How Uniting Church in Australia clergy, particularly females, experience and deal with stress in ministry.

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ABSTRACT

The focus of this study is how Uniting Church in Australia (UCA) clergy, particularly females, experience and deal with stress in ministry. The stress experience of female clergy in Australia is an unstudied phenomenon and this research represents an attempt to address this research gap. Although the study has a particular focus on female UCA clergy, three of the clergy interviewed were male. The reason for this sampling choice was to provide opportunity for exploring gender differences in relation to the clergy stress experience.

Since the study seeks to understand the lived experience of stress of UCA clergy, particularly females, a qualitative narrative methodology informed by heuristic and constructivist approaches to analysis has been used. A narrative approach assumes that the experience of stress can only be adequately understood within the context of a person's life, including their social and cultural context. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with eight members of the UCA clergy to obtain narratives about their experience of stress in ministry. As an insider researcher, my story as a member of the UCA clergy is included to provide the reader with an understanding of the interpretive framework through which I view the participant narratives. The study emphasises a philosophical position that argues that the experience of stress can only be adequately understood against the back drop of the context in which a person lives.

Although there are some commonalities between the male and female narratives, the stories show evidence of particular stressors for females in ministry and that there may be differences in the ways that male and female clergy respond to stress.

The stories of the participants in the study also suggest that female UCA clergy are still pioneers. UCA female clergy still face discrimination, although the denomination has ordained female clergy since its inception in 1977.

The research leads to a number of recommendations relating to the following needs: development of a clearer understanding of 'call' in the UCA; education of congregations in relation to the reason the UCA has female ministers; examination of the UCA model of church

leadership; stress management for ministers and education of Presbyteries in relation to gender differences and stress.

GLOSSARY OF TERMS

Advisory Committee on Ministerial Placements (ACOMP) – A synod (State) established committee with the responsibility of oversight of Uniting Church clergy.

Assembly – Assembly is the national council of the UCA. It has determining responsibilities in relation to doctrine, worship, government and mission.

Basis of Union – The Basis of Union is the formational document of the UCA. It was written in 1971 and has guided the UCA since its inception in 1977.

Candidate – A candidate is someone who has been accepted by the UCA to enter the process of ministerial training. A candidate is therefore someone who has convinced the UCA that they have a genuine call to ministry.

Clergy – The term clergy is a synonym for ordained ministers.

Congregation – A congregation is seen to be the embodiment, in one place, of the church. Local congregations are where the majority of UCA clergy carry out their ministry.

Joint Nominating Committee (JNC) – A JNC is formed when a congregation searches for a new minister. The JNC is responsible for a process which leads to them recommending a minister to the congregation. A JNC is made up of at least two members of Presbytery and two to six people appointed by the congregation.

Minister – In the context of this research minister refers to a UCA Minister of the Word. A minister in the UCA has been through the process of ministerial training and been accepted into ministry through a service of ordination.

Ministry formation – The process of training a candidate for ministry. It involves education (both theological and pastoral), practical experience in ministry (field education) and substantial times of personal and group reflection.

Moderator – The moderator of a Synod has general and pastoral leadership over ministers and congregations within the state.

Ordination – The accepting of a candidate for ministry into the ranks of ministers of the UCA. It takes place in a worship service and includes prayer and the laying on of hands. The minister agrees to come under the discipline of the UCA and abide by its ministerial code of ethics.

Parish – A parish refers to one or more congregations which are recognised by Presbytery as one pastoral and administrative unit. Although this term ceased to be an official UCA term in April 2000, it remains a commonly used term within the UCA.

Presbytery – A regional council of the UCA representing a collection of congregations.

President – The president presides over the Assembly (National Council) of the UCA.

Stipend – A minister's income. When working within a congregation, it is the congregation who is responsible for the stipend. In some instances, congregations receive Synod grants to assist in the payment of their minister.

Synod – A state council of the UCA

Uniting Church in Australia (UCA) – The UCA was formed in 1977 through the coming together of three existing protestant denominations. These were the Methodist, the Congregational and the Presbyterian Churches. Some Presbyterian Churches chose to stay outside union and to continue independently of the UCA.

UCA regulations – A document that assists in guiding and giving directions to the UCA. The regulations assist in ensuring that various processes in the life of the church are carried out appropriately. The regulations further assist in providing accountability.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Introduction

This chapter provides a context and rationale for my research into the stress experience of women clergy within the Uniting Church in Australia (UCA). The chapter will also examine the UCA cultural context in which this research is located because it is impossible to understand the participant narratives that form the data for this research without some understanding of their context. The chapter also provides an initial overview of the research design including my role as an 'inside researcher.' My interest in this topic emerges partly from my own experience as a UCA minister. My own ministry story is included to assist the reader in understanding the interpretive position from which I view the research.

Rationale for the research

The National Church Life Survey (NCLS) of 1996 shows that ministers in Australia produce burnout scores above the national average (Kaldor & Bullpit, 2001:20). The aim of this research is to understand the connection between the ministry task and clergy stress, and to gain insight into the way that clergy, particularly female clergy, deal with the stress of ministry.

Anecdotal evidence amongst UCA clergy suggests that stress levels amongst clergy are high. Kaldor and Bullpit (2001) indicate that stress is having a significant impact on clergy. My own experience of stress as a UCA clergy member and as a witness to the effects of stress amongst colleagues, has led to a number of hunches: UCA clergy are experiencing high levels of stress;

they tend not to employ self-care strategies; some theological assumptions lead to a denial of the effects of stress amongst clergy; there may be differences in the stress experiences of female and male clergy and, most importantly the best way of understanding the effects of stress amongst clergy is to listen to clergy.

Although it is widely accepted that stress is problematic for clergy, chapter 2 will show that there has been little research into clergy stress. The research that has been conducted has been largely limited to male samples. The lack of research into the experience of stress amongst female clergy represents a gap in the knowledge base for ministerial training and support. The UCA has accepted women into the ordained ministry since its inception in 1977 (UCA Basis of Union, 1992:para.14a) and this openness to the legitimacy of women clergy has led to a substantial increase in the number of women in professional ministry. The UCA with its relatively large percentage of female clergy, provides a useful context for research that seeks to fill the abovementioned gap in knowledge about stress. If gender differences exist in the experience of clergy stress, knowledge of such differences may benefit both individual clergy and the church as an institution responsible for preparing and supporting people in ministry.

Smith and Cooper (1994:6) have shown a link between stress in leaders and stress within organizations. A 1995 study conducted by Greenberg and Baron found that high stress levels can lead to a lack of concern for the organisation and the people within it (Greenberg & Baron, 1995). Thus, in understanding the stress experience of those who are leaders within the UCA, there is the potential for a better understanding of how to assist whole church communities.

Introducing the researcher

I am a UCA minister and therefore a researcher who approaches the subject as an insider. It will be argued in chapter 3 that this does not need to be seen as a disadvantage. My story is presented in acknowledgement of the fact that the research presented in this paper is interpreted through the filter of my own experience as a UCA clergy member.

Between the years of 1985-1986 I experienced a growing sense of call to the ministry. In 1986 I offered myself as a candidate for the UCA ministry, and following acceptance, I began my theological studies and ministerial formation in 1987. I spent three years at United Theological

College and was deemed ready for ministry at the end of 1989. The second and third years of my theological training were accompanied by experiences of anxiety and depression. This meant that although the UCA saw me as ready for ministry I had substantial misgivings about my own capacity for such a vocation. As a result of these misgivings, I spent three years as a non-ordained ministry worker (lay-assistant). I was ordained in January 1994 and am now in my third ministry placement.

During my training for ministry I developed a keen interest in one to one ministry. This evolved into a love for counselling work and I undertook training in this field when I left theological college. My initial counselling training was with the Anglican Counselling Centre and I later completed a Postgraduate Diploma in counselling through the Wesley Institute for Ministry and the Arts. I am currently completing a Masters in Counselling (Hons.) through the University of New England (UNE). I am a member of the Christian Counsellors' Association of Australia (CCAA) and have served on the NSW state executive of this organisation. I have also served as the facilitator of the NSW accreditation committee for CCAA. The CCAA is one of the organisations that come under the umbrella of the Psychotherapists and Counsellors Federation of Australia (PACFA). I am a listed counsellor on the PACFA national register.

Throughout my ordained ministry, I have combined ministry with counselling. The counselling work that I am currently undertaking is in the context of a small private practice. Although the counselling work is arranged independently of my employment as a UCA minister, I sense that it reflects something of who I am as a minister. It is a part of my vocation.

My overall experience of being a member of the UCA clergy has been positive. I do not believe I have experienced the high level of stress that is reported by some of my colleagues. I do sometimes find myself wondering whether this is related to having dealt with depression and anxiety during my ministry training. I have often said to others that I have a sense that the crisis that I went through in college was the most helpful part of my training.

Although stress has not been a major concern for me in my ministry it has been part of my ministry experience. My sense of stress is closely connected to my perception of how I am being viewed by those to whom I am ministering. There are two components to this stress. The first is relational and the second is psychological. In regard to the relational aspect, it is when my relationships within the congregation I am serving are going well that I feel calm and in

control of the ministry tasks I am called to undertake. The psychological aspect is to do with how I am 'reading' the relationships of which I am a part.

Another factor in my personal experience of stress is the difficulty of knowing when 'enough is enough.' Prior to becoming a minister I had spent twelve years as a draftsman. This was a profession in which the work was measurable. I knew how much I had achieved in a day. Ministry is the antithesis of this. There is never an empty 'in tray' and because so much of the work is to do with the intangible (i.e. spiritual well-being), it is difficult to know whether anything worthwhile is being achieved.

Another source of stress is the discrepancy between the UCA hierarchy's expectations and those of the local congregation. The message from the UCA hierarchy is that the church is in decline and that things need to change. The message for clergy is: 'You need to be agents of change.' This message often runs counter to the thinking of congregations that want to maintain the status quo. Having said this, I suspect that the stress that I experience in my work is less than it would be if I was doing something about which I felt less passionate.

The narrative I have presented above shows that I am qualified to undertake the exploratory research that makes up the remainder of this paper. I have a lived experience of what it is like to be a minister, and my training as a counsellor assists me to reflect upon and interpret the stories of UCA clergy. This is not to suggest that counselling skills are the only ones needed for the research, rather they are a helpful addition to accepted research techniques. It may be argued that being an 'inside researcher' makes objectivity difficult. This issue will be taken up in the discussion of research methodology in chapter 3.

As a member of the UCA clergy, I along with my ministry colleagues, live out ministry within the context of UCA culture. My experience tells me that the UCA places great emphasis on the notion that ministers are people who live out a 'God given vocation.' This larger context needs to be understood when researching the experience of those who minister within it.

Vocation: The heart of ministry

The notion of vocation is central to an understanding of the lived experience of UCA clergy. Within the UCA a person is only accepted into ministry if he or she is able to articulate clearly a sense of call to the satisfaction of the church. In speaking of ministers, the UCA Basis of Union states,

> The Uniting Church, from inception, will seek the guidance of the Holy Spirit to recognise among her members men and women called of God to preach the gospel, to lead the people in worship, to care for the flock, to share in the government and to serve those in need in the world. (UCA Basis of Union, 1992:Para.14).

Ministers view their role as a *vocation* (calling) rather than as a job. The word vocation is derived from the Latin word *vocare,* which means 'to call' (Peck, 1993:61). In modern times the word vocation has been applied to any career path that a person might choose to follow, but originally it referred specifically to a path chosen in response to a call by someone or something beyond the self (Cochran, 1990). Cochran points out that it is possible for a person to be in a career, without that career being perceived by the person as their vocation. He cites the example of John Stuart Mill who

> for thirty-five years, … worked as a clerk and secretary in the East India Company, preparing correspondence for outlets abroad. The only importance this occupation had for Mill was that it supported and did not interfere with his vocation (Cochran, 1990:5).

In contrast to his paid work, Mill understood his vocation to be that of a reformer.

Ministers in the UCA are usually people who leave an existing occupation to enter ministry. This choice means at least three years of significant financial hardship whilst attending theological college, and the giving up of a clear career path for the remainder of life (Pryor, 1986:59).

Pryor (1986) believes that the individual experience of call is a potential contributor to the stress experienced in ministry, especially if it is seen to compensate the person for some perceived deficit. Pryor (1986:15) highlights the possibility that some who enter the ministry do so in an effort to atone for their self perceived mistakes of the past. For such people ministry is primarily about themselves rather than serving. In such circumstances Pryor suggests that 'quicksands will surround the very entry point of ministry' (Pryor, 1986:15). Pryor further suggests that if call is experienced as primarily a summons to meet human needs, then God can become a taskmaster who drives the minister closer and closer to exhaustion and burnout.

James and Evelyn Whitehead (1980) argue that when call to ministry is primarily perceived to be about altruistically meeting needs, the sense of call can end in compulsiveness.

The understanding of calling amongst UCA clergy

The understanding of vocation amongst UCA ministers reflects a particular vocational tradition. There are many religious and spiritual systems that speak of calling but the understanding that is important for this study is the vocational tradition of Western Christianity and in particular the Protestant understanding of calling.

The origins of a Christian, Protestant understanding of vocation or calling lie in the words of St Paul, 'And those he predestined, he also called; those he called, he also justified; those he justified, he also glorified' (Rom.8:30 NIV). Paul is not speaking here of vocation in the sense of one's work, but rather of God's salvation. Elsewhere Paul says, 'Each one should remain in the situation in which he was when God called him' (1 Cor.7:20 NIV). Although it is unlikely that Paul was referring to vocation in the sense of a call to ministry in either of these verses, two of the Protestant reformers, Luther and Calvin, developed a theology of vocation based on these elements in Paul's writing. They were not the first to do this. Tertullian had earlier translated the Greek word κλεσισ, (1 Cor.7:20), into the Latin word *vocatio* from which we gain the word vocation. Although Tertullian did not apply this term to everyday life, Clement of Alexandria (200AD) did and he urged Christians to recognise the presence of God in their everyday work (Calhoun, 1954 cited in Guzman, 2004). Clement's emphasis was not upon professional ministry but upon the work of all Christians.

Based on the words of Paul, Luther and Calvin developed a concept of vocation that promoted a belief that a Christian was called to do some task, 'secular' or 'religious' (Marshall, 1979:86). Within English Protestantism, a calling came to be seen not so much as 'the duty to fulfill a task… but rather it was the task or trade itself' (Marshall, 1979:86).

A Christian understanding of calling is one that assumes that there is one who is doing the calling. Christians believe vocation to be relational in nature and that the voice heard, is the voice of a personal God (Peck, 1993:61). Christians believe themselves to be people who have

responded to the call to discipleship. This concept is based on gospel stories of Jesus calling people to follow him (Matt.4:18-22; 9:9-11; Mark 1:14-20; Luke 5:1-11; John 1:35-51).

The call to ministry enshrined in the UCA constitution is a call beyond this prior call to be a Christian. A minister in the UCA is understood to be a person who has responded to the call to discipleship and who has heard a 'second call' to ministry. Further to this, the UCA regulations speak of a 'third call' that comes when an existing minister is called to a ministry placement (UCA regulations 2.7.16 d, j(ii), m). Because of the UCA's emphasis on call, any study of UCA clergy experience, needs to take this phenomenon into account. However, the phenomenon of call is not quantifiable and is therefore open to interpretation (Judy, 1996:294).

Questions raised by the notion of call

The preceding discussion points to a sense of ambiguity and mystery around the notion of call. The terms 'call' and 'vocation' may be used by different people to describe their experience of hearing God, but each person's understanding of that experience is unique. Part of this uniqueness is in the way that the call comes. The calling may come through an experience of restlessness or dissatisfaction. Farnham et al (1994) see calling as a longing or a yearning. In some instances it is a sense of being at a 'crossroads' in life.

In his book *Let Your Life Speak,* Palmer (2000) argues that calling comes through reflection on the experiences and patterns of life. Calling is a voice to be heard rather than a goal to be pursued. He says, 'Before I can tell my life what I want to do with it, I must listen to my life telling me who I am' (Palmer, 2000:4-5). For Palmer, being is prior to doing.

In contrast to Palmer's view, Jung (1965 cited in Cochran, 1990:171) describes call in terms of vision,

> There was a daimon in me, and in the end its presence proved decisive. It overpowered me, and if I was at times ruthless it was because I was in the grip of the daimon. I could never stop at anything once attained. I had to hasten on, catch up with my vision.

For Jung the vision is a call to wholeness and individuation (Barlow & Durand, 2005:21). It is possible that the views of Jung and Palmer are not as divergent as their language may initially suggest. They are both speaking about the discovery of an authentic sense of self, involving a

call to wholeness and integration. In both cases calling involves a lifelong journey. As Cochran (1990:175) says, 'vocation means never arriving.' The recipient of a call is always urged onwards.

Potential link between call and the experience of stress

There are writers who suggest a link between call and the experience of stress. Peck (1993:66) emphasises that following a calling is not necessarily a comfortable way to live. He cites the example of the artist Vincent Van Gogh who experienced a call to paint. Though he followed that calling frenetically it did not relieve him from inner torment. Peck claims that the call that comes is not always the call that may be wanted (Peck, 1993:79).

The idea that call does not make for comfort is seen in the Christian Biblical tradition. Christians follow Jesus, whom they believe chose suffering and death in obedience to a sense of call. The apostle Paul writes, 'He humbled himself and became obedient to death – even death on a cross' (Philippians 2:8b). In the same passage Paul states 'your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus' (Philippians 2:5). Indeed in some Christian thinking, suffering is seen as part of spiritual growth (Gilkey, 1985).

People who have a strong sense of call can inadvertently become virtual 'slaves' of their vocation. Miller-Herron (1994-95:752), a lawyer and pastor, argues that called people sometimes struggle to recognise their limitations. She also suggests that there is the danger that the urgent can eclipse the important. She believes that those things that are unimportant but labeled urgent, steal time away from the things to which one is called.

The difficulties in discerning call

Discerning call is difficult. Irvine (1997:44) insists that if the church is to have a theology of call then it needs to have as part of this theology a belief that individuals and the church as a whole can make mistakes. Irvine says,

> To somehow assume, even with all piety, that the Holy Spirit and whatever mechanism the church structure has established, by some act of magic, always creates the right fit, is to

> deny the freedom for humanity to interfere and to frustrate the divine intent and will of God.

It is difficult to differentiate between the psychological and spiritual dimensions of a sense of call. Speaking from an object-relations perspective, Welwood (2000:108) claims that most of us live in a state of 'prereflective identification' by which he means that we unconsciously live out the internalised self image gained in childhood from the messages we received. These messages are the foundation of the internalised images that we develop about ourselves. Welwood (2000:91) says,

> In this way we develop an ego identity, a stable self-image composed of self-representations, which are part of a larger object relations - self/other schemas formed in our early transactions with our parents.

Thus the person who believes they are 'called' may be seeking to live out these internalised reflections, fulfilling others' expectations rather than living out an inner sense of call. In addition early relationships also contribute to a person's image of God. In their work on attachment theory, Kirkpatrick and Shaver (1990:320) cite several studies that suggest a connection between internalised images of parents and of God (Lamb, 1978; Nelson, 1971 & Strunk, 1959).

Many of us spend our time operating at the level of this prereflective identification (Welwood, 2000:108). This means that we imagine that our feelings, thoughts and attitudes are accurate portrayals of reality. This is particularly problematic when it comes to deciphering an experience such as call.

Another layer to this discussion is provided by transpersonal approaches. Transpersonal experiences have been defined as experiences that transcend the boundaries of body-ego and time and space (Grof, 1988 cited in Ferrer, 2000:214 & Walsh & Vaughan, 1993 cited in Ferrer, 2000:214). This is different from speaking of call in terms of external signs or hearing the call through other people. Such experiences are not transpersonal in the sense described above.

Ferrer (2000) however, advocates a multilocal understanding of transpersonal phenomena. By this he means that transpersonal phenomena can occur, 'not only in an individual but also in a relationship, a community, or a place' (Ferrer, 2000:225).

The immediate UCA community is located within an increasingly secular, social and cultural context. As Irvine (1997:146-147) points out,

> the 'other worldliness' of the role of the minister appears at time in conflict with the physical and rationalistic world which predominates in modern thinking, especially in Western civilization.

The above discussion suggests that there is ambiguity around the whole notion of vocation and how it is to be discerned (Farnham et al, 1994; Irvine, 1997:44; Judy, 1996:294). This raises questions about the link between the psychological and spiritual dimensions of human experience and motivation, as well as the social construction of notions like call. For the purpose of this study, vocation or call can be seen as part of the larger narrative within which the individual stories of ministry take place. Call is part of the UCA cultural story which in turn is located within an increasingly secular context. A narrative approach can include psychological, spiritual (transpersonal) and social and cultural aspects, and is therefore the appropriate approach to use.

Research focus and Methodology

This research explores the ways UCA clergy, particularly women, experience and deal with stress. As previously indicated, a narrative approach is appropriate to this study, and a full rationale for this assertion is presented in chapter 3.

To elicit these narratives, the following questions were used in semi-structured conversational interviews: Tell me about your experience of ministry? Have there been stressful times? What was the experience like for you? What did you find helpful in these times? What was unhelpful? Is there anything else you would like to share with me?

Eight clergy were interviewed (five female and three male). These participants were all UCA clergy working in congregational settings. They were not chosen because of a perception on my part that they were particularly stressed. I was not interested in seeking 'stressed' clergy. I operated on the assumption that all UCA clergy know what it is to be stressed in their work. Details surrounding the selection of the participants are provided in chapter 3.

Scope of the research

I believe that one of the strengths of this research is that it takes seriously the lived experience of the participants and their construction of that through the stories they tell. There has been little qualitative research conducted into the experience of clergy and to my knowledge there has been no such research conducted amongst female clergy in Australia. The phenomenon of stress is complex, and a qualitative rather than quantitative approach can do justice to this complexity. There are many variables meaning that quantitative research is limited in what it is able to deduce about an individual's unique experience of stress which will include physical, psychological, sociological and spiritual dimensions. Having said this, it is equally true that there are limitations with this research. Qualitative research of this nature produces vast amounts of text that needs to be analysed and interpreted. This is time consuming and cumbersome. The research also works with a small sample leading to results that cannot be generalised. This does not need to be seen as a negative when research is exploratory in nature (Burns, 2000:93).

Conclusion

This chapter has argued that there is a need for research into the experience of stress in UCA clergy, particularly female clergy, and that it is important that the stories of female clergy be heard. My own ministry story has been included to provide the reader with some insight into the 'insider' perspective of my analysis of these stories. A discussion of vocation (call) has been presented to assist the reader to understand an important part of the larger context in which UCA ministers live out their ministry, and to raise some of the questions related to the notion of call that have emerged in the process of doing this research.

In the next chapter I will present an overview of existing research relating to the experience of stress and how it is conceptualised before proceeding to existing literature on clergy stress. particularly female clergy stress.

Chapter 3 argues the case for using a narrative methodology, informed by a phenomenological, interpretive epistemology, before providing an account of the research design. Matters such as sampling, recruitment, data collection, data analysis and ethics are also discussed.

Chapters 4 to 6 present the data in terms of participant narratives. In chapter 4 the reader will be introduced to the participants whose stories provide the narrative that forms the data for this research. Chapters 5 and 6 focus on the common themes that emerged from the experiences of the participants.

In the final chapter I will discuss in more detail the findings of the research in the light of the existing literature. The final chapter will also make a number of recommendations and suggestions for the practical application of these findings.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

This literature review commences with a consideration of the ways in which stress has been conceptualised in general terms, before moving on to examine research on clergy stress. A review of literature relating to gender differences and occupational stress is included, as is literature that relates specifically to the stress experience of female clergy. The literature review concludes with an examination of research focusing on stress management.

Ways of conceptualising stress

Understanding ways in which stress is conceptualised is important for determining an appropriate methodological approach for stress research. The word stress was introduced during the 1930s, by scientist Hans Selye, who noted the human physiological systems that were brought into play when a person responded to a challenge (McEwen, 2002:11). The early work of Selye focussed on the body's physiological responses.

Selye (1978) made a distinction between pleasant and unpleasant experiences of stress and the role of perception in determining into which of these categories a stress experience falls. Selye names the positive stress experience 'eustress' and the negative stress experience 'distress.' He notes that

> the fact that eustress causes much less damage than distress graphically demonstrates that it is 'how you take it' that determines, ultimately, whether one can adapt successfully to change (Selye, 1978:74).

Cohen, Kessler and Gordon (1995:3-4) suggest that there are three broad traditions in the assessment of stress. These are: the environmental tradition focussing upon external stressors; the psychological tradition focussing upon the subjective experience of stress, and the biological tradition, focussing on the physiological effects of demanding conditions (Cohen, Kessler & Gordon, 1995:3-4). They contend that these three different traditions share a common interest in a process in which a person's adaptive capacities are exceeded. Though it may be true that these traditions share a common interest, there are a variety of ways in which stress is conceptualised and measured. Monroe and Simons (1991:447) argue that within stress research there exists a 'permissive conceptual structure' that leads to findings that are confusing. Such criticism reflects a positivist assumption that stress can be quantitatively measured.

Sutherland and Cooper (1990 cited in Irvine, 1997:16-20) describe three models for understanding stress. These are the stimulus-based model, the response-based model and the interactive model. The stimulus-based model sees a human being as an object affected by external stressors. The response-based model emphasises the response of the individual to external stimuli whilst the interactive model allows for external stressors, the response of the person and the personality of the person. It is generally accepted that an interactive model of stress is needed to incorporate the complexity of the human stress experience (Irvine, 1997:18).

Greenberg and Safran (1987 cited in Jakupcak et al. 2003:111) speak of primary and secondary emotional responding. Primary emotional responding refers to the emotional response linked directly to specific external stimuli. Secondary emotional responding refers to an individual's reaction to the experience of primary emotions. An example of this is the fear of experiencing fear.

Cognitive Behavioural therapists claim that emotions are tied to the way that people think (Edelman, 2002). Beck, Ellis, Miechenbaum and Seligman show the connection between cognitions and feelings (Epstein & Brodsky,1993). If emotion has the potential to be stressful and emotion is linked to cognition, then any discussion of stress needs to account for the role of

perception. The meaning that is placed on a life event will determine the cognitions and emotions that arise. Perception is the end result of the central nervous system translating sensory input into a new form of information. Battista (1996:86-87) says:

> The central nervous system processes the sequence and pattern of input, generating a new level of information: information two. This level of information – the meaning of sensory input to the central nervous system – is called perception.

McEwen (2002:34) argues that there is a strong link between perception and stress. In relation to the particular focus of this thesis, a study by Lee and Iverson-Gilbert (2003:255) points to the possibility that perception plays a larger role in clergy stress than do the actual demands of ministry. A stimuli based model of stress makes no allowance for this aspect of human experience. The response based model is also found wanting in that it does not allow for external stimuli influencing the way in which a person thinks about the world and their place in it. The best chance of an understanding of stress that reflects the reality of human experience is within an interactive model. The need for a contextualized and interactional understanding of the role of perception in the experience of stress will be further discussed in the next chapter where I discuss the appropriateness of a narrative approach to this research.

An understanding of stress as a complex interactive phenomenon is evident in the work of people like Richard Lazarus. Lazarus (1990:4) regards stress as 'a complex, multivariate process.' Lazarus claims that a single measure of stress is unattainable. He places an emphasis on the subjective nature of stress by focussing on the psychological dimension of stress. Lazarus et al. (1985:770) emphasise that stress does not lie in the environmental input (stimuli) itself but,

> in a person's appraisal of the relationship between that input and its demands and the person's agendas (e.g. beliefs, commitments, goals) and capabilities to meet, mitigate, or alter these demands in the interests of well-being.

Commenting on the work of Lazarus, Costa and McCrae (1990:22) suggest that individual personality needs to be taken into account in stress research. Two people can be subjected to an identical external stressor and yet report quite different experiences of stress.

Language relating to stress is often confused by the use of the term 'burnout' which is treated as a stress synonyms. Therefore, I will now turn to a discussion of literature relating to burnout and its connection with stress.

Stress and burnout

The terms stress and burnout are at times used interchangeably. The Australian Government's National Occupational Health and Safety Commission web page (Commonwealth of Australia 2003) includes a section titled *Stress and Burnout at Work.* The word burnout does not appear. The inference is that stress and burnout are two terms for the same phenomenon.

Schwartz (2002:79) has linked burnout with 'compassion fatigue'. Compassion fatigue is explained by many as a form of countertransference related to work with Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) sufferers (Danielli, 1988; Herman, 1992; Wilson & Lindy, 1994). In contrast to this view, McCann and Pearlman (1990) insist that compassion fatigue (or vicarious traumatisation as they call it), is distinct from countertransference in that it is distinctively related to working with trauma survivors.

Rudenberger and Richelson (1980, cited in Whetham, 2000:31) suggest that burnout is related to a cause or way of life that has failed to produce an expected reward, while Maslach (1982:3) views burnout as 'a syndrome of emotional exhaustion, depersonalisation, and reduced personal accomplishment that can occur among individuals who do 'people work' of some kind.' Maslach and Leiter (1999:51) from their research into burnout suggest six protective keys: manageable workload; sense of control; opportunity for rewards; feeling of community; faith in the fairness of the workplace and shared values.

