Joyce et al., 2018).

Frontline workers (FLW) are themselves at considerable risk for secondary traumatic stress, burnout, and related psychiatric sequelae; depression, anxiety, suicidality, post-traumatic stress, sleep, and substance use disorders (Grabbe et al., 2021).

It is well documented that when FLW suffer psychologically, they may become emotionally depleted, disengaged, have difficulty making decisions, retire early, or engage in self-harm. Resiliency, that is, thriving and growing despite stressors, is a recognised protective factor against stress. Many resiliency interventions require multiple sessions and have a cognitive focus (Grabbe et al., 2021).

The Community Resilience Model (CRM) is a non-cognitive variant of mindfulness, emphasising attunement to signalling cues for self-stabilisation interventions to regulate their own body sensations and mood. It reports a reduced PTSD, improved

mental wellbeing, decreased secondary traumatic stress, and somatic symptoms (Grabbe et al., 2021).

Doody et al. (2021) presented a synthesis of the literature on the efficacy of pre-deployment resilience building programmes for military and frontline emergency service personnel to uncover what is known about resilience training in organisational contexts (Doody et al., 2021).

Doody et al. (2021) reviewed a wide range of therapeutic modalities used across 28 studies, including CBT informed programmes, biofeedback-based programmes, stress-management programmes, and mindfulness and relaxation programmes. Eight studies reported resilience as an outcome. No studies reported on acute stress disorder, emotional flexibility, social functioning, quality of sleep, or quality of life (Doody et al., 2021).

Scheuch et al. (2021) scoping review to uncover what is known about resilience training in an organisational context. The theoretical foundations were positive psychology, cognitive (behavioural) and mindfulness approaches. The various contents of the training programmes include relaxation training, problem-solving, meditation, coaching, feedback, psycho-education on resilience, reflective, and critical thinking (Scheuch et al., 2021).

Heath et al (2020) gave us a summary of interventions and strategies for mitigating risk of psychological distress based on healthcare workers during the covid-19 pandemic to reduce burnout and build resilience (Heath et al., 2020). These include:

- **Self-care**
  - exercise
  - sleep hygiene
  - social support
- **Meaningful work**
  - small group discussions
  - reflective counselling
- **Emotional health**
  - mindfulness practice
  - stress management programme

- **Organisational justice**
- **Effective leadership**
- **Competency training**
- **Computer based resilience training**

Regarding resilience, Forbes & Fikretogula (2018) comment that the quality of the literature is mixed, resilience training is not well differentiated from other forms of training, and that the impact of resilience training depends on the outcome measured and the setting of the training (Forbes & Fikretoglu, 2018).

### **2.26.3. *What integrated resilience training looks like for clergy***

The effect of Pastoral Crisis Intervention (PCI) training on resilience (Noullet et al., 2018). PCI for the clergy integrates faith-based resources with recognised techniques of crisis intervention (Everly, 2000; Everly, 2007). Teaching the clergy crisis communication skills; crisis assessment and psychological triage; cognitively based crisis intervention tactics; awareness of differentiating spiritual from religious interventions and when to apply each; and finally, personal self-care and stress management techniques (Everly, 2000; Everly, 2007; Noullet et al., 2018).

Noullet et al. (2018) found that clergy who completed Pastoral Crisis Intervention (PCI) training showed greater resilience and lower levels of burnout and secondary traumatic stress (Noullet et al., 2018).

Providing preliminary support and initial evidence that formal PCI training might serve to enhance resilience and mitigate the impact of compassion fatigue in those clergy responding to repetitive critical incidents.

Nevertheless, while clergy across the profession continue to report experiencing emotional difficulties, such as compassion fatigue, secondary traumatic stress, and burnout related to the repetitive nature of responding to critical incidents (Hendron et al., 2012b; Lewis et al., 2007) many clergy have not received any formal training in crisis intervention beyond that of providing spiritual support (Everly, 2000; Wang et al., 2003; Weaver et al., 1996).

## **2.27. A summary**

### **Why do Clergy Stay?**

#### **Investigating the Nature of Contemporary Clergy Work and Retention, with a Focus on Mainstream and Church-Specific Resilience Training**

A core assumption of this study is that actionable insight into what causes clergy to stay their course while others resign their vocation is missing from current literature.

What is needed here is a practical response towards a real-world solution.

The phenomenon of clergy resignation persists (Barna, 2022; Fee, 2018; Spenser et al., 2012).

The literature supports a fresh approach if we are to explore how the changing nature of church-work contributes to attrition of the clergy (Dockins, 2015; Elkington, 2013; Schoenherr & Young, 1990; Taylor, 1997), while building on the factors presented by Spenser et al. (2012) of vision conflict and compassion fatigue (Kapoulitsas & Corcoran, 2015; Noullet et al., 2018; Spenser et al., 2012) and guided by the further extant literature related to the psychology of work, work engagement and leadership (Blustein, 2010, 2013a; van der Laan et al., 2023).

Burnout factors inherent to the role of the clergy are significant – and these are many: work related stress, demands and expectations, scope of work, role complexity, limited resources, adversity, conflict, fatigue, social isolation, lack of organisational support, impact on their family, and more (Clarke, 2023; Krejcir, 2016; Malcolm et al., 2022; Reimer, 2010).

The overwhelming focus of traditional literature concerning the clergy was to identify reasons for their departure rather than to explore why certain other clergy survive, even thrive in their role (Barna, 2022; Hoge & Wenger, 2005; Joynt & Dreyer, 2013). Identifying the research gap: that prior studies typically focused on causes of resignation rather than the factors that enable clergy to remain, thrive and show resilience under significant occupational stress.

Nevertheless, the challenge of clergy resignation persists (Dockins, 2015; Krejcir, 2016).

And why this thesis demonstrates a robust understanding of the “wicked” nature of this problem and seeks to provide a new practical impetus for professional practice which justifies the use of a constructivist, practitioner-centred research paradigm, explicitly challenging outdated or narrowly framed responses based on remuneration and recruitment alone.

While there is no direct correlation of resilience, engagement, motivation, or crisis intervention training on clergy resignation or their continuance, mainstream literature recognises and includes such factors as priorities, but the absence of such training may inadvertently fuel clergy disengagement which contributes to their burnout and subsequent departure (Clarke et al., 2022a; Fletcher, 2019; Noullet et al., 2018).

If we recognise the relational context of clergy work, reaffirm their beliefs and the benefits of faith, grit, personality, pay them adequately, respite and vacation, acknowledge their family and the unique constellation of professional factors impacting clergy (Allain-Chapman, 2012; Grudem, 2016; Malcolm et al., 2022; Meek et al., 2003; Price, 2001); and include mainstream dimensions of work, identity, engagement, resilience and support (Blustein, 2010; Demerouti et al., 2001; Schaufeli & Salanova, 2011; van der Laan et al., 2023), we might help to tame the problem to avert the needless casualties and stem the avoidable resignation of the clergy (Fee, 2018; Grint, 2010; Hendron et al., 2012a; Hoge & Wenger, 2005).

## **CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY**

### **Why do Clergy Stay?**

#### **Investigating the Nature of Contemporary Clergy Work and Retention, with a Focus on Mainstream and Church-Specific Resilience Training**

A core assumption of this study is that actionable insight into what causes clergy to stay their course while others resign their vocation is missing from current literature.

Chapter 2 provided a systematic review of the relevant literature related to the topic of the study. As previously noted, the study acknowledges the significant amount of literature associated with the reasons for clergy resignations from Christian churches. The review, however, reveals that less is known and specified about the nature of clergy work in contemporary society within the context of more recent definitions of work.

The study aims to gain a deeper understanding of why clergy remain in ministry and to what extent mainstream literature and approaches to resilience can complement efforts by churches to retain clergy within the ministry.

The purpose of this study is to develop a qualitative narrative in order to address the apparent inability to understand and address the seemingly apathetic response by Church groups. To this end it was determined that one would first need to develop a deep understand of the nature of contemporary work and ministry of Christian clergy before being able to understand why clergy remain in ministry and what mainstream, non-church approaches may support them.

The study's central premise is that achieving this is a precedent to meaningfully respond to what has proved to be an otherwise intractable problem.

Chapter 3 describes the design and methodology of this exploratory study. This chapter comprises an explanation of the research paradigm that informed this research; a discussion of the research design; an outline of the research methods applied; the data analysis approach and finally, the ethical considerations when undertaking human research that the study took into account.

### **3.1. Research questions**

#### **Why do Clergy Stay?**

#### **Investigating the Nature of Contemporary Clergy Work and Retention, with a Focus on Mainstream and Church-Specific Resilience Training**

Based on the conceptual model four research questions were developed to guide the study. These are:

**RQ1:** What is the nature of church work for the clergy as “frontline” workers?

**RQ2:** What is the nature of frontline workers’ training?

**RQ3:** What would be the benefit of integrating mainstream literature into clergy training and is there bandwidth within the church to be able to take on mainstream approaches?

**RQ4:** Can we build on current resilience training for the clergy and what would that look like?

### **3.2. Research paradigm**

A critical consideration when considering a study’s methodological approach to respond to the research question(s) is the paradigmatic ‘lens’ through which the phenomenon is best observed. The lens differs depending on the nature of the phenomenon being observed, the research questions and to what extent a depth of understanding and breadth of generalisability of the findings is desired.

The research paradigm that informed the design of this research is constructivism. Constructivism's epistemology acknowledges that an individual's knowledge is formed based on their experience of the world. This perception of the world is unique, yet the individual's perception of knowledge is a socially shared one. That is, the individual's perception of the world and acquisition of knowledge is influenced by social activity and created within the communities they live in (Kaushik & Walsh, 2019).

This study explores the richness of human experience in the context of Christian frontline clergy work and participation in frontline ministries at a community level. It is concerned with a "wicked problem" reported in the literature of the increasing trend of clergy resignation, despite much being known about the reasons for resignation.

To address this problem, it is posited that by gaining a deeper understanding of why clergy remain in ministry and what interventions may reinforce this, the problem can be better understood providing an alternative insight than what typifies current beliefs and church efforts.

Constructivism employs abductive reasoning. Abductive reasoning involves the process of decision making by the researcher using insights from their own experiences, and the experiences of the community, while learning from experiences of others (Kaushik & Walsh, 2019).

Constructivism is a research paradigm that views knowledge as socially and experientially constructed, rather than discovered as an objective reality. It emphasises the subjective nature of reality, arguing that individuals interpret and construct meaning based on their experiences, interactions, and cultural context (Vygotsky & Cole, 1978). This paradigm is widely used in qualitative research, shaping methodologies that prioritise meaning-making and participant perspectives (Guba & Lincoln, 1994).

The key philosophical underpinnings of constructivism is that its epistemology assumes that knowledge is constructed (Schwandt, 1994) and that meaning emerges through human interaction with the environment and social systems

(Vygotsky & Cole, 1978). It views reality (ontology) (Nature of Reality) as relative, shaped by individual perspectives and social contexts (Creswell, 2013). It acknowledges that multiple interpretations exist, rather than a single objective truth (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). However, one necessarily first needs to investigate deeper meaning from the experiences of others in order to progress to more generalisable studies (Creswell, 2013). Therefore, certain common themes that emerge from a constructivist enquiry serves to prompt and test future research that may describe a more generalisable truth for that population.

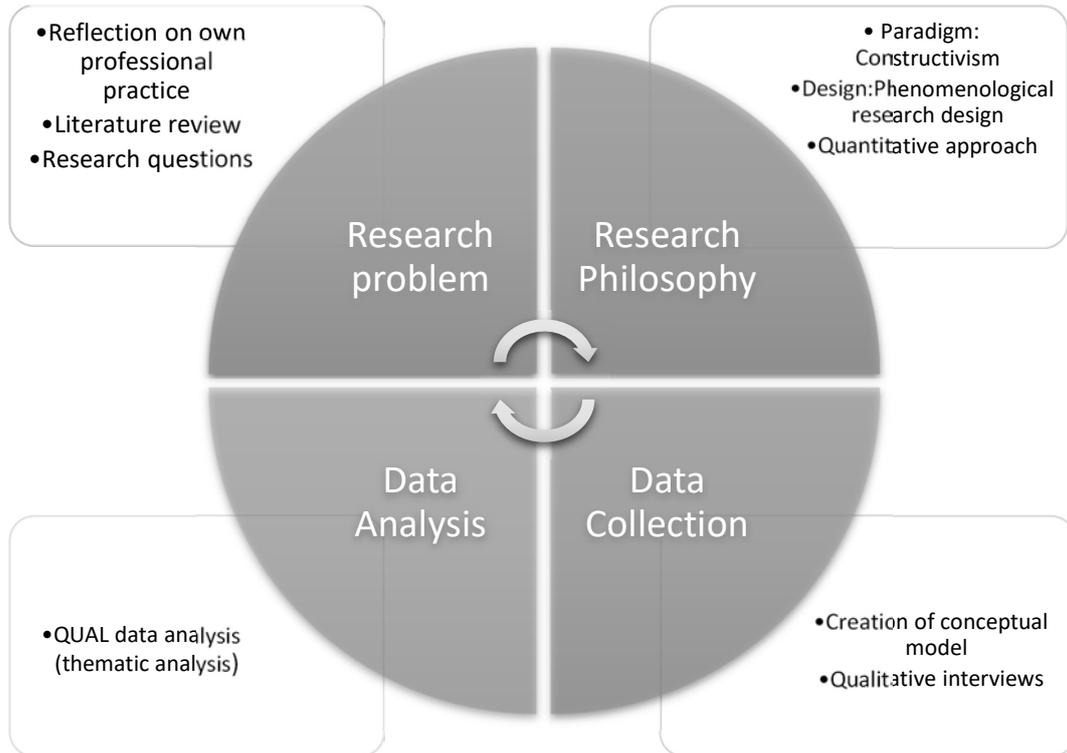
Constructivist research is descriptive, based on the interpretations of the observations, focusing on subjective meanings and experiences (Denzin & Lincoln, 2018). The methods associated with constructivism seek to allow themes to emerge rather than imposing predefined categories (Schwandt, 1994). Constructivism informs research design by emphasising contextual exploration, flexible inquiry, and participant-driven meaning-making (Creswell, 2013).

Constructivism prioritises rich descriptions and deep understanding rather than numerical measurement (Schwandt, 1994), exploring how individuals narrate their experiences to make sense of personal identity. Open-ended inquiry allows for adaptation based on unfolding understandings (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). It further accommodates research processes to evolve as new insights emerge from participants (Creswell, 2013). Rather than collecting exactly the same data from participants, the constructivist approach allows the researcher to guide the data collection in a way that achieves a 'saturation' level of understanding where no new insights can be gained.

An important aspect of constructivism is that researchers acknowledge their role in shaping and co-constructing knowledge with participants (Creswell, 2013). As such, the alignment between adopting a constructivist approach and the work-based learning approach adopted by the study (and nature of the Doctor of Professional Studies award), allows for the researcher to draw on their significant experience and knowledge gained in the ministry (40 plus years) in order to enrich and inform the study. Therefore it is necessary that the researcher reflect on their own biases and perspectives, ensuring transparency in interpretation (Denzin & Lincoln, 2018).

### 3.3. Research design

The following research design was developed in order to adequately respond to aims of the study and research questions (Figure 2).



**Figure 2: Research Design**

A constructivist research paradigm necessarily implies a qualitative approach as the researcher aims to gain a depth of understanding, and a description of deeply embedded experiences associated with the phenomenon.

Common research designs include phenomenology, grounded theory, ethnography, and case studies (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). For the purposes of this study a phenomenological research design was chosen.

Phenomenological research is a qualitative approach that aims to explore individuals' lived experiences and the meanings they attribute to them. Rooted in the philosophical framework of Edmund Husserl's (1913), phenomenology seeks to understand consciousness and perception by examining subjective experiences in

their purest form. This methodology is widely used in social sciences, education, healthcare, and psychology.

The phenomenological approach adopted by this study uses purposive sampling and semi-structured individual interviews to explore the unique lived experiences that frontline clergy assign to their life, purpose, identity and work and the context in which these occur - bracketing their experiences shaped by their perspectives to answer the main research question of why clergy stay, and to inform professional practice, training and organisational change in faith-based Church organisations.

Phenomenology is particularly well-suited for exploring subjective meaning and lived experience because it focuses on individuals' direct encounters with phenomena, rather than relying on external explanations or predefined theories. Rooted in Edmund Husserl's (1913) philosophy, phenomenology seeks to bracket assumptions and uncover the essence of human experiences as they are consciously perceived.

Phenomenology is uniquely suited to capturing the essence and meaning of these experiences, Unlike quantitative approaches which focus on measurable variables and statistical analysis, or other qualitative methods such as grounded theory or ethnography, phenomenology centres on the richness of individual narratives and the interpretation of meaning.

This explicit choice of a qualitative phenomenological methodology reflects a commitment to uncovering nuanced insights that might be overlooked by methodologies emphasizing generalisability or theory development, ensuring that this research remains grounded in the authentic voices and realities of those involved.

There are a number of reasons why phenomenology is suitable for this study:

- 1. It is able to capture first-person perspectives**

Phenomenology prioritises how individuals experience a phenomenon, making it ideal for understanding emotions, perceptions, and interpretations in depth (Husserl, 1913; Van Manen, 1990).

- 2. It emphasizes meaning construction**

Unlike positivist approaches that measure objective realities, phenomenology investigates how meaning is constructed within specific contexts (Heidegger, 1927). It acknowledges that experience is subjective and shaped by individual consciousness.

### **3. It provides contextual understanding**

Phenomenology recognises that lived experience is influenced by culture, relationships, and environment, providing rich, detailed insights into human interactions (Moustakas, 1994).

### **4. It is a flexible and open-ended inquiry**

This approach does not impose predefined categories but allows themes and interpretations to emerge organically from participant narratives (Smith et al., 2009).

### **5. It reduces researcher bias**

Researchers engage in bracketing, a process of suspending preconceived beliefs to access participants' pure, subjective experiences (Giorgi, 2009).

### **6. It allows for the description of deep emotional and psychological insight**

Phenomenology is extensively used in mental health, nursing, and education research, where understanding personal struggles, identity formation, and transformations is essential. It is particularly well-suited to frontline, community based work such as that involved in the work of clergy (Creswell, 2013). Qualitative approaches typically use interviews, observations, reflective practice, and narrative analysis to capture complex human experiences (Denzin & Lincoln, 2018).

For the purpose of this study, the phenomenon to be observed and described is defined as *“The contemporary nature of clerical work, how this relates to clergy resignations, the reasons why clergy remain, and the role of current and mainstream interventions to support the clergy”*.

### **3.4. Methods**

The literature review presented in Chapter Two resulted in a conceptual model and is followed by a qualitative study. The qualitative study considers the results from the literature review and applies what was learned from the review and the resultant conceptual model to inform the semi-structured interview questions. The semi-structured interviews are then administered to a sample of the population, consisting of past and present community-based clergy in Australia.

#### **3.4.1. Population and sampling**

Purposive sampling is a non-probability sampling technique widely used in qualitative research to deliberately select participants based on specific characteristics, experiences, or expertise relevant to the study's objectives. Unlike random sampling, purposive sampling ensures that the selected participants provide rich, meaningful data that aligns with the research focus.

In particular, purposive sampling has a targeted selection. Participants are chosen intentionally to provide insights into the phenomenon being studied (Patton, 2002). Purposive sampling is a non-randomised process in which researchers identify individuals based on predefined criteria rather than chance (Creswell, 2013). The criteria applied to determine potential respondents for the interviews were:

1. Current clergy of the Christian faith providing frontline clerical work in an Australian community; or
2. Past clergy of the Christian faith providing frontline clerical work in an Australian community; and/ or
3. Current leaders and educators of the Christian faith involved in the organisational support for and education of clergy.

It was noted that flexibility in participant recruitment may evolve based on emerging insights during data collection (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

### 3.4.2. *Qualitative study: Semi-structured interviews*

In-depth semi-structured interviews are adopted as the primary data collection method (Smith et al., 2009). A purposive sampling technique is appropriate as a representative sample of the broader population.

The interviews involves asking open-ended questions intended to elicit views and opinions, allowing participants to narrate their experiences as storytellers (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). The utility of qualitative research is to gain greater depth of understanding of the phenomenon. The participants were given the opportunity to speak extensively about their experiences, providing them with a chance to directly or indirectly add insights into their perceptions of motivation to participate.

The questions contained in the interview protocol (see Appendix A):

#### **START-UP QUESTIONS:**

- How would you best describe your occupation?
- How long have you been in this role?
- What is your experience of frontline clergy resignation and retention?

#### **QUESTIONS:**

1. What is the nature of church work for the clergy as “frontline’ workers in terms of the five dimensions of work from extant mainstream literature. These are:
  - Work is **an innate human function that informs one’s life purpose and role.**
  - Work **affects and influences our wellbeing.**
  - Work is **relational and manifest through socialisation.**
  - Work **is identity**, driven by **personal and societal codes** expressed through **our professional or vocational identity.**
  - Work **is learning** as a result of **subjective experience** from within the context of work.

While there is no direct correlation between resilience training and clergy resignation or continuance, mainstream literature suggests that resilience training guards against burnout and work-related stress in frontline workers.

The literature shows that there is a difference between the church and a mainstream approach to resilience training.

2. Describe clergy resilience?
3. Does your church have resilience training for its clergy?  
If yes, what are its key foci?
4. What do you understand to be the difference between church and mainstream resilience training for frontline workers?
5. Is the church in denial of adopting mainstream training to building resilience?  
If yes, do you think there is bandwidth within the church to be able to take on mainstream approaches?
6. What action might be taken to ensure that an integrated model of resilience training be incorporated that would benefit frontline clergy, pastoral workers, laity and the church?

### **3.4.3. *Reflexive accounts by the researcher***

Reflexive accounts by the researcher and their positionality are a common feature of the phenomenological approach (van Manen, 1990). This study is couched in a work-based research approach to responding to the research problem. The study is focused on making a contribution to practice and is part of the Doctor of Professional Studies research higher degree. It is at its core practice based and is conducted by a practitioner in the field of practice associated with the topic of the study. In this case the researcher is minister of a Christian Church with extensive experience in Australia and abroad exceeding 40 years. As such, the researcher kept a record of reflexive accounts, justified within a phenomenological approach, contrasting and reflecting upon the literature (Chapter Two), interview responses (Chapter Four) and in the discussion (Chapter Five). However, to limit bias, the reflexive accounts are only presented to inform the discussion in Chapter Five and the conclusion of the thesis.

#### **3.4.4. Data analysis approach**

Utilising thematic analysis, the data is explored against and grounded in the insights that emerged from the conceptual framework in Chapter Two. Informed by theoretical assumptions, thematic analysis provides an opportunity to test the insights (Braun & Clarke, 2021) from the literature and model, against the perceptions of the clergy in the sample.

A thematic analysis is appropriately undertaken where the interviewees' experiences are foregrounded to construct meaning within their contexts (Braun & Clarke, 2021). After conducting the interviews, the data recordings transcribed and deidentified.

There are six steps to thematic analysis outlined by Braun & Clarke (2021):

1. Data familiarisation;
2. systematic data coding;
3. generating initial themes from coded data;
4. developing and reviewing themes;
5. refining, defining and naming themes; and
6. writing up the results. (p. 331)

#### **3.5. Data collection**

A series of semi-structured interviews were conducted according to the study interview protocol (see Appendix A) with clergy who met the criteria for selection as part of the purposive sampling approach of the study. This process helped confirming the attributes identified in the literature associated with the nature of the work and ministry as a necessary first step in the interview process. In conducting these semi-structured interviews, clergy's perceptions, and lived experiences in the context of an Australian ministry was captured to gain a deeper understanding of the nature of clergy work, the nature of resignations, why they remain in ministry and whether mainstream approaches to frontline support may help mitigate resignation.

The study implemented a progressive comprehensive style of interviewing (Morse, 2012) which enabled a more holistic understanding of the phenomenon through iterations of the initial questions and interview protocol lines of enquiry. Extending the

questions during each iteration allowed the researcher to saturate the data which helped identify the main themes that emerged in each iteration.

### **3.6. Ethical considerations**

Human ethics approval was granted by the relevant Human Research Ethics Committee (HREC) before any participant was recruited and before interviews were conducted. Human Ethics approval, **ETH2024-0685 (HREC)**, was granted by the USQ Research Ethics Committee before any interview or survey was conducted.

Anonymity and a safe space to capture the interviewees responses was required at all times to ensure that participants did not feel any risk of sharing their perceptions of what is a sensitive topic and may be perceived as a reflection of their church or their commitment to their work.

There was a total of 16 participants who explicitly gave consent to be interviewed. To reflect a diversity of views: i) all participants needed to have served as clergy, and ii) a number of church leaders or educators were also invited to participate. A full description of the experience, current role and characteristics of participants is presented in Chapter Four.

Prior to the interviews, the interviewees received a Participant Information Sheet (PIS) for the study (Appendix B). A scheduled interview was booked once signed consents were collected. The interviews were held at a mutually convenient time and place.

Interviews were conducted between 30-Sept 2024 and 28-Oct 2024, either in person or using the ZOOM online meeting platform, each interview lasted between 50-110 minutes. Participants were asked to respond to the questions as per an interview protocol (Appendix A), and they were also given the opportunity to withdraw at any time. None of the participants indicated a wish to withdraw.

Participants were advised that interviews would be audio recorded. These were then transcribed. All participants were given the opportunity to opt out of the audio recording.

After the interview, participants were provided with a copy of the transcript of their interview to confirm its accuracy. Using pseudonyms, the participant responses were then anonymised for coding. This meant that transcripts and recordings were not only anonymised but also stored in a private and secure platform.

Initially, text frequency analysis was used to draw out a list of themes per question. From there, the iterative refining, defining, and naming of sub-themes and main themes were conducted manually.

### **3.7. Limitations of the research design**

Phenomenological research provides valuable insights into individuals' lived experiences; however, it is not without limitations. While it excels in capturing subjective meaning and personal perspectives, challenges arise in areas such as generalisability, researcher bias, and methodological rigor.

#### **Subjectivity and Researcher Interpretation:**

Phenomenology relies on deep engagement with participants' experiences, meaning the researcher's interpretation plays a significant role in shaping findings (Moustakas, 1994). Despite efforts to bracket personal biases as proposed by Husserl (1913), complete objectivity is difficult to achieve (Van Manen, 1990). This subjectivity may lead to variability in analysis, as different researchers may interpret the same lived experiences differently (Smith et al., 2009).

#### **Researcher Bias and Reflexivity:**

One limitation of this study is the potential influence of researcher biases. Although every effort was made to maintain objectivity, it is acknowledged that the researchers' perspectives may have shaped aspects of the research process, including data collection, analysis, and interpretation. To address this, critical reflections were engaged throughout the study, and steps taken to recognise and mitigate personal biases. However, complete elimination of

bias is not possible, and the reader should consider this when interpreting the findings.

### **Limited Generalisability:**

Since phenomenological studies focus on small, purposively selected samples, findings often lack broad applicability (Creswell, 2013). Unlike quantitative research, which relies on statistical significance, phenomenology prioritises depth over breadth, making it difficult to generalise results beyond the studied individuals (Giorgi, 2009). This context-dependent nature limits its use in large-scale policy or decision-making research (Patton, 2002).

### **Challenges in Data Collection and Analysis:**

Phenomenological research demands rigorous and nuanced data collection, often through in-depth interviews, which can be time-consuming and resource-intensive (Van Manen, 1990). Analysing narratives requires identifying themes without reducing complexity, making it methodologically challenging to maintain authenticity in representation (Moustakas, 1994). Additionally, ensuring participant recall accuracy can be difficult, as memory distortion may affect descriptions of past experiences (Smith et al., 2009).

### **Difficulty in Replication:**

Replication is a core principle in scientific research, but phenomenological studies are highly context-dependent and difficult to reproduce (Giorgi, 2009). Since experiences are unique and interpretative, repeating a study with different participants may yield different conclusions, reducing reliability from a positivist standpoint (Creswell, 2013).

### **Ethical and Emotional Considerations:**

Phenomenology often investigates deeply personal and emotional experiences, requiring sensitivity in ethical considerations (Smith et al., 2009). Participants may disclose traumatic or distressing experiences, necessitating ethical safeguards such as informed consent and emotional support (Creswell, 2013). Researchers must navigate ethical dilemmas while ensuring

participants' wellbeing without influencing responses through emotional involvement (Van Manen, 1990).

While phenomenology offers rich and meaningful insights, researchers must acknowledge its subjective nature, limitations in generalisability, methodological challenges, and ethical considerations. These limitations do not diminish its value but highlight the importance of methodological transparency and reflexivity in qualitative research.

### **3.8. Conclusion**

Chapter 3 has presented the methodological approach adopted by the study. It acknowledges the limitations of this methodology. However, the study's purpose was to respond to what it has characterised as a "wicked problem", namely the increasing tendency of clergy resignations, (and decreasing numbers attracted to becoming clergy) and more generally the decline in membership of mainstream Christian churches in Australia. As noted in the literature, churches appear to be adopting the same perspectives (most prominently the reasons why clergy are not attracted and retained) and repeat the same interventions to mitigate resignations. The literature too appears to be repeating the same perspectives, thus entrenching rather than unravelling the problem.

This study seeks to address the problem from a different perspective. It has as its core propositions that: i) the nature of contemporary clergy work and ministry is significantly different than it was even a decade ago, ii) while the reasons for resignation have broadly been studied and agreed, the conditions of contemporary clergy work have made these reasons more pronounced, iii) studies on why the clergy remain are rare especially as it relates to the intersection between contemporary work and clergy resilience and significant in this study, and iv) the extent to which mainstream studies and interventions that enhance resilience are integrated into church support for clergy and their training is unknown as is their potential. Bearing this in mind, this study's central premise is that in order to address the problem of clergy resignation: a) a different perspective is needed which b) demands that initial studies are exploratory and are required to gain a depth of

understanding in order to be tested in further studies. As such. The limitations associated with qualitative research is therefore justified in terms of the study's purpose.

Chapter 4 presents the results of the data analysis of the study.

## **CHAPTER 4: RESULTS - PRIMARY DATA**

Data collected from 16 individual interviews: 654 pages, 170.431 words

### **Why do Clergy Stay?**

#### **Investigating the Nature of Contemporary Clergy Work and Retention, with a Focus on Mainstream and Church-Specific Resilience Training**

A core assumption of this study is that actionable insight into what causes clergy to stay their course while others resign their vocation is missing from current literature.

#### **4.1. Interview structure**

A series of individual interviews were conducted with 16 working clergy discussing their roles, experiences, insights and views related to the resilience and retention of frontline clergy in local church ministry investigating why clergy stay and the nature of contemporary clergy work and retention, with a focus on mainstream and Church-specific resilience training.

The interviews explore the nature of churchwork, the complex challenges faced by the clergy, the importance of adequate training and support systems, and the potential benefits of integrating mainstream resilience training into clergy preparation and training.

#### **4.2. Participants**

The purposive sample contains 16 individual clergy across nine denominational groups.

Their individual tenure ranges from twelve to fifty-eight years, with an average tenure of 27.25 years, and a combined total of 436 years.

Twelve are serving frontline local church clergy. One is semi-retired.

The remaining three hold significant executive roles: one in theological training for clergy candidates, and the other two focus on the wellbeing of clergy in their respective denominational organisation.

Three of the interviewees have themselves suffered work-related burnout.

#### **4.3. Responses to the individual research questions**

The interviewees understood the intention of the study to investigate the nature of contemporary clergy work and retention with a focus on mainstream and church-specific resilience training.

They recognised that the study was less concerned with identifying reasons why frontline clergy leave the ministry. Rather, that the study sought to develop a deeper understanding of the contemporary nature of clergy work and their motivation to continue doing the work.

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*“From what I can pick up, you're looking at ways to help people perhaps who have dropped out of ministry return back into ministry or perhaps not even dropped out, but who are in ministry but struggling to continue to stay the course. I picked up that it wasn't so much the reasons why they drop out, but to continue (#14).”*

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*“It's great. I think it's a great topic, you know, because we hear the opposite end, where people drop out so quick and what is it that makes others hang around longer (#03).”*

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#### **4.4. How would you describe your current role?**

The interviewees described the extent of their roles to include a variety of pastoral and executive responsibilities within Church and community settings.

These include raising funds for institutions, overseeing multiple congregations and welfare facilities, engaging in ministry work among refugees and migrants, and providing pastoral care and counselling.

Some involve significant administrative oversight of schools, community services, and aged care. While others are focused on disaster recovery chaplaincy, frontline evangelism, and promoting genuine community engagement.

Many have extensive ministry experience of advocating for clergy wellbeing, supporting rural and urban churches, and in training and mentoring candidates for ministry.

Additionally, some have backgrounds in trade, emergency services, and bi-vocational roles, contributing to their diverse skillsets in leadership, teaching, and community involvement.

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#### **4.5. What is your experience of frontline clergy resignation and retention?**

The interviewees shared their personal experience of clergy being burnt, hurt and dropping out of local church ministry for a variety of reasons. Naming health issues, stress, and moral failure. For others, a loss of faith, a loss of confession, a loss of meaning, a loss of trust in the Church. Also, those who found it very difficult to work within a particular denomination for whatever reason. Prompting a deliberate emphasis on Clergy wellbeing.

Some clergy who would return are unable because of their lack of trust in the church and don't want to relive their trauma.

Still others stayed the whole course of their ministry and have been serving in one church for decades.

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*“I've got a few friends who are no longer in pastoral ministry. Some are doing chaplaincy. Some of them are out altogether. Bit burnt. Bit hurt.*

*“You know how the corporate wheels of the Church drive the church and they're out and burnt, don't wanna go back.*

*One mate, he wants to go back, but he just says, “I don't know if I could trust the church again.” That whole kind of, I've been burned, you know, like, why would I really want to put myself in that position again (#03).”*

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*“I think of recent times, that I have a few friends that have left the ministry for various reasons. Health issues, and stress. Moral failure, that's sad to say. Or they just found it very difficult to work within a particular denomination for whatever reason.*

*“I have got friends that have done that, but then on the same course I've got other friends who stayed the whole course of their Ministry, been in one church for decades and pastored it really well. I wish that that was my story, but it's not my story (#04).”*

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There was also an acknowledgement that this is a widespread issue and that a focus on clergy wellbeing has been institutionalised. However, despite these efforts a loss of meaning for the individual and purpose of the church appears to be among reasons why they leave.

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*“It's certainly something that we talk about a lot. So through our Church Work Support Department, which is national... we do try and focus on the wellbeing of clergy. Reflecting also on those clergy who leave, why they leave, we found that there's a variety of reasons, from the loss of faith,.. particular the loss of*

*confession... in relation to what the church should look like, and... a loss of meaning (#13)."*

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**4.5.1.     *The work of the clergy is a Calling not a career choice, but one's destiny from which one cannot escape or retire***

The interviewees generally agreed that the work of clergy cannot be recognised as an 'ordinary' mainstream occupation or career. Rather, that the clergy are driven by a higher order purpose described as, "a Calling" with a spiritual dimension to the work. They agreed that those who leave may lose or never had this strong sense of purpose or Calling.

That this Calling is not a career choice but part of one's life and destiny from which you can't escape or retire.

