

Mitigating Pastoral Loneliness Using Centering Prayer: A Mixed Methods Study

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INTRODUCTION

Many people recently experienced feelings of loneliness due to the COVID-19 pandemic,ⁱⁱ but pastors suffer from an aggravated form of isolation due to the nature of their work.ⁱⁱⁱ Among pastors, the burden of leadership exacerbates feelings of isolation due to their high visibility^{iv} and the emotional distance required to function as a minister.^v Pastors feel an ambient sense of loneliness tied to their involvement in ministry as they keep their most natural support group—the congregations they serve—at arm’s length. Scott and Lovell reported that ministers felt the people *around* them were not *with* them^{vi} and that loneliness was a strong predictor of burnout for clergy.^{vii} They attempted to ameliorate feelings of isolation among church leaders by connecting pastors to support groups, but many preferred to prayerfully reach within the self rather than find support among others.^{viii}

To explore this problem, I conducted a four-week convergent mixed method study of eleven pastors to see to what degree centering prayer affected their feelings of isolation. The participants recorded their loneliness levels before and after the intervention using the third version of the UCLA Loneliness Scale (ULS).^{ix} Each pastor recorded their impressions about centering prayer and their sense of isolation in their prayer journals, pretests, and post-tests. The idea for this project began when I saw the relative inefficacy of peer groups in mitigating pastoral loneliness.^x I proposed that increasing pastors’ connection to God would decrease their feelings of isolation.

THE POTENTIAL OF CENTERING PRAYER TO MITIGATE LONELINESS

I predicated my intervention on the idea that centering prayer would reduce the sense of isolation among pastors. Loneliness presents itself in two forms: a lack of the desired number of interpersonal relationships^{xi} and an inner sense of isolation that human companionship does not resolve.^{xii} Increasing social contact or the number of other individuals with whom one interacts does not necessarily negate loneliness, especially in people experiencing protracted isolation.^{xiii}

In this convergent mixed methods study, pastors who consistently engaged in centering prayer reported a reduction in their loneliness as their stronger connection to God lessened anxiety and increased contentment. In this section, I review the scholarly literature on two main topics: the impact of the recent pandemic on ministers’

Mitigating Pastoral Loneliness Using Centering Prayer: A Mixed experiences of isolation and the potential of centering prayer to mitigate such loneliness. Even in the face of the heightened isolation brought on by COVID-19 and social distancing, centering prayer offered a mixture of psychological healing mechanisms^{xiv} such as deep breathing,^{xv} bodily awareness,^{xvi} and the repetition of a mantra-like prayer word that reduced the stress and anxiety that contributed to feelings of loneliness.^{xvii}

THE PANDEMIC AGGRAVATED LONELINESS FOR PASTORS

Pastors who lead and navigate a complex system of interpersonal relationships endure their share of stress and isolation,^{xviii} and the recent pandemic aggravated such feelings.^{xix} Loneliness has existed among clergy for a long time due to relationships that lack depth,^{xx} unachievable expectations,^{xxi} and boundary ambiguity.^{xxii} Understanding pastoral loneliness requires studying both the pre-pandemic experiences of ministerial isolation and how the pandemic impacted the loneliness felt by many clergy. Even before the pandemic, the demands of ministry caused some clergy to neglect personal wellness,^{xxiii} which led them to distance themselves from their parishioners^{xxiv} and negatively affected their home lives.^{xxv} Recent studies have suggested that many pastors fail to maintain their own physical or mental health. One report claims that ministerial stressors caused recurrent fatigue for 90 percent of pastors, while nearly the same percentage (89 percent) of ministers contemplated leaving the ministry.^{xxvi} Isolation among clergy occurred as the pastor's unmet needs and job-related stressors rose. According to other studies, the loneliness inherent to the pastoral role remains a strong factor in clergy burnout and contributes to dissatisfaction in ministry marriages, further intensifying the pastor's experience of isolation.^{xxvii} Increased stress and loneliness cause pastors to stop seeing their parishioners in human terms—a process called depersonalization—which results in ministers emotionally detaching from their congregants.^{xxviii} This level of emotional distance deepens the sense of isolation experienced by members of the clergy.^{xxix}