Burnout can be thought of as the outcome of prolonged exposure to stress. Selye (1978) recognises three stages of stress: alarm, resistance and exhaustion. Pryor (1986) suggests that burnout refers to the exhaustion stage of stress. Hart (1984 cited in Pryor, 1986) whilst distinguishing between stress and burnout shows that there are also significant connections between them (Pryor, 1986:7). Given these connections it may be that when a person is describing their lived experience they may use one or both of the terms in describing that experience.

A search through the stress literature highlights a paucity of qualitative research into the topic. Given the lack of an agreed upon definition of stress (Rees & Redfern, 2000:120), and the many variables (i.e culture, personality, gender, experience, beliefs, values etc) involved in the

stress experience, it is questionable as to how quantitative studies can do justice to research focussing on the experience and meaning of stress. In the next section I will focus on literature relating to clergy stress.

Stress amongst clergy

I have provided a review of literature related to the conceptualising of stress. I now turn to the experience of stress amongst clergy. Both international and Australian studies are included.

It is commonly acknowledged that traditional Christian churches are struggling to survive in Western societies. As Miley (2002:19) states,

> Even the most optimistic and Institutional of Christians in the West today would hardly deny that there is a problem in the church. The failure of mission, with its subsequent fall-off in adherence, ageing congregations, clergy stress, church closures and shortage of money for everything including mission - all testify to the existence of some sort of problem.

In the above quotation Miley refers to clergy stress. In an American study conducted by Mills and Koval (1971 cited in Lee & Iverson-Gilbert, 2003:249), emotional stress amongst Protestant clergy was found to be severe and lasting throughout the careers of some clergy. Lee and Iverson-Gilbert refer to the 'unrealistic and intrusive expectations pressed on clergy by their congregations' (Blackbird & Wright, 1985 cited in Lee & Iverson-Gilbert, 2003:249).

There have been attempts to understand the factors that contribute to vocational stress amongst clergy. Rediger (1994) suspects that the growing gap between the 'theoretical world' of the seminary and the work of clergy in the local church setting has resulted in inadequate training. McHugh and Scanlon (2001) conducted research amongst Roman Catholic Priests in the United Kingdom using semi-structured interviews, diaries and questionnaires (2001:11). Their research identified fifteen contributors to stress. These were, work overload, attendance at meetings, uncertainty about role, lack of defined and achievable objectives, difficulty of arranging for days off, conflicting job tasks and role demands, inadequate or poor quality training/development, trying to live out Gospel values in today's world, lack of visible results, managerial responsibilities, administration, inability to say 'no,' relocation, living with another priest and dealing with troubled people who need constant help.

Uncertainty about role, lack of defined and achievable objectives, conflicting job tasks and role demands are stress factors identified in many other studies. These studies, listed by Abraham (1997:236), have been across disparate occupational groups (Beehr et al.1976; Brief & Aldag, 1976; House & Rizzo, 1972; Johnson & Stinson, 1975; Oliver & Brief, 1978; Paul, 1974).

Research focussed on Roman Catholic clergy, was also conducted by Virginia (1998). In a quantitative study, Virginia researched burnout and depression amongst religious order priests (Benedictine, Franciscan or Dominican), secular priests, and Trappist monastic priests. The research indicated statistically relevant differences of emotional exhaustion between the three groups, with the secular priests experiencing greater emotional exhaustion. Virginia suggested that this is linked to the multiple demands that are placed on secular priests who are on call at all hours (Virginia, 1998:62). The study raised the issue of work context and boundaries as contributors to stress.

Lutheran Disaster Response (Sevig, 2002) reports that amongst congregations affected by disasters, the minister is likely to leave because of stress. In a study examining the response of ministers to the West Virginia floods of 1985, 50% of the sample reported feeling fatigued and burnt out. These ministers also reported struggling with guilt feelings for not having done more (Bradfield, Wylie & Ecterling, 1989). Although such stress is different from daily stress, ministers are are often involved in the crisis experiences of the lives of others. Pastoral response to disaster is an aspect of a minister's brief.

Rediger (1994:2) suggests that a contributor to the stresses of ministry is an identity crisis that emerges from the de-humanising of the clergy. He points to the 'mystique' of the pastoral role. Rediger suggests that this may lead to an unrealistic expectation of clergy. He wonders if clergy sometime experience stress for simply being human. Evidence of pressure for clergy to be more than 'human' is also seen in the work of Richmond, Rayburn and Rogers (1985 cited in Birk, Rayburn & Richmond, 2001), Malony (1988 cited in Birk, Rayburn & Richmond, 2001), Rayburn (1991 cited in Birk, Rayburn & Richmond, 2001), and Birk, Rayburn and Richmond (2001:137). Harbaugh (1984 cited in Irvine, 1997:51) says,

> Pastors are persons. Most of the problems pastors experience in the parish are not caused by the pastor forgetting he or she is a pastor. Most difficulties pastors face in the parish arise when the pastor forgets that he or she is a person.

Irvine (1997:xii) suggests that the history and tradition of the church have contributed to the denial of the humanity of the priest or minister. Irvine (1997:74) also notes that ministers must bridge two worlds. One world is the tradition of ecclesiastical authority, a world which gives importance and credence to the office of minister or priest. In contrast is the world of an increasingly secularized Western society that sees little relevance in the role of clergy. Such confusion can easily lead to a crisis of identity. The confused minister cannot escape into the comforting arms of the congregation as the clash of worlds is often evident in the congregation itself. The older generation of church goers still hold to an authority based view of the clergy while younger members are likely to demonstrate a post modern view in which authority is questioned (Irvine, 1997:74).

Loren Mead (1991), William Easeum (1993) and Thomas Bandy (2001) have said that churches need to make substantial changes in order to have significance in the new century. Change creates particular challenges for clergy whose role is becoming increasingly unclear. In 1977, Harris examined the impact of the changing nature of church life on leaders and congregations. Harris (1977:77-93) used a case study approach which highlighted the change of the locus of power in church life. The study indicated that a shift in power from clergy to the laity is a stressor for clergy. Such lack of clarity in understanding one's role adds to clergy stress as shown in the previously mentioned research by McHugh and Scanlon (2001). Harris' (1977) study also suggested that the changing perception of the role of the clergy person in society as a whole is a potential stressor for clergy.

Western clergy find themselves working in an environment where there is pressure to reverse a societal trend away from church attendance (Hall, 2003:170) Perhaps this trend in society is connected with the growing separation of religion and spirituality. Woodhead and Heelas (1977 cited in Miller, 1977) suggest that religion is seen as institutional and to do with the human rather than divine. As such it is of marginal interest to those who are seeking to connect with the 'larger mysteries of the universe' (Woodhead & Heelas cited in Miller, 1977:464).

In research conducted in New Zealand, Jamieson (2000) found that there are many Christians who have left institutionalised religion yet who still maintain an active spiritual dimension to their lives. Such trends further complicate the work of clergy who often feel the weight of helping the church remain an attractive spiritual option.

An additional stressor for ministers is the difficulty of maintaining boundaries between work and home life. Morris and Blanton (1994) drawing on Presnell (1977), Hulme (1985) and Lee and Balswick (1989), argue that clergy are constantly dealing with ambiguous separations between their professional and private lives. Deluca (1980 cited in Morris & Blanton, 1994:189) describes this aspect of ministry as 'holy crossfire.' Morris and Blanton's (1994) findings show that the lack of clear boundaries leads to an intrusiveness from congregational members that can negatively impact levels of marital satisfaction amongst clergy couples.

St. Romain (1991:7) suggests that there are many co-dependent ministers in the Christian church. St. Romain uses this term to refer to people who carry with them a 'messiah complex'. These people gain their sense of happiness and self-esteem from taking responsibility for the lives of others. It has been said that within the co-dependent is an unconscious drive to control the relationship (Abi-Hashem, 1999:212). St. Romain (1991:9) further suggests that co-dependent ministers often become burnt out.

Another source of stress is that the tasks of ministry are often difficult to evaluate and quantify. This aspect of ministry may add to the difficulty of placing clear boundaries around work. McHugh and Scanlon (2001:11) suggest that a lack of defined and achievable objectives make it difficult for clergy to have any definite way of knowing whether what they are doing is making a difference.

In a critical review focusing on a number of quantitative studies, Shreve-Neiger and Edelstein (2004) examined the link between anxiety and religion. They encountered contradictory findings. While some have proposed that the religious person is more susceptible to anxiety, others claim the opposite. Shreve-Neiger and Edelstein (2004:15) state that the contradictory results in studies may be attributed to

> a lack of standardized measures, poor sampling procedures, failure to control for threats to validity, limited assessment of anxiety, experimenter bias and poor operationalisation of religious constructs.

They also raise the possibility that some aspects of the religious life may be anxiety producing whilst other aspects may protect from anxiety. Their review offers the possibility of a spectrum of religious experience ranging from healthy to unhealthy (Shreve-Neiger & Edelstein, 2004:15). The study suggests a possible correlation between anxiety and religion and calls for further research in this area.

Hulme (1985:2-12) outlines factors contributing to clergy vocational stress. One is that clergy are crisis people who involve themselves in the 'pains of life'. In addition, 'religious professionals are the only professionals whose job includes a built-in community' (Hulme, 1985:4). Given that communities are places where conflicts occur and clergy are the ones that have to deal with such conflict, stress is never far away. Hulme (1985:4) mentions frustration over living out convictions about ministry, stress resulting from administrative demands and deadline stress in relation to sermons that need to be delivered with weekly monotony.

Based on observations from his work with clergy and seminarians, Rassieur (1982:35), an American pastoral counsellor, identified a particular characteristic amongst those who cope with the stresses of ministry. He recognises this characteristic as 'a strong, firm sense of self and personal identity':

> It is a characteristic of such pastors that they bite off more than they can chew, but it does not choke them. Another way to put it is that they are risk takers, particularly in their relationships with other persons. They risk being close, they risk being loving, and they risk telling the truth.

Rassieur's statement focuses on the importance of clergy being relationally adept. In Paul and Libby Whetham's (2000:31) study, male clergy in Australia reported issues of blurred boundaries between work and private lives and the lack of clarity in the work place as sources of stress. Four out of every five church leaders within the sample failed to mention any meaningful relationship in their lives.

Irvine (1997:99-101) suggests that clergy often struggle with isolation and loneliness. Although people disclose intimate details of their lives with clergy, clergy are not at liberty to disclose intimate personal details to those to whom they pastor. Irvine (1997:91-94) speaks of seven levels of relationship. These are the passing nod, the courteous exchange, the neighbourly chatter, the working relationship, the social connection, the depth interaction and the intimate encounter. Irvine (1997:94) claims that although clergy provide a forum for others at the level of the intimate encounter, they are only able to communicate at the level of the working relationship when it comes to self-disclosure (Irvine, 1997:94). Irvine believes that this leaves clergy drained and unfulfilled as relational beings.

In his book, *The Plight of the Australian Clergy,* Blaikie (1979) outlined research that was based on a sample of over nine hundred Australian clergymen. Blaikie identified a number of

problems faced by Australian male clergy. These were inadequate training, lack of time to complete tasks, excessive time required for organising, the expectations of others, little appreciation from others, minimal leisure time, financial strain and strain on family life (Blaikie, 1979:186-187). Blaikie further identified a relationship between a minister's theological worldview and ability to cope with stress. Blaikie distinguished between those who held to a 'liberal' (secularist) view and those who held to a 'supernaturalist' (evangelical) view. Blaikie concluded that those who held to a secularist view experienced more stress. Liberals had a tendency to be tolerant of other worldviews and were more likely to engage with stress inducing experiences in the community. A more liberal viewpoint also made it difficult to achieve an internally consistent system of meaning due to openness to other viewpoints. Liberal clergy were also found to hold substantially different worldviews to the members of the congregations in which they worked. This added to isolation and thus reduced scores related to social support and legitimation.

It has been many years since Blaikie's research was conducted and there are new labels that have emerged as part of Church Culture. In addition to 'liberal' and 'evangelical' there are now terms such as 'post-evangelical', 'exclusivist', 'pluralist' and 'particularist' (Okholm & Phillips, 1995; Phipps, 2003 & Tomlinson, 1995). It makes more sense to think in terms of a continuum rather than a dichotomy. Many would find it difficult to know where to place themselves on this continuum.

In contrast to Blaikie's findings, Miner (1996) argues that conservative theology can be linked to stress. Miner (1996), speaking of Australian Presbyterian clergy, says that the clergy's conservative Calvinistic theology can lead to the development of perfectionist and isolated personality styles due to an emphasis on self-examination and a striving to become Christ-like (Miner, 1996:14).

Pryor's (1986) study of UCA ministers identified vocational stress as a reality in the lives of a third of the sample (84% male, 16% female). The main stressors identified were

> the perceived workload, unsatisfactory conflict management, the still developing structures and procedures of the UCA, the diverse and often unrealistic expectations of members, and a not infrequent feeling that to 'improve the parish seems a hopeless task' (Pryor, 1986:119).

In 1987 the UCA Queensland Synod conducted a church leaders' stress survey (UCA, Queensland Synod Stress Committee, 1987 cited in Whetham, 2000:25). The participants were divided into subgroups of Church leaders (Clergy) and lay leaders. The sample (376) included both sexes and all subgroups reported their church work as highly stressful. An Australian Anglican Church survey (Hay, 1995 cited in Whetham, 2000:25) found that most clergy were near burnout. Immediate remedial attention was needed for five per cent of the sample. Loneliness, isolation and tiredness were found to be common.

The National Church Life Survey (NCLS) of 1996 indicated that church leaders under the age of fifty showed burnout scores above the national average (Kaldor & Bullpitt, 2001:10). The NCLS used the Alban Institute's Burnout Inventory (AIBI) as its research tool. This inventory conceptualised burnout in a similar way to the Maslach Burnout Inventory. As mentioned previously in this chapter, Maslach (1982:3) viewed burnout as 'a syndrome of emotional exhaustion, depersonalisation, and reduced personal accomplishment that can occur among individuals who do 'people work' of some kind.'

The NCLS indicated that 4% of clergy suffered extreme burnout, 19% described burnout as a major issue in their lives and 56% said they are borderline and on the edge of burnout. Only 21% said that burnout was not an issue (Kaldor & Bullpitt, 2001:10). The NCLS also made use of a survey that was compiled by staff from NCLS and Edith Cowan University. This survey was designed to compare health levels in church leaders with those of the general population. Church leaders reported lower levels of health than the Australian population in general. This was also the case when contrasted with other white-collar professions (Kaldor & Bullpit, 2001:25).

This section of the literature review has shown that Australian and international studies provide ample evidence to suggest that stress is a reality for clergy. The research suggests the existence of many causal factors to this clergy stress. Given that one of the key areas of this study is how female clergy experience and deal with the occupational stress of ministry, I will now discuss the literature relating to the stress experience of women in the workplace.

The female experience of occupational stress

Recent research (Bittman & Wajcman, 2000; Lim & Teo, 1996; Tolhurst & Stewart, 2004; White, O'Connor & Garrett, 1997; Zani & Pietrantoni, 2001) into stress suggests some differences in the way that males and females experience and deal with occupational stress.

Until fairly recently research into occupational stress focussed mainly upon men (White, O'Connor & Garrett, 1997; Davidson & Fielden, 1999 cited in Iwasaki, MacKay & Mactavish, 2005; Somerfield & McCrae, 2000 cited in Iwasaki, MacKay & Mactavish, 2005; Zani & Pietrantoni, 2001). Research focussing on the stress experience of women in the workplace is now commencing.

Lim and Teo (1996) found that female occupational stress was related to either overt or subtle discrimination at an organisational or personal level. McDonald and Korabik's (1991 cited in Lim & Teo, 1996) findings also showed evidence of discrimination and gender based barriers in the workplace. In addition, they suggested that female managers were more likely to name stress arising from the work-home interface.

The stress arising from the juggling of home and work life emerges as problematic for women in many studies (Davidson and Cooper, 1983 cited in Lim & Teo, 1996; Firth-Cozens, 1987 cited in White, O'Connor & Garrett, 1997; Uhlenberg & Cooney, 1990 cited in White, O'Connor & Garrett, 1997; White, O'Connor & Garrett, 1997; Frankenhaesur, 1999 cited in Fielden & Cooper, 2001). Further to this, Posig and Kickul's (2004) findings show that although the work-family balance is an issue for both male and females, women are at a far higher risk of role overload than men. This mirrors research by Sekaran (1985 cited in Elloy & Smith, 2003:59).

Frankenhaesur (1989 cited in Irvine, 1997:83-84) undertook a gender comparison study using both biomedical and social indices. He discovered that in contrast to male workers, the stress levels of women workers increased substantially at the end of the day. Frankenhaesur deduced that this was due to women carrying a heavier responsibility for home duties.

Tolhurst and Stewart (2004) researched the attitudes of Australian medical students to balancing work and family life. The study used a qualitative research methodology (grounded

theory) with focus groups and interviews as data gathering methods. Female students of all ages were found more likely than males to name family issues as important in making decisions relating to career choices. Female students had a heightened sense of needing to face a balancing act in the future.

Research undertaken by Bittman and Wajcman (2000) into leisure time across the working population in Australia found that when the data for married men and women in full time employment was analysed there was a differential of 2.22 hours a week in favour of men (Bittman & Wajcman, 2000:177). The study also concluded that leisure enjoyed by men was uncontaminated by interruptions, whereas for women leisure was often fragmented and snatched between fulfilling a number of competing roles.

Zani and Pietrantoni (2001) examined gender differences in their study amongst health professionals. The study focussed on symptoms of burnout, empowerment and somatic symptoms. The results indicated lower levels of burnout and a higher sense of empowerment for women. The converse was true in relation to somatic symptoms such as headache, back pain, sleeping problems, nausea, accelerated heartbeat, skin problems and loss of appetite (Zani & Pietrantoni, 2001:42).

There are conflicting findings in research contrasting the health of working and non-working mothers (Fielden & Cooper, 2001). Arber, Gilbert and Dale (1985 cited in Fielden & Cooper, 2001) suggest that women who take on multiple roles (e.g. work and motherhood) experience poorer mental health than those who do not have multiple roles. Pleck (1985 cited in Fielden & Cooper, 2001) argues that women would be less stressed if they removed themselves from paid employment. However Fielden and Cooper counteract this argument by pointing to the work of Piechowski (1992 cited in Fieldman & Cooper, 2001) who argue that it is the quality of a woman's experience across her various roles, rather than the number of roles that influence mental health. Thoits (1986 cited in Fielden & Cooper, 2001) maintains the possibility that the greater the number of roles in which a woman is engaged, the greater the psychological well-being due to access to resources and greater opportunities for gratification and social interaction. Repetti, Matthews and Waldron (1989 cited in Fielden & Cooper, 2001) believe that employment is good for women's health whether they be married or single if they have a positive attitude to work.

Fielden and Cooper (2001:7) suggest that a possible variable accounting for these different findings is the individual's perception of the situation and the degree of personal control they have. The importance of control is also indicated in studies conducted by Cornell University and New York Hospital (McEwen, 2002:70) and Fotinatos-Ventouratos and Cooper (2005).

Lack of control is identified in Fielden and Cooper's research analysis as a feature of the experience of women managers. Pointing to the research of Long (1998 cited in Fielden & Cooper, 2001) they report that women managers indicate lower levels of control than their male colleagues. Referring to the work of Sherman, Higgs & Williams (1997 cited in Fielden & Cooper, 2001), Fielden and Cooper state 'in addition, women generally believe that they have less control over relationships and life events than men' (Fielden & Cooper, 2001:7).

Australian research conducted into the influence of job stress on hypertension (Lindquist, Beilin & Knuiman, 1997) showed little connection between occupational stress and blood pressure. It did however show that the way in which a person chose to cope with stress affected blood pressure. A significant difference in stress management choices between genders was evident. The study showed that men were more likely than women to engage in maladaptive stress coping behaviours. These included excessive drinking, over eating, smoking, and avoidance or denial of stressful work situations.

John McCormick's (1998) study amongst teachers in the New South Wales Education system showed that females tended to be more likely to attribute responsibility for failure to themselves than would males. This sense of failure had the capacity to increase the experience of occupational stress.

The research outlined above indicates that gender differences in the experiencing of occupational stress exist. Two of the key differences are that women tend to perceive they have a greater lack of control over their lives than do men and women continue to carry the burden for home duties. This burden can make it more difficult for women to engage in quality recreational time. There are also signs that men and women behave differently in response to stress.

Despite the recent increase in research into gender differences relating to occupational stress, there is a perception amongst some that much of the research has continued to use a

conceptualisation of stress that is male oriented. Many of the existing measures of stress have been criticised as being based on research conducted amongst males. Formulated measures for stress have been criticised for gender and cultural biases (Bell & Lee, 2002 cited in Iwasaki, MacKay & Mactavish, 2005; Zalaquett & Wood, 1997, 1998 cited in Iwasaki, MacKay & Mactavish, 2005).

Taylor, et al. (2000) raise the question of the suitability of fight or flight as an appropriate understanding of the female stress response. Recent research, beginning with the work of Taylor et al. (2000) indicates that the 'fight or flight' response so long assumed to apply to both men and women, is predominantly a male response. Taylor's research coined a new term 'tend and befriend' to describe the behavioural response to stress by women.

Fight or Flight and Tend and Befriend

The proposition of Taylor et al. (2000) is that whilst testosterone is the key to the 'fight or flight' stress response in men, the neuropeptide oxytocin is the catalyst for the female 'tend and befriend' response. Oxytocin decreases blood pressure and reduces levels of cortisol, a hormone believed to be indicated in the 'fight or flight' response. Taylor et al. argue that females release oxytocin in response to stress and that this in turn leads to a focus on the 'quieting and caring for offspring and blending into the environment' (Taylor et al., 2000:412). In addition to this is a befriending in the form of a 'creation of networks of associations that provide resources and protection for the female and her offspring under conditions of stress' (Taylor et al., 2000:412). The hypothesis outlined by Taylor et al. represents a marked shift in thinking about stress. It is therefore not surprising that some remain sceptical.

Bruskin (2005) sees the contrast that is suggested as too stark. Bruskin's concern is that the hypothesis leads to an assumption that women are built for motherhood, while men are 'still cavemen concerned only with hunting and dominating the rest of the tribe' (Bruskin, 2005:6). Bruskin cites research (Rosenblatt, Olufowobi & Siegel, 1998 cited in Bruskin, 2005) that shows that expectant fathers display drastic increases in levels of estradiol, a hormone connected with maternal behaviour. Bruskin cites other research indicating drops of testosterone levels in new fathers (Gubernick & Nelson, 1989 cited in Bruskin, 2005; Brown et al, 1995 cited in Bruskin 2005; Reburn & Wynne-Edwards, 1999 cited in Bruskin, 2005). Bruskin sees 'tend and befriend' as too simplistic and a hypothesis that ignores many variables.

Patricia Bergemann (2005:7) commenting on 'tend and befriend' is critical on the basis that it does not account for the range of hormone levels that may exist between members of the same sex.

A limitation of the work of Taylor et al. (2000) is that the arguments presented for 'tend and befriend' are based on work with animals. The social and cultural constructs of reality that are a part of human experience are not factored into the 'tend and befriend' hypothesis. Having said this, there is research on humans carried out by Heinrichs, Baumgartner, Kirschbaum and Ehlert (2003) that provides some corroboration of the 'tend and befriend' hypothesis. The study used a placebo-controlled, double-blind research methodology.

Thirty seven healthy men were randomly assigned to receive either intranasal oxytocin, or placebo, fifty minutes prior to stress, along with either social support from their best friend or no social support. The results indicated that oxytocin may be an important factor in determining levels of social interaction and that a lack of oxytocin may be connected with 'clinical disorders of psychosocial relevance' (Heinrichs, Baumgartner, Kirschbaum and Ehlert, 2003:1395). Citing the work of Carter (1998), Insel (1997), Insel and Young (2001) and Pedersen (1997), Heinrichs, Baumgartner, Kirschbaum and Ehlert claim that oxytocin is shown to be directly related to prosocial behaviours.

An Australian behavioural study (Frydenberg & Lewis, 1993) conducted amongst adolescents lends some support to the biological hypothesis of 'tend and befriend.' In this study it was noted that males used physical recreation (fight or flight) and that females were far more inclined to seek out social support (tend and befriend). A previously cited study amongst Singaporean IT personnel (Lim & Teo, 1996) suggested that female IT workers were more likely than men to employ social support as a stress coping strategy.

Given that the focus of this present study is the occupational stress experience of a particular group of women, and that stress research has focussed primarily on male samples, research that does indicate gender specific traits in relation to stress is of importance. Consideration of such research will continue as I now turn to research focussed on the stress experience of female clergy.

Female clergy and stress

In chapter 1 it was shown that ministry is qualitatively different from other occupations due to the importance placed on vocation by the denominational culture within which UCA clergy work. Therefore, although I have presented a review of literature relating to the female experience of occupational stress, it is important to look at the literature which specifically explores the experience of stress amongst female clergy. Given that clergy roles have traditionally been seen as the province of males, it is not surprising that little research has been conducted on the experiences of female clergy. Although research amongst female clergy is limited, it does exist.

Bock (1967) undertook an analysis of data on clergywomen in the United States. The analysis was based on tabulations drawn from the US Bureau of Statistics. Bock determined that during the period of time from 1900-1960, the percentage of females in the total clergy decreased from 3% to 2.3%. Bock's findings indicated that young women in particular were unlikely to be found amongst clergy ranks. He proposed that 'as young single females enter the ministry, they face opposition, experience role conflict, and do not perform the roles for which they thought they were prepared' (Bock, 1967:538). Bock concluded that in the USA in the 1960's, female clergy were victims of 'professional marginality' (Bock, 1967:539).

A qualitative longitudinal study was conducted amongst clergywomen in America by Joy Charlton (1997). In the late 1970s, Charlton interviewed 30 women who were enrolled in two Protestant seminaries. These seminaries were affiliated with the United Methodist Church and the American Lutheran Church. These same women were interviewed again fifteen years later. Charlton was able to reinterview all but two of the original participants. By the time of the second interview half had left parish ministry. Six others had taken temporary leave at some point, and many of the others had given serious consideration to leaving the ministry. Although it was found that both men and women were leaving ministry, women were doing so at a greater rate. Charlton emphasised that the women she interviewed were almost always the first clergywomen to take up the post of minister in the congregations to which they went. Being a 'pioneer' was an aspect of this group's experience. Pioneering was exhausting and as Charlton reported 'exit' easily becomes an attractive coping mechanism for the stress associated with pioneering.

Chang (1997) claims that the stressful experiences of pioneering are still experienced by clergy women. Chang cites the work conducted by Carroll, Hargrove and Lummis (1983) titled *Women of the Cloth.* The study indicates that women clergy have made great progress 'relative to the pioneers who first entered seminaries in the 1970's' (Chang, 1997:567). It also identifies areas of ongoing struggle for female clergy. Some of the ongoing issues include lower salaries than male colleagues, 'flat' career trajectories and resistance to hiring a female pastor at the local church level.

Referring to a study by Zikmund, Lummis and Chang, Chang (1997:569) points out that female clergy are more likely to end up in non parish roles than are their male counterparts. This tendency exists for women throughout their clergy career. The same research indicates that the difficulty of juggling work and family responsibilities is felt predominantly by female clergy.

Chang claims that there is a 'grassroots' discrimination against females amongst laity. Citing work by Lehman (1981, 1987, 1987), Chang points out that whereas most people seem to indicate an acceptance of having a woman pastor, these same people hold a belief that others in their church will have difficulty and therefore choose to oppose hiring a woman to avoid conflict and tension. Chang (1997:569) concludes that there is still resistance to women pastors at the local level despite official denominational acceptance. On the other hand, research indicates that when lay people are exposed to female leadership, positive attitudes toward such leadership increases (Carroll et al. 1983 cited in Chang, 1997; Royle, 1982 cited in Chang, 1997; Lehman, 1981 cited in Chang, 1997; Dudley, 1996 cited in Chang, 1997). Other writings indicate that people who have such positive experiences with a female pastor do not always generalise this thinking to other female clergy (Carroll et al. 1983 cited in Chang, 1997; Lehman, 1985 cited in Chang, 1997). Discrimination against female clergy is evident in the results of a study by Sullins (2000) amongst Protestant churches in the USA.

Research by Lummis and Nesbitt (2000:447) suggested that when women clergy speak against gender injustice and fight for anti-discrimination, the stress impact is even greater than if they keep quiet. They found that the more proactive female clergy were in endorsing female presence and power in churches, the worse was their overall health.

In another American study, McDuff (2001:15-16) found that female clergy are more likely to be found serving small rural congregations in declining communities. Yet these same women

expressed a high degree of satisfaction in their work. Often this expressed satisfaction was higher than that of male colleagues. There is evidence in the study to suggest that this may be due to women placing less emphasis on objective and material rewards than do their male counterparts.

Irvine (1997:78) concludes that 'the church has been one of the few remaining bastions of male dominance in the professional world'. He claims that upon their entry into ministerial training, women come up against the stress associated with having to fight for the right to be there. In *Between Two Worlds*, Irvine (1997) cites the study of Shipley and Coates (1992) that indicates the high level of stress created by dual role conflict. Irvine postulates that the traditional nature of the church along with the high levels of commitment of women clergy to both the ministry and the family, makes the 'risk of stress from role conflict and guilt exceptionally high' (Irvine, 1997:83).