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*"I have a very strong sense that that there's a need for a Calling into ministry. I don't see ministry as an ordinary type of job. I think there's a spiritual dimension to it. And... I have observed that people who drop away don't have a strong sense of Calling.*

*"They've taken it on perhaps more as a just as an occupation... it's a good way to help people, but having sensed that there's a spiritual dimension to it there's a struggle going on all the time.*

*"They just work themselves to death, they maybe function out of a sense of guilt, or they are functioning because of other people's expectations on them. And they just get to a point where they just can't continue any longer.*

*"(With) a skewed idea of what ministry is all about – disillusionment, what am I doing wrong – and dropped away, and they leave with a real bitterness (#14)."*

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*“I would sum it one word actually, Calling. I think some people go into ministry because it's a job. It's a career. And some people are going because it's a Calling.*

*“If you pursue it as a job or career, you're gonna change career at some point because that's the Australian way. Most people change careers two to three times in their working life. So if you are in ministry because it's a career or a job, then you'll change.*

*“But you can't escape a Calling if you're Called. That's why retirement doesn't end it. You retire, but how do you retire from a Calling? Mm-hmm. It's part of your life... so you can't escape a Calling, whether it's holidays or retirement or anything else. So, longevity. Calling (#12).”*

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*“I've seen what they do to pastors, to see in various places. I sat and cried with them and shared the agonies with them as well as the triumphs. But when I was Called into this role, I did it out of obedience because I got a definite Call from God out of Scripture. It was very clear. It wasn't half-hearted and it wasn't open to debate...*

*Knowing I had a definite Call from God, it wasn't a career choice. It wasn't like, gee, we need a pastor, it might as well be me sort of thing. I'm in it for the long haul because I believe God's given me a destiny and a Calling. So, I'm here until they carry me out in a box as far as I'm concerned (#06).”*

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**4.5.2. Ministry training institutions are now producing graduates who view ministry as a middle-class career and lack the perseverance to fulfil their Calling in a bi-vocational setting**

Two interviewees replied that ministry training institutions are now producing graduates who see ministry as a middle-class career and for whatever reason lack the perseverance to fulfil their Calling in a bi-vocational setting.

Suggesting that the dropout rate of these graduates would be greater now than previously because in the past there was more of an emphasis on Calling than training.

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*“Well, we know that percentage wise it’s not very good. There’s a very high dropout rate in the ministry. But I think part of that is because more and more these days the ministry has become a career.*

*“It used to be, and I’m not just wanting to say let’s go back to the good old days. I’m not thinking in those terms. But it used to be that a lot of ministers would begin their ministry in a by-vocational setting where they would be fulfilling their Calling but gain their income from another source.*

*“These days, we’ve trained people to say, OK, go to Bible College or Theological College, ministry Training Institute or whatever we want to call it. And when you come out the other end you can expect a high to a high middle-class income, a house and a car.*

*“That’s the expectation so many have and the idea of being by-vocational is just totally anathemas to many coming out of training institutions today. And I think that the dropout rate of those would be greater than it has been in decades past where there was more to do with Calling and less to do with training (#12).”*

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*“And then there were those that just when they left college, for whatever reason, just chose not to go into full-time ministry. I spent a lot of time bi-vocational with the church not being able to support a full-time Pastor. So I worked to support that, and did that for many, many years.*

*“Yeah, just the thing for me was a lot of them just never, they got to the end of college and never took the step. And I guess that highlights a particular thing, and that is, are we prepared to persevere because for my own personal life? While I wanted to go into full-time ministry soon as I left college, it was*

*actually close to 20 years before it actually ended up as my single employed role as a full-time Pastor eventuated (#02)."*

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#### **4.5.3. Training those without a Call is to set them up for failure**

One interviewee replied that if the Church trains people without an evident Calling in their life and sends them into clergy work, then the Church has set them up for failure.

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*"Whether we're talking about a paid clergyman or in the Church context an elder in the church. Biblically, I'm talking about... I do not believe that within the Church you can create an elder. I believe you can only recognise an elder. That is to say, you can see the Calling that God has on the person and you recognise that Calling.*

*"And to a very large degree, I think the same applies for ministry. Sorry. We can't create a minister. We can equip. We can provide training. But only God can give the Calling.*

*"And if we simply train people and send them out we're setting them up for failure (#12)."*

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#### **4.5.4. Present training does not equip clergy with the necessary skills to handle churches in crisis given the broader expectations of the clergy today**

One interviewee reflected on their experience, noting that perhaps half of the cohort they trained with 11 years ago are no longer in ministry to illustrate that the clergy are not being equipped with the skill set needed to deal with churches in crisis.

And their belief is that if clergy are going to sustain long-term ministry, omission needs to be understood because the expectation of society upon the clergy is a lot broader now than it ever used to be 30-40-50 years ago.

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*“It's such an important and good question. I'll give you a little anecdote to start with, and then the kind of observations. So I went through training with a group of about 12 other candidates in our cohort... and 11 years later from when I started that process, probably nearly half of those people are no longer in ministry, which is a pretty damning statistic really, isn't it, if you think about all those people going into ministry... and nearly half of them are not doing ministry...”*

*“Then it's also, I think in the Church context, I think this is true with a lot of other churches as well, is the sense of what do you do with churches that are largely in crisis? Yeah, because a lot of our churches are in crisis mode for one reason or another.*

*So, to send people into those contexts I think you need a real particular set of skills and I don't know if you're always giving our ministers the skills they need to deal with that particular issue.*

*You know, we send them out with the expectation that... it's all gonna be hunky-dory and very exciting... But actually, what they're dealing with a lot of the time is a lot of tired, disaffected, weary, unhappy people in churches that are basically not going very well. So how do you deal with that?*

*So, I think if we're going to really have long term ministers, we need to really understand that well and change the expectations because society has changed a lot, you know things have changed. And, I think, you know the expectation of ministry is a lot broader than it used to be. You know, I think it was a bit more of a well-defined skillset going back 30-40-50 years. But now it's a very broad skillset and there's a lot of stuff you need to be across (#07).”*

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**4.5.5. Those who left too soon were too busy with their own goals to foster support and accountability.**

Three interviewees offered their observation of clergy who left ministry too soon were reluctant to communicate with others who may have had a different approach or methodology in ministry. Instead, they had attempted to stand alone and had not cultivated a team dynamic in order to support and provide accountability. Instead, they were too busy with their own goals to have space for themselves, close relationships, or their family.

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*“I suspect that some of my friends who moved on from ministry again, in my view, maybe too soon, there also was an aspect of being quite insular, there was also an aspect of not necessarily having exposure to other folks in ministry who might have a different approach or different methodology (#08).*

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*“I think it's too many pastors stand alone. I'm really, really big on teams and I think I was driven to that point because, flipside, there's also pastoral abuse, where pastors really treat their people very badly. I've been a victim of that a couple of times.*

*But as a pastor, if you're trying to stand alone, it's very, very hard... particularly in the small churches where they, they're the one pastor, there's no team dynamic, there's no support. So, I really think the stand-alone thing is a terrible idea.*

*So, I've been smart enough, I guess, blessed enough to gather around me a team who are very, pro me, very supportive of my vision and where we're going (#06).”*

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*“So, he (the pastor) had something in mind. He had some goals in mind, but he gave himself no space... there was no space there. There was no time for him or for his close relationships (#14).”*

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**4.5.6. *Contrasting the scale of clergy leaving in America and Australia, and confirming that many clergy are still going strong in ministry***

One interviewee related their experience in America and Australia through maintaining contact with their peer group and others around them and pointed to many of their peer group to be still going strong in ministry.

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*“My experience has been pretty good. But then, obviously you being in this situation being in this in this field, you hear a lot of that. So, in America, we were constantly hearing how many pastors were leaving the ministry all the time... it's a massive, massive issue. The number of retiring, departing burnt out ministers is almost astronomical when you think about it. But then, that for me, a lot of that is, the severity of that is conditioned by the fact that they're a much bigger country population wise.*

*“So, in Australia, where you're so much smaller and so you just don't hear of all of that. Whereas in America you heard about it all the time and for whatever reason it was news, you know, it would find its way onto the secular broadcasts, just the statistics anyway.*

*“So, I guess I'm, I'm drawing on what experience I have based on that demographic and that cohort that I was connected with, and those years around me, as well at the Bible College. So I think of a couple of years ahead of me and a couple of years behind me, many of those guys are still going strong in the ministry (#02).”*

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**4.5.7. The consuming nature of clergy work is a potential catalyst for the breakdown of clergy marriages and family life, causing some clergy to leave full-time ministry for their family's sake**

Four of the interviewees characterised the consuming nature of clergy work as a potential catalyst for the breakdown of clergy marriages and family life, causing some clergy to drift away from full-time ministry for their family's sake.

They pointed to spousal tension and a lack of wisdom in managing family life or themselves until they are too far gone to stay.

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*“One of the things that has crippled some of our guys to drift away from ministry is the family, their marriage because as you know, the ministry takes over and it becomes the consuming drive that there's no time for families, no time for marriage, no time for the kids and they grow up resenting that... just because you are anointed when you're preaching and teaching doesn't mean we have the wisdom to manage our family. So, I think that's one of the biggest things that has drifted guys away from the ministry.*

*“The other one is just lack of wisdom in looking after yourself, and I'm very strict on my time. I don't say yes to everything, yet I've seen some pastors who say yes to a lot of things... in Bible college it was the same thing. I mean, I think there's probably out of a class of about 30 students, there's three of us that are still serving the Lord today. Yeah, which is really sad (#05).”*

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*“It's interesting because some of the guys who left came back, but they left mainly through burnout. I guess not recognising it, then being too far gone to stay. And they were just emptied, or their families were burnt out, not them. And so they had to leave for their family's sake (#11).”*

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*“Whatever job you're doing, you're accruing service. Then take it. Don't wait till the end and cash it out. Actually take it because it's so you can stay doing what you do... that's the whole idea is that you don't suffer burnout... at least take it when you can because that's what it's there for... and that's on me, so it's also on your church. The church should be making you take that. That's a requirement.*

*“I've watched too many burnout now and go... because they've not taken their leave. And they owe it to themselves, their family, and the church (#11).”*

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*“I think I've been fortunate in that I've not seen many guys resign particularly so from those that I'm close to. I think about my College class and how it got down to a core group by the last year and those that chose to go into ministry, most of them are still in ministry with the exception of one or two who are still in a volunteer but not paid ministry.*

*“I mean, obviously when you go to (Bible) College full-time, you're really going because you want to become a full-time minister - that's why we sort of went...*

*“But one of those people who went into full-time ministry straight out of college there was a disconnect from a family perspective, he felt very strongly Called to pastor a church, but his wife partner didn't have that same strength of Calling and that caused a tension that resulted in him ending up back in the workforce, in the secular workforce but maintaining a connection to church as a trustee on the church Board or through running the men's ministry, preaching things like that (#02).”*

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**4.5.8. *There is a stigma directed towards those clergy known to be experiencing burnout that hinders a clear message of support from the Church and dissuades others from speaking up before it's too late***

One interviewee commented on their surprise to observe how a colleague was denigrated by other pastors for leaving due to burnout. They never expected to see that reaction in the church towards a colleague, and it caused the interviewee to consider what might be said about them by other pastors if they were ever to leave the church due to burnout.

Causing the interviewee to ask if there is support amongst the clergy for those experiencing burnout, or a stigma towards them for not being unable to handle the pressures of being a pastor.

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*Speaking of a colleague who left due to burnout... "This is an awful thing, which I think we do. I've heard people denigrate him, like other pastors denigrate him because he couldn't handle being a pastor, and that surprised me. I expect that in the bank (secular employment), but I don't expect that in the Church. And so, I would be quick to jump on that.*

*"But that affected me as well, and if that's what they're saying about him, if I ever leave the church for burnout or whatever, that's what going to say about me. Hmm, maybe they would, maybe they wouldn't. But so, that's another, I guess, a mindset thing too. Are we supporting each other or not? Because that was a clear lack of support for this guy.*

*"And he has thrived since he's come back. But he also knows his limits now, too, after his burnout (#11)."*

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**4.5.9. *The feelings of shame, grief and failure that accompany clergy burnout requires faith, affirmation, care, patience, understanding and a sense of being valued in the long journey towards recovery***

One interviewee responded with their own burnout journey – how they had felt a serious sense of shame at not being able to cope, accompanied by a great deal of personal grief and a real sense of failure at not being able to continue.

They noted that the people in his local church congregation were not ashamed of him and generally supportive, but unsure of his capacity to be able to cope in the future.

They reflected with regret now at not being able to admit his limits before crashing out, and now even after four-and-a-half years still having to face “the long tail” of daily admitting his limits and stress thresholds.

They talked about the support that the Church (Denomination) put in place in terms of their legal obligations including Work Cover with time off and a phased return to work programme, and not initially having to face the most stressful situations upon their return.

They spoke about the provision to see a psychologist who was a Christian and able to understand the interviewee’s faith, but not why the interviewee became a pastor in the first place, let alone why the interviewee would go back.

The interviewee recalled a memory during burnout in which they felt taken for granted when working insane hours caring for people in complicated situations that were all but impossible to resolve.

And in the recovery phase, they were left with a sense of having failed and unable to do their job without crying.

they talked about the strong sense that came from their church and the older pastor sent by the Church (Denomination) to support them. They felt valued and the church would wait for them to recover.

During all that, the interviewee's faith motivated them, and the pastoral care they received focused on faith and reassurance. For the interviewee, the critical difference was receiving a real sense of being valued.

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*"I myself felt a serious sense of shame over (my burnout) what had occurred, over not being able to cope. The people of the church were generally quite supportive and I didn't sense that they were ashamed of me in any way when that occurred, although they were unsure of me and my capacity, and unsure if I'd be able to cope in the future..."*

*"I wish I had been able to admit that before I got to the crash point. But what I face now, that is four and a-half years ago, what I do face now is that it has a long tail. You gotta watch your stress thresholds.*

*"There's a great deal of grief that accompanies burnout. There's a real sense of failure in not being able to continue. To admit your limits, but you know that's something I face day-to-day because I still notice my limits (#15)."*

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*"The supports that the Church that I serve put in place in terms of their legal obligations, they fulfilled them and I received Work Cover. I saw a psychologist who was a Christian and was able to understand my faith. I was given an adjusted work program and a return to work program (#15)."*

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*"The psychologist couldn't really understand why become a pastor in the 1st place, let alone why I'd go back.*

*"I felt like in the case of my circumstances, it was actually the spiritual care that I received. We call it pastoral care. But it was care focused on my faith and reassurance. And that's the honest truth.*

*“He (the psychologist) was excellent. He did affirm my Christian faith in this. He didn't discuss faith matters with me a great deal, but he was able to be, yeah, really respectful and affirming of the Jesus thing that I have.*

*“I wouldn't say that I didn't need the other supports that were given me, specifically the time off, the return to work programme which saw me come back half time and not have to face the most stressful situations...*

*“I think the thing that kept me was good pastoral care and knowing that I was valued (#15).”*

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*“A large sense of the burnout for me and a lot of the pastors that I seem to work with is just feeling taken for granted, just working insane hours. Caring for people in complicated situations that are almost impossible to resolve very often.*

*“You know, you're not. You're not dealing with nice open and shut – like I laid my hands on him and everything was perfect after that stuff.*

*“And so in the burnout, there was a sense of taken for granted.*

*“And in the recovery phase for me there was a sense of, despite the fact that I felt like I had failed, simply because I hadn't had a great explosion or fallen into any great terrible public sin or anything, I just couldn't do my job, I was unable to carry on without crying. That was my big problem.*

*“There was a strong sense that came from the church and the pastor that they sent to me that I was valued and that they would wait. They would wait for me.*

*“The faith kept me going. I mean, that's the only reason I overdid it in the first place, for the young (youth) and not for recognition. Because I'm motivated by the Gospel and I want people to hear that and know that, and so receiving that and being valued in that and yeah. Being ministered to, all the other things are good but for me that was the critical thing that made a difference and a sense of being valued (#15).”*

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**4.6. What is the nature of church work for the clergy as “frontline” workers in terms of the five dimensions of work from the literature?**

**4.6.1. *Integrating Christian faith and professional resources to meet the challenges and realities of their role***

The interviewees agreed that their commitment to Christian faith becomes the catalyst to provoke a life decision for something more, something else, something different than what can be found in an otherwise satisfying corporate work experience.

They described their work unique as a profession because they perceive it to be bigger, greater, and more profound than just doing a job, and that those without a Call would engage clergy work as a job will suffer for it and eventually walk away.

Nonetheless, they had an awareness of an overlap between the spiritual and professional aspects of their work.

The interviewees referred to observing some clergy who had suffered burnout due to a lack of preparedness for the spiritual aspect of the work, while others had not availed themselves of the professional resources available to them either.

They identified the challenge for the clergy to honour what is essentially a spiritual vocation, while effectively integrating the professional resources available to equip them to take ownership of the realities of their role.

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*“In my university years I committed my life to Christ, so there was a new element to my orientation at that point in time, but I think that orientation to Christ meant that a thoroughly satisfying work experience in a multinational corporation was not quite as satisfying, because I sensed that maybe I could be and do and contribute more than I was at that point in time, hence the trajectory of my life.*”

*“So, you work, you do your best. You perform, you achieve, you're rewarded, and you're constantly assessing, am I totally fulfilled in this?”*

*“As a Christian, you say, do I really feel like I'm fulfilling God's shape for my life? And that sort of question for me and for other people I've talked to, it becomes the catalytic factor that makes a decision for something more, something else, something different along the way.*

*“So, I pretty well buy all of your five dimensions. Some of them are much more, I think, innate, fundamental, absolutely essential to being human.*

*“Couple of them are just a function of working in the context of broader organisations societal organisation, professionalism, if you like. So yeah, I think they're all there in my life (#16).”*

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*“Being in the clergy is not, it is a job, it is a profession, but it's also a Calling.*

*“But the overlap is in the professional area, yes, we have a Calling and that makes it unique.*

*“Very few people would say I was Called to be an optometrist - I was called to be, I got a flash of light and inspiration to be a, you know, a lawyer or whatever it is.*

*“We have a Calling from God. That's makes it different. But for some people they haven't got the Calling. All they've got is the profession, so being in the clergy is a profession to them...*

*“If you don't have the initial Calling and the spiritual input to it, it does become a job. And look, you and I know people even in our denomination, it's a job. It's what they do.*

*“And so I think, there is overlap in the practical side of things, but if you want a quote, we say to pastors and leaders when we were sharing with them, ‘Jesus Christ did not die on the cross to give you a job.’*

*“And that's what makes what we do bigger and greater and more profound, because when it's not a job, you know, even the greatest guys, and research guys that I know are, you know, it's still a job.*

*“But this is a Calling. I think it goes beyond that.*

*“If it's a job, then you'll suffer for it and eventually walk away, because it was a job (#06).”*

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*“There's a lot of spiritual warfare that goes on in that space at times... and so when you when you think about (the spiritual side of things) some of the people that have suffered burnout and, you know, the ones that I've seen, sometimes there's a lack of preparedness for that as well...*

*“So it's that side of it. So the spiritual side of things, but then you've also got the kind of professional side of things as well. And what you can do to support yourself professionally? And I think the ministers that tend to really hit the wall are the ones who are not availing themselves of that support as well.*

*“You know that they're not doing professional supervision, that they're not, you know that they're not mindful of the code of ethics. We have a ministry code of ethics, which is a great resource, and we do one day a year where we have a morning where we get together and talk about that and there's a lot of good stuff in there because it's about boundaries. It's about, you know, looking after yourself, all that kind of stuff... about availing yourself of those resources.*

*“But it's a difficult balance and one of the tricky things I think is the sense of saying, well, this is a spiritual endeavour that we do. How do we honour that? Yeah. But then how do we, how do we avail ourselves of all this professional support, but then sort of integrate that together, you know?...*

*“And the danger is you kind of, can lose the spiritual side of things, but then you know, if you really go down, this is a pure, purely spiritual thing that we're doing and you don't care about all the professional support that's available*

*then, you know, people burn out of that and so it's kind of having an integration I think (#07)."*

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*"When I saw that question, what is the nature of the Church Work for the clergy... the first thought that I had was... that we're Called to equip people one by one to love God, love the church, love the lost.*

*"Now let me explain why I think that because I think it will cover a lot of these things. So, so loving God has to do with equipping people in relation to their spiritual journey in regards to their spiritual walk.*

*"The importance of prayer. Why do we pray? Who do we pray to. The importance of daily reading of the Bible, the importance of them getting a good grounding in the Word (the Bible). The importance of fellowship and the importance of fighting spiritual battles...*

*"So it's equipping, the work of the clergy is to equip people to love God... and then give them a good grounding of all of those... so part of the role of the clergy is to equip the people...*

*"The last one is equipping the people to love the lost. And that's for us never to move away from our mandate of the Great Commission...*

*"It doesn't matter where you're at, whether it's at your work, at home, in the school, in university. You're a missionary. You're there as a missionary. You're not just there to have fun and earn money. You're actually there to work, and you're there as a representation of Christ, with the way you work, that you are a missionary...*

*"So to answer the question that our role as clergy is more than just equipping people in the spiritual aspect, but it's equipping people to love the church by connecting and building good relationship and equipping people to never forget their mandate in reaching the lost (#05)."*

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*“We get God's guidance, and we feel our way and we go to Bible College, and we study to become a minister.*

*“And Bible College is very good at prepares you in many ways for certain things, but certainly not for everything.*

*“And, I was fortunate that I had been in a church that was growing and had a very established pattern for pastoral care, for training, making disciples, raising up new Christians and loving people, and a strong prayer base. So, I had all those things.*

*“So, when I went through Bible College, that was great, but when you come out the other end and you're going to ministry, all of a sudden you find where the buck stops with you.*

*“So, you have to take ownership of that and be responsible. I'm answering your question right here, but I reckon somewhere when I was about 40 I just acknowledged and took ownership of the fact that I was hardwired by God I believe to love people and pastor people.*

*“And that's what I was Called to do. Well, that's what I was pre-programmed to do. Whatever you want to say. However, you wanna describe it (#04).”*

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#### **4.7. Work is an innate human function that informs one's life purpose and role**

##### **4.7.1. Calling informs Purpose and Role**

The interviewees understood the innate nature of work to be a gift from God. This understanding was informed by their belief that all humans are created in the image of God, possessing certain capacities, competencies, and the ability to respond positively or negatively to Divine Call.

They agreed that their role as clergy is shaped by a clear sense of meaning, agency and achievement which is derived from their unique Calling, and that Calling provides them with purpose, role and vision without which their community will falter.

This distinction in relation to their Calling is both internal and external which means they can't simply switch off at the end of the working day regarding the on-call nature of pastoral work.

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*“Work as an innate human function that informs one's life, purpose and role. Well. That's a thoroughly Christian understanding. Absolutely. I endorse that fully. I think that my life has a shape. A trajectory of focus.*

*“I don't think it's some, like there's only one path and if I miss it (I can miss it). My life is a reflection of what I think is Divine Call, and Divine Call is accompanied by Divine Gifting, if you like or Divine Empowerment, Divine Opportunity. Whatever way you want to describe that. I describe my life in terms of purpose and role. That moment in time, you would feel like there was strong purpose in all of your life.*

*“But yeah, look, unless your work is connected to meaning, and meaning doesn't come unless there's a sense of purpose, a sense of agency, a sense of achievement. Then what is Work without a sense of purpose? It's really some way to fill in, to fill in your time and make some money (#16).”*

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*“I totally understand where they're coming from. And to a degree, that's true. But I think that ministry is informed from a higher source. And again, I see Calling as different to Work.*

*“When I was in full-time pastoral ministry, I never went to Work. I never was away from it because it's a Calling. So my purpose and role... that that was never really the issue. It was the Calling (#12).”*

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*“I would absolutely agree. God worked for six days and rested on the 7th, and then God made us in His image. And so it is an innate human function that human beings work, and we also rest, cause it's an innate God-given gift.*

*“So I would see work as an expression of the image of God. Yeah, so for me. Work is very much a part of my purpose and role. I often think as clergy, maybe even more so, work is deeply identified with my life purpose because this is an expression of my Call (#15).”*

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*“I would see work as a gift of God in the first sense in the secular world and I would see work informed by, shaped by my Calling in the Gospel as something even better. It's kind of redeemed, redeemed work over in the in the world God made.*

*“God might have given work, but it got corrupted and, you know, workaholism and working for yourself and you know, work for the wrong reasons. But in the Gospel, maybe my work can be redeemed and become working for something better, for a new creation (#15).”*

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*“Innate purpose. What about in the church movement I serve? Innate? Absolutely. Yep. And what in Christian context, we call that Call, we feel Called to do what we do. We feel Called to, we feel within that Call that we we're making a contribution to our wellbeing and wellbeing of others. You know, you wouldn't be a Christian minister unless you felt that you were contributing to human flourishing with a very distinct understanding of human flourishing as humans created in the image of God with a certain set of capacities, competencies and the ability to respond positively to a Call or negatively away from a divine Call (#16).”*

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*“You know, you're not born to be a pastor. But you get a unique Calling, and when you get that unique Calling that gives you a purpose and a role and a vision.*

*The Bible says without a vision that people perish. Very true of pastors if they come in and there's no purpose or drive or vision in what they're doing... they're not able to drive a vision, and so the people start to perish. They start to waste away because there's no vision.*

*So I think Vision and Calling are the two areas rather than the innateness of needing to work or that that we feel that work is part of our being.*

*I think it's for the clergy it's more about a Calling and a Vision for what's happening (#06).”*

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*“I think it does. Work is an innate human function, that informs one's like purpose and role. I think one area with clergy especially is the identity as a pastor, as a clergyperson...*

*“We have a distinction in... relation to internal Calling. So the external Calling that God Calls through the church acknowledges the internal Calling that a person may have into ordained ministry. And that then is then formalised through a Call to serve a parish, or the Call to serve an agency of the church.*

*“So, we distinguish between an internal and an external Call, and certainly I think within that you don't stop being a pastor when you switch off at the end of the day... which then influences the on-call nature of pastoral work...*

*“That we do talk about that. So, the purpose and the role and the innate human function that informs one's life is very much, I believe, accentuated for clergy (#13).”*

#### **4.7.2. Calling is also Work**

One interviewee commented that for many people in mainstream society, their Work is merely a means *to earn money*.

That, some in the Church find it difficult to use the term 'Work' in relation to the duties performed by the clergy, preferring to use Vocation or Calling.

But the interviewee thought it is essential to recognise that ministry is work as well.

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*"Look, it's tricky. I get where that's coming from and on one level, yeah, that's fine. But there's something in this, if you apply it to clergy work. I think it's fine (but) thinking about the whole dimension of it... but just the recognition that for many people, work doesn't really have this function. You know, a means to an end... and I'm just pondering that.*

*"The thing that comes to me through this I suppose is the question we have in the church about, what is ministry? And I think it is Work, but there are people that don't like to use that word, or kind of shy away from that. Yeah. And we'll use things like Vocation, Calling, this kind of stuff as well.*

*"I appreciate that dimension of it. Don't get me wrong, but sometimes we shy away from the word, Work. We shy away from it. And I am a little bit wary of that because I feel like, you gotta recognise that it is Work as well. You gotta recognise that it is so (#07)."*

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#### **4.7.3. When clergy define their purpose, they can be flexible in their roles**

One interviewee observed that clergy feel a deep sense of Call but are also hardwired as a human to find purpose and fulfill their role. Adding that church roles often come with job descriptions that keep clergy busy (*faithful*) but not necessarily fulfilled (*fruitful*).

That when clergy define their primary purpose, they can be flexible to adapt their various roles to achieve that identified purpose to be both faithful and fulfilled (fruitful) in their work.

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*"I think that we get within us, we're hardwired to want to work. But also to have a purpose and to have a role. Yeah, I think the role is very flexible. The purpose I think you would want to clearly define. I think not working is almost contrary to how we function as a human being. I think we're hardwired to work.*

*"So in the context of being clergy, I think you feel a deep sense of Call and responsibility to find a purpose, or define your purpose.*

*"For me, my whole clergy life is defined by two statements. My desire is, number one to go and make disciples. Number two is to shepherd the flock of God. That governs however, and whatever I do within the life of the church.*

*"The role can change. However I function can be defined by that role. But the purpose never changes. My purpose is pretty clear. I know what I'm there to do. To make fully devoted followers of Jesus Christ.*

*"Now it took me many years to work that out, because you, if you're in a church, sometimes you just get a job description or a role and you fulfill that, and you're busy and you're working. But I don't know necessarily you are fulfilled. You become faithful... sometimes you're not always fruitful.*

*"I think once you define, what's my real purpose, I can be flexible with the role. I can be, faithful, and I can be fruitful...*

*"But I think what happens has to happen that you have to work that out for yourself as a human being, what you really want to do as far as your purpose goes, but I think my role can change.*

*“You know, I can be a senior pastor or I can be a lay worker in the church. I can do a number of different things (role) as long as I’m achieving the purposes that I want to (#04).”*

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#### **4.7.4. Purpose is not focused on job security or making profit**

One interviewee commented that the five dimensions of Work from mainstream literature are, in fact, an extension of a Christian understanding of ministry.

At the same time, they expressed their skepticism about for-profit organisations defining themselves in terms of anything other than making a profit.

Suggesting that people choose jobs with governments and bureaucracies for job security rather than any altruistic purpose.

That only people with a strong sense of Call or personal vocation are those prepared to take precarious positions working for an environmental cause, animal welfare, or for the welfare of humans living on the streets in the inner city, or the like.

That only the Church space or the not-for-profit sector exists for an altruistic purpose, where profitability and return on investment are not the focus other than to pay the bills and have a dollar left afterwards.

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*“Look, you know, to me, to be frank, this (the five dimension of work from mainstream literature) is an extension of Christian understanding of ministry.*

*“One of the great things that causes me a degree of humor, I suppose, is watching, for-profit organisations trying to define themselves in terms of purpose. I look at them like, no, you’ve got no purpose at all except to make profit. That’s your real purpose.*

*They come up with all these, you know, these... they're not fabrications, that's unfair, but they're manufactured purposes... Awe, rubbish. No. You make a profit for shareholders.*

*“And the truth is when I look at governments and bureaucracies, and forgive me for being really forthright, I just don't buy it. People get a job there because it's a safe job. There's a good unionisation in that place. They're protected, blah blah, blah blah. The only people who really are out there and some sense of Call or vocation are people who take precarious positions.*

*“It could be in faith-based institutions. It could be outside of that. You could be working for the environmental cause or animal welfare, or, you know, just the welfare of humans on the streets, something in the inner city of Sydney or something like that. And they're the people who really have a strong sense of personal vocation. But everyone else manufactures it now, and I just think it's a bit of nonsense to be frank (#16).”*

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*“I won't criticise the entire world. I'll criticise business. It makes me laugh when I look at, you know, a Fortune 500 company or an A6 100 company and they give you this noble purpose. And I think no, that's not your purpose. Your purpose is to deliver returns to your shareholders.*

*When you jump into the church space, or the not-for-profit space. Churches or not-for-profits exist for one thing.*

*An altruistic purpose. Now you know you might agree with it or not, but it's a really strong sense of purpose and so profitability return on investment they're not really important categories. You've gotta pay your bills and have a dollar left afterwards that's all that matters (#16).”*

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**4.7.5. Purpose is not the source of clergy Identity, but Calling defines their purpose and role**

The interviewees recognised Work to be an innate human function and a primary expression of their purpose, but not the source of their identity which does not come from what they do, but from who they are as a follower of Jesus Christ.

That their ministry is more than a job or a role, but a Calling that defines their purpose and role. And that they see the danger of being distracted from their Calling by ever allowing their Work to become their source of their identity.

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*“The guys or the people that I’ve noticed that stayed the course, who have been able to hang in there, have had a real sense of purpose, they know the reason why they’re there...”*

*“I think ultimately your purpose comes from Christ... that your primary identity is in Christ. But I don’t think that takes away from the fact that our Work does reflect something of who we are.*

*“I think our identity comes out of Christ, but it expresses itself - and one of the places it expresses itself in a primary way is in our Work. So it’s an expression. So our Work is an expression of who we are in Christ.*

*“(For example) the typist... she saw her primary role as a disciple, or as a follower of Jesus Christ, and that gave expression every day in her role and I think that’s what that means, that whatever you’re doing, you do it well (#14).”*

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*“I have two thoughts on that.*

*Firstly, yes, it is an innate human function, and I think the problem could be, can be that (Secondly) we derive a sense of identity from what we do as opposed to who we are.*

*And so there can be something of a clash there, and we just have to be careful of that because our identity is found in Christ, not in what we do in terms of work.*

*“But it’s definitely true a true statement. It does inform our purpose and our role, I mean we always have to look at the fact that we are working even though when it comes to ministry we would probably use the term “Calling” as opposed to Work, but I do get that Work is an important...*

*“And so looking at Genesis and through the Scriptures how work fits into the biblical narrative. So it’s yeah, it’s important to hold those two things in some level of tension in the sense that, yes, we are working and working is good, God commanded that we would work, but we would also rest, but that we don’t - and I think this is where our modern, up until the last generation I think we created an identity for ourselves based on our work.*

*“Whereas this younger generation that’s entering the workforce now have a different view on that. They’ve sort of got this idea that work doesn’t, you know, identify who they are, it is just one of many things that identify who they are, and they’re searching for that. They’re not really sure actually what it is. My contention would be that it’s obviously a number of factors. And from a secular point of view the one factor that they’re leaving out is the God factor, the spiritual side of things.*

*“So yes, I would say yes, work is an innate human function that informs on our purpose and role, but as a Minister, I have to be mindful that it doesn’t define who I am. I’m defined by Christ and my relationship with Christ (#02).”*

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*“I do, in that we we’ve been created to be creative in the image of God in my mind which is work... the only difference I guess is, and I’ve seen this way too often, especially in men, is that we let the Work become our identity... rather than something we do because of who we are, if that makes sense.*

*“But, but I do think it's built in us to work. God created us that way. So that makes perfect sense to me. I think ministry has to be more of a Calling than a job... I think the work is very different or can be different, whereas for ministry it is a Calling and I think we're prepared to give more to that maybe than just a job or a role, which therefore makes part of that purpose (#11).”*

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*“Ohh absolutely. I think one of the problems with a lot of individuals going into the ministry is that they see it as a job and not a Calling. To me that speaks everything of Calling as a human function that informs one's purpose and role... I know beyond a shadow of doubt that I was Called into the ministry and it then became my purpose, it became my role (#09).”*

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*“Certainly in ministry, you're being led by, you desire to be led by God, so you know what you believe God's direction is and then you are obedient to that. But that does give you that purpose and role in life. Yes, in ministry, it's led by God (#10).”*

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*“Yeah, absolutely. I think that lines up biblically. We are God's workmanship created in Christ Jesus to do good, good works that He's prepared for us in advance to do. So there must be this to work, and for the clergy, the minister, the pastor, absolutely it informs one's life purpose and role.*

*“So that for me, then that also is, differentiates from identity. If I begin to identify that my work is my identity, what I do is who I am, that's a step too far.*

*“But, because of who I am, when my identity is established, then I seek purpose and meaning and it informs my life purpose and role. Yeah. I think that that checks out from a clergy perspective...”*

*But then the purpose kind of overlays with that in terms of how that has worked out. So that the Call can be very broad, but then the purpose maybe*

*more narrow, not narrow, but more refined. So the Call might be you're going to share the Gospel but the purpose may be, my purpose is to young people for instance, or to street evangelism or such as that. Yeah, I think the purpose may change over life seasons, but the Call remains (#01)."*

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*"I think we all start in that purpose and role place. But I do think we get caught up or easily distracted in the, in just the machine and the mechanisms of church life itself and rather than being in an innate human function that informs our purpose and role, it actually becomes our identity in a negative way.*

*"Your role and which church you're in, and its growing or shrinking, and church life becomes your identity. You know like, if you go to conferences, which I don't go to too much anymore to be honest.*

*It'll be the dudes from massive big mega churches and what they say is inspiring and good communication. All that, and if you think most of the churches in Australia are small churches and what they're saying isn't really relevant for us with 100 people.*

*So people chased that, and it became their identity. The purpose and identity gets replaced subtly and overtime. It gets replaced by, you're doing it for my identity. Some may become more interested in building their church than growing the Kingdom (of God) (#03)."*

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*"In my reflections on the church there's been a shift towards a model of church that almost, to some extent mirrors the secular world in the way that the church functions... it's been popularised that we work with this idea of excellence, which I'm all for, but then you've still got pockets of church where it's very much reliant on the Biblical mandate..."*

*"But the church has got this push to become, it's (the Church is) not in the world but it's somewhat mirroring the world in the way that it's been set up in*

*the way that it utilises various tools... but you would get a different answer depending on the type of church that you used as your marker. There are some of these more, I guess, larger contemporary churches that are very, very structured and formalised, and follow lots of business acumen and principles.*

*“And then there are churches that are still very much in the vein of, we’re a church and we don’t want to go down that path. We’re trying to in everything that we do, we will try to stave off going down that path and there’s good and bad for both of those I think, you know, and it it’s almost a discussion all-of-its-own that could be had (#02).”*

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#### **4.8. Work affects and influences our wellbeing**

##### **4.8.1. Dedication to their Calling, their work, their life, the expectations of others and burnout affects their wellbeing**

The interviewees gave several perspectives of what affects their wellbeing, and how their dedication to their Calling, balancing work, private life, expectations and burnout affects their overall wellbeing whether things are going well or not.

