

What Pastors Do to Sustain Good Ministry

Over the last several years, Lilly Endowment has sought out talented pastors and engaged them in conversation about the practices and experiences that are instrumental in sustaining their ministries over time. Although these pastors give no single response and provide wide-ranging answers, several are cited consistently. Collectively, their experience provides insight into practices that sustain pastoral excellence over time. These include:

- ✓ Regular engagement in spiritual disciplines. The best and most effective pastors have a deep and disciplined prayer life and are engaged in ongoing personal biblical and theological study.
- ✓ Periodic time apart from the congregation. The healthiest pastors take opportunities to step away from the daily demands of pastoral ministry (sometimes through a sabbatical or study leave) to engage in spiritual, intellectual and personal renewal and to gain fresh perspective on their ministries.
- ✓ Participation in ongoing biblical and theological study with colleagues. Good pastors meet regularly with a group of peers for disciplined biblical and theological study, prayer and sharing of pastoral concerns.
- ✓ Fostering sustainable friendships with colleagues and developing peer networks. Well-balanced pastors are able to overcome their sense of personal and professional isolation through building and maintaining friendships with peers and mentors.
- ✓ Regular efforts to hone the fundamental practices of ministry to a high level of competence. Successful pastors seek opportunities to improve their skills and develop new capacities appropriate to their ministries.
- ✓ Honor and recognition for their ministries and those of their congregations. Some institution (congregation, denominational office, community group, seminary, religious agency or other group) lifts up the faithful work of the pastor and recognizes the value of his or her ministry.

In addition, pastors with whom we have consulted note the importance of taking personal responsibility for their own growth and development and their desire to participate actively in designing and implementing their own study and renewal experiences.