The pandemic added to existing demands on pastors by causing them to adapt their roles, practices, and avenues of pastoral care in ways that led some to consider withdrawing from the ministry.^{xxx} Pastors struggled with their identities,^{xxxi} felt incompetent,^{xxxii} endured busier schedules,^{xxxiii} and became disconnected from their parishioners.^{xxxiv} Few ministers felt satisfied with their level of pastoral care even though they found themselves exhausted by the effort.^{xxxv} Church of England clergy saw decreased wellness as they experienced greater fatigue (54 percent) and stress (37 percent). Increased frustration (46 percent) and diminished excitement (32 percent) marked the experience of these ministers during the pandemic,^{xxxvi} while some (23 percent) reported not receiving support from denominational leaders.^{xxxvii}

Some positive outcomes occurred during the pandemic for the small number of pastors who increased the regularity and fervency of their prayers. The reports on Church of England clergy support my notion that a regular centering practice would allow pastors to better process isolation. About half of the clergy polled felt closer to God (43 percent) due to increased prayerfulness (50 percent) even when isolated from others.^{xxxviii} These results remained consistent with pre-pandemic findings that revealed pastors' tendency to cope with loneliness by strengthening their connection to God rather than through peer groups alone.^{xxxix}

WORDLESS PRAYER IN SOLITUDE BENEFITS CONTENTMENT

Given these contours of the heightened problem of ministerial isolation, the scholarship on the benefits of centering prayer suggests that this practice holds the potential to mitigate the rising problem of pastoral loneliness. Centering prayer rests on the assumption that apophatic prayer connects people to the heart of the God in love beyond the limits of words and knowledge.^{xl} Since the fourth century CE, theologians such as Evagrius Ponticus have encouraged wordless prayer.^{xli} The anonymous sixteenth-century author of *The Cloud of Unknowing* and *The Book of Privy Counseling* stated that though most people relate to God through their intellect and knowledge, believers best connect to God in love with the heart as God exists above human intellect. Words flow from knowledge and must be suspended for the duration of this deeper form of prayer.^{xlii}

The twin practices of solitude and silence rest at the foundation of centering prayer. God's presence becomes the sole focus of prayer as practitioners limit everything that might distract their attention from God. Evagrius Ponticus recommended that these disciplines escape worldly pressures that threaten to rob them of their time with God.^{xliii} Silence removes audible distractions that tend to pull one's focus from the divine and frees one to experience undistracted time in God's presence.^{xliv} Solitude works much the same way by removing disruptions caused by other people and changing one's experience of being "alone" to being "alone with God."^{xlv} In this place, the believer rests in God's presence,^{xlvi} shares heart-to-heart intimacy with God,^{xlvii} receives God's healing,^{xlviii} and becomes free to serve others from a settled center.^{xlix}

ASSESSMENT: THE POTENTIAL OF CENTERING PRAYER TO MITIGATE CLERGY LONELINESS

Four realities surrounding loneliness and centering prayer support the notion that wordless prayer has the potential to mitigate pastoral isolation. First, pastors' interactions with parishioners often deepen their sense of isolation due to a lack of relational depth,^l unrealistic expectations,^{li} and boundary ambiguity,^{lii} which evince the

need for intrapersonal coping mechanisms.^{liii} Intrapersonal coping resources are positive elements in one's setting that one does not directly experience as relationships with other people.^{liv} Second, ministers who do not see their loneliness resolved through community need a deeper connection with God in low-pressure prayer without the added stress of trying to find the perfect words but simply sitting with God in restful silence.^{lv} Third, centering prayer combines solitude and silence in a way that removes pressure by allowing the believer to enjoy a more restful and intimate time with God than verbal prayers achieve.^{lvi} Fourth, centering prayer bolsters three intrapersonal resources: a healthy perception of the self,^{lvii} satisfaction with one's walk with God,^{lviii} and decreased self-criticism^{lix} as the practice precludes one's relationships with other people and helps one rest more securely in one's connection with God.^{lx} decreased self-criticism^{lxi} as the practice precludes one's relationships with other people and helps one rest more securely in one's connection with God.^{lxii}

METHODOLOGY OF THE INTERVENTION

This study sought to reduce pastoral loneliness by increasing contentment through centering prayer. I investigated the following primary research question: "What effect does a regular centering prayer habit have on the sense of loneliness pastors possess?" The intervention lasted four weeks, and the participants engaged in four sessions per week (three individual and one group session) that totaled one hour each week. I chose to conduct a convergent mixed methods study because the sample size was too small for meaningful quantitative results without complementary qualitative data.^{lxiii}