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*“100% it impacts your wellbeing. Whether people see it or not it impacts you mentally, emotionally, physically, spiritually... usually for the negative.*

*“I don’t want to be a pessimist, maybe just need to be a realist.*

*“And, the other side is when the church is going really well, everything is cranking along really well. Then that can suck so much time and energy that your family lose out because you’re going 24/7. You don’t get enough sleep when you’re tired you run to caffeine and sugar, you rely on them for your energy. And that’s when things are going good, let alone when things are not going well (#03).”*

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*“Yes. Work. What you do obviously affects and influences our wellbeing because it becomes sometimes emotional and stressful. And there is no doubt that that takes a physical and emotional toll on a lot of people.*

*“I understand why pastors burnout. It's very easy to see why they burnout. And I think part of the reason that the pastor has burned out is because of the expectation that people place on them.*

*“Every church wants a pastor who's 30 to 40 years of age with 50 years' experience. Able to relate to youth and old people. Obviously, well trained and educated. Had time to go to university, do theological training but yet still be in that younger age bracket and have children that are perfect. Not to mention a wife that is subservient and a free extra for the church as an extra worker that they get for nothing. And so, with all of those pressures, I can understand why a lot of pastors burnout and find they just cannot do what is being expected of them. So Work. Yes, it affects and influences our wellbeing (#12).”*

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*“Wellbeing. Definitely. Most definitely, yeah. You can't get away from that one. Definitely, and it does affect and influence our whole wellbeing in that, if we give too much to the Calling and not enough to either our families or looking after ourselves (#11).”*

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*“Absolutely. I think that what you do affects and influences how you feel or your wellbeing. Definitely.*

*“I think sometimes though, it depends. If you're a very driven personality your work is going to be affecting your wellbeing and influencing your wellbeing because you will want to see results, you want to see achievements. You want to see things happening, and if things don't happen...*

*“For instance, you're working as clergy. You're doing all this really good, loving, caring, etcetera. But. you lose people in the church, key people leave and go.*

*“If you're very focused and very like driven, that will really affect you.*

*“Definitely. So what I'm saying there is what you're doing, your work will have affect and influence your wellbeing, especially if it's results driven.*

*“Whereas I'm more, I focus now on the purpose. Am I doing what I'm Called to do?*

*“I just got to do my work. But it won't affect my wellbeing. Because I've just been doing what I'm supposed to be doing (#04).”*

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**4.8.2.** *A unique challenge to clergy wellbeing in contrast to secular employment is that clergy do not have the freedom to compartmentalise their work and simply enjoy the weekend at home*

One interviewee in relation to their wellbeing identified the challenges of ministry compared to secular employment.

How when in secular employment, he could compartmentalise his work and enjoy the blessing of weekends at home without carrying any particular Call or spiritual element to what he had been doing throughout the week. Compared to the concepts and understanding around ministry, it not being a job, but your whole identity, and the struggle and complexity to deal with that well.

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*“And again, I think you see this, this is the difficulty for ministry. In terms of having. Yeah, there's several things that connect here.*

*“So before, before I got into ministry, I used to work. Yeah. And, you know, had different jobs. Yeah. And there was a capacity for me with a lot of those roles to really compartmentalise that.*

*“So (in secular employment) on a Friday night, when I was coming home from work, I was done for the week. I didn't need to think about work over the weekend. I wasn't interested in thinking about work over the weekend. Yeah, and I didn't feel there was any particular Call on my life or spiritual element to what I've been doing in the week.*

*“So the blessing of that is that when I got home for the weekend, I was home. I was engaged there. I was not drifting off elsewhere. Yeah. And I was not carrying this whole work thing through the rest of my time in the week.*

*“The difficulty with our kind of conceptions and understanding around ministry, I think, is this sense of how we carry that. Yeah, because very much so in terms of how we frame things, we are saying, you know, when you become a minister, it's not, you know, it's not really a job you do, it's your whole identity. Yeah. You know, it's definitional for your life, and I'm not arguing against the understanding But it carries with it at times certain complications, and I think we struggle to deal with them well (#07).”*

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#### **4.8.3. Clergy enjoy a positive sense of wellbeing from the positive outcomes they witness in ministry**

Interviewees related the positive sense of wellbeing and strength they gain from being where they feel Called to be, and the positive sense of purpose they feel from making a contribution to both the Church and society.

That despite the pressures of the Work, the immense satisfaction they feel when witnessing the supernatural gives them a remarkable sense of wellbeing much greater than that of just a job well done.

And how in ministry, the positive outcomes they witness reinforce their sense of wellbeing.

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*“Yeah, I'd certainly agree that with that one too. I mean, if you're in the place, but you know, again I'm coming at it from a Christian point of view, but if you're in a place of where you believe God wants you to be. Then there is a sense of purpose, and there is a sense of wellbeing and there is a sense of His strength too.”*

*“You know you can't, I wouldn't be still in ministry if it wasn't for God's strength. Yes, so it does give you a sense of wellbeing being in a place where you believe God wants you to be (#10).”*

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*“Work effects Wellbeing. Look, I thank that's true. I don't think there's anything like the satisfaction that comes out of feeling that you've done, you've achieved something. I think ministry is one area where sometimes it's a bit hard. You could, I could look back over a week and think what did I do this week? You know, where are the results? But in ministry that doesn't happen as quickly. You do see results. It affects and influences our wellbeing. I think generally Work does, but I think in ministry sometimes, being humans, we like to see the results in front of our faces (#14).”*

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*“Absolutely. Again, it's that sense of purpose and having a role, a sense of contribution, contributing. Not just to the church and God's Kingdom but to society that does feed the soul, doesn't it? And it helps influences our wellbeing. I'm contributing. I'm making a difference. And so there's a, yeah, a sense of purpose there and that touches people's wellbeing (#01).”*

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*“It does. The pressures of the job can really affect your wellbeing, especially if you're a poor manager of time and I was a poor manager of time... I'm much better at managing time.*

*“I have learned to because I have so many irons in the fire and I'm a I'm a busy person in my head. I've learned to compartmentalise things and so it's desperately important for clergy to do that...*

*“But the other thing I would say there is a tremendous satisfaction when God asks you to do something and you step out in faith and do it and God comes through for you, which inevitably God does. So that's like the best part of wellbeing.*

*“It's more than just a feeling of a job well done. It's seeing God supernaturally move to make something happen that you feel God's Called you to do and it vindicates you.*

*“And I think you know, for all the pressures that are in the job, the joys of being vindicated by the Lord when you see his hand doing these things, that's the huge payoff for me...*

*“That sort of stuff, that sort of stuff not just vindicates you, but it gives you a tremendous sense of wellbeing because you realise that unless the Lord builds the house, we labor in vain.*

*“So all the all the busyness that you come up with, ultimately, it stands or falls on the Lord. There's tremendous comfort in that and that's tremendously affects, that aspect of work affects my wellbeing enormously. So there's the downside where you're giving all the time and being drained. But the upside is when God does these amazing things (#06).”*

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*“Yep it does. It gives us a sense of wellbeing, not only the Calling, but it gives us a sense of wellbeing. I know that we will have our days where we think, ‘Oh my goodness, I'd like to start that one over again,’ but the reality is I'm working with one pastor and a mentoring situation, and the attack on him was*

*pretty dramatic. And it knocked the stuffing out of him and his sense of wellbeing and his sense of having influence was diminished because of inappropriate behaviour by others.*

*“But it’s taken time to redirect him back and now his sense of influence has been quite profound in the church, and the church is going from strength to strength... I talked to him and asked what is the best thing that’s happened you this week? And he’s just full of all the great things that have happened... and to know that we are an influence and our wellbeing is just reinforced (wellbeing) by the positive things that we’re involved in (#09).”*

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**4.8.4.** *The positive and negative impact of Work on wellbeing is not unique to the clergy, and building healthy peer relationships can make the difference when the pressures of clergy work become overbearing*

One interviewee recognised that Work often extends beyond a standard eight-hour day and has significant impact on wellbeing, both positive and negative. They emphasised the importance of building healthy professional relationships with colleagues at the “coalface” who can appreciate, empathise and resonate with you when the pressure of work becomes overbearing. This is especially so for the clergy who often bear the weight of others’ personal challenges, impacting their own mental health and wellbeing as they work towards positive outcomes for others.

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*“Absolutely. I think just by the very fact that, I guess if you were to divide up your day, and you see this often when it comes to health and wellbeing... in the sense that most people would work more than the 8 hours in any given day, it definitely influences and effects our wellbeing... so it has a significant impact if it’s not held in a healthy balance it can be detrimental in that respect.*

*“But then it can be very positive as well because you form... you build lots of healthy friendships. And I’ve worked ‘secular,’ I’ve worked, you know, banking*

*and finance. I've worked in retail. I've worked not-for-profit. I've worked in the in the church sector. And in all of those it's been important to have that sense of... relational connection which can help when it comes to our wellbeing to have people that you can relate to and resonate with and be able to talk to when the pressures of work become overbearing.*

*“But I think the best place to start is often with colleagues who are at the coal face with you and can appreciate and empathise with what you're going through. I think it's more positive than negative in its effects and its influences, but it definitely does influence our wellbeing. So it has to be managed well.*

*“Yes, I would say that is true we. Well, one of, I guess one of the key things in this regard when it comes to clergy is that we are often carrying or bearing the weight of other peoples' personal challenges. And so, some of that stuff sits with you.*

*“Talking about my pastor friend... who had to experience that very difficult situation with a family within his congregation at the time who, the husband took the life of his wife. That had a significant impact on his wellbeing and his health, and his mental state. Which I think was the trigger to get him to start thinking about, I need to get out of this and I need to get into something where I don't have that pressure. So yes, it definitely, within the clergy, does that.*

*But at the same time then there's lots of positives that come out of it when you see people growing, and you see them engaging with God in their personal walk and their discipleship, you have lots of positive effects, and lots of positive influence. So again... it's “tension,” you know, it's holding those things in tension, and then knowing that and having the mindset that work is something that God instituted. He instituted work, and it is good. It's good for us and it encourages us. The Bible encourages us to work (#02).”*

#### **4.8.5. Autonomy, mastery, commitment, motivation and engagement**

One interviewee mentioned their commitment to engagement, their dedication to their work. They referenced self-determination theory and the importance of engagement and autonomy in maintaining their commitment and motivation. Suggesting that the clergy need to experience autonomy, mastery, engagement and dedication in their work to stay motivated – and that no amount of salary could otherwise keep them motivated (Deci & Ryan, 2004; Gagné & Deci, 2005).

They stated that clergy are doing their work because they want to do it, *“I know I've got a job description and a position description, and I get paid and there's the performance reviews. But I'm doing this out of a sense of this is who I am, and this is my ability to contribute, so autonomy (#16).”*

This means allowing the clergy to demonstrate their capacity and competence without micromanagement, *“So don't micromanage me. Don't boss me around. Don't change my role. Don't make me a square peg in a round hole. Allow me to demonstrate my capacity, my competence in this space (#16).”*

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*“My commitment to engagement, you know, the amount of work I put into what I do, I wouldn't be able to maintain it without that wouldn't matter if you doubled my pay. To be frank, that wouldn't be enough. It wouldn't be enough that at all to keep me going (#16).”*

*“...Self-determination theory says that people they need to experience autonomy, mastery and relatedness in their engagement. Whatever they're doing, autonomy is, you know, basically I'm doing this because I want to do it. I know I've got a job description and a position description, and I get paid and there's the performance reviews. But I'm doing this out of a sense of this is who I am, and this is my ability to contribute, so autonomy.”*

*“So don't micromanage me. Don't boss me around. Don't change my role. Don't make me a square peg in a round hole. Allow me to demonstrate my capacity, my competence in this space (#16).”*

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#### **4.9. Work is relational and manifest through socialisation**

##### **4.9.1. Clergy work is intentionally relational, accepting the struggles and conflict in dealing with people as a part of the job**

Interviewees identified the importance of relationships, and that Christian ministry is essentially a relationship with God and each other that is defined in terms of love, forgiveness and acceptance.

And for the clergy, pastoral work is intentionally relational, accepting the struggles and conflict in dealing with people as a part of job.

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*“And again, in secular environments, but also in the clergy. As well. Yeah, I mean ministry. Christian ministry is firstly relational. No matter what else gets added to it, its relationship with the Lord and with others. And yes, very important (#01).”*

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*“I absolutely endorsed that statement. Work is relational and manifest through socialisation entirely is of thoroughly Christian thought. Unless I can feel like I've got friends, relatedness. And friendship for me is defined by love and forgiveness and acceptance (#16).”*

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*“Yeah, I think it I think pastoral work is intentionally relational. OK, I think your pastoral work. That a lot of pastoral work, a lot of pastoral work is 80% relational.*

*It is obviously, you're dealing with people... and there's good and bad with that, obviously, and there's the struggles and the tough times and conflict and all that, but it's all part of that package, isn't it? (#10).”*

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**4.9.2. *There is an extra layer of love, acceptance and forgiveness in relationship to navigate for the clergy with their church congregation and church leadership***

Interviewees pointed out that Work relationships are generally about the people you work with, and work is relational with coworkers, clients or patients.

That for the clergy there is an extra layer. They have a relationship with their church but beyond that, clergy have a working relationship with those in church leadership.

This working relationship with church leadership needs to be deliberate and foster the understanding that their contribution is more than just doing a job.

Their examples given are the church leadership team, operational oversight team, and trustees. Their socialisation is to ensure a work environment that is harmonious and unified. Their examples of socialisation are that they pray together and spend time together in a mutual relationship that resonates with love, acceptance, and forgiveness. This aspect of socialisation is very difficult to achieve for solo clergy in small churches.

Clergy sometimes forget that the whole church is a broader social unit, and that their work is dealing with people.

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*“Any sort of work is, is you've got to work with other people, not just your clients or patients, because I'm an ....., we have patients, right? But yeah, it's mainly the people you work with and so work is relationship.*

*“And sometimes you inherit a group that you have to deal with. You didn't have a choice. You didn't pick him. You probably wouldn't have picked some of them, but that's what you got the cards you were dealt.*

*“About my situation, particularly being in the role for a while, the key is to build the right people into your team.*

*“And so when you say work is relationship, yes, there's relationship with your church members and what have you. But I think the bigger relationship is the relationship within your team*

*“And I've fostered, very deliberately chosen and very deliberately fostered an attitude within my team that that they are team players, that they then build teams themselves so we're not have we're not, I'm not into the pastor that does everything scenario.*

*“So, I think when you say it's relational as a as a clergy, you can very often affect the people who are in your team and therefore, affect the relationship, is what I'm saying (#06).”*

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*“Yeah. And I think it's a critical aspect that we have to recognise with work... you can't work for yourself in a functional role that is completely isolated, which is very rare because everybody has that business to business, business to customer relationship, there's always going to be a level of relational, and there's always going to be the requirement, particularly when you use the word socialisation...*

*“But then beyond that, the socialisation level is having a workplace that's harmonious and unified. And when it comes to the church, I think it's very important that we recognise that we don't just come and do a job.*

*“So for example, ...myself and two other staff, we don't sit in isolation and just do the tasks that we know we have to do. We pray together and we spend time together doing other things. You know, we might go out and grab something to eat or whatever. We have our leadership group, so we have an oversight team, we have trustees. And often we meet around a meal to do those meetings. So that's, in my thinking, is a level of socialisation.*

*“It breaks down the formality of the task that we're doing, so whether it's operational oversight of the church or whether it's the spiritual oversight of the church we do that in that spirit of our relationship, and... of socialisation. And so that then creates a harmony within your team, so work is definitely relational and manifest through socialisation (#01).”*

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*“I absolutely endorsed that statement... unless I feel you know, resonance, love, acceptance, forgiveness when I get it wrong, then I'm not going to enjoy my job (#16).”*

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*“I don't think you work in isolation... I think this especially affects pastors in small churches a lot - I think it's it affects all leaders because leadership can be lonely, obviously - but I think it has affects a lot of small churches because your pastors don't have teams. And I put myself in that (#11).”*

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*“Absolutely. We talk a lot about teams, but it's great to have a team in a church, a local leadership team. But what we sometimes forget is the whole church is a social unit and our work is dealing with people...”*

*“I remember a lady that used to be in our church. She was the absolute right royal pain in the neck and she was she. She could hardly say a positive thing to me, but it was a very, very early stages of pioneering a new church. And then then I had to realise, hey, if you can't put up with one of them in in 15 or 20, how you gonna put up with two of them in 40? Cause if you can't put up with two in 40, how you gonna put up with three or four of them in 100? Because they're always gonna be there (#09).”*

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#### **4.9.3. Work relationships with the congregation and community as an example of the incarnational ministry of Jesus**

Interviewees commented that effective ministry for the clergy involves strong relationships with people in the church, and their leadership teams, and with the wider community, and these relationships are socialised by connecting with each other as an example of the incarnational ministry of Jesus.

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*“I think you could make the case even more so for the clergy. If we’re doing our jobs effectively, they are very relational, and if we are perpetuating the Gospel and helping people to find hope in that, you’re not able to do that without proximity to people, in relationship on some level...”*

*“If work is part of being human, then you know this very much applies, we’re relational beings, so I think that too makes sense (#08).”*

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*“Yeah, 100% relational. Relational in terms of our relationship with God, but also relational in terms of our relationships with people in our church, our leadership teams, our community.*

*“You know, and that is all manifest, all those, all that relational stuff is manifest through, socialised through being together, you know, through community and connecting...”*

*Does the world do it. I think the world is made up of individuals, and the world is a construct of desires. They could draw on a higher power.*

*Christians in the world, I would like to think take seriously the incarnational ministry of Jesus and that’s what we should do (#03).”*

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#### **4.9.4. *The shift for clergy in pastoral work from discouraging friendship within the parish to building connections with parishioners and the complexity of dual role relationships***

One of the interviewees commented on the dual role of clergy socialising amongst their own parishioners, elucidating how their seminary training was not to make friends within the parish, because the interviewee was not their friends but their pastor.

The complexity of clergy who work and live in context where they have no friends or family support, and the people they have to socialise with are often the parishioners from their own congregation.

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*“Pastoral work is innately relational, and they are the relationships that one has with parishioners - from the complexities of, do we have friends in the parish?”*

*“The seminary training in the years gone by was do not make friends in your parish. You are their pastor, not their friend. To the realities of today, where obviously our clergy... can be sent... to work and live in context where they have no family support, where their friends may be hours and hours away.*

*“And hence the friends you make are other people you connect with, and the people you connect with are often your parishioners. So that is changing as well (#09).”*

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#### **4.9.5. *The challenge for both introverts and extraverts to balance their socialisation to avoid burnout***

Two interviewees commented on the need to manage the social component of ministry by highlighting the challenge faced by introverts in an otherwise people-

oriented role, in contrast to clergy who love being with people need to manage getting overloaded.

Those who do not naturally seek socialisation need to spend most of their time with other humans as part of their role, but they find that a hard thing to do.

Those who love people and call with them, visit them, see them, catch up with them, network with them into small groups or into discipleship need to keep a balance between being close to their work and finding time to rest from people and socialisation.

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*“Yeah, look, I mean absolutely ministry. I mean, ministry is a very social job. Again, I think that some people aren't prepared for that so that can lead to issues as well.*

*I mean, if you're an introvert like me, that's part of the cost of ministry. You know, I'm. I'm. I'm not someone who, naturally seeks a lot of socialisation so, for me, the fact that I seem to spend most of my time with other humans speaking to them as part of my role, you know, is a hard thing for me to do.*

*“I have to work at that. So, it's definitely a part-and-parcel of ministry is socialisation...*

*Because there are some blessings of introversion which feed into ministry too... around things like you reflection and that kind of creative mode of thinking at times I find that a bit easier than other people seem to do.*

*But yeah, I think, yeah, there's definitely a cost in that. So it it's good to work that one out, but it's yeah, it's part-and-parcel. And if you if you think about ministering in terms of like relational and social, it's probably towards the top end of the scale (#07).”*

*Yeah, a lot of my work or what we do within the church or as clergy is it, it's all relational and it is manifest through socialisation, working with people, being with people. It's people orientated.*

*Mind you gotta say this, you gotta manage it because I do find myself even though I love people and will call them and visit them and see them and catch up with them, you know and network them into small groups or into discipleship, ...whatever I'm doing with them, right, I still get to a place where I need to keep that healthy balance of being close to my work, but being separate. So you I need to have times where I cannot be working and not socialise.*

*Socialisation. You know, when I come home from work at night and I've done a big day and I've been with a lot of people and I'm just happy and I'll say to, I'm all peopled out. No more people. I need a rest. I need a break. I just need to relax. Although I love socialisation. I love being with people and I love people, I don't work with them (\$04)."*

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#### **4.10. Work is identity, driven by personal and societal codes expressed through our professional or vocational identity**

##### **4.10.1. For the clergy, their professional roles do not determine their personal identity**

The interviewees generally agreed that in ministry their professional roles do not determine their identity. Their true identity is established through their relationship with God. Work for them is a reflection of identity, not the source of it.

Unlike the "secular" world where people get their status and identity from their Work, clergy are not driven by the trappings of success. They are guided by their Call and their passion for ministry rather than seeking validation through societal titles or roles.

It is a trap for clergy to take their identity from their profession and become performance driven and lose their true Calling and identity.

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*“Work is identity. In ministry I would take that one as an exception, and say absolutely not. Work is not the identity. My identity is secure. Outside of my work, my work is a reflection of my identity but my identity is not driven by or determined by professional or vocational identity. That's never going to happen. They could take all the trappings away and it doesn't remove the Calling (#12).”*

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*Work is identity: “Yeah, probably not so much with pastoral work, well, it could be. But you're not, I didn't wake up and say, you know, I really want to advance and go up the ladder of Christian ministry. In some ways, being directed by God, not because I wanted to be in a certain place.*

*So yeah, I don't. I can see in secular world place it can be identity and you're driven to maybe the next level or something like that. For me personally, I mean it could still be in pastoral ministry that could still play a part I suppose, but for but for me personally it hasn't (#10).”*

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*“Well, obviously, if you think of the secular, people get their identity by their job and their work and what they do. You know, if you have a conversation with someone, eventually you're going to say, what do you do for a living? It's a key question. What do you do for a living?...”*

*“I've met a couple of pastors who would only ever be a senior pastor. They can't be on a team because their identity, or their pride, or the fact that they've got to have a title because society wants them to have a title, you know, status... gives them identity...”*

*“And for the clergy? Yeah, that can happen sometimes, I think. I've realised I'm hardwired to love people. I'm hardwired to be a pastor. But I don't need a title. Although people, everyone calls me pastor...”*

*“You know, I had to go to (attend) a funeral at my old church yesterday. That was 1100 people strong. I got hugged to death and one guy was there... he said, since you've left this church, this church has employed seven other pastors, and they still can't do your job.*

*“It was a nice compliment. That's all I gotta say (#04).”*

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*“Yeah, our identity should always be in Christ... at one of our pastors meetings, one of the questions I asked was, ‘if your role was stripped away as a senior pastor, then who are you?’*

*“Who are you? And. Yeah, so look, you know, I agree our identity must be in Christ, but I think I think, although some ministers say that, but I know that their identity is definitely their work. What they do...”*

*“I've certainly, seen that over the years and when they see their identity in their work, they become task driven and it becomes performance driven. Now, you definitely see that now.*

*“That's not to say that we shouldn't give it our best and we should always give it our best. But the purpose of us giving our best is because of our relationship with God. Not based on the task (#05).”*

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*“I think this is a real trap for us as clergy, because you do tend to take your identity in your church and sadly, I see this at conferences. You know, you go talk to a guy and the first question is how many people in your church...”*

*“Sadly, sadly, there is an identity associated with us as pastors and the size and the successfulness of our church. When my church was 35 people and we owned nothing, no one wanted to hear from me. Nowadays we own*

*millions of dollars' worth of property or hundreds of people here, people want to hear from us, you know? So it's just that, I guess it's the way of the world.*

*"And I think we have to be careful as clergy. How would I say this? If we as clergy take our identity from our success in ministry then it will always let us down. We have to take our identity from the Lord himself and how God sees us.*

*"And when God sees you, whether you've got a big church, small church, a successful church, unsuccessful church, whether you're full-time or working for free, if your identity is in Christ and in who He's Called you to be, you can kind of face anything.*

*"But I think the world's way is to take your identity from your profession. What do you do.*

*"But when we say we're clergy, we need to realise, who are you? I'm actually a child of God who happens to work in the area of clergy...*

*"That's as I would see it and because I had such a definite Call, that's really helped with my identity... I think it's a huge trap, their identity. For me its who I am in God (#06)."*

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**4.10.2. For the clergy, their primary identity is rooted in their faith as Christians, which accentuates the importance of balancing personal and societal codes with their professional responsibilities and Christian values**

Some interviewees saw a danger in people becoming so invested in their work that they draw their sense of self and self-esteem solely from what they do.

For clergy, their identity, first and foremost, is as a Christian. Their ministry work is connected to that identity, but their work is not the source of their identity.

When clergy allow work to become their identity, they begin to make decisions based on their own metrics of success with little regard to God, His Will and His Kingdom.

Society generally recognise the legitimacy of a Call and that some people choose a vocation, and that is respected.

There are personal and societal codes inherent in every job. This may be challenging for clergy who must balance personal and societal codes with their spiritual identity. Clergy will be involved in and adhere to the professionalisms ensued by these. But the role of the clergy is to make sure these are not the only marker for their identity, but are balanced in the light of Scripture. The ideal situation being when one aligns with the other.

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*“It definitely is, work is identity... I guess, my challenge is to make sure it doesn't become my sole identity.*

*“People get so invested in their work that that becomes who they are and how they get a sense of self-esteem and self-worth is based on what they do. And so, when it comes to the church and working as clergy, or working in the ministerial role, have to make sure that I don't allow identity to come from that.*

*“So there are personal and societal codes that are inherent in every job, and it's making sure that those are balanced and held in light of Scripture, I guess is what I'm trying to say...*

*“People recognise that is a legitimate “Call” that... people choose a vocation, go into the ministry, and that's respected.... The point is though, as work as identity, it's important that it doesn't drive, it isn't the only marker for identity.*

*We can't allow it to be the thing that informs our identity, so we will be involved in the societal codes, we will have to adhere to the professionalisms that are ensued by these things, but at the same time we can't allow it to become who we are and define who we are (#02).”*

*“There's some merit in this, but there's also a bit of a challenge as well because you know, some of the comments, well one of the comments my colleague made is, my identity first and foremost is as a Christian, as a child of God and then the ministry is something that's connected with that. But my identity first and foremost is not a minister.*

*“So when I'm out in the community, if I'm not in a sort of official capacity as a minister, you know, I'm being me. I'm being a Christian. And that chimed with me pretty well. Because if you're carrying that ministry identity with you all the time, I think it can get a bit draining and there's a bit of a need to have a breather from that (#07).”*

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*“I think this one is a problem for the clergy. It can be driven by personal and societal codes and express through a professional or vocational identity.*

*“If our role in the church becomes our identity, we're in trouble... we should be doing what we do because we're connected to God. He's Called us into this role to do what He's asked us to do.*

*“Now the ideal is when those are aligned and we're doing what God wants us to do, and our identity is in Him.*

*“Once our (clergy) Work becomes our identity, I think that's going to be really quite difficult because we will make decisions based on what we want or what we think. And at that point, we could be growing our own empire with very little to do with God and His Will and His Kingdom.*

*“And then we can create metrics. You know we can create metrics then like God is blessing me if our church, God is blessing us... everybody is active. If the church is growing, there's more bums on seats we need a new building. We got more money coming in.*

*“But then God's Word says, “go and make disciples of all the nations.” You know, so why don't we use that as a metric? I mean, it's a bit of a harsh*

*statement... but maybe some of our current metrics have more to do with our identity... and I do have a Kingdom (of God) worldview...*

*I'm not denominationally minded, so I have a Kingdom (of God) worldview. And I wonder, as clergy and the matrices we use, what does God think of those? (#03)."*

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#### **4.10.3. Society interprets the Work identity of clergy through the social codes and professional standards expected of other professions**

Some interviewees pointed to the contribution that all humans make, and that contribution is interpreted through societal codes and understandings of performance and engagement that is linked to one's Work identity.

While clergy hold that their identity comes from God and not from their work, there is no doubt that our society interpret the Work identity of clergy through the societal codes and professional standards that are expected of the other professions.

Clergy need to recognise that they are viewed as a profession with established standards similar to other professions like law and dentistry, but there are behavioural codes that are unique to the clergy.

However, clergy may view themselves, clergy need to recognise the professional standards applied to the secular workforce and consider how these might serve as a guide to whatever Work identity is expected of the clergy as a profession.

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*"Look, that's just the nature of engagement with others - but I accept that that's the way it is. You know, I think about myself. So there's no doubt that I interpret what I'm doing and who I am through codes. Through understandings of performance and engagement, no doubt.*

*“The purpose that enhances humanity, there's a better word than that, and I haven't got at this moment in time. This one here, is work identity? Yes, it is.*

*“I think that to be human and not to be wanting to make a contribution, not to be wanting to have structure in your life, moving towards objectives that are good for me and mine and ours is probably something that that dehumanises us. And I think you know when people are out of work, when people can't get work, when people are viewed as not capable of work well, that's thoroughly dehumanising. So Work is definitely identity (#16).”*

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*“Well, we've got to recognise that. It's a profession. I know I started off by saying it is a Calling. I understand that, and that is my motivation. That's drives me. But it is a profession. So we need to look at it professionally the same way that a dentist or a lawyer.*

*“So there are professional standards that then come in and all that type of thing. There are acceptable behavioural responses that are peculiar to our industry as ministers that are not in other industries.*

*“A lawyer can have 10 affairs and who cares but in the ministry there are standards because of who we are. So yes, I think there are cross over. I think it's more a question, so in the secular workforce there's may be the standard, how does that operate or how is that manifest within the ministry? So yes, there are crossover.*

*“I think it's more question, so in in the secular workforce there's may be the standard, how does that operate or how is that manifest within the ministry? So yes there are issues that the secular workforce, not so much can speak to us, but can act as some sort of guidance so we process the ministry in a professional way (#09).”*

*“Identity. I think that’s true for different reasons of both mainstream and church. In mainstream, I think your identity is driven more by your work and therefore their codes and what they expect of you.*

*“I think sometimes in Church it’s the same thing. What we do as pastors and clergy is often because of what’s required of us, and that becomes our identity even if it’s not our identity that we see, it’s the identity of others see and expect... because my identity comes from God, not from the Church.*

*“And when I feel like I’m suffering that loss of identity because it’s becoming too much of the expectation, I limit my time with certain people that expect that. That’s personal for me with God, definitely, and family for that matter – for families expect that of you, society, but then especially through our professional vocation, most definitely (#11).”*

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#### **4.10.4. Societal codes and Work identity have changed over time**

Interviewees described how societal expectations of the Church and clergy in caring for the poor and disadvantaged influence how the Work of the clergy is identified. These societal codes have shifted over time ranging from honour to disdain for the clergy. Making the professional and vocational identity of the clergy more complicated and tenuous.

One interviewee described how they are able to maintain their identity because of their Calling, that their Calling is the mold out from which their identity is cast and gives them the potential to go the distance.

Accepting that a pastor will be involved in certain things which people will see as his identity, the pastor does not need to do a particular role to discover his identity.

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*“Work is identity. What I’m thinking is that we gain our identity by many things. First of all, I don’t need to do a particular job to be a man of God.*

*“I am a man of God because of my relationship, so my basic identity is in my relationship as a minister of the Gospel and as a Christian, and whether or not from my perspective as a Pentecostal or from a perspective of an Anglican minister or whatever, Baptist, it doesn't make any difference. Their identity is who they are, and work will help define that, but to me it shouldn't be the mold in which we cast our identity.*

*“So, I'm not a minister of the Gospel because of the work I do. I am a minister of the Gospel because of my Calling, and because of my Calling, I will be involved in certain things which people will see as my identity.*

*“So, it is driven by personal and society codes.*

*“For example, basically society would think that the church should be involved with caring for the poor and the disadvantaged, so that becomes a societal expectation of churches. So if it's of churches, it's of pastors, and so that all ministers.*

*“So yeah, so identity does come out of work, but I just making this point strongly, it's not the mold in which my identity is cast. My identity is cast in my relationship with Christ as Lord and Saviour.*

*“And, my High Calling, I refer to it 'High Calling' into the ministry, I never asked to be in the ministry. I worry about people who just wake up one day and think I'll be a pastor. You know, I worry about them. But I truly believe that individuals who have the potential to go the distance, their identity and their ministry is the mold, their work comes out of that, a manifestation of that. I just have some concern that the work becomes your identity. I think it's a manifestation of who I am (#09).”*

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*“Personal and societal codes. That one that's changed in my time. I was ordained 25 years ago and I already experienced fairly quickly, a lot of disdain for Christians. In 1998-99 there was already disdain for the clergy. I can remember visiting hospitals and having nurses just turn their back on me.*

*“It has moved from one that experiences some honour to a lot of dishonour and shame and disregard. So our professional and vocational identity has become at times a bit more complicated and tenuous than it was 25 years ago (#15).”*

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#### **4.10.5. The difficulty for clergy to separate their Work identity from their personal life**

One interviewee shared how clergy identity is strongly tied to their ministry work, and the difficulty in separating their work identity from their personal life because of the complex, multi-dimensional relationships in ministry, unlike the simple one-dimensional relationships of a doctor and patient.