The literature outlined above shows that research amongst female clergy has tended to reflect the American experience. The research has been largely quantitative in nature, with the longitudinal study by Charlton (1997) being an important exception. Existing research indicates discrimination and the home-work interface to be sources of stress amongst female clergy. There remains a research gap in relation to the stress experience of female clergy in Australia.

Dealing with stress

As well as being interested in the experience of stress amongst UCA clergy, this research is concerned with the ways in which clergy deal with stress. I will therefore explore literature related to stress management, gender differences in dealing with stress and how clergy deal with stress.

Today, there are many stress management techniques available (Schiraldi & Kerr, 2002; Edelman, 2002). A number of stress management techniques tap into the mind body connection. Slowing one's breathing (Schiraldi & Kerr, 2002; Edelman, 2002) is a recognised and proven way of calming oneself when stressed. Schiraldi and Kerr (2002) and Edelman (2002) also highlight the importance of Progressive Muscle Relaxation (PMR) involving the progressive tensing and relaxing of the major muscle groups of the body.

Recognition of the link between perception and stress has led to the development of cognitive strategies that seek to deal with stress. Cognitive therapists such as Aaron Beck, Albert Ellis and Donald Meichenbaum have argued that thoughts determine feelings (Epstein, 1998:123). Epstein (1998:124) says: 'feelings cannot arise until the mind takes in what has happened.' The work of cognitive therapists has led to an emphasis on the importance of assisting people to counteract the negative thinking that leads to stress and anxiety. Cognitive therapists train people to change their patterns of thinking through the use of cognitive restructuring techniques (Beck, 1976; Edelman, 2002; Epstein & Brodsky, 1993; Epstein, 1998; Hart, 1996; Padesky & Greenberger, 1995; Rupke, Blecke, & Renfrow, 2006; Schiraldi & Kerr, 2002). One such technique is that of reframing (Rupke, Blecke, & Renfrow, 2006:83) that encourages people to look at difficult situations in a different way.

McEwen (2002) pays attention to combating the physical effects of stress. He recommends that attention be given to exercise (walking) (McEwen, 2002:137), diet (McEwen, 2002:140-141) and social support (McEwen, 2002:146).

Just as there are gender differences in the experiencing of stress, there is research suggesting the existence of gender differences relating to dealing with stress. Research conducted by Watson and Sinha (1998:72) suggests that 'gender may be a possible moderating variable in the relationship between stress and coping behaviour.' The results of the study point to males tending toward isolation and suppression as coping mechanisms and females toward altruism. In commenting on these results Watson and Sinha (1998:72) say that the differences may reflect cultural expectations that males will withdraw and that females will act in a helpful and nurturing way.

Although Watson and Sinha point to culture as a mediating influence on the behaviour of males and females in the face of stress, the earlier mentioned research by Taylor et al. (2000) and Heinrichs, Baumgartner, Kirschbaum and Ehlert (2003) suggesting 'tend and befriend,' raises the possibility that culture is not the only factor in the manifestation of such gender difference.

Lim and Teo (1996) found that female IT personnel were more likely to use social support as a coping mechanism than males. Males were more likely to use logic as a coping strategy than were the female sample.

Lindquist, Beilin and Knuiman's (1997:10) study (cited earlier) indicated that men are more likely to use 'maladaptive coping behaviours.' Men in this study reported a greater reliance on alcohol and unhealthy eating than did the women.

A number of writers have written on the subject of stress management for clergy. Irvine (1997:160-161) argues for a two-tiered approach to dealing with clergy stress. He suggests that both system support and personal support is needed to address specific needs. System support is that which is provided structurally by the denomination and personal support is that which the individual clergy member tailors for himself or herself. Irvine suggests that it has been difficult in the past for denominations to set up adequate system support models as ministry is seen as a 'calling' rather than a profession. Professions tend to have well developed codes of ethics that provide parameters within which practitioners agree to work. Ministry often has a 'fragmented nature' (Irvine, 1997:161) that makes it difficult to have agreed upon codes. However, it should be noted that the UCA in which this study has its locus, has a very clear set of ministerial ethics in place (UCA, 2000).

There is another difficulty in a church denomination being a source of support for stressed ministers. The denomination wields power over the lives of the clergy. 'Ministers are often reluctant to utilize the support networks provided by the denomination for fear of the influence this may have on their future in ministry' (Irvine, 1997:163). Irvine (1997:166) makes special mention of the role of clergywomen. He argues that denominations need heightened awareness of the unique stresses that relate to gender and take seriously the support of women in ministry.

Spiritual practice has been suggested as a source of comfort and assistance for clergy in dealing with stress. Charles Rassieur (1982:63) promotes the idea that the spiritual resources that can be used to combat stress need to reflect the individuality of the person. He links this to authenticity, noting that every minister needs to 'discover an authentic style of piety that is congruent with his or her own unique spiritual journey' (Rassieur, 1982:63).

Although many clergy are unmarried, Rassieur (1982) argues that for those who are married, marriage and family life can be a rich resource for coping with stress. Rassieur concludes from his experiences of working with clergy of all denominations, that a strong marital relationship helps the minister cope with the daily stresses of ministry. He (1982:77) also emphasises the importance of ministers focussing on their areas of interest. He argues that if a minister focuses

on those things that he or she is passionate about, ministry itself has the capacity to be a form of creative self–care.

Hughes' (1989:83) study of Australian Clergy identified the support gained from meeting with other clergy as significant for a majority of the informants (68%). The same study identified that the area for further training that clergy are most likely to name as important is the area of 'people skills.' This included counselling, psychology, pastoral care, marriage counselling and youth work.

Australian NCLS research of 1996 suggested that the most common method for clergy dealing with stress was speaking to someone (Kaldor & Bullpitt, 2001:110). The two most significant categories for such conversation were spouse and ministerial colleagues. In Pryor's (1986) Victorian study amongst UCA clergy, 57% of informants named their spouse as the most significant source of support. The value of interacting with others is evident in research conducted by Paul and Libby Whetham (2000). The research concluded that meaningful interaction is an antidote to loneliness and that interactive clergy who are intentional about connecting with colleagues and others have greater levels of enjoyment and job satisfaction.

A surprising aspect of the NCLS research was that few clergy chose proactive strategic options for dealing with stress. The researchers state 'many leaders are not used to thinking about ways to change their environment, but accept it as a given and try and work out how to survive within it' (Kaldor & Bullpit, 2001:111). A significant proportion of informants named recreational leave and getting away from the area as a means of coping. However, it appeared that recreational leave was ineffective in lowering burnout scores. Kaldor and Bullpit (2001:111) postulate that this may be because the stresses remain in the workplace after the holiday.

Although the NCLS study provided insight into how clergy choose to deal with stress, its methodology did not allow it to shed light on the efficacy of these selections. Another limitation of the study was its inability to provide knowledge of gender differences amongst Australian clergy experience. This limitation was due to the study being conducted across all denominations and therefore based predominantly on information supplied by male informants.

On the website of John Mark Ministries (www.pastornet.net.au), Rowland Croucher (2003) suggests prevention and cure strategies such as fresh spiritual disciplines, taking regular time

off, proper exercise and sleep, relaxation, joining a small support/prayer group, cognitive restructuring and building 'fun times' into life. These suggestions seem to be based largely on anecdotal evidence. The emphasis on rest and relaxation mentioned by Croucher, is echoed by Bradfield, Echterling and Wylie (1989:7). This emphasis emerges from their interviewing of clergy following the 1985 floods in West Virginia.

Pryor (1986:104-105) emphasises similar self-care techniques, citing eleven care strategies named by Oswald (1982). These strategies cater for a range of physical, spiritual, emotional and social needs. Hulme (1985) highlights four areas to which clergy need to pay attention in order to ensure a balanced life. These are spiritual development, hobbies, physical exercise and social development.

Conclusion

This chapter has provided an overview of literature pertaining to the conceptualising of stress, clergy stress, gender differences in occupational stress, the female clergy stress experience and the ways in which people and in particular, clergy, deal with stress.

The literature review reveals that there is a 'gap' in research as it relates to the topic of this study. There has been little research undertaken in Australia on stress amongst female clergy. It also seems there has been very little qualitative research undertaken on clergy stress in general. This research gap suggests the need for qualitative research into the clergy experience of stress in Australia with a particular focus on the female clergy experience.

The next chapter will explore why narrative methodology was chosen for the research and explain how the research has been carried out.

CHAPTER 3

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The literature review points to the need for qualitative research into stress amongst UCA clergy and in particular female clergy in Australia. This chapter demonstrates that a qualitative, narrative approach to this research is the most appropriate and useful.

The chapter begins by discussing the theoretical implications of using a narrative framework within an overall phenomenological interpretive orientation. In particular I will discuss narrative and heuristic inquiry and the appropriateness of these for the current study. In the second part of the chapter, I outline how the study has been carried out, the data collection methods used, including sampling, and the selection of participants, as well as the approach to analysis. Finally I examine the ethical considerations associated with the study.

Methodology of research is determined by philosophical assumptions regarding knowledge and the ways in which knowledge can be obtained. Given the highly subjective nature of an experience such as stress, it is important that the methodology used allows for the participants' experience and interpretation of stress.

Rationale for using a narrative approach

Several writers mentioned in the last chapter have emphasised the role of perception (e.g. Edelman, 2002; Epstein & Brodsky, 1993) in constructing a person's experience of stress. Perception is the meaning that results from a process in which the central nervous system

translates sensory input (Battista, 1996:86-87). Other understandings of perception focus on the way in which the mind translates sensory information into a meaningful whole (Looy, 1999; Meier et al. 1991:64). Hermans and Kempen (1993:5) have linked perception with imagination and narrative. They suggest that through the use of imagination people 'select perceptual elements and combine them into meaningful, narrative configurations.'

It is these 'meaningful, narrative configurations' that interest me as I consider the experience of stress of UCA ministers. It is my contention that a person's interpretation of experience is linked to and influenced by their life history. This life history and the stories that emerge from that history are connected to the physical and social environments in which that life is embedded.

To build further my case for linking perception with a person's life history or emerging self narrative, I would like to give consideration to two oppositional views of self. These are the Cartesian and Vichian views. The Cartesian world view based on Descartes' *Cogito, ergo sum* ('I think, therefore I am') presents;

> a self of reason completely purged of body and feeling, a self without shadows, a self totally transparent to itself, totally knowing of itself, totally self-possessed, totally certain of itself (Levin, 1988:15).

The result of this view has been the emergence of a Cartesian dichotomy (Hermans and Kempen, 1993:3). This dichotomy separates mind from body and self from others. It is a view of self that leads to a belief that an individual's meaning making is disconnected from the environmental context in which the person is embedded. Such a view has held a significant position within the history of Western philosophy (Encyclopedia Britannica, 2006).

In contrast is the Vichian view based on assertions made by Vico. Vico rejected the concept of a disembodied mind. For Vico, people have a history and to understand a person, that history needs to be understood (Hermans & Kempen, 1993:1). Further to this is the view of Bakhtin (1973:26) who argues that 'consciousness is never self-sufficient; it always finds itself in an intense relationship with another consciousness.' According to Vico and Bakhtin a view of self that dismisses the larger contexts of life within which the self exists is a diminished view of self.

Shotter (1993:45) says,

> …the current view we have of persons, as all equal, self-enclosed (essentially indistinguishable) atomic individuals, possessing an inner sovereignty, each living their separate lives, all in isolation from each other – the supposed experience of the modern self – is an illusion.

Psychologist William James (1890) differentiated between *I* and *me* in his concept of the self. Rosenberg (1979) suggests this way of understanding self can be seen as the self-as-knower (I) and the self-as-known (me). The self as knower is the *I* that is able to reflect on one's life experiences (Hermans & Kempen, 1993:44). James (1890) understood the self-as-known *(me)* to be constituted of material, spiritual and social characteristics. This is the part of the self that transacts with the physical and social environments. Like Vico, James rejected a notion of a self disconnected from others. Though the *I* is distinct from other people, the social *me* is not.

James can be seen as the forerunner of a narrative approach to the self. In speaking of James' *I, me* distinction, Hermans and Hermans-Jansen (1995:8-9) refer to the *I* as the author and the *me* as a narrative figure. They suggest that people make sense of their lives through a process of narrative construction. The person is understood as a motivated storyteller. Such a view sees the person as being involved in a 'continuous process of meaning construction' (Hermans & Hermans-Jansen, 1995:9).

The philosophical positioning that I have taken in this study is reflective of Vico, Bakhtin and James. A commonality in their views of self is the dialogical nature of human existence. Hermans and Kempen (1993:62) refer to a 'dialogical self', arguing that from the moment of birth human beings are inter-actional and that the self is not constant but emergent and always developing in a constantly changing context of interrelationships. Shotter (1993:17) also stresses the importance of recognising the shifting contextual nature of human experience and its impact on human structuring of reality.

Such a philosophical stance leads naturally to a constructivist approach that sees that 'every human situation is novel, emergent, and filled with mulitiple, often conflicting, meanings and interpretations' (Glesne & Peshkin, 1992:19). Researchers into human experience recognise that the positivist approaches that have been useful in many areas of science are lacking when it comes to complexities of human actions and experience. An experience such as stress is fundamentally based in the context in which an individual life is lived and therefore needs to be studied against the 'background bustle and hurly-burly of life' (Shotter, 1993:29). Braud and

Anderson (1998) list many researchers (Borg & Gall, 1989; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Monette, Sullivan & De Jong; Morse, 1991, 1992; Nielsen, 1990; Parse, 1996; Polkinghorne, 1983 and Tesch, 1990) who believe that such complexities are best understood by a constructivist qualitative approach to research.

Given the arguments outlined above I have chosen a qualitative stance in the form of an interpretive phenomenological approach for this research. This approach to research takes seriously the complexities of human phenomenological experience. It asserts that human beings construct meaning. It is therefore important to give some consideration to the way in which people do this. Central in such a discussion is the role of language.

One of the products of the enlightenment is that language has been viewed as a way of describing the world (Shotter, 1993:24). This is a view based on an assumption that there exists a 'neutral set of underlying 'mental' principles upon which the rest of life *should*, rationally, be based' (Shotter, 1993:24). Such a view of language fails to recognise the personal histories that lie behind every conversation. In recent times post modern critiques have suggested that language and in particular the conversation that is a part of self-other relations, constructs the realities within which we live. Harré (1983, 1990) claims that conversation is the primary human reality. In the *I – me* conversations of the inner world and the self-other conversations of relationships we both construct and make sense of our world. Shotter (1993:33) suggests that a person's reality is constructed within the conversations of everyday life.

All of this leads naturally to a research methodology that places an emphasis on the use of narrative. Narrative inquiry is an accepted research methodology amongst the social sciences (Chase, 2005:651). Clandinin and Connelly (2000:18) have suggested that narrative provides the best way of representing and understanding experience.

Narrative inquiry involves the use of life stories with the aim of discovering how people are affected by life events and the meanings they give to these events (Grbich, 1999:134). The method of narrative inquiry in this study draws on heuristic methods to analyse the participants' narratives. The term 'heuristic inquiry' is coined by Moustaskas (1967; 1981; 1990 cited in Hiles, 2002; Douglass & Moustakas, 1985 cited in Hiles, 2002) and is defined by Douglass and Moustakas (1985:40 cited in Hiles, 2002) as follows:

> Heuristic research is a search for the discovery of meaning and essence in significant human experience. It requires a subjective process of reflecting, exploring, sifting, and elucidating the nature of the phenomenon under investigation.

As a form of phenomenological inquiry, heuristics recognises the role of the researcher and the lived experience of the researcher as he or she engages in the process of research. It takes seriously the idea that we know through participation (Hiles, 2002:2). Moustakas (1990:14 cited in Hiles, 2002) suggests that in heuristic research the researcher needs to have 'had a direct, personal encounter with the phenomena being investigated.' Hiles (2002:4) puts this as 'it is not you who chooses the research question, but the research question chooses you.'

Given that I am a UCA clergy member, bracketing is an impossibility in this research. This does not need to be seen as a disadvantage. McLeod (2001:143) acknowledges that research into human experience can never be totally free from the effect of the presuppositions of the researcher and he asserts that recent developments in qualitative research have restored a place for the personal experience of the researcher. Byrne (2001:2) says, 'the researcher's values provide contextual meaning for consumers.'

A constructivist, qualitative approach to the research is also justified due to the paucity of such research amongst Australian female clergy. There is a need for research that explores and provides rich descriptions of their experiences.

Another dimension of this enquiry is the transpersonal. Clergy often have a deeply held belief that they have been 'called' out of an existing lifestyle and placed into an ordained vocation. The language that is often used by clergy to describe this aspect of their experience is transpersonal in nature. Transpersonal experiences are the

> …most profound aspects of human experience, such as mystical and unitive experiences, personal transformation, meditative awareness, experience of wonder and ecstasy, and alternative and expansive states of consciousness (Braud & Anderson, 1998:xi).

Such experiences lie beyond the reach of a positivist approach to research. Kelly (1995:46) says,

> …the human and conceptual complexities of spirituality and religion require a high tolerance of nuances among sometimes complementary and sometimes competing definitions, explanations, interpretations, and lived experiences.

Kelly's comment suggests that a careful analysis of language is required if religious experience is to be understood. A narrative approach remains an appropriate way of exploring transpersonal experience.

Consideration needs also to be given to the fact that the UCA concept of vocation is in part, socially constructed by the UCA. Institutions such as churches have their own shared history which controls the meaning making of the individual players within that institution (Berger & Luckmann, 1966:51-61; Bruner, 1991). It has been suggested that the larger stories of life in which our own life stories are embedded, exert control over the way we understand ourselves (Miller et al. 1990:293). As suggested in chapter 1, to make sense of clergy stories of call, one needs to understand the institutional story of call which exerts influence on the narratives of call related by clergy. The approach to research outlined above allows for such dynamics in recognising that participant narratives are to a greater or lesser degree, socially constructed.

I have argued the case for a research approach that recognises that a phenomenon such as stress can only be understood by giving consideration to the context in which an individual life is lived. I have further argued that a research methodology that provides such consideration is that of a interpretive phenomenological inquiry using a narrative approach in which heuristic methods are used to analyse the data. The interpretive analysis used in this research will take into consideration both the individually and institutionally constructed understandings of ministry which have influenced the participants' narratives. Following is a discussion of the research design formulated for carrying out the research.

Research Design

a) Sampling

Convenience sampling has been used as a means of selecting informants. Convenience sampling 'involves selecting a sample from a convenient location without considering the degree to which the sample is representative' (Schofield & Jamieson, 1999:157). There were two reasons for this sampling choice. Firstly, the researcher is part of a ministry network that provides access to appropriate informants thus making convenience sampling attractive both in terms of cost and time management. Secondly, although convenience sampling leads to

research that cannot be generalised to any wider population it is an appropriate approach when research is qualitative and exploratory in nature (Burns, 2000:93).

b) Recruitment and data collection

Participants were recruited from amongst the ranks of UCA clergy. Recruitment took place through a personal invitation. I approached potential participants either by phone or face to face to tell them about the research and invite them to be a part of the study. I found a high level of interest amongst those approached with all agreeing to take part in the research. Verbal acceptance was followed by a letter which outlined the details of the research (see appendix A) and written consent was obtained prior to the interviews commencing. Each interview was audio taped and transcribed as a way of providing a helpful initial immersion into the data to be analysed. Immersion in the data is recognised by Mcleod (2003:85) as an essential first step in the analysis of qualitative data.

To obtain meaningful narrative, semi-structured interviews were conducted. This method of interviewing provided an opportunity for the informant's story to emerge naturally in an unforced way. Rather than the interview being tied to particular questions that forced an agenda on the participant, an interview guide made up of topic areas was used. These topic areas included participants' experience of ministry, stressful times in ministry, methods used to deal with the stress and what may have been unhelpful during times of stress (see appendix B). The questions were couched in a way that allowed participants latitude in how they answered. This relaxed approach maximised the chances of the interviews being genuine in depth encounters (Minichiello et al. 1995:65 & Josselson & Lieblich, 2001:281). In conducting the interviews I sought to enable the participants to explore the phenomenon of stress as it was understood by them. Although different to a counselling session, some of the principles of client-centred counselling such as empathy and respect were used in the interview to maximise the chances of the participants engaging in the process (Mearns & McLeod, 1984). Eight informants were interviewed (five female, three male) over a period of nine months. The interviews ranged between one and one and a half-hours in length. The three male informants were included to allow the research to explore possible gender differences in relation to clergy stress.

The heuristic approach to analysis used in this study accepts the subjective nature of narrative analysis. To allow the reader some understanding of the 'interpretative glasses' through which

the narrative is interpreted two other data sources have been a part of this research. One source is the researcher's own story (see chapter 1). The other is a research journal that was kept throughout the duration of the research.

c) Data Analysis

The analysis of the data involved a five step process (McLeod, 2003:85). The first step was *immersion.* This was an intensive engagement with the material obtained through the semi-structured interviews. The aim was to assimilate as much meaning as possible (McLeod, 2003:85). A case analysis file was structured from this stage of the process. *Categorisation* (McLeod, 2003:85) was the assigning of coding categories to the themes emerging from the data. This led to the development of a cumulative file which allowed for comparisons to be made between the themes emerging from the different informants. From these comparisons a category file was established. The third step, *phenomenological reduction* (McLeod, 2003:85) involved questioning the themes and categories. *Triangulation* (McLeod, 2003:85) was the process of determining which themes were significant in terms of recurrence and the final step of *interpretation* (McLeod, 2003:85) made sense of the research data in light of the wider context (see chapter 2 and reference list).

The outline above suggests a step by step, linear process. In reality heuristic analysis is a process that is far more complex. In the analysis of the text of the participant stories I am aware of an internal dialogue between information obtained in the literature review, the themes that emerge from the semi-structured interviews and my own ministry experience. This means that throughout the analysis of the narrative I have been 'in and out' of the different parts of the process. Even as I write the words that make up this Thesis I am still involved in analysis. This non-linear process of analysis is a recognised process of qualitative analysis (McLeod, 2003:36 & Minichiello et al., 1995:248).

d) Ethical Considerations

The study outlined in this paper was approved by the Human Research Ethics Committee of the University of New England (HE04/126). The conduct of the research was guided by the principles of integrity, respect, beneficence, justice (UNE School of Health, 2003:122) and validity (McLeod, 2003:93-96).

Integrity of research

It has been argued that bad science is unethical (Parsons, 1999:80). Research needs to be methodologically sound. The discussion in this chapter has shown that the methodology chosen for this study is appropriate. The heuristic approach to this study requires self honesty and a willingness to reveal something of myself to the reader (McLeod, 2003:84). The inclusion of my story in chapter 1 and the keeping of a research journal are testimony to my attempts to be faithful to this heuristic requirement. Regular contact with the appointed supervisors for this project has been maintained throughout the research process.

Respect for persons

It is generally agreed amongst researchers that a number of important criteria need to be met in respect of participant needs. These are confidentiality, voluntary participation, informed consent and participant welfare (McLeod, 2003:170-176; Burns, 2000:18-22 & Parsons, 1999:83-88). The participants in this research agreed to be a part of the research in response to an invitation. There was no coercion or manipulation used. Confidentiality of material was a paramount consideration throughout the process, as was the safe storing of data. A number of procedural constructs were put in place to ensure confidentiality. These included the avoidance of using the real names of participants in taped interviews or in the transcribing of these interviews. Questions that might hint at where a participant may be located were not used in the research. All research data was kept within a locked filing cabinet. Computer material was accessible only through a password known to the researcher. These were practical ways of showing respect for the stories that the participants were willing to share. An information sheet was provided for each participant to ensure that each person who took part knew what the research was about and what was being asked of them (see appendix B). Participants were required to sign a consent form prior to the interview (see appendix B). Counselling support was available for participants if they felt the need for it.

Beneficence

The issue of beneficence involves a careful weighing up of the potential of the research to benefit people and the importance of the research being nonmaleficent (McLeod, 2003:167). This research has the potential to provide insight into the world of female clergy and in so doing assist female clergy to understand their particular stress experience and to find ways of enhancing their lifestyle. In this sense there is the potential for beneficence. There was the possibility that the process of interview may have produced stress for some participants. As

mentioned above, counselling support was on offer for any participant who suffered distress. No participant sought this support.

Justice

It is important that the benefits of any research are able to be distributed throughout a population (UNE School of Health, 2003:122). The benefit of this research will be for whole communities not just for the clergy. Clergy who are content in their profession will be more effective in their service and less likely to behave in ways that create problems for the community to whom they relate.

Validity

The validity of this research can be judged against a number of recognised qualitative research evaluation criteria. These criteria are clarity of the description of research procedures; contextualisation of the study; conceptualisation of data; consideration of competing interpretations of the data; credibility of the researcher; experiential authenticity of the material; use of triangulation; catalytic validity and replication (McLeod, 2003:94-96 & Stiles, 1993:593-618).

I contend that these criteria have largely been met in this research. This chapter has provided a detailed description of the research procedures used. The following chapter introduces the participants' stories providing a contextual framework for the study. The phenomenological nature of this research means that the data is conceptualised as a 'description of experiences and life-worlds' (Mcleod, 2003:94) rather than being focussed on the construction of models or theories. The data analysis that makes up the final chapter of this thesis included a striving on my part to explore the participant narratives from different viewpoints (Chase, 2005). In chapter 1 I outlined the basis of my credibility as a researcher into the current topic. In regard to the issue of experiential authenticity it is the participants themselves who are the ones who can best judge whether this research accurately captures the reality of their worlds. It will be they who ultimately determine whether I have been successful in this endeavour. Triangulation took place through the commonalities found in the experiences of the participants (McLeod, 2003:85). In relation to catalytic validity, Kvale (1983 cited in McLeod, 2003:96) has said, 'a well conducted qualitative interview can be a positive, enriching experience for research informants.' I cannot conclusively say that this was the case in every instance of interview. My sense was that each participant found it helpful and to some extent liberating to speak of the

reality of their stress experiences. This sense may be partly a reflection of my hope that this would be the case.

There are limitations in the methodology of this research. The sample that has been used in this research is small and cannot be generalised to the wider UCA clergy population. This study is therefore unable to make definitive statements about clergy stress. Having said this the study does show hints of meeting the criteria of replication. As will be seen in the following chapters, many areas of commonality emerged amongst the participants. The findings are not the result of a single isolated case. This research points to areas for further research. Suggestions for such research will be presented in the final discussion chapter.

Readers who hope that this study might lead to a quantifiable understanding of clergy stress will be disappointed. The methodology works with the assumption that stress is too complicated a phenomenon to be quantified. The individual experience of stress is unique and multi-layered.

Conclusion

This chapter has outlined the reasons why I chose a phenomenological interpretive approach involving the obtaining of narratives which are then presented and analysed utilising heuristic and constructivist approaches. Using such methodology the research views stress as an experiential phenomenon to which individuals attribute their own sense of meaning. The stories of stress that clergy share are connected to their larger stories of ministry experience. The chapter has also outlined the research process under the headings of sampling, recruitment and data collection, data analysis and ethical considerations.

The following three chapters will explore the stories of the participants. Chapter 4 will introduce the participants through their individual storylines. Chapters 5 and 6 will present the common themes that emerged from the interviews.

CHAPTER 4

INTRODUCING THE PARTICIPANTS THROUGH THEIR INDIVIDUAL STORYLINES

It has been argued that a narrative approach that draws on heuristic methods, at the same time acknowledging the individual and social construction of narrative is an appropriate method for the research contained in this thesis. The analysis in chapters 4 to 6 takes the form of rich text emerging from the informant stories shared during semi-structured interviews. The story of stress shared by each informant is connected to that person's larger story of ministry. Each informant's story is also part of the larger UCA story. There is a larger story still and it is the story of the wider Australian society. The way in which society speaks of the Christian church impacts the individual stories of clergy. The interview text does not stand in isolation from the larger story of each informant, nor the corporate UCA story, nor even the story of the society in which the UCA is placed.

This chapter consists of the ministry storylines of the individual participants. The stories provide a 'broad brush' approach to the participants' experiences of ministry within the context of their life narrative. The ministry storylines are a 'stitching' together of information from the interviews and my personal knowledge of the participants. They are included to provide the reader with a context in which to embed the extracts from the semi-structured interviews presented later. Permission was granted for the use of these stories, and the names that are used are fictitious to preserve confidentiality. The participants are introduced in the order in which they were interviewed.

In many ways the interviews were collegial encounters. The participants who took part in this research were all known personally to me. They were ministers with whom I had an established collegial relationship. As a researcher from within the 'clergy world' I experienced times of personal 'resonance' as I listened to the stories that were shared.

Sophie

Sophie is a minister in her late forties. She is well educated with a Master of Theology degree and is currently undertaking PhD studies. Sophie has recently completed her first ministry placement in a Sydney suburban setting.

