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In 2017, LCMS RESEARCH CONDUCTED A SURVEY of the well-being of church workers and their spouses.

In 2019, CHURCH WORKERS WERE INVITED to sign up for worker wellness focus groups.

**EVERY CHURCH WORKER SUFFERS (2 TIM. 3:12).**
It can’t be avoided. We want to be there to bring the Gospel of Christ and care for those who bear the cross (1 PETER 4:10). To that end, we have reached out to our workers and their spouses to find out what kind of help they need most. This has resulted in the largest study of its kind ever carried out by the LCMS. Our church workers’ suggestions are godly, helpful and often touching and selfless. We are already hard at work to put their advice into practice.

— Rev. Dr. Matthew Harrison, president of the LCMS

**WHAT WE HEARD:**
Church Workers Speak on Wellness

**WHY WE CARE**

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**NOTE:** Many of these statistics were also made available in the January 2019 worker wellness insert to Reporter, but we are providing them again to reiterate the need for this discussion with our church workers. Please visit blogs.lcms.org/2018/reporter-insert-church-worker-wellness to view the January insert for more detail and other statistics not included here.

**26%**
have experienced serious marital difficulties while in ministry

**24%**
have been told by a professional that they suffer from anxiety or depression

**55%**
have experienced stress from financial concerns

**47%**
do not have a father confessor or similar type of spiritual companion

**75%**
have a Body Mass Index (BMI) considered overweight or obese

**53%**
commissioned paid below district guidelines

**41%**
ordained

**45**
one online worker wellness focus groups included commissioned workers, ordained ministers, international missionaries and spouses

**380**
workers participated in these focus groups

**9**
Key themes were drawn out of the results of the focus groups (see Pages 2–3)

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* Of married church workers.
THE WORKERS SPOKE...

AND WE LISTENED. The nine themes below were mentioned often among the workers and their spouses throughout worker wellness focus group discussions. Nearly every one of the 25 groups repeatedly touched on these needs without being prompted by the facilitators. Since these themes are obviously heavy on church workers’ minds, ministry leaders now have a clearer guide for how best to care for workers and their family members.

WE NEED to be in each other’s lives — eating together ... talking ... listening ... praying.

A CHANGE IN THE CULTURE OF THE SYNOD

WE NEED something that we can access in our own neck of the woods!

NON-REPORTING CAREGIVERS

I CONSTANTLY FIGHT the lie that I should not be in this position. The thought of admitting I need help is just one more thing to make me feel unqualified.

IN ORDER TO FEEL comfortable sharing or admitting that I have a need, I have to know with certainty that the caregiver is trustworthy and that my call won’t be jeopardized.

MANY WORKERS EXPRESSED a great need to have someone whose role is to provide personal, attentive care to them and their families. Unfortunately, there’s a high level of distrust between church workers and a lot of fear that, by talking to someone about their challenges, they might lose their call.

HOW ABOUT a person that could serve as a ‘worker chaplain,’ providing pastoral care and counseling especially for spiritual and emotional issues among workers? But seriously, only if they don’t report to my district president!

CHURCH WORKERS WANT to be at their best in order to serve their congregations and ministries well. This is why so many in the focus groups stressed that care for workers needs to be proactive to ensure that all church workers and spouses meet with someone regularly, leave behind judgmental attitudes and make sure no one is isolated.

WE WANT someone who walks alongside us and understands, not someone who just occasionally checks in.

CARE PROVIDED AT THE LOCAL LEVEL

WORKERS ALL AGREE that they do need care. They also agree that it’s best done at the local level, with care and support available from the people around them. Who best to be responsible for the care of the worker than the church or ministry to which they’re called and the other church workers around them?

RELATIONSHIPS MORE THAN PROGRAMS

WE NEED recommendations for trustworthy resources that we can access in our own neck of the woods!

WE ARE ALL CREATED to be in relationship. It’s no surprise, then, that when it comes to care and support, the workers clamored for personal, relational care from fellow workers and trusted professionals, rather than generic programs that are intended for a broad audience.

