Ministers' perception of support received from their congregation: a qualitative study

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Ministers' perception of support received from their congregation: A qualitative study

by

Jackie Lynne Halstead

A dissertation submitted to the graduate faculty
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of
DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

Major: Human Development and Family Studies (Marriage and Family Therapy)

Major Professor: Harvey D. Joanning

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2000

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ABSTRACT

Churches and the ministers who lead them play a role of significance in our society. The dynamics of the relationship between them impact the success of the ministry occupation. This study examined this relationship, specifically the minister's perception of support from the congregation. Focus groups of ministers and laity provided the dialogue from which the following categories emerged: absence of support, basis of support and absence of support, expectations, identified support, manifestations of support, and recommended solutions. It was determined that both populations have an understanding of the topic and awareness of possible solutions for an absence of support. The availability of support and its absence were examined from the standpoint of whether they were emotional, esteem, tangible or information support. Two of the most frequently cited themes were that of advocacy and peer groups. Based on the data, these themes emerged as vital to the creation of a supportive environment for the minister. Implications for various populations and future research are suggested.
CHAPTER ONE
INTRODUCTION

Our culture is one in which churches play a significant role. Pargament, Ensing. Falgout, and Warren (1988) state the following statistics that demonstrate the magnitude of this role: (1) There are over 344,000 religious congregations in the US; (2) Over 60% of our population belongs to a religious congregation; (3) There are over 520,000 clergy in the United States. (4) 94% of the population reports that they believe in God; (5) Religious systems contribute three times more to philanthropy than any other social institution; and (6) Religiousness is a significant predictor of many important attitudes and behaviors, including alcoholism, drug abuse, non-marital sexual activity, prejudice, voting, and mental health.

Statement of the problem

Clergy in particular play a role of importance in society. Their leadership is of utmost importance to the survival of the religious bodies. This role, however, is one of the most stressful occupations both now and in the past. John Oberlin, the pastor of Waldsbach in the early part of the 19th century, wrote this of his parish duties. "The pastor of Waldsbach if he tries to be what he ought to be in this vast and most burdensome parish...is a poor dog, a beast of burden, a cart horse. He must do everything, watch everything, answer for everything. From early morning until bedtime I am occupied, hurried, crushed without being able to do half or a tenth part of what ought to be done. A decent leisure, which others can enjoy, has long been unknown to me. Who cares? Everything rests upon the pastor who meets everywhere nothing but hindrances, obstacles, delays, and red tape; and not being able to please everybody or satisfy those
who disagree with each other must fight constantly against malevolence” (Malony, 1988, p. 165).

The professional literature has given little attention to the support that is available for clergy. Most references to clergy deal with aspects of professional pastoral practice rather than the minister's personal relationships or social context (Lee, 1995). Malony (1988) quoted studies showing 75% of clergy experienced periods of major stress. 33% seriously thought of leaving what they had conceived to be their life-work, and that among professionals, clergy rank third in the number of divorces granted annually. An examination of this issue is therefore in order to enhance the relationships and tenure of ministers in their congregations.

**Purpose of the study**

This paper is an attempt to make this examination of ministers' perception of support. To state it more clearly, the research question of my dissertation is “What is a minister's perception of support he receives from his congregation.” In other words, what actions of the congregation does the minister perceive as useful or beneficial and how is his perception influenced? As opposed to the negative impact an absence of support has on a minister (Malony, 1988), it is assumed that a perception of adequate support has a positive impact on the minister personally and professionally. I am also interested in the discrepancy between the minister's perception of support and that of the congregation. (I will refer to ministers as males due to the make-up of the population I am studying. Up to this point, there are few women ministers in the Church of Christ.) By facilitating a qualitative study of focus groups of both ministers and congregations members, support
deemed appropriate by the denomination was identified as well as the support desired by the minister.

A secondary focus was an exploration of the influence of perceived theological orientation (progressive, moderate, or traditional) on the perception of support of the ministers. In my experience with the Churches of Christ, the lay member defines a progressive orientation as one desiring of change. An individual with this mindset is expected to take a more liberal position on issues such as women’s roles in the church and acceptance of other denominations as being saved. Traditional orientation refers to those who are more conservative in their thinking. They are thought to resist change and adhere to the ideas of the founders of the denomination. Moderate, then, is perceived as being a balance between the two ends of the continuum.

This examination is articulated in the following manner. A portrayal of the literature regarding the stressors and support available to ministers will be given initially. Due to the variability in the literature, the terms “clergy” and “ministers” will be used interchangeably as will the terms “laity” and “congregation members.” The literature review will include an introduction to the concepts of Symbolic Interactionism and Social Constructionism as they relate to this topic. This segment will be followed by a portrayal of the qualitative method of research that was utilized. The research began with a pilot study that served the purpose of refining the research in order to facilitate the remaining of the study. Finally, a discussion of the rich outcome of the study of ministerial perception of support from their congregations will be offered.
CHAPTER TWO
LITERATURE REVIEW

Ministers face a myriad of stressors related to their occupation. These stressors fall into intra-psychic/interpersonal and organizational or systemic categories involving the minister and the church. Following the portrayal of stressors, an examination of the various types of support available for ministers will be presented. Clergy support can also be categorized as intra-psychic/interpersonal and systemic. Particular focus will be given to the systemic support of the congregations. The issue of social support will be discussed in terms of the contribution it can make to the topic of ministerial support.

Although there appears to be an increasing amount of attention paid to the identification of stressors and suggestions for ministers in dealing with these stressors, limited research was found that identifies intentional congregational support.

Attention will also be given to the formation of the perceptions of the minister regarding support. This will be examined through discussion of the concepts emerging from the theories of Symbolic Interactionism and Social Constructionism. As is the case with qualitative methodology (Creswell, 1994), the literature will be used to offer a framework of the study and will then be utilized in the discussion of the data for the purpose of supplementing the findings that have emerged.

Stressors

Daniel and Rogers (1981) associate the burnout syndrome with problems of the clergy. Burnout is a phenomenon present in the social services and people-helping professions. "It is a type of emotional exhaustion resulting from the stress of interpersonal contact" (p. 232). They state that the stressors associated with burnout fall
into two basic categories. First are the intra-psychic/interpersonal stressors that include personal characteristics, and second are system stressors that relate to the organizational or systemic aspect of one's vocation. These categories are beneficial in discussing the stress experienced by the minister.

**Intra-psychic/interpersonal stressors**

Since religion is based upon the voluntary consent of the laity, the values held by the laity strongly determine not only the professional status of the minister, but also the acceptable behavior of the minister and his family (Hutchison & Hutchison, 1979). Lee (1995) spoke of the intrusiveness that is experienced by the family of the clergy. The church has expectations of the clergy family that would be considered inappropriate or even unthinkable in other social contexts. Wives of male clergy are often drawn into what has been called the "two-person career" whereby they are expected to fill several important roles in the congregation, but are neither consulted regarding the assignment of roles, nor compensated for their contribution. Benda and DiBlaso (1992) mentioned that the minister and his wife have a two-person single career, in which both are expected to perform the duties of the one position. They state that when the wife pursues a career, the minister is often unable to fulfill the expectations of his position. This can lead both minister and spouse to view the clerical role in a negative light and feel resentment toward it. If the wife accepts the unpaid position, it is also expected that the minister will minister to the church while she ministers to her husband. This can also lead to personal denial, bitterness, and guilt as she struggles with anger toward the hallowed work of her husband (Richmond, Rayburn, & Rogers, 1985).
Expectations are also placed on the children of clergy. They are expected to be model children, properly dressed, well behaved, and more knowledgeable about the Scriptures than their peers. The relationships within the family are expected to meet exacting standards that do not apply to the parishioners’ own families (Lee, 1995). Parent/child conflict is affected greatly by stereotypical thinking and these expectations. Children of clergy expressed concerns about the need for predictable time with their parents, the unrealistic expectations of the congregation, the lack of privacy at home, and financial pressures (Morris & Blanton, 1994a). Morris and Blanton (1995) also cite the stress in clergy families evidenced by the marital and parent/child conflict in the parsonage. They mention that a growing number of these marriages end in divorce.

Benda and DiBlasio (1992) also note concern regarding the marriages of clergy as they cope with the intense strain due to the time and demand pressures placed on the minister.

In dealing with these family stressors, Lee (1995) suggests ways that the clergy family can deal with the intrusiveness of the congregation by having clear family communication. The clergy and his spouse must also have the ability to recognize potential boundary intrusion, and delineate clear boundaries around family subsystems. This boundary delineation protects the family from inappropriate intrusion into their private lives by church members. It can also protect them from the significant time pressures that take a minister away from his family.

Hall (1997) speaks of the highly visible position of pastors. They are expected to meet parishioners’ spiritual and emotional needs. One of the primary difficulties they face in attempting to meet these needs is lack of time. They also deal with stress, frustration, loneliness, isolation, spiritual dryness, and as previously mentioned,
diminished marital adjustment (Ellison & Mattila, 1983; Warner & Carter, 1984). Hall (1997) states that the great demands on pastors can potentially have a negative impact on their psychological and spiritual functioning.