Sophie came into ministry somewhat reluctantly. She began her theological studies with the view that it was *'just something to do.'* During her first year of theological study other students began suggesting to Sophie that perhaps there was another reason for her being there. Slowly Sophie began to entertain the thought of ordained ministry. Thinking about such a possibility brought her up against a part of herself that questioned whether she was a worthy enough person to be a minister. Sophie says,

> *I spent a lot of time fighting and railing against it because, I could not see myself as a suitable person for ministry because I still understood ministers as people,…in some way or other, without fault.* (Sophie)

As a lone parent from an abusive family of origin and an abusive marriage, Sophie could not see herself as an appropriate person for ministry. The tension created by the inner conflict of two competing ideas meant that Sophie's undergraduate work was accompanied by an inner journey of dealing with painful and traumatic memories. Sophie eventually came to a point where she believed that she was being called into ministry. Sophie describes this sense of call as follows:

> *I didn't have the language to understand it and in some ways I still don't have the language to understand it. It's about knowing, and if I was to talk about my call to ministry now, it's probably stronger than it ever was but I still couldn't necessarily find the words to explain it in a very coherent fashion. Apart from, it's an inner knowing.* (Sophie)

Sophie describes her ministry placement as a congregation that had been *'damaged'* during the tenure of a previous minister. She entered the placement with a strong sense that because of her own experiences of abuse and the healing process that she had gone through, she was ideally suited for working with a congregation that had itself been subject to a form of abuse. In

addition to her own experiences, Sophie by this stage had undertaken postgraduate studies in the development of a theology of forgiveness from the perspective of a survivor of abuse. Sophie feels that the combination of her own personal journey and the academic rigour of her study equip her well for such a ministry context.

Sophie finds her ministry placement to be highly stressful. Sophie says that *'when you work with a disempowered and disenfranchised congregation there is nothing but stress.'* Sophie uses the word 'burnout' to describe where this ministry placement has left her. She says that for the last six months of the placement she has been bordering on burnout and finding it difficult to continue functioning in ministry. Sophie is adamant that whatever shape her next ministry placement takes it will not involve her working with a congregation. She recognises that for her own health she needs to separate from that style of ministry.

Sophie believes that her ministry experience is responsible for major impacts on her health. She also reports that the discriminating attitude of many towards female clergy has added to her stress.

Ken

Ken is in his mid forties and is married with three children. He has been a Uniting Church Minister for fifteen years. Prior to entering the life of an ordained minister, Ken had a number of years in various forms of lay ministry. These lay ministry years were formative for Ken in helping him wrestle with the shape and meaning of Christian ministry. Ken believes that his call to professional ministry is closely connected to his identity as a person. Ken says, *'It's at the heart of who I am, it's just how God's lined up my planets.'*

In contrast to Sophie, Ken entered the ordained ministry with a strong sense of call strengthened by what he perceived as *'signs'* of God opening the doors. A pivotal biblical passage for Ken was Micah 7:14ff part of which reads 'Shepherd your people with your staff, the flock of your inheritance, which lives by itself in a forest, in fertile pasturelands. Let them feed in Bashan and Gilead as in days long ago' (NIV).

Ken says

> *I'd got right to the end of the book, chapter 7 from verse 14 onwards, and it just, those words leapt out at me, where while its actually a call for God to be the shepherd of his people, I read it at the time as God calling me to be the shepherd with him of his people. Ah.. and that still is the central image of my sense of call, the sense that God would have me be a shepherd. And I understood that right from the beginning to be both a pastoral and a leadership function.* (Ken)

There are aspects of ministry that are stressful for Ken. The different understandings of faith that are found in a congregational setting were a challenge for Ken in his first ministry placement. Ken, wanting to encourage people to explore and wrestle with faith, found himself in conflict with those who saw faith differently. Ken puts it as follows:

> *Some people see things in very black and white ways and I guess the longer I live and work in the world the more I sense it's just not that black or white. So when you want to paint a picture with more greys in it than just straight black and white and are unwilling to name it in the black and white sort of terms that some people will want, ah, that was a difficulty ... I found that stressful.* (Ken)

Seeking to be an agent of change also leads to stress for Ken. Ken has a strong belief that tasks within churches should be undertaken by people who have the right gifting for those particular tasks. The idea that a ministry should continue because it has always existed, even if there is no one qualified to carry out that ministry is an idea that sits uncomfortably with Ken. Exhorting congregations to match ministry with giftedness has led Ken into conflict with those who have wanted to maintain existing ministries despite a lack of gifted personnel.

The greatest area of stress for Ken has been times when he has had to deal with the disappointment of unrealised goals and expectations. There have been two major instances of this during Ken's ministry, both of which were related to disappointment in the wider church. One was an instance with an international church community and the other was connected with the hierarchy of the UCA. In the first instance the primary sense for Ken was a profound sense of disappointment. In the second instance, which occurred a number of years later, the disappointment was largely related to a sense that the church of which Ken is a part was rejecting him. He felt very alone and deeply hurt. The impact of these events, and in particular, the second set of circumstances was that Ken became depressed. In speaking of that period of time Ken says, *'There were two times in those three years that I was close to suicide.'*

Despite the deep disappointment, Ken says that he remains committed to living out the call that he senses so strongly.

Leanne

Leanne has been a UCA minister for 13 years. Her fist placement was a small rural community in NSW that was facing the inevitability of rural decline. Leanne spent six years there and is currently seven years into a placement in a regional congregation in Sydney. While Leanne was in her first placement, she gave birth to two of her children. Having a pregnant minister was a new experience for both the congregation and the town. Although the church had had a previous woman minister, Leanne was much younger. Leanne's pregnancy meant a major paradigm shift in the minds of many of the congregation. The first placement was also one in which Leanne often had doubts about whether she would be paid. Due to the church's precarious financial situation, there was always uncertainty about whether there would be enough money for the minister's stipend.

Leanne's current placement is a team ministry. The stresses have increased in the last couple of years for Leanne on two fronts. The first is a subtle message that comes from her colleague who is more of a '*workaholic',* that she should always be on the go. In addition to this are some wider church commitments that have been onerous and demanding. Leanne has a perception that as the female in the ministry team, people often expect her to be stressed, whereas stress responses in her male colleague never seem to be noticed. She senses that there is a perception amongst some that as a female she will be more stressed than a male.

Leanne struggles with the unmeasurable nature of ministry. The tension of not knowing when enough is enough, or even how to evaluate what is done, is a stressor for Leanne. Coupled with this are the measurement criteria used by others. Church finances and the number of people in Sunday worship services are often used as the primary criteria of success. Leanne who works at the *'coal face'* of people's lives is privy to ministry that is occurring at a non-public level. Leanne finds it frustrating that this is often not taken into account. It seems that the private sphere of ministry, such as hours of pastoral care with people, is not valued as highly as the number of people in church on a Sunday.

At this point in her current placement Leanne is experiencing tension between her ongoing sense of call and stressors leading to a lack of job satisfaction. Her sense of call to stay in this settlement is connected to a feeling that the congregation is on *'the brink of reaping the fruit of the hard work of the last seven years.'* She wants to be there to see *'the harvest.'*

As a minister who describes herself as a strong pastoral person, Leanne finds the tension between pastoring and administration difficult. A particular area where Leanne finds this tension is when she needs to recruit people for tasks within the life of the congregation.

Max

Max is in his second ministry placement. He has been in ministry nine years and four of those years have been in his current placement. Max's first placement was a large regional centre in NSW. Max looks back at that placement with fond memories. The reasons behind Max and his family moving to their current ministry setting were largely pragmatic. Max says,

> *I guess we were initially drawn here because we like the area, um…that's a very selfish thing to say but it suits us well from a family point of view and um…..also because the church was quite open and seemed to fit us well.* (Max)

However, this setting has proved more difficult and stressful than anticipated. The congregations with which Max works are facing declining numbers and Max has been exploring new ways of undertaking ministry. He is working hard at being an agent of change. Max believes that unless the congregations embrace change, their days are numbered. Max describes the situation as follows:

> *in one way our Parish is going down the gurgler…you know…we've got very few people under 50 in our Parish. Two of the congregations are very small, very old. I mean our NCYC age profile or whatever, our youngest congregation was 60 years and then 63..oh no …63,70 and 73. They were the average ages and um….and that just says you're not going to be around very much longer.* (Max)

Promoting change has brought Max up against a great deal of resistance from those who want to keep the *'status quo.'* Max has been the target of some vitriolic responses and has been scapegoated by members of his own faith community. Max has also been marginalized by non UCA ministry colleagues in his geographical area because of theological differences. They have made it clear to him that he is no longer welcome in the local ministers' association. It was suggested to Max by some members of this association that if he continued to attend the meetings they would not. Max offered to no longer attend. This leaves Max in a quite isolated situation.

Max believes that some of the issues of change that he is facing should have been dealt with by previous ministers. He is convinced that he has inherited problems that could have been worked through years ago. He has inherited a ministry context rife with potential stressors.

Much of the stress that Max experiences is related directly to the ministry context in which he finds himself. Added to this, are stressors that are simply part of the role of being a minister. The time demands of the job and the difficulty of balancing home and ministry life add to the stress that Max experiences.

Although Max experiences ministry as a stressful vocation, Max is able to name a number of stress reducing mechanisms that he finds helpful. Max has a solid understanding of human dynamics and this reduces the likelihood of Max taking things personally. Max also finds supervision and time with supportive colleagues who understand ministry to be helpful. Time with his family is also of immense value to Max.

Sue

Sue is a newcomer to the UCA ordained ministry. Sue is married, with no children, and has been in ministry for a little over a year and a half. Prior to entering the UCA ministry Sue spent thirteen years with a government organisation. During that time Sue sensed that she was being called into the ministry. Sue says, *'I think…well the move was simply I felt God called me and over several years I investigated that call and moved across.'*

Sue's ministry is in a regional congregation in NSW. Sue describes ministry as extremely stressful. The stress has led to health consequences for Sue. Sue lost 17 kilograms in her first twelve months of ministry and she has battled chronic tiredness.

Sue perceives that much of the stress is due to conflict between the job brief that she was given when she was called to the present congregation, and the expectations of the congregation. Sue entered the placement believing that her task was to implement changes that would take the congregation into the future. Throughout her time in this placement she has come against resistance to such changes.

Sue has continued to persevere, at times under high levels of stress. This has largely been due to the strong sense of call that is a part of her experience. In speaking of call, Sue says:

> *Call for me is confirmed by your own sort of sense of innate peace or security about a decision, about what people say or don't say, and for me it tends to be something that is over a period of time.* (Sue)

Sue speaks of staying in the stress filled environment because she would only leave if she felt *'called out'* in the same way that she had been *'called in.'*

Sue's stress is compounded by ways in which some people have treated her. Sue is aware of subtle hints that suggest to her that being a female is an issue for some members of the congregation. Sue relates a conversation with a lady who said

> *'If you were a male they wouldn't even have the courage to ask you about that decision.'* [Sue said,] *It sort of hit me in the face. She's been in the church like 40 years……and she believed that there were definitely issues about women.* (Sue)

With awareness heightened Sue has begun to notice subtle messages that give further verification of this unspoken issue.

Sue finds it helpful to connect with colleagues who understand ministry. Supervision is a helpful part of this. Being involved in a continuing education programme is of assistance in giving her an outside focus away from the pressures of congregational ministry.

Tom

Tom is coming to the end of his second placement as a UCA minister. He has been a member of the clergy for 15 years. Tom's first placement was in a semi-urban fringe of a major Australian city and his current placement has been in a large urban regional church located in a predominantly middle class locality. Tom is in his late forties, is married and has two daughters. He has been in his current placement, a team ministry context, for the last ten years. During this time, Tom has been the team leader. Although working with a team has meant that there has been some freedom for Tom and the other staff to concentrate on their own areas of giftedness, Tom has found that as the team leader he has had to be *'a jack of all trades.'* Tom has found this frustrating at times.

With the passing of time Tom has found that the sense of newness and freshness that was present at the beginning of the current placement, has now diminished. He finds it increasingly difficult to muster the energy to be *'all things to all people.'* Tom says, *'that sense of excitement or adventure or newness about tasks has well and truly gone after this many years of ministry.'*

Tom recognises that he is able to effectively manage most things that ministers are called upon to do. He is not sure whether this is a 'blessing or a curse.' On one hand it is helpful for achieving tasks but this competency delivers an expectation from others that he *'will just be able to do things.'* In actuality, Tom finds some aspects of ministry quite stressful. Tom recognises that his introverted personality type leads to the intense one-on-one nature of the pastoral dimension of ministry being highly stressful. Tom says, *'I've become weary of that dimension of ministry.'*

On the other hand, Tom believes that his personality brings some substantial benefit to the life of the church. Tom has the ability to stand back and be an observer of people and relationships. He is able to see things with more clarity because he is able to bring a degree of objectivity that others can not. Tom says *'I tend to be somebody who ...who ah...kind of stands back and sees the bigger picture and so can help people explore getting some perspective on issues in their lives.'*

Tom is becoming more aware of the physical cost of ministry stress. Tom expresses a strong belief that for him the most stressful part of ministry is being the *'public person.'* He dislikes being the centre of attention and the adrenaline that he needs to draw upon to cope with the public demands of ministry is now recognised by Tom as a potential health threat.

Over the last twelve months Tom has been faced with major health issues. After considering medical opinions and research, Tom has become convinced that the style of ministry that he has been exercising is one that has the potential to impact his health in the future. For this reason Tom has made the decision to remove himself from congregational ministry.

Jill

Jill is in her third congregational placement. She has been a minister within the UCA for 15 years. Jill is married with two daughters. She also has an adult stepson and stepdaughter. Jill's current congregational placement is half time and she has a half time position on the academic staff of a theological college.

When Jill speaks about stress as a minister she quickly turns to experiences that she has had in working with and dealing with the bureaucracy of the UCA. Jill speaks of frustration with the ways in which the UCA bureaucracy deal with contentious employment issues. Having come from the business world prior to ministry training, Jill believes that often the corporate world deals with people in more helpful ways than does the Church. Jill adds that her idealism contributes to her sense of frustration. She recognises that although she should know better, she still has an idealistic view of the Church.

In contrast to her experience with Church hierarchy, Jill expresses satisfaction with her actual work as a minister in a congregation. But alongside this sense of satisfaction is the acknowledgement that

> *I feel like I'm on the edge of leaving most of the time. Even though I would say with hindsight that I really enjoy the ministry, I constantly feel like 'okay this is the last one, this is it. I can't do it anymore.'* (Jill)

Jill finds the juggling of the demands of ministry with family life a major area of stress in her life. Jill feels '*pushed to the edge'* all the time and ministry impacts her family in a way that she does not like. She sees this concern of hers as gender specific. She believes that the juggling of work and family time is much more of an issue for her than it is for her husband who is also in full time work.

Jill recognises that she pushes herself. She perceives herself as being involved in three jobs that she is trying to do to the fullest possible extent. These are *'the mother thing,'* working as a congregational minister and working with students at the theological college.

When asked what keeps her in ministry, Jill says that it is her sense of call that keeps her going. In speaking of this sense of call Jill uses language that suggests mixed feelings. In speaking of it Jill says,

> *that's the bane of my existence I think. The minute that goes I'm free… It's a funny thing, it's very strong and always has been and every time I've contemplated maybe this is time to leave um….I haven't been able to do that with any sense of peace.* (Jill)

Jill acknowledges the role of family of origin issues in her experience of stress. Jill comes from a family in which her father held and continues to hold strong beliefs that women should be homemakers and:

> *… that educating women is a waste of time and money….So that little voice runs around. I have a go at him, I always have but it doesn't stop. That voice is there, 'you should be at home, if you were a good mother you would be..'* (Jill)

Of major assistance to Jill has been the relationships that she has with people who have no connection with the church. She values these relationships highly and is intentional in making sure that her church life is kept separate.

Janine

Janine is five years into her first placement as a UCA clergy member. The placement is in a major commercial district of Sydney. Janine is married to a clergyman and has two adult children and a younger teenage son living at home. The ministry placement in which Janine finds herself is a full time placement. In addition, Janine is a Police Chaplain.

The chaplaincy work has produced periods of increased stress for Janine. There are times when the chaplaincy role takes Janine into critical incident work. Such work can be emotionally taxing and therefore tiring.

Janine finds that there are times when life becomes a difficult balancing of roles. Full time ministry and chaplaincy combined with the role of mother and wife make for a particularly full work load. Janine says:

> *So it is a kind of juggling act and there are always people in the congregation who you could be visiting…I don't regard the chaplaincy and the congregation as the main things I'm juggling. The main things I'm juggling is all the other more domestic issues in life as well as the ministry things. And that's where I find the pressure comes.* (Janine)

Janine is frustrated that the competing demands of the various roles she has, lead her to never feel that she is giving her best. Janine feels tired much of the time.

Janine speaks of a troublesome relationship with a past member of her church that produced a great deal of stress. Although it was a pastoral relationship it was also a friendship. Due to a misunderstanding on the part of this friend the relationship became fractured. This has been problematic for Janine. Janine recognises two significant aspects of this situation that have added to the stress. One is that it was a friendship that is now lost and the other is that for Janine it remains unfinished business. It feels like there is a lack of resolution.

Janine experiences tension between two different aspects of the ministry to which she feels called. On one hand she recognises the importance of working pastorally with her congregation. At the same time she has a deep sense that her task is to challenge what she sees as the status quo in her congregation. Janine has a deep passion for social justice. This includes an interest in inter-faith dialogue. This passion is drawing Janine more and more to those outside her immediate community of faith. This is another example of the juggling of issues with which Janine feels she is compelled to engage and balance.

Janine struggles also with a lack of feedback from those to whom she ministers. This makes it difficult for her to have any clear way of measuring how her ministry is progressing.

Janine speaks of having lots of competing demands running around in her head. She notes,

> *I think it's all different things ... all the different things I carry in my head about time, about what is required for school things and very basic things like that and...to the running around a lot to um...having a husband who is very supportive but extremely busy.* (Janine)

When stress levels are running high, Janine recognises a tendency to try and bring things under control. This is an aspect of herself of which she has only recently become aware. Janine is a reflective person and her self-awareness helps her in coping with the stress that she experiences in ministry.

Janine recognises a number of strategies that she uses for de-stressing. Meditation is an important part of her life as is being intentional about taking *'time out.'* Janine also values the time that she spends with a spiritual director.

Although stress is a companion to Janine in her ministry she finds ministry to be an immensely satisfying vocation.

Conclusion

The stories that have been outlined in this chapter hint at a number of themes. It seems that promoting change can be a stress inducing activity for UCA clergy. This is present in the stories of Ken, Max and Sue. The impact of stress on clergy health can be quite significant. Sophie, Ken, Sue, Tom and Janine related quite significant impacts of stress in ministry. There are signs of discrimination present in the female stories (Sophie, Leanne and Sue). In two of the stories (Sue and Jill), there are hints of a sense of call being something that can keep a person locked into a stress filled ministry.

There are aspects of these stories that I find myself resonating with due to my own ministry experience. These include the stress connected with trying to bring about change and the way in which a sense of call can make it difficult to give up ministry. I also relate strongly with those participants who speak of the difficulties in measuring ministry effectiveness. The themes which are hinted at in the storylines become more obvious in the more detailed textual analysis that makes up the next two chapters.

CHAPTER 5

A MYSTERIOUS CALLING: GROUP NARRATIVES ABOUT STRESS IN MINISTRY

Introduction

The previous chapter has introduced the eight research participants through their individual storylines about their experience of stress in ministry. In this chapter I will be focussing on the interweaving of these stories through the recurring themes that emerged from the interview transcripts. Although each interview was an event in time, the heuristic nature of the analysis has meant that the interviews have played themselves over many times in my mind through ongoing immersion, transcribing, and analysing of narrative. It is as if I have been engaged in an ongoing dialogue with each of the participants. The narrative that is included in this chapter (and also chapter 6) has therefore also become 'my' narrative. I have selected it as important for inclusion as a result of the ongoing internal dialogue just mentioned.

The recurring themes around which the narrative is arranged are, the relationship between a sense of call and stress, the stress related to promoting change, the bureaucracy, context, impact of stress, blurred boundaries, conflict, measuring ministry, personality and stress, and female clergy and stress. These themes are grouped under the headings of narratives of call, the narratives of stress and female clergy and stress. The first of these headings reflects the amount of narrative that focussed on call and its connection to clergy stress. Narrative about stress was divided into the two headings of narratives of stress and female clergy and stress to distinguish between those experiences of stress that were common to both male and female and those that were unique to female clergy.

Narratives of call

Call is an important theme in these narratives about stress in ministry. Admittedly, I raised the idea of call in the first two interviews, indicating how central the notion of call is to my understanding of the topic, but I found that it continued to emerge in subsequent interviews despite a conscious effort on my part not to raise it. A sense of call is in the foreground of not only my own understanding of ministry but the understanding of the participants. In analysing the data I asked myself the question, 'How does the sense of call relate to the experience of and response to stress?

Six of the eight informants speak of a sense of call. Five of these six state that it is this sense of being called that keeps them in ministry during difficult times.

Sophie, though feeling stressed and *'burnt out',* reports that her sense of call is *'stronger than ever'*. Sue reports that she endured intense levels of stress until she sensed that she was being *'called out'* of a particular ministry context. Speaking of this she says,

> *I'd gone kicking and screaming not wanting to go to (place name). I wanted to go out country somewhere where there was a struggling church that really needed me rather than a, what looked like a very middle class, very wealthy, very 'got it all together' church. So from about September till about December I hung in there thinking no I still don't feel called out.* (Sue)

When explaining why she continues to stay in ministry Jill says,

> *…that's my sense of call and that's the really, that's the bane of my existence I think. The minute that goes I'm free (laughter).*(Jill)

She elaborates by saying

> *It's a funny thing, it's very strong and always has been and every time I've contemplated maybe this is time to leave um… I haven't been able to do that with any sense of peace.* (Jill)

Janine also states that it is the sense of vocation that stops her walking away from ministry;

> *… I do think there is, I mean a sense of call thing, I mean something that comes back at times when I feel, 'Why don't I just give all this away.' There are times when I've felt like walking, turning around and walking away from everything and, I think I couldn't do that, I really couldn't do that.* (Janine)

Ken who sees his sense of call as central to who he is as a person says:

> *The church has sometimes felt like a hard taskmaster. And people are often problematic; people are often difficult to work with, but my sense of call from God has always only ever been a positive thing. If it was more ambivalent maybe I could let it go.* (Ken)

The sense of vocation that keeps these informants in ministry leads them to stay in situations that are emotionally painful. It seems that vocation can be viewed as either a 'blessing' or a 'curse.' It could be argued that it is a blessing in the sense that it helps these informants to keep going in difficult circumstances. It could also be argued that it is a curse because it prevents them from leaving circumstances that are potentially detrimental to their well being. Some of the descriptions of emotional pain are quite vivid. Sue, drawing on biblical imagery says,

> *One person I really identified with in this time was Jeremiah and ... there's one part where he's sitting in this pit and they're throwing dung on him and all that sort of stuff, (laughter) and I sort of thought, 'That's the image I have for me at the moment.'* (Sue)

Three of the informants make it clear that the sense of call to ministry that they experience has such priority in their lives that it influences the rest of life, including marriage. Ken explains that it took his wife many years to understand:

> *I think it took her some years to realize how over- riding my sense of call is. And while I'm happy to leave the church, to seek ministry out, outside of the church or alongside the church or something like that, I can't really let go of the sense of call.* (Ken)

Ken's comment makes it clear that his understanding of call is broader than professional ministry.

Before Sue was married she said to her fiancé,

> *I think I'm being called into ministry. You have to understand that that's probably what I'm going to do if you want to be married.*

Jill believes that it is likely that her sense of call to professional ministry will one day come to an end but that while it is there she will not be able to ignore it and be happy.

> *Um, probably because it's an area that I don't think I have a heap of control that's why I think, I like to be in control (pause) the call doesn't go away no matter what I do to control it, it doesn't change. It's just that nice reminder that I'm not in control and that I don't like (laughter). I'm happy to live with it, yeah so, and I suspect it will go one day.*
> *... I mean if I make a choice not to do it then um, it's no choice at all. It's like being forced into something. So then you're not in control, someone else is making you do it, or something else.*
> *... I still get the sense that there's a choice, except that making the choice is not going to make you happy.*

Jill seems to link her happiness with obedience to her call.

The phenomenon of call is a difficult concept to describe. This difficulty was alluded to in chapter 1. Three of the female informants refer to it as something that is experienced internally.

It is interesting that none of the male informants make mention of this. For Sophie it is an inner knowing:

> *It's about knowing, and if I was to talk about my call to ministry now, it's probably stronger than it ever was but I still couldn't necessarily find the words to explain it in a very coherent fashion. Apart from, it's an inner knowing.* (Sophie)

Both Sue and Janine refer to it as something experienced in the back of the head. Sue says *'I always had that sense in the back of my head --- that God had other plans for me.'* Janine says,

> *....because I went into ministry late I'd had a lot of time knowing that this was something in the background of my mind and that I'd thought very seriously about doing it at that stage of my life. I felt that everything pointed towards that and that there really was a feeling of being called to that.* (Janine)

This internal knowing mentioned by female informants mirrors Palmer's (2000) view of call outlined in chapter 1. The emphasis in this approach to call is listening to one's life.

In contrast to 'inner knowing,' external signs of call are deemed important by some informants. Sophie and Sue who mention inner knowing also refer to the credence that they place on the opinions of others. Sophie had not entertained the thought of a ministry vocation until it was put to her by others. In reference to her first year at theological college Sophie says:

> *During my first year of being there, they kept talking about this call thing and I didn't know what it was… But it became more of a case of, by the end of the year...you're actually doing this for another reason, you just don't realize it yet, which was, um, voiced to me by some of the students there.* (Sophie)

Sue, who speaks of a strong belief that God has recently called her out of a painful ministry placement refers to hearing this call through the voice of a person with loose connections to her church:

> *And he came up to me one day and he said 'Sue, God tells me that you're resigning, that you're going somewhere else. He's got other plans for you.' I was just blown away cause I'd never spoken to him about anything. He knows nothing about the church politics and …then saying to God 'if I'm really hearing what you're saying properly, I need a clear indication from someone I can't manipulate.* (Sue)

Regardless of explanations as to why this man said these words to Sue, it is clear that Sue believes that she was hearing the voice of God. Sue's use of the word 'call' in this instance is interesting in that it refers to a call out rather than a call to. Vocation or call as it is usually understood is a call to something not a call away from something. It could be argued that the 'call out' experience of Sue may be a calling to something else, but Sue does not give any hint of any new sense of direction in the interview. The call out is about an ending of pain.

Ken and Sue refer to other external signs that confirm the reality of their experience of call. They both mention a belief that doors were opened for them when they were applying as candidates for ministry. Ken says:

> *…in the space of six days, I'd jumped every hurdle. While this is a coincidental thing, in terms of call, I sensed that just the way the process was expedited it seemed to be, it was made remarkably easy.* (Ken)

In a similar fashion, alluding to a sense of call that she experienced when she gained a position with a major federal government organisation, Sue says:

> *It was interesting, cause when I went in I was 19 and normally they take people in their late 20s and 30s and it normally takes about 2 years and it took 4 months to get through all the processes so…for me there's indicators 'well God seems to be opening doors.' Sort of my evangelical background I guess.* (Sue)

Like Ken, Sue clearly believes that call is not limited to professional ministry.

There is another dimension to the UCA understanding of call outlined in the following words from Sue.

> *One of the reasons I was called was to grow them into a regional church and bring the structures into place. So when I started doing that, um, some people were very happy and some people were very cranky because they didn't believe that's what I'd been called for.* (Sue)

Sue is referring to a call to a particular congregation. The UCA language of call suggests that there are different levels of call: the call to be a minister is followed by the call to a particular congregation. It is this call that Sue speaks of here. Sue's words highlight the tension that can exist when there are differences between a minister's understanding of why they are called to a particular congregation and the understanding of that call amongst people in the congregation.

The data outlined above indicates that ministry is often perceived by clergy to be more than a job. There is often a perception of divine appointment to it, which leads it to taking priority over much of life. In other professions, work choices are often made on the basis of that which is pragmatic. For clergy it is often this sense of vocation, or being called that is central. Clergy may be willing to endure great psychic pain in their efforts to be faithful to the call that they believe they have experienced. From the stories of the participants there is the suggestion that having a sense of call may keep people in stress filled situations.

Some participants allow their sense of call to determine major life decisions. The stories suggest that call can be experienced as an internal phenomenon or through the voices of others. It is of note that it is only women participants who report call as an internal phenomenon.

The enshrining of the concept of call or vocation by the UCA through its constitution and regulations may place subtle pressure on ministers to experience a call and speak in such language. Call may be a social construction. Further consideration will be given to these matters in chapter 7.

The narratives of stress

The narratives that were provided in the interviews show that stress is a reality in the lives of all of the informants. There were a number of common themes that emerged in relation to the stress experienced.

The stress related to promoting change

The data that follows shows that some UCA clergy feel the burden of implementing change in an effort to be more aligned to the modern social and cultural context. Five of the eight informants speak of experiencing stress connected to their efforts to be agents of change within their congregations.

When Ken decided to implement change in his first placement, people found his approach disconcerting. Ken says, '*It was stressful because people didn't like me putting everything up for grabs, they wanted everything nailed down.'* The changes that Ken implemented meant that some of the things the congregation had always done were not going to be done. The response of one person was, *'You can't run a church like that.'*

Max deals with hurtful responses to change that he seeks to implement. Max believes that there is no future for the congregations with which he works unless there is change. But the people are fearful of change and so Max finds himself caught in the middle. Max speaks of the frustration:

> *I guess I was frustrated, and I guess it was a cause of stress because you know, in one way our parish is going down the gurgler, you know, we've got very few people under 50 in our*

> *Parish. Two of the congregations are very small, very old. I mean our NCLS age profile or whatever, our youngest congregation was 60 years and then 63..oh no, 63,70 and 73. They were the average ages and um (pause) and that just says you're not going to be around very much longer.* (Max)

The level of anger amongst some of Max's parishioners are such that they speak of refusing to accept communion from him.

