THE CAREER DEVELOPMENT OF CLERGY
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CLERGY WORK...a snapshot

(Doolittle, 2010)

- Called to their profession – divinely, spiritually led
- Diverse skill set
  - Administering, leading, counseling, teaching, writing
- Highly visible / model for “holy” behavior
- High demand – on call 24/7
- Diffuse lines of authority → obstacle to work productivity
  - Congregations and religious bodies - typically self-governed and organizationally flat

VOCATIONAL ISSUES

- High Stress - majority report high levels of stress and work-overload, yet very few have formal procedures to deal effectively with psychological demands of the job (Berry, Francis, Rolph, & Rolph, 2012); stress induced largely by time, boundary, and balance issues (Stewart-Sicking, et al., 2011)
- Depression / Job Satisfaction - low vocational satisfaction predicts depression in clergy and they report depression 7 times more than the general population (Knox et al., 2002; Knox et al., 2005)
- Work performance ≠ identity – they find it difficult to separate who they are from what they do; higher differentiation of self = more work satisfaction and less burnout (Barnard & Curry, 2011)
- Multiplicity of roles - influences the degree to which they are cautious about seeking support (Berry, Francis, Rolph, & Rolph, 2012)
- High turnover - 50% leave the ministry within first five years (Coles, 2002)

VOCATIONAL PSYCHOLOGY THEORIES – An Application

POSITIVE PSYCHOLOGY: CALLING, SPIRITUALITY, SELF-COMPASSION

Career Calling
Defined as work that is motivated by a higher power (transcendent summons), has purpose and meaning (existential implications), and works to serve others (prosocial goals) (Dik & Duffy, 2009)
Benefits
- Correlates positively with career decidedness, self-clarity, work-choice salience, life meaning, life satisfaction (Duffy et al., 2014); job satisfaction, and health (Bott & Duffy, 2014)

Potential pitfalls
- Rigid expectations - grief if expectations not met (Adams, 2012)
- Tunnel vision - over-reliance on self-perceptions to the detriment of other data (Dobrow & Toski-Kharas, 2012)
- Career disengagement – focus on transcendent summons may breed career passivity (Hunter et al., 2010)

Career calling in clergy
A complex relationship:
- May both fuel work motivation and at times undermine career development
- May prompt other-focus at the expense of self-care
- May distract from awareness of vocational burnout / mental health
- May influence a failure to prioritize healthy utilization of relationships / occupational resources in service of career health

Spirituality
(Bikerton, Miner, Dowson, & Griffin, 2015)
- Spiritual resources foster clergy work engagement and reduce intentions to leave the occupation
- Use of personal spiritual resources by clergy (e.g. invoking the sacred, secure attachment to God) – associated with resilience, positively impact ability to control and influence the environment

Self-Compassion
(Barnard Crosskey, Curry, & Leary, 2015)
- Clergy who practice self-compassion show higher satisfaction in their ministry and lower emotional exhaustion – less likely to experience burnout

INTEGRATION OF EXISTENTIAL THEORY AND SUPER’S LIFE-SPAN LIFE-SPACE THEORY

(Sternberg, 2012)

Existentialism - implies an ongoing attempt to understand life and the purpose of existence from one’s subjective, first-person worldview
- Integration: Meaning layered onto career development stages, roles, self-concept (Super, 1980), transitions, barriers, adaptability (Savickas, 1997)

Integrating Existentialism and Super’s LSLS for Clergy
- Existentialism is a natural fit – religion asks the “big” questions
- Biblical potter/clay analogy – self as “becoming” informs meaning, purpose, freedom, and limitations in work (self-concept)
- Developmental stage-specific and role-specific questions about meaning
- How might my varying roles (leader, spouse, child, parent, citizen) inform the meaning I make out of my work?
- Explore loss of identity or existential despair that comes with career transitions
- How might occupational change or stress inform my self-concept? My purpose?
- Explore meaning assigned to barriers experienced in work and adaptability to them
  What meaning do I make of barriers? Where am I able to be adaptable or not, and what does this mean about me? the work?

CONCLUSIONS / RECOMMENDATIONS

Resources
- Address spiritual resources to support clergy vocational health (Bickerton, Miner, Dowson, & Griffin, 2015) - e.g. spiritual enrichment activities
- Acknowledge importance of psychological, logistical, emotional resource availability, it links strongly to career satisfaction (Stewart-Sicking et al., 2011) – e.g. mentors, peer support, sabbaticals, paid time off, built-in mental health services

Burnout Prevention (Doolittle, 2010)
- Encourage a variety of interests outside of vocation
- Encourage engagement in behaviors that enhance relationships – e.g. mentors, peer groups, retreats, professional development

Consider and address...
- Self-compassion – other-compassion does not imply self-compassion
- Spirituality – harnessing spirituality in service of vocational development, not a given
- Calling – pervasive in clergy work AND life
  - Conceptualize calling as a vocational strength
  - Identity inseparable from the work – honor this… and gently challenge it
  - Honor divine direction - less emphasis on career (job) “choice” - can’t NOT do it
  - Be vigilant of the influence of calling on boundaries, self-care, and help-seeking