Crittenden (1992) mentions that due to the role strain and ambiguity, ministers are not entirely comfortable with their ministerial identity. He states that the barriers to a minister’s perceived significance arise from three sets of issues. Issues within a minister’s life involve minister’s beliefs regarding his vocational choice, the minister’s self-definition and if he entered ministry as a means of achieving wholeness and worth. The personality of the minister, according to Francis and Rodger (1993) also has an impact on the satisfaction of the minister with his position. Certain personality types are said to lead ministers to various level of conflict or even to a predisposition to leave the ministry.

Another set of issues suggested by Crittenden (1992) arises from the nature of ministry. In other words, the minister must deal with the expectations of others and how competent he believes he is to meet these expectations. In a study performed by Hatcher and Underwood (1990), it was found that when a minister demonstrated a low self-concept, he experienced a higher level of stress. This was partially due to the necessity felt by the minister to prove himself in reaction to the low self-concept. A self-perpetuating situation resulted in that as the minister was unable to meet the typically high expectations of the church, they would feel inadequate. This inadequacy would in turn lead to a greater attempt to meet the expectations.

The nature of ministry also involves ministerial training. This training tends to focus on one’s intellectual capacities rather than the pragmatics of dealing with people.
The final set of issues, as stated by Crittenden (1992), are those that affect the minister's sense of significance are the issues that arise from ministerial relationships. These relationships are with the church leaders, members, and the minister's peers. The issues pertain to the focus on expectations and support. They will be explored in the following section on systemic stressors.

Members of the clergy tend to perceive that they have few friendships. In a study performed by Blackbird and Wright (1985), ministers see this as being due to the "pedestal effect" and anti-fraternization norms, in which parishioners tend to be possessive about their ministers and would disapprove if he developed friendships that were overly exclusive or special. The pedestal effect refers to ministers' inability to behave spontaneously due to parishioners' expectations, and to the caution and inhibition of laity in expressing themselves openly. This, however, does not necessarily reflect on the minister's ability to have close relationships. It instead is a factor in the relationship between the minister and parishioners. Blackbird and Wright (1985) found that ministers' closest friendships were no less strong or rewarding than those of control laymen, with some indication that they were more so. The authors indicate that this dissonance may be due to the pastors' desire for deeper relationships than other people but at the same time, the reluctance of the parishioners to express friendship toward the minister (Wright and Blackbird, 1986). It could also be due to the authority structure of the church. Carroll (1981) spoke of the difference in relationships between clergy and laity based on this structure. When the authority relationship is asymmetrical in nature, the clergy has access to power that is not available to the laity. This promotes a hierarchical relationship that discourages the development of friendships. When the
relationship is symmetrical, the power is more equally distributed and the minister is
more likely to develop close relationships within the congregation.

Malony (1988) portrayed another point of view when he found that clergy
appeared to experience less on-the-job stress and personal strain while feeling they had
greater personal resources than the general population. They believed themselves to be
capable of dealing with the high level of stress. He stated the following: “Although
ministers do feel that their responsibilities are great, that their job definitions are
ambiguous, and that they are overloaded with expectations, they, yet, feel the rewards
outweigh the liabilities and that their ability to handle the strain is adequate” (p. 166).

Rayburn, Richmond, and Rogers (1986) also found that religious leaders experience a
lower overall personal strain than the general population. They stated that this could be
attributed to the pressure placed on clergy to exhibit a noncomplaining attitude.

Systemic stressors

As stated previously, systemic variables are those that relate to the organizational
or systemic aspect of one’s vocation. In a study by Hoge, Dyble, & Polk (1981), it was
identified that although personal fulfillment was the most important individual factor, the
systemic factors of staff relationships and conflict management were significantly
correlated with vocational commitment. Harris (1998) associated some of the problems
relating to these relationships with staff and congregation as being due to the voluntary
mentality of the congregation. It often led to tension between the clergy whose
livelihood was dependent on the success of the congregation and the laity who were less
invested.
Malony (1988) identified other areas of concern for the minister. The primary difficulties he suggested dealing with the systemic dynamics of the congregation and minister were role overload, role ambiguity and role responsibility. Struggles with financial management and benefits were added by Morris and Blanton (1994a).

**Symbolic Interactionism**

The theory of Symbolic Interactionism offers some aid when examining the systemic stressors faced by a minister. According to Klein and White (1996), Symbolic Interactionism deals with the acquisition and generation of meaning. Attention is paid to the interpretation of events. They offer four assumptions that are the basis of the theory.

The first assumption stated by Klein and White (1996) is that "human behavior must be understood by the meanings of the actors" (p. 93). In the examination of ministers and congregations, the behavior of each individual or group can only be understood if one obtains the meaning attributed to the behavior. This assumption aided in the emergence of the research articulated in this dissertation. It was decided that one must look at the meaning laity has for their behavior and why they perceive that behavior to be supportive or not. One must also examine the meaning attributed to the behavior of a minister. Without a portrayal of these meanings, a minister might mistake intended supportive behavior for something else or a congregation may decide to withhold support because they do not believe the behavior of a minister merits support.

This leads to the second assumption stated by Klein and White (1996) that individuals define the meaning of a context and situation. A minister will define the situation within which he finds himself as supportive or unsupportive. This will influence the actions or solutions the minister undertakes. For example, some ministers
view a written contract as an asset while others see it as an attempt of the leaders to control. They will react to the contract depending on the meaning they attribute to it.

The third assumption is that individuals have minds. Klein and White (1996) state “the human mind acquires, integrates, and processes information” (p. 93). An individual has the capability of processing this information at a number of levels. They can attribute meaning to a situation while at the same time perceive that they are acting based on the chosen meaning. This assumption demonstrates that both ministers and congregations, when educated, can learn about the support of ministers and chose whether or not to change their meaning and behaviors attributed to this dynamic.

Finally, Klein and White (1996) state that society precedes the individual. The process of socialization is important. An individual gains understanding from the meaning attributed to situations by society. Ministers do not live in a vacuum, but come to the ministry with certain perceptions offered by the larger societal context within which they live. The pedestal effect, for example, demonstrates the influence that society places on the role of minister. Both ministers and laity believe that they must remain apart emotionally in order to perform their occupation successfully.

Several authors mention the concept of role taken from the theory of Symbolic Interactionism when examining the ministerial occupation. Role overload appears to be related to the numerous roles which clergy are called upon to manage effectively. Web and Hultgren (1973) designate ten clergyman roles. They are as follows: musician, director of Christian education, scholar, evangelist, campus minister, parish minister, administrator, social worker, counselor and missionary. The visible roles (preaching, pastoring, and teaching) that are most enjoyable and important to ministers receive less
time, while less visible and less enjoyable roles as administrative and organizational responsibilities occupy most of their time. As a result, many clergy wrestle with role strain and ambiguity as they find themselves spending most of their time doing ministry that is of less importance and enjoyment to them. The minister must, however, be willing and flexible enough to employ the various skills for the different roles (Nauss. 1995).

Other aspects of the concept of role that are useful in the discussion of ministers are role taking, expectations of role, and role strain. Role taking refers to the ability to put oneself in the place of another person. In the setting of a congregation, this would refer to the congregation putting themselves in the place of the minister and the minister putting himself in the place of the congregation. When this occurs, there is a greater level of understanding. Jussim, Soffin, Brown, Ley, and Kohlhepp (1992) state that role taking allows people to know how others view them. There must, however, be sufficient information regarding those roles in order for clarity into the perception of another to take place. These interactions (taking the role of the other) then shape one’s self-perceptions. Problems arise when the role is ill defined or vague. When a person cannot take on the role of others, he or she must create a role (Williams, 1989). This may result in further confusion.

The clarity of roles impacts the expectations of roles that refer to the perceptions that both the individual and others have about the performance of the role. Without clear expectations of the role, it is difficult for the minister to perform the role or for others to know how to behave with the minister.

Another influence on expectations is whether or not they are similar or dissimilar. If similar, the congregation will both understand the minister and express greater levels of
understanding. In this case, I suggest that the minister will perceive greater levels of support. If the expectations are dissimilar, however, there will be dissonance in the relationship as the congregation will expect actions and attitudes which do not fit with the minister's perspective (Klein & White, 1996).

Role strain occurs when the minister does not have sufficient resources to enact a role or roles. This may happen when: (1) too many parts are assigned to the minister (role overload); (2) the expectations of one role contradicts the expectations of another role; and (3) the minister cannot enact the contrary roles suggested by varying expectations at the same time (Klein & White, 1996).