Sue, like Max, speaks of being caught in the middle of conflicting expectations. Sue accepted her ministry placement believing that she had a mandate to implement change. She quickly found that the reality is very different.

> *I wasn't prepared not to be missional, so you've got two stubborn things (laughter) clashing, you know like, 'Well what do I give up? I'm not prepared to give up these things. This is my sense of call and who I am and it was on my profile and on your profile that's what you wanted.' So, I guess at (Place name) the one steady thing that I kept feeling my sense of call was they needed a change. They needed a kick up the back side basically.* (Sue)

Sue's determination to be an agent of change costs her greatly in terms of stress. She says,

> *There was some strong resistance in some areas because some of the people who'd been in power in inverted commas or in positions for 5,10 or 15 years could clearly see that they didn't have the gifts for the new roles and that was unsettling for them I think. Scary, and it got to the point with me, I was so, I think stressed and um debilitated by a whole lot of stuff that was happening that there were a few people in the congregation that I just didn't talk to anymore.* (Sue)

Janine also experiences a sense of being caught in the middle. She speaks of existing forms of ministry that she sees as important and valid but also of a passion and drive for moving into new areas of ministry:

> *The stress in more general terms has been related to ministry in an aging congregation where um, there are a lot of other things happening around the edges and that I feel very committed to not just being a chaplain for the elderly but to be being the church in the world and our neighbourhood.* (Janine)

Adding to Janine's dilemma is her fundamental belief that the Christian gospel challenges the value systems of Western society.

> *I think there's always a feeling that there's an element of rebelliousness not just about me but about what I feel the gospel is called to be in terms of being, rebelling against the status quo of so much of society today and um, it's very easy to um, take an easier option, and a more comfortable option which is the wrong option.* (Janine)

Both Tom and Janine speak of a belief that ministry involves a delicate balancing act. This balancing is between meeting and challenging congregational expectations. Tom says,

> *For me it's kind of the backdrop against which all of ministry happens. It's a constant, it's a constant dance between needing to a degree ah, meet people's expectations, as faulty as*

> *they may be, so that you can establish a working relationship with them and then yet at the very same time seek to challenge their understandings and expectations and break them and step beyond them.* (Tom)

In a similar vein Janine says,

> *There's the tension there between um really two strands of ministry and being able to do, what is a very necessary fundamental totally worthwhile ministry for people who are aging, and which I really enjoy and also being able to sometimes be more radical and in the way that I always felt inclined to be and theologically as well. And I suppose that's always been hard to balance and I think one needs to balance.* (Janine)

It is significant that Max and Sue, the two informants who are seeking to implement major change in their congregations, name competing expectations as a major source of stress. In Max's case the competing expectations relate to the old and new, the traditional and the innovative.

> *...what I'm finding is that there's a bit of stress now between a few people who um, one person who is extremely liturgical in outlook and thinks that the way that things have been done since the 4th century is just about, you know, the way. And there's a conflict between some one like that and the need to develop worship that is interesting and inviting to families. So that's a bit of a stress and I guess that just represents more of the competing, you know, demands for different styles of worship and so on.* (Max)

Sue's experience has been that the 'winds of change' create tension between those who wish to embrace change and those who are resistant.

> *One of the reasons I was called was to grow them into a regional church and bring the structures into place. So when I started doing that, um, some people were very happy and some people were very cranky because they didn't believe that's what I'd been called for. So, I think, what I found stressful initially was juggling that sort of grief and bitterness about well 'hang on I got told very squarely by this group of people this is why I was coming and now I'm hearing all these other things.'* (Sue)

In the above stories it appears that ministers and their congregations often have very different views of what the future of the church should be. While clergy often have change at the forefront of their mind, congregations can find the thought of change threatening and unnerving. This clash of viewpoint sometimes causes tension leading to clergy stress. The minister may become the proverbial 'meat in the sandwich' between a hierarchy that wants change and a congregation that wants to maintain its traditions. This intersects with my own experience of a subtle pressure to be an agent of change. The recent experiences of Max and Sue highlight that competing expectations within congregations can add further to the dilemmas surrounding change.

Institutional and Structural Issues: The Bureaucracy

Congregations in the UCA do not operate in isolation to the wider denomination. Ministers are often the bridge between congregations and the wider councils of the church. Involvement with the UCA at a denominational level is a potential stressor for UCA clergy.

Five of the eight participants regard the institution of the UCA as a stressor. A factor in this stress is frustrated expectation. At times when these participants wanted support, it felt like they received the opposite.

Feeling unsupported by the UCA is an experience shared by both male and female clergy. Such experience is seen in the stories of Sue and Ken. Sue experienced what she perceived as a lack of support by the UCA when she ended up in a situation of conflict with the congregation with which she was working. She says,

> *I think in hindsight that Presbytery should have intervened more and earlier but they are also very under resourced and they were,.. I was meeting with the Presbytery minister every month but that was like 'How are you going and like got any strategies or whatever.' But, I realise, or I think now what should have been happening, is they should have also been talking to the congregation saying, 'Sue's struggling, What are your issues? What are your expectations?' and doing some education for the congregation as opposed to just the minister.* (Sue)

Sue's comments suggest that it is not enough to offer individual support. Systemic support is also necessary. Sue's experience of frustration with the UCA institution is not limited to the Presbytery. She was frustrated by what she perceived as a lack of honesty in the negotiating process at the beginning of her ministry placement. In speaking of this Sue says, *'I went through a stage where I was so angry at the JNC (Joint Nominating Committee) for lying to me.'* The lie that Sue is speaking of here relates to being given inaccurate information about the ministry settlement that she is working in.

At a time when Ken was seeking out a ministry placement at the completion of further studies overseas, he found the bureaucracy to be unhelpful. Ken reports:

> *There'd been a change of regime while I had been away and they really didn't want to know me when I came back. After 18 months there was one episode, in the light of which (wife's name) said, 'Ken, you've got to go and see a doctor now.' She said, 'you're depressed.' ...it's a slow transition out of that. And I think, again it was a profound disappointment of unrealized expectations.* (Ken)

Ken believes that this difficulty related to his unwillingness to take whatever he was offered.

> *Because I didn't take what they offered, they even made it appallingly difficult for me to get back in, and I thought, what the, what the heck am I doing this over here for.* (Ken)

Max and Jill both experienced frustration as a result of UCA institutional representatives acting in ways that they perceived as inept. Max reports on what happened when he invited Synod and Presbytery representatives to assist in a conflict situation that he was experiencing with his congregations:

> *It was an absolute disaster (laughter). Ah, just miscommunication. A bit of agro from the Synod and Presbytery people really put our people off side and it was just a real mess.* (Max)

When part of a Synod committee, Jill became alarmed at the process.

> *Doing the task was fine, I mean I don't kind of get so emotionally attached that I can't make rational decisions. It's actually something I can do. But what annoyed me was after doing that and after going through all the pain and sacking people left right and centre, I think five people lost their jobs in that round, um, then to discover that the money was in other accounts. It wasn't um, the money was there.* (Jill)

Jill continues,

> *I'm probably too idealistic I think, I get very frustrated with what I see as behaviour that's very bureaucratic and not helpful um, ...It's a major source of stress and hence I have withdrawn from all Synod committees.* (Jill)

Jill describes her experience of working at a Synod level as *'kryptonite to superman as Synod is to me um, just too debilitating.'*

Jill's experience reflects the expectation that is placed on UCA clergy to spend some time working for the wider UCA in addition to congregational duties. Leanne reports that the sheer weight of such additional work is a stressor:

> *The new stressor has been some of the stuff to do with Presbytery, because that's been a very heavy load with short term deadlines, dealing with people's lives. So if any of the things that I have to pick I would say that that is the one, that has been on top of, that I could have done without.* (Leanne)

In addition to the experiences outlined above, two other potential sources of stress emerge. The first is consultative culture of the UCA and how this relates to leadership in the UCA. The second is the ambiguous power relationship that exists between a minister and the congregation in the UCA.

In a conversation that Max had with a friend who is an Anglican minister, the friend expressed his belief that the consultative process of leadership in the UCA is *'an appalling approach to*

leadership.' Max reports that his friend would just make the changes that he felt necessary and let the people catch up.

> *I've thought about that and so I sort of feel that to some extent our Uniting Church says that people are important, that congregations are important, that they ought to have input. And I think that that's all good stuff, but I can see what he's saying that it is pretty limiting. Um, there comes a point at which you say, 'Are we actually doing more harm to the congregation by consulting and talking and everything else? Would it just be healthier for the church if you could just make the changes?' Um however you do that. And then um, move on.* (Max)

Max's comments suggest that the consultative decision making emphasis in the Uniting Church makes it difficult for UCA clergy to lead, thereby adding to their stress. This suggests a degree of ambiguity within the UCA understanding of leadership.

The ambiguous nature of the power relationship between minister and congregation is seen in a comment that Leanne makes. She says,

> *When I was at (place name), once a year I would actually bring to the Parish council 'This is what I'm spending my time doing, are you happy with that? Is that okay, or is there something else you'd like me to do? And if that's the case what do you want me to drop?' Part of that I think is my accountability to them, because they're the ones I'm responsible too, and part of that is making sure that I'm doing the right thing.* (Leanne)

The question, 'Who is the leader'? arises from this comment. Whilst ministers are called to be leaders of congregations, they can also feel accountable to their congregation who pays the minister's stipend. It seems that there may be uncertainty for many clergy regarding how much authority they have for leadership.

There is some tension between the comments of Max and Sue above. Max expresses some frustration about not being able to be more authoritarian in leadership while Leanne seems quite at home using a consultative approach to leadership. I find myself wondering if this contrast in outlook is reflective of gender.

UCA clergy do not always feel supported by the UCA bureaucracy. Participants report that the church bureaucracy adds to the stress of already stressful situations. Sometimes this added stress comes through behaviour that clergy perceive to be inept and unprofessional. The expectation that UCA clergy commit extra time to work for the wider UCA can further add to the burden of ministry.

There are signs that particular features of decision making in the UCA may lead to some uncertainty and ambiguity in relation to leadership for UCA ministers.

The Immediate Context: The local congregation

In addition to factors directly related to the broader culture of the UCA, there is the immediate context in which a particular member of the clergy carries out ministry. The congregational context is another component in the stress experience of clergy. Following are participant narratives around stressful aspects of congregational life.

The contextual factors named as relating to the experience of stress by participants are understandably varied. This is to be expected given the idiosyncratic nature of ministry placements. The contextual issues that contribute to stress include, working with an *'abused congregation',* congregational financial difficulties, multi-culturalism, a church with a history of conflict and carrying out additional ministry roles to congregational duties.

Congregational financial difficulties are named as significant by three of the informants. In one of her ministry placements Leanne experienced constant uncertainty about whether there would be enough money to pay her stipend. Although she was always paid, she lived with a constant cloud hanging over her:

> *Almost every month the treasurer would say to me. I don't know if we have enough money to pay you. So that was an underlying concern in some ways. There were certain times where I was scraping through the piggy bank to buy milk. I knew that pay would happen in the next couple of days but not necessarily the time that I needed it. So, it wasn't easy from that respect but, they never missed a month. It wasn't as if, like some other horror stories I've heard from other ministers in other places. It wasn't as bad as that.* (Leanne)

Leanne's comments indicate her knowledge of other UCA clergy who were being affected financially. The stress of this financial situation was compounded for Leanne by a belief that ministry is often measured by financial security. The church financial crisis also impacted on Leanne's sense of self-worth:

> ***Researcher:*** *Sorry, can I just check one thing? I'm interested, when you said that the treasurer each month would half in jest say, 'I'm not sure that we've got enough money to pay you', what was that like for you? Hearing that month after month?* ***Leanne:*** *Um, wearing, you know. But I was also aware of the reality of that. And I also knew the length of terms of the grants that we received. Ah, also knowing that there's an expectation that a lot of people measure ministry by if you're being effective in your ministry the results of that are bottoms on pews, money in the plate.*

Compounding the issue further for Leanne was the knowledge that although there were question marks over her stipend, she was well off in comparison with many of the church members who were struggling financially due to the rural decline in the community to which Leanne was ministering. In commenting on this Leanne says,

> *It was that underlying sense of um, guilt in some ways, that yes I was comfortable in comparison to a lot of the other people, but also recognising, 'hey I gave them their money's worth.'* (Leanne)

Leanne experienced a double bind of not being sure about her own financial security and guilt due to being better off financially than many others.

Sue found that not long after she began her first ministry placement, questions surrounding finances emerged. She reports,

> *We had a full time accredited youth worker, full time minister, me coming on board, a half time ministry assistant which I think the wages and extras approximated to $140,000, something like that. They were getting in $65,000 and had been chewing reserves for the last like four years.* (Sue)

Sue had not been told this information prior to commencing ministry in the placement. Within the first few weeks of her placement Sue was being pressured to address the financial situation.

> *They didn't actually have the money and so the first couple of weeks I got in there I started getting pressure to start preaching sermons on giving ... I'm trying to make connections with people not start off by saying, 'Well now I'm here you've got to pay for me.' So that put me under a little bit of pressure at the beginning although I resisted it.* (Sue)

The difficulty with congregational finances is not limited to female informants. Max experiences a different kind of financial double bind. Max is minister to three congregations struggling to survive financially. He wants to implement changes in an attempt to address this difficulty but is meeting great resistance within the congregations that he is seeking to serve. *'We are under financial pressure now so we have to do something. (pause) I don't know there's something about needing to take steps to be a bit, thinking a bit ahead.'*

In speaking of the reaction of people to suggested changes Max says, *'When we have made some suggestions people have really um, you know gone off the deep end.'*

The experiences of Leanne, Sue and Max indicate that financial difficulties in churches can produce stress for the clergy. These three are the only participants in placements pressured by financial difficulties. It is significant that all three name finances as a source of stress. It would

seem that in the eyes of some church members, ministry success is determined by a minister's ability to solve financial crises. Financial crises in congregations may well have the power to influence a minister's sense of effectiveness and self-esteem.

'Blurred boundaries' between home and church life

The data from the interviews suggests that clergy experience stress due to difficulty in drawing clear boundaries around the tasks of ministry. Ken is the exception.

Six of the eight informants speak of the unrealistic amounts of time that they spend on the job as being a major determinant in the difficulty of keeping clear boundaries between work and personal life. Sophie muses,

> *I guess, what I didn't know was how much time I'd have to give to it. It was not a forty hour week job. And its not necessarily a 60 hour a week job, because when you visit people you don't necessarily have a half hour conversation and walk out of the house and its really nice to see you Mrs Jones.* (Sophie)

Leanne reports working 50 hours a week on average. *'I try and cut that down but sometimes you can't do much about that.'*

Max believes that the expectations upon clergy are unrealistic.

> *A lot of it's just a lot of work. I mean there's just a lot of stuff to do. One of the things that I try to say to myself is actually the expectations in terms of work in ministry is probably, is probably unrealistic.* (Max)

Max responds to these unrealistic expectations by trying to prioritize and do the most important things. But even this does not resolve the tension that he experiences.

> *I just have to prioritize and do the most important things, but that's hard. And that means that you're living with a certain amount of tension the whole time because you know there are things undone.* (Max)

Like Max, Sue reports that the *'in tray'* just keeps piling up. Sue speaks of the guilt that she experiences if she does not get the work down to what she believes to be a reasonable level:

> *Your in tray is this big and it just keeps piling up and always knowing that there's something there and sort of wanting to get it done, wanting to finish but rationally knowing that you're not going to finish and somehow wanting to get to a certain point. Yeah, I'd feel guilty sometimes about not getting things done as quickly as what other people wanted.* (Sue)

This has led to real difficulty for Sue in delineating when she is on duty and when she is not. It has impinged on her home life by making it difficult for her to take days off.

> *I found that stressful because I could never delineate so I ended up never really taking my days off because there was always somebody else that needs you.* (Sue)

Tom describes the dilemma succinctly when he says *'I think the greater area of stress for me has simply been the, the periods of intense work load.'*

Janine acknowledges that as a clergyperson there are ongoing levels of busyness and that when crises are added to this existing busyness there is resulting stress.

> *It's the ongoing level of too much busyness following on perhaps from a crisis or two or three and no time, no time to process it and wind down. I think that's probably where the stress comes in more.* (Janine)

Max, Sue and Janine report boundaries that, to use Max's term *'bleed into one another.'* Max says,

> *I'm probably not very good at keeping those boundaries. I like having the office here rather than having an office in church, not that we've got a space for it, but um, even so I like having it here at home just because, I guess because the stage the kids, I still run the kids around of an afternoon to some things and that's helpful. But um also I work at night, you know Saturday night I'll be up late finishing a sermon or whatever else and um, it's better to be able to do that at home.* (Max)

Sue speaks of the lack of clarity over boundaries by contrasting her role in the clergy with a previous career:

> *In my previous career you do your overtime or whatever but at six o' clock you go home. Probably for half my career, the other half I was always on call but if I was on call I was on call for something specific and when it was over you went home again whereas ministry is kind of like constant. People always ringing and knocking on your door and so I found that dif,- I found that stressful.* (Sue)

Janine speaks of the boundary dilemma in terms of a constant changing of hats. *'It's the changing hats all the time or piling all the hats on top of one another.'* This statement seems to suggest that you can not even take *'a hat'* off before you put on another one. You have to wear all of them all the time.

A comment from Sophie highlights the particular difficulty that can exist for a single minister in regard to the work-home interface. She reports,

> *One of the stressful things was balancing home and work ummm because of the kind of congregation I was in and because of my family circumstance being the only parent. Umm, or what do you call it, the only primary care giver.* (Sophie)

The sheer work load of ministry adds to the stress experience of clergy. There is never an empty in tray and it can be difficult for clergy to determine when enough is enough. Perhaps the

vocational emphasis on ministry adds to the difficulty in boundary definition. A job has clearly delineated hours, but ministry is seen to be about all of life. A minister is always on duty.

Dealing with conflict

Added to the work load of ministry and the difficulty in knowing when enough is enough, is the amount of time spent relating to people. When relating at deep levels with people there is the likelihood that tension and conflict will occasionally emerge. The participants' stories indicate that working to promote change heightens the potential for conflict. Sometimes the conflict that needs to be dealt with by clergy is between competing groups of people within the congregation whom the minister is serving. Conflict is cited by some participants as a source of stress.

Sue reports stress resulting both from conflict in which she has been directly involved and conflict between different groups within the congregation to which she ministers. In speaking of the conflict in which she was directly involved Sue says,

> *I'd go to a church council meeting and I'd just close down because I'd been to several in a row where I was yelled at or was ambushed about things that I had no idea were coming up.*

She reports that during this time she felt disempowered and unsafe on the church premises if she was on her own. There is a possibility that the feelings of threat of which Sue speaks, were influenced to some extent by her previous career which involved dealing with crime.

In speaking of conflict between disparate groups in the church, Sue reports,

> *the first group I would say was larger and that caused me an incredible amount of stress because I couldn't take everyone on board and it became very problematic because you'd say something and or this group would say something and this other group would project or not hear what was being said and it just got worse and worse and worse to a point where some people weren't talking to each other.* (Sue)

This conflict was related primarily to tensions over suggested changes. Sue states that,

> *what happened was there was a group of us that moved forward reasonably quickly in some respects, depending on who you talked too, and there was a group that was kind of like an anchor that didn't like it, for whatever reason*. (Sue)

Max also reports conflict connected with tension over change. Speaking of this he says,

> *…when we have made some suggestions people have really um….you know gone off the deep end…I get sent a letter with twenty signatures underneath it …you know….saying how they feel totally distraught and um…what were the words they used? That they felt…um…uncared for and so on and what they said was, 'what we think should happen is'….and they wrote exactly what is happening now.* (Max)

Leanne notes a conflict that arose on a Sunday morning between worship services:

> *Two of the key leaders in the congregation had a spit down hands up fight in between two of the worship services one Sunday morning, and so I had to deal with that.*
> ***Researcher:*** *Publicly?*
> ***Leanne:*** *Yes. Yes. So, yeah, I had to not only deal with that in the immediate situation with the transition between the two morning services, but then, work out, 'How do I deal with that and other things?' So thankfully the chairperson of elders is a very wise, gentle, caring person who was able to be with me following that, and those two people continue to have conflict. They're just conflicting people, they get a lot of people offside, but this was a physical blue.* (Leanne)

Janine tells of a situation where the church in which she is the minister needed to reduce the work hours of an administrative person on staff. The task of informing this person of the church's decision was left to Janine. Janine still feels hurt as a result of the broken relationship that ensued. Janine speaks of having no closure on this matter:

> *I got left with the task of telling them … I think there were all sorts of other issues going on in her life, that I was the one who was the scapegoat in that and she walked off, she left the church and I think that the thing I find most stressful is not being able to be pastoral as I would have wanted to be pastoral. Having to bear the thing about being the, well what I feel was misunderstood, because, I, I still do not, this, this is something I have no closure on.* (Janine)

Adding to the hurt of this situation is Janine's belief that this person was a friend. The loss of this friendship adds to the ongoing pain associated with this conflict.

In speaking of his first ministry placement Max relates a story of conflict with a member of his congregation. The member in question was taken off the preaching roster by Max due to Max's belief that this member was not a helpful preacher. The result was that this particular member left taking a significant number of people with him:

> *I came back from holidays early one time and went to a service that I wasn't really expected to be at, and this fellow was preaching, and um, he was just really dreadful, from a whole range of points of view, presentation, theology, almost putting people down in a really bad way. So I felt that I had to ask him to go off the preaching plan.* (Max)

As a result of this decision Max says,

> *I wasn't surprised that not too long after he decided to leave, and I think that was the start of the Exodus really.*

Max perceives that in this instance there was a vying for power taking place.

> *There'd always been a bit of power play there. I think he wanted to be the super spiritual guy in the congregation.*

The experiences relating to conflict highlight the way in which interpersonal dynamics can add to the stress experience of ministers. Conflict is one such dynamic. Conflict is often over the

differing opinions that people have about what makes ministry effective. Similarly, my own experience of stress in ministry echoes the relational component in the narratives above. In chapter 1 I spoke of how the stress I experience is often related to my relationships with people in the congregation.

Measuring the effectiveness of ministry

It is difficult to assess the effectiveness of ministry. It is a vocation that deals with intangibles. Different people will hold different ideas regarding what makes ministry successful.

When asked to name aspects of ministry that are stressful Leanne says,

> *...one of the key ones, um, and this is not just for now, I suppose this is for across the board, in all the situations I've been in, is the way that we measure ministry, the effectiveness of ministry.* (Leanne)

Leanne relates the tension that often exists for her due to a difference between the way that she measures ministry and the way the congregation measures ministry. On one hand Leanne has a deeply held sense that she is being effective in ministering to people, but the Church she ministers to seems to want to measure effectiveness in terms of finances and people attending Sunday morning worship. This tension is evident in the following comment:

> *To know that I do the individual stuff and people appreciate it and I am making a difference in people's lives is good. So that's, so that's not an issue. But it's the big picture stuff where people say 'How do we measure your effectiveness? And what's the measure of that? How successful are you?' But, the measurement is 'they're not at church.' And that affects the finances, and so there's an extra pressure at the moment because of that.* (Leanne)

Two of the other female informants name this same issue as a source of stress but it is not named by the male participants. Whereas the measurement issue for Leanne is the frustration caused by the way her congregation seems to measure effectiveness, for Sue and Janine the issue is the lack of clarity about how to measure effectiveness.

Sue speaks of frustration related to lack of a clear job description. In Sue's opinion this leads to everyone in the congregation feeling free to use their own idiosyncratic way of measuring the minister's effectiveness:

> *There's no real specific job description. Everyone can have a piece of you saying 'You're not doing enough in the community' or 'You're not doing enough visiting' or 'You're not doing whatever.' And so it's then knowing 'Well when have you done enough and what is enough?'* (Sue)

Janine speaks of the frustration of not getting clear feedback to allow her to determine whether or not she is being effective.

> *I think one of the frustrations, and possibly a stress for me and because I think it's my first congregation is that there is very little feedback. I mean people might come out of a service and shake your hand and say 'oh that was really good thank you very much' or they more likely say nothing at all and um, in general you don't know how people are feeling about what you are doing.* (Janine)

Although the measuring of ministry effectiveness is named only by female informants, my own story shares this experience (chapter 1). It is also true that both Leanne and Sue left careers that involved the use of stringent measurement to enter ministry. It is possible that this contrast heightens their awareness of the issue.

Personality and stress

The themes above are primarily to do with external stressors but the stories of the participants also acknowledge the mediating role of one's own personality on the experience of stress. Five of the eight respondents acknowledge the role of their own psyche in the experience of stress. Max speaks of *'stress I put on myself because of the person I am, so that's part of it.'* Sue speaks of stress as having at least two *'spheres'* to it with one of these spheres being one's own particular personality.

> *I think there are two spheres at least. One is depending on your personality, what you find stressful and there are some generic things that are stressful.* (Sue)

Given this belief Sue acknowledges the possibility that her stress experience may be heightened by her idealism.

> *When you first begin in ministry you have this romantic ideal and you've got all these ideas you come out of college wanting to try and so it's like, I don't know, it seems to be a part of what I went through is some of what my colleagues in their first year out or so have also experienced but I don't know if it's been heightened by my personality or not.* (Sue)

Tom refers to being the public face of the Church every Sunday as a difficulty due to his introverted personality. He says,

> *It's just Sunday and then next Sunday and there's a week's breather in between them in terms of having to be the public leader um, that, that can be bad enough year after year after year for my personality.* (Tom)

Jill speaks of a belief that her particular personality type means that she struggles and becomes frustrated with things that she can not do.

> *I watch how people get things done and think 'well that was rather clever' but I can't do that, so it's, partly brain power and partly integrity, it's just like 'I can't do it' and that's*

> *frustrating. INTJ, because we can do it all (laughter). As long as I know what I'm doing I'm not stressed (laughter). Put me in a new situation where I don't know what I'm doing and I'm stressed.* (Jill)

When relating the story of a particularly difficult pastoral situation Janine speaks of the possibility of her own need to be in control as being a contributor to the stress that she experiences.

> *I think that's the most stressful thing I've had to deal with and I think it's, maybe it says something to me about my need to control things.* (Janine)

Impact of Stress

Seven of the eight participants report that they feel that stress has a significant impact upon their lives. Leanne is the exception. Sophie, Sue, Janine and Tom express a belief that their physical health has been affected by the stress of ministry.

Sophie says that her experience of ministry,

> *didn't do my health a lot of good at times. Mainly because um, I got very, very, very run down. Um, the first three months of being in the congregation I didn't have a day off. Mainly because something happened every day I was meant to have a day off. Some form of some, um, something happened. But it was (pause) I don't think the impact health wise kicked in for nearly two years.* (Sophie)

In discussing her experience, Sophie acknowledges the existence of stressors in her family life as co-contributors to health concerns:

> *I just ran on adrenaline, um, and I got a case of the flu that was incredibly severe and it required um, a month off, maybe a bit more because I just could not get rid of the flu. And I think it was because I was so run down. ... it wasn't just because of the congregation, it was because of what was happening at home too.* (Sophie)

Sue refers to a severe loss of weight due to the stress that she experiences in her ministry placement.

> *Well, I lost 17 kilos in that first 12 months or so. Not that I was overweight before. On the height weight chart I was right at one end, but normally I'm down the other end. Um, and that was I think, I just, I think I ate okay, but just the emotional energy I think I was burning up.* (Sue)

Janine states that when she becomes stressed she experiences physical manifestations of the stress. *'I start just being really aware that I am stressed, I get um, sore muscles, physical sort of things as well.'*

Sophie and Tom both mention a belief that the physical ramifications of their respective stress experiences are linked to adrenaline. Tom describes the 'adrenaline factor' as being largely responsible for health concerns that have emerged for him in recent times.

> *For me as a very shy person I almost need to draw on adrenaline just to make a simple phone call at times. Um, ah, even pastoral work has an element of needing to draw on adrenaline to, to be the public figure even in the one on one conversation. I mean the reason that I know that it's adrenaline is because my physical reactions on a Monday after every Sunday. Um, it really, it really is like being hit on the head with a sledge hammer. I'm dull headed, I don't have the same energy.* (Tom)

Tom's comment again raises the mediating factor of personality in the experience of stress. As an introverted person, Tom finds the public dimension of ministry more stressful than would a less introverted minister.

In addition to the impact of stress on physical health, tiredness is reported by Sophie, Sue, Janine and Tom. Although she doesn't mention tiredness, Jill outlines that she finds it difficult to sleep when under stress.