RELATIONSHIPS last over time, but programs lack stability and come and go quickly! We need more supportive mentoring relationships.

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OF COURSE, not all programs are bad. Several were praised in the focus groups for their mentoring/coaching model, local opportunities, and high quality of care and services. The workers hope that these kinds of programs and experiences can be made even more accessible to all workers, not just those new to the field.

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**Recognize and Connect**

We don’t want to feel lonely, forgotten, and disconnected anymore. Sometimes we feel that we’re only cared about for the sake of our call, but we want to know we’re cared about because we’re human.

**Church Workers**

Many feel that we’re lonely, forgotten, and treated as - and we certainly don’t want to come across that way! We need someone else to speak up for us, both generally and specifically. Focus group participants wondered if the Synod and districts might provide training for ministry leaders and direct them to helpful resources for their church workers. Not only that, but workers are hopeful that those entities might also advocate for workers, especially when it comes to compensation, time off and access to resources.

**We Now Know**

Through the focus group discussions, workers reiterated that the Synod is doing well in raising awareness among workers, but it’s the ministries and congregations that truly need to know how to care for their workers. Some workers explained that it may be helpful to remind ministries that worker care is a stewardship issue.

**Church Workers**

Put their all into their vocation, so it’s typical to see that the health of a church worker’s congregation or ministry directly relates to their sense of vocational well-being. The focus groups also noted that a church or ministry’s health also greatly impacts how well that ministry can care for its workers — so it’s easy to see the connection. Especially for many pastors, if their church is doing well, they feel they are healthy, too. And vice versa.

**Financial Assistance**

Many of us just find ourselves in mathematically impossible financial situations, and we are in need of financial assistance to help us get our footing.

**Finances can be a challenge.** Church worker or not. Workers realize that many churches and ministries cannot afford to offer them better salaries, health care, retirement and so on. Financial well-being, however, is unique among church-worker needs in that the major problems are beyond the worker’s ability to change. In most situations, they are unable to “take on more hours” or get a second job in order to make ends meet. Most workers are underpaid for their skill level and workload, and the problem is being compounded as costs for health care are being pushed onto the workers while young workers are burdened with significant student debt.

**The toughest work** is often being done in the places that can pay the least, like dying congregations, inner-city churches, immigrant ministry, etc.

**The workers** largely realize that the Synod itself is not full of money, but they believe that the most effective way to care for workers is to invest in the workers themselves, regardless of their location and ministry. Many churches and ministries are not able to pay their workers what they fully need, so workers have mentioned several ideas and options for closing the gap, like helping to alleviate student loan debt, providing salary assistance for ministries that can’t afford to pay their church workers what they need, and helping church workers with high health-care deductibles and premiums.

**Communication: Awareness and Advocacy**

It can be awkward for workers to discuss their needs with their churches and ministries. They need someone else to speak up for them, both generally and specifically. Focus group participants wondered if the Synod and districts might provide training for ministry leaders and direct them to helpful resources for their church workers. Not only that, but workers are hopeful that those entities might also advocate for workers, especially when it comes to compensation, time off and access to resources.

**If workers speak up for themselves, it comes off as self-serving — and we certainly don’t want to come across that way!** We need someone else to speak up for us, both generally and specifically. Focus group participants wondered if the Synod and districts might provide training for ministry leaders and direct them to helpful resources for their church workers. Not only that, but workers are hopeful that those entities might also advocate for workers, especially when it comes to compensation, time off and access to resources.

**To Build Healthy Churches, Schools, Ministries**

We now know that it’s important to care for ourselves even as we care for those in our churches and ministries, but how can this information be shared with our people? We hope that those entities might also advocate for workers, especially when it comes to compensation, time off and access to resources.

**My Well-being**

May affect my church, but even more the health of my church affects my own well-being — we’re one and the same!

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**We don’t want** to feel lonely, forgotten, and disconnected anymore. Sometimes we feel that we’re only cared about for the sake of our call, but we want to know we’re cared about because we’re human.