Based on the propositions made by Burr, Hill, Nye, and Reiss (1979), role clarity and diversification of roles is important to the quality of role enactment. As stated above, when expectations are clearly defined, the minister can better enact the role given by the congregation. As portrayed by the literature, ministers experience a great deal of role strain. The role overload that has been described previously is impacted by the expectations placed on the minister by the congregation, the lack of role clarity, and the high level of diversification of roles that the minister faces. In keeping with the theory of Symbolic Interactionism, an individual will interpret the situation in which he finds himself based on his quality of role enactment. In other words, if the individual is doing a good job of enacting the role of minister, he will feel good about it. I would suggest that a minister’s perception of the support he receives from the congregation is correlated with how skillfully both he and the congregation believe he is playing the role. In other words, the greater the level of role strain, the lower the perception of support received from the congregation.
Nauss (1995) addresses the struggle the minister has with role clarity or ambiguity. As he attempts to meet the expectations of his congregation, he finds that the numerous roles have numerous job descriptions. Not only will he experience role strain due to this overload, but also this would be a situation in which I suggest that the minister would perceive a lack of support as he tries to be all things to all men. As all individuals have a greater degree of ability in some areas, he is going to fulfill some roles more adequately than others. In keeping with the dynamics of a congregation, some will be satisfied with his fulfillment of these roles, but others will be dissatisfied with his less than adequate fulfillment of their expectations. They will either formally or informally give the minister an evaluation of his performance or competence. Jussim. et. al. (1992) explain that if the minister internalizes this appraisal of his performance, it will affect his intrinsic motivation. If the internalized appraisal is positive, the minister will have a greater degree of motivation to work with and feel positively toward the congregation. If negative, he will feel less motivation and perceive the congregation in a negative light.

As will be portrayed in the following section, the congregation can serve as a resource upon which the clergy may draw to enable him to cope with the stressful side of his job. Alternately, the congregation, in itself, may serve as a source of stress to the clergy, draining his or her resources and providing little support in return (Pargament et. al., 1988). Krause, Ellison, and Wulff (1998) demonstrate agreement with this paradox. They state the following.

social support provided by coreligionists may exert an especially beneficial impact on well-being because it reaffirms shared beliefs and may even be viewed as evidence of the indirect influence of God...Even so, the very strength of social
ties in the church may at the same time make church members especially vulnerable to the effects of negative interaction. (p. 7)

They portray findings that this vulnerability particularly applies to clergy, as the effects of emotional support and negative interaction appear to have a greater impact on well-being for clergy and other leaders than for laity.

Another area with which ministers struggle is that when they have problems, they may internalize the philosophy of a congregation by regarding their problems as a result of personal failure (Morris & Blanton, 1995). Clergy and their families may not seek out denominationally sponsored support services due to anxiety in which they are reluctant to admit difficulties and seek help before a crisis becomes full blown. They fear denominational backlash--being judged unfit for the ministry due to publicly acknowledging their struggles. Frame and Shehan (1994) agree with this scarcity of help seeking by ministers. They found that seeking professional counseling for the clergy family’s problems was not a typical coping response. This is due to the pressure placed on families to have marriages that appear to be sound and to have no apparent family dysfunction. Those who do have family problems are often downgraded in terms of their church appointments.

**Support**

Social support

One of the definitions of social support by Cutrona (1996) in her exploration of the topic is “the fulfillment by others of basic ongoing requirements for well-being (p. 3).” In a summary of the various models of social support, she found that relationships meet the following functions of support. Expressions of love, empathy, and concern by
others are believed to be emotional support. Esteem support refers to the respect offered for the person's qualities, belief in the person's abilities, and validation of the person's thoughts, feelings, or actions. Information support is factual input. Finally, tangible assistance is help with physical resources. These functions of support are applicable to the support offered to a minister by the congregation with whom he or she works.

It was also suggested by Cutrona (1996) that the perception of availability of support has a consistent positive relation with one's well-being. Sarason, Pierce, and Sarason (1990) believed that the perception of available support had a greater affect than the actual received support. Along with this perception and actual received support, they stated that the concept of social support included a sense of acceptance and perceptions of support and level of satisfaction engendered from those perceptions.

In looking at the impact or effect of social support on a minister, Krause, Ellison, and Wulff (1998) suggest that due to the ministerial role, the minister will experience both differential exposure and differential vulnerability. Differential exposure refers to findings that the minister is expected to receive a higher level of support due to their perceived intermediary position between God and the congregation. It also refers to the opposite extreme of a lack of support in that due to their visible position; they experience a greater level of negative interaction. This negative interaction takes the form of criticism and the demanding nature of the congregation.

Differential vulnerability refers to the higher level of vulnerability due to the importance placed on the role by the minister. They place this significance on the role due to the length of training to achieve the position, the magnitude of the role in terms of it demanding a twenty-four hour a day commitment, and one's sense of calling by God to
assume the role. The higher their level of investment in the position, the higher the level of vulnerability. The findings of this study demonstrate that clergy are the recipients of more positive affect than others in the congregation, but that “the apparently destructive consequences for clergy are only partly offset by the benefits of emotional support” (p. 73).

Support for ministers, both the perception of availability of support as well as received support, was scarce in the literature. A number of recommendations, however, were made on the manner in which support services could be offered to the minister. Suggestions are articulated on how the minister can receive support at his initiation and at the initiation of the congregation. As with the abovementioned stressors, it is suggested that support can be initiated at the intra-psychic/interpersonal and systemic levels.

**Intra-psychic/Interpersonal support**

Ministers can meet their support needs through prevention and intervention. Daniel and Rogers (1981) encouraged ministers to take preventive measures such as self-examination. By identifying one's stressors, a minister can determine the direction to take in identifying support for himself and his family. In addition, the minister can learn to release control and delegate responsibility in order to lessen the pressure he is experiencing. They state that it is beneficial for the minister to become involved with a peer support group. Although, ideally, the church would implement this support, it is up to the minister to search out and become invested in a group. Marciano (1991) supports this suggestion in saying that ministerial support groups have been found to be effective and should be encouraged.
The minister and his family cope with the issue of embeddedness with their profession. Embeddedness refers to the degree to which work life commingles with personal life (Marciano, 1991, p. 172). Marciano (1991) compared the degree of embeddedness of the profession of ministry with that of secular professions and found a higher level of embeddedness affected not only the role of the minister, but also their personal and family life. It was suggested that the minister become involved in activities outside the sphere of the church in order to meet the physical and emotional needs of both himself and his family. This would create necessary space between the congregation and the minister in order to allow the minister to be somewhat less invested in having all his needs met by the church (Daniel & Rogers, 1981).

Morris and Blanton (1994b) state that prevention and intervention programs should include the development of strategies for dealing with congregational intrusiveness, excessive time demands, and deficiencies in social support. Strategies that enhance skills (such as conflict resolution and assertiveness training) would give members of the clergy family system a greater sense of control and mastery over the stressors that invade their lives. In a later study by the same authors (Morris & Blanton, 1998), they suggest that one be aware of the influence of the social context of the ministry as well as the perceptions of the stressors as they affect the functioning of the minister’s family. They suggest that families have clear boundaries, and develop socially supportive relationships.

The families of ministers themselves are an aspect of support for the minister. Nesbitt (1995) found that if a minister was male, his spouse was found to be one of his most important resources. Although this was not the case for female clergy, “it was
found that marriage and family consistently benefit the occupational attainment of male priests across their career lifespan” (p. 412).

The career satisfaction of a minister necessitates a certain amount of hardiness. The concept of hardiness, as articulated by Blaney and Ganellen (1990), involves three components. It involves “(1) a sense of having control over one’s fate, (2) the inclination to face adversity or novelty with a sense of challenge rather than defeat or intimidation, and (3) a sense of commitment as opposed to aimlessness, purposelessness, and meaninglessness” (p. 298). When an individual demonstrates hardiness in their thinking, the stress effects with which they deal are typically moderated.

Mickey, Wilson, and Ashmore (1991) performed a study in which they examined expectations from the minister’s point of view. They stated that the attitude of the minister affects the level of stress and confusion they experience with their ministry. If the minister perceives himself as being involved in a God-called ministry, he has more clearly perceived roles and is more emotionally involved with the congregation. These ministers displayed a lower level of stress and confusion. If the ministers are more service-to-humanity oriented, however, they experience more ambivalence and confusion and experience more conflict. The authors conclude that what ministers believe to be the purpose of their efforts does in fact determine how they perform and the degree of personal satisfactions that they receive. Two of these authors, Mickey and Ashmore (1991), discuss this importance of the sense of calling for the clergy family. They state that the family also demonstrates a lower level of stress and confusion when they believe the ministry is based on a calling by God. When the family has the service-to-humanity orientation, they also experience a higher level of stress and confusion.
Ellison and Mattila (1983) conducted a survey with Christian leaders in the United States and identified other perceived difficulties in meeting the needs these pastors. These difficulties pertain to self-and other-perception and a variety of demographic factors such as Christian leadership position, denomination, type of formal training received, area of residence, and desired form of support. They concluded that Christians leaders may be insecure in their profession, but that it is less a result of their personality and more closely impacted by “traditional idealism commonly associated with the ‘man or woman of God’,” (p. 34) as well as ambiguous job descriptions and evaluation criteria. They tied this to the unrealistic expectations that impacted the unrealistic expectations that a leader had for him or herself.

**Social constructionism**

The theory of social constructionism coincides with the importance placed on the perception of the minister. It suggests that we construct what we know through interaction with others (Anderson & Levin, 1997). As ministers interact with their congregations, their perceptions are shaped and result in either positive or negative beliefs regarding the available support.