Obtaining the Sample

This study used a convenience sample of eleven pastors who had experienced loneliness in the recent past. I created a list of sixty pastors by searching through my list of contacts of active ministers and invited them to participate in the intervention via Facebook Messenger. The initial correspondence consisted of a short message that summarized the goals of the project. I sent pastors who expressed interest an overview of the study that explained what was expected of the participants. Thirty-nine of the sixty pastors I invited to participate in the study responded to my initial message, which led to the eleven who participated.

Overview of Intervention Meetings

In the weekly intervention meetings, I gave short instructions on centering prayer and led the focus group as we engaged in the practice together. First, I taught them how to center in five steps. Second, I gave them a brief history of apophatic prayer from the time of John Cassian to the Cistercian monks of St. Joseph's Abbey, who revived the

practice in the 1970s.^{lxiv} Third, I explained how centering prayer causes a person to relate to their thoughts differently^{lxv} and allows cognitions to pass through the conscious mind.^{lxvi} Fourth, I shared a contemplative definition of unceasing prayer that occurs when one has repeated a prayer word or phrase so often that it reverberates perpetually within oneself, deeper than the conscious mind.^{lxvii}

The Five Steps of Centering Prayer

At the first group session, I instructed the participants in a five-step method of centering prayer that I adapted from David Frenette's four-step model.^{lxviii} First, one chooses a comfortable setting free of distractions. A time early in the morning when all still feels undisturbed works best.^{lxix} One does well to sit in a chair in which one can keep one's back straight and shoulders relaxed while planting both feet on the ground.^{lxx} Second, one chooses a prayer word that symbolizes one's consent to the presence of God within one. One chooses a term significant to oneself that reminds one of God's presence—words such as "Jesus" or "beloved" work well for some veterans of centering prayer.^{lxxi} Third, one sits with eyelids gently closed and takes a few deep breaths to settle oneself. Then, one silently and gently introduces one's prayer word as her consent to God working within one.^{lxxii} Fourth, when distractions arise in the form of thoughts or sensations, one gently returns to one's prayer word to calmly refocus one's attention back on God's presence.^{lxxiii} Fifth, at the end of the allotted time, one keeps one's eyes closed in silence for a moment, before gently reopening them. Pennington recommends reciting the Lord's Prayer to reintegrate oneself into one's daily routine.^{lxxiv}

Collection of Data

I collected data for this project in five steps throughout August and September 2021. First, I emailed the focus group members asking for personal details: their position, church name, denomination, how long they had been in ministry, and the length of time they had served in their current role. Second, a week before the intervention, I sent out the ULS as part of the pretest survey,^{lxxv} which also included open-ended questions about participants' previous experiences with solitude, silence, and loneliness.^{lxxvi} Third, I asked focus group members to journal immediately after their individual centering sessions and to record how long they centered, whether they noticed changes in their mood, and any effects the practice had on them when done before a ministry event. Fourth, upon the conclusion of the final week, I sent out the ULS as part of a post-test that included open-ended questions about the regularity of their loneliness; whether centering prayer affected their sense of isolation, relationships, or ministry events; and how often they planned to continue the practice. Fifth, each participant

received a loneliness score before and after the intervention. The difference between the two scores

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indicated whether centering prayer had affected the loneliness of the ministers in the study.

ROLE OF THE RESEARCHER

I acted as the participant observer within the intervention in that I both offered instruction on centering prayer and participated in the group sessions. The benefit of my participation was that I helped the other participants catch what I taught them as I centered with them. The challenge presented by my participation was that other participants might have mimicked my example to the detriment of their own sincere experiences. Serving as the facilitator of the intervention carried the potential to “lead” the participants too far in a certain direction, although I found some guidance necessary to teach a form of prayer alien to most of the group members.

ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

I adhered to ethical standards during the intervention phase of the project. First, I submitted the details of my project to my university’s internal review board and received an exempt determination. Second, I alone accessed participants’ surveys and prayer journals to ensure the confidentiality of all data. Third, I kept the group members’ information confidential by using pseudonyms and stored their data on a password-protected computer. Fourth, I kept contact information for local therapists on hand to guide participants to mental health professionals if needed and committed to reporting actual and potential harm to the authorities. Fifth, participants were volunteers and could withdraw at any time.