Clergy may act as a friend, pastoral carer, counsellor, and confidant which can lead to dual relationships that may end up in conflict resolution with them.

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*“I think #4 (Work is identity) is where some pressure points have certainly hit me as a pastor. Ministry work is definitely identity, strongly bound with identity, and hard to extricate work from not work because the community I serve is family. And the relationships are not simple one-dimensional ones like Doctor to a patient.*

*“The relationships are complex because they may be my friend. They may also be the one that calls me as a pastoral carer or a counsellor when a disaster strikes, or when they're getting divorced, or and they may call me for end of life care and they may have me hear their deepest secrets, which happens still happens quite a bit and so, you know, as a counsellor I would say, oh, there's a bunch of dual relationships there that are unhealthy. You know, their deepest secrets. You've acted as they're confidant. But you're also their friend in public, and you may even end up in conflict resolution with them so.*

*“I think that the identity part of work is very complicated for pastors in Christian community because sometimes it's hard to work out which part of our life is work and which isn't if I'm their pastor, but I'm also their friend (#15).”*

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#### **4.10.6. The importance of knowing one's identity beyond a professional role**

One interviewee spoke of the importance of understanding their identity beyond their professional or vocational role as a school Chaplain, and the grief they experienced upon leaving that role because their role had become their identity.

Commenting that when a nurse, a teacher, a politician, or a pastor see their identity as their role, it is not at all healthy. We need to know who we are apart from our work, apart from our profession.

And concluding his perspective by stating that Work is not what we do, but what God does through us. For the interviewee, that removes any sense of his identity hanging on this job or role, or this professional or vocational identity and highlights the idea that Work is a reflection of God's creative nature working through us.

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*“When I did 10 years of High School Chaplaincy at a local high school, and I was I was Chappie, right? So I was known by all in the school community, all the kids that came through, all their siblings, all their parents, all the teachers, all the P&C, even local politicians, state and federal and local. I was Chappie, right, Chappie. And when it came time for me to leave that role a big part of the grief and the challenge in leaving that role was because it had become my identity. This is who I am. I served as a chaplain and, but I'm Chappie.*

*“And so that was a real journey to go through - that to actually let that identity be undone. Because ultimately as a believer, as a follower of Jesus, my identity must be as His son first and foremost. And not be confused with my role or my purpose.*

*“So I see this and I see this in society. You know, a nurse or a teacher or a politician or whatever, a pastor sometimes can begin to see themselves, their identity as that role, that professional or vocational identity and I don't believe it's all that healthy.*

*“It needs to be challenged. It needs to be dug out from time to time. And I think when people look at people that retire after doing the same career for 40 years, they don't know who they are. You know, and so we need to know who we are apart from our work and apart from our professions...*

*“So let's talk to that purpose... That word ‘workmanship’ is ‘poema’ in the Greek and from which we get the word. ‘poem.’ And so there's more. There's more about the God's creative nature working through us there than just us doing good works, you know, doing bits and pieces...*

*“Work is not what we do. Work is what God does through us. And so that for me is a clincher. If we're talking about work becoming our identity, and this is my whole life is based on what I do, and this is how I'm known, then we've, I think we've gone into, we're in dangerous ground there.*

*“But if we can have this perspective that actually what I do, it's not ‘me’ that works, it's God working ‘through me.’ Because first and foremost, I am His son. That's my identity. I'm ‘in Christ’ and He is in me. And so any work that I do, whether it be secular or in ministry as a believer, it's actually God working through me. I'm His workmanship... I'm God's ‘poema’ and so I've got a role and a purpose to do, but it's actually God working through me.*

*“And so that for me removes any sense of, like, my identity hanging on this job that I have or this role, this professional or vocational identity. So that for me, that's my perspective.*

*“I think that, if clergy they hold on to that perspective, I think we'll, they'll be much more retention because it's actually I'm God's son and I'm God's servant. And so, I don't have anything to prove. I'm just here available for Holy Spirit work through me. Removes the pressure, doesn't it? (#01).”*

#### **4.11. Work is learning as a result of subjective experience from within the context of work**

The interviewees were in general agreement that subjective learning is a quest for us all, and essential to one's personal, spiritual and professional growth over a lifetime.

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*"Self-actualisation, we want to be all that we can be. I think that's a good thing. Way better than wanting to be less than we could be. So. So I think that that learning is a quest for all of us. We're subjective experience - I don't know if there is any other form of experience (#16)."*

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*"We are always learning in life, whether we're talking about spiritually or naturally. When we stop learning, we die. But I wouldn't see it as a subjective experience from within the context of work. I think it's far broader within the context of life, and I'm not necessarily convinced to say subjective experience. But certainly we learn in life from our experiences, whether we're talking about our faith life or our natural life (#12)."*

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*Yeah, definitely. You never stop learning and at 72, I've learnt more this year, I think it's just a continuing a continuing thing, isn't it? If you're in the workplace, things come up that you've never encountered before in your life. I mean, even with the COVID experience back in 2020, how churches handled that and how you know what we looked at. It's just constant, a constant learning experience really (#10)."*

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##### **4.11.1. Continuous learning builds clergy resilience**

One interviewee described clergy work as a continuous learning experience, not just learning information, but also learning to view a situation from a different perspective.

The interviewee emphasised what they called the 'reality drawing experience' to building clergy resilience – where clergy reach a point of becoming conscious of the ongoing changes needed in themselves to deal with the issues they face, or the issues will control them and the church will not move forward.

The interviewee pointed to their own worst work experiences as their catalyst to grow their skills and find better ways to understand and manage conflict and crisis. Hence, their own study focuses on conflict management at both Master's and Doctoral research.

Also using as an example of the organisational adaptations that clergy have had to make in the last 10 years, and to pity the church if their pastor's organisational ability is the same as it was 15 years ago.

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Learning: "Oh absolutely. In my list of things that I believe that resilience is developed of the first one... one of the most important things to me is what I call the 'reality dawning experience.' What I mean is you reach a particular point in your ministry where you realise the wonderful things that have happened in the life of yourself as a minister, your family, as a ministerial family, the church and you think about this and you think, but I've also changed.

"And then you realise, well, hang on, if I'm not the same as I used to be this becomes an important point to get where I want to be, I'm going to now have to manifest other changes. So we become conscious, and so my very first point about resilience was this reality dawning. So there comes a point where you realise, if I'm to do what I've gotta do, I've gotta be a constant agent of change. I've got to change... if I don't deal with this issue, this issue will deal with me.

"And then you realise, if one is not the same as they used to be, it is important to make changes to reach desired goals. Therefore, other changes need to be manifested. So, becoming conscious of this fact is crucial. There comes a point where it becomes clear that to achieve objectives, one must be an agent

of change. One has to adapt, because if this issue is not addressed, it will persist."

"And so the reason I became preoccupied with the whole issue of conflict management in the church, both my Masters and my Doctoral research was in those areas, was because of what I went through now... these worst of experiences become the womb, almost, of our capacity to grow and see something birth in us that is going to make us smarter.

"The last eight to 10 years have been a nightmare for most pastors in terms of the organisational adaptations that they've had to make. They've had to, you know, handle this terrible creature of work, health and safety. They've had to children's check, okay, it's one thing after the other and so the, a Pastor's organisational ability 15 years ago, if he's just at the same today, pity help his church.

"So the last point is, there are subjective experiences that we go through, but they usually are manifestation of what's happening there for you to get all these organised. I've got to address this issue or else our church is not gonna move forward. Or my skills, you know, I've got to look at better ways of managing conflict. Do I even understand conflict and so different crises?

"So for me, this was, you know, it's always a learning experience. It's always a learning experience, not only learning information, but also seeing things from a different divine perspective. Also changing in our emotional, so becoming more tolerant rather than one-eyed about a particular point of view. And then skills you know, basic skills that we've got to upgrade (#09)."

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#### **4.11.2. Subjective learning keep clergy in touch and authentic**

The interviewees shared their perspectives of subjective learning for the clergy as more than formal ministry training can provide. Instead, a willingness to listen and

learn subjectively from their work experience informs their abilities and staying power, keeping them grounded, authentic, and in touch with their community.

That continuous learning is essential for growth in leadership and ministry, constantly learning how to love people better, especially in engaging with younger generations.

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*“Ideally yes. Ideally yes. So, my encouragement to new clergy, recently ordained clergy, they do their five, six, seven years of seminary, is to say that when you're assigned to your first parish, that is your greatest seminary. That is your most profound seminary. Learn to listen to your people.*

*“And the problem we have being a university based, scholastic scholarly type of a movement or denomination by tradition, is that our clergy know it all when they are ordained, when they leave seminary, and it's often a process for the pastor to realise that actually my community is my greatest teacher...*

*“And it's very similar to our parishes, that our parishes, if we are willing to lean and listen, will teach us everything that we need to know in relation to our Work. So certainly learning, sometimes we are slow learners. (#13).”*

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*Yeah, yeah. I, I definitely believe that work is learning. We're always learning if we're, if we're open to learning. And so, engaging in work provides that opportunity to learn. And I guess that comes through experiences, subjective experiences. Say yeah, I mean. I can see that...*

*“What I see in the broader Church over the last two to three decades, maybe a ‘professionalism’ in the clergy... that has come to a point now and there's probably much of the church that's still on that track where the ‘professional clergy’ where, you know, they're the ones with the doctorate in theology. They're the ones who know the Word of God inside out. They're the ones who it's almost like the, you know, back in the Middle Ages when it was just the priests, you know, who had the Word of God. And all the lay people just couldn't go near to God, and that's religion isn't it. That's the nature of religion.*

*“As ‘knowledge’ puffs up, you know, but that ‘love’ builds up. And I think I see portions of the church that are coming out of that, are I guess are bringing it back down to the priesthood of all believers. Everybody gets to play their part, everyone's included in this work. Which is a reaction against professional Christianity. But at the same time I think, for me again, it's just relationships.*

*“Like if you're in authentic relationships both with people in the church and people outside the church that it's very hard to go into the super spiritual realm - you know our language or the overly professional Christian language.*

*“Like if I'm in touch in the lives of people of my community then I've got to be down to earth. I've got to be authentic. I've got my conversations and my interactions with regular people to keep me from that. You know that professional super spiritual.*

*“And I'm not saying that we need to just be lackadaisical or, you know, chilled and I'm trained, or unprepared. We've got to be prepared.*

*But I think that (being prepared) comes through more time in the Word and time in the presence of God, and time with people. That and gives us then a voice to be able to speak into situations, to bring and open up the Word of God. I just, I just see that's what Jesus did, and that's what the early church did (#01).”*

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*“We're not here necessarily talking about opening up a textbook. We're talking about the subjective nature of learning, by virtue of experience and that is a really amazing thing. And as I look back over my experience, I can see that that type of learning has also informed my desire or ability, my staying power...*

*“And so there's one aspect right there of, you know, maybe it's more conventional learning, but even of experiencing other ways of worshipping God. For example... simple and certainly Christian ways, but other ways it can provide that feedback and that subjective learning. I think also within our*

*context... if we are not discipling on a two way street, and we're not pulling people from the entire pool of those who are gathered, then we again restrict our ability to learn as much as we might... we're not trying to engage in broadening our experience.*

*"So, I believe this is one would apply to both again, and I think that there's much that we can do to actually make that one work better for ourselves (#08)."*

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*Yes. We learn from our job all the time. I am constantly learning about people. Learning different ways how to love them.*

*So, you're learning all the time. Yeah. Tell you what it is the massive learning curve for me is social media. The power of it. How people use it or the younger generation.*

*Those sort of 35-40 years of age down. They don't ever fill out a 'next step' card. We have to get all the information through relationships via that platform to put them into our church (#04)."*

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*"I think this is really, really important. When we stop learning, we stop growing. And I think for so many clergy, they stopped learning.*

*"You know whether it's going to conferences, or bettering themselves or whatever study, when they stop learning their messages become stale.*

*"I've sensed a drawing to that, and I always I go deep. I do tons of research. It probably takes me four or five, six hours Intense and spread across the week to write a sermon.*

*And then because I really want to learn, I also study leadership a lot because I realise being a great leader is far more valuable than being a really good preacher or being a hard worker but being a leader.*

*But I think you've got to have an attitude that says, Lord, I'm ready. Teach me something new. Teach me something new all the time (#06)."*

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#### **4.11.3. *Measuring subjective learning with objective truth***

Two interviewees shared their concern of focusing on subjective learning within the context of clergy work, over objective Truth that is derived from personal devotion and personal discipleship to gain a deeper interpretation of their subjective experiences.

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"I think, the danger for the clergy can be that we as clergy tend to look for that professional experience in conferences. And we can fall into the danger of just going from conference to conference to conference, and that is what bolsters our subjective experience, so we just we just need this constant, being fed by the next conference, the next conference.

"Whereas work is learning, but it's learning in the context of personal devotion and personal discipleship and time in the Word. That's where we need to focus our learning, because that will, that will take out the subjectivity and replace it with an objectivity that comes with the Word of God. And so we just have to be mindful of that...

"So it's very, very important that we don't allow subjective experience within the context of work to replace the learning that comes from our own personal devotion time and personal reflection...

"So that's part of the learning process as well, I believe. So you do it from a personal level, but also peer level. And then obviously there are other ways you can draw learning from external things like podcasts and other, you know, listening to other preaching and things like that. But for me, I think I would always say my learning is not subjective experience. It's the objective truth that comes from a relationship with Christ and the Word of God (#02)."

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So in terms of the clergy, we should always be learning more about the Scriptures, more about who God is, more about how to do His Work better. And that will come from subjective experience.

Also good to draw on the subjective experience of others. I mean the Scriptures talk about witnessing and testifying, you know, to what we've seen God do. I mean, that's subjective experience and we should be learning from our subjective experience...

And then we also have God to interpret - - - -, I think God can help us interpret our subjective experience...

Which presupposes that we believe that God still speaks to us. I personally believe that to be true... We should be learning, but we should be asking God for it. His interpretation of our subjective experience (#03)."

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#### **4.11.4. *The loss of potential for the Church to reject mainstream learning***

Another interviewee reflected upon the relationship between mainstream society and the church, suggesting that both have rejected each other.

They commented that while the church believes it holds the Truth, mainstream society has foundations rooted in godly principles, even if these are disrupted.

Because mainstream rejected the Church and lost what they might learn from the interviewee, the Church has decided to reject what they might learn from mainstream.

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Learning: "Yeah, because God. God created us all in His image, even if many of us don't say that or reject that, it doesn't mean it's not true. And so it has to be true for mainstream as well as clergy because they're people too.

“I think it's because mainstream has so rejected the church that the church has decided to reject mainstream, that's petty, but I think it's true. Because the church goes, well, we've got God and we do what God wants. And, God, like everything in mainstream is at some point got its foundation in godly nature even if they've, like, have disrupted them, and messed them up and whatever. But, we go, well, we're right, they're wrong, as opposed to, what have they got we can utilise?”

“And I've heard it and can't even think where it was, but there was a business in mainstream that actually went and looked at what the church did and took on the good parts of that, and became more successful (#11).”

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While there is no direct correlation between resilience training and clergy resignation or continuance, mainstream literature suggests that resilience training guards against burnout and work-related stress in frontline workers.

The literature shows there to be a difference between the church and a mainstream approach to resilience training.

#### **4.12. Describe clergy resilience?**

##### **4.12.1. *Resilience is a hallmark of the clergy***

The interviewees described resilience as a Christian concept and the hallmark of the clergy is rooted in faithfulness, persistence, and a commitment to authenticity. Otherwise, it might be stubbornness or habituation, but it's not resilience.

Resilience is dedicating oneself to achieving their ordained potential that shapes their lives as a redemptive journey of discipleship to do good work which God has prepared in advance for them to do.

The Bible through any number of its statements speaks about resilience as a theological concept for life, mission, and ministry, having done all to stand to be more

than overcomers and to press on towards the goal, calling it faith, hope, and optimism.

They described a lack of resilience as a sense of vulnerability, defeatism, a lack of heroism, a reluctance to address or resolve issues, a backing away from the confidence of previous generations.

That resilience is a crucial human trait and something that the clergy could better formalise in terms of training and approaches that help the clergy to be better equipped to face difficulty without being overwhelmed by that situation.

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*“What we're looking at today really is resilience. I mean, it's the buzzword... absolutely, for about the last 10 years... Even though it's got so many derivations now, I wonder, resilience sounds a bit like faithfulness and persistence in Christian terminology definitively...”*

*“That's true. You know, look, I'm a Christian believer. You're a Christian believer and so it adds a layer to this sense of who I am and what I'm doing. But it doesn't mean I have to do what the Church or what my peers expect me to do.”*

*“And so resilience... It's gotta be a commitment to authenticity. Otherwise it's not resilience. It might be stubbornness. It might be habituation, but it's not resilience.”*

*“Resilience is dedicating yourself to achieving your potential, and that's a thoroughly Christian concept. Think about Ephesians 2:10, that we, you and I, are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good work which He prepared in advance for us to do.”*

*“That people have some, somehow there's a shape to their life. There's a trajectory to their life, and can they orient themselves toward that? (#16).”*

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*“Yeah. Well, I think it's a hallmark of the clergy and I think it it's probably something that we could formalise a little better in terms of the training and the way we approach it so that we are better armed to deal with it, but I think, again, it comes back to the Word of God.*

*“We, you know, resilience it's a term that is popularised now... but I think the Bible, without using the term, speaks a lot of resilience. It's something that as we embark on this discipleship journey... one of the things that for me comes from that is this idea of resilience, to put a word to it, is this ability to face difficult situations and come away from them not overcome by that situation.*

*“And I think that's got a lot to do with the stories and the narratives that we read in the in the Word of God, because those stories and narratives as we know are all redemptive in nature, and they point to the person of Jesus, Who gives us that ultimate resilience that we can, the Bible says we are more than overcomers. But that's not because in and of ourselves, we have the ability to do that, it's because... we find our identity in Christ (#02).”*

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*“Resilience, the capacity of a piece of metal to bounce back. Do we have that in Christian ministry or Christian professionalism? The answer is I do because it's a theological concept. There's any number of statements in the New Testament. ‘Having done all stand?’ ‘Fix your eyes on Jesus the author and perfecter of your faith.’ ‘Not that I've already achieved this, but I press on toward the high cause the goal in Christ Jesus.’*

*“What do they relate to? They relate to a profound sense that Christ has transformed my life, and if I keep my focus on Christ. I'll be able to overcome anything that comes my way, so faith in Christ trump's all adversity. It's a very noble. It's a very heroic understanding.*

*“Now the more retrospective response to an increased sense of vulnerability - even a sense of, yeah, almost defeatism, a lack of heroism backing away from the confidence of previous generations. Not to address and fix that, but just a reflection on the fact that resilience is an incredibly important human*

*trait. We would call it faith. We have called it hope. We would have called it optimism (#16)."*

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**4.12.2. *Resilience is not just bouncing back, but learning to be better prepared for the next time around***

Interviewees commented that clergy facing the unclear expectations associated with their roles, need to pursue resilience as the mental, emotional, physical and spiritual tenacity to stay in ministry.

Clergy under stress need the ability to honestly assess their performance and situation while remaining flexible and resilient.

Resilience for them is not just the ability to bounce back, but also the ability to learn from such experiences to be better prepared for the next time when something similar is going to make life difficult in ministry, family or any other challenges that may appear.

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*"Resilience. The ability to continue and remain. So, let's not even say in the face of good or bad, like just to maintain, just to keep going. So, let's go the ability for clergy to remain in the ministry.*

*"So that would, I would say that has to include, there has to be some tenacity like that mentally, emotionally, physically, spiritually. So, I think we have to pursue resilience.*

*"And be aware that we're a composite being, you know, like mental, emotional, physical, spiritual. So, we have we have to include our whole being in being resilient.*

*“And I could be completely wrong, but I assume say the world (secular) would have much clearer boundaries than the clergy have. I mean, being a pastor, when's your job done? When do you finish? When do you knock off?”*

*“The expectation. I think there's a lack of communicated expectational roles. And well, there's a difference between that communicated expectational roles and on the ground practical roles.*

*“Like so, I have a job description and I and everyone would agree, yes, that's your job description. That's what we want you to do. But how they see you fulfilling that and again, you can never do enough (#03).”*

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*“OK, so for me, resilience is the ability to keep going. Keep moving forward through life.*

*“But resilience is a bit like an elastic band, you know. It stretches and it contracts. To be resilient, you need to have the ability to be stretched at times. You need to be able to relax, like you relax a rubber band.*

*“I've seen people that are so tense. So pent up. The stress of the church is just so huge. But they don't. They don't have the ability to emotionally relax, or the ability to shut off or the ability to find that balance. That's what I think. (#04).”*

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*“OK. Staying resilient in the role... Well, that's a really good question because I think... like for instance, having the ability to assess how you are as a person and how you're functioning in the role on a regular basis to make sure that we ask all the right questions...*

*Where you're being honest and open and you're telling the truth, and you can review the situation that you're in, would obviously help you to be resilient in your role. Because you're faced with all sorts of stuff (#04).”*

*“It obviously is the capacity to withstand and recover from difficulties, troublesome times. It's the bounce back factor. That is an important issue.*

*“But I think with it that it's undergirded by learning that we bounce back. I've seen some pastors have bounced back, but what they've done, they've gone back to a personality manifestation etcetera, but they haven't learned a jolly thing.*

*“It's not just simply bouncing back, it's learning, and as the basis of that learning being smarter the next time round. When we're confronted with something similar that's going to make life difficult for us, whether in ministry, family or whatever (#09).”*

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#### **4.12.3. Resilience training is desperately needed for pastors but not as another obligation in the already busy lives of the clergy**

One interviewee communicated that resilience training does have a link to retention in the secular world. But that there is not much support for the clergy in the Church apart from attending annual conferences or encouragement to join retreat groups.

And the already busy lives of the clergy make even these opportunities seem like just another obligation.

But that *resilience training for the clergy* is desperately needed.

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*“Yeah, I think that's really interesting that you pull out that in the secular world. Resilience training does have a direct correlation to retainment retention. But we don't, we don't necessarily have that in the clergy and I'm trying to think, you know, apart from you know, church denominations providing an annual conference or an encouragement to getting part of a pastors retreat group or things like that, there's not too much there (in the church) that's kind of spoken about in going to the long haul*

*And I think, I think for pastors in general as well, life is so busy and so full that those things can become, they can be seen as just another thing that I've got to go to, or another thing I've got to be involved in...*

*"So I think for pastors, yeah, I think it's desperately needed (#01)."*

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**4.12.4. Successful performance strengthens resilience, and, if one does not succeed, peer empathy provides support and enhances resilience in that context.**

One interviewee suggested that role-resilience, a sense of being fit for purpose, knowing that you can do your job, the sense of being competent to achieve specific goals expected of your role in line with your passions, is connected to your sense of personal resilience. To do well in that space, you're going to feel better in that space.

They emphasised that role-resilience in context as a Christian leader relates to a sense of Call, and a sense of gifting or equipping related to that Call that enhances a sense of self-efficacy: I'm Called, I'm equipped, I can do this.

To them, role-resilience is enhanced by where one finds peer identity: non-competitive acceptance, insight and empathy beyond the governance level of the organisation to perform. While successful performance enhances resilience, when one does not succeed, such peer empathy enhances resilience in context.

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*"Role resilience. To deliver the job that you are expected to do, employed to do. Yes, the spiritual, disciplined professional competence – that is sensing you're professionally competent enhances your sense of resilience – so to do well in this space, you're going to feel better in that space (#16)."*

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*“Role resilience for a Christian leader relates to a sense of Call and a sense of gifting or equipping for Call. That's thoroughly Christian thinking. And I know that that might not necessarily translate outside Christian context, but for me that enhances my sense of self-efficacy. I'm Called. I'm equipped. I can do this. It helps (#16).”*

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*“Look, I really think role resilience is connected to personal resilience. A sense of being fit for purpose, you know, being a round peg in a round hole or a square peg in a square hole. You know, I can actually do this job.*

*OK, my competency is more. My competence is actually my passions. What I'm interested in, my sense of achievement connect well with the particular outcome expected of this particular function that I've got (#16).”*

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*“So yeah, I think there is a role resiliency. I think that's enhanced by where I find peer identity, where I find non-competitive acceptance, insight, empathy. So you, I think you've gotta have that for role resilience.*

*“I just don't know that can be just on the basis of success or even feedback within the organisation or from, you know, the governance level of the organisation. That's not good enough, cause you're always feeling, you know, within the organisation you're always feeling. The need to perform.*

*“And successful performance enhances resilience, but sometimes you don't succeed. Some years are better than others, so I think you've gotta find, I think peer empathy is the word I'd like to use. Peer, peer empathy actually enhances resilience in context (#16).”*

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#### **4.12.5. Clergy resilience involves faith, devotion and prayer**

One interviewee put their emphasis on how clergy resilience is linked to their relationship with God. It's not just turning up for a job and going through the motions. Instead, it is the importance of faith, devotion, and prayer which provide strength and Divine assurance to face the day and continue in their ministry.

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*“Obviously, I think that resilience comes out of a walk with God. You know, for the clergy, if you're turning up to work and it's just a job where you're going through the motions. But if you believe that you're actually walking with God, doing a certain task or in your role, and even when you can have the most miserable day, you can pull it off and go, but God will give you the strength to keep going the next day.*

*“If you didn't have, you know, if I didn't have that assurance of God and His strength each day then I'd be finished, you know.*

*“So it's your walk with God. Like every morning I have, like as most pastors would, I'm not saying I'm one person, every morning I would get up, you know, 4:45 or something. And I would have an hour devotion, prayer time equipping, not kick start the day, but that's, you know, putting that in place first, and that's the that's what you draw on each day (#10).”*

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#### **4.12.6. Denominational structure is a major factor in job-security and long-term stability that affects clergy mental health and resilience**

One interviewee observed that the structure of the Church organisation, and its provision of job security is a significant factor in the resilience of their clergy.

While the interviewee felt secure in their position, others, they observed, are subject to the instability, being repeatedly relocated from one location to another. Others must maintain a majority vote of members or be ousted by factions.

While there is no perfect way to run a church, some structures seem to provide less job security for the clergy, impacting their ability to build any long-term stability, and their resilience to continue.

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*“Resilience. The actual structure of the organisations gonna have a huge bearing on this because one of the things that will increase your resilience is security in your position...*

*“So, my role is extremely secure. My team is supportive, my board is supportive. My role is extremely secure.*

*“But then I talk to other guys like the ....., they're moved on every two years come what may. Terrible idea I think. So, they can't really build anything long term and so they've got that instability there.*

*“I know the ..... guys I talked to, I know several of them and some of them have been ousted by a democratic vote sort of system so they are like politicians... got to make sure I maintain a majority here, otherwise I'll be out on my ear. Well, that's not stability.*

*“Where's your Pentecostal guy? He's not thinking that. Well, we don't have a numbers game, you know we make decisions, it's a Board and it's formed by the body, so I'm very secure.*

*“I think for resilience for the clergy it depends on the structure of what they're doing. If they feel if they made a decision then the Parish Council will come down on them or the Bishop will come down on them, that really affects your mental health and your resilience.*

*“And I think if you get enough of that, if you get enough hits you sort of just want to walk away. Like you say, you can't pay me enough money to keep being abused this way.*

*“And I think that's the problem in a lot of the different structures that are there, like the ..... for example. I mean, if you know there's a faction building*

*that's against you, you try and build your faction to try and retain, and it's just all kinds of bad.*

*“So there's no perfect way to run a church. But I think some ways provide a lot less security. Therefore, a lot less resilience for the clergy (#06).”*

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#### **4.12.7. Resilience requires an emotional component to keep moving forward through tough times**

One interviewee used a metaphor, that was particularly significant to them, of a full marathon to give voice to the emotional and spiritual strength they needed to just keep putting one foot in front of the other for their own preservation and protection when things were really tough.

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*“I'm sure other people have different metaphors, but metaphors are a powerful thing because logic at times breaks down, logic becomes dry, it becomes useless. It has no emotional component and you need an emotional component.*

*“You need an emotional component for resilience. So, for me, metaphors work, I've only got one metaphor. It's a marathon. But it gives me emotional strength. Full marathons and a few more than that. And, that's part of my spirituality. To be frank, it's a part of my self-preservation, my self-protection.*

*“Yea, marathon is a metaphor for my life, when it's getting really tough, all you have to do is keep putting one foot in front of the other (laughter). I've got a metaphor that works for me (#16).”*

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#### 4.13. Does your church have resilience training for its clergy?

If yes, what are its foci?

##### 4.13.1. ***While theological training promotes resilience, the clergy are not trained to manage the personal, social and spiritual challenges that promote their resilience in the tough environment they will occupy***

The interviewees were in general agreement that they received no resilience training beyond the formal liturgical roles within their Christian traditions.

Anecdotal evidence suggests that there is a significant attrition rate for clergy, and the Church is beginning to realise that this high attrition rate can be attributed to the tough environment clergy occupy.

While their theological training enhances, encourages, and reinforces the concept of resilience, the Church is beginning to realise that the clergy themselves are not equipped to deal with the personal, social and spiritual difficulties they experience when engaging an occupation that is so focused on the grief and trauma of other people.

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*“I think in the theological setting, in the seminaries the colleges... back in the 70s there was nothing. There was nothing for us, for the cohort that I was involved with, there was nothing.*

*And so when the challenges came, we were unequipped, under equipped, we just weren't equipped. I suspect that there's not a lot being addressed today in the formal training for ministry. I suspect it's not there (#14).”*

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*“No, we never covered it at Bible college. No, not once. Once. Yeah, I think I think one of the lecturers called it hatches, batches and dispatches. But the only thing they taught about dispatches was how to do a funeral service.*

*“Didn't talk about how to deal with people who were grieving. Well, I mean, today we have teenage suicides, overdoses. We've got so much to deal with (#11).*

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*“I haven't got an exact stat on it at this moment in time, but I understand anecdotally that there are twice as many ex-Pentecostal ministers around the country as current Pentecostal ministers. So that's a pretty high attrition rate.*

*Now you know ours' is a pretty brutal environment. Pentecostal ministry you don't have, you know, denominations backed by property investments that can subsidise ministries. So sink or swim and you get out there and you fly a flag and you hope people come. And if enough people come, you can pay yourself a wage and you can build. So it's a tough existence. It's a do or die existence.*

*“So, all this to say. I think our theology enhances, encourages, reinforces resilience really strongly. We're starting to realise that theology is not good enough. People (clergy) are still human. Marriages still break up, families still fall apart. People lose their confidence. People even lose their faith. Not because of the devil, but because of adversity because of the difficulty of engaging in an occupation that's heavily focused on people and people's responses (#16).”*

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#### **4.13.2. Resilience training cannot replace a sense of Call, but can provide the confidence and resilience gained from acquiring new work skills to manage the demands of ministry**

Interviewees made the distinction that Calling should never be replaced by resilience training alone in ministry, but also the value of resilience training to equip the clergy to avoid unnecessary stress and become acutely aware of the triggers that start the downward spiral toward burnout.

Interviewees recognised the confidence and resilience gained from acquiring new work skills and better managing the emotional demands of ministry.

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*We can equip and we can provide training - and we can do all of that with our training, but training will never compensate, or will never take the place of a calling...*

*“And I would rather have somebody who is Called than somebody who is trained. Now, really, ideally I'd rather have somebody who is Called and trained. But, if I had the stark choice between a Call and a trained, I would go for the Call every time (#12).”*

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*“I cannot get away from the aspect of Calling. And so if we are Called, then we are going to rely on God to give us that resilience. However. I also am aware am acutely aware that in the days in which we live, we face a lot of stresses that are avoidable.*

*“We all have a very much a natural part of our life. And so we are going to sometimes fail to walk in Our Calling and we are going to walk as a natural human being and we are going to feel a lot of those stresses and strains.*

*“And resilience training there, I would think, would certainly be in the area of equipping us to recognise when we are beginning the downward spiral of burnout. Learning what the triggers are for us and having somebody that would be able to prompt us (#12).”*

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*“You know, some people are innately, really good at what we do. Most people need to learn a bit better at what they're doing. So the notion of, you know, just skills acquisition and the confidence that comes from skills acquisition (#16).”*

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*“There's an emotional giving in the ministry that naturally affects us and part of resilience would be to know how to cope with that... and to find that release when it's over. (#12).”*

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**4.13.3. Resilience is seen as a personal issue only because it is easier for the Denomination to dismiss the loss of many capable people as not being able to stay their course, rather than developing resilience in their clergy**

Two Interviewees commented that clergy resilience is primarily seen as a personal issue because Church denominations have failed historically to adequately encourage and train clergy to develop resilience. Denominations find it easier to dismiss those who are not being able to stay the distance rather than develop their resilience, leading to the loss of many capable people from the ministry.

An example of self-development was attending events such as the Global Leadership Summits for clergy which provided formal teaching on the whole area of staying the course when facing hard challenges in ministry, and training to put in place the coping mechanisms of being resilient.

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Resilience as a spiritual discipline or a professional competence: “Uh, that's a tough one. It should be a personal discipline, but I don't think that as a fellowship of churches, I can, because we can only speak from the context of our own.

“You know, denominational history. From my experience, we have not spent enough time encouraging our pastors to develop resilience, showing them how to develop resilience. It's been too easy to sort of say goodbye to someone. Ohh well couldn't stay the distance. Whereas in many cases we've lost many really good people.

“So I think it is personal, but I think that, while I can't speak for other denominations, some might have exceptionally good courses. I would be really interested to see... some denominations might have exceptionally good courses for developing resilience in their pastors and ministers.

“But, I think it is a personal issue at the moment because it's not being handled by denominations (#09).”

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Self development: “... by attending the Global Leadership Summit. There was some good formal teaching in that on this whole area of staying the course, of running up against the hard stuff in ministry, but being inwardly strong enough, resilient. There was some formal training and on how you could put into place some things to, I guess coping mechanisms (#14).”

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**4.13.4. *There is an emphasis on personal growth and self-care in theological training, but an absence of practical training for the emotional and mental weight the clergy carry***

Two interviewees responded with their individual experiences during their theological training, an emphasis was given to the personal growth of the pastor to avoid burnout, with an emphasis on time-management and self-care . But there was an absence of how to apply that knowledge to the emotional and mental weight the clergy carry.

One interviewee gave the example of their attempt at self-development, having engaged a counselling psychologist to support their personal development, but they stopped because the psychologist was unable to offer any value to them.