Gergen (1999) suggests four working assumptions of social constructionism. They are as follows: (1) The terms by which we understand our world and our self are neither required nor demanded by “what there is.” In other words, there are an unlimited number of explanations available for any given situation. A minister may view their situation from a certain standpoint and according to this assumption; there are an unlimited number of other descriptions or explanations that apply to the situation. Gergen states that although for some people this assumption is threatening, for others it is
enormously liberating. (2) Our modes of description, explanation, and/or representation are derived from relationship. This refers to the importance of relationships for language. Without the relationship, the communication has no meaning. Anderson (1997) explains that a community of relationships authors everything we experience. She says that the meanings we attribute to aspects of our lives are arrived at by the language we use. In her understanding, this opens up a multitude of possibilities. As ministers and congregations dialogue, they shape the meanings that they offer to the various aspects of their interaction. When this is understood, the languaging takes on a new significance.

(3) As we describe, explain or otherwise represent, so do we fashion our future. This encourages a freedom to transform our relationships, our culture and ourselves. Again, the significance of language is demonstrated as the minister is offered the opportunity to perceive his situation in a manner that he can take a part in influencing. (4) Reflection on our forms of understanding is vital to our well-being. There must be continued self-evaluation for growth (p. 47). The relationship between the minister and congregation is vibrant and has a continued impact on both parties of the relationship. Neither can resist being influenced and changed.

In speaking of social support, Sarason, Sarason, and Pierce (1990) also speak of social relationships and the manner in which supportive behaviors are a product of those relationships. There is reciprocity in the relationships in which both parties (in this case the minister and congregation) are both provider and recipient of support. They are interdependent on each other. This emphasizes the impact that not only the minister but also the congregation has on the creation of a supportive environment.
Systemic support

Morris and Blanton (1994a) write that as Employee Assistance Programs are on the increase, there are concerns parallel to that of the workplace that are facing denominations. These concerns address the provision of adequate support services for clergy and families. Historically, denominations have used denial and dismissal by relocating or excommunicating clergy when they have problems. Denominations have an underlying moral default philosophy in dealing with troubled clergy and their families. This philosophy supports responding to troubled clergy by eliminating them rather than restoring them to an active role of service.

The church is in a position to provide social support for the minister. When looking at the matching of various types of support with specific stressors, Cutrona and Russell (1990) suggested that stress associated with the workplace required reassurances of worth, social integration and affect. They stated that reassurance of worth was especially important in that the self-esteem of the employee was at particular risk. Baker, Israel, and Schurman (1996) found that when an employee had a certain measure of influence in the decision-making process of their position, they experienced fewer negative job feelings. This finding offers encouragement for the leaders of the congregation to include the minister in those aspects of decision-making that pertain to the ministerial role. This coincides with the statement of Maguire (1991) that social support can provide at least five resources for the individual receiving it. It provides a sense of self; encouragement and positive feedback; protection against stress; knowledge, skills and resources; and socialization opportunities.
Another manner of imparting social support is through the provision of sufficient financial reward (Daniel & Rogers, 1981). Bonifield and Mills (1980) state that clergy are thought to have little regard for their financial support because of the unique calling associated with the ministerial position. The congregation may view the work of the minister as a free good rather than a service that incurs payment. This perception discourages a salary that matches the fulfillment of the ministerial position.

It is vital, however, to offer adequate compensation. Relieving financial burdens allows the minister to have energy to address the family’s other needs. It also helps the pastor feel personally worthwhile. Daniel and Rogers (1981) state that often the minister takes the meager salary received as a measure of worth or value in the eyes of the church. Other practical suggestions are that churches are encouraged to give ministers long enough vacations to provide them rest, to provide time and resources for some type of continued education, and to have someone else available to be on call. It is suggested that pastors be provided enough financial reward to obtain a private home. As stated by Frame and Shehan (1994), many times the requirement of living in a parsonage denies families the opportunity to personalize their living quarters. Members may not be respectful of the privacy of the minister and his family as the congregation is invested in the property due to a sense of ownership.

Morris and Blanton (1998) suggest that the church lessen the frequency of moves required of ministers. They state that frequent relocations or moves undermine opportunities for establishing social support networks, create greater role demands, interrupt personal growth and development, and contribute to marital and family dysfunction. Although this is not a concrete offering of financial assistance, it has an
impact on the financial situation of the family, especially if the family is required to move repeatedly.

Frame and Shehan (1994) address the role that the church can adopt in taking on a supportive role with clergy. They see the most important factor as one of education. The church must be educated in the roles that are placed on their minister. It should eliminate candidates for ministry who may not be suited to the demands, but also educate the ministers to understand the dynamics with which they will be dealing. Morris and Blanton (1994b) add to the theme of education in suggesting that congregations be educated about the realities of life in clergy families and the ways in which they can collectively enhance or diminish the satisfaction of clergy families. They state that the goal of such efforts should be to facilitate the congregation’s awareness and understanding of the importance of and need for specialized care of the clergy family as they serve in their professional and familial roles.

Much can be required of a church when addressing the issue of support for a minister. It is important, however, that one examine the perception of both the minister and congregation regarding ministerial support. Coyne, Ellard, and Smith (1990) address the interdependence of support. They state that the following

the strength of close relationships under stress is the extent to which they entail mutual responsiveness, shared goals, and simple caring as a result of the basic interdependence of the persons involves. Yet, these relationships may fail to live up to their potential as the most crucial sources of support to someone facing stressful circumstances. When they do fail, it may often be a matter of the persons’ too intensely and single-mindedly attempting to be supportive. What
may be needed most is not ‘more social support’ but a disengagement from effects that are not working, based on an appreciation of the limits of social relationships and of one person’s taking responsibility for the other. It is possible to care too much to make a positive difference. (p. 146)

Although they were not specifically referring to churches, the dynamics of social support are certainly applicable to this relationship between ministers and congregations.

This study, therefore, is a depiction of the significance and availability of support within a church population. It portrays a sample of ministers and laity and their perspective of what they view as supportive as well as an identification of the actual occurrence of support by their congregations.
CHAPTER THREE
METHODOLOGY

Assumptions and rationale of qualitative research

Due to the prevalence of the quantitative method in the social sciences field, it is typically necessary to provide a rationale for the use of qualitative research. Although it is growing in popularity, the qualitative methodology continues to receive the scrutiny of the scientific community. Denzin and Lincoln (1998) give a valuable introduction to the nature and utilization of qualitative research.

The word qualitative implies an emphasis on processes and meanings that are not rigorously examined, or measured (if measured at all), in terms of quantity, amount, intensity, or frequency. Qualitative researchers stress the socially constructed nature of reality, the intimate relationship between the researcher and what is studied, and the situational constraints that shape inquiry. Such researchers emphasize the value-laden nature of inquiry. They seek answers to questions that stress how social experience is created and given meaning (p. 8).

Brotherson (1994) speaks of the three key assumptions that differentiate the qualitative method of inquiry from that of the quantitative method. The first assumption regards the nature of reality. A qualitative method adheres to the postmodern paradigm of multiple realities and the mutuality of influence on these realities. Brotherson states that this is in contrast to the focus on determining a single reality in the cause and effect perspective of quantitative research.

The second assumption pertains to the nature of the inquirer and respondent relationship. Again, this postulates the mutuality of relationships in that the inquirer and
respondent influence the realities they hold. The researcher is viewed as the instrument—a position that is unique to the qualitative research experience. The researcher uses himself or herself as a part of the research process. They acknowledge the fact that certain biases are inherent in the research process and that these biases need to be made overt. Quantitative research, on the other hand, requires the maintenance of an objective perspective.

Finally, the third assumption deals with the nature of truth statements. The belief in multiple realities is again apparent as the researcher acknowledges the influence of one’s perception on the cognitive process. This is in opposition to the belief that the correct or true answer must be sought.

Additional assumptions are articulated by Merriam (as cited in Creswell, 1994). Qualitative research is interested in both process and meaning. Process is the “how” of a phenomenon rather than the “why.” It involves the meaning that people make of their lives. It typically involves fieldwork, in which the researcher goes to the participants rather than having them come to him. Qualitative research is descriptive and inductive in nature. It is descriptive due to the researcher’s interest in process, meaning, and understanding. The inductive quality of the research is demonstrated in the building of ideas rather than deductive in which one begins with a theory and attempts to prove it.

Role of the researcher

As qualitative research is an interpretive process, it is vital to make overt the biases and experience of the researcher as these relate to the research topic (Creswell, 1994). Therefore, the experience and biases of this researcher are as follows. I have extensive contact with the population of ministers in the Churches of Christ. My father is
a minister of this church and has been all of my life. Since my birth, he worked with
churches in Saskatchewan, Canada, Montana, Texas, and Ontario, Canada. Their longest
tenure was with the church in Montana. They worked with that church for twelve years
and I was there for eight of those years before leaving for college. They experienced
supportive environments as well as ones where support was lacking. During my
undergraduate training, I worked as a secretary for a large Church of Christ. This offered
an additional perspective as I was privy to the dealings of the ministers and congregation
from the viewpoint of a member of the staff.