INTERVENTION MIXED METHODS FINDINGS

Three findings emerged from the integrated analysis of the quantitative and qualitative data. Most loneliness levels decreased, while novice practitioners and pastors relatively fresh in their current roles experienced a greater reduction than their longer-tenured counterparts. In the remainder of this article, I present three findings by reporting on the quantitative information followed by the qualitative data. The quantitative data supported the conclusion that centering prayer effectively reduces loneliness experienced by clergy. The qualitative data revealed the participants’ congruent firsthand experiences.

Finding 1: Practicing Centering Prayer Correlated with Reduced Loneliness

I assessed the quantitative data by charting the difference between each participant's pre- and post-test loneliness scores. I discovered two major quantitative differences

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between the two tests. First, all but two pastors saw a reduction in levels of loneliness, and the scores of the remaining two did not change. Mike gave up centering halfway through the intervention and simultaneously entered a difficult season of ministry in which he responded to four suicide attempts in one week. The fact that his loneliness score stayed the same and did not increase in the face of tragedy strongly suggests that the practice benefitted him. Carlos' loneliness score remained static because he had already had a centering practice for several years before the intervention. He gleaned such value from the practice that he centered twenty-four times during the intervention (I only asked for sixteen times) and increased the duration of his practice to 20 minutes, rather than the ten-minute sessions I requested. Second, the minister who began with the lowest amount of loneliness also saw the most dramatic decrease in loneliness. Figure 1 presents the pretest and post-test results for all participants, and table 1 shares the change in loneliness scores for everyone involved in the study.

Figure 1. Change in Loneliness Scores among Participating Pastors.

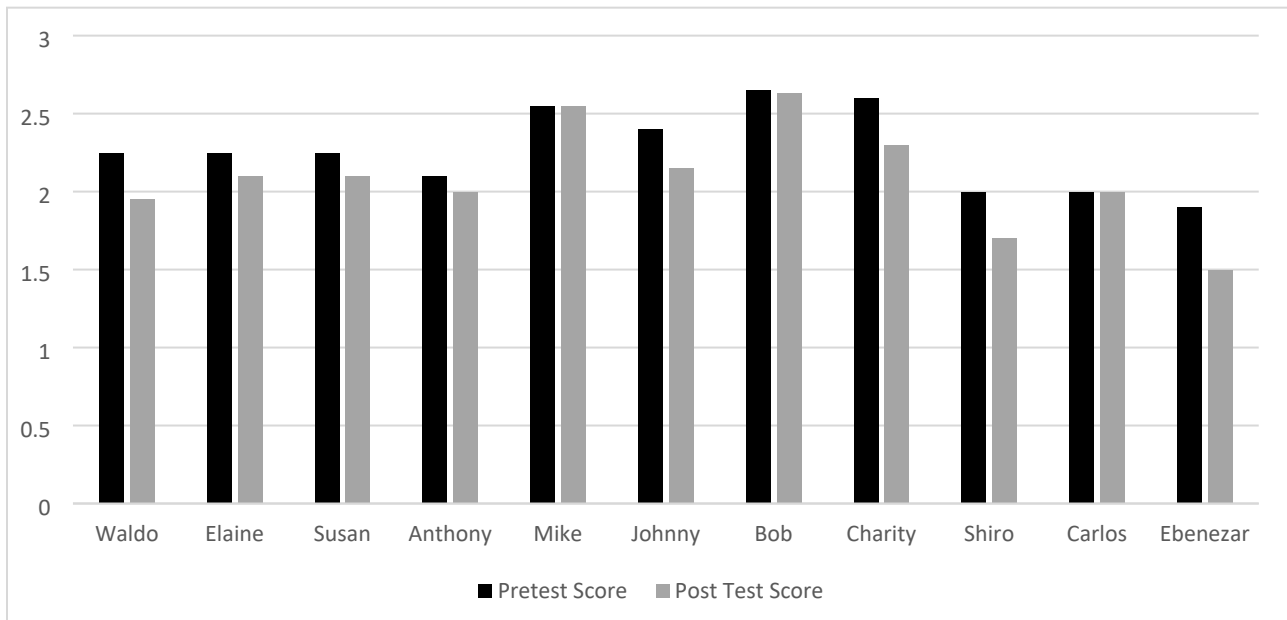


Table 1. Change in Loneliness Scores among Focus Group Members.

