

## **Abstract**

This dissertation addresses the question of ‘Who Pastors the Pastor?’

Clergy, through the fulfilment of ordination vows to serve, may find that the stress of serving others can cause them to suffer from mental health issues. This dissertation draws on the experience of the community of retired Church of Ireland clergy resident in the Republic of Ireland in its examination of burnout, depression, isolation, and management of personal health among serving clergy. The insights of the retired clergy constitute valuable guidance on how mental illness may be avoided and/or dealt with, should new and serving clergy fall prey to such mental health issues.

Surveys were sent out through the assistance of the diocesan secretaries to ensure the anonymity of the participants. A total of 22 responses were received. Participants responded to a series of 30 questions relating to a number of aspects of their ministry. These included areas they found satisfying mentally, physically, and spiritually as well as those they found stressful. Explanations and advice were then sought for how these aspects related to their management of personal circumstances involving the mental health issues of burnout, depression, isolation, and personal health.

Results showed that 10 out of 22 (almost half) suffered from burnout. Depression, isolation, and personal health issues were not as prevalent, but did exist for many of the retired clergy. To offset these mental illnesses those surveyed advised clergy to seek the help and the support of others and find spiritual fulfilment in prayer and worship.

The retired clergy expressed their opinion that clergy cannot fulfil their ordination vows to serve others if they themselves are unwell. Their responses give valuable indicators towards good self-care for clergy. The practices they advocate can be implemented to ensure flourishing, both in active ministry and in retirement, for all.