Soon after this experience, my husband became a minister. During his tenure in
this profession, we worked with three churches—two in the Midwest and one in the
Northwest. We experienced what we perceive as supportive and unsupportive situations
in each of the churches. In the first church, my husband had a job description that was
quite varied. He was the youth minister, college minister, educational director, and co-
preacher. We left that position as he wanted to concentrate on one area of ministry rather
than feel he was being spread too thin. The second church involved an associate minister
role. This opportunity offered a wonderful camaraderie among the ministerial staff.
However, the church went through an intense politic battle during our stay that eventually
resulted in his resignation. The final church offered the role of pulpit or senior minister.
This was for a small congregation, so again he had many hats. By this time he had
decided to change directions with his career. Again we experienced a mixture of both
support and an absence of support. We left this position in order that I might pursue an
academic career.
Another influence on my perceptive was that we also spent an abundance of time speaking with and counseling ministers of other congregations and hearing of similar experiences. Initially, it was affirming to hear the stories of others. It had a normalizing affect in that we came to realize that what we were experiencing was a common occurrence. It was also distressing, however, as I came to understand the magnitude of the issue. I heard of many churches that did not seem to be providing needed support for ministers, but of few that supplied a supportive environment. This led to the desire to study the topic of minister’s perception of support from their congregation.

Certain biases are obvious in conjunction with this experience. I am intimately acquainted with the triumphs and struggles of ministers and desire to enhance the ministerial vocation. As stated previously, many well-intentioned ministers become disillusioned and leave their current location or the ministry altogether. I believe this is related to their perception of an absence of support from the church. Although my biases appear to be in favor of the minister, I also believe that congregations typically desire a healthy relationship with their minister. As a child, I believed that all fault lie with the congregation when a minister was experiencing difficulty. As the wife of a minister, however, I began to understand that fault lie with both parties. Increased maturity as well as the training I had received in marriage and family therapy impacted this understanding. The training offered an education in systems theory that taught circular causality and reciprocity of relationships, among other concepts. Congregations appear to invest heavily in their minister and it is difficult for them to lose them. They grieve the loss of each minister and struggle with locating another. Education of the church on what the minister perceives as a supportive environment seems to be a key in helping create a
healthier relationship. In my opinion, this healthy relationship is the desire of both congregation and minister.

I cannot help but be sympathetic to the perceived plight of the minister. This point of view will cause me to highlight certain aspects of the data. My awareness of this perspective, however, will aid in my attempt to view all sides of the issue. I am now a member of a congregation and I am realizing the impact my beliefs and actions can have on the dynamics between the congregation and the minister.

**Method**

**Sample**

The sample was opportunistic and purposive. In other words, the focus groups were comprised of ministers and laity who were attending the annual bible lectureship at three universities affiliated with the Churches of Christ. These events draw ministers from three regions—the Midwest, the southwest, and the west coast, so allowed for a sample of ministers and congregation members from various churches. The institutions were chosen for their reputed theological orientations. York College, located in York, Nebraska, was thought to have a more traditional mindset. A progressive orientation was expected of Pepperdine University of Malibu, California. Abilene Christian University in Abilene, Texas, was thought to be in between the two—moderate. It was expected that the orientation of the populations attending the lectures would coincide with the orientation of the site they chose to attend.

The sample was purposive in that the participants had to meet certain criteria in order to be involved in the study. Nineteen ministers (all men) and fifteen laity (seven men and eight women) from the Church of Christ participated. The ministers met the
selection criteria of being pulpit or senior ministers and having ten consecutive years of experience in ministry. The reason for these criteria is that I desired ministers of some experience who viewed their profession as a career. The laity met the selection criteria of being members of the Church of Christ for more than ten years and of not having ministerial experience. The length of membership allowed for a thorough understanding of the workings and system of the Church of Christ. The absence of ministerial experience offered the possibility of an objective perspective regarding the topic of ministerial support.

The Human Subjects Committee at Iowa State University reviewed the research before it was implemented. In disclosing the possible risks to the subjects, the following was suggested.

The only risk of which the investigator is aware is the psychological discomfort that may occur as the ministers and laity share information that may not be complimentary about their congregation. There is a certain level of competition between congregations. Precautions taken will be in the selection of mature, self-confident participants who will be able to see beyond their congregation to the broader picture of helping ministerial/congregational relationships at large. This broader picture will be repeatedly emphasized.

The committee approved the proposed research. The participants were given consent forms to sign at the beginning of each focus group (see Appendix A).

As previously mentioned, the terms "minister" and "clergy" will be used interchangeably to reflect the nomenclature of the literature. "Laity" will be used interchangeably with "congregation members" because the term "laity" is commonly
used in the literature and the phrase “congregation member” is specific to the Churches of Christ. The term “elder” will be used to refer to the leaders of the congregations. There is not national organization within the Churches of Christ. Leadership of the congregations lies with men who are elected by the congregation. These are typically men who are mature in age, have demonstrated certain characteristics required by the Church, and have exhibited the capacity to take on a leadership role.

Design and procedure

A pilot study was implemented with the population at York College for the purpose of fine-tuning the research. The study was comprised of three stages: initial contact, focus groups, and follow-up summaries. Initial contact took place by phone. Aid from the head of the Bible department at York College was enlisted in identifying ministers who met the selection criteria for each focus group. Those selected were sent a letter of invitation, a recommendation letter by a well-known leader in the Church of Christ, and a reply postcard. Those who replied in the affirmative were contacted by phone. These eight ministers were asked to classify themselves and their congregations regarding their theological orientation on a continuum from progressive to traditional. The participants were asked to explain the rationale for their choice of progressive, moderate or traditional orientation. They gave their explanation in either verbal form over the telephone or written form by e-mail. The ministers were then asked for a list of names of possible laity focus group participants.

Two names were chosen from each list received from the ministers. They were sent letters of invitation, recommendation, and a reply postcard. The eight individuals who agreed to participate in the focus group were contacted by phone and asked to
classify their ministers and congregations regarding theological orientation in the same manner as the ministers.

The focus groups took place on October 9 and 10, 1998, on the campus of York College. Participants were contacted the evening before their group in order to confirm attendance. Eight participants were expected in each group, six individuals were present for the ministerial group and four for the laity group. The primary researcher facilitated the groups. My husband, a former minister of ten years, was present and served in the role of consultant. The participants were seated around a table for best possible reception of the audio-recording equipment.

Questioning plays a vital role in qualitative methodology. Spradley (1979) speaks of three kinds of questions used in the qualitative process. Descriptive questioning elicits information regarding the description of the participant's reality. Structural questions deal with gaining more information regarding the context of a given topic. Finally, contrast questioning explores the differences of various aspects of the participants' reality.

Interviews make use of questions by beginning with broad general questions called grand tour questions. Spradley (1979) gives the analogy of taking a tour through a house. One does not begin by opening closets and drawers, but by looking at the obvious characteristics of the house. This manner of questioning allows the participants to express their own thinking without it being guided by the agenda of the researcher. Concepts and ideas emerge without help from the facilitator. If topics of interest to the researcher do not naturally emerge, mini tour questions can be asked. These questions are specific and fill in the gaps.
The focus group composed of ministers was facilitated in the following manner. Discussion was initiated with the grand tour question, "As a minister, what are your experiences with support in the Church of Christ?" Mini-tour questions were then asked as follows: "Describe various experiences you have had in your interaction with congregations," "What support systems do you have?" "What do you want?" "What has happened in the past that has made you feel supported?" "Do you have an advocate in the congregation?" In addition, I intended to ask the following questions: "How does your theological orientation impact the manner in which you are treated?" "How does your orientation affect the support you receive from the congregation?" "How well do you fit with your congregation?" However, when asking the question regarding theological orientation of the participants in the initial telephone contact, I found that the focus of their thinking shifted from issues of support to an ongoing political tension within the Churches of Christ. I consulted with two individuals who are familiar with the dynamics of ministry. Both of these individuals had a long tenure as ministers and are now in influential positions in the denomination. One is a writer, speaker, and mentor of ministerial groups and the second is a writer and head of a bible department at one of the universities of the church of Christ. As the church of Christ does not have a national governing body, there is a less formal structure of influence that takes place through the universities and publications of the denomination. The two men suggested that the questions regarding orientation would certainly change the focus of the groups. I therefore did not include the questions in the discussion.

The laity group questions were similar but focused on the ministers of the congregations rather than the participants themselves. The grand tour question used to
open discussion was “What are your experiences with the manner in which ministers are supported in your congregation?” Mini-tour questions asked were as follows: “Describe various experiences in which the congregation supports the minister.” “What support systems are available to them?” “What do you think they need and want in terms of support?”

There was a peer debriefing between the primary researcher and consultant of the focus group immediately following each session. Peer debriefing refers to discussion by the facilitator and assistant on their perceptions of process and content of the focus group (see Appendix B).