Name	Pretest Data	Post-Test Data	Pretest Score	Post-Test Score	Score Change
Waldo	45	39	2.25	1.95	-0.3
Elaine	45	42	2.25	2.1	-0.15
Susan	45	42	2.25	2.1	-0.15

Anthony	42	40	2.1	2	-0.1
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Mike	51	51	2.55	0	0
Johnny	48	57	2.4	2.15	-0.25
Bob	53	50	2.65	2.63	-0.02
Charity	52	46	2.6	2.3	-0.3
Shiro	40	34	2	1.7	-0.3
Carlos	40	40	2	2	0
Ebenezer	38	30	1.9	1.5	-0.4

The qualitative data corroborated the decrease in loneliness reflected in the quantitative numbers. Johnny stated that he did not think that he was any less alone or isolated, adding, “But it bothers me less because I know I have a place to take [feelings of isolation].” The practice helped him become “more aware of blessings that I had taken for granted.” Anthony relayed that he only experienced loneliness in his ministerial setting, and “therefore the [greater] awareness of the Lord’s presence certainly helped to reduce those feelings.” Susan asserted that while her support system kept her loneliness to a minimum, centering prayer was “very helpful with [reducing] feelings of isolation.” Elaine saw centering prayer as a contributing factor in her waning loneliness and stated that “it does really help to create space for silence and spend time with Christ.” Bob attributed the greater awareness of God’s presence to his decreased loneliness, saying, “To be able to quiet [his] mind, hear [God’s] voice, and sense [God’s] presence is impactful!” Shiro also grew in awareness of God’s presence, saying, “[I] recognized how much I need to spend time in silence with God . . . trusting that [God] knows everything I am dealing with . . . and that [God] is there for me.” Although Carlos’ quantitative data remained static, he quantitatively reported a decrease in loneliness as he developed the awareness that he was not alone in his solitary tasks and that in “each situation, thought, and moment, there is Someone else who is there. Remembering this has greatly affected my sense of loneliness and isolation.” Waldo said that his loneliness only occurred in his academic pursuits, and it decreased because centering prayer “made me able to pay greater attention when I am able to have conversations [with other academics].” Charity also did not experience loneliness in her pastoral role but felt isolated as a mother. She said that centering prayer “gave me inner peace and allowed me to have a more positive perspective on my life as a mother.” Ebenezer felt that centering prayer made him “feel more connected to God and others.” Qualitatively, centering prayer mitigated loneliness for ten out of the eleven pastors in this intervention.

Finding 2: Novice Practitioners Reported the Most Dramatic Reduction in Loneliness
 The focus group members found centering prayer effective in reducing their loneliness levels, especially those who had never engaged in the practice previously. Seven participants reported that the intervention marked their first time engaging in centering prayer, while four of those seven—Ebenezer (−0.4), Waldo, (−0.3), Charity, (−0.3), and Shiro (−0.3)—reported the most dramatic reductions in feelings of isolation. Anthony and Bob reported a moderate decrease in their sense of isolation (−0.1 and −0.02, respectively). Anthony engaged in the practice the full number of times I requested (sixteen), while Bob missed 25 percent of his centering prayer sessions, which likely explains why Anthony reported greater relief. The trend of novice practitioners reporting a substantial decrease in their loneliness level shows the efficacy of centering prayer in combating isolation.

The four veteran practitioners generally saw minimal decreases in loneliness levels. Elaine and Susan (−0.15) tied for the second lowest decrease in feelings of isolation, which likely resulted from their familiarity with the practice and a lack of consistency with their individual sessions. Susan missed 19 percent of her sessions and did not complete the full ten minutes 33.3 percent of the time. Elaine reported cutting her sessions short 20 percent of the time and missed 12.5 percent of her individual sessions. Carlos' quantitative scores remained static although he centered for longer periods and engaged in the practice more often throughout the four weeks. Johnny had the fifth most significant decrease in loneliness (−0.25) and the most reported by anyone acquainted with the practice. Seasoned practitioners Johnny and Carlos were the most consistent; Johnny engaged in the practice 91.7 percent of the time without ending sessions early, while Carlos centered longer and more often than the study required.