> *I might find it difficult to sleep, to go to sleep. Once I'm asleep I'm alright, I don't usually wake up in the middle of the night. I find it difficult to settle and that's my head going, yeah, replaying conversations and, trying to think up possibilities because I'm a bit of a possibility thinker ... So yeah not being able to get to sleep.* (Jill)

Janine mentions a similar issue. *'I don't sleep. (pause) That's the first thing that comes to mind because my mind doesn't shut off.'*

Tom has come to a point where due to concerns over his physical health he has decided to take a break from ministry to re-evaluate the future. Tom explains,

> *There are aspects and elements to the role of being the key leader in a congregation that, well, it's hard to imagine that they could ever be a perfect fit with anybody. There's always going to be compromise involved, but for me the ah, the potential costs of those compromises are no longer costs that I can afford to bear for health reasons.* (Tom)

In addition to the manifestations of stress outlined above, the participants report an impact of stress that could be described as relational in nature. Ken speaks of a tendency for stress to lead to impatience that he expresses at home.

> *I'm not as attentive or as gracious or as patient with people. I try to get, particularly with the family, the more you're in those kinds of places the more you realize the inappropriateness or the inadequacy of the way you deal with the kids and you don't want to do that. But I think (son's name) is getting a better deal than the girls did.* (Ken)

Max has noticed a similar tendency,

> *Um I think that it um, so I internalize a little bit and perhaps get angry, probably more moody at home, with my family which isn't a good way of dealing with it.* (Max)

This phenomenon of displacement is also acknowledged by one of the female informants. Jill says:

> *I'll be very short tempered, that's usually my first sign that I'm under stress. I don't often recognise it but being short tempered and the kids, the family, are very good at pointing that out. So the little one says 'Mummy why are you yelling at me?' (laughter) 'I don't know' (More laughter). 'I always leave my shoes here. Why are you yelling now?' Um, so that's a good indicator of stress.* (Jill)

Each of the three male respondents are aware that when under stress they tend to withdraw emotionally from relationships. Ken says,

> *If I'm in an acutely stressful situation, I go into functionality mode. Just get the things done that need to be done.* (Ken)

He goes on to say that during stressful periods,

> *I'm less relationally alert. Its almost as though I shut down those things, and say 'I've just got to get this done, I've just got to survive this. I've just got to do this.'* (Ken)

Similarly Max reports

> *I guess I come from a family that doesn't demonstrate their feelings very broadly, you know you keep those sort of things, keep your feelings close to yourself. I'm trying to learn to be more appropriately assertive and um, and outward with my feelings in an appropriate way so that it doesn't all internalize and boil over.* (Max)

Tom describes it as follows,

> *...it's ah, it, in peak seasons when I'm really stressed it tends to um, make me draw into myself a bit so I become a little bit more aloof in terms of my relationships with the family. It tends to make me a little more serious.* (Tom)

It is significant that the tendency to withdraw emotionally is not reported by any of the female participants. Although Sue acknowledges that when she is experiencing significant stress in ministry she avoids contact with those who are seen to be a source of the stress, she intentionally seeks out relationship with people who are safe. Sue says,

> *It got to the point with me, I was so, I think stressed and um debilitated by a whole lot of stuff that was happening that there were a few people in the congregation that I just didn't talk to anymor*e. (Sue)

At first glance this seems a little similar to the response of the three males, but whilst protecting herself from the 'enemy,' Sue intentionally seeks nurturing relationship. She says,

> *Friends. We've got a few um, friends with some of our God children in the general area. So sometimes just saying, 'I've had enough.' You know, we'd just jump in the car and we'd go over and we'd play with the kids and jump on the trampoline or they'd run and they'd give you a hug and they just don't want anything of you other than you're you, and you know you're their friend.* (Sue)

This stands in stark contrast to the response of withdrawing from nurturing relationships outlined by the three male respondents.

The tendency to withdraw reported by the male respondents is consistent with literature mentioned in chapter 2 (Frydenberg & Lewis, 2003; Heinrichs *et al.* 2003 & Taylor *et al.* 2000). This will be discussed further in chapter 7.

The experiences outlined above are those which exhibit some degree of commonality across the sample. There are many other impacts mentioned by individual informants. For instance Ken speaks of a battle with depression,

> *...I'd probably been depressed the whole 18 months. It took me another 18 months of treatment before I probably got on an even keel. But it's a slow transition out of that. And I think....again it was a profound disappointment of unrealised expectations.* (Ken)

Sue speaks of her experience of anxiety,

> **...** *the feelings I guess I have were of constant anxiety. I mean I was never diagnosed with anxiety but constant anxiety of even when I'm sitting here with you there's back of my head thinking 'I've got to do this, I've got to do that by 11 o' clock' sort of constantly being anxious, not being able to live in the moment where I normally ... there would still be that kind of jumpiness if someone knocked on the door or rang the phone or I don't know.* (Sue)

Sue also reports that the stress of ministry places strain on her marriage;

> *It put a strain on my marriage with (husband's name) ... he was getting angrier and angrier and upset about the situation but as the spouse feeling that he can't do anything about it, can't really involve himself, and he'd have nowhere to debrief really.* (Sue)

Tom speaks of his belief that there is a connection between the stress he experiences in ministry and his recently diagnosed heart disease.

> *So...and then that adrenaline I think was a contributing factor to heart disease from what I've read, despite the fact that doctors don't want to commit themselves to saying 'yes it's a factor.' I think for me it is.* (Tom)

The experiences of the participants highlight that some of the consequences of stress in ministry, are physical, emotional and relational.

Female Clergy and Stress

In the stories shared by the participants there are signs of possible gender specific aspects to the experience of stress. An example of this is the already mentioned male tendency to withdraw relationally and emotionally when under stress. In this section the focus is on those issues that emerge specific to female participants.

The four married female informants name balancing work and family life to be a stressor. Leanne and Jill report tension that comes from being *'mum'* as well as a minister. Leanne says:

> *I suppose being a mum. I have to balance, you know, I'm the children's mum, there's no one else that can be their mum, so that has to be a prime responsibility. Um, being a minister, yes that is a very prime responsibility. However, there's a lot of ministry stuff that the minister doesn't have to be the one to do. So, it's working out, how do you balance that.* (Leanne)

Jill speaks of pushing herself in three areas: motherhood and the two ministry roles that she has:

> *I push myself in all the areas, so like I'm doing three jobs, so that's bizarre but I do the three jobs really fully. I do the mother thing, I'm there most afternoons. I'm not there in the night but I'm there in the afternoons, so the kids come home from school and I pick them up and I take them to whatever they do, netball, piano, band you know, so I do that sort of mother thing.* (Jill)

Jill perceives that striving to be effective as a parent is more of an issue for females than males.

> *I choose to do the mother stuff. Um, I probably could get my head around not doing it, but I don't, maybe I couldn't get my head around it, I don't know um, or making (husband's name) do more. He does a fair bit, I mean we do share a fair bit of the parenting but he doesn't have the same, most of the fellas I know don't have the same kind of pull.* (Jill)

Jill's belief that mothers experience a greater *'pull'* towards carrying the weight of parenting is mirrored in Janine's experience. In speaking of the juggling of ministry and family life Janine says,

> *I think its all different things, all the different things I carry in my head about time, about what is required for school things and very basic things like that and, to the running around a lot to um, having a husband who is very supportive but extremely busy, so that the assumption is that even though we are both busy, I'm the one who will be there to make the meal.* (Janine)

Janine describes the tension between home life and ministry as a kind of *'juggling.'*

> *The main things I'm juggling is all the other more domestic issues in life as well as the ministry things. And that's where I find the pressure comes...feeling you never quite give your best to any of those things because there isn't enough of you to give… It's just not possible to do that very well, so you have to let yourself off the hook which isn't always that easy, or at least I'm not very good at doing it.* (Janine)

Janine speaks of seeing the years with her son slipping away and feeling a need to make the most of the time that she and her husband have left with him at home:

> *...the frustration I think of seeing that um (son's name) is now 13 and is becoming much more of a teenager and you're aware that he wants to spend most of his time in his room and not be with the family and that in a few year's time he will be away from home and that the actual family time that's left is very little and we need to work very hard at using that time and so there's very little space to do it. ... It's not unknown for me to write my sermons on the sideline (laughter) of the cricket pitch, or in the carpark at training and all that sort of thing.* (Janine)

The experiences of both Jill and Janine suggest to them that the burden of responsibility for domestic life is weighted toward them. This echoes a recurring theme in the occupational stress literature discussed in chapter 2.

It is important to note that one of the male participants (Max) also makes reference to the balancing of work and family life as a stressor. When speaking of stressors Max says,

> *One is the, the um, the home and work balance, which I find pretty difficult. I would have hoped that by this time in ministry I would have done something a bit better about that. Um, I like the fact that I can work from home, and that I'm home often when the kids get home and that sort of stuff. But that um, you know, finding a time when you leave sort of thing is really difficult, you know so..*
> ***Researcher:*** *Not clear boundaries.*
> ***Max:*** *No, the boundaries bleed into one another and that's probably my biggest struggle I guess.* (Max)

Although Max names the balancing of home and work as a stressor there is an important difference in emphasis when compared with the female narratives. Leanne, Jill and Janine relate not just to being home but also to the primary tasks of parenting.

Leanne is married to a UCA minister and yet it is Leanne who takes responsibility for the children during school holidays. In speaking of ministry in school holidays she says '*I hardly do anything.*' The inference here is that during these times she hardly does any thing in ministry. She has to focus on the children.

Although Max's comments do not have the same domestic focus as those of Leanne, Jill and Janine, he does mention elsewhere. *'I still run the kids around of an afternoon to some things and that's helpful.'*

It is of interest that while all three male informants are fathers, none of them mention the tension created by being a father. This contrasts with the female response where the tension

between mother and minister is marked. It has been noted that Max reports the tension of balancing home and family life but he does not speak directly of his role as father. The language used by Leanne, Jill and Janine is stronger. Leanne speaks of her role as mother as a *'prime responsibility.'* Jill and Janine make it clear that they believe that they have the major responsibility in the home. They both speak of supportive husbands *'but'*. Sophie, the one other female participant who is a mother does not mention the desire to be a good mother as a stressor. This may be explained by the fact that both her children are adult and no longer living at home.

The narratives of the female informants suggest the existence of discrimination against female ministers in the UCA. Sophie relates the following story.

> *When I finished my undergraduate work and I entered the ACOMP process of being on the list to receive a placement they sent me to places that didn't want a woman, that didn't want an exit student. That, even though we say we are um, have men and women in ministry and both male and female are called by God, there is still those places and people who don't necessarily see it that way. And um, so having an experience of being a person who was being sent by the church to meet a congregation, who then tell you, but we don't want a female. It's very disheartening. And then you get really angry, like, 'well why the hell did you send me there in the first place? Why did you do that to me?'* (Sophie)

A disturbing aspect of the above story is that it suggests a prejudice that is 'underground.' Given that the UCA officially ordains females into ministry, such a prejudice is one that congregations will be loathe to admit. It is hard to confront and challenge prejudices that are denied.

After commencing a placement Sophie found that prejudice was evident amongst some members of the congregation.

> *There was, a couple, about half a dozen people who had been long term members of the congregation who just couldn't handle the fact that I wasn't a bloke.* (Sophie)

Sophie speaks of her belief that female ministers need to work harder then males to be deemed acceptable. *'There's that sense of you have to be 80% better to be half as good.'* Sophie is the only female informant to mention this and there is the possibility that this belief at least to some degree informed by her reservations prior to entering the ministry that she was not *'a good enough person'* to be a minister.

In her first placement Leanne found that the rural congregation to which she ministered saw her as being *'very young'* to be a minister. Leanne was thirty years old at the time. Leanne feels that it is much more to do with her being female than being young.

> ***Leanne:*** *They didn't have any problems having a female minister. They'd say 'but you're so young.'*
> ***Researcher:*** *Oh! That's interesting.*
> ***Leanne:*** *And even though I was in my early 30s they still saw me as being very young. And I'd just say, 'It's oil of Ulan or something.' (laughter). But that comment came from not only the people in the congregation, from the Uniting Church, but from across the community as well.*
> ***Researcher:*** *Looking back, do you think that in what they were saying it was about 'You're very young' or was it 'that you're very young and female?' I'm just wondering.*
> ***Leanne:*** *To me it was the young and female. They would never say that, but to me it was the young and female because there were males that had come out, that had been in either that congregation or neighbouring congregations, that were younger than me.*

This *'young and female'* attitude is also reported by Sue.

> *One of the ladies of the Church Council came up to me one day and said 'Sue, I can't believe what they're carrying on about,' she said. 'If you were a male they wouldn't even have the courage to ask you about that decision.'... Then I started noticing a little bit more, like I had one guy who's one of the elders who has been for many years who at one meeting in front of four other people sort of said to me, 'Well Sue,* ***you know you're only very young****' and sort of went on a bit and I thought, 'Well I don't know if that's female or not, but he was certainly being very patronising.'* (Sue) (Researcher's emphasis)

Sue further reports that she has heard from some quarters of the UCA a belief that women clergy can not be trusted to handle stress as well as men. In speaking of this Sue states,

> *I've had several people say unofficially, 'You know that there's an issue in the Uniting Church about trusting women ministers.' and 'Oh what do you mean?' Well, apparently a few of us have sort of gone up and said 'Nuh, we're not doing it anymore, out of here' sort of thing and asked for positions to be terminated in some people's eyes more than men do.* (Sue)

She goes on to say,

> *I don't know if that's a Presbytery thing or a Synod thing or whatever but there's a perception that women tend to get out of their placements early. ... So there's a perception underlying for some people, 'Can we really trust women ministers?'* (Sue)

Conclusion

It is clear from these stories that ministry within the UCA is understood to be a vocation. UCA clergy believe themselves called by God to be ministers. Clergy submit at times to stress filled situations in obedience to that which they perceive to be their call. The call of God of which ministers speak, may come internally as an *'inner knowing.'* This inner knowing is only reported by female participants. Call may also come through others. The phenomenon of call is

an important factor in the stress experience of clergy. Although it can be a source of support, it can lead to clergy remaining in high stress environments.

These stories reflect a social context in which the declining importance of the church in Australian society leads to pressure on clergy to instigate congregational change. The UCA is seeking to be more relevant to the wider community. It would seem from the information provided by the participants (and from my own story) that such endeavours can be a significant source of stress because congregations can find the thought of change disconcerting. There can also be competing expectations of what change should look like.

In addition, a decline in congregational numbers related to the changing social context leads to financial difficulties in churches. Three of the participants minister in contexts in which church finances are heavily stretched. All three of these informants name the church financial situation as stressful.

Another source of stress is that UCA clergy do not always feel supported by the UCA bureaucracy. Two informants speak of ineptness and lack of professionalism on the part of UCA bureaucrats. The expectation that clergy give time to the wider work of the UCA further adds to the stress associated with ministry. The consultative decision making of the Uniting Church may add to confusion surrounding authority and leadership for ministers in the UCA.

The impact of stress on clergy can be substantial. Sue speaks of losing 17 kilograms in weight in a twelve month period. Tom has made a decision to leave congregational ministry due to a heart condition that he links to the stress of ministry. The costs of ministry stress are not only physical. There are reports from the informants of relational and emotional disturbances due to the stress experienced in ministry.

Maintaining clear boundaries between personal and professional life is difficult for UCA clergy. The majority of participants speak of the difficulty in being clear about exactly what the job entails and where its boundaries lie. This seems to be related to the understanding of ministry as a vocation. It is different to a job with clearly delineated hours.

The fact that ministry is fundamentally about working with people adds to the capacity for stresses due to interpersonal dynamics and conflict. Ministers deal with complex aspects of

human existence. This creates difficulty for ministers in knowing when they are being effective, and how to measure success. This difficulty in measuring ministry effectiveness resonates with my experience (see chapter 1).

All of these ministry stressors are mediated through the unique personality of the individual minister. The literature review (chapter 2) highlighted the large perceptual component of the stress experience. What is a stressor to one minister may not be to another.

The balancing of home life and ministry is reported as particularly problematic for the women ministers interviewed, and the stories of the female participants in this study hint strongly at ongoing discrimination against women in ministry. Sometimes this discrimination is covert, often it is overt but not official. Because the UCA ordains females into ministry the discrimination is unnamed and therefore difficult to address. One participant hinted at the possibility that within some parts of the UCA there is a belief that women ministers do not handle stress as well as men.

There is some evidence in the interviews that lend support for the notion that women are more likely to seek out relationship than men when under stress. Men in contrast seem to have a tendency to isolate themselves.

In this chapter I have presented interview narratives that relate to the themes of vocation, stress and female clergy and stress. The following chapter will further develop these narratives. The emphasis will be on the ways in which the participants have dealt with stress in ministry.

CHAPTER 6

GROUP NARRATIVES ABOUT DEALING WITH STRESS

The previous chapter explored the stress experience of UCA clergy. During the interviews, informants were also asked about the ways that they dealt with stress. This chapter examines the narratives that emerged in response to this question. These responses are organised into the following themes: relational, psychological, spirituality, a life outside and things that are unhelpful.

Relational

Six informants speak of the importance of connecting with people who have some understanding of what being a minister is like. Sophie says,

> *I think my connections with my ministry peers. And having conversations with people who know what I'm talking about.* [She goes on to say,] *one of the things that, that I have always um, valued, is my very minimal but very special um, friends stroke colleagues who I can debrief with when I need to.* (Sophie)

Ken speaks of the importance of *'key peer mentors.'* For Ken, peers who identify with his experiences provide opportunity to debrief and normalise life as a member of the clergy.

Exercising ministry in a reasonably large church has the advantage for Leanne of working with a number of supportive staff. In speaking of this Leanne says

> *We intentionally take time out to go and have lunch. So once a month we go out and have lunch together, and we talk a little bit about work, but we also talk a little bit about how we, you know how each of us is, how our families are and we take care of each other from that perspective. So we do that intentionally.* (Leanne)

Max speaks of the relationship he has with a friend who is a minister within a different denomination.

> *I have a particular friend who's a minister in another denomination and we get together most weeks and …we're just mates but I guess he's a bit of a mentor to me and we sort of talk these kind of things through and that enables me to get a pretty good perspective… there'd be other people too who I would count in that kind of circle of people who, I could talk a little bit more deliberately about ministry and expect a bit of response back and a chance to talk things through, and a bit of care for me personally.* (Max)

The responses from the informants also indicate an appreciation of formalised opportunities for speaking to people who understand the world of the UCA clergy. These formalised opportunities include individual supervision, group supervision, minister's growth groups, retreats and spiritual direction.

> *I would have gone mad without supervision,* [said Sophie.] *I would have done myself in I think, because it's the only place that I felt safe enough to cry or swear, or stamp my feet, or say, 'I hate the church' or say, 'I hate the congregation' this week, which I don't think I ever did, but it would be a place where I could do that, because I know its sacrosanct.* (Sophie)

Like Sophie, Leanne values supervision and says that she gets *'frustrated if she can't get to that.'* Tom reports of the benefit of supervision when he says,

> *…supervision I have found very helpful, to find that person to just simply bounce, um, experiences and thoughts off.* (Tom)

Although Jill acknowledges the benefit of supervision she believes the benefit is linked to the relatively informal way that she and her supervisor operate:

> *Well supervision is helpful because I get to choose. So I go to my supervisor when I've got the energy to do it. And my supervisor knows enough to um, say, back off. So sometimes my supervision session will be nothing other than a coffee or a general chit chat and I'm happy with that. Um, I couldn't do that all the time that wouldn't be supervision. But that's the supervisor being tuned in.* (Jill)

In Jill's mind the effectiveness of supervision is linked to having the right match between supervisor and supervisee.

> *I actually think supervision is a good idea. I'm an advocate for supervision but you've got to find the person who will work with you.* (Jill)

Max and Sue speak of the benefit that they gain from group supervision processes of which they are a part. Max speaks of the professional perspective that supervision provides:

> *Supervision is important for me. Ah, we have group supervision, um, with a facilitator and um, that's really helpful because um, again for me it's about dealing with stress, its about sometimes getting that perspective on what I'm doing and um, and, supervision allows a, a, a more professional appraisal and discussion of some of the stuff that you're going through.* (Max)

Sue speaks of the normalising impact of group supervision.

> *The supervision group, that was good because it at least normalised things a bit when other people were talking about issues that they had, so it wasn't like, 'gee it's me. I'm the only one in the world who's having problems.'* (Sue)

Ken and Tom both refer to the value of the Presbytery growth group of which they are a part. This is a group of UCA Ministers who meet once a month to offer mutual support. Ken says:

> *So while I'm not the most regular attender at our growth group or whatever they call it now, growth group meetings, ah, but that environment is useful and fruitful and I particularly appreciate the blend of that group. Its been great.* (Ken)

Tom notes,

> *I really enjoy, even though it's sometimes you leave the minister's growth group thinking, 'Well what did we do? Talk about, what did we do there?' But I kind of enjoy that frivolous um space, um that opportunity to sound off against, against the frustrations of the church to um, find things about church life that are amusing so that we don't take ourselves or the church too seriously, you know, I find that helpful. Um, our particular growth group and the approach that it takes.* (Tom)

Though for different reasons, Sue and Tom both speak of the benefit of organised retreats. Sue appreciates such retreats for the relational opportunities. She says:

> *we had our first year retreat out from UTC and we just had a second year one, we decided to do it. So being able to discuss ministry, the good and the bad with people you've gone through college with, um is quite good. Our particular year is very close, very different but a really coherent and very collegial group.* (Sue)

Tom's appreciation of such retreats is for the contemplative space they provide. In contrast to Sue he reports,

> *Presbytery retreats generally speaking I've found a great support and resource. Not that I've been able to get to them for a few years, um but I generally speaking really look forward to those times because if nothing else they for me structure into my year a little bit of space um, for um, do a little bit more reading or, those sorts of things.* (Tom)

Janine appreciates time with a spiritual director whom she sees on a regular basis. In speaking of her spiritual director Janine says:

> *...it's actually someone who knows my congregation although she's not in my congregation so there's a certain degree that I don't need to explain things all the times, things are understood. I can talk more about my frustrations or my desert times or my enriched times and feel that that's quite safe.* (Janine)

A common thread through the narrative above is the perceived value of being able to speak to people who have some appreciation of what it is like to live life as a minister. Though the context may differ, conversing with people who understand the clergy world is important. Such

experiences provide a space where ministers can be themselves as well as providing opportunity for distancing and detachment.

Psychological

The participants' stories suggest a correlation between the level of stress they experience and the way that they think about a stressful situation.

Ken, Leanne, Max, Tom and Jill all report the benefit of intentionally changing the way that they think about that which seems responsible for their stres. Ken speaks of a reframing method that is effective about *'ninety plus percent of the time.'* Ken says,

> *When I'm stressed by what I see as a problem, I've learnt to say, with my father-in-law actually, 'I don't have problems I just have people.' Seeing these things are really about how people are, how I am and how the other person is, then try and humanize the situation, and I've also learnt when it comes to process, a de-escalation process is most often appropriate.* (Ken)

Leanne speaks of the importance of separating in her mind those things that she can influence from the things that she cannot. She frames it in terms of the serenity prayer.

> *So a part of it is working out what's important and part of it is (pause) sitting back and reflecting on what's going on and trying to tease out 'Can I change that? If I can't change that how can I work with it?' You know that little prayer thing, 'God give me the wisdom to know what I can and can't, and the serenity to accept what I can't change. That sort of stuff.'* (Leanne)

When hearing Leanne speak of this I was reminded that this is a strategy that I use in my own ministry when under stress.

Leanne, Max, Tom and Jill all speak about the importance of seeing 'the bigger picture,' of being able to step back and see things in perspective. When speaking of times in ministry where tough decisions might lead to conflict Leanne notes,

> *It helps in that I'm also able to reflect on, to reflect on what's the bigger picture. Um, I used to be a nurse. And I would know that there were lots of things that I had to do for people that would hurt them in the process. You know, like giving a needle. You know that needles are not nice things to have. And I suppose that it's, if I can see that what we're doing is something that will help them in the long run I will do it. And that's like dealing with conflict. Um, avoiding conflict, there are times and places for avoiding conflict, but there are times and places for dealing with it head on. So then, in the big picture, it's the right thing to do.* (Leanne)

Max says that it is the ability to see the big picture that enables him to persevere. *'I can cope with it, if I can see what the big picture is. And I wouldn't want to be going through what I've*

been through if I didn't think there would be a reasonable outcome.' The implication in Max's comment is that there is a need to have a larger meaning to life and the challenges it entails.

Tom reflects:

> *Because by nature I'm a person who stands back a little bit in life and takes a good long look at the big picture and the wide picture, um, I'm rarely surprised by anything. I, I, ah, I'm not one who tends to project my expectations or the way I would think or behave about something expecting, 'Well why don't other people think this way? Why can't they understand me?' I ah, I guess it's because I'm actually fascinated by the way people tick and, and, I this isn't demeaning in any way but I find it kind of entertaining in a sense, I, I, I get some joy and delight about observing the way people function and ah, so I don't have a sense of um, harbour any anger or bitterness towards people not understanding my poor plight as a person in ministry or anything like that because I just don't have that expectation um, that's not for me a source of stress because I feel as though I'm a pretty realistic person and I don't have, I work really hard at not having unrealistic expectations of other people.* (Tom)

Tom here is saying that being somewhat detached is an advantage in remaining objective.

In speaking of a particularly difficult decision making committee of which she was a part, Jill notes how seeing the *'bigger picture'* has been of immense benefit to her.

> *I suppose I am a bigger picture person. I'm not really good at details, and get, feel confined if I'm sort of sucked into something. So it's getting out and seeing the larger stuff has been helpful.* (Jill)

Jill says that she finds the best way to get this *'bigger picture'* is by creating some geographical distance from her place of ministry. She values

> *… just getting away being by myself for a day…getting in touch with nature, trying to get perspective because most of the time I find that my perspective's clouded. That's where, that's how I understand the stress, so if I can get the perspective back then see the bigger picture.* (Jill)

Part of being able to see the '*big picture'* is an understanding of human dynamics. Ken notes, *'these things are really about how people are, how I am and how the other person is.'* Ken says that this assists him to *'humanise the situation.'* Max reports,

> *I do have an understanding of what happens at a systems level if you like. When you introduce difficult concepts and so ah, I recognise that it's not as personal as what people are really making out and that there are deep things going on, you know, deep emotional conflicts for people when all these sorts of things happen, and um, they're often reacting because their system's been thrown out of sync or because they're feeling threatened or you know whatever it is. But I guess what I'm saying is that that sort of underlying um, understanding helps me get through and not personalize things quite as much as I might otherwise.* (Max)

Sue speaks of recognising that in human relationships there are dynamics that mean *'it doesn't matter what I do, people are still going to complain.'* Tom notes the benefit that he finds in working really hard *'not to have unrealistic expectations of other people.'*

The stories of the informants suggest that the ability to be able to think objectively about a particular stressful situation is helpful. This ability to view things objectively is enhanced by knowledge of psychology and interpersonal dynamics. All of this is helpful in depersonalising stressful situations.

Spiritual practice

Only four of the informants cite prayer or meditation as a way of dealing with stress. It is often assumed within church culture that ministers are people who spend substantial time in prayer. The fact that four of the informants do not mention prayer or meditation does not mean that they do not pray or meditate. It may simply mean that they do not experience these dimensions of life as beneficial in dealing with stress.

Leanne, Max and Janine speak of the importance of including intentional times of quiet in their lives. Leanne says, *'I just stop at a park and sit there, and just look and think and whatever.'* Max reports,

> *I try to spend some quiet time in prayer, with and or with music, um and those things I find remarkably healing.* (Max)

Janine says,

> *I really do know that I need to, more times of quiet and I try to have a regular, devotional quiet time anyway. I'm a member of the Iona community and that is one of the disciplines of it although it's not always possible but um, I know that I regenerate by being away and also by being quiet. Other people regenerate by making noise like my husband (laughter). And I live in a household where the television's on an awful lot and I, it's just another pressure for me.* (Janine)

Two of the male informants, Tom and Max comment that they benefit from combining walking and prayer. Max sees value in

> *...taking the dog for a walk ... where it's beautiful is um, is um something that helps me. I want to do it on a more regular basis. I mean I do it you know, twice a week or something but, um, but I ought to make that more of a daily, and I find that I pray when I walk. Sometimes I say 'I take my sermon for a walk.'* (Max)

Tom adds

> *I find that um, walking is when I pray best. Um, there's something about the movement, there's something about the physicalness dimension, the physical dimension of walking that enables me to have conversations with God, um so that's also a creative time as well as a discharge, you know, it's a kind of a problem solving time, and that in itself reduces stress.* (Tom)

The perceived value of combining prayer and physical activity (walking) is interesting given research findings indicate a connection between physical exercise and mood (McEwen, 2002:137). Jill also mentions the use of exercise as a destressor but she does not speak of it in connection with spiritual practice.

A Life Outside

UCA clergy do not live the secluded life that many religious leaders have led throughout history. Although this is the case, the life of a clergy person can take on a secluded feel. The demands of ministry can lead clergy to sometimes feel removed from the rest of the world. The difficulty of establishing clear boundaries between work and non-work activities can lead to a feeling of being always engaged in the world of the church. This is expressed by Max when he says *'the boundaries bleed into one another.'*

Six of the eight informants speak of the importance of having *'a life outside.'* A life outside refers to a life away from the demands of ministry. It is significant that the two who do not name this as important are extroverted in nature. It may be that time away from the intensity of pastoral relationships is particularly important for the introverted personality.