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*“I've only been doing this senior pastors gig now for six years. I was a high school chaplain for ten years before that. I was an associate pastor for six*

*years before that, so it's not like I've been leading this local church for 20 years. I've done a few different things, so I can't necessarily speak into how do you stay in the long run for 20 plus years.*

*But what was helpful for me in my Bible college years 97-2000, a lot of that, it wasn't just theology training, it was about the life of the pastor and a lot of it was recognising, it was Australian College of Ministries, they recognised that pastors were burning out and leaving the ministry after, you know, short amount of time. And so a lot of my training built in was caring for, the caring for the self.*

*And so... taught the subject on, the Minister's personal growth and not burning out, and putting into place things like, have a day off. Don't take Monday off, for an example... because Monday is the day after Sunday and you're already fatigued, and it's not a good day to have a day off. You're kind of reflecting on Sunday and all the things that you could do better so to use Monday is an admin day, so give back to the church... and then have Friday off later in the week when you were more energised. And so just things like that have been, and that's not for everyone, but that was like, well that's cool to think about (#01).”*

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*“The people who were training us for ministry, there was no formal training on time management. And then there was, make sure you have a quiet time. Keep your connection with God, you know, good and real and vital.*

*And there was a little bit more training around that. There was never that integrated, be aware that you know your whole being physical mental. Like you need to keep and this is how you do it.*

*It was almost like you were told, you were told what you knew you needed but you weren't trained in what to do with that. Particularly the emotional and mental stuff. You know, like the weight you carry. Never told what to do with that or how to deal with that or whatever.*

*Like I see a psych. I do my own personal development. So, I pay a psych. He's a Christian guy. But, I've stopped seeing him cause he's not. He's not adding any value to me. I'm paying him like \$170 for an hour and there's nothing out the other side (#03)."*

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**4.13.5. *There has been a significant response from the Church in mandatory training as a reaction to the Royal Commission but no equivalent support for the clergy in resilience training***

Interviewees recognised that there has been a significant increase in training over the past decade because of the Royal Commission and the growing recognition within the Church for effective supervision and accountability amongst the clergy to prevent issues and comply with government regulations.

But they also expressed their concern about the heavy burden of mandatory training focused on child protection without equivalent support for clergy in resilience training.

Particularly when authenticity and integrity are related concepts to resilience for clergy, and not a consequence of some vague obligation to regulation.

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*"Let's go look at just the last decade, the lion's share of training has all been around safe practices. Safe practices for the vulnerable and that's an example of it as massively reactive to the Royal Commission (refers to the Australian Government, Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse 2017 which outlines recommendations and standards for child-safe practices). And I and the pastors have just been struggling under a constant increasing and heavy load of training in Child protection etc and that's all mandatory, and that's all really involved.*

*"But, you know, PD (Professional Development) training expectations around resilience or health? Nothing. So that's been some of the feedback that was*

*heard fairly loudly by our leaders at our recent Pastors Conference actually (#15)."*

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*"I would say the church largely, no, but it's changing. And I guess I can only talk about our Denomination, and I'm seeing it now in the, and again, a lot of this came through from the Royal Commission into child safety (refers to the Australian Government, Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse 2017 which outlines recommendations and standards for child-safe practices).*

*"Stuff that happened. Yeah. And so, our church is going well, we'd better get on the front foot of this. And so we've had people devoting a lot of time into what sort of supervision do the clergy in our church need, and not just clergy, but especially clergy, because we're the ones are going to get the blame if something goes wrong.*

*"What supervision, which will hopefully build resilience training in there, do we need to make sure stuff like that never happens in the church?"*

*And secondly, to please the government, because the government's gonna insist on this stuff. It's gonna be the law... Yeah. And so the resilience and the supervision gives an accountability which we all need and I think there a lot of pastors don't have accountability because they're in their little bubble (#11)."*

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*"To me, that's resilience. That's authenticity, that's integrity, which are related concepts and yeah, just to maintain something out of some vague sense of loyalty to something that we can't quite define. Well, that's not authentic, you know, to thine own self be true (#16)."*

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**4.13.6. Resilience training for clergy in all ministry roles must include mental first aid, drug dependency and suicide prevention to recognise it in others and avoid it in themselves**

One interviewee highlighted the absence of training amongst local clergy in mental, first aid, and suicide prevention which at some point they may encounter in ministry.

This absence of basic training leaves clergy unsure of how to cope and potentially increase the trauma of others by asking wrong questions of the individuals involved.

They concluded that resilience training for clergy in all ministry roles must include training in mental health, first aid to recognise suicidal tendencies, drug dependencies in others, and how to avoid these issues in themselves.

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*“I was out at the bushfires at Coonabarabran and we're there for a week. Another Chaplain and myself in the evacuation centre - and I said to the other chaplain, I said, we're gonna be out of here in a couple of days, but these people are gonna be carrying this for a very long time. Why don't we get the ministers fraternal see if we can meet with them and just pass on what we've done so they're aware of it, and so forth...*

*“The pastors of I think it was 5 or 6 of the churches in town to come and meet with the two chaplains. So we met and we talked for a little and I said to them, I presume you've all had some training in psychological first aid or a suicide prevention and they all looked blankly. Not one of them. Not one of them had any training at all in suicide prevention in mental health first aid. Not one of them.*

*“Now, without that training you're go into ministry and you're going to be dealing with this at some point in ministry. How you gonna handle it when somebody suicides? If you haven't, if you haven't had any training in that field, even the I, I'm not talking about advanced training. I'm talking about basic first aid, mental health first aid. If you haven't had any training at all in that, how do you cope with that?*

*“Do you blame yourself? Do you ask the ‘what if’ questions? If you haven’t had training, maybe you’ve contributed to the problem because you’ve asked the wrong questions and increased the mental health issues on the individual and eventually that’s contributed to this. How do you handle that? How do you walk with that? How do you live with that? Mm-hmm.*

*So with resilience training, I think one of the things we must do in all ministry roles is provide training in mental health first aid. So that at least the people who are involved in ministry have some basic knowledge of how to recognise suicidal tendencies, drug dependencies and how to avoid it for themselves as well (#12).”*

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**4.13.7.** *Resilience for local church clergy is different from the needs of first responders, and is a matter of self-care, professional supervision and adequate boundaries*

One interviewee differentiated between the resilience needed by first responders and chaplains in crisis situations, and self-care for clergy working in local churches, where resilience and stress-relief are understood to be a question of having a good work-life balance.

They emphasised that the Church provides professional supervision and spiritual guidance, including training in a Code of Ethics to local church clergy.

And the real problem is that some clergy do not have adequate boundaries and will not avail themselves of the support structures available for them.

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*“In Queensland, in the last year or two, particularly, there’s been a real movement towards disaster chaplaincy training. Yeah, and just recognising*

*about the first responders and people that are kind of doing chaplaincy in these contexts in terms of what you're talking about in resilience.*

*“Resilience to me is that broad heading of self-care. And so it's having those several things in place. So while the church doesn't use that word resilience, I mean it's kind of talking about similar territory really, you know.*

*“So, you know, I said professional supervision. So, I mean in the churches, the minister, you're mandated to do that now. Yep. You can't not do that without raising someone saying, well, why aren't you doing this? Basically, you need to let your presbytery know your professional supervisor.*

*“So to me that's a regular, you know, usually about a six week catch up over an hour just to debrief and talk about, you know, whatever's happening and some of the difficult stuff. Obviously that's a particular set of skills.*

*“Spiritual direction is another part of that. There are quite a few ministers that will have spiritual direction as well, which is another tool. Then obviously we have the Code of Ethics. We have training on that regularly as well. Again, that's another tool.*

*“But then, yeah, if you think about resilience and stress relief, to me, at the heart of that question is actually having a decent work-life balance, you know, and I think that is the problem that seems to overwhelm a lot of our ministers, is that they just can't work that out. And when we were talking about this at the most recent Synod. So the Queens and Synod meeting a proposal was about ministry and adequate time off...*

*“Yeah, I found it really interesting and one of my comments which I think has some truth to it, I think that whatever structure you put in place, there are just some people here go into ministry who just can't help themselves. And that's a really difficult problem to deal with. And what I mean by that is that you can put all kinds of structures in place or have all kinds of conversations but they still will not avail themselves of that help, and they still won't find a work life balance.*

*“And I feel like in order to be resilient, you need to have a work life balance. Yeah. And many people in ministry don't do that well, and don't have adequate boundaries. And that's a problem basically (#07).”*

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**4.13.8. Clergy resilience involves their physical, mental and spiritual health, and the skills and competencies needed to fulfil their Calling confidently**

One interviewee suggests that clergy resilience stems from their overall physical, mental, and spiritual health, with a dual focus of seminary training on both academic (*theological*) and practical (*ministry*) competencies.

They added that it is difficult for clergy to be resilient without the skill and competency to do the work they believe Called to do, and the necessity of aligning that Call with the expectations of the community for the pastor to confidently respond to the realities they face.

Sometimes that involves clergy acknowledging the realistic expectations of the parish and community, other times it is broadening the pastor's theological perspective to see how they may be able to fully engage that work.

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*“Our focus is on health. To me, resilience is an outcome of health. So we focus on spiritual health. We focus on physical health. We focus on mental health.*

*“When our clergy are healthy, I believe they're more resilient. So that's our focus (#13).”*

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*Resilience as a spiritual discipline or a professional competence: “It's certainly, only, both. I believe it's both. We need, we need to be stretched in*

*our Work sufficiently to be challenged, but we need to be confident in responding to that challenge.*

*“Our seminary training tries to aim at both. Not always successfully, but both academic and a practical competence. So our clergy training is a double degree, so it's a Bachelor of Theology and a Bachelor of ministry and hence tries to combine competence required both at an academic scholarly theological level and also at a practical ministry level...*

*“Without a certain level of competence it, I believe it's very difficult to be resilient, but I'll go back again to the health aspect, spiritual health, physical health and mental health are key to the ability to continue to be resilient.*

*“And I use the analogy of I'm a marathon runner, so I run marathons in relation to physical health. The resilience that one needs to complete a marathon or an ultra-marathon does come from the competency that one has in relation to what's happening to your body and the knowledge of that, and how to respond to that with refuelling and so forth.*

*“So that's a competence based response, but it also comes from the health, the physical health of your body. In relation to your training, and you're not encumbered by matters that may otherwise stop you from running that matter.*

*“So again, I think in my response I go back to the health in relation to spiritual health, my conversations with clergy, I find clergy who are in difficulties in their ministries, it's fairly common to hear that my devotional life or my practice, my faith or the receiving of strength from devotional life is rather depleted at that point and hence the focus on spiritual health, on prayer, on receiving the sacrament, on regular worship (#13).”*

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*“It's both again, going back to the health of the person in being able to respond in a healthy, meaningful way, both physical, mental and spiritual health. But it's also then the skill sets required for being competent in the areas that one is Called to do.*

*“And being very clear about the expectation of the community and so the expectation of the pastor.*

*“Some of the complexities and the complex that are into the spaces that I enter in relation to parishes and Clergy have to do with misaligned expectations...*

*“So the parish may well expect the pastor to do A, B and C, and the pastor is very clear that he's been Called to do D, E and F.*

*“And from a theological perspective our focus is on the pastor being a ‘seelsorge’ a soul carer and ministering with the Word and the sacraments. The traditional hatch-match-and-dispatch type of ministry...*

*“And the realities of it is as you highlight in relation to disasters and other challenges that our communities find themselves in, the people in our churches are just like people anywhere and everywhere with the exact same challenges, whether that's brought up financial disasters or unemployment or COVID or what have you.*

*“The expectation of the community for the pastor to respond to those needs as well we would classify that as the deaconate ministry, it's still a ministry, but it's a different type of skillset and Calling.*

*“So when those expectations misalign, then we have conflict between the pastor and the parish...*

*“So sometimes it's a matter of acknowledging the realistic expectations of the parish, and sometimes it's trying to broaden the tent - the theological ministry tent of the pastor to see that no, actually you have been Called to do this, and this is how you may be able to fully engage in that Work. So it's both (#13).”*

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*“One restricting perspective of that in relation to the mission of church is that it can be very parish focused rather than the parish being there for the larger community.*

*“You know that's a cultural shift, I think, in the Lutheran Church's thinking, is that because in our foundational stories are very powerful and they continue to influence the culture of our community for generations, and in the way that we understand ministry today in the 21st century, in relation to these communities being there in order for us to participate in God's mission to the world,.*

*“That is a shift in in, in the thinking and the self-idea understanding of Identity of this community. So that's certainly, I think, influences the way that pastors interact and the challenge that we find today... in relation to the identity and the self-understanding of clergy is then to realise the pastor is there to equip the saints in order to engage with God's mission to the world.*

*“So that's probably the challenge that we find ourselves seeing in many, many of our parishes and the parishes that's, that are growing are the ones that actually come to terms with that.*

*“Having said all that, what contributes to the resilience? I can really only point to what I said earlier in relation to health and also the skill and the competency to do what is expected of the pastor (#13).”*

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#### **4.13.9. Spiritual resilience and supervision are key for clergy staying in the profession**

One interviewee emphasised that the most important element of resilience for the clergy is the spiritual aspect of maintaining a strong relationship with God which makes them more resolute in their Calling.

At the same time the importance of supervision over resilience training because of the burden people unload on clergy, and the need to share that with others.

*“In this training, the missing element in all this is the is the spiritual stuff, the Call of God...”*

*“If you have someone centered in the Word of God, truly connected to God, then they’ll be much more resolute because they will understand their Calling, understand their relationship with God.*

*“So, I know it’s harder to say at a university level, but to say that the spiritual aspect is the most important but as far as resilience goes, I really believe it is...”*

*“So I think supervision is important, but I think, yeah, I know it’s old fashioned, but just getting the clergy back to basics, reading the Word of God, memorising the Word of God, studying the Word of God, not just for your sermons, but for your personal growth, your personal time...”*

*“It’s unbelievably powerful and I think that’s where that is the key for me. And I think it’s the key for our profession. Keeping guys in the profession, keeping their relationship with God’s sweet.*

*“Conferences help, resilience training might help. Supervision will help, but nothing helps more than spending time every day with the Lord. I mean seriously doing it, not just a token. That’s my opinion for what it’s worth...”*

*“If you could frame that as far as your personal relationship with God, that’s what makes all the difference, cause that makes your Call sure, it concretes your Vision in place. It gives you the ability to face any trial (#06).”*

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*“I think resilience, I think supervision will be more important than resilience training because knowing the burden that we carry, the things that people unload to us in counselling sessions and that sort of stuff. It’s a burden that we sometimes have to carry and we need someone we can share that burden with. So I think supervision will be more important than resilience training (#06).*

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**4.14. What do you understand to be the difference between church and mainstream resilience training for frontline workers?**

The interviewees were in general agreement that both Church and mainstream prioritise caring for people but may differ in motivation, with mainstream focusing on their bottom line and the Church focusing on vocation and spiritual wellbeing.

The Church can benefit from integrating mainstream resilience literature in areas of supervision and accountability and prepare clergy for contemporary issues such as mental health crisis, conflict resolution, and relationship breakdowns. Conversely, secular institutions can learn from the Church's emphasis on vocation, affirmation, confidence and spirituality.

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**4.14.1. *While the motivation in resilience may be different, the similarities are significant with the real possibility of learning from each other***

There are significant similarities between the Church and mainstream, particularly in professions which are similarly care for people. While the motivation may be different, both need to care for their leaders. The Church can learn in the areas of supervision and accountability, just as the secular world can learn from the Church.

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*“Look, I know, I think there are lots of similarities actually in that, especially if you're a Christian mainstream as well. So as a Christian in the banking industry I worked to give people the service, products, whatever it was that I would want as a, as a person and treated them the way that I wanted to be treated.*

*“So I might decline a lot, but I would tell them why and give them all the reasons. Now, they may not accept that, but at least I've done my best for*

*them and said you shouldn't have this loan because you can't do this here now, but it might be later.*

*"You're still caring for people, and so whether it's especially in, and I think retail can be a caring industry, probably not thought of as a caring industry, but it can be a caring. Right. Because you're dealing with. People all the time.*

*"And I remember one person asked me about two years after I'd been pastoring there was a customer I used to have and he said so what's the difference between banking, like what you did and pastoring, and my role in banking was small business lending. I said, you know what? There's not a whole lot of difference in the way that I did my job in that I was caring for people. I'm still caring for people, I just have a very different product.*

*"You know that I believe wholeheartedly it's being salvation and discipleship, I said so. Nothing's really different, except my boss. And I now have a boss who cares for people compared to the other, but and what I do didn't really change...*

*"A customer in an interview to work out who they were... I wanted to know more about their lives to... then work out what would suit them best. It's the same in pastoring... because you are just being with them, getting to know them and sharing their own life... I think they're very alike.*

*"And I think we need to not necessarily adopt everything that mainstream does, but certainly look to them and say, well, what are they doing? For them it's, going to be brutal, it's all about their people. It's actually about their bottom line... we can learn from that. We don't have to do it for the same reasons. But if they've got something more, why shouldn't we take hold of that and apply it?*

*"Yeah, I think you use it if it's there. Why reinvent the wheel when it's already there? (#11)."*

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*The purpose behind it is different because I think mainstream again do it for their bottom line, so to speak, not so much the care of people. Whereas we're starting to see that we need to care for especially our leaders, our clergy which will help them care for the people that they're discipling (#11)."*

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*"And I think that's so we can learn from the secular world definitely.*

*"I think particularly in the supervision area and accountability area.*

*"But I think they can learn from us in the relationship with God area (#06)."*

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**4.14.2. *There is an absence of Church related resilience material, and the Church should explore what models of resilience may be working at a secular level that could potentially benefit the clergy***

One interviewee pointed to a lack of Church material related to the concept of resilience beyond that of perseverance, and the wisdom of exploring what models of resilience training may be working at a secular level that could be adapted to potentially benefit the Church.

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*"I read fairly broadly. Some pastors, you know, wouldn't read anything secular. I think that's just ridiculous. Sometimes you get amazing wisdom by an individual or from a group. We may not philosophically agree with the group, but they touch something that we need to pay attention to.*

*"So yes, I think that it is important to have a look at some of the resilience training that is done on a secular level, because, as I said, I'm not aware of a lot, but that could be totally my ignorance and not the fact of reality. So if churches are dealing with it absolutely great and I'd like to know where, but if not, let's have a look at what is working with corporations and why it's*

*working. Looking to see if it transfers across, the concept, and as I said, I haven't heard a great deal of ministerially.*

*“Actually, it made me think if I ever, ever spoken on the subject of resilience, and I'm thinking I don't think I ever have. I've spoken on something which people often interpreted as the same, the concept of perseverance, but it's just slightly different, but the resilience is an important issue.*

*“Yeah, that's an interesting one I think. I think, yes, we could be seriously advantaged by having a look at what's, is there anything... that are good models that could be looked at and incorporated (#09).”*

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**4.14.3. *An example of concepts learned from a secular resilience workshop designed to enable university students to thrive shows the Church to be far from where it should be with this concept of resilience and the potential turnaround of equipping ministry candidates for the long haul***

One interviewee reflected on how resilience concepts learned from a secular workshop have proved to be life changing in their personal and spiritual growth, as well as their methodology for disciplining others.

The interviewee explained the context of the workshop was to enable university students who were struggling to survive to thrive by acquiring extra resilience skills. The interviewee reported that students who received additional resilience skills experienced significant improvement with reported 60% turnaround in coping abilities.

The interviewee suggested that the Church is nowhere near where it should be in recognising resilience as crucial concept for equipping candidates entering the ministry for the long-haul, or what preemptive resilience training might look like within the Church.

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*"I really am happy about the opportunity to speak about resilience in particular. I used that word intentionally earlier and it's something that I stumbled into 10 years ago... by virtue of being a chaplain at ..... University. I went to this conference that was a University conference for professionals... and what was fascinating, and what drew me to the presentation was that they were talking about resilience training and they had researched the outcomes of students who were failing and leaving university (...to identify the students who are not yet in crisis, but who are not thriving).*

*"And were trying to understand why and then what could we do to help them (...we're trying to help the ones who are struggling more quietly and are not getting attention because they're not falling apart, they're just not doing very well. They could be doing so much better with a couple of extra skills). And it was astounding to see the, the statistics and the analysis. It wasn't a huge study at that point. So they weren't trying to draw huge conclusions (Thriving in Action. Resilience Training. Diana Breacher & Deena Kara Shaffer. 2019) (Breacher & Shaffer, 2019).*

*"The point of the workshop was actually then to take that research, and this little workshop that they had come up with and disseminate it to those of us who would be willing to lead these things, so that they could then gain more understanding and make it better ("There are a lot of traditional one-on-one supports available; for me, sometimes that's intimidating. For me, being in a group and sharing similar struggles with folks going through similar experiences was really helpful in knowing that it wasn't me alone that was experiencing it. We're all here together, and we're all here to support each other in this journey." Chinelle McDonald. <https://www.torontomu.ca/news-events/news/2017/09/a-new-way-to-help-students-thrive>).*

*"And I don't know where the research is now, but I know it. It exploded in Canada at least, like through the Canadian universities because there was such a difference. I want to say it was something like a 60% (70%) turn around and students who just didn't know how to cope at university, and get back up after being knocked down - and whatever analogy you want to use - and then, as you say.... a toolkit. Well, the toolkit that they helped those students see*

*clearly, and see within themselves, it's already there... I can't remember, there's five (Mindfulness; Meditation; Optimism: Self-Compassion; and Grit) different areas of resilience that they talked about (Appreciativeness; Attentiveness; Connectedness; Deliberateness; Determinedness; Healthfulness; Joyfulness; Meaningfulness; Open-Heartedness; Presentness; Resourcefulness; and Skillfulness).*

*“And, that, for me was life changing. Not only because I was able then to use that with those I was leading, but because it was very relevant for me. And I do remember sitting there thinking of examples in Scripture of what they were talking about. I think one of the five was this idea of meditation or they called it something else, but like, that was a less charged word.*

*“But one aspect of resilience was, you know, this idea of being calm or whatever. But I could just instantly think of how many examples do we have in the New Testament of leaders withdrawing and having time to themselves for a very long period of time, or short period of time, or whatever.*

*“So that's just one example of how this research then really began to inform how I try to live, but then also how I engage in discipleship with others.*

*“And I think that we are not anywhere close to where we could be in my experience in the stream that I swim in, in the body of Christ, nowhere near where we should be with equipping our candidates that are coming into ministry for... the long-haul, the long term.*

*“And I think that this idea is a huge part of it, this concept of resilience and what does it look like in the church? (#08).”*

**4.14.4. The benefit of integrating mainstream literature with good theology would be to equip the clergy to connect with people in distress and get them the help they need**

An integrated approach to resilience that combines mainstream literature, and good theology would equip the clergy for their first response to people in distress; what to do with suicide ideation, marriage breakdown, domestic violence, or even social media.

To know how to stabilise the situation, not because clergy are mental health responders, but as part of their role to be able to understand what people are facing and provide them the help and support they need.

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*“I was, you know, reminded of one of the questions that that I've read in your thing (Participation Information Sheet. ETH2024-0685) and that was, what would be the benefit of integrating mainstream literature into clergy training?”*

*“And I was pondering on that question yesterday because this is along the line of what you're asking. And so, for me, the clergy training to me is more than theology training.”*

*“It's training and understanding today's challenge, and worldview and societal, and marriage and breakup and domestic violence, and all of those things.”*

*“Now, the reason I'll say that, so some mainstream literature is solid and actually really good theology as far as the spiritual aspect... I love the theology but good theology alone without the conviction... becomes just good head knowledge... so I think there's a need, that has to be a need for both...”*

*“So the benefit of integrating mainstream literature into the clergy training is the clergy is more equipped in their understanding of Scripture in their understanding of today's worldview.”*

*“Understanding of how to reach people better, even having a basic understanding of technology in today's training, because it's their language, and it's having an understanding on how to connect with people.”*

*“So what does that mean? Teaching our leaders if somebody comes up and says ‘hey, listen, I’m thinking of ending my life.’ What should our first response be to that person, at that moment, before you pass them on to a professional?*

*So it’s teaching, it’s equipping our people what our first response should be in regards to that. What is the first response should be when somebody says, ‘I’ve given up on my marriage.’ What should be the first response be for you?*

*“So, I call it, you’re the first aider, you’re the ‘ambulance guy.’ What do you when you when you get there? You gotta stabilise them before you take them to the. So that’s how I see as part of the role of the of the Clergy is to help equip you know what our first response should be (#05).”*

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*“Mental first-aid (Mental First Aid with Chaplaincy Australia). That’s a very important one for pastors, not because we are mental health responders, just because we need to be able to have a rough idea of what we’re facing and get them to the right help. Yeah, very, very much. I would very much seek an integrated approach to resilience and to support very much (#15).”*

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**4.14.5. Practical skills are often overlooked in ministry formation but are mandated and funded in mainstream as essential professional development**

Interviewees highlighted the evolving nature of Church ministry and the challenge to fit the essential skills needed in pastoral ministry, such as crisis management within a traditional Bible College which focuses on Bible study and exegesis.

They mentioned that in the mainstream, such practical skills are mandated and funded as essential professional development, whereas in the Church such skills are not prioritised in ministry formation, and what is offered is often optional and self-funded. The situation is unlikely to change unless the Denomination itself at the highest levels takes ownership to bridge this gap.

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*"I, and I think it comes down to formation of Ministry... and the church, it's always shifting, always changing, always evolving. I think the difficulty at times has been trying to squeeze too much into it, you know, because there's an awful lot of stuff that you could cover in theory.*

*And that's been some of the difficulty, you know, is trying to work out or what is really important, what's essential and what's the stuff that's a bit more sort of optional for you...*

*No, no, but if you think about it, I mean you, you use the word, Bible College. Yeah. OK. You know, if you if you talk, if you use that language of Bible College. So, what does it conjure to mind? It conjures that you're gonna be doing a lot of reading of the Bible, a lot of study, a lot of exegesis.*

*Yeah. Now, most of that is not really going to prepare you for crisis management, pastoral care, all that other kind of stuff as well. So the question is, is where does that fit into your formation? (#07)."*

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*"Well, I think one of the differences is in the mainstream it's mandatory. It's like you would, you know, it's what you will do. It's professional training right? You know what do, they call it professional development? Yeah, it's actually allocated. It's paid for, and you're gonna do it.*

*"In the church especially, well, in my particular denomination, things are offered, but pastors don't have to take it up. And so in my own in Queensland ..... for instance, I was invited to be part of a new senior pastor or solo pastor cohort, and I did that for 12 months and that was good that we had, I think every two months, we had a Zoom call. We had some resources recommended to us. We went away on the 24 hour retreat to have different leaders and different voices speaking into our lives, and it was beneficial – and so things like that, that can be offered could be useful.*

*“But again, they're not mandatory and they probably never will be in the local church setting unless it's the denominations, you know, very top down, you will do this sort of deal (#01).”*

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**4.14.6. A Christian perspective in wholistic wellbeing for proactive training and resourcing clergy in resilience and relational dynamics**

One interviewee stressed the need for Church Employee Assistance Programmes (EAPs) to understand holistic wellbeing from a Christian perspective and provide proactive solutions like conflict resolution for training to equip clergy in resilience and relational dynamics.

Secular EAPs are not just to provide solutions to clergy after they get into problems.

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*“First of all, it's a complete joke that a Christian pastor would go to an EAP program (Employee Assistance Program) that's completely secular and has no assurance that his Christian faith would be respected. And formerly our church just had an EAP, you know, just a secular EAP and whatever.*

*“So Empatia (Empatia Pty Ltd: provides wholistic wellbeing services from a Christian perspective) have come and brought counselling and things like conflict resolution and you know, not just a suite of solutions for the problems when you get into them, but they've actually brought to us talk about standards. Training and resourcing for pastors to go and learn stuff about resilience and know about relational dynamics (#15).”*

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**4.14.7. Resilience training is needed more in the broader community than in the Church because of the confident faith affirmation in the Church.**

*That spiritual discipline and a sense of Call are a source of resilience in a Christian context. The ability to bounce back, and more importantly the ability to maintain forward momentum through periods of ordinariness*

One interviewee replies that there is no specific resilience training per se in the expression of Christianity they belong to because of the confident faith affirmation in the Church movement they are a part of.

Nor is the need for it as much as in the broader community because society in general has lost confidence, and so resilience is an attempt to help it find confidence again and start to make forward progress.

The spiritual discipline is connected to a sense of vocation within a Christian framework and it is a great source of resilience. It involves the ability to bounce back, and more importantly the ability to maintain forward momentum through periods of ordinariness to stand your ground in the midst of suffering, affliction and adversity.

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*“Spiritual discipline does work – within a Christian framework in which they derive great inner strength – the capacity to deal with adversity, and a spiritual discipline is essentially part of their life – the first part of my day is mediating on Scripture... I put spirituality right at the forefront of my day, followed by physical wellbeing. Without those two I don’t think I’d be here now and to be frank, if they doubled my pay it would be enough to keep me going.*

*“That spirituality is a great resource for resilience. And probably the caveat I’ve put on that is it’s not a vague spirituality. It’s a spirituality connected to a sense of vocation. You know, I’ve lived my whole life on the basis. So I believe God called me to do what I’m doing...*

*“That reinforces my sense that I’m doing okay, and my sense of personal success I think is a factor that contributes to resilience. You know, the ability to bounce back in in times of adversity and maybe more important than that,*

*the ability to maintain forward momentum through periods of ordinariness (#16).”*

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*“I actually think resilience is a trait of the particular expression of Christianity I belong to.*

*(21:56) “Is there resilience training in in the Church Movement I belong to? I don’t think so per se, but I don’t know that the need is as strong as in the broader community. To be frank, there’s so much confident faith affirmation...*

*(32:42) “But society in general, I think has lost confidence and so resilience is an attempt to help it... (32:50) find confidence again and start to make forward progress...*

*(32:56) “Is there resilience training in the Church Movement I belong to? I don’t think so per se, but I don’t know that the need is a strong as in the broader community. To be frank, there’s so much confident faith affirmation...*

*(33:42) There’s this really strong sense of, you know, God is on your side. God has Called you. Be brave. Be bold. Stand your ground in the midst of suffering and affliction and adversity. Very, very Christian thinking (#16).”*

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#### **4.14.8. Regular retreats for pastors and chaplains are very helpful**

One interviewee related their experience emphasising that retreats structured into the annual calendar are beneficial.

Regular retreat groups for pastors and chaplains, held three or four times a year to tell their stories and receive support from their peers, would be very helpful.

Also, silent retreats allow time alone with God to be very helpful.

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*“That's a good question. What has helped me is retreat groups where you meet with a bunch of other pastors or chaplains or, you know, 3 or 4 times a year. And tell your story and they support you and you. I found when... I was part of a retreat group for about for about 9 years, I found that incredibly helpful.*

*“Silent retreats and you know, just having time alone with God. Things like that I found really helpful.*

*“Yeah. Structured into your year. It's always good to have a retreat of some kind (#10).”*

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#### **4.14.9. Resilience may be related to upbringing and individual personality traits, and learning to deal with setbacks early in life**

One interviewee shared their experience of observing resilience, particularly among country pastors who have faced challenges such as bushfires and floods. They suggested that resilience may be influenced by personality traits and backgrounds, with some individuals being better equipped to handle setbacks based on their life experiences.

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*“In terms of resilience? Yeah. Yeah, it's I think some of it does come down to personalities. Yeah, because it's strange, you know they're upbringing as well I think.*

*“Maybe I'm biased a little bit towards country people. I think there's more of a resilience amongst some country pastors because they had to battle, you know, bushfires and floods and you know, they just, they've had to work through a lot of setbacks and they haven't been entitled to a lot of things. So, they've been, they've learned on the job, to be resilient against setbacks, sometimes not.*

*“I think some people's backgrounds haven't set them up to be able to deal with setbacks, I mean every life's gonna have setbacks, but we don't, depending on personality and background and all that, sometimes we don't have that earlier in life (#10).”*

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**4.15. Is the church in denial of adopting mainstream training to building resilience? If yes, do you think there is bandwidth within the church to be able to take on mainstream approaches?**

The interviewees presented a comprehensive perspective on the evolving role of the clergy, and of the diverse skills and services expected of the clergy beyond their traditional responsibilities to meet the inherent challenges in modern ministry.

They highlighted the opportunities for the Church to learn from other sectors and specialised professionals to better support clergy resilience across various ministry contexts.

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**4.15.1. *There is a significant roadblock within the Church to adopting mainstream theories and paradigms in resilience and community health to strengthen the clergy***

The interviewees pointed to the readiness of the Church to learn valuable operational insights and integrate practical applications from mainstream to strengthen its operations.

And yet a reluctance (*a roadblock*) within the Church to look to mainstream for ways to strengthen the clergy for the practical challenges they face in ministry – perhaps because of an idea in the Church of being separate from the world – and not to contextualise practical truth from mainstream in areas of resilience and community health that are shown to work well across all other areas of life and spheres of Working.

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*“I know the church I'm in, I've been involved in it. It realises that in, let me say the business world, the political world, there's stuff that we can learn. We can learn from those particular areas of life.*

*“I think it's good for us to sit down and listen to what they're saying to see what's working in those fields and take on board, put into practice some of those things. I know that the Global Leadership Summit (GLS) was always followed up with workshops. We would sit down together with the people who attended and say right, how does this apply to us here?*

*“Looking for ways to strengthen our people, to make them strong in the face of the challenges that that ministry does face can show us practical truth, functioning truth that's working in all sorts of spheres of the world (#14).”*

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*“Probably 20 years ago, I wouldn't have thought that either. I thought that the only truth, that the only supports that we can get are from within ourselves, from, from amongst ourselves...”*

*“What I guess you're talking about is building into the people's lives, into clergies lives before their having to go to get the remedial support or help (#14).”*

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*“Yeah, absolutely. I think there is a roadblock to mainstream literature whenever it comes to effectiveness, resilience... I think that there are a number of roadblocks and I think it stems from, at least here... where I am, it stems from this concept of being separate from the world, quote-unquote.*

*“And we have a great deal of difficulty processing that all truth is God's truth. That there are theories and paradigms in the world that serve us well all the time. Like when we go to the doctor or when we go to the bank... I don't know*

*off the top of my head, but we do operate in those contexts with dimensions that are very much secular.*

*“The important part is the contextualisation of this knowledge that we are bringing in that can be true, but how are we then going to apply it in our context is where we sometimes lose it.*

*“I think also we lose it because this idea of separation, how can we bring something from the world in into what we’re doing in the church because we have a misunderstanding of separate and Holy...”*

*“But I can look at all of these dimensions... we can find a scriptural basis for we can see how these have played out in the lives of the amazing characters in Scripture.*

*“And so I feel that the roadblock is multifaceted, it is heavy and it definitely exists (#08).”*

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#### **4.15.2. Observing an emerging shift in approach to mental health and clergy resilience for the Church**

Interviewees have observed a long-held suspicion within the Church toward speaking about resilience and burnout in terms of psychological concepts, leaving the clergy to fulfil their professional responsibilities without certain proactive protections that are typically provided by a secular employer.

They also observed a slowly emerging shift in some areas of the Church to engage professional services from within the context of the church, and intentionally utilising the training and skillsets of Christian psychologists to promote church health and resilience for the clergy.