Long-time practitioners of centering prayer saw a more modest reduction in feelings of isolation levels than novices as they were familiar with the practice's slowing effects. Novice practitioners experienced centering prayer's calming effects and its basic life applications for the first time. Centering prayer dissipated novice practitioners' distractions as it calmed their minds (Bob, Susan, Elaine), reduced their stress from feeling overwhelmed with work and pastoral care (Bob, Mike, Shiro, Susan, Anthony), empowered them to not overreact to disappointments (Bob), and prepared them to relate to people who respond slowly, such as the elderly (Waldo). As these novices decreased their pace, they developed a more prayerful relation to their tasks (Waldo, Elaine), felt God's reassurance (Ebenezer, Charity, Susan, Elaine, Mike, Bob, Anthony), began to center during worship gatherings (Shiro, Ebenezer), and began creating space to be more wholehearted with people rather than focusing on finishing their task lists

(Elaine, Susan, Waldo, Shiro). It was more common for seasoned practitioners to sense direction from God by way of a silent word of knowledge or visions of Jesus (Johnny,

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Carlos). They consistently received directions such as hearing calls to “wait” and “lead” (Johnny, Carlos) and reported that their scattered thoughts lost the place of privilege in their minds and hearts (Johnny, Carlos).

Finding 3: Novice Pastors Reported the Greatest Benefits of Centering Prayer

The pastors in my study had served five or fewer years in their current roles or had ministered for over five years. The measurable data showed a markedly greater average reduction in loneliness scores for the pastors who had served for less time (−0.27) than those who had stayed in their roles longer (−0.12). The quantitative data revealed that novice participants experienced a greater rate of decreased loneliness than the more experienced focus group members. This phenomenon surprised me as I thought pastors who had served in one place longer would have more supportive relationships in the church and wider community than those in the early stages of their ministries. The longer a participant stayed in their current role, the more likely they carried emotional wounds and compounding stress, which weakened the reduction in their feelings of isolation. The pastor with the lowest rate of decreased loneliness had been serving in his current role for thirteen years and had recently celebrated his fifteenth anniversary serving the same church. Even though the more seasoned clergy members reported minor reductions in feelings of isolation, their engagement in centering prayer lessened their loneliness enough to show up on their post-test surveys.

Pastors who had been in their current roles for less time recounted minimal stressors and reported them in general terms, while longer-tenured ministers recounted more stressors and noted their details. The newer clergy mentioned broad, minor stressors and felt tired, grumpy, rushed, anxious, judgmental, and mentally scattered (Elaine, Waldo, Ebenezer, Charity, Shiro, Elaine, Bob, Susan, Carlos). They also recounted pressures stemming from trying to strike a healthy work-life balance and found themselves preoccupied with unfinished tasks during prayer (Shiro, Charity, Susan, Carlos). The pastors who stayed in their current roles longer stated such specific stressors as a racing mind (Anthony), aching heart (Anthony), and the need to stifle reactionary responses toward team members who failed to follow detailed instructions (Bob). Anthony grieved the loss of a friend and officiated the service while planning a second funeral for a church member’s son. Some reported having their prayer times interrupted by parishioner emergencies, navigating expanded responsibilities, and feeling the pressure of the health struggles of their congregations (Anthony, Bob, Johnny). The fact that the seasoned ministers reported in such volume and detail shows that they had been conditioned to focus on stress due to years of navigating tense

moments. Johnny traversed several difficult situations and believed centering prayer helped him realize that he assumed the inevitability of divisive outcomes.

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The seasoned ministers in my study suffered from heightened anxiety related to their pastoral roles as evidenced by their self-reported anxiety markers such as overreacting to disappointment (Bob), assuming the worst of people (Johnny), having a racing mind (Anthony), and hyper-focusing on detailed stressors (Bob, Johnny, Anthony). Anxiety refers to a biological, automatic response to a perceived threat that triggers the body's natural defense mechanisms.^{lxxvii} Healthy anxiety resolves when a perceived threat has passed, but chronic anxiety keeps the person under constant stress.^{lxxviii} The tenured clergy in my study had experienced enough past tension in their roles that they became reactive at inappropriate times. Johnny reported anticipating that several meetings would become toxic and felt ashamed when the parishioners involved remained peaceful.