The final stage involved sending summaries to the participants of each focus group. The summaries were compiled following the focus group and gave an accounting of the categories and subcategories derived from the data analysis. The participants were asked to survey the information and give their reactions to the summary. These reactions elicited a more in-depth response in that the participants were given more opportunity to express their feelings and thoughts regarding the issue of support. This allowed for individualized answers that were different from those elicited in the group setting.

The pilot study demonstrated that the focus group format served the purpose for which it was intended. Therefore, the study was replicated with the two sets of focus groups in Texas and California. The same format was utilized with the three stages of contact. The participants for the groups located at Abilene Christian University were compiled based on a listing of all the churches and ministers in the area. The bible department of the university provided the list. Recommendations for participants of the laity group were again sought from the ministers. The participants were sent a letter of
invitation, and a recommendation from a well-known minister in the vicinity. They were asked to return a post-card indicating their ability or inability to participate. Those who expressed willingness were sent a letter with details of the time and meeting place and were also contacted by telephone to confirm their attendance. The ministerial group took place on February 22, 1999, while the laity group occurred the following day.

As the grand tour and mini-tour questions stimulated the discussion for which I had hoped regarding ministerial support, they were again utilized in the following groups. One change made was in regards to the questions regarding theological orientation. As previously mentioned, I had asked the participants to state their theological orientation when they were initially contacted and then I had intended to include discussion regarding theological orientation in the focus group. For both the Abilene and Pepperdine groups, I asked the question regarding theological orientation only in the post-focus-group contact.

Regarding changes made to the physical aspects of the focus groups. I located the groups in settings that could be videotaped. I believed that videotaping the groups would allow me to offer more attention to the groups while they were in process, rather than attending to my note-taking. I could later observe the tapes and focus on the nuances and process that was occurring. The Abilene groups were set up in a room without a table. The participants sat in chairs in a circle.

The Pepperdine focus groups were set up in a similar way with the exception of the development of the list of contacts. Aid was acquired from the lectureship director for the annual lectureship. He offered me a list of speakers and information on those that fit the criteria for which I was looking. I again asked the ministers for recommendations
on participants for the laity group. These groups were seated around a table. I utilized a table because having the participants sit around a table seemed to encourage a more relaxed atmosphere. They were able to lean on the table or push back when they desired.

The focus groups were audio taped and the groups at the second two sites were videotaped as well. The audiotapes were transcribed. A graduate research assistant and I as primary researcher participated in an independent review of the raw data. This assistant was chosen due to her interest in the topic of ministerial support. She was familiar with qualitative research due to previous experience with the methodology.

Data analysis occurred simultaneously with data collection; in other words, my attention was given to various activities such as the collection of information in the focus group, processing the information both during and following the groups, and writing the text. After each focus group, a summary of the transcripts was compiled (see Appendix C). This was for the purpose of presenting the participants with the information given by the focus group in an organized manner for review purposes. The participants were sent a copy of the summary and instructed to write their reactions on the summary and return it to the researcher. This input was compared to the researchers’ analyses of the transcripts. The comparisons were used to determine the similarity of issues and themes found by each researcher. We dialogued regarding our rationale for choosing some themes and issues rather than others. The analyses were compared across groups in the same manner. Redundancy of categories appeared to be reached. Redundancy refers to the finding that the same themes and issues are emerging repeatedly (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, Tesch, 1990, Patton, 1990). An example of this process is portrayed in Appendix D.
Along with the transcripts from the focus groups, data collection also involves the note taking of the researcher. Notes are vital to the fleshing out of the information gained through the qualitative study. Creswell (1994) recommended four types of note taking. The first type of notes recommended was referred to as jottings. These were to occur on a notepad during the focus groups. These were not in-depth as I had my attention on the dynamics of the group. The purpose of the notes was to help me remember group dynamics and non-verbals that occurred. This was found to be a hindrance rather than help with the facilitation of the groups. As previously mentioned, following the first two focus groups at the initial site at York, Nebraska, the sessions were videotaped in order that I observe the nuances and process at a later time. This allowed me to offer my full attention to the facilitation of the groups. Having an assistant present at the sessions also was an aid in that as we had our debriefing following each session, we were able to discuss various aspects of the process that appeared significant.

The second type of note taking occurred following the focus group. Ideally these were to occur immediately following the groups. Due to time constraints on the rooms, however, I wrote the notes later in the day. Notes are methodological (dealing with the method of the group/interview), descriptive (what occurred), and analytical (how one makes sense of the process). The biases I possess have a significant impact on the analytical notes. As mentioned previously, I have lived with ministers all my life. This gives me a lens that is familiar with both the plight and joy of ministry. As I listen to the dialogue of the groups, I hear the information through thirty-nine years of ministry. I am aware of this bias, so realize that I cannot perceive the data in an objective manner. I also filter the information through the lens of a marriage and family therapist. The training I
have in systems theory offers a view that takes into account the dynamics of all parts of
the system, in this case the church. I believe that this is an aid in offsetting the lack of an
objective perspective. I have been trained to view relationship in terms of reciprocity.
With this in mind, the data from these analytical notes made the analyses richer and
fuller. The transcript ideas focus on words and information, but the notes reminded me to
bring life to the analyses.

The third type of note taking recommended by Creswell (1994) is the keeping of a
log of business details; such as money spent and time used for various aspects of the
research. These aspects have an impact on both the research and myself. When the
possibility of funding occurred, this log was useful in giving an account of monies spent
for the research. Another impact it had was it offered complaining material because of
the volume of time spent on the project. If nothing else, I am terribly impressed with
myself.

Finally, an audit trail was kept from the first conceptualization of the research
idea to the final writing of the report. An audit trail is a written account of the process of
the study (Creswell, 1994). This demonstrates the manner in which my thinking evolved
and changed. It shows the development and growth of the study. This was an aid in the
writing of this dissertation as it helped me display the rationale and interest I had in the
research (Bernard, 1994).

There are various methods of data analysis available. I made use of a system
adapted from the analyses suggested by Tesch (1990), Lincoln and Guba (1985), and
Data analysis

The focus groups were transcribed verbatim. They were carefully read by the research assistant and myself. Any information pertaining to congregational support was noted. We both summarized the statements about support into synthesis statements. These statements were used to identify major themes and issues. The synthesis statements of both researchers were then compared. Discrepancies were discussed until consensus was reached. For example, when a participant spoke of an absence of support in the area of housing, one researcher believed this to be under the major category of tangible support, while the other designated it as being financial support. As this discrepancy was noted, it was decided to identify the category as financial support in order to highlight it as a major theme of support rather than placing it under tangible support. The synthesis statements and the themes and issues emerging from these statements were then compared to the themes and issues identified with the transcripts from the other focus groups (Tesch, 1990, and Patton, 1990).

In terms of the identification of theological orientation that was in addition to the focus group data, there was a discrepancy between the identification of the first two sets of groups and the last set. The participants from the York and ACU groups identified themselves as having a moderate or moderate-progressive theological orientation. At this point it was assumed that all ministers and members would identify themselves as such. However, the final set of groups that occurred on the Pepperdine campus, had a slightly different perspective of themselves and their ministers. As had previously been expected, they identified themselves as more toward the progressive end of the continuum. There did not appear to be a difference in the identified support and absence
of support. However, the group process for the ministerial group was somewhat different in that the participants appeared to be more open as a whole to the dialogue of each other. Whereas the first two sets of groups and the laity group from the final set addressed their comments to me, the last minister’s group was much more invested in the dialogue of each participant and spoke freely among themselves. This could be due to the make-up of the group, but could also be due to the tolerance of the beliefs of others that is associated with a more progressive paradigm in the churches of Christ.

Creswell (1998) uses the analogy of a spiral to explain the procedure for data analysis. He states, “One enters with data of text and exits with an account or a narrative. In between, the researcher touches on several facets of analysis and circles around and around” (p. 142).

Data management is the bottom circle and begins the upward spiral. This refers to the physical management of data through separating it into different transcripts for each focus group and placing the material in files. Due to the great volume of data, this phase organized the data in order to make it manageable rather than overwhelming.

The next circle in the spiral involved the reading and reflecting. I read and reread the transcripts in order to get a sense of the focus groups as a whole subsequent to breaking them down into smaller parts. This is the initial phase of the classification and interpretation of synthesis statements, categories, and comparisons that is the next circle in the spiral. This loop is the heart of qualitative data analysis. Classifying pertains to taking the transcripts apart and looking for the themes and issues. This classification occurred with the use of a word processor. As categories emerged, I created files. The
subsequent statements that supported the categories were copied and pasted into the created files. This continued until the entire transcript had been examined.

Interpretation involved making sense of the data. In other words, I was able to observe the patterns that emerged and gained understanding into the situation regarding ministers and their perception of support. Biases were evident as I interpreted the data. The simple process of designating categories was affected by the rationale I had for this study in the first place. As stated previously, the purpose of this dissertation was to examine the perception of support a minister believes he receives from his congregation. I looked for categories of support and absence of support and classified the data accordingly.