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*“I also, this reminds me of the 80s, particularly at least here in Canada. I don't know about globally, but in Canada there was such a reticence in... the movement I'm a part of to adopt or to engage with psychologists and psychology.*

*“You know, it was very, very much demonised... and then somewhere along the way it started to change because I'm sure someone got help and it worked and they kept their salvation.*

*“So it became this idea, this is very helpful... like everything else that we study, if we have the openness it does point us right back to God... point us back to the effectiveness that we learned from looking at Christ's life and how He lived it.*

*“So the roadblocks do exist. And I think it's unfortunate because there are many people, I believe, who could have been helped had they had some level of resilience training, you know, that could have been rooted in Scripture for sure but the principles are still those that someone down the street might be teaching at a very secular organisation.*

*“Again, we're all humans, so these things apply to the Christian and they apply to the non-Christian. And yeah, that's just my view of where we're at (#08).”*

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*“We as a mainline, fairly standard Protestant denomination, we have the Protestant work ethic and all of that. We have the attitudes that come with that. And there has been a resistance to speak about and to pastors in terms of psychological concepts. We're very suspicious of speaking of things like resilience or burnout or whatever it may be.*

*“We rightly say, I mean rightly say that we want to speak in terms of Scripture and Gospel stuff, but there has been a lot of stuff on record (in their related entity), one pastor actually stood up (at our National Pastors Conference) and*

*said these documents (about burnout) are a psychosocial hazard to us. That was actually said publicly.*

*“I actually spoke at a conference which the theme was burnout and resilience about 10 years ago, but I did the exegetical stuff. I didn't do anything to do with support, that wasn't my topic... like no one talks about this stuff.*

*“I'm been to most pastors conferences that the Lutheran Church is around in the last 25 years, never heard resilience discussed, have heard arguments about workload and workweek (a minimum 48 hour workweek plus volunteer time)... I'm giving you a glimpse into our denomination, but in our denomination, pastors are not regarded as employees. The church has deliberately enshrined that we are not employees who receive a wage, we receive a stipend (a living allowance to cover living expenses while engaging in unpaid work or study). And so the churches actually used that at times to get out of certain obligations to pastors so that the complaint you hear universally across pastors in our denomination is we're required to exercise professionalism and exercise the obligations of an employee, but we don't have the protections of employees.*

*“I think a willingness to talk about these sort of things from a secular point of view is now increasing, but it's pretty slow (#15).”*

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*“Hmm. I think we're getting better at that. And one of the good examples of that is... church, they've intentionally developed programmes... now utilising (Christian psychologists) their training and skillset to provide, or speak into that space of church health in particularly what you're talking about, so resilience and other areas like that...*

*“And this is one of the positives, I think that's come of the churches push to engage a more modern mindset is that we are a little more open to engaging with services that are outside of the church. We aren't relying just on the pastor to be, you know, everything, all things to the church, you know, to be the preacher, to be the counsellor, to be, you know, the carer for the sick, the,*

*the taker of meals, you know, all the things that often would come with, the visiting of those in hospitals.*

*“While those things all still happen, I think we over-emphasised that the pastor was almost like a one-stop shop, he (pastor/clergy) did all. For that, now we’ve recognised that there are services available and often they’re available within a Christian context. So people within the church have recognised what their gift is and they’ve fanned that gift into a flame, and now they’re providing those services to the church and so the pastor doesn’t have to carry that, the weight of some of these things that they’re really potentially not even qualified for.*

*“You know, I mean, when we were back at College in those days? I did one subject on counselling, went for how many weeks, 8 weeks that was it. You know, whereas you’ve got Christian men and women who feel Called to the vocation of psychology, psychiatry, social services, and that’s where that’s where they take their ministry too. They go into that often into the secular marketplace, but also then provide that to the broader church context as well (#02).”*

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**4.15.3. *The Church should recognise the shared experience of the mainstream, knowing a Call to be more than a job, and learn the ideas of resilience from the mainstream to train their clergy in resilience***

Interviewees identified similarities between the clergy and mainstream when a Calling extends to more than just a job, using the common example of a sportsman with a Call to be a great runner.

They knew that success and failure and being driven to stay on track through the dark times because both knew what they were called to do with their lives.

Seeing the loss of clergy from their position, it would be prudent for the Church to analyse the work of the clergy and learn the corporate ideas of resilience from mainstream to train their clergy in resilience.

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*“When I see all people as you would, made in the image of God, so we can learn from people that are not spiritually, you know, we would say are not spiritually motivated, but they are still made in God's image and some of the ideas that have come from mainstream, we can certainly learn from (#10).”*

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*“I think that there should be. We should learn from, you know, mainstream regarding resilience and we should have more training that guard ourselves. Yeah, I do think that this needs to be good... in my limited knowledge, I think with clergy, we do need to have more resilience training (#10).”*

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*“You know, as a scientific guy, when you're seeing clergy loss from the position, the wise move is to ask the question why and do a study to try and figure out why.*

*“So, I think what you're doing is excellent, and I think on a secular level you can analyse it like any other job.*

*“But we have this extra dimension which is the Call of God in the relationship with God that drives us on, and in my experience, in my darkest hours, it's been my relationship with God and my relationship with the people closest to me that has kept me on track...*

*“I don't talk about quitting... I've got a Call. To me, the Call of God is what drives you on and keeps you going.*

*“Same for the sportsman, if a sportsman has a great Call to be a great runner. They'll have success. They'll have failure. But at the end of the day, that's their Calling. It's what they want to do with their life.*

*“And I think that's the missing element in the job. You know, we have a Calling. It's beyond a job. And so if we, if we concentrate on the Calling that we have, the relationship with God, I think our resilience will go up and I think we'll lose less clergy, and the ones we will lose are the ones who went in for the wrong reasons in the first place (#06).”*

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#### **4.15.4. Church leadership needs to implement proactive support systems and integrate comprehensive training in ministry formation to build clergy resilience and effectiveness in pastoral care**

The interviewees observe the Church to be reactive rather than proactive in addressing the needs of clergy, resulting in significant losses among the clergy due to burnout and disillusionment.

And while skills development for the clergy in various areas including community services and drug rehabilitation is considered essential by the interviewees for clergy resilience and effective pastoral care, the need for such training to be included in ministry formation has not infused Church leadership as a whole.

Consequently, the interviewees highlighted the need of proactive Church support systems, and comprehensive training such as disaster chaplaincy training and Clinical Pastoral Education (CPE) to be included in ministry formation to build clergy resilience and clergy effectiveness in pastoral care.

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*“We are way behind the eight ball. We've lost so many clergy in the last couple of decades. I look at the people that I studied theology with and you know, the cohort I was ordained with there's been mental health problems. There's been an affair. There's been just general burnout and then moving*

*into other fields. One of them, there's been complete loss of faith and disillusionment.*

*“So. the answer is that we’ve been very reactive. There hasn’t been a great deal of thought. So within the CPE (Clinical Pastoral Education) movement, which is strong within the denomination and I’ve encountered, I’ve had a bit to do with it, and it’s been wonderful, it’s there. But that doesn’t infuse our denomination as a whole.*

*“So. there are pockets of it. Pockets of beautiful integrated proactive thinking about resilience and growth in ministry. But no, you know, if you look at clergy training in our denomination (#15).”*

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*“I think there is an acknowledgement that we do need... under the oversight of Queensland churches together there's been disaster chaplaincy training.*

*“We've gone through our disasters in Queensland with floods and what have you and that's been taken up especially by people who have been affected by those disasters, I think absolutely is a need.*

*“In our own theology, in our tradition. This then overflows to the Work of the diaconate... and the skills to do deaconate ministry calls for a special skill set, and whether that's in disaster response, whether that's in, for example, we run women's shelters or in either community services, drug rehabilitation or similar... that is the ministry that's overseen by a clergy person.*

*So I absolutely acknowledge that it's required and I think there is some response to upskilling. In some ways, from my observation, the denomination is taking the lead in that broad area (#13).”*

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*“Well, look, I mean so. So in that, in that aspect of things, I mean I would support the notion that if you're going into ministry, you need to do something*

*like CPE (Clinical Pastoral Education) like clinical or pastoral education. Now mandatory to be an Anglican Priest that you do CPE training.*

*Like, you can't go into a hospital and offer pastoral care unless you've done some kind of training, But in ministry we don't always require that you do...*

*"Yeah, because that (CPE) will give you resilience and be able to give pastoral care and be pastoral care. Yeah, because it will equip you to be able to self-reflect, to kind of like, you know, work out when things haven't gone well, the reasons why all that kind of stuff.*

*So. you know that's a specific tool step for that context, because we do end up doing a lot of pastoral care. Well, most of us do and I think that's an important thing to have skills in and reflect on and then the rest of it.*

*In terms of resilience, yeah, it's those self-care things. You know, dealing with crisis management. Yeah, I absolutely get that dealing with stress. I mean, I mean it's an important set of skills to have and it's stuff that needs to be part.*

*I think it depends on your context again, and this is the difficulty in trying to fit a lot of stuff into formation that you know you don't want to put stuff in there that's not going to be relevant or useful (#07)."*

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**4.15.5. *The Church emphasises Calling and mission but leave clergy unprepared for the intentional resilience needed to confront the challenges they encounter***

Interviewees observed a constant emphasis in the Church on Calling and effectiveness in mission, but a lack of specific training resources available to forearm individual clergy with the skillsets needed for intentional resilience in their roles, leaving the clergy without the personal or professional resilience needed for their role when confronted with challenges in the community.

They suggested that numerous clergy leave the ministry without fulfilling their life vocation owing to the lack of adequate resilience training.

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*“Bandwidth? Yeah, look, Movement buy-in I think is pretty strong... So look, I think as much as you hold together, you know we're not a coherent denomination with structure. We're a group of people who acknowledge one another and cooperate. And we've always cooperated for two reasons. One is mission, and the other one is for training ministers for mission.*

*“Of Christian professional development in my Movement is there's a constant reemphasis on Divine Call, Divine empowerment. And the efficacy of our efforts in impacting society.*

*“What I don't see is careful calibration of professional development to help you, the individual within the group, enhance yourself in terms of minimising your specific weaknesses and enhancing your specific strengths.*

*“I think that a very focused sense of training development is not there, it's not sophisticated enough in the Movement I belong to.*

*“But in in the sense of that greater sense of Calling and equipping and Divine Empowering and passion, and a sense of you making a difference in the world, I think it's a very strong and a confident affirmation within the Movement I belong to (#16).”*

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*That development for clergy in that frontline role, in particular crisis intervention training and family mediation, or any other such thing. Have you any other thoughts about..?*

*“Not really, because I don't, I don't see anything like that for clergy either and I guess it's not what we're dealing with. It's not, you know, we're not going to*

*car accidents. We're not seeing people die. You know, we're not, but there's still heavy things.*

*“And you know, as I, as I say, that I think, oh, hang on a minute you know, there are, there are times in the clergy's life where, oh, actually, yead, yeah, we've gotta do, you know, doing a funeral for a suicide victim or, you know, even this last year, a young guy, my gym, who was hit by a car on his way home, you know, and, yeah, I had the privilege of taking his funeral. You know you're there talking to his mum who's lost her teenage boy.*

*“And say that's, I guess for us, if that were to happen, boom, boom, boom, boom, boom every day, then we would definitely need really excellent resilience training.*

*“But for me personally, I guess it's been there's an example there and then you know, a month later there might be another example or two months later or something else that it's out of the ordinary that's heavier than normal.*

*“And so I think for me, you've got you've got time in between. You've got space in between. And again, those practices of, you know, keeping the Sabbath. Getting good rest. For me, exercise is important. It's just as important for mental health as it is physical health. Things like that I think help in the game.*

*“But definitely, yeah. I wonder what it would look like for the clergy. To have more intentional resiliency. Resiliency training (#01).”*

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*“It's both again, going back to the health of the person in being able to respond in a healthy, meaningful way, both physical, mental and spiritual health.*

*But it's also then the skill sets required for being competent in the areas that one is Called to do, and being very clear about the expectation of the community and so the expectation of the pastor (#13).”*

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*Yeah, I would come back to maybe some sort of retreat, you know, that Bible college students would actually have a time away and where they could be presented with some scenarios which will come up in, you know, most ministers eventually do encounter a number of these things. But to be forewarned is to be forearmed. So students, and that it'll be good for them to encounter some of those things (#10)."*

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*Personal resilience and role resilience: "Yeah, there is a difference. Yeah, certainly. I mean, your role as a pastor sometimes your thrown into things... I see that you've also got to deal with that personally, don't you, because some of the some of the things that you encounter then you do have nightmares at night and that you have to deal with on a personal basis so that you can continue to do your role.*

*"You know you can't let effect you that much that it takes you out of the picture, that much it takes you out of the game (#10)."*

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*"It could be in denial. I just think sometimes that from our Pentecostal churches we have been blessed. We certainly have been blessed with significant growth and significant prosperity, and I don't mean that in a financial sense. I mean it in a spiritual sense.*

*"In a growth sense where we've been really blessed. And so I think at times that ministers think, ohh well everything's going on OK here. Why do I have to worry about such a thing as resilience.*

*But I do think it's an important issue because, I'm not exactly sure of the percentage in America. It's certainly close to 50% leave the ministry not fulfilling it as a total life vocation,*

*But what? Who could we have saved if we had had input into their life with material about resilience and when they're confronted with that they're saying... we just don't provide enough resources. Do you think that is enough? (#09)."*

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**4.15.6. *There is a gap between a positive, faith-based Church culture and training clergy with the practical skills to manage the rising prevalence of trauma in society effectively***

Interviewees identified the gap between a very positive faith-based Church culture and the idea of creating an environment where clergy can safely express their vulnerabilities and challenges, and are trained in the practical skills to manage the increasing prevalence of trauma in society related to long-term illness, mental health and family breakdown.

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"Yeah, yeah. I would certainly say that there would be some value because in the world that we're living in now, I think there seem to be more and more people that have experienced trauma in their lives.

"A lot of the time, well, I know for me personally, I was never trained in trauma counselling or not that I would put myself forward, but as a pastor, you are put in the situations where you are, that's exactly what you're dealing with is you are speaking into a situation that's full of trauma.

"Yeah. So to have training on that process would be very helpful, I think for all ministers particularly. I'm saying particularly these days because with the breakup of families and court cases and kids, you know, can't see their grandparents and there's so many different traumas, you know, we can pray about situations as a clergy, but you know, to have some more, other ways that we can assist or help or you know, to try to have some more training in that area would be helpful. I think for all clergy really (#10)."

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“We have a very positive faith-based view of healing and the supernatural. I don't think that we have the healthy balance of long-suffering, self-control, patience. Those sorts of things and dealing with long term, like illnesses or mental health issues that we need...

“I think we've got an environment, our culture is so positive so to speak, that to be vulnerable and to admit that I'm not coping here, I'm failing, I can't handle this, I don't know what to do, I'm emotionally, you know, like, I need a break I don't think

“You know, a good tool in the toolbox would be to talk about vulnerability. Who are we really and how are we going? (#02).”

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#### **4.15.7. *When is resilience needed?***

One interviewee suggests that no one needs resilience when times are good. However, religious creeds and conformance to ministerial codes of conduct do little to help clergy in times of adversity when the need for resilience becomes apparent in defining boundaries to develop personal efficacy and the capacity to make a meaningful contribution to mission.

And how resilience is not the rigor to pursue every passion, but in knowing one's strengths and limitations to evaluate the opportunities that come their way. To maintain a sense of identity and reflect on how one's journey is shaped by divine influence, and the realisation that pursuing specific objectives requires constraining one's life.

This self-realisation being essential for a sense of self-efficacy, self-worth and personal achievement while maintaining family relationships are key to a fulfilling life, and preventing feelings of dismay when comparing oneself to others.

For adversity highlights the need of resilience. While things are running smoothly, there may not be much need for resilience and one can simply enjoy the good times. However, during tough periods or "seven lean years," resilience is essential, and the real value of resilience is not recognised until it is needed.

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*"The last one's interesting, you know, spiritual versus religious. Every religious person claims it's spiritual, not religious.*

*"So, there's some, there's some sort of a polemic dichotomy, but religion is pretty useless actually in terms of, you know, breeds declarations of creeds conformance to ministerial codes of conduct, blah, blah blah, blah.*

*"They don't help anyone in a moment of adversity, and I think that's what, you're resilience applies in adversity doesn't it. Who needs resilience when you're cruising in the seven good years, you just enjoy the fat of the land and seven, the seven lean years you are in need of resilience... you don't need resilience until you need it (#16)."*

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*"Just that last comment you made me think that, you know, a part of resilience is the ability to define boundaries.*

*"There are so many things I'm passionate about, you know, but I just can't access them all. I can't do all those things at all. And I don't want to define boundaries to protect myself.*

*"I want to define boundaries for efficacy or capacity to make some form of contribution.*

*"I would say that God has shaped my experience from there to now. I didn't choose this, but at a certain point in time I realised, look, this is what I'm doing. But I know that I can't do that, and do this.*

*"If you're gonna pursue a certain objective or set of objectives you're gonna have to constrain your life and that self-realisation is incredibly important to a*

*sense of self-efficacy, self-worth, personal achievement - It's like a Don Quixote, you know, he's tilting at windmills he's chasing a dream.*

*“So look, you've gotta have a sense of Call, Call is actually a boundary. And the notion of Gifting are boundaries as well. I'm not gonna tell you what I'm bad at, or even what I'm good at.*

*“But I know what I'm bad at, and I know what I'm good at, and I know what opportunities come my way. So my sense of who I am, my sense of the shape of my life, my sense of my capacity, my incapacity. The opportunities that come my way, I've just gotta say, well, well, that's enough.*

*“And if I can do my best in that space and still maintain my family, my wife and my children, my grandchildren and their, you know, loving relationships that's a life well lived.*

*“And almost that those boundaries that gives me strength. That gives me resilience that that makes me not feel dismayed when I see someone else shining brighter than me doing better than me.*

*“So incredibly important for me (#16).”*

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**4.16. What action might be taken to ensure that an integrated model of resilience training be incorporated benefiting the clergy and the church mission?**

**4.16.1. Action begins with Church Leadership having a difficult conversation about what needs to be done to stop the loss of so many clergy from ministry**

Interviewees suggested that actions begin with Church leadership having a difficult conversation about how many more clergy would still be in long-term ministry had the Church been dealing with matters that may have helped them such as resilience, and to initiate a basic expectation from the ground up to roll out training to all those

engaged in frontline mission to understand and deal with conflict before they are ever in burnout where EAP support is needed.

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*“But it just takes, sometimes we’ve got to be prepared to deal with an issue. And, honestly, if we’re leaders then let’s lead. Let’s not, you know that curve about the initiators and then the followers, and we’ve got to actually initiate up the front end and be prepared to actually say, hey guys, we’ve lost so many people from our ministry.*”

*“We’re standing up and saying we’ve opened so many churches, we’re standing up and saying how many pastors we’ve added in the last 12 months, but nobody bothered to say 25 pastors slipped out of the ministry.*”

*“Now the big question is, we would be 25 even further ahead had we been dealing with issues that might have helped them, such as resilience and whatnot.*”

*“So I think it needs to be done. But it’s a dangerous territory (#09).”*

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*“I suppose it would start with the expectation, just the basic expectation from the ground up that we are going to do this stuff. We want to roll out training to employees of churches and those actually in the game so that you can understand and deal with conflict more healthily before you get to an EAP (Employee Assistance Programme) saying now I’m burnt out due to conflict and I need psychological support (#15).”*

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*“Maybe we don’t have the conversation because we don’t have the training on how to have the conversation.*”

*“But the training for resilience? Maybe it’s how do we raise and deal with difficult situations, you know, difficult conversations...”*

*“And I’m pretty interested and passionate on the subject ’cause, again, I just see some of my some of my friends (clergy) just walk away.*

*“I like the last half of our conversation, where we’ve talked about what it’s like on the ground.*

*“So, I think we need training for resilience. Like we need to be trained for the long term.*

*“And then, what does that look like in practice? Like conflict resolution? (#03).”*

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**4.16.2. *An integrated resilience model must be fundamentally, spiritually and theologically sound to give it legitimacy but not neglect the physical, mental and emotional aspects of why the clergy are leaving the ministry***

Interviewees mused that an integrated approach can not merely add Christian faith to compatible secular tools, but must be informed by the Gospel and be fundamentally, spiritually, and theologically sound to give it legitimacy and force.

Nor should the Church put so much weight on the spiritual to forget the physical, mental, and emotional wellbeing of clergy and reject a relationship with *mainstream* which is willing to help when so many clergy are leaving the ministry for other reasons including financial stress, relationship stress, and the sense of having to perform and have a church with all the bells and whistles.

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*“Relative to our conversation today, I think it’s really good. We are losing a lot of people out of the ministry for a number of different reasons, financial stress, relational stress. The sense of having to perform, have the anointing. To preach good Word. To have the latest and greatest church, all the bells and whistles...”*

*“I think relationship is one of the key things that needs to happen in such a way that in ministry, we relate to other people who can really help us, love us unconditionally and care for us (#04).”*

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*“It's the same as a Christian counsellor. I don't want to just use a bunch of secular tools and say, and here's why they might be compatible with or agree with my faith. I actually deeply bring my faith to them and in some cases, reframe them or discover ways that the Gospel maybe enhances them, and deepens them and speaks to them.*

*“That's why I'm excited about Empatia because I think they're attempting that work from what I heard in their presentation (#15).”*

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*“I do not know what an integrated approach would actually look like, except for, obviously it would integrate my Christian faith as a key aspect of the whole thing, and not as an add on, you know, not as here's some really great tools from the secular world so we can keep you running well and you know we tack on some secular tools.*

*“For me, it would have to be fundamentally, spiritually – theologically sound, informed by the Gospel... that would give it legitimacy and force and I'm I would feel that would be effective for me (#15).”*

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*“Yeah. OK. Yeah, so. Maybe the clergy place... maybe the clergy throw too much weight on the spiritual aspect with very little on the physical, mental, or emotional aspect of who we are.*

*So, you know, like whatever we're going through, we just need to pray more. We just need to read the Bible, you know, I mean, like, I'm not trying to be patronising, but maybe we throw so much weight on those at the expense that we're not looking at the other areas (#03).”*

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*“I’m just emphasising the pastoral or spiritual... at least when we get into crisis, the church suddenly went ohh, you know, and Workcover forces a few things to happen, so the other stuff happened. I would love to see it more integrated, yeah (#15).”*

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**4.16.3. *Allocating a budget at a National or District level for integrated resilience training, supervision and related areas would counter criticisms of past inaction by the Church and shape the perception of being committed to supporting their clergy and the communities they serve***

Interviewees emphasised the necessity of allocating a budget at a National or District level for integrated resilience training, supervision, and related issues as a proactive demonstration to counter criticisms that the Church has been unwilling to deal with in the past. This would prove to the Government that the Church is taking steps to benefit not just its own churches, but also the whole community without being forced to do so.

There would be a cost involved but too many clergy are leaving for the wrong reasons, and this will encourage them to stay. The Church has to find a way to pay for it because it is more than just providing resilience training, it shapes the perception of clergy and the community of what the Church is doing and what it values.

Interviewees pointed to the role of the Church in disaster relief, highlighting the importance of training clergy to be resilient to support the community. It is worthwhile and valuable opportunity for the Church to engage a wider professional conversation and play their part to serve alongside secular relief organisations during significant crisis events affecting communities.

*“Or just, just when you read out those topics in that disaster or the crisis response, whatever that was (...crisis communication skills, crisis assessment, psychological triage, cognitively based crisis intervention tactics, awareness of spiritual and religious intervention, personal self-care, and stress management techniques) , I thought, you know, that would, those sorts of things are a great starting point, you know, because it's lived experience. It's professional, good, wise and all wisdom comes from above. You know, truth is truth, whether it's Christian truth or whether it's found in the world, it's all, it's from God if it's true.*

*“And so that's where those two lines converge and come along, and working shoulder to shoulder even in secular principles and models is, I think is worthwhile and valuable.*

*“Absolutely, because if they're, if we're talking about a disaster that affects a whole city or a whole region, then it's not going to be, it's not going to be the Church alone addressing the needs. It's going to, in fact, if anything, the Church, yeah, will be looked to, but invited to sit alongside and sit at the table with others, you know, disaster relief and response organisations.*

*“Yeah, we've gotta widen our language, widen our scope. We carry, you know, the Call of God, the heart of God into situations. And that's where we get to shine our light in the darkest of times. So, yeah, I think, I mean, yes.*

*“I think you we're kind of talking about a broad subject of resiliency training for pastors and clergy, but then also narrowing it down too. If and as you know, you know, significant events happen that affect whole communities, then, then the church needs to be able to be alongside. Have a seat at the table, not to lead, but to serve and to bless and to be a spiritual support to the community.*

*“And at the same time, the representatives of that church, usually clergy would be supported and known – that they could be strengthened and have good resiliency built in order to be there for the long run. Yeah, I don't have the answers to that. But I, I like it, it's good (#01).”*

*“I think somewhere that needs to be built into that budget on a district basis or a national basis probably district basis because they're the ones that control the churches... has to go to resilience, supervision, everything to deal with that, because one benefit of it is we can tell the government we've being proactive, you don't have to tell us to do it, we'll do it.*

*“That's one aspect of that which is good because it shows the world the church is willing to deal with this because that's part of the complaint of the church is that they the church were never willing to deal with it.*

*“Whereas we need to show we are dealing with it. So that benefits the whole community, not just our fellowships. Which for the church then... they're seeing the church doing the right thing. So they are not as against the church.*

*“It'll fit in more than just the resilience training, right? I think it fits in perception about what we're doing.*

*“If the police have to do it well the government has to pay for it. Well then pastors have to do it, then the church has to pay for it somehow.*

*“Yeah, makes sense... There's a cost of doing it, but for the church, I think it fits in well because of the retention side of things. Too many pastors are leaving for the for the wrong reasons. This should help them stay in.*

*Look, I know there's no direct correlation at the moment. I think come over time there will be a direct correlation to keeping clergy in the church because we're showing them what we value, and we're showing outside world what we value, which means we value them if they come into the church. So there is that evangelisation perception part that goes with it (#11).”*

#### **4.16.4. Bible Colleges need to differentiate the spiritual and practical resilience needed to equip the clergy for dealing with the challenges of ministry**

Interviewees differentiated the spiritual aspect of resilience associated with one's Calling, and the practical resilience of knowing what to do, what to say when confronted by challenging ministry situations.

While admitting that some clergy may not think they need practical resilience training, Bible Colleges have not adequately equipped clergy beyond their theological training to deal with people. The interviewees argued that aspect of practical resilience in ministry should form a natural part of everyone's Bible College training process.

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*"One pastor said to me one time, why do I need this pain? I totally understand it. We've all been there. We've all done that. But our resilience is tied to Our Calling. And that's tied to our Caller. And He tends to look after His people.*

*"All of us have been through rough situations in ministry. Yeah, I could run them off. What do you do? Get on the phone. Ring somebody and say I need help. Do you think you don't ask those questions? Of course you do. OF course you do, but you can't escape Calling.*

*"But there's a difference between Calling and job. So did I have resilience training for that?*

*"It's God that takes you through those. Resilience training helps you to handle stress in another sense. Its valuable and it should be included in every pastor's training... everything comes back to Calling (#12)."*

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*What do you think about some of these topics? Do you think that might contribute to better resilience training for the clergy?*

*“Well, definitely, definitely. Because, most of the times you walk in difficult situation as you know, having no idea what to do... I mean, what do you do? What do you say? What are you doing in situations like that? Yeah, I had no idea what to do. Walking in there.*

*“All I know is that you're walking and you're just gonna trust God, because what might work for this situation is not going to work in this situation. So it's having backpack, a wealth of training just to at least give you something, especially because they don't teach you that stuff at Bible college.*

*Do you think we should? That's the point, isn't it? Do you think we should?*

*“Think? We should. I think we should. You should be taught about in Bible college what to do you when you walk into this? You know, what do you do when you get a phone call from somebody that says I'm sitting here with a gun at my head.*

*“What are you going to do? (#05).”*

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*I wish I knew why we don't do it, - - - - . It's crazy. It's absolutely crazy. I think particularly within the Pentecostal evangelical charismatic realm, we like to think that we don't need it.*

*“We are training people... We have not, we have not done training very well... we have missed a lot of the ministry stuff. And part of the ministry stuff includes, not only our theological training, but our equipping for dealing with people, ministry...*

*“Jesus... engaged in ministry. He was engaged in making disciples.*

*“And as part of that disciple making, there is an equipping process to equip people to minister to others and as part of ministry, resilience training, as we might like to call it, is a natural part of that process. That we train others to be resilient and in the process, we learn how to rely on God a little more ourselves (#12).”*

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**4.16.5. Engaging in real-word conversations to discover fresh insights into the training issues we are attempting to address**

Interviewees suggested an integrated model of resilience begins with the Church taking the next step to engage in a conversation with ethical external voices to discover fresh insights into the training issues it attempts to address.

They encouraged clergy to take time out to encounter life in the real-world to gain a broader understanding of the challenges their congregations may experience in their daily lives, strengthening them in their ministry.

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*“I just so totally and wholeheartedly agree to you. The world is falling apart. I think clergy need to understand that, they need to encounter it...”*

*“Your question is how do we how do we address this in how do we bring this to the Church to the clergy? How do we, how do we get them to start to engage in this conversation? I'm not, I'm not sure. The church is the people. But I don't think we're taking the next step. The church is not only the church when it gathers, the church is also the church when it scatters. It's still the church. And it's that church that is facing the toughest stuff of all. I think they need, I think that the church, and that it includes the clergy need to understand the world we're living in (#14).”*

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*“I think sometimes it, but possibly with some of this it's better from someone coming from outside because nobody bothers to sit there and think, who is he talking about?... And so... to have someone coming in from outside that is obviously completely empathetic with your ethics and your standard of morality and all the rest of it... I think they can say... may have amazing things to be able to say to us Pentecostals and none of us would bother to think, I wonder what pastor he's talking about.*

*“It's like the old Water pump - you have to prime the pump before you can get the water. Initially I would say there would be a general resistance and that, you know, you know we don't need this etcetera. But it just takes somebody breaking the ice (#09).”*

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*“And I do think we need to have a broader understanding of the issues that you're looking to address. I think we can in certain pockets of the church have that old mindset and that is, “no we just deal with this in-house - we don't go outside.” I think there is a lot of value in recognising that not everybody's Called to be the pastor, and not everybody's Called to just sit in the church and just be a follow up (#02).”*

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*“Because for three years, I went into the very place where the people I was ministering to where, where they were five days a week, it awakened within me an awareness of what, let me say, what the real world is like. A lot of clergy have no friends outside of the church. Their only relationships are within the church. I think they've got a false understanding of what – of what their congregation is engaging in, or encountering through the week.*

*“And I think there's value in clergy actually having time out... you know, a planned six months they go and Work in a factory or Work in a building site or something like that. Or they just build it in once a week to do something, I think it's those three years strengthened me for when I went back into ministry (#14).”*

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#### **4.16.6. Sharing personal stories is vital to advocate for change within the Church**

Interviewees observed that clergy find it hard to admit their vulnerabilities and understand resilience in the context of self-care. And encouragement to participate in

what may be available such as support groups and retreats are not always taken advantage of because of naivety or an idealism that might be perceived as a sign of weakness to admit being struggling in ministry.

That situation works against any movement to instigate any conversation about resilience training. Sharing personal stories is a vital means for individuals to advocate for change within the Church, encouraging more voices to join the conversation.

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*“So we need to do it now, so I tell my story. I think any of us that have been through it has to tell our story. And I was able to do that in that conference when they started talking about this... I went and I said, if you need me to be to be a voice for this, you just tell me, and I'll put my name on the list. I don't know, but I think that means more of us have to tell our story to make this happen (#11).”*

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*“In terms of resilience, yeah, it's those self-care things. You know, dealing with crisis management. Yeah, I absolutely get that. Dealing with stress. I mean, I mean it's an important set of skills to have... and it's stuff that needs to be part of it.*

*But I think in the church we're kind of doing that to some extent, you know, I mean, there's a conversation about these things. People are having honest conversations about it. Is it perfect? No. Yeah.*

*“And so, I think in terms of resilience, it's that whole suite of things and whether we take advantage of that or not. And the ministry agent that I get really concerned about is the person who goes into the ministry, yeah, I suppose sometimes there's a naive, naive idealism about that and really struggled in ministry... and then at the end of it... often say something along the lines of, oh, you know, it will all work out cause God's in control. You know this kind of stuff.*

*“You know how I absolutely get this theology that God's in control. Yeah. But I think sometimes there's an avoidance behaviour there that ministers will say well I'm not actually going to do all the steps that I need to take to remain healthy in ministry cause you know I'm just gonna pray and God's in control and God will take care of it all (#07).”*

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*Resiliency Training: “Yeah, I, I think so. I think for my own movement (denomination) I guess at a leadership level, they recognise the need for that, and there's an encouragement. It's not ‘resiliency training’ as such, but there's encouragement for pastors to, you know, to get into retreat groups and go away once a year, and to be able to have those processes where they debrief and support one another and the like.*

*“I think. I think a couple of things are happening. I think. I think there's a reluctance, necessarily, because of the preferred method, not necessarily because of the professionalism of clergy, but maybe sometimes, again, like I said before, that it might seem a weakness to admit, you know, vulnerability or admit I'm struggling here.*

*“And because we're meant to be the spiritual ones, right, and ready to go. And so that's works against any sort of movement for ‘resiliency training.’ But that's again, that's a case by case. You know, pastor by pastor situation.*

*Yeah. How would you? I guess the question is, how would you instigate such conversations? How would that? Yeah. How would that start? How could it multiply or grow? Yeah. Yeah, I'm not. Yeah. I think it's good, absolutely good, but that I'm at a loss as to what would, might that look like or how would that how? Could that be shaped? (#01).”*

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#### **4.16.7. Training as a potential catalyst for discord in Mission**

Despite Colleges and frontline clergy having the same goal, training is a catalyst (a *source*) of discord in Mission.

There is an acknowledgement that training clergy has a cost, and a belief that it is a necessary investment for the Church's long-term success and credibility.

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*"I think somewhere that needs to be built into that budget on a district basis or a national basis probably district basis because they're the ones that control the churches... has to go to resilience, supervision, everything to deal with that, because one benefit of it is we can tell the government we've being proactive, you don't have to tell us to do it, we'll do it..."*

*"That's one aspect of that which is good because it shows the world the church is willing to deal with this because that's part of the complaint of the church is that they the church were never willing to deal with it."*

*"Whereas we need to show we are dealing with it. So that benefits the whole community, not just our fellowships. Which for the church then... they're seeing the church doing the right thing. So they are not as against the church."*

*"It'll fit in more than just the resilience training, right? I think it fits in perception about what we're doing (#11)."*

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At the same time, there is a concern that Bible Colleges have focused on achieving enrolment numbers for financial reasons, which has diminished the sense of purpose and role that once motivated students to attend.

*"Because unfortunately, the other thing is that today a lot of Colleges will bend over backwards to get the best numbers... and don't worry about the quality of the individuals coming as long as they've got X number, which becomes the*

*financial attitude, and we've moved right away from Calling, we've moved right away from our purpose and role (#09)."*

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The criticism that Colleges accepting external funding has led to a shift amongst students from a personal Calling to a job opportunity, affecting the quality and dedication of students who attend.