Ken, Leanne, Max and Sue all speak of the importance that their immediate family have in assisting in the managing of stress. Ken names as helpful,

> *the coherence of a family as a community and the way you work with each other grappling with those things, so the, having (wife's name) as a best mate, being able to talk through these things and both of us being, we are both innately intuitive people. We tend to when we observe each other going through that difficult spot we start talking. Its always been our mode and I think we do it better now than we've ever done.* (Ken)

Part of this observation from Ken is that it is the particular kind of personality match that exists in their relationship that is of benefit. Like Ken, Max speaks of valuing conversation with his wife.

> *I guess I find, I find I talk with my wife a lot about that sort of stuff. Um, and that's a helpful thing, that's a two way street. She's been happy to listen and be a good sounding board.* (Max)

Leanne speaks of family times away from the scene of ministry.

> *Every now and then we as a family go into the city, and we wander through the botanic gardens and get an ice cream and that, we just go and do that.* (Leanne)

Sue reports on the importance of having a husband to whom she comes home.

> *For me being married has been helpful. I think if I was single I don't know how that would have been because at least I had someone to come home to rather than an empty house, who I wanted to come home too. So that sort of stuff was good.* (Sue)

The value of taking time off, continuing education, getting away from the context of ministry and house building are common themes.

In speaking of taking 'time out' Leanne says,

> *By time out I mean um, I'm as up to date with my holidays as I can be. Um, I have intentionally taken the family days, family Sundays. Ah, I know that I'm an introverted person, I know I gain energy from being by myself and so um, I will take time out to go and play a computer game. I read, I'm an avid reader. I read rubbish um, not always, but when I'm really stressed I will read rubbish because I don't really have to think about it. You know, but it's that process of reading, escaping I suppose. I do a lot of that. I've managed to make my way through 5 bags of rubbish books since last July, so you know, and I do that in stints.* (Leanne)

It is clear from Leanne's comments that the time off is not just about being removed physically from the activities of ministry but emptying the mind of ministry matters.

Max says,

> *Just taking time out's important. Just taking a day off…um...in terms of managing yourself. I mean, I actually, I'm pretty strong on taking my day, my day off.* (Max)

Tom speaks of the importance of *'making sure that there's adequate space in my week for um just being on my own.'*

Janine speaks of her frustration of valuing time out but struggling to make it regular. She names taking a proper day off as important but then goes on to say

> *I often don't take a proper day off and that's partly because of (son's name) coming home at 3.00 o'clock and on my day off we have a date normally. We go up to (shopping centre name) and he goes to Donut King or KFC or something because I've tried to make one special time when he knows he's the most important.* (Janine)

Janine's response again reflects the tension of juggling ministry and being mother.

The importance placed on 'time out' may to some extent be determined by personality. Both Leanne and Tom categorise themselves as introverted, whereas Sophie, more extroverted, does not name 'time out' as an important part of stress management. It is also the case that Leanne and Tom are married whereas Sophie is single and lives on her own. It is possible that for Sophie *'time out'* also means loneliness. As an extroverted single woman, Sophie needs to have social connection as an integral part of her life.

Leanne and Sue both speak of continuing education as an opportunity for time away from their congregation. Leanne says *'it took me out of the situation to reflect on it in a supervised capacity, which was brilliant. Good move.'* Sue says,

> *I continued to study my Masters in my first couple of years. I quite enjoy that and for me that was really important because, particularly if I came to class here, here I felt safe, people knew me, people um liked me. Like the lecturers and everybody here I get on well with and they know who I am rather than all this stuff that was happening up there so it was a place to get out and also a place to often reflect on what was happening. All the subjects I did I chose deliberately to be able to try and integrate with my ministry at the moment as well as in the future, so there was a place to try and work through some of the stuff.* (Sue)

Leanne, Jill and Janine all name removing themselves from their context of ministry as important. Leanne states,

> *...when we get the chance we go up to (town name), the house at (town name). As I drive up the mountains I can feel the stress go.* (Leanne)

Jill names,

> *going to the beach. Doing the introverted stuff, just getting away being by myself for a day.* (Jill)

Janine speaks of the importance of ensuring that she leave her ministry locale to minimise the chance of meeting people from Church.

> *I really want to be away from people and I might meet people.*
> ***Researcher:*** *People from church?*
> ***Janine:*** *Yes, the best one to do is to go up to (place name) and have a cup of coffee and then go for a walk and then have a bowl of soup for lunch somewhere. Or the (place name) botanical gardens.*

At the time of interviewing, both Tom and Leanne are involved in house building. Both speak of this as a helpful stress reliever. Leanne states,

> *Building this house has been good. Physical stuff. You can actually see that things get done. So there is a sense that you can have some completion there, that you can't necessarily have in ministry.* (Leanne)

There is something in the practicality of house building that brings satisfaction to Leanne. This may be connected with her earlier comments about the difficulty in measuring effectiveness in ministry. Tom's sense of the value of house building is similar to Leanne's. Tom names

> *tasks that don't require a great deal of thinking um, but still are productive and still give me a sense of satisfaction, of achieving something which is important for me by nature. Um, so building mud brick houses, things like that.* (Tom)

The information provided by the informants involved in this study suggests that for some clergy, the ability to have areas of interest outside of the immediate ministry context can be helpful. In some instances, clergy report that geographical separation from the ministry context is important. Continuing education is a forum that can provide a helpful outside focus. For married clergy, connecting with the family can be of considerable assistance.

For some, involvement in activities that provide a sense of completion are of value. Such activity provides a buffer against the difficulties of measuring the success of ministry.

Unhelpful ways of addressing stress

The participants related information that provides some insight into attempts to alleviate stress that are perceived to be unhelpful.

UCA clergy are required to be part of a ministers' growth group and to be supervised on a regular basis (UCA Code of Ethics and Ministry Practice, 2000: 3.8). In addition to this, clergy are expected to engage in ongoing education throughout their ministry career. These requirements aim to provide accountability and ministerial support. Although these requirements are spoken of as helpful by some informants, this is not a universal experience. There are some expressions of discontent in regard to these requirements.

Sophie speaks of the difficulty of being in a ministers' growth group and not feeling comfortable to fully engage:

> *In a situation where I don't know the people um, closely, I'll be incredibly quiet and not say anything. So I actually found that more stressful. Because you were expected to be there and you were technically expected to share, but it was like, 'I ain't doing this because I have no idea if these people are safe people or not I don't know who they are.' Um, and my very first one I went to not one person was introduced to me.* (Sophie)

Though this was Sophie's initial experience of this group, elsewhere in the interview she acknowledges that this same group is now a substantial support for her.

The following exchange shows that Jill finds the minister's growth group to which she belongs problematic.

> ***Researcher:*** *Have there been any things that you have found unhelpful um, in terms of, in terms of destressing.*
> ***Jill:*** *Groups.*
> ***Researcher:*** *Groups.*
> ***Jill:*** *I hate groups.*
> ***Researcher:*** *So the groups, you know church says, 'You should be in because they will help you.'*
> ***Jill:*** *Yeah that one. I mean I enjoy our growth group, I mean I quite enjoy it but I would never use that group as a destressor. It would be far too stressful. Yeah.*
> ***Researcher:*** *Because. It would be far too stressful because (pause)*
> ***Jill:*** *Because I'm not a group person. I'm a one on one so occasionally a one on one conversation's fine but even that's energy drawing. I don't get energy from talking to people so if I'm flat I don't really benefit from someone trying to help me sort it through. I mean sometimes it's useful but I usually come away feeling exhausted. So, yeah so I don't find that, and I don't like people being nice to me.*

Janine finds her peer supervision group unhelpful. She says, *'I actually don't find my peer supervision group destresses me at all really'.* She goes on to say,

> *we get on fine but there's one person who always has enormous issues and they go on at great length every time whether they're supposed to be doing a short presentation or not. And I find myself quite exhausted just having to concentrate and to listen to the other people and that's not really what I want supervision to be.* (Janine)

It is possible that in the instance mentioned here by Janine, the problem is not so much the peer supervision group but rather a lack of adequate leadership in the group.

Whilst affirming the need for accountability, Ken speaks of frustration with the notion that by simply having formalised structures in place the church is being caring. He says,

> *at one level I affirm that that's a good thing to have, but I think it just means nothing to the church, its just another piece of paper, that doesn't actually mean anything to anyone other than yourself. And I think it's that lack of connectivity in our accountability that is actually dangerous. It can lead us into a false sense of security that I find unhealthy. That we say because we have all these self care things in place therefore we're all cared for. We're not, what is it, 'it takes a village to raise a child.' We, we, we can't get away from our collective responsibility to each other, to accept that we put things in place that make it all our individual responsibility and we kid ourselves that we're caring and we're not. It only make sense if it goes alongside other forms of collective care.* (Ken)

Ken seems to suggest that the regulations that mean to ensure that clergy are accountable and cared for can become an excuse for not actually caring. There is the possibility that Ken's own experience of hurt informs this perception.

Tom identifys a similar concern to Ken in what he calls the *'legislated approach'* to caring actually functioning as a source of stress.

> *I don't know how helpful is the fairly legislated approach to it um, that, just seems to add extra stress to me because ah, have to sort of to a degree fit somebody else's mould and ah. I mean I understand the importance of accountability and all that but I just personally find that a bit tedious.* (Tom)

Sophie, the only single informant in this study cites a particular aspect of church life as unhelpful. She says,

> *I think one of the things that I was taught at college is technically and maybe ethically ministers should never have friends in a congregation. And that's something I understand but I really struggle with, because being a relational person I don't know how I could prevent that from happening, and that would be very stressful for me. If I had to keep everybody at arms distance all the time that would be incredibly, that would add to my stress more than relieve it.* (Sophie)

Earlier in this chapter the group experience was named as helpful in assisting with dealing with stress. It is clear that this is not a universal experience. Three of the five female informants named some aspect of group experience as problematic.

Ken raises the possibility that the very structures that are in place to provide care and accountability inadvertently provide an excuse for not caring. There are also unwritten rules and assumptions in the UCA. The unwritten rule within the church, as identified by Sophie, that ministers not have friends in the congregation can provide great difficulty for ministers, particularly those who are single.

Conclusion

The participants' stories suggest that when they are under stress, there is value in being able to speak to somebody who understands what it is like to be a minister. The context of such conversation differs at times (i.e. one on one, or part of a group process), but the sense of understanding that ministry colleagues provide for one another seems to be beneficial. Though group experiences (i.e. growth groups) as instigated by the UCA are reported as helpful by

some, not all agree. Some find the group experience unhelpful in assisting with stress. It is possible such negative experiences are partly the result of poor group leadership.

Objectivity, or having a larger perspective, seems to be an important tool for dealing with stress. The ability to stand back and see the *'bigger picture'* creates an opportunity for depersonalising a stressful situation. The ability to be objective can be enhanced by an understanding of the relationship dynamics that occur between people.

The narratives do not indicate that prayer and meditation are major stress relievers for many participants. The two females who mention specific prayer speak of contemplative activity while the two men who speak of prayer emphasise a combination of prayer with physical activity (walking).

Most of the informants speak of the importance of a life outside the immediate ministry context as an important component in assisting with dealing with stress. Geographical distance from the ministry site, continuing education, connecting with family and involvement with activities that give a sense of tangible accomplishment are all named as helpful.

The following final chapter will enlarge on the discussion of findings. It will also highlight a number of recommendations and suggest areas for further research.

CHAPTER 7

DISCUSSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Introduction

In this final chapter I will discuss the findings from the previous three chapters in the light of the literature, including my reflections on the research methodology and process, make recommendations for the application of these findings, and suggest some possible areas for further research. The chapter will begin by presenting the narratives of call before proceeding to the narratives of stress.

Narratives of call

The call narrative has been an important area of focus when exploring the stress experience of the clergy involved in this study. It has been argued that vocation is part of the UCA cultural story in which the narratives of the participants are embedded. A number of the participants spoke of their sense of call being instrumental in keeping them in ministry even when ministry was proving stressful.

Some of the narrative paints a 'bitter sweet' picture of the minister's sense of call. Jill described it as *'the bane of my existence'* and Sue expressed how her sense of call was responsible for her choosing to stay in a highly stressful ministry placement. In contrast Ken said that *' my sense of call from God has always only ever been a positive thing.'*

It seems that the UCA emphasis on call is a potential contributor to the experience of stress amongst clergy. It may well be that the same people who choose to remain in stressful ministry situations would not do so but for the belief that they have been called to be where they are. Though a purely pragmatic thinking process might lead to a conclusion that it makes sense to leave behind that which is affecting one's health, the added component of 'call' has the potential to lead a person to stay in that which is a difficult situation. Sue lost 17 kilograms in twelve months because of the stress that she was experiencing in her ministry, yet apparently it did not occur to her to leave.

One of Sue's comments raised the possibility that the concept of call might, in some instances, provide a way out of a stressful context. Sue, who at the time of interview was in a particularly difficult ministry settlement, spoke of a need to feel called out of this ministry settlement before she would be willing to leave. *'...from about September till about December I hung in there thinking, 'no I still don't feel called out.''* (chapter 5)

Sue's comment reflects a view of call and vocation that is quite different to the UCA understanding of being called 'to' something, not 'away' from something. Later in the interview Sue spoke of feeling called out of her settlement placement and therefore free to leave with a clear conscience. It may be possible that people with a strong belief in vocation, when under stress need to believe themselves to be hearing a call before they will leave. Perhaps others, in a similar circumstance to Sue, would argue that the call is to ministry, not an unhealthy working environment and that there is always freedom to leave that which is unhealthy. Sue's comment points to how powerful a sense of call can be.

Sue's experience raises questions about vocation and choice. As part of the larger cultural narrative in which clergy live out their own life story, there is the denominational belief that there is a God who calls. It is not easy for someone who holds a belief in God to choose a path that seems different from that to which they believe they are being called. A strong sense of call can reduce thoughts of other options. With the UCA institutional stress on call there is the possibility of subtle but powerful pressure not to go against the collective and leave the role of minister. The ability of organisations to influence the thinking of members was referred to in chapter 3 (Berger & Luckmann, 1966; Bruner, 1991). It is possible that at times there is a fine line between feeling called and being instructed by the cultural status quo.

There are particular Christian assumptions about life and health which interface with the concept of call. For many Christians, discomfort alone is not a reason in and of itself for leaving behind a difficult situation. In fact, spiritual growth may be linked with suffering (Gilkey 1985). The literature review also referred to Peck (1993) and Pryor (1986) who commented that to experience stress as a minister is no reason to conclude that one has not been called. A term that is often used by Christians when they speak of going through difficulties is the term 'test.' The term is related to the previously mentioned concept of growth through suffering. As 'called' people there is difficulty for clergy in discerning whether difficulties represent a time of 'testing' or are evidence that it is time to move on.

There are often practical considerations for clergy to take into account when it comes to ministry. Although the UCA speaks of ministry in vocational language, ministry is also the way in which clergy survive financially. Although not mentioned in the interviews, there are financial considerations when a minister is stressed. To leave ministry due to stress can be to leave that which provides financial security for self and family.

These narratives indicate that the notion of call needs to be explored from a number of perspectives including the psychological and sociological. For instance, it is possible for the experience of call to be connected to 'prereflective identification' referred to in chapter 1 (Welwood, 2000:91). The person who believes him or her self called may be living out of internalised images of self, others and God that are not healthy. The work of Kirkpatick and Shaver (1990) mentioned in chapter 1 present strong evidence for the likelihood of a correlation between an internalised image of a parent and one's image of God. This presents the possibility that in some instances a sense of call may reflect an imagined call of an inner object (parent). Perhaps there is also the possibility of a sense of call being related to a rebelling against an internalised object. In the story of Jill there is a hint of a striving to prove wrong the inner voice of her father who sees no good reason for women to be educated.

It may also be true that for some a call will not be heard until the assumptions of 'prereflective identification' are challenged. This seems to have been the case with Sophie who when speaking about her history of abuse said *'I didn't fit the image, I was an unlovable person with an unlovely experience.'* Sophie was unable to hear the voice of call until others challenged the internalised notion that she was an *'unlovely person.'*

Object-relations dynamics like these have the capacity to influence the way a minister thinks theologically and psychologically about call. If God is viewed as one who must be appeased then one's call to ministry may be orientated towards trying to atone for one's mistakes. Such a sense of call has the capacity to be about serving a hard task master for one's own salvation. A person who perceives God to be a punishing God may see themselves as being at God's mercy. There are hints of such a view in some of the comments of Sue. She speaks of going *'kicking and screaming'* and likens herself to the prophet Jeremiah having dung thrown on him.

There have been some indications in the participant narratives that women and men experience call differently. Three of the five women informants placed some emphasis on the internal experience of the call. Phrases such as *'inner knowing'* and *'something in the back of my head'* were used. This language echoes the notion of Palmer's 'listening to one's life' (Palmer, 2000:4-5) referred to in chapter 1. The men in the study spoke only about external signs of call. In chapter 1, literature relating to call as a transpersonal phenomenon was presented (Grof, 1988 cited in Ferrer, 2000:214; Walsh & Vaughan, 1993 cited in Ferrer, 2000:214). Grof (1988 cited in Ferrer, 2000:214) and Walsh & Vaughan (1993 cited in Ferrer, 2000:214) suggested that it is only the 'call language' of women participants in this study that reflected genuine transpersonal experience. They argued that traditionally, transpersonal phenomena have been viewed as phenomena that transcend the boundaries of body-ego and time and space. Such an understanding makes transpersonal phenomena wholly experiential. In chapter 1 I noted that there was debate over whether this is an adequate understanding. Ferrer (2000) argues for the place of relationships, community and place. Perhaps the differences between external validation and inner knowing hinted at in the narratives of the informants in this study, reflect different ways of knowing rather than a difference between genuine and non-genuine transpersonal experience. It is of course quite possible for a single person to experience both these ways of knowing. For instance Sophie, who spoke of inner knowing, also spoke of the significant role that the 'community of faith' had in her sense of call.

The data in this study clearly indicates that the sense of call to which UCA ministers refer, can be an important component in the experience of stress amongst clergy. Although a detailed exploration of vocation is outside the scope of this particular study, a comprehensive study of this area of UCA life may well be of benefit.

The next section of this chapter will focus on the connection between the task of ministry and the stress experience of UCA clergy.

The Narratives of Stress

It is clear from the stories shared by the participants in this study, that when men and women act on a belief that they are being called into the UCA ministry they enter into a way of life that is potentially stressful because call can justify all sorts of personal sacrifice. There is danger that in some instances stress can move to burnout. In chapter 2 the link between stress and burnout was shown in the work of Hart (1984 cited in Pryor 1986). The work of Kaldor and Bullpit (2001) which points to significant levels of burnout amongst Australian clergy was also cited.

The interviews highlighted a number of contributors to the stress experience of UCA clergy including the stress related to promoting change in the church, institutional and structural issues, the immediate context of the local congregation (especially in terms of financial crisis), blurred boundaries, dealing with conflict and the difficulty in evaluating the success of ministry. Individual differences in personality were also acknowledged as a potential source of stress. The gender specific aspects to the experience of stress will be discussed later in this chapter.

Maslach and Leiter's work, (1999:51) on burnout (see chapter 2) suggested that definable roles, manageable workloads and a sense of control were important in the workplace. The indefinable nature of ministry make a number of these keys difficult to obtain. The stories of the participants suggested that the workload was never manageable and that there was ambiguity about who was actually in control in a UCA congregation. The stories of the participants also suggested a lack of perceived fairness of the workplace because of disappointed expectations and a lack of shared values due to conflict between the need for change and congregational preferences for maintaining the status quo.

The Stress related to promoting change

Chapter 2 also highlighted a number of writers (Bandy, 2001; Easum, 1993; Irvine, 1997 & Mead, 1991) who emphasised that clergy in Western societies work in a context where change is believed to be required within Christian churches. It was shown in the literature review that dwindling numbers, church closures and funding shortages were the lot of Western churches (Miley, 2002). The interviews indicated that the informants felt the weight of having to be agents of change. The interviews pointed to the difficulty of promoting change amongst people who saw change as threatening. Several participants mentioned they felt caught between the denominational demands for change and growth and congregational forces operating to cling to tradition. Within my own experience of ministry (see chapter 1) there has been stress associated with this tension.

Institutional sources of stress

UCA clergy are required to bridge the world of their own local congregation and the wider denominational world of the UCA. The relationship that UCA ministers have with the denominational structures of the church can in some instances contribute to the stress of ministry.

The stories in this study pointed to a degree of frustration with the bureaucracy of the UCA. Some informants reported a perceived lack of support. Sometimes the disappointment was due to Presbytery or Synod personnel acting in ways that were perceived to be unhelpful (Jill, Sue, Ken, Max). At other times the frustration was due to the way the UCA operates as a denomination (Leanne, Max).

An interesting aspect of UCA culture that emerges in the interviews is the way in which decision-making takes place within the UCA. The UCA is theoretically a non-hierarchical denomination. It is not a denomination where power is vested in an individual (i.e. bishop, pope). Decisions are made by councils. In a congregational setting where most UCA ministers work it is the congregational meeting that makes major decisions. UCA members often argue that this is a strength of the UCA in that it guards against abuse of power by individuals. It is seen to be a system that provides accountability. But the stories of informants (Leanne, Max) hint at the possibility that such a system makes it difficult for UCA clergy to lead. On the one hand, ministers often feel that church members want them to offer leadership, yet the authority

ultimately rests in the congregations. Max spoke of a friend (an Anglican minister) who had more authority to lead and conveyed his frustration at the lack of authority available to UCA ministers.

In chapter 5 it is shown that Leanne feels a need to report to the congregation each year. Leanne's comments indicate the tension that exists for UCA ministers in regard to leadership. The UCA regulations stipulate that ministers report annually to Presbytery, not to the congregation, yet Leanne feels a need to report to the congregation (UCA Regulations. 2.4.4). Leanne's experience points to some ambiguity in the church's understanding of leadership. To be expected to lead without having the authority to lead can be a double bind that provides great potential for stress. Having said this, it is possible that this interpretation of Leanne's comments reflects my male perspective. Perhaps Leanne is displaying a balance between servant leadership and assertiveness. This difference in interpretation hints at a possibility of different ways in which men and women approach the task of leadership. There are possible signs of these differences in the contrasting perspectives of Max and Leanne. Max speaks of frustration at not having the authority to lead. Leanne speaks of her desire to be consultative and inclusive. Perhaps women are more likely than men to be democratic and consultative.

As well as potential stressors linked to the denominational culture of the UCA, there are stressors connected with the particular local ministry context in which a minister lives out the task of ministry.

The immediate context - The local congregation

All the participants interviewed in this study carried out their ministry in a congregational setting, although two of the informants were also involved in other forms of ministry.

Although the focus in this section is on the local congregation, it is assumed that congregations are influenced by wider social and cultural trends like a declining rural sector, waning church attendance in a secular society, and lingering discriminatory attitudes to women. However, each local congregation is different and each provides a context in which there are particular stressors that need to be dealt with by the minister. One particular contextual stressor seems to be that of congregational finances. The three informants (Leanne, Sue and Max) who at the time of interview were working with congregations facing financial difficulties cite these

difficulties as a source of ministry stress. For two of these informants (Leanne and Sue), an expectation that they would solve the financial crisis added to the stress they experienced. It was made clear to them by members of their congregations that their effectiveness is measured on the basis of congregational finances.

Such an expectation on a minister has the potential to be quite burdensome. It is an expectation that the minister may not have the power to meet. There can be many reasons why a congregation is struggling financially and none of them may have anything to do with the minister.

'Blurred boundaries' between home and church life

If the stories of the informants in this study are in any way indicative of the normal experience of UCA clergy, then difficulty in keeping clear boundaries between work and one's private life is a major concern for UCA clergy. This mirrors studies of Hulme (1985), Lee and Balswick (1989 cited in Morris & Blanton, 1994) and Presnell (1977 cited in Morris & Blanton, 1994) referred to in chapter 2. There is a question of whether the blurring of boundaries is related to external expectations, internal attitudes or both. UCA cultural assumptions about the way in which ministry should be conducted may also be relevant.

The experience of the informants suggests that ministry seems to be a vocation in which it is difficult to know the limits of work. The flexibility of ministry and the need to demonstrate constant initiative perhaps adds to the difficulty of knowing when one is on duty and when one is off duty. This was clearly articulated by Sue when she said *'I could never delineate so I ended up never really taking my days off because there was always somebody else that needs you.'*

Ministry is a job in which there is always more to do. *'Your in tray is this big and it keeps piling up'* (Sue). It is unrealistic for a minister to believe that he or she will ever complete all the work that could be done. Max explained, *'one of the things that I try to say to myself is actually the expectations in terms of work in ministry is probably unrealistic.'*

A comment made by Sue raises the spectre of guilt as a factor in some instances of stress related to blurred boundaries. Sue said, *'I'd feel guilty sometimes about not getting things done as quickly as what other people wanted.'* There is a suggestion here that guilt feelings may be a driving force that leads some clergy to work in a way that interferes with other areas of life. Such guilt feelings may be related to particular core beliefs that are a part of a person's life. For instance a deeply held belief within the minister that it is important to meet the expectations of others will lead to feelings of guilt if the 'others' expectations are not met. It is possible that the mixture of UCA cultural norms and individual core beliefs adds significantly to the stress of ministry.

The power of such an internalised core belief leading to the experience of guilt was seen in Jill's reference to the belief system of her father. This was spoken of earlier in this chapter when discussing the object-relations model of internalised images. Jill spoke of the 'inner voice' of her father who never believed that women should be educated. This internalised message produced feelings of guilt at times when Jill was struggling to be wife, mother and minister.

It seems that the difficulty that UCA clergy have in maintaining clear boundaries between work and private life relates in some degree to inner tension. Whilst ministers know how important it is to protect themselves from over work, there can also be 'inner voices' that create a different kind of stress if boundaries are maintained. Stress connected with the blurring of boundaries may at times have more to do with the internal world of the minister than the ministry task itself (Lee and Iverson-Gilbert, 2003:255).

Dealing with conflict

The informant stories also suggested that interpersonal conflict can be a significant source of stress for clergy, whether between individuals or groups within the congregation, or conflict with the minister directly. The stories of conflict told by the informants suggest that reasons for conflict are varied. Reported areas of conflict included the threat of change (Sue and Max), dysfunctional personalities (Leanne), fallout from personnel decisions (Janine) and issues of

power (Max). The connection between relational issues and stress that emerges from the participant' narratives echo my own ministry experience (see chapter 1).

Although on the surface it would appear that these areas of conflict are dissimilar, a closer examination of the informant narratives indicates that the conflict in all cases except one, was related in some way to the implementing of change. The personnel decision that led to conflict for Janine resulted from a congregational need to alter the administrative functioning of the church. The power issues in which Max was embroiled with a particular church member were due to Max feeling a need to alter the amount of influence that the church member was exercising. The conflict story that stood as an exception was Leanne's story of dealing with the conflict that was taking place between two church members after a morning church service.

Measuring the effectiveness of ministry

Effectiveness in ministry is difficult to determine (refer to chapter 2, McHugh and Scanlon, 2001). A minister may have a sense of what constitutes success but this may be in conflict with the way another person or the congregation views success. When speaking of her stress in ministry, Leanne says that a key stressor for her is *'the way that we measure ministry, the effectiveness of ministry.'* Leanne is commenting upon the objective measurements of financial security and the number of people in church on a Sunday as the tools by which success is understood. These comments are in keeping with the research of McDuff (2001) mentioned in chapter 2, which indicates that women clergy place little emphasis on objective measurements of success. Sue also speaks of the difficulty in measuring effectiveness. She relates her frustration in not having a clear job description in her ministry placement. This frustration echoes the results of studies across other occupational groups listed by Abraham (1997) in the literature review. The other informant who makes reference to measuring the effectiveness of ministry is Janine. Her concern with measurement is slightly different. It is not so much about how to measure ministry but rather the lack of feedback from her congregation to allow measurement to take place.

It is of note that both Leanne and Sue entered ministry from careers where 'job measurement' was clear and regular, and where the tasks involved led to a clear sense of completion. Although it appears of interest that it was only women who made mention of this particular stressor, the researcher (male) also finds this a stressful aspect of ministry (see researcher's

storyline in Chapter 1). The researcher also entered ministry from a career where work effectiveness was easily measured. It may be that this particular stressor is particularly problematic for people who have entered ministry from a style of profession in which task completion is clear.

Personality and stress

Although there was an emphasis placed on external stressors by the participants, some referred to personality as a mediator of the stress experience. This was particularly the case in the stories shared by those informants experiencing high levels of stress at the time of interview.

Tom spoke of the difficulty of being an introverted person in a public profession and the stress associated with this. Janine spoke of her awareness of needing to control things when under stress. The self awareness indicated by the informants in relation to their stress experiences, indicates a possibility that although problematic, stress experiences have the potential to provide a growth and learning opportunity for UCA clergy. When under stress, a person can be thrown into a time of self-reflection. This self-reflection can lead to a greater awareness of the source of stress. For instance Janine's awareness of her need to be in control is directly related to her experience of stress.

The link between personality and the experience of stress in ministry mentioned by some of the informants, echoes some of what was seen in the literature cited in chapter 2. St. Romain (1991) makes a link between co-dependency and burnout. Rassieur (1982:35) also mentioned in chapter 2, identifies those who find satisfaction in ministry as having "a strong, firm sense of self and personal identity."