Other biases affected the manner in which I noted certain categories while perhaps ignoring others. My experience as a minister’s daughter and then as a minister’s wife encourages a sensitivity to the plight of ministers when they are not located in a supportive environment. It is hoped that my expertise as a therapist in going to a meta level of analysis was helpful with this bias. By this I mean (as alluded to earlier) that I have gained the ability to rise above the content of the situation and focus on the process.

Finally, the data are presented in the final circle of the spiral. It is critical at this phase to present the findings in the most intelligible way possible (Creswell, 1998). Hopefully the reader is able through reading this dissertation to have a clear idea of the process and outcome of the study.

Criteria of rigor

Lincoln and Guba (1985) use alternative terms than the quantitative terms dealing with validity and reliability. The terms “credibility,” “transferability,” “dependability,”
and “confirmability” are suggested as comparable to “internal validity,” “external validity,” “reliability,” and “objectivity.” I will demonstrate the manner in which I handled these issues in my study. I will then illustrate an alternative point of view suggested by Creswell (1998) to address this issue of “verification” that is another criterion for assessing the quality of a study.

**Credibility.** Credibility is the issue of trustworthiness in qualitative research dealing with truth-value. It asks the question, “Are the realities of the participant and facilitator congruent?” In other words, do the results reflect the thinking of facilitator and participant rather than solely reflecting the thoughts of the facilitator? Credibility was established in this study through triangulation, member checks, and peer debriefing. Triangulation refers to the use of various methods to encourage a congruence of thought. The strengths of one method compensate for weaknesses in others. Triangulation occurred through the use of two researchers, note taking, and the possibility of listening to the audiotapes or watching the videotapes when in doubt.

**Member checks** refer to the solicitation of the participants’ views of the credibility of the findings and interpretations. It involved the revision of the summaries of the transcripts that were sent to the participants. I sought the participants’ critical observations and interpretations of the summary transcript. Initially, I had thought to send the summaries to two individuals from each group, but as the number of the sample was rather small (thirty-five), I sent it to each participant. Eighteen returned the summaries. I therefore gained input into the category summarization from almost half of the participants. Some of the participants simply signed the summaries and returned them.
Others, however, wrote comments that added to the depth of the findings. Lincoln and Guba (1985) consider this to be the most critical technique for establishing credibility. This is also another method of triangulation.

As mentioned previously, peer debriefing occurred immediately following the focus groups as well as various times throughout the research process with both the consultant and research assistant. It was a time when we could discuss thoughts, feelings, impressions, and other responses we had to the group process. Information gained during these debriefings was valuable to the facilitation of the groups as well as the continuing evolution of the research study. It was valuable to the group facilitation in that I was able to fine-tune the manner in which I interacted with the participants for the subsequent groups. It aided in the evolution of the study because the consultant offered a varied perspective of the information that emerged from the group. This in turn impacted the manner in which I perceived the dialogue.

Creswell (1998) states that peer review or debriefing provides an external check of the research process, similar to interrater reliability. Lincoln and Guba (1985) refer to this individual(s) as having the task of keeping the researcher honest. They refer to them as a devil’s advocate.

**Transferability.** Transferability addresses the issue of applicability for trustworthiness. According to Lincoln and Guba (1985), it is comparable to external validity. This lends the possibility that the findings are transferable between the researcher and those being studied. Transferability was established through purposive sampling and thick description. Purposive sampling involved the selection of ministers who met the selection criteria of having ten years of experience and being a pulpit
minister. It involved ministers in the Church of Christ. As stated previously, this encouraged a more like sample in order that another group of like ministers in the Church of Christ could be chosen and the same results would occur.

**Thick description** is the manner in which researchers keep an abundant amount of information regarding the research study. This is why the emphasis on various types of note taking is vital. Again, note taking included the jottings, note taking following the session, keeping of a log, and keeping an audit trail. This also refers to the manner in which I wrote. It is hoped that the reader of the report has the feeling that they experienced the focus group or that they could experience the events described (Lincoln and Guba, 1985). Rich thick description also refers to the detailed description of the participants and study. It allows the reader to decide whether or not the results can be transferred to other settings. These decisions are based on the determination of the similarity of characteristics between this and other possible studies. It is hoped that this research was described in such a way that findings of ministerial would be easily transferable to other populations of ministers and laity (Creswell, 1998).

**Dependability.** Dependability is stated as being the naturalistic equivalent of the issue of reliability. It deals with the problem of whether the results can be replicated. Means for establishing dependability are multiple researchers, multiple methods, and a process audit. The consultant and I as primary researcher were present at each focus group. We each kept notes for later use. As stated previously, another individual served as an assistant researcher. Both of us had copies of the transcripts from the focus groups to read and reread. We came up with synthesis statements, and then combined them into themes and issues. I determined whether my synthesis statements agreed with those of
the assistant researcher and then integrated them. In we disagreed, we discussed the differences.

The criteria for satisfying multiple methods was the use of focus groups and summary reviews. We observed the richness of the group process with the focus groups and then gained additional depth from the summary reviews. Process audit was conducted by the major professor of the researcher. He served as a consultant who assessed the use of the qualitative method in this study and whether it was being used to the advantage of the research. I met with him following the first set of focus groups and again was able to fine-tune the facilitation of the groups. I asked questions regarding the process of the group as well as content questions; such as the degree to which I could lead the participants in the discussion of the issue of support.

Confirmability. Confirmability is the final issue of trustworthiness and addresses the issue of neutrality or objectivity. In other words, were the results the perspective of the participant and not the researcher? This criterion was met through member checks, triangulation, and product audit. Member checks involved giving the participants a summary of the transcript for their input. By allowing focus group members the opportunity to view the summary, the participants assessed whether the report included what they said and meant and rather than being simply portraying my interpretation of the issues discussed. Triangulation ensured that more than one source is addressing the material in order to facilitate more objective results.

Product audit refers to the audit of the transcripts and the manner in which I analyzed them (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). This also occurred through consultation with the major professor, Dr. Harvey Joanning. Due to his experience with the analysis of focus
group transcripts, he was able to offer suggestions that aided in the management and interpretation of the data. Creswell (1998) states that external audits call for an external consultant to assess both the process and product of the research for accuracy. The auditor determines whether or not the findings, interpretations, and conclusions are supported by the data. He mentions that the auditor should have no tie to the study. This was the case with this study in that the major professor who served as auditor was connected with the research only through myself. His familiarity with the qualitative research process, however, enabled him to assume the role of auditor. Throughout the entire process of the study, I met and spoke with Dr. Joanning regarding the process and product of the dissertation. He played a critical role in determining whether the study was progressing according to the criterion necessary for effective qualitative methodology.

Other methods of verification

Creswell (1998) advocates the use of the term "verification" as opposed to validity in assuring the quality of the study because it "underscores qualitative research as a distinct approach, a legitimate mode of inquiry in its own right" (p. 201). In portraying the multiple views of verification, he found that the writers of these perspectives demonstrate the following: (1) the writers look for a manner to offer equivalents from a quantitative perspective. (2) They use a distinct language to offer legitimacy for verification in naturalistic research. (3) They reconceptualize verification with a postmodern framework. (4) They believe that verification is a distraction to good research. He believes that it important to operationalize the criteria of rigor as suggested by Lincoln and Guba (1985). He presents eight verification procedures gleaned from the
various views on verification. Several of the procedures in Creswell’s list have been mentioned in the above discussion of criteria of rigor, so will not be repeated. The verification procedures he included and the manner in which they were used in my study are as follows:

**Prolonged engagement and persistent observation.** Prolonged engagement and persistent observation allows the researcher to build trust with participants, learn the “culture,” and check for misinformation introduced through researcher bias. I was unable to spend much time with the participants due to the distance between the focus group site and myself. The contact I had with the research participants was the initial contact by telephone, the actual focus group, and interaction regarding feedback on the transcript summaries. However, due to the fact that I spent so many years in this setting, I am very knowledgeable of the culture of the Churches of Christ. This offered credibility to the study as the participants accepted that I had an insider’s understanding of the issue of support.

**Negative case analysis.** Negative case analysis refers to the refining of the focus of the study as the research progresses due to negative or disconfirming evidence. As the data were analyzed, it was revised as the categories emerged. I made the final revisions late in the analysis of data as the categories emerged and were placed in an organized manner. As redundancy of information was reached through the analysis of each additional group, certain categories emerged while others were identified as being specific to one group. For instance, the first ministerial focus group placed an emphasis on the identification of the provider of the support. However, the following five groups
made little mention of this category. This realization aided in the elimination of this category as an outlier and exception.

**Clarifying researcher bias.** Clarifying researcher bias enables the reader of the report to understand the researcher's position and any biases or assumptions that impact the research. At the outset of my study, I commented on my past experiences as a minister's daughter and wife, in an attempt to make my biases, prejudices, and orientations overt. This portrayed the manner in which the research has shaped the interpretation and approach to the study. During the writing of the results and discussion, I attempted to make overt the interpretive process I was experiencing. As I read the comments of the participants and discussed them, I made the biases of which I was aware overt. Although this does not eliminate the bias, it makes the bias evident so the reader understands through what lens I perceive the dialogue.