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*"And here's a criticism, but nevertheless I think when Colleges became funded with government funding we lost something because individuals didn't go to College because they felt the Call, something deep within them, the purpose and role deep within them. They thought, 'ohh it's not a bad a job, my pastor looks to be doing pretty well. I might as well go and train as a minister because I'm gonna get paid to do it.*

*"And I think we lost something. And I think about a lot of the students, because all of the guys that were in my 6 years of training, all had to pay a price to come to College because there was something in your life and, so I do believe that first one is such a powerful statement because it does speak to one's life and purpose and role (#09)."*

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These criticisms underscore the challenges faced by Bible Colleges in maintaining financial viability and fidelity to ethos, mission, beliefs, and God's Call upon themselves to equip Christian leaders for mission.

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*"...so we're trying to fund several research projects... and remain faithful to our mission. So, two railway tracks for us as distinct from perhaps a public university. Number one, financial viability. We've all got that issue and number two, fidelity to ethos, to mission, to what we believe, and to God's Call upon ourselves.*

*“And the Call hasn't changed on since you were... many years ago. We feel we're Called to equip Christian leaders to change the world. So, and pretty well the same thing as when I started here in... and I think I could trace that sense of mission ran back to... when the College started.*

*“The only difference being... back in... there was... a degree of urgency and pragmatism about the training at that point in time that... perhaps is not quite as clear at this moment in time... yeah, I think it's a true statement actually...*

*“So, I think as much as you hold together... who acknowledge one another and cooperate... and we've always cooperated for two reasons. One is mission, and the other one is for training ministers for mission (#16).”*

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#### **4.17. A chapter summary**

Chapter 4 presents the results of interviews with 16 clergy who stay in ministry mainly because they see their work as a Calling, not just a job.

Their discussion provides rich, qualitative insights into their challenges and motivation, highlighting both the spiritual and professional dimensions of their work.

Many face burnout, stress and family pressures, but each retain a strong sense of purpose and personal resilience sufficient to thrive and stay in their roles.

Nonetheless, their comments suggest that current ministry training more often lacks focus on the practical skills and resilience needed to meet the real-world challenges of ministry.

## **CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION OF THE RESULTS**

### **Why do Clergy Stay?**

#### **Investigating the Nature of Contemporary Clergy Work and Retention, with a Focus on Mainstream and Church-Specific Resilience Training**

A core assumption of this study is that actionable insight into what causes clergy to stay their course while others resign their vocation is missing from current literature.

This study is concerned with frontline clergy in Australia and their awareness of high levels of attrition from their profession. The study sought to gain a deeper understanding of clergy resilience as a dynamic process and why these frontline clergy responding to the adversity they face have remained in their chosen vocation.

The previous Chapter 4 presented the results of an expanded sematic analysis of the respondents' answers to the interview questions. The chapter was arranged according to the interview questions and the results were summarised and supported by the evidence and attendant quotations from the respondents.

This Chapter 5 is informed by the respondents reply to the interview questions with an interpretation and implication of what has been discovered corresponding to the four research questions guiding this study, with a conclusion.

### **5.1. Research questions guiding this study**

#### **Why do Clergy Stay?**

#### **Investigating the Nature of Contemporary Clergy Work and Retention, with a Focus on Mainstream and Church-Specific Resilience Training**

**RQ1:** What is the nature of church work for the clergy as frontline workers?

**RQ2:** What is the nature of frontline workers' training?

**RQ3:** What would be the benefit of integrating mainstream literature into clergy training?

**RQ4:** Can we build on current resilience training for the clergy and what would that look like?

## **5.2. RQ1: What is the nature of church work for the clergy as frontline workers?**

**Background:** *This section is informed by the interview questions related to respondents' experience of frontline resignation and retention. These questions include a contemporary definition of Work and the workplace (van der Laan et al., 2023) that breaks from a traditional employment, productivity, and remuneration view of work and focuses on the five dimensions of Work: Work is innate, affects wellbeing, relational, identity, and learning.*

### **5.2.1. The five dimensions of work**

Interviewees considered the five dimensions of Work identified in mainstream literature (van der Laan et al., 2023) to be an extension of a Christian understanding of ministry work for frontline clergy. They postured the challenge for the clergy to honour what is essentially a spiritual vocation, while effectively integrating the professional resources available to equip them to take ownership of the realities of their frontline role.

### **5.2.2. The innate nature of work**

The innate nature of Work is understood to be a gift from God and a primary expression of their purpose, but not the source of their identity because they understood ministry to be more than just a job or a role, but hard work nonetheless.

### **5.2.3. *The nature of clergy work***

The participants understood the nature of clergy work as a Calling from which they could not escape rather than a career choice. Yet they spoke freely about the consuming nature of clergy work as a potential catalyst for the breakdown of clergy marriages and for resignation. They also observed the challenges faced by the clergy, including their inadequate training given the broader expectations made of clergy today.

### **5.2.4. *Balancing personal and professional life***

Clergy's primary identity is rooted in their beliefs as Christians which accentuates the importance of balancing personal and societal codes with their personal lives, professional responsibilities, and Christian values.

### **5.2.5. *Relational nature of pastoral work***

For the clergy, pastoral work is essentially relational, accepting the struggles and conflicts in dealing with people as a part of the job. While the positive and negative impact of Work on wellbeing is not unique to the clergy and how building healthy peer relationships can make the difference when the pressures of clergy work become overbearing.

### **5.2.6. *Societal expectations***

Society interprets the Work identity of clergy through the social codes and professional standards expected of other professions, and how these societal expectations have changed over time making the professional and vocational identity of the clergy more complex and tenuous.

### **5.2.7. Continuous learning**

Clergy's subjective learning on the job beyond their formal ministry training is a continuous process that informs their abilities and sustains the staying power needed to remain relevant and in touch with their community.

### **5.2.8. Impact of burnout**

Burnout among clergy is accompanied by feelings of shame, grief, and failure. The stigma surrounding burnout hinders a clear message of support from the Church for those clergy experiencing burnout which in turn dissuades others from speaking up before it is too late.

### **5.2.9. Interpretation:**

Most Churches see their clergy as being Called to serve. As such, according to the observations above, the Church appears to have a blind spot to recognise a Calling also being a form of Work, and that being Called does not necessarily equip the clergy with the personal and professional skillset needed to meet the inevitable challenges inherent in their frontline role.

### **5.2.10. The implications:**

- **Nature of Clergy work:** Clergy work is seen as a Calling rather than a career choice which can lead to a consuming nature of work that may cause the breakdown of marriages and resignations.
- **WORK dimensions:** The five dimensions of Work identified in mainstream literature (van der Laan et al., 2023) are considered to be an extension of a Christian understanding of ministry work, posing a challenge for clergy to integrate professional resources while honouring their spiritual vocation.
- **Identity and purpose:** Work is seen by clergy to be a gift from God and an expression of purpose, but not their source of identity.

- **Relational nature of Work:** Pastoral work is relational, and building healthy peer relationship which can help manage the pressures of clergy work.
- **Societal expectations:** Society's interpretation of clergy work through societal codes and professional standards has changed over time, making the professional and vocational identity of clergy more complex.
- **Clergy awareness:** There is an awareness amongst frontline clergy of a need for improved support systems, comprehensive training and adequate resources to enable them to effectively manage their roles, maintain their wellbeing and remain in ministry.
- **Inadequate training:** The broader expectations of the clergy today highlight the inadequacy of their training which can lead to burnout, feelings of shame, grief, and failure.
- **Stigma and support:** The stigma surrounding burnout hinders clear support from the Church, dissuading other clergy from speaking up before it is too late.
- **Continuous learning:** Continuous learning beyond formal ministry training is essential for clergy to remain current and in touch with their community.

#### **5.2.11. In conclusion:**

According to the discussion above, the nature of Church work for the clergy as frontline workers is understood to be a spiritual vocation rather than a career choice, but that they are not immune to the well-researched challenges and complexities of Work and are subject to those same challenges and complexities of balancing the social and professional expectations as others associated with their role.

That work is not the source of their identity. And the broader expectations of the clergy today expose the inadequacy of their training which can lead to burnout, feelings of shame, and failure.

### **5.3. RQ2: What is the nature of frontline workers' training?**

**Background:** *This section is informed by the interview questions asking to describe clergy resilience, and if the Church has resilience training for its frontline clergy.*

### **5.3.1. *Emphasis on Calling and effectiveness***

Interviewees observed a constant emphasis in the Church on Calling and effectiveness in mission but noted a lack of specific training resources available to forearm individual clergy with the skillsets needed for intentional resilience in their frontline role. They were in general agreement that they received no resilience training beyond the formal liturgical roles within their Christian traditions.

### **5.3.2. *Resilience and sense of Call***

It is believed that a sense of Call within a Christian framework is a great source of resilience giving the ability to bounce back, and more importantly the ability to maintain forward momentum through periods of ordinariness. This resilience helps the clergy to stand their ground in the midst of suffering, affliction and adversity.

### **5.3.3. *Historical failure in encouraging resilience***

With the Church seeing clergy resilience primarily as a personal issue, Church denominations have failed historically to adequately encourage and train clergy to develop resilience in their work. Denominations find it easier to dismiss those as not being able to stay the distance rather than developing resilience in their clergy, and as a result have lost many capable people from ministry.

### **5.3.4. *Lack of resilience training***

Despite a significant response from the Church in implementing mandatory training as a reaction to the Royal Commission, there has been no equivalent support for clergy in resilience training, leaving many frontline clergy without the personal or professional resilience needed for their role when confronted with challenges in the church and community.

### **5.3.5. *Christian concept of resilience***

Resilience is described as a Christian concept and the hallmark of the clergy that is rooted in faithfulness, persistence, and a commitment to authenticity. And something that the Church could better formalise in terms of training and approach for the clergy to be better equipped to face difficulty without being overcome by that situation.

### **5.3.6. *Role resilience***

Role resilience is a sense of being fit for purpose, knowing that you can do your job. The sense of being competent to achieve specific goals expected of your role in line with your passions is connected to your sense of personal resilience. To do well in that space means that you're going to feel better in that space.

### **5.3.7. *Peer identity and empathy***

Role resiliency is enhanced when one finds peer identity in non-competitive acceptance, insight, and empathy beyond the governance level of the organisation to perform. And while successful performance enhances resilience, when one does not succeed, such peer empathy enhances resilience in context.

### **5.3.8. *A lack of resilience***

A lack of resilience is a sense of vulnerability, defeatism, a lack of heroism, a reluctance to address or fix issues, a backing away from the confidence of previous generations.

### **5.3.9. *Theological training and resilience***

While their theological training enhances, encourages and reinforces the concept of resilience, the Church is beginning to realise that the clergy themselves are not equipped to deal with the personal, social and spiritual difficulties they experience when engaging in an occupation that is so focused on the grief and trauma of other people. And the interviewees suggested that numerous clergy leave the ministry without fulfilling their life vocation for want of being provided adequate resilience training.

### **5.3.10. *Gap between Church culture and practical skills***

They also identify the gap between a very positive faith-based Church culture and the idea of creating an environment where clergy can safely express their vulnerabilities and challenges and are trained in the practical skills to manage the increasing prevalence of trauma in society related to long-term illness, mental health and family breakdown.

### **5.3.11. *Learning from experiences***

And that resilience is not just the ability to bounce back, but also the ability to learn from such experiences to be better prepared the next time around when something similar is going to make life difficult in ministry, family, or for any other challenge that appears.

### **5.3.12. *Interpretation:***

This discussion emphasises resilience as a crucial trait needed for frontline clergy and while training cannot replace a true sense of Call, it can provide clergy with the skills needed to fulfil their Call.

### 5.3.13. *The implications:*

- **Lack of specific training resources:** Interviewees observed a constant emphasis on Calling and effectiveness in Mission but a lack of specific training resources to equip clergy with the necessary skillsets for resilience.
- **Sense of Call and resilience:** A sense of Call within a Christian framework is a significant source of resilience towards enabling clergy to maintain forward momentum through periods of ordinariness and adversity.
- **Historical failure of the Church to enable resilience:** The historic failure of the Church to adequately encourage and train clergy to develop resilience and maintain their Calling and avoid the loss of many capable individuals from ministry.
- **Mandatory training response:** Providing mandated training in response to the Royal Commission leaves many frontline clergy with no equivalent support leaves many frontline clergy without the personal or professional resilience needed.
- **Concept of Christian resilience:** Resilience is described as a sense of being fit for purpose and competent to achieve specific goals and maintain forward movement through periods of ordinariness.
- **Successful performance:** Successful performance enhances resilience while non-judgmental peer empathy helps maintain resilience in the face of failure.
- **Vulnerability and defeatism:** A lack of resilience is associated with vulnerability, defeatism, and reluctance to address issues.
- **Gap between positive faith-based culture and practical Work skills:** There is a perceived gap between the positive faith-based Church culture and need of practical skills to manage trauma, mental health, and family breakdown in the communities they serve.
- **Learning from experience:** Resilience is not just the ability to bounce back but also the ability to learn from experiences to be better prepared for future challenges.

#### **5.3.14. In conclusion:**

According to the discussion above, while theological training promotes resilience, there is an absence of practical training for clergy beyond their formal liturgical roles for the emotional, mental, and professional resilience needed in their frontline roles, highlighting the need of better training and support for frontline clergy.

The lack of training resources exposes a historic failure of the Church to develop resilience in the clergy, providing mandated training with no equivalent support for the clergy.

#### **5.4. RQ3: What would be the benefit of integrating mainstream literature into clergy training?**

**Background:** *This section is informed by the interview questions asking what is understood to be the difference between Church and mainstream resilience training for frontline workers.*

##### **5.4.1. Evolving nature of Church ministry**

Interviewees highlighted the evolving nature of Church ministry and the challenge to fit the essential skills needed in pastoral ministry such as crisis management into a traditional Bible College which focuses on Bible study and exegesis.

##### **5.4.2. Professional development**

In the mainstream such practical skills are mandated and funded as essential professional development. Whereas in the Church such skills are not prioritised in ministry formation, and what training is offered to clergy is often optional, self-funded and an additional undertaking upon already busy clergy. And that is unlikely to change unless the Church itself at the highest levels takes ownership to close the training gap.

#### **5.4.3. *Integrated approach to resilience***

An integrated approach to resilience that combines mainstream literature and good theology would equip the clergy for their first response to people in distress. To know how to stabilise crisis situations, not because clergy are mental health responders but as part of their pastoral role to understand what people are facing and how to respond to suicide ideation, marriage breakdown, domestic violence, and even social media.

#### **5.4.4. *Church and mainstream motivation***

The interviewees were in general agreement that both Church and mainstream, particularly in the caring professions, are caring for people but may differ in their motivation. With mainstream focusing on their bottom line and the Church on vocation and spiritual wellbeing. Nonetheless, the Church can benefit from integrating mainstream resilience literature in areas of supervision and accountability and in preparing clergy for contemporary issues such as mental health, conflict resolution, and relationship breakdowns. While secular institutions can learn from the Church's emphasis on vocation, affirmation, confidence, and spirituality.

#### **5.4.5. *Resilience training models***

There is a lack of Church material related to the concept of resilience beyond that of perseverance, and highlighted the wisdom of exploring what models of resilience training may be working at a secular level that could be adopted to potentially benefit the Church.

#### **5.4.6. *Life-changing resilience concepts***

An example of resilience concepts learned from a secular workshop have proved to be life-changing in their personal and spiritual growth, as well as their methodology for disciplining others. And explained the context of the 'Thriving in Action' programme (Breacher & Shaffer, 2019) which enables struggling university students

to uncover their strengths, restore motivation, build momentum, and find new learning by acquiring new skills. The interviewee reported that students who received these resilience skills experienced significant improvement in their coping abilities.

#### **5.4.7. *Intentional resilience in ministry***

The Church is nowhere near where it should be with the concept of intentional resilience being crucial for equipping candidates that are coming into the ministry for the long-haul, or what pre-emptive resilience training might look like in the Church.

#### **5.4.8. *Realistic expectations***

Clergy resilience stems from their overall physical, mental and spiritual health. Adding that it is difficult for clergy to be resilient without the skill and competency to do the work they are called to do. And the necessity of aligning that Call with the expectations of the community for the clergy to confidently respond to the realities they face.

#### **5.4.9. *Realistic expectations of the parish***

Clergy need to recognise the realistic expectations of the parish and community and broaden their theological perspective to see how they may be able to fully engage that work.

#### **5.4.10. *Interpretation:***

Frontline clergy advocate for an integrated approach to clergy training, emphasising the importance of skills, competence and resilience needed to effectively serve their communities.

#### **5.4.11. The implications:**

- **The evolving nature of Church ministry:** Interviewees highlight the evolving nature of Church ministry and the challenge to fit the essential skills needed in pastoral ministry into a traditional Bible College focus on Bible study and exegesis.
- **Professional Development:** Practical skills are mandated and funded as essential professional development in mainstream but not prioritised in ministry formation.
- **Training emphasis:** Practical training offered to clergy is often optional, self-funded and an additional undertaking upon already busy clergy.
- **An integrated Approach to Resilience:** Combining mainstream literature and good theology can equip clergy to respond to people in distress.
- **Motivation Differences:** Both Church and mainstream professions care for people and may differ in motivation but can learn from the other.
- **Resilience Training Models:** Exploring secular models of resilience training could potentially benefit the Church.
- **Personal and Spiritual Growth:** Resilience concepts learned by clergy from secular workshops have proved to be life-changing and changed methods of discipleship.
- **Intentional Resilience:** The Church should focus on intentional resilience to equip candidates for long-term ministry.
- **Overall Health:** Clergy resilience stems from their overall physical, mental, and spiritual health.
- **Skill and competence:** It is difficult for clergy to be resilient without the skills and competency needed to do the work they are Called to do.
- **Realistic Expectations:** Clergy need to align their Call with the realistic expectations of their parish and community and broaden their theological perspective to fully engage their work.

#### **5.4.12. In conclusion:**

According to the discussion above, without a change in training emphasis at the highest level to fund and prioritise an integrated approach to training, frontline clergy

may be deprived of the resilience and overall health needed to effectively align their skills with community expectations to do the work they are Called to do.

My findings indicate the absence of integrating mainstream literature leaves a limited perspective, reduces relevance, weaker communication skills, misses ethical and moral lessons, stifles creativity and absent critical thinking.

#### **5.5. RQ4: Can we build on current resilience training for the clergy and what would that look like?**

**Background:** *This section is informed by the interview questions asking whether the Church is in denial of adopting mainstream training to building resilience and is there bandwidth within the Church to take on mainstream approaches.*

##### **5.5.1. Evolving role for the clergy**

The interviewees present a comprehensive perspective on the evolving role of the clergy, and of the diverse skills and services expected of the clergy beyond their traditional liturgical responsibilities to meet the inherent challenges in modern ministry.

##### **5.5.2. Learning from other sectors**

There are opportunities for the Church to learn from other sectors and specialised professionals to better support clergy resilience across various ministry contexts.

##### **5.5.3. Integration of practical applications**

There is a readiness in the Church to learn valuable operational insights and integrate practical applications from mainstream to strengthen its operations.

#### **5.5.4. *Engaging with ethical external voices***

An integrated model of resilience begins with the Church taking the next step to engage in a real-world conversation with ethical external voices to discover fresh insight in the training issues we are attempting to address.

#### **5.5.5. *Roadblocks within the Church to mainstream***

And yet there is a significant roadblock within the Church to look to mainstream for ways to strengthen the clergy for the practical challenges they face in the ministry – perhaps because of an idea in the Church of being separate from the world – and not contextualise practical truth from mainstream in areas of resilience and community health that are shown to work well across all other areas of life and spheres of Working.

#### **5.5.6. *Resilience, burnout and psychological support***

The Church has a long-held suspicion of ever speaking about resilience and burnout in terms of psychological concepts, leaving the clergy to fulfil their professional responsibilities without the benefit of what is typically provided by a secular employer.

#### **5.5.7. *Vulnerabilities and self-care***

The clergy find it hard to admit their vulnerabilities and understand their resilience only in the context of self-care. And such support as may be available is not always taken advantage of because of naivety or idealism – that to admit they are struggling in the ministry might be perceived as a sign of weakness.

#### **5.5.8. *Reactive Church practices***

And while there is a slowly emerging shift in the Church to utilise the training and skillsets of Christian psychologists from within the Church to promote church health and resilience for the clergy, in the main the Church remain reactive rather than proactive in addressing the needs of clergy. Resulting in significant losses among the clergy due to burnout and disillusionment.

#### **5.5.9. *Similarities of understanding***

The Church should recognise the similarities between clergy and mainstream when a Calling extends to more than just doing a job, using the common example of a sportsman with a Call to be a great runner. And of each being driven through success and failure to stay on track through the dark times because each know what they are Called to do with their lives. And how the Church can study similar ideas of resilience from mainstream to train clergy in resilience.

#### **5.5.10. *Essential skills in resilience***

And while the interviewees consider skills development for the clergy in various areas including community services, mental first aid, and drug rehabilitation to be essential for clergy resilience and effective pastoral care, the need for such training has not been widely accepted by Church leadership as a whole.

#### **5.5.11. *Practical resilience training***

Although certain clergy may not perceive a need for practical resilience training, Bible Colleges have generally fallen short in preparing clergy to engage with people beyond theological instruction. Integrating practical resilience into ministry formation should be considered an essential component in every candidate's training process.

Aspects of training supporting resilience in clergy would include leadership development; conflict mediation and crisis intervention; social needs and community trauma; and new technologies.

#### **5.5.12. *Real-world Work experience***

And for those clergy to take time-out to encounter life in the real-world to gain an understanding of the challenges their congregations are experiencing in their daily lives in order to recognise the need of such training. Consequently, sharing personal stories is a vital means for individual clergy to advocate for change within the Church, encouraging more voices to join the conversation.

#### **5.5.13. *An integrated resilience model***

Consequently, an integrated resilience model must be fundamentally, spiritually and theologically sound to give it legitimacy but not neglect the physical, mental and emotional aspects of why the clergy are leaving the ministry. It should not merely add Christian faith to secular tools but be informed by the Gospel.

#### **5.5.14. *Budget allocation***

Allocating a budget at a National level for integrated resilience training, supervision and related areas of training would counter criticism of past inaction by the Church and shape the perception of being committed to supporting their clergy and the communities they serve.

#### **5.5.15. *Interpretation***

Recognising the diverse skills and services expected of the clergy beyond their traditional liturgical responsibilities to meet the inherent challenges in modern ministry and highlighting the opportunity for the Church to learn from other sectors and specialised professions to better support clergy resilience.

### **5.5.16. The implications**

- **Evolving Role of Clergy:** Highlighting the diverse skills and services expected of the clergy beyond their traditional liturgical responsibilities.
- **Learning from Other Sectors:** There are opportunities for the Church to learn from other sectors and specialised professionals to better support clergy resilience across various ministry contexts.
- **Ethical conversations:** An integrated model of resilience begins with the Church engaging in real-world conversations with ethical external voices to discover fresh insights in the training issues being addressed.
- **Operational Insights:** The Church shows readiness to learn valuable operational insights and integrate practical applications from mainstream sectors to strengthen its operations.
- **Roadblocks within the Church:** The Church is hesitant to contextualise practical insights from mainstream shown to work across all other spheres of Working in support of its clergy.
- **Psychological Support:** The Church has long-held suspicions of psychological concepts, leaving clergy without the benefits typically provided by secular employers.
- **Vulnerabilities and Self-Care:** Clergy find it hard to admit their vulnerabilities and understand their resilience only in the context of self-care. Available support is not always taken advantage of due to naivety or idealism.
- **Shift in Practices:** There is a slowly emerging shift in the Church to utilise the training and skillsets of Christian psychologists to promote church health and resilience for the clergy.
- **Similarities of Understanding:** Mainstream knows what it is to have a life Calling.
- **Skills Development:** Skills development for clergy as essential for resilience and effective pastoral care has not been widely accepted by Church leadership.

- **Bible College Training:** Bible Colleges have not adequately equipped clergy beyond theological training to deal with people, and practical resilience in ministry should be part of the training process.
- **Real-World Experience:** Clergy should take time-out to encounter life in the real-world to understand the challenges their congregations face and recognise the need for training to accommodate it.
- **Advocating for Change:** Sharing personal stories is vital for individual clergy to advocate for change within the Church, encouraging more voices to join the conversation.
- **Integrated resilience training:** Any integrated resilience model must be fundamentally, spiritually, and theologically sound to give it legitimacy that also addresses the physical, mental and emotional aspects of ministry.
- **National Budget Allocation:** Allocating a budget at a National level for integrated resilience training, supervision and related areas to support clergy and the communities they serve would counter criticism of past inaction by the Church and shape the perception of being committed to supporting their clergy and the communities they serve.

#### **5.5.17. In conclusion**

According to the discussion above, there is support for the Church to build on current resilience training for the clergy beyond their traditional liturgical roles to meet the challenge of modern ministry. For legitimacy, any integrated resilience model must be (i) spiritually and theologically sound and (ii) address the physical, and emotional aspects of frontline ministry.

The notion here is that the philosophy behind any integrated mainstream model must first align with the core theological beliefs and values of the clergy themselves.

An example of an integrated model is Pastoral Crisis Intervention (PCI) training to integrate faith-based resources with recognised techniques of crisis intervention (see 2.26.3 Pg.51), and Table 1 Pg.48). Teaching the clergy crisis communication skills; crisis assessment and psychological triage; cognitively based crisis

intervention tactics; awareness of differentiating spiritual from religious interventions and when to apply each; and finally, personal self-care and stress management techniques.

Not to build on current resilience training engenders increased vulnerability to crisis and slower recovery, mental health strain, and instability.

#### **5.5.18. A conceptual diagram based on findings and description**

Ministry Formation and Training focus on equipping clergy with the essential skills, knowledge and support needed to support clergy resilience for effective ministry.

This includes:

- **Continuing Theological and Liturgical Training:** Ongoing education in theology and liturgy to ensure clergy remain current and proficient in their spiritual and religious practices.
- **Mentoring and Pastoral Care Training:** Developing abilities to guide, support, and care for others within the faith community.
- **Leadership Development:** Building strong leadership skills to manage teams, inspire congregants, and lead ministries effectively.
- **Conflict Mediation and Crisis Intervention:** Training to handle disputes and crises constructively, promoting peace and resilience within the community.
- **Social Needs and Community Trauma:** Understanding and responding to the social challenges and trauma faced by congregants and the wider community.
- **New Technologies:** Adapting to and integrating modern technologies to remain current with social media, enhance ministry outreach and effectiveness.

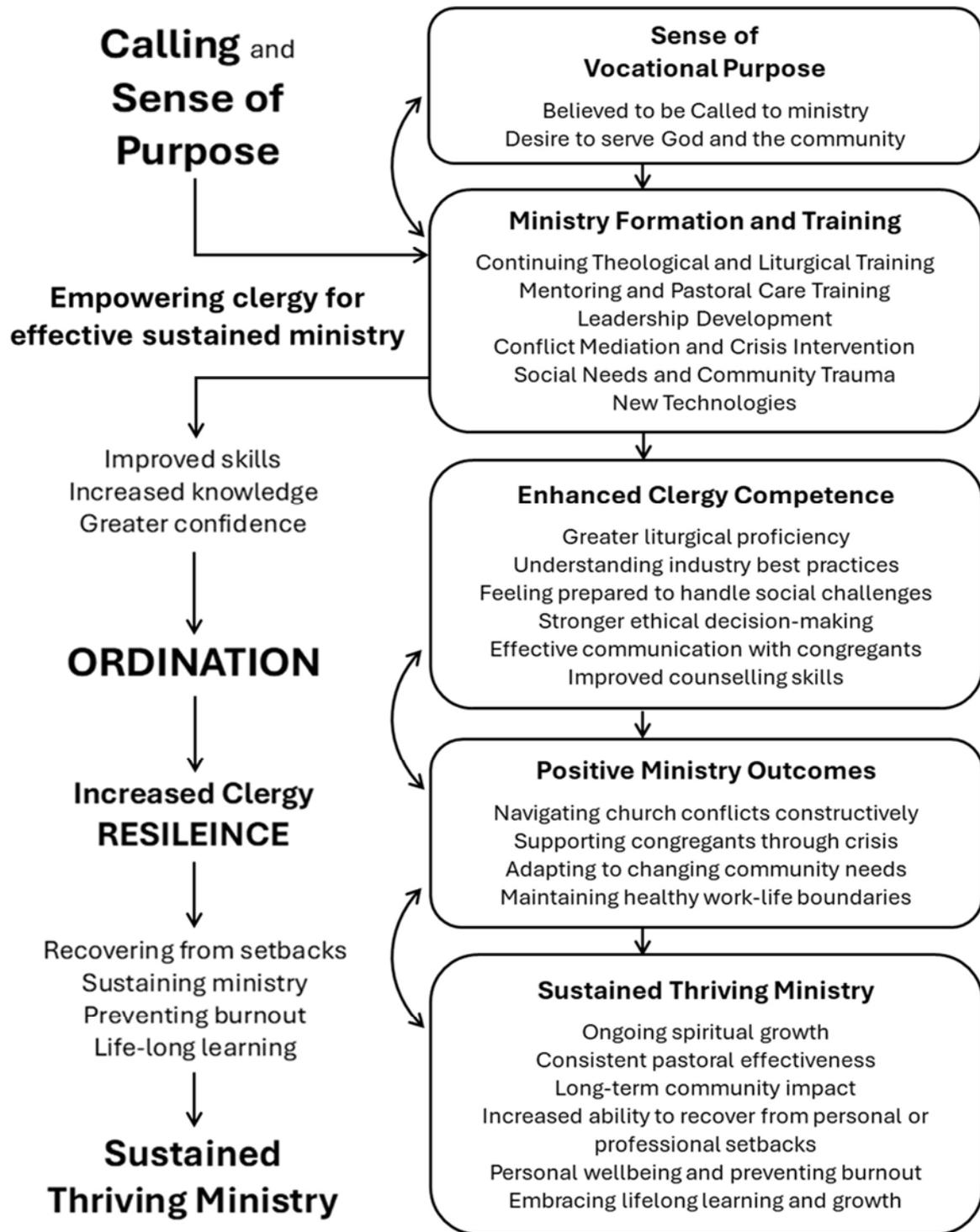


Figure 3: Conceptual Diagram - Practical resilience training for clergy

## **5.6. Additional insights drawn from the interview questions**

***Background:** This section is informed by respondents' general replies given within the context of the research questions.*

### **5.6.1. Motivation and commitment**

True motivation and dedication to work for the clergy comes from a sense of identity rather than financial compensation, and clergy need to experience autonomy, mastery, engagement, and dedication in their work to stay motivated. (Deci & Ryan, 2004; Gagné & Deci, 2005).

### **5.6.2. Training challenges**

Financial considerations can affect the quality and objectives of training programs.

### **5.6.3. When resilience is needed**

Resilience involves knowing one's strengths and limitations to evaluate opportunities and maintain a sense of purpose during tough times.

### **5.6.4. Loss of clergy**

The Church's reluctance to adopt mainstream theories and paradigms in resilience and community health has left many clergy struggling without the necessary protections and training.

### **5.6.5. Missed opportunities**

By not integrating practical applications from mainstream, the Church loses the opportunity to benefit from valuable insights that could support clergy in their practical challenges.

#### **5.6.6. *Inadequate training***

The absence of adequate training in community services and issues such as drug rehabilitation has left the Church leadership unprepared to handle the challenges of modern ministry.

#### **5.6.7. *Financial stress and performance pressure***

The Church's emphasis on spirituality often ignores Clergy's physical, mental, and emotional health, in relation to financial stress and performance pressure.

#### **5.6.8. *Interpretation:***

These points suggest that motivated clergy still face significant challenges related to financial stress, inadequate training, performance pressures, and lack of perceived support from the Church.

#### **5.6.9. *The implications:***

- **Financial Stress:** Clergy face financial stress and performance pressure.
- **Inadequate Training:** Lack of training in community services and drug rehabilitation leaves clergy unprepared.
- **Missed Opportunities:** The Church misses valuable insights.
- **Loss of Clergy:** A reluctance to adopt mainstream theories leaves clergy struggling.
- **Resilience:** Knowing one's strengths and limitations is essential to maintain purpose.
- **Training Challenges:** Financial concerns impact clergy training.
- **Motivation:** True motivation comes from a sense of identity.

### **5.6.10. In conclusion:**

According to the discussion above, no participant is disputing the validity of their theological training, just an absence of a corresponding practical one. Consequently, it is crucial for the Church to realise that these challenges to the overall health and effectiveness of its engaged clergy are a fundamentally motivational issues, rather than spiritual ones.

### **5.7. A self-reflective account of this study**

I hold a deep concern for the loss of clergy from the Church and the impact it has on them, their families, their church, and the wider communities they serve.

This study began with a hopeful optimism to engage frontline clergy and make an innovative contribution to help tame the otherwise intractable loss of other clergy from what they believed would be their life Calling.

This study has helped me to develop a better understanding of how clergy wellbeing and professional competence affects their resilience to fulfil their Calling.

And clearly indicates that their Calling does not inherently equip them to handle church conflict, or the disaffected, weary, unhappy people they will inevitably encounter.

And I have discovered two key insights from this study:

- 1) That frontline clergy face similar work-related challenges as those in other mainline professions.
- 2) That clergy competence in that space enhances their sense of spiritual and professional resilience to keep moving forward.

Specifically, how the detailed insights from this study on the dimensions of Work has the potential to redefine our understanding of modern clergy work. At the least to provide a needed focus on the practical aspects of clergy work, and not just the spiritual.

Prompting me to ask new and more insightful questions. For example: How can the Church utilise mainstream findings that mirror what is happening to the clergy such as Work engagement, and employee turnover?

And gives opportunity for the Church to demonstrate credibility in their training and preparedness. To be professional, accountable, and transparent. Being equipped to be at the forefront of community expectations rather than falling behind it.

Consequently, this study supports a focus on the practical aspects of clergy work alongside the spiritual, which can potentially lead to better outcomes for the Church, the clergy, and the communities they serve.

I am committed to foster and continue this important discussion.

## **5.8. Conclusion**

This chapter answers the four research questions on the (i) nature of church work for clergy, the (ii) nature of their training, and the potential of (iii) integrating mainstream literature to (iv) build on current resilience training for the clergy.

In conclusion, the interviewees see their role as a spiritual Calling but agree that they are not immune to the parallel challenges and complexities of mainline Work. And how the historic failure of the Church to provide practical training beyond their formal liturgical roles, except of mandated training, has resulted in no equivalent support for the clergy.

According to their discussion, without a change in training emphasis at the highest level of the Church to fund an integrated approach to practical training, frontline clergy may be deprived of the resilience and overall health needed to align their skills with community expectation to do the work they are Called to do. This could potentially leave the Church with a limited perspective, reduced relevance, weaker communication skills, missed ethical and moral lessons, stifled creativity, and absent critical thinking.

For legitimacy with the clergy, any introduced integrated model must be spiritually and theologically sound and address the physical and emotional aspects of frontline ministry.

In all, no interviewee is disputing the validity of their theological training, just an absence of a corresponding practical one. Consequently, it is crucial for the Church to realise that these challenges to the overall health and effectiveness of their engaged clergy are a basic motivational issue, and not a spiritual one.