CONCLUSION

I invited a diverse group of pastors with varying degrees of loneliness to engage in centering prayer for four weeks to see whether the practice would be effective in mitigating pastoral loneliness. In this article, I reported on three significant findings from the integrative analysis of my study. First, I found that practicing centering prayer for four weeks correlated with reduced loneliness among pastors. Second, pastors new to apophatic prayer showed the most dramatic reduction in their feelings of isolation. Third, pastors who had served in their current role for five years or less reported greater benefits from the practice than longer-tenured clergy members. I reported on each finding, beginning with the quantitative data before supplementing it with participants' corresponding qualitative information. These findings provide positive evidence of the efficacy of centering prayer to decrease pastoral loneliness.

¹NOTES

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¹ Janelle Warner and John D. Carter, "Loneliness, Marital Adjustment and Burnout in Pastoral and Lay Persons," *Journal of Psychology and Theology* 12, no. 2 (1984): 125–31; Jessy Zumaeta, "Lonely at the Top: How Do Senior Leaders Navigate the Need to Belong?" *Journal of Leadership & Organizational Studies* 26, no. 1 (2019): 112–13.

² Zumaeta, "Lonely at the Top," 112–13; Ryan Staley, Mark McMinn, Kathleen Gathercoal, and Kurt Free, "Strategies Employed by Clergy to Prevent and Cope with Interpersonal Isolation," *Pastoral Psychology* 62, no. 6 (2013): 845.

³ Zumaeta, "Lonely at the Top," 112–13; Staley et al., "Strategies Employed by Clergy," 849–50.

⁴ Greg Scott and Rachel Lovell, "The Rural Pastors Initiative: Addressing Isolation and Burnout in Rural Ministry," *Pastoral Psychology* 64, no. 1 (2015): 78.

⁵ Scott and Lovell, "The Rural Pastors Initiative," 88.

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² Christie Hartman, "Loneliness Statistics (2022): By Country, Demographics & More." Statistics. The Roots of Loneliness Project, 2022, <https://www.rootsofaloneliness.com/loneliness-statistics>; Jo Cox Commission on Loneliness, *Combating Loneliness One Conversation at a Time*, https://www.ageuk.org.uk/globalassets/age-uk/documents/reports-and-publications/reports-and-briefings/active-communities/rb_dec17_jocox_commission_finalreport.pdf.

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^{iv} Zumaeta, "Lonely at the Top," 112–13; Ryan Staley, Mark McMinn, Kathleen Gathercoal, and Kurt Free, "Strategies Employed by Clergy to Prevent and Cope with Interpersonal Isolation," *Pastoral Psychology* 62, no. 6 (2013): 845.

^v Zumaeta, "Lonely at the Top," 112–13; Staley et al., "Strategies Employed by Clergy," 849–50.

^{vi} Greg Scott and Rachel Lovell, "The Rural Pastors Initiative: Addressing Isolation and Burnout in Rural Ministry," *Pastoral Psychology* 64, no. 1 (2015): 78.

^{vii} Scott and Lovell, "The Rural Pastors Initiative," 88.

^{viii} Scott and Lovell, "The Rural Pastors Initiative," 78, 91.

^{ix} Daniel W. Russell, "UCLA Loneliness Scale (Version 3): Reliability, Validity, and Factor Structure," *Journal of Personality Assessment* 66, no. 1 (1996): 23.

^x Elizabeth Skoglund, *Beyond Loneliness* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday and Co., 1980), 144; Andrew Miles and Rae Jean Proeschold-Bell, "Overcoming the Challenges of Pastoral Work? Peer Support Groups and Psychological Distress among United Methodist Church Clergy," *Sociology of Religion* 74, no. 2 (2013): 199, 213, 217–18. Skoglund asserted that pastoral loneliness did not resolve by finding more or better friendships. One way she believed one lived "beyond loneliness" was by committing to solitude. Miles and Proeschold-Bell posited several reasons for the mild benefit of peer groups to curb loneliness among Methodist clergy in their study but did not consider the deeper need of the heart's longing for a deeper connection to God.

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^{xvii} Johnson, "Prayer," 2294; Ferguson et al., "Centering Prayer," 311–12.

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