**We build healthy churches, schools, ministries** through the focus group discussions, workers reiterated that the Synod is doing well in raising awareness among workers, but it’s the ministries and congregations that truly need to know how to care for their workers. Some workers explained that it may be helpful to remind ministries that worker care is a stewardship issue.

**Most workers** put the best construction on the intentions of those for whom they care. They believe that the people want to love and support those they’ve called, but they just don’t know quite how to show it. Still, there are many other church workers who don’t feel secure or cared for in their current call, perhaps because of unrealistic expectations (time, duties, results), demanding or burdensome individuals, or the tendency to treat the pastor as a scapegoat for the church’s problems.

Continued on Page 4
WE’VE HEARD FROM CHURCH WORKERS and continue to consider how to add and improve resources to better serve our precious pastors, teachers, deaconesses, musicians, DCEs and others. Many resources are already available at lcms.org/wellness, and more are being added all the time. Continue to check the worker wellness website regularly for updates, as well as concordiaplans.org. Below is a sample of some of the resources listed on lcms.org/wellness:

**Spiritual Well-being**

Devotional videos to strengthen and encourage Lutheran Hour Ministries
Video devotions by LCMS President Rev. Dr. Matthew C. Harrison
Pastoral devotional life
Worker-to-worker devotions lcms.org/wellness

**Congregational Well-being**

VisionPath, a program that helps congregations align ministry purpose
Lutheran Church Extension Fund
Worker’s compensation tool Concordia Plan Services
Video courses on stress, worry, mentoring and conflict
Lutheran Hour Ministries

**Emotional Well-being**

Dealing with pornography DOXOLOGY
Helpful questions when seeking a counselor
“I Trust When Dark My Road: A Lutheran View of Depression” by Rev. Todd Peperkorn

**Physical Well-being**

Church Worker Wellness Series: Vacation KFUO Radio
Recipes and fitness Concordia Plan Services
Women’s health videos Grace Place Wellness Ministries

**Intellectual Well-being**

Sermon on mental health by Rev. Dr. Herbert C. Mueller Jr.
“Four Pieces of a Mentor” LCMS Pacific Southwest District
Additional resources Concordia Theological Seminary, Fort Wayne, and Concordia Seminary, St. Louis

**Relational Well-being**

Writings about relational well-being by Deaconess Heidi Goehmann
“Relational well-being and Romans 1” Grace Place Wellness Ministries
Articles and resources Ambassadors of Reconciliation

**Financial Well-being**

Rostered church worker mortgage loans Lutheran Federal Credit Union
Serving church workers Soldiers and Veterans of the Cross
Online learning video lessons on financial basics Lutheran Church Extension Fund

**Vocational Well-being**

“Church Workers in Mission: Pastor to Pastor” videos Lutheran Women’s Missionary League
Sabbatical resources Ministry Sabbath Resources Ways of nurturing church workers Concordia University, Nebraska

**Contact Information**

Worker Wellness workerwellness@lcms.org
888-843-5267

**Focus Group**

Participants explained why so many church workers don’t take regular breaks, days off or vacations. They noted that many find their worth in their ability to perform without taking a break, while others pointed to a lack of financial or time resources as a reason not to rest or spend time away from their work. Many workers only have one day off per week, and they often don’t even take it. Vacations usually center on visiting family members who live far away. Some workers fear they won’t have a job when they return. Regardless of the reason, workers agree that time away to refresh in the Gospel and reconnect with their Lord in worship and prayer is of utmost importance.

Many of us feel inadequate in our call to ministry due to our various struggles, while others of us find self-worth in our calling and accomplishments. In both cases, we need regular reminders that our identity is in Christ alone.

As the earlier statistics indicate, many church workers and their spouses do not have someone providing them with spiritual care. This means they are not regularly offered pastoral reminders of their identity in Christ. Part of spiritual well-being for workers and their families means being connected with personal pastoral care that includes confession and absolution.

We’ve been reminded of our identity in Christ.

To be reminded of our identity in Christ

Meeting Worker Needs