It is recommended by Creswell (1998) that the qualitative researcher engage in at least two of the procedures in a study. He suggests that triangulating among different data sources, writing with detailed and thick description, and performing member checks are the most cost-efficient and popular procedures for the researcher.

Kincheloe and McLaren (1998) discuss the difficulty of establishing validity in qualitative research. They state that it adheres to the goal of more traditional research in that it reflects a concern for determining what is real. They offer the notion articulated by Lather (as cited in Kincheloe & McLaren, 1998) called catalytic validity.

Catalytic validity points to the degree to which research moves those it studies to understand the world and the way it is shaped in order for them to transform it...Research that possesses catalytic validity will not only display the reality-
altering impact of the inquiry process, it will also direct this impact so that those under study will gain self-understanding and self-direction. (p. 289)

This was apparent in the group dynamics of the focus groups. As the dialogue of each group progressed, ideas were stimulated that in turn stimulated other ideas. Hopefully each individual left with a deeper understanding and a new perspective of the issue of support. When invited to participate, all of the members of the laity groups stated their belief that they did not have much to contribute, but were willing to attend anyway. As they began talking and thinking about the issue of ministerial support, they realized that they did have an understanding and a part in the support of their minister in their congregation. Some stated that the group was beneficial in helping them become more invested in the deliberate support of their minister.

The ministers gained understanding, but more importantly, due to their high level of investment in the topic, the groups themselves served as avenues of support. Although the groups were the same length of time, the participants of the ministerial groups remained for further dialogue following the completion of the groups. One group of ministers stayed for forty minutes following the dismissal of the session. I believe this demonstrates the benefit the ministers received from our conversation.

**Limitations**

Rosenblatt and Fischer (as cited in Creswell, 1998) speak of limitations to qualitative research. The first is that it is labor intensive. It costs more in researcher time due to the extensive contact that is required in data gathering and the intensive work involved in the data analysis. Although the personal contact of this study was limited, time spent in the data analysis was certainly extensive. In my opinion, however, the
richness of information offsets the time involved in its analysis. The second limitation is that data analysis often requires that the analyst master a rich array of data. It cannot be broken up and given to assistants—the primary researcher must be familiar with the whole. I was able to discuss the data with the consultant and assistant researcher, but in the end, it was up to me to make sense of it all. Third, although the purpose of qualitative research is to allow the voice of the participants to be heard, it is the researcher who selects, organizes, interprets and summarizes the material. One must be cautious to make ones biases and prejudices overt, however, as with any research, there will always be biases of which the researcher is unaware.

Another limitation specifically with focus groups and interviews is the potential problems of selective memory, self-presentation biases, and the inability or unwillingness to disclose some things. This limitation was addressed by the use of several methods of verification and participants to achieve redundancy of material. Due to my stated investment in the support of ministers. I have attempted to be cautious in the reporting of the results. It would be easy to present a skewed picture of this issue, and although that may encourage some to address the support of ministers, it would not allow the population of churches a realistic perspective of the situation. I believe a realistic portrayal will be of great benefit in promoting a proactive stance toward the issue of support from both ministers and laity.
CHAPTER FOUR

RESULTS

The results are separated based on the two populations of the focus groups—congregation members and ministers, and by the input of the participants regarding theological orientation. The data from the focus groups were broken down into main categories and subcategories pertaining to the topic of ministerial support. For the understanding of the reader, I have cited the group and page number of each quotation. The groups are identified based on location (C – California, N – Nebraska, and T – Texas) and by type (L – laity and M – ministerial). The page numbers refer to the location of the quotation within the transcript of the focus group. This allows the reader to have a sense of the time at which the participant made the statement. For example, if the citation is CM, p. 6, it is the California Ministerial group and the statement occurred early in the discussion. All transcripts were between 21 and 32 pages in length.

Congregation members population

The categories that emerged from the laity groups were (1) absence of support, (2) basis for absence of support, (3) basis for support, (4) expectations of minister, (5) identified support, (6) manifestations, and (7) recommended solutions.

Category 1: Absence of support

The category of absence of support identified subcategories of behavior and attitude that the minister perceived as demonstrating an absence of support. They originated either with the congregation as a whole or with the church leaders. These subcategories are as follows:
Origin with the congregation. Areas addressed as originating specifically from the congregation were an absence of familial and emotional support, and the dynamic of multiple employers.

The participants perceived that the ministerial family did not receive adequate support. They discussed this absence in regards to both the children and the wife of the minister. One participant made the following remark about the children of the minister:

Along the comment somebody made about letting the preacher be just a member, sometimes the kids themselves are set up to a higher standard that’s hard for me to even sometimes to say, “They’re just kids.” And they don’t have any special gift on grace and being perfect. (CL, p. 5)

Aspects of social support were missing in that the minister may not receive a great deal of emotional support from the congregation. The criticism a minister receives was mentioned repeatedly, in one instance pertaining to the number of days he might be absent. There was also considerable discussion regarding the lack of esteem some ministers experienced from their congregation. I am familiar with this dynamic in that in my perception, ministers in the Church of Christ experience what I refer to as a leveling effect. In reaction to the distinguished position a pastor holds in other denominations, the Church of Christ seems to want to maintain equal footing between the congregation and the minister. This results in a double bind situation for the minister as he is hired as a visionary for the church, but not empowered to take the lead.

Another way that ministers lack social support is in their isolation. It is perceived that the minister has an absence of intimate relationships. The groups articulated numerous causes for this phenomenon. The size of the congregation may encourage
isolation. If the church is large, the minister may be lost in the shuffle. He may not be able to identify an appropriate social group. The following was stated about the minister feeling lost:

There’s a whole lot of ways you can get lost in a large congregation. People have to work harder maybe to meet a small group of people one on one. Like you said, your congregation is broken into these small family groups to get to know someone rather than just a thousand faces staring at you. (CL, p. 12).

If the church is small, it offers a smaller pool of possible friends and the minister may not find the type of friendship he desires. In either case, he must be cautious of the appearance of being cliquish.

Finally, the perception of multiple employers leads to the view of an absence of support. With no clear chain of command the minister may be uncertain as to his responsibilities. He may also face repeated violation of his personal boundaries that can be coupled with an absence of fondness from individuals or the congregation as a whole.

One participant mentioned the difficulty of multiple employers. He stated the following:

I think the basic problem with having that job as a preacher is that you have too many bosses. Everybody thinks they are contributing to your wage, and so they have a say in what you preach, what you do, where you go, and that comes into this whole issue of wages and the support. And I don't know how people do that job. (NL, p. 5)

**Origin with leaders.** The leaders’ absence of support was addressed separately from that of the congregation. It was perceived that at times the leaders did not provide emotional support in the form of guidance for the minister. If this was coupled with a
lack of respect for the leadership of the minister, as previously mentioned, they were placed in a difficult position in that they were expected to take the lead but were not followed. One of the consultants agreed with my perception of the frustration many of the ministers in the Church of Christ face as they experience this double bind. He stated that ministers are typically visionaries and are hired because of this talent. They then are placed under a group of leaders who are less idealistic and want to maintain control of the actions of a minister. The laity spoke of the criticism that a minister often experiences from his leaders. They also stated the need for some type of minister care committee or personnel group, but found it to be virtually nonexistent. One participant spoke of his being a part of a personnel group that had tried to perform both a policing and a nurturing role with the minister. He said the following:

There was I think a miscommunication at first in. . the charge of that group. We didn’t really know whether we were supposed to help the staff or whether we were supposed to whip them into line. You know, we felt like we were supposed to help them, yet some of the elders who were pushing this program, said, well, you need to go explain to them how they need to do their budgets. Or you need to go do this or you need to tell them if they don’t get results, then they may be looking for another job. And, of course, what happened with the people who really felt threatened, they didn’t want to talk to us at all. You know, we were the police. We were there to find things to kick them out. (TL, p. 20).
The group had eventually developed a role that was helpful to the minister, but then had disbanded for reasons unknown to the participant.

An absence of support was apparent in the area of tangible support--finances. This was typically the first area discussed by the laity groups. They spoke of the absence of benefits, such as health and retirement benefits and a sufficient salary. This was articulated as follows:

I haven't been in any congregation in any place where I saw that Social Security was being paid, health benefits, retirement, or anything like that was being done for the minister. I guess over the years, this has been kinda just generally accepted, you know, and you just don't do anything about it. If they want to carry their health, like Blue Brook and Blue Cross or something like that, why that's up to them. And I know that some of the ministers have talked to me about it, and they have quite a bit of concern about this retirement. (NL, p. 2)

The groups also spoke of the negligence of the congregation in terms of educating ministers regarding finances. They said, "You know, my experience is that preachers are notoriously poor financial managers in many cases. And I've seen both. Some of them are very good, but some of them are horrible. Congregations sometimes have just let them be that way." (NL, p. 2)

Two other areas in which the minister lacked financial support were in home ownership and the offering of sabbaticals. It is difficult for ministers to own a home due to the expectation that they live in a parsonage or due to their insufficient salary. When we