This prompts the recommendation for the Church to address the practical challenges faced by clergy as frontline workers and implement a comprehensive approach to their training and support.

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# **CHAPTER 6: CONCLUSION**

## **Why do Clergy Stay?**

### **Investigating the Nature of Contemporary Clergy Work and Retention, with a Focus on Mainstream and Church-Specific Resilience Training**

A core assumption of this study is that actionable insight into what causes clergy to stay their course while others resign their vocation is missing from current literature.

#### **6.1. Introduction**

This purpose of this study was to challenge redundant assumptions regarding the work of clergy and to prompt discussion of the extent to which mainstream studies and interventions that enhance resilience are provided to the clergy.

The clergy are an essential resource in the effort to rebuild lives and communities in the wake of trauma and disaster – and yet that resource is often under-prepared and frequently overlooked in the contribution that it makes.

Developing such clergy brings with it the need to provide adequate training and related support to sustain their role.

Chapter 1 introduced this topic, provided the background and context, and described the research problem.

Chapter 2 reviewed the relevant literature and concluded by presenting the research questions and the conceptual model guiding this study.

Chapter 3 describes the methodology and research paradigm adopted by this qualitative study.

Chapter 4 presented the results and thematic analysis of the data.

Chapter 5 was structured according to the research questions of the study and assimilated the results into answering each research question.

This chapter concludes the thesis, reflects on the conclusions and contributions of the study.

## **6.2. RQ1: What is the nature of church work for clergy as frontline workers?**

The Church continues to see the work of their clergy primarily as a spiritual Calling, leaving the clergy ill-prepared to meet the social and professional expectations of their frontline role.

The answers in this section are structured around a contemporary definition of Work and the workplace (van der Laan et al., 2023), which breaks from a traditional employment, productivity and remuneration view of work. And **focus on the five dimensions of Work**: Work is innate, affects wellbeing, is relational, is identity and involves learning.

The interviewees broadly agreed that...

- Calling informs clergy purpose and role, and is also hard Work.
- When clergy define their purpose, they can be flexible in their roles.
- For the clergy, their purpose is not focused on job security or remuneration.
- Purpose is not the source of clergy identity, but Calling defines their purpose and role.

### **6.2.1. *Work is an innate human function that informs one's life purpose and role***

The clergy understood the innate nature of Work to be a gift from God. This understanding was informed by their belief that all humans are created in the image of God possessing certain capacities, competencies and the ability to respond positively or negatively to Divine Call.

They agreed that their role as clergy is shaped by a clear sense of meaning, agency and achievement that is derived from their unique Calling, and that Calling provides them with purpose, role and vision, without which the whole community will falter.

Some in the Church find it difficult to use the term “work” in relation to the duties performed by the clergy, preferring to use “vocation” or “Calling”. Nonetheless, the interviewees agreed that their Calling was also hard work.

By knowing that their purpose comes from their Calling, they can be flexible in their roles to achieve their identified purpose and to be both faithful and fulfilled in their work.

Because their Calling defines their purpose and role, they see a potential danger of being distracted from their Calling by allowing their work to become their source of identity.

### **6.2.2. *Work affects and influences our wellbeing***

The overall wellbeing of the clergy is significantly influenced by their dedication to their work.

The pressures and complexity of their work, especially bearing the weight of others’ personal challenges, can greatly impact their mental health.

Their work has unique challenges compared to secular employment, and often extends beyond a standard eight-hour day and the conventional working week.

Engagement, autonomy, mastery, and dedication are essential in maintaining their motivation. Allowing clergy to demonstrate their capacity and competence without micromanagement is crucial to their wellbeing and resilience to achieve their Calling.

### **6.2.3. *Work is relational and manifests through socialisation***

The work of the clergy is inherently relational, accepts the struggles and involves significant socialisation. This involves building strong relationships with people in the church, leadership teams and the wider community.

These relationships for the clergy are different from general work relationships with co-workers, customers or clients.

The importance of clergy relationships in Christian ministry is exemplified in terms of love, forgiveness and acceptance.

These factors bring an extra layer of complexity for clergy. Both introverts and extroverts in clergy roles face challenges in balancing these dual-role relationships and social interactions to avoid burnout.

**6.2.4. *Work is identity, driven by professional and societal codes expressed through our professional or vocational identity***

Society interprets the work identity of clergy through the social codes and professional standards expected of other professions. Yet society does not allow the clergy to separate their work identity from their personal life owing to the complex, multi-dimensional relationships in ministry.

However, unlike the “secular” world where people get their status and identity from their Work, clergy are not driven by the trappings of success and are guided by their Call and their passion for ministry rather than seeking validation through societal titles or roles.

It is important then to the clergy to understand their identity beyond other professional or vocation roles. There is a conviction amongst the clergy that their work is not what they do as much as what God does through them, removing any sense of their identity hanging on a job title or a role.

**6.2.5. *Work is learning as a result of subjective experience from within the context of work***

Subjective learning derived from personal experiences within the context of clergy work is essential for their growth in leadership and ministry, essential in building clergy resilience and for keeping them engaged with the wider community.

A tragic loss of potential for the Church occurs when it rejects mainstream learning, leading to missed opportunities for mutual learning.

### **6.3. RQ2: What is the nature of frontline workers' training?**

There is an absence of practical training for the clergy beyond their traditional liturgical role for the emotional, mental and professional resilience needed in their frontline roles.

Whatever frontline training as may be available to the clergy – such as Clinical Pastoral Education (CPE), Pastoral Crisis Intervention (PCI) training, mental health first aid, drug dependence and suicide intervention, conflict resolution, relationship breakdown and the like – these are considered optional, self-funded and seen as another thing to be fitted into their already busy life.

While at the same time, these skills are funded and mandated in the mainstream community and are considered as essential professional development.

### **6.4. RQ3: What would be the benefit of integrating mainstream literature into clergy training?**

Frontline clergy advocate an integrated approach to clergy training, emphasising the importance of the skills, competence and resilience needed to serve their communities effectively.

Such training would build clergy competence that enhances their sense of resilience to maintain their forward momentum and fulfil their Call.

### **6.5. RQ4: Can we build on current resilience training for the clergy and what would that look like?**

Frontline clergy would support a model of integrated training that is spiritually and theologically sound, and able to address the physical and emotional aspects of frontline ministry.

However, the Church has resisted adopting an integrated model of training, maintaining that clergy are Called to a vocation, and not to a job for remuneration.

But the evidence of this study demonstrates that engaged clergy are evidently not motivated by remuneration, nor do they gain their identity from their work.

Furthermore, by the Church adopting parallel mainstream training on competence building beyond traditional liturgical roles, the Church would better enable their clergy to maintain and deliver their Call.

## **6.6. Contributions to practice**

This study engaged with serving frontline clergy to contribute their lived and hard-won expertise towards reducing the calamitous loss of clergy from their Calling.

### **6.6.1. *Combining spiritual and professional roles***

Insights from this study identify clergy work to be both a spiritual Calling and a professional job. This dual recognition alerts our understanding to the real-world challenges and complexities the clergy face.

This study offers a contemporary, detailed description of the nature of clergy work as an intrinsic, relational, purpose driven activity linked to their overall wellbeing in life.

Consequently, a mainstream approach to Work for remuneration does not work for clergy. Theirs is a real vocation. They are not trying to construct a purpose or an identity as a financial transaction. Remuneration is not at the heart of their work nor their motivation; it is only an outcome.

This new understanding of clergy work allows the benefit of integrating mainstream literature with good theology to equip the clergy with the practical skills that are often overlooked in ministry formation but that are seen, understood and funded in the mainstream community as essential professional development.

### **6.6.2. *Connecting competence to resilience***

Insights from this study identified that clergy relate to a sense of Call, a sense of gifting and of being equipped to deliver the job they are expected to do.

And that clergy being professionally competent in that space greatly enhances their sense of spiritual and professional resilience to keep moving forward. This suggests that practical aspects of clergy work should be prioritised alongside the spiritual aspects of their role to enhance their resilience and effectiveness.

### **6.6.3. *Informing strategy, training and practice***

The Church has long maintained a paradigm of separating Calling from Work. Viewing clergy as Called to their vocation rather than employed for remuneration. However, It is evident that dedicated clergy are not primarily motivated by remuneration, nor do they derive their sense of purpose or identity from their occupational roles.

This separation of Calling from paid work is a nightmare for engaged clergy, who are left facing the contemporary challenges of modern ministry without the tools to deal with it. A traditional approach of Work, remuneration, and employee and employer does not work for clergy trying to fulfil their job.

What is more, a sense of competency and success in that space greatly enhances their resilience to move forward and fulfil their Calling. Consequently, this new understanding of clergy work calls for a change in both approach and strategy by the Church towards training their clergy.

For while we may not be able to recover those clergy who are lost from the profession, we can validate their service, and recognise the change needed to prepare and support those who take up the role to stay their course and fulfil their Calling.

#### **6.6.4. *Utilising mainstream work engagement findings***

The insights from this study about legitimately engaging with mainstream literature can help prepare the clergy for their responsibilities and utilise mainstream findings of work engagement and employee turnover to develop an updated understanding of modern clergy work, wellbeing, competence and role resilience.

#### **6.6.5. *Professionalism and accountability***

The insights from this study about adopting mainstream learning can legitimately enable the Church to be at the forefront of community expectations to be professional, accountable, transparent and credible towards their clergy and the communities they serve. Enabling opportunities to be proactive in addressing issues like child protection and domestic violence, rather than being dragged along somewhere behind it.

### **6.7. Contributions to literature**

#### **6.7.1. *A fresh approach – why clergy remain***

This study contributes to the literature by offering a different perspective to the issue of clergy resignations and the evolving nature of clergy work.

That clergy resignation has for some time been the subject of sustained investigation attests to the intractable nature of this phenomenon.

While the reasons for resignation have been broadly studied and agreed upon, studies on why clergy remain are rare, especially as it relates to the intersection between the nature of contemporary Work and clergy resilience.

Consequently, this study represents a different approach in order to gain a deeper understanding of clergy resilience as a dynamic process. And of why certain frontline clergy facing the same challenges and pressures as others who resigned, have nonetheless remained in their chosen vocation.

That is to say, the factors precipitating clergy to resign or remain are complex, fermenting multiple cause and effect relationships that defy traditional processes to define, describe or resolve. This very complexity has shaped an apathy towards its resolution, provoking an adaptation to the problem rather than generating a sustained resolve to defeat it.

This study accepts the “wicked” nature of the phenomenon and the complexity surrounding local church ministry.

Nonetheless, this study represents a new approach to challenge redundant assumptions in the literature regarding the work of the clergy and prompts discussion of the extent to which mainstream studies and interventions that enhance resilience are provided to the clergy.

### **6.7.2. *A gap in the literature***

By far the dominant prevailing and often repeated definition of Work in current literature is defined as employment, remuneration, productivity, workplace, employee and employer. This paradigm sees Work primarily as an economic transaction.

This paradigm might work for others, but frontline clergy describe their work as an intrinsic, relational and purpose driven activity linked to their overall wellbeing in life.

The prevailing approach to Work does not work for the clergy. Their motivation and purpose comes from their Calling. Exposing a gap in the prevailing literature regarding the nature of Work.

Consequently, a mainstream approach to Work for remuneration does not work for clergy. Theirs is a real vocation. Clergy are not trying to construct a purpose or an identity as a financial transaction. Remuneration is not at the heart of their work nor their motivation.

## **6.8. Limitations of research design**

The methodology adopted by this study acknowledges its limitations but aims to address the “wicked problem” of clergy resignation. It critiques existing literature for perpetuating repeated perspectives that have not addressed the problem nor resolved these challenges.

And as noted in the existing literature, churches appear to be adopting the same perspectives, most prominently the reasons why clergy are not attracted or retained, and are repeating the same failed interventions to mitigate resignations.

### **6.8.1. *Phenomenological research***

Phenomenological research provides valuable insights into individuals’ lived experiences; however, it is not without limitations. While it excels in capturing subjective meaning and personal perspectives, challenges arise in areas such as generalisability, researcher bias and methodological rigour.

### **6.8.2. *Subjectivity and researcher interpretation***

Phenomenology relies on deep engagement with participants’ experiences, meaning the researcher’s interpretation plays a significant role in shaping the findings. Despite efforts to bracket personal biases, complete objectivity is difficult to achieve. This subjectivity may lead to variability in analysis, as different researchers may interpret the same lived experiences differently.

### **6.8.3. *Limited generalisability***

Since phenomenological studies focus on small, purposively selected samples, findings often lack broad applicability. Unlike quantitative research, which relies on statistical significance, phenomenology prioritises depth over breadth, making it difficult to generalise results beyond the studied individuals. This context-dependent nature limits its use in large-scale policy or decision-making research.

#### **6.8.4. Challenges in data collection and analysis**

Phenomenological research demands rigorous and nuanced data collection, often through in-depth interviews, which can be time-consuming and resource-intensive. Analysing narratives requires identifying themes without reducing complexity, making it methodologically challenging to maintain authenticity in representation. Additionally, ensuring interviewee recall accuracy can be difficult, as memory distortion may affect descriptions of past experiences.

#### **6.8.5. Difficulty in replication**

Replication is a core principle in scientific research, but phenomenological studies are highly context-dependent and difficult to reproduce. Since experiences are unique and interpretative, repeating a study with different interviewees may yield different conclusions, which reduces reliability from a positivist standpoint.

#### **6.8.6. Ethical and emotional considerations**

Phenomenology often investigates deeply personal and emotional experiences, requiring sensitivity in ethical considerations. Interviewees may disclose traumatic or distressing experiences, necessitating ethical safeguards such as informed consent and emotional support. Researchers must navigate ethical dilemmas while ensuring participants' wellbeing without influencing responses through emotional involvement.

While phenomenology offers rich and meaningful insights, researchers must acknowledge its subjective nature, limitations in generalisability, methodological challenges, and ethical considerations. These limitations do not diminish its value but highlight the importance of transparent methodology and reflexivity in qualitative research.

## **6.9. Researcher's reflections**

My participation in the DPRS programme and completion of the research have contributed significantly to my personal learning and self-awareness, providing the opportunity for new perspectives in relation to my personal and professional development.

### **6.9.1. Reflections**

The detailed insights from this study on the dimensions of Work have the potential to redefine our understanding of modern clergy work, or at least to provide a needed focus on the practical aspects of clergy work.

That this research gives opportunity for the Church to demonstrate credibility in their training and preparedness, to be professional, accountable and transparent, and to be equipped to be at the forefront of community expectations and not being dragged along somewhere behind those expectations.

This study has prompted me to ask new and more insightful questions, such as how the Church can utilise mainstream findings that mirror what is happening the clergy, such as work engagement and employee turnover.

### **6.9.2. Before the study**

The researcher is a frontline pastor with extended service in both Australia and Canada.

I hold a deep concern for the loss of clergy from the Church and the impact it has on them, their families, their church and the wider communities they serve.

As both a practitioner and a critically reflective professional, I have found that the DPRS at UniSQ has provided me with the opportunity to consolidate my lived professional experience and to make a scholarly contribution in support of frontline clergy to the mission of local churches and the communities they serve.

My hope was that this rigorous academic study would provide the opportunity for the whole profession to review, analyse and act upon credible research able to give new impetus to professional practice related to clergy longevity.

### **6.9.3. *Where it began – hopeful optimism***

In my experience, the clergy's Calling to ministry does not inherently prepare them to manage human crisis or church conflict, or to address the concerns of the dissatisfied or weary individuals they inevitably will encounter.

Action learning has been my method of learning, and resilience emerged as a key professional competency needed for success in local church leadership.

Consequently, this study began with a hopeful optimism to make an innovative contribution by engaging with serving frontline clergy to help tame the otherwise intractable loss of clergy from what they believed would be their life Calling.

It remains a process. The results of this study suggest that a dynamic sense of competency in their work promotes a sense of resilience in their role. It is not an answer, but perhaps a contribution to help tame the problem. It is more than a beginning but not yet an outcome. Hopeful still.

### **6.9.4. *What was striking about my learning journey***

#### **Personally:**

Professional learning is a risky business. Learning something new about professional practice is not always easy, but professional stagnation is even worse.

It was an amazing privilege to be in conversation with the interviewees and to hear something of their challenges, sorrows and triumphs and to learn from their wisdom, compassion and courage.

My involvement in the DPRS programme and completion of the research have contributed significantly to my personal growth, providing me with the opportunity for new learning and the development of new perspectives on life.

**Professionally:**

This study helped me to develop a better understanding of how clergy wellbeing and professional competence affect their resilience to keep moving forward to fulfil their Calling.

**To literature:**

That frontline clergy face similar work-related challenges to those in other mainline professions, and how their competence in that space enhances their sense of spiritual and professional resilience to keep moving forward and to fulfil their Calling.

**Discoveries:**

1. Spiritual disciplines are connected to a deep sense of purpose for clergy.
2. Resilience is both a theological concept and a Christian trait.
3. Clergy resilience is related to their sense of Call, reinforcing their sense of self-efficacy – I'm Called, I'm equipped, I can do this.
4. Competency and a sense of personal success in what is expected contribute significantly to role resilience.
5. When clergy do not succeed, peer identity, non-competitive acceptance, empathy and insight enhance their resilience in context.
6. There is an emotional component to resilience.

**6.10. Future research**

Initial studies should be exploratory to gain a depth of understanding that can be tested in future studies.

### **6.10.1. *Contemporary clergy work***

Further research is needed to understand the significantly different nature of contemporary clergy work compared to a decade ago, and the dominant definitions and deeply held assumptions about what constitutes work.

### **6.10.2. *Clergy resilience***

There is need for studies of why clergy remain, especially in relation to the intersection between contemporary Work and clergy resilience.

### **6.10.3. *Church support and training***

Research should explore the extent to which mainstream studies and interventions that enhance resilience are integrated into Church support for clergy and their training.

### **6.10.4. *Enhancing reflexivity and triangulation to address subjectivity***

Future research should incorporate more structured reflexive practices, such as analytic memoing and reflexive journals, in order to track explicitly the influence of researcher perspectives throughout the study. Additionally, the use of investigator triangulation – engaging multiple researchers in the coding and interpretive process – can offer comparative interpretations and enhance the trustworthiness of the findings.

### **6.10.5. *Expanding transferability through purposeful diversity in sampling***

While generalisability is not a goal of phenomenology, researchers may improve transferability by selecting interviewees with more diverse backgrounds, settings or experiences.

#### **6.10.6. *Leveraging technology and mixed methods to strengthen data collection and analysis***

To address the intensity of data collection and analysis, future studies could utilise digital transcription tools, qualitative software (e.g. NVivo or ATLAS.ti) and structured interview protocols to streamline processes while preserving depth. Integrating mixed-methods approaches – where phenomenological insights are supported by quantitative data – may also enhance analytical rigour and triangulate key themes without oversimplifying lived experiences.

#### **6.10.7. *The recommendations for future research includes...***

- i. The suggestion that a mixed-methods or longitudinal research designs to triangulate findings and assess the impact of equipping for resilience training on clergy outcomes.
- ii. Piloting and evaluating a modular equipping for resilience training curriculum as a next research phase.
- iii. Confirmatory research building on the model proposed in the conclusion.

### **6.11. Conclusion**

This academic study is concerned with frontline clergy in Australia. The persistent phenomenon of clergy resignation has defied resolution and remains a global challenge. That clergy resignation has for some time been the subject of sustained investigation attests to the intractable nature of this phenomenon.

Consequently, this study adopted a different approach to gain a deeper understanding of clergy resilience as a dynamic process and of why frontline clergy have remained in their chosen vocation. Such studies are rare, especially as they relate to the intersection between contemporary work and clergy resilience.

By engaging in a wider enquiry of the circumstances precipitating their resignation, this study accepts the “wicked” nature of the phenomenon and the complexity surrounding local church ministry.

These new findings with evidence of clergy work have significant consequences for training and preparation in competence building.

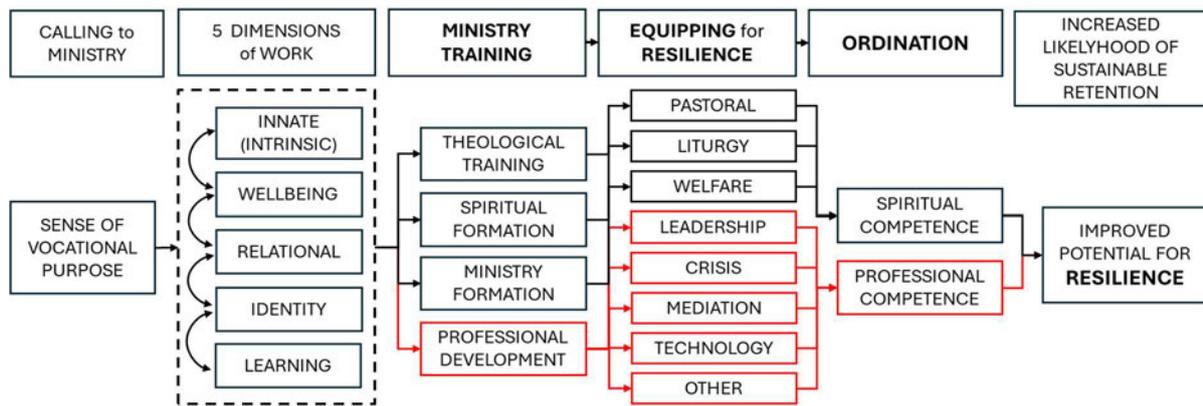
The results present an opportunity to revisit the nature of clergy work, and the relationship between their competence and their resilience in order to keep moving forward to fulfil their Calling.

Two key insights were identified: 1) That frontline clergy face similar work-related challenges to those in other mainline professions; 2) That their competence in that space enhances their sense of spiritual and professional resilience to keep moving forward to fulfil their Calling.

This study concludes that those clergy who thrive have a sense of resilience that is enhanced by their sense of competency in relation to their Calling and the ministry.

As noted in the introduction, this study relates to professional practice and demonstrates a “wicked” response that is resistant to attempting any simple solution to this systemic, multifactorial problem. The major findings of this study relate to the nature of clergy work and suggests that their multi-dimensional competencies contribute towards their resilience.

A summary model (Figure 4: A tentative model of equipping for clergy resilience and sustainable retention based on study findings) has been included based on these findings that it may inform future research building towards a comprehensive approach to clergy resilience as a dynamic process.



**Figure 4: A tentative model of equipping for clergy resilience and sustainable retention based on study findings**

Key findings in the study expose a gap in current literature regarding the dominant definition of Work as employment, remuneration, productivity, workplace, employee and employer. This definition may work for some, but not for all. The clergy describe their work as an intrinsic, relational and purpose driven activity linked to their overall wellbeing.

In relation to informing professional practice, clergy are Called to their vocation but it is also hard work. A sense of competency in that space greatly enhances their sense of spiritual and professional resilience to bounce back and fulfil their Calling.

Also informing operations and training strategy. The Church has traditionally maintained that clergy are Called to their vocation rather than to a job for remuneration. Leaving clergy to face the contemporary challenges of modern ministry without adopting the parallel mainstream training needed for a sense of competence and building resilience in that space to fulfil their Call.

In all, no interviewee disputed the validity of their theological training, just an absence of a corresponding practical one.

Consequently, it is crucial for the Church to realise that the challenge to the overall health and effectiveness of their engaged clergy is a basic motivational issue, and not a spiritual one.

This prompts the recommendation for the Church to prioritise the practical challenges faced by clergy as frontline workers and to implement a comprehensive approach to their training and support for their Calling.

Without a change of training emphasis at the highest level of the Church to fund a corresponding integrated approach to practical training, frontline clergy may be deprived of the resilience and overall health needed to align their skills with the expectations of the community to do the work they are Called to do.

For while we may not be able to recover those clergy who are lost from the profession, we can validate their service and recognise the change needed to prepare and support those who take up the role to stay their course and fulfil their Calling.

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# Appendix A: Interview Protocol

## INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

**Topic:** Why do clergy stay? Investigate the nature of contemporary clergy work and retention with a focus on mainstream and church-specific resilience training.

### Qualitative Research: INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

- Outline of the study

*The purpose of this project is to challenge redundant assumptions in the literature regarding the work of the clergy and prompt discussion regarding the relevance of resilience training provided to the clergy.*

*The clergy are an essential resource in the effort to rebuild lives and communities in the wake of trauma and disaster – and that resource is often under-prepared and frequently overlooked in the contribution made.*

*To develop such clergy brings the need to provide adequate training and related support to sustain their role.*

*We have some ideas from the mainstream literature on the changing nature of clergy work, anticipating a negative impact on clergy.*

*Resilience training for the clergy appears to be out of sync with mainstream training techniques. **What has not been well researched are (i) reasons that contribute to the retention of clergy (why they stay), (ii) the nature of church resilience training (if it exists) and (iii) what contemporary resilience training for frontline clergy may look like.***

- Assurance of anonymity and confidentiality
- Outline feedback procedures
- Ask the participant if he/she had any questions about the purpose or conduct of the interview before commencing.
- Remind the participant that this is an exploratory process, not an assessment or evaluation of any kind.
- Ask permission to record the interview.
- If requested, the participant will be provided an executive summary.

**Indicate:** If you have any concerns or complaints about the ethical conduct of the project, you may contact the University of Southern Queensland, Manager of Research Integrity and Ethics on +61 7 4687 5703. Or email the Manager of Research integrity: [researchintegrity@unisoq.edu.au](mailto:researchintegrity@unisoq.edu.au).

#### START-UP QUESTIONS:

- How would you best describe your occupation?
- How long have you been in this role?
- What is your experience of frontline clergy resignation and retention?

#### QUESTIONS:

1. What is the nature of church work for the clergy as “frontline” workers in terms of the five dimensions of work from extant mainstream literature. These are...
  - Work is **an innate human function that informs one’s life purpose and role.**
  - Work **affects and influences our well-being.**
  - Work is **relational and manifest through socialisation.**
  - Work is **identity**, driven by **personal and societal codes** expressed through **our professional or vocational identity.**
  - Work is **learning** as a result of **subjective experience** from within the context of work.

*While there is no direct correlation between resilience training and clergy resignation or continuance, mainstream literature suggests **that resilience training guards against burnout and work-related stress in frontline workers.***

*The literature shows there to be a difference between the church and a mainstream approach to resilience training.*

2. Describe clergy resilience?
3. Does your church have resilience training for its clergy?  
If yes, what are its key foci?
4. What do you understand to be the difference between church and mainstream resilience training for frontline workers?
5. Is the church in denial of adopting mainstream training to building resilience?  
If yes, do you think there is bandwidth within the church to be able to take on mainstream approaches?
6. What action might be taken to ensure that an integrated model of resilience training be incorporated that would benefit frontline clergy, pastoral workers, laity and the church?

#### IDEAS NEEDING FURTHER DISCUSSION:

- Is the response to clergy work primarily adaptative or proactive?
- How do Christian beliefs about suffering, self-sacrifice, and purpose inadvertently challenge a resilient response by clergy to adversity and the work-related stress accompanying the work of the clergy?
- How could a renewed focus on clergy retention through adequate preparation and an awareness of resilience enable clergy and their families to be less susceptible to the trauma of premature resignation?

# Appendix B: Participant Information Sheet



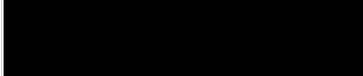
## Project Title

**Why do Clergy stay? Investigating the nature of contemporary clergy work and retention with a focus on mainstream and church-specific resilience training.**

## Research team contact details

### Principal Investigator details

Prof Luke van der Laan



### Co-investigator (UniSQ Student) details

Mr John Cheyne



## Description

This project is being undertaken as part of Doctor of Professional Studies through the University of Southern Queensland.

The purpose of this project is to challenge redundant previous assumptions in the literature regarding the work of the clergy and prompt discussion regarding the relevance of resilience training and ongoing professional development provided to clergy.

Anticipated benefits with this study will be to i) address a gap in the literature, ii) specify the nature of contemporary clergy work and iii) assist Churches to facilitate more resilient local church leadership.

## Participation

Your participation will involve participating in an individual interview at a time convenient to you that will be conducted online via Zoom and take approximately one hour of your time.

Questions will include: What is the nature of church work for the clergy as frontline workers? What would be the benefit of integrating mainstream literature into clergy training? Is there bandwidth within the church to be able to integrate mainstream approaches? Can we build on current resilience training for the clergy and what would that look like?

Your participation in this project is entirely voluntary. If you do not wish to take part, you are not obliged to. If you decide to take part and later change your mind, you are free to withdraw from the project at any stage. You may also request that any data collected from you be withdrawn from the study and confidentially destroyed.

If you do wish to withdraw from this project or withdraw data please contact the Research Team (contact details at the top of this form). Your decision whether you take part, do not take part, or take part and then withdraw will in no way impact your current or future relationship with the University of Southern Queensland.

## Expected benefits

It is expected that this project may not directly benefit you. However, it may benefit clergy, their families and the communities they serve through gains in knowledge, insight, understanding and improved social welfare.

Prompting a renewed focus on clergy retention through adequate preparation and an awareness of resilience to enable clergy and their families to be less susceptible to the trauma of frontline work and a premature resignation.

### Risks

While the risk may be low, your participation in the interview may trigger or create some uncomfortable or distressing feelings, provoking a negative response from precious trauma you may have experienced in your church work.

Should you feel uncomfortable at any time, inform the interviewer immediately and withdraw your participation.

If you would subsequently need to talk with someone, please contact an appropriate support or helpline.

If life in danger call: 000

For 24/7 crisis support call Lifeline: 13 11 14

For 24/7 support call Beyond Blue: 1300 22 4636

### Privacy and confidentiality

All comments and responses are confidential unless required by law.

- Your interview will be audio recorded for transcription.
- You will receive a de-identified copy of this transcript within a week for you to review.
- You will have two weeks to request any changes before the transcript will be considered as final and included in the project for analysis.
- Only the Research Team will have access to audio recording, transcript and data.
- All project data collected will de-identified and kept in a secure, password protected digital file.
- Any data collected as a part of this project will be stored securely, as per University of Southern Queensland's Research Data and Primary Materials Management Procedure.
- Any data collected will be made available for further research.

### Consent to participate

We would like to ask you to sign a written consent form (attached/enclosed) to confirm your agreement to participate in this project.

Please return your signed consent form to a member of the Research team prior to participating in your interview.

Thank you for your consideration.

### Questions

Please refer to the Research team (contact details at the top of the form) to have any of your questions answered or to request further information about this project.

### Concerns or complaints

If you have any concerns or complaints about the ethical conduct of the project, you may contact the

University of Southern Queensland, Manager of Research Integrity and Ethics on +61 7 4687 5703.

Or email the Manager of Research integrity: [researchintegrity@unisu.edu.au](mailto:researchintegrity@unisu.edu.au).

The Manager of Research Integrity and Ethics is not connected with the research project and can address your concern in an unbiased manner.

**Thank you for taking the time to help with this research project. Please keep this document for your information.**

# Appendix C: Participant Consent Form

 University of Southern Queensland  
Consent form  
Interview  
UniSQ HREC Approval number: [ETH2024-0685](#)

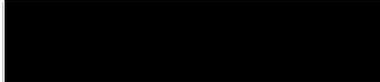
## Project Title

**Why do Clergy stay? Investigating the nature of contemporary clergy work and retention with a focus on mainstream and church-specific resilience training.**

## Research team contact details

### Principal Investigator details

Prof Luke van der Laan



### Co-investigator (UniSQ Student) details

Mr John Cheyne



## Statement of consent

By signing below, you are indicating that you:

- Have read and understood the information document regarding this project.  Yes /  No
- Have had any questions answered to your satisfaction.  Yes /  No
- Understand that if you have any additional questions, you can contact the research team.  Yes /  No
- Are over 18 years of age.  Yes /  No
- Understand that any data collected may be used in future research activities  Yes /  No
- Understand that the interview will be audio/video recorded  Yes /  No
- Agree to participate in the project.  Yes /  No

Name (first & last)

Signature

Date

**Thank you for taking the time to help with this research project.**  
Please return this document to a research team member before undertaking the interview.

# Appendix D: Ethics Approval Letter

**john.cheyne@hotmail.com**

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**From:** RISE\_NoReply <researchadmin@infomanaged.co.uk>  
**Sent:** Wednesday, 27 November 2024 1:11 PM  
**To:** John Cheyne Student  
**Subject:** Decision - Ethics ETH2024-0685 (HREC): Mr John Cheyne (Student) (Low risk)

## University of Southern Queensland

### Office of Research

Human Research Ethics Committee

[human.ethics@unisq.edu.au](mailto:human.ethics@unisq.edu.au)

27/11/2024

Prof Luke van der Laan

Australia

Dear Luke

### UniSQ HREC approval certificate

Thank you for submitting your human ethics application to the University of Southern Queensland Human Research Ethics Committee (UniSQ HREC) for consideration for consideration by the University of Southern Queensland Human Research Ethics Committee (UniSQ HREC). The Committee has reviewed your application and is deemed to meet the requirements of the *National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research, 2023*. Ethical approval has been granted as follows:

HREC Project ID: ETH2024-0685

HREC Project title: Why do Clergy stay? Investigating the nature of contemporary clergy work and retention with a focus on mainstream and church-specific resilience training.

HREC Project approval date: 27/11/2024

HREC Project expiry date: 27/11/2027

This approval is for the work as outlined in your application and only within the commencement and expiry dates listed approved (unless amended by a subsequent UniSQ HREC decision).

### Standard conditions of approval

The UniSQ HREC requires you, as Principal Investigator, to:

- (a) Conduct the project strictly in accordance with the submitted and granted ethics approval, including any amendments to the proposal.
- (b) Ensure any person engaged by the University of Southern Queensland on this project is named and approved by the UniSQ HREC.

(c) Advise the University immediately (email: [ResearchIntegrity@unisq.edu.au](mailto:ResearchIntegrity@unisq.edu.au)) immediately of any complaint pertaining to the conduct of the research or any other issues in relation to the project which may warrant a review of the ethical approval.

(d) Promptly report any adverse events to the University (email: [ResearchIntegrity@unisq.edu.au](mailto:ResearchIntegrity@unisq.edu.au)) and take prompt action to handle the adverse event.

(e) Make a submission for any project amendments before implementing the changes.

(f) Provide a progress report when requested and at least for every year of approval.

(g) Submit a final report when the project is complete or following the expiry of a UniSQ HREC approval.

(h) Submit any other report as required by the UniSQ HREC.

**Other conditions of approval**

(i) If your project involves the use and/or collection of biological materials, please contact [biosafety@unisq.edu.au](mailto:biosafety@unisq.edu.au) before commencing your project.

(j) If your project involves the use of drugs or poisons, please contact [biosafety@unisq.edu.au](mailto:biosafety@unisq.edu.au) before commencing your project.

The University of Southern Queensland Human Research Ethics Committee reserves the right to undertake spot audits of your project records at any time to ensure compliance with this ethical approval. Non-compliance may result in the withdrawal of this approval.

If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact the UniSQ HREC Executive Officer ([human.ethics@unisq.edu.au](mailto:human.ethics@unisq.edu.au)).

Yours sincerely

**UniSQ Human Research Ethics Committee**

**Ethics ETH2024-0685 (HREC): Mr John Cheyne (Student) (Low risk)**