

Making Room For The Holy: Clergy Self-Care

By Warren Lynn

In the face of Advent and Lenten seasons, a dual response often emerges out of the life of North American clergy. Both seasons are usually experienced as opportunities for a deepening spirituality within the congregational, or other institutional, setting. But as more and more seasonal activities, events and efforts are scheduled, many clergy are also confronted with the dis-empowering burden of a heavier workload.

In the midst of high, holy, times within the church's life, ministers are often at risk of eliminating any space for an experience of God's holy incarnation in their lives. But there is another, more healthful, way to observe Advent and Lent, even for clergy. These seasons are wonderful times to practice fasting.

Contrary to what most people imagine when they think about fasting, such a practice is not foundationally about refraining from food. Nor is it an effort in denial or punishment-like restraint. At the heart of a true fast is the deeper love for a celebrative relationship with God.

Fasting is about a practice of opening up possibility rather than weighing one down with responsibility. The practice of fasting is about making room for a deeper relationship with the Holy by eliminating things which crowd out such intimacy. It involves slowing down rather than speeding up, creating an emptiness for Grace to fill. Fasting is a quieting endeavor so that whispers of God are heard. It is the fashioning of an empty canvas upon which God has complete creative freedom.

There are many ways to fast. Some ideas might include:

- *Not eating a certain meal on a regular basis*
- *Giving up specific food(s) through an extended amount of time*
- *Putting aside a recreational diversion for a certain period or season.*
- *Mindfully refraining from a less than helpful habit, attitude or other behavior*

Fasting is giving up anything that fosters self-reliance and separation from Spirit rather than holding one lightly in God's sustaining presence.

In this holy season, is there something in your life that, if removed, could provide opportunity for spiritual renewal? And, if you fast from such for a time, what will you put in its place? How will you fashion a way to enter into and out of your fast, so as to make it a nourishing and empowering Christian experience?

Now, in one of the busiest seasons of the church year, you are invited to make a spiritual room in which your soul can rest. Clear out the clutter. Set aside some of the stuff that keeps you from enjoying God's abiding presence. Make a fast. Make a journey, for a time, away from spiritual distraction, materialism and the frantic pace of an over-scheduled life. Find your way into the clarity of God's inhabiting love. May peace be a gift for you in this time through the practice of a spiritual fast.

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