Both in the literature of chapter 2 and the interviews conducted in this research it has been seen that clergy stress is linked to personality and life history. A person's stress experience has a historical component to it. It is for this reason that self-awareness is such an important part of stress management. When the 'triggers' that lead to stress are understood, there is a better chance of dealing with stress.

The impact of stress

Stress is part of the experience of being human. In chapter 2 information on the mechanics of the human stress response was presented (McEwen, 2002; Pryor, 1986; Selye, 1978). It was seen that when stress is prolonged, the defence system that the body uses to deal with stress can lead to unwanted physiological consequences (McEwen, 2002). The impact of this can be quite pronounced. The informants spoke of the personal cost of stress in their lives.

The impact of stress on the clergy interviewed in this study included the physical, psychological and relational dimensions of life. The physical costs of stress that were mentioned were being physically run down and therefore more susceptible to viruses (Sophie), dramatic loss of weight (Sue), sore muscles (Janine), running on adrenaline (Sophie and Tom) and tiredness (Sophie, Sue, Tom and Janine). The severe impact of stress on physical health had led to one informant making a choice to leave congregational ministry (Tom).

Psychological impacts of stress that were mentioned included depression (Ken), anxiety (Sue) and a racing mind that made it difficult to sleep (Jill). All three male respondents mentioned a tendency to withdraw emotionally from significant relationships when under stress. The fact that this was not evident amongst the female informants is of interest, given the previously mentioned literature which argues that the female response to stress is better described as 'tend and befriend' rather than 'fight or flight' (Heinrichs, Baumgartner, Kirschbaum & Ehlert, 2003; Taylor et.al, 2000). Sue spoke of how she sought out safe relational experiences when under stress.

The notion that women move towards others while under stress, while men withdraw, might account for the perception that women clergy do not deal well with stress. Sue spoke of a view that had been expressed to her that female clergy do not deal with stress as well as male clergy. Could such a perception be related to the fact that women may be more likely to speak to others of their experience (due to their tendency to relate), whereas men may be more inclined to keep it to themselves (due to their tendency to withdraw)? Is it possible that female stress is simply more visible? If this is the case then the UCA may need to give some consideration to how stress is identified amongst clergy. The exploratory nature of this study, along with the small sample involved, means that these questions must at this stage remain as questions. There are hints here for further areas of research.

Stress is a multidimensional phenomenon. If gender influences a person's response to stress, this needs to be balanced against the reality that it is only one of many such influences. Individual personality, life experience, theological viewpoint and world view will all contribute to the way in which situations are perceived. There will be great variation within gender groups (Bergemann, 2005 cited chapter 2). This is clear in the participant narratives in this study. Although there are areas of commonality within the gender groupings there is ample evidence of substantial difference.

Perhaps the best way of understanding the influence of gender is to think in terms of two overlapping continuums. One continuum represents male and the other female. Within each gender group there will be a range of stress responses. Due to this range it may be that some male and female responses are quite similar. As Bergemann (2005 cited in chapter 2) suggests, it is problematic to think in terms of one clear-cut level for every member of the same gender. There are simply too many variables at work.

Female clergy and stress

Literature cited in chapter 2 indicates that the overseas experience of female clergy is that they are still pioneers and that discrimination still exists (Chang, 1997; Charlton, 1997; Lummis & Nesbitt, 2000 and Sullins, 2000). This discrimination is also sometimes seen in the broader occupational landscape (Lim & Teo, 1996;McDonald & Korabik, 1991 cited in Lim & Teo, 1996). The stories of the female participants in this study suggest that UCA female clergy also experience discrimination. Mention has already been made of a possible gender specific difference in regards to the relational impact of stress. In this section we will focus on the issues of discrimination and the tension between home and church life.

Chapter 5 showed evidence of both covert and overt discrimination against women ministers and that there were people within some congregations opposed to having women clergy. It is possible that in such settings, the task of implementing change may be particularly stressful for female clergy. It is likely that for some church members, the presence of a female minister may in itself be a symbol of unwanted change. Certainly in the interview narratives, participants have recounted the difficulties that some church members have in accepting female clergy. Sophie spoke of being told that she did not fit the 'image' of a minister and that there were

congregations that did not want her because she was a female. Leanne spoke of how in her first placement the congregation had to adapt to having a minister who was pregnant.

The UCA officially accepts the place of women in ordained ministry (UCA Constitution, para.14). However, the stories of the female informants suggest that there is a lingering discrimination that may be covert, against UCA female ministers. It is possible for women to take on major roles within the UCA. The UCA has had women Moderators at a state Synod level and women filling the role of President of the National Assembly. There is no barrier to women in the UCA at a structural level. But the majority of ministers live out their ministry in the 'grassroots' communities of congregations. It is at a congregational level where the differences between espoused policy and reality, theory and life are played out. It is here that the women in this study have experienced covert and sometimes overt discrimination. Because the UCA officially accepts female clergy the discrimination is hidden and therefore difficult to name. This may make the discrimination even more problematic. There is nothing to stop a congregational member acting in a discriminatory way and then insisting that it has nothing to do with the minister being a woman. There are signs that women clergy in the UCA are still pioneers and that the issue is a current one for some congregations.

Another area of particular concern for female clergy is the juggling of family and church. This reflects the American findings of Zikmund, Lummis and Chang on female clergy stress (1997) cited in chapter 2. Similarly, evidence was provided of occupational stress studies that showed the family-work interface as stress inducing for females in general (Davidson & Cooper, 1983 cited in Lim & Teo, 1996; Tolhurst & Stewart, 2004; White, O'Connor & Garrett, 1997). All four married female informants reported that they found the balancing of home and family life to be difficult. Although one male informant (Max) talked about this balancing as a stressor he used different language from that of the female informants. Max's language was about being *"at home for the children",* whereas the language of the women was focussed around the tasks of parenting and the domestic duties needed to keep a household functioning. None of the male informants spoke of the tension created by being a father as well as a minister. The tension between being mother and minister was clear in the stories of the women. This finding is consistent with the literature outlined in chapter 2 pertaining to research on gender differences in occupational stress.

Dealing with stress

The stories shared by the informants in this study highlighted a number of strategies that the informants identified as helpful in dealing with stress. These strategies are discussed under the categories of relational, psychological, spiritual practice and having a life outside the ministry.

Relational

The Australian based research of Hughes (1989) and Whetham (2000) that was cited in chapter 2, indicated that opportunity to connect meaningfully with people who have some understanding of what it is like to be a minister is of great benefit to clergy. The value of such connection was also evident in this study with six of the eight informants naming it as helpful. There are different ways in which this connection can happen. It can be in a formalised setting such as supervision, or a minister's growth group, or informally with friends or colleagues. A value of such relating may well be what Sue described as the normalising effect that it produces. Stress is perhaps more manageable when it is able to be viewed as part of the experience of all ministers rather than an isolated personal experience.

Informants who were married also spoke of the marriage relationship as a significant source of support. This replicates the findings by NCLS (1996) and Pryor (1986).

Psychological

The ministers interviewed seemed to have a good sense of the connection between the way they thought about a perceived stressor and the level of stress that they experienced. The strategy that emerged as a recurrent helpful theme was the ability to step back and see the bigger picture. Although the informants did not use the language of cognitive therapy, they described techniques of cognitive restructuring such as reframing, as a method of dealing with stress. (Reframing was noted in chapter 2 as a cognitive restructuring technique (Rupke, Blecke, & Renfrow, 2006)). The meaning of seeing the *'bigger picture'* was also related to detaching psychologically from what was happening to enable a more objective perspective. In a way the strategy of seeing the '*bigger picture'* is related to the relational strategy already mentioned. The value of connecting with people who understand the world of the minister could be interpreted in some instances as the value of speaking with people who assist in presenting the bigger picture.

Psychological knowledge was also cited as being helpful. Both self knowledge and knowledge of the dynamics that operate between people were seen as being of assistance in seeing the big picture.

Spiritual practice

The literature review of chapter 2 indicated that a number of writers have written of the importance of spiritual practice in dealing with clergy stress (Rassieur, 1982; Pryor, 1986; Croucher, 2003). Rassieur (1982) makes the case for each minister needing to develop a form of spirituality that has congruency with his or her own being.

Spiritual practices were not a major part of the stories that were shared by the informants, although half of the informants did make mention of prayer. The prayer that was mentioned as useful was a form of contemplative prayer. In Leanne's case it took the shape of intentional silence. Max spoke of combining quiet reflective prayer with listening to appropriate music. Max and Tom spoke of combining physical exercise (walking) with prayer. In these references to prayer, the environment in which the prayer took place was important. Leanne's intentional silence was in a park, Max's quiet prayer would be with music in the background. Tom would walk in the bush. It seems that what was being expressed was the usefulness of meditative prayer within an appropriate environmental setting.

Although she did not mention prayer or meditation in a direct sense, Janine spoke of the value that she places on having a spiritual director and the value of contemplative spiritual practices that are a part of her lifestyle.

A life outside

Having a life outside the ministry was a major theme that emerged in the interviews. It would seem that for married clergy, family life is particularly important. It is also important to keep in mind that the juggling of family life with ministry has been named as an area of stress for clergy. Although family life may assist in keeping a balance in life, being part of a family can also be a cause for stress due to the tension between roles. The role of the spouse for married informants was named as significant by four of the seven married informants.

Being intentional in taking days off and removing oneself geographically from the scene of ministry was seen as useful by some informants. This can be difficult due to the boundary issues of ministry. It is not always easy to get a regular day off.

Two of the female informants spoke of the helpfulness of being involved in continuing ministry education. They spoke of how it gave them another context in which to reflect upon their experiences of ministry.

There seems to be an idiosyncratic aspect to dealing with stress and the way it is handled. When it comes to those things outside of ministry that assist people to destress there is a degree of individuality to it. Tom destresses by physical activity, Leanne will *'read rubbish'* as a way of escaping. Janine will go to coffee shops, while Jill will go to the beach. What works for one person may not be appropriate for another.

Unhelpful ways of addressing stress

The informants found it far easier to name those things that assisted with dealing with stress than to name things that were unhelpful. One common theme that emerged was that the *'legislated approach'* to clergy care in the UCA is not always helpful. Sophie, Jill, Janine, Ken and Tom all indicated that UCA clergy can find this approach to care somewhat problematic.

The informants were all part of the NSW UCA Synod. A requirement for ministers in this Synod is that they be part of a minister's growth group. Sophie reported that her initial experience in this group was stressful due to an expectation *'to share.'* This stress was related to Sophie not being sure that the other people in the group were *'safe people.'* This may be related to Sophie's experience as an abused person. If so, it raises the question of whether legislated approaches to caring are able to cater for the idiosyncratic nature of individual stress phenomena.

Jill reported that she *'hates groups.'* She said that she would never think of using a group setting as a way of destressing. She said *'it would be far too stressful.'* Janine found her peer supervision group to be unhelpful due to the dominance of one particular person and Ken and

Tom both reported difficulties with the idea that *'formalised structures'* or a *'legislated approach'* to caring was adequate or helpful.

Sophie, the only informant who was single, made mention of the pressure to *'never have friends in a congregation'* in which one ministers. She reported that this was something that she was taught at college. For a single minister whose life is largely consumed by ministry, the pressure to not have friendships within the congregation can lead to substantial experiences of loneliness.

The impact of the research process and methodology on the researcher's narrative

In chapter 1 I referred to a number of personal hunches emerging from my own experience of ministry. These hunches were that UCA clergy are experiencing high levels of stress, that they tend not to employ self care strategies, that some theological assumptions lead to a denial of the effects of stress amongst clergy, that the best way of understanding the effects of stress amongst clergy is to listen to clergy and that there may be differences in the stress experiences of female and male clergy.

The research that I have conducted has confirmed some of these hunches. UCA clergy do indeed experience substantial stress in ministry and the research indicates that despite many commonalities there are gender differences in the experience of stress amongst UCA clergy. On the other hand, the hunch that UCA clergy do not employ self-care strategies is not verified by the research. The participants name a number of strategies that they find helpful in coping with stress. However, there is also evidence that the demands of ministry sometimes make it difficult to employ these strategies.

There is not enough in the stories shared by the participants to make conclusions regarding the hunch connecting theological belief and the denial of stress. There are however, signs that the theological concept of Christian call (vocation) is a powerful concept within the UCA that does have the potential to keep people locked in stressful situations.

The hunch that the best way of understanding the effects of stress amongst clergy is to listen to clergy, guided the study from the beginning. As I have read literature and struggled with decisions regarding methodology, I have become more certain that the methodology outlined in chapter 3 is the reasonable and respectful way to approach the research contained in this thesis.

This research has been an interesting journey. I chose a narrative methodology because I believed that the human stress experience is multi-layered and can only be understood within a person's overall life narrative. However, the research has opened up the phenomenon of clergy stress in ways that I did not expect. I have been surprised at how many layers are evident in the clergy stress experience.

Prior to the commencement of the research I held to a conviction that clergy stress would be linked to the life stories of individual clergy, but I was not expecting evidence of the powerful influence of the UCA institutional emphasis on call as a factor in clergy stress. The social construct of call in the UCA and its relationship to clergy stress has surprised me in two ways. I find it surprising that it seems to be in the background of all of the participants' narratives. The second surprise is in finding how much it is a part of my own understanding of ministry. I am now aware of the way in which this institutional belief in call has become a part of the interpretive framework through which I view ministry. It is a little like the frame around a painting working at an often unconscious level to influence the viewer's perception.

The research experience has brought me to a place where I have many ongoing questions about call and how it is understood, including my own sense of call. I have discovered the truth of Clandinnen and Connelly's (2000:59) claim that 'as narrative inquirers we work within the [narrative] space not only with the participants but also with ourselves', and this involves a self-confrontation for the researcher. Just as call is one layer within the stress story of UCA clergy, call itself has many layers to it. I have been reminded by these clergy narratives, interacting with my narrative, of the psychological, spiritual, historical and sociological dimensions to call. The experience that clergy refer to as 'call' is worthy of further investigation.

In wrestling with the philosophical underpinnings of the chosen methodology I found myself assessing assumptions about the ways in which Western culture understands the self. This exploration opened up ways of understanding that I had not encountered before. My view of

'self' has changed dramatically. I have warmed to the concept of the 'dialogical self' and the fact that self is a journey or a narrative (Hermans & Kempen, 1993:62). This has implications for the way that stress is understood. The rejection of a Cartesian view of self which sees the individual as a disconnected individual or 'island' means that stress becomes viewed as a part of a unique human story that intersects and overlaps with the stories of others (i.e. family, culture, institutions etc.). This has implications for dealing with stress. If stress has connections to the various parts of one's life history, then awareness of this history and its impact is crucial if one wants to do more than just soothe the symptoms of stress.

This has ramifications for the counselling profession. Stress models that focus on managing stress through the removal of external stressors risk missing the perceptual elements of stress unique to each individual. The research I have conducted leads me to a belief that when counselling clients who are seeking to deal with stress, growth in self-awareness is an important part of therapy.

In chapter 3 I mentioned that there are limitations to the methodology of this research. The sample is small and therefore cannot be generalised to the wider UCA clergy population nor does it lead to any quantifiable understanding of clergy stress. However, the research has brought me to a place where I am not sure that I see this as a weakness. Indeed to apply quantitative criteria of reliability, validity and generalisability is inappropriate. Rather, I need to ask whether these stories are authentic, plausible and credible (Clandinnen & Connelly, 2000:185).

Recommendations

On the basis of the research outlined in this thesis I now suggest for consideration by the UCA the following needs:

1) A clearer understanding of call in the UCA
2) Education of congregations as to the reasons the UCA has female ministers, the changing societal environment in which the church operates and the nature of clergy stress.
3) Examination of the UCA model of church leadership
4) Stress management for ministers

5) Education of Presbyteries in relation to gender differences and stress

The need for a clearer understanding of call in the UCA

While vocation or call is recognised as an important part of the life of a UCA minister, Irvine (1997), cited in chapter 1, contends that the church can make mistakes in relation to vocation. Determining whether a person has a genuine sense of vocation is hardly an exact science. Discernment of call in the UCA is communal rather than individual. There are well established processes that the church uses as part of the task of discernment (UCA Regs.2.2.5 – 2.2.14).

Given the possibility of a sense of call being linked to particular understandings of self and God, it is important that there be opportunity for times of reflective attention for potential ministry candidates (Welwood, 2000). UCA processes place an emphasis upon reflective attention at two stages of ministry training. The first is in the recently introduced mandatory period of discernment (POD) that all potential ministry candidates undertake prior to candidating (UCA Reg.2.2.2 (a)(iii)). This is a period of time in which the potential candidate works with a mentor in intentional reflection upon the sense of call. The second stage of reflective attention is during the training for ministry. Running conjointly with the academic requirements for ministry is a process of ministry formation. This process is reflective in nature.

The introduction of the POD shows that the UCA understands the complexity in determining the nature of a sense of vocation. Any process no matter how well formulated is dependent upon the ability of those involved in the process to carry out that process. In the UCA, the discernment process relies heavily upon the use of interviewing committees at both a Presbytery and Synod level.

The researcher recommends that the UCA give consideration to ensuring that those involved in the process of discerning the genuineness of call have a sound understanding of the complexities involved in such discernment. Given that the findings of this study point to the importance of recognising the psychologically and socially constructed dimensions of call, it is my contention that all those involved in the discernment process need to be aware of these dimensions, including candidates and mentors.

Education of congregations

The stories of the informants in this study reveal that women clergy in the UCA are at times discriminated against. It is recommended that the UCA give consideration to educating congregations on the reasons the UCA has female clergy. It seems that in some UCA congregations there are people who seem unable to celebrate the fact that the UCA is a denomination that values the place of female clergy. Women clergy remain pioneers in the UCA.

The UCA clergy narrative has shown that the changes in both church and society add substantially to the experience of stress in ministry. This is mirrored in many other studies (Harris, 1977; Hughes, 1989; Rediger, 1994 cited in chapter 2). It is members of the clergy who are often left with the task of assisting congregations to make necessary changes. The task of ministers would be made easier if congregations had a clear understanding of the societal landscape in which churches now find themselves.

In recent years the UCA has put a vast amount of time, money and energy into running programmes aimed at assisting the church to understand these issues. Often it is clergy who receive this training. This can lead to a knowledge gap between clergy and congregations. This knowledge gap may add to stress due to a mismatch in the way that clergy and congregations view the churches role in the world.

There is potential value in congregations being educated about why there is a push toward change in the UCA. How this education is done may need to vary from place to place. In some settings, it may be the minister who is an appropriate educator. In other settings it may be the Presbytery or Synod who needs to take the lead in such educating. This is said in the knowledge that the UCA is already putting great effort into such education. This recommendation is more of an encouragement to keep looking for new ways of getting the information through to the local congregation. Cultural change within the church is needed and such change requires substantial resources over a period of time.

When clergy suffer under the effects of stress there are detrimental consequences for them, their families and indeed for the church as a whole. Adequate care of ministers by congregations surely leads to benefits for all concerned. It is therefore recommended that the

UCA give consideration to assisting congregations to understand the nature of the stress experience of UCA clergy and how they might assist in ensuring that their minister receives adequate care.

Examination of the UCA understanding of leadership

This research has raised some questions about the ambiguity surrounding leadership in the UCA. One question relates to who leads whom and who is accountable to whom. This is really a question of authority. Although the UCA regulations make it clear that ministers are answerable to Presbytery and not the local congregations, it is the congregations who pay the minister (UCA Reg.2.4.4). This makes for a confusing scenario. A member of a local congregation who is not versed in the regulations of the UCA is likely to think of the minister as an employee of the local church. A reading of the duties of a minister in the UCA regulations shows that the word 'lead' is missing from those duties (UCA Regulations 2.4.2 – 2.4.4). Yet the same regulations outline that one of the duties of the church council is 'leading the congregation' (UCA Regulations 3.1.13 (a)).

A second question is to do with 'style of leadership.' Contrasting leadership styles are hinted at in the narratives of Leanne and Max. Perhaps women prefer a more consultative approach than do some men. Max's frustration hints at a need for clergy to be better trained in the tools of negotiating difficult relationships.

I would like to recommend that the UCA give consideration to addressing some of the ambiguity surrounding authority that is making leadership difficult for UCA clergy and to give consideration to ensuring the adequacy of ministerial training relating to leadership.

Stress management for ministers

The stories of the informants have indicated both commonalities and idiosyncrasies when dealing with stress in ministry. The UCA has developed within its structures ways of caring for ministers. These take the form of compulsory supervision and minister's growth groups. Ministers have freedom in determining both the type of supervision (peer group or individual), and their supervisor. So although the structured care that was labelled as *'legislated care'* (by

one informant) was deemed a little problematic by some informants, there is some degree of freedom of choice in terms of how this care is delivered.

A potential problem with peer group supervision is that although it carries with it the benefit of speaking with those who share an understanding of the ministry world, it may be a difficult context in which to share anything that one feels may reflect on one's ability as a minister.

This research has shown that stress is part of an individual's narrative. This means that it is impossible to establish any overall system of stress management that will fit each person. There is a risk in assuming that because there are regulations in place to ensure that clergy are having supervision and are engaged in growth group participation that this will guard everyone from stress. According to Irvine's (1997:160) assertion cited in chapter 2, stress management for clergy requires a two tiered approach. Irvine describes these two tiers as system support and personal support. The best that a denomination can be expected to do is to have system support in place. In addition to this, each minister needs to have his or her own tailored stress management programme. It is this personal support that can allow for the idiosyncratic nature of the individual.

It is recommended that each candidate for ministry be encouraged to work with an appropriate mentor to establish a personal support strategy. An appropriate mentor will be one that is trained in psychological and spiritual insight. This could be done as part of the training for ministry and could be continued throughout the intern period following college. In conjunction with this recommendation is a further recommendation to ensure that training of potential mentors be undertaken.

An important theme in this study is the importance of clergy being able to see the 'bigger picture.' This is reported as being of great benefit in dealing with stress, highlighting the importance of clergy being able to reframe a stressful experience. Individuals are at times blinded to 'the bigger picture' by entrenched core beliefs that distort perception. There may well be benefit in training that assists clergy to recognise troublesome distortions in their thinking. This may be of particular value for female clergy given research that indicates that females are more likely to attribute failure to themselves than do males (McCormick, 1998 cited in chapter 2).

Part of being able to see the 'bigger picture' may be being clear on what one is able to take responsibility for. One participant (Leanne) referred to the serenity prayer.

> God grant me the serenity
> To accept the things that I cannot change;
> Courage to change the things that I can;
> And wisdom to know the difference.
>
> (Niebuhr cited in Brown, 1974:327)

The interviews conducted in this study indicate that there is often pressure on ministers to take responsibility for matters that are outside their control (i.e numbers in church, finances). Niebuhr's prayer is a reminder that it is unhelpful to try and take responsibility for anything where either authority or power or both are missing. If either one or both of these ingredients are missing a powerful 'stress recipe' awaits.

Given the connection between a minister's experience of stress and that minister's overall life narrative in this research, I would further recommend that part of assisting clergy to deal with stress in their lives needs to be the intentional development of self-awareness as part of their initial ministry training and ongoing professional development.

A strong theme that is indicated in the interview narratives is the difficulty in maintaining a balance between ministry and private life. The assumption here is that life can be split into compartments. There may be value in a paradoxical approach that sees all of life as ministry. I remember a colleague many years ago saying to me that ministry is a 24 hr a day task in which clergy give a certain amount of that ministry time to the work of the church. The helpfulness of this view is that time with family and time for one self are seen as legitimate and valuable.

Education of Presbyteries in relation to gender differences and stress

In the UCA, ministers are accountable to the particular Presbytery within which they minister. The Presbytery therefore has oversight of ministers both in terms of discipline and care. It is important that Presbyteries be up to date in research that relates to the care of ministers. It is recommended that Presbyteries keep abreast of emerging trends in research that are hinting at differences in the way that males and females experience and deal with stress. For instance, the stories in this study suggest that juggling family life and ministry may be more of a stressor for female clergy. It will be important for the church to find the best ways to support women

clergy. The church also needs to examine ways to break down some of the discrimination that seems to exist toward female clergy. This study also echoes research that suggests that women go into networking behaviour when under stress. This may mean that female clergy stress is more visible. If this is the case how does one keep tabs on stress amongst male clergy where it may not be so obvious? These are important considerations for the UCA.

Further Research

Completing this research leads me to suggest the following suggestions for further research;

1) *Discrimination* – Research could be conducted amongst UCA congregations to test the level of acceptance of female ministers in an attempt to shed light on the degree to which the discrimination hinted at in this study is found across the UCA.

2) *Gender differences* – a) Research that focuses on gender differences relating to stress responses amongst UCA clergy over a larger sample would be of benefit. It would be possible to frame a quantitative study focussing on testing out 'fight or flight' compared with 'tend and befriend' type behaviours amongst stressed clergy.

b) Although leadership style is not a particular focus of this study, there are some signs in two of the interview narratives (Leanne and Max) that men and women may exhibit different approaches to leadership. Men may have a tendency toward authoritative leadership with women opting for more consultative and democratic processes. This would be a worthwhile area of exploration within the UCA. It may be that there needs to be an adjusting of the existing church structures to allow for different leadership styles. It may also be that female and male clergy may be able to learn something about leadership from one another.

c) There are hints in this research of possible differences in the ways in which males and females experience a sense of call. Qualitative research that further explores this phenomenon amongst both men and women may be of worth.

3) *The concept of self* - The research outlined in this thesis has left me passionate about further research relating to the concept of self and its relationship to stress. This is an area of research that I would be interested in exploring.

Conclusion

The stress narratives that form the data in this study indicate that the UCA clergy that were interviewed have experienced high levels of stress. It is of note that as I write the final words of this thesis only one of the eight participants in this study is still working as a congregational minister. In the sharing of my own story in chapter 1, I stated that I have not experienced the high levels of stress of colleagues. I no longer believe this to be true. A by-product of the research process is a greater awareness of my own ministry stress. This increase in awareness has been largely due to the methodology used in this research. The semi-structured interviews were collegial encounters in which the stories shared resonated strongly at times with my own experiences of ministry. In chapter 5 I showed that the stresses connected to being an 'agent of change' and the difficulties in measuring the effectiveness of ministry were particular stressors to which I relate.

As I conclude this thesis it is with the hope that this study provides some understanding of the experience of UCA clergy and in particular female UCA clergy. A further hope is that it might mark the beginning of further research into the female clergy experience in Australia. The lasting impression that I am left with is that female clergy in Australia continue to be pioneers. I am saddened to think that in a time when it is particularly difficult to be a clergyperson in Western society, the stress experience of female clergy continues to be intensified by discrimination.

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APPENDIX A

Information sheet for Participants in Research on stress amongst UCA female clergy.

My name is Peter Pereira. I am a Uniting Church Minister and I am currently enrolled in a Masters research project titled ***How female Uniting Church in Australia (UCA) clergy experience and deal with stress in ministry.*** As a UCA minister I have some awareness of the stresses of ministry and of its impact upon colleagues. Research into clergy stress in Australia has focussed upon male clergy and I am interested in conducting research that begins to shed some light on the stress experience of female clergy. Although the research will focus upon female clergy, the assistance of both male and female participants will be important to enable gender comparison.

The research will seek to understand stress as clergy themselves experience it. This means that the collection of information will take place primarily through the use of in depth interviews. These interviews will be audio taped. Confidentiality will be ensured throughout the research process. The researcher will be the only person able to connect names with data and all data will be kept under lock and key. In the interviewing the researcher will intentionally avoid using participant names.

Participants in the research may be interviewed more than once. Interviews will be arranged for times that are convenient for the participants.

Your availability to be interviewed will be purely on the basis of your willingness to participate in the research. You have the freedom to withdraw from the research at any time. If you should choose to withdraw at any time then all data obtained from you will be destroyed.

It is recognised that in some instances the sharing of stories can be a painful experience. It is also true that it can be cathartic and helpful. If during the interview process emotional pain is experienced, you will have the freedom to end the interview. If as a result of the interview process you become aware of a need to consult with a professional counsellor, referral to an appropriate person can be organized.

I welcome your interest and the possibility of your participation in this research.

Yours sincerely

Peter Pereira

If you would like further information please contact:

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This project has been approved by the Human Research Ethics Committee of the University of New England (Approval No……, Valid to ...../...../....).
Should you have any complaints concerning the manner in which this research is conducted, please contact the Research Ethics Officer at the following address:

Research Services
University of New England
Armidale, NSW 2351.
Telephone: (02)677 3449 Facsimile (02) 6773 3543
Ethics: Ethics@metz.une.edu.au

Please detach consent form along the dotted line and retain the information sheet above.

……

I …….have read the information above and any questions I have asked have been answered to my satisfaction. I agree to participate in this activity, realizing that I may withdraw at any time. I agree that research data gathered for the study may be published, provided my name and other potentially identifying information are not used.

……. ……
Participant's signature Date

……. ……..
Investigator's signature Date

APPENDIX B

Interview Guide

Tell me about your experience of ministry? (Context of ministry, length of time in ministry, sense of call)

Have there been stressful times? (Would you mind telling me about them?)

What was the experience like for you?

What did you find helpful in these times?

What was unhelpful?

Is there anything else you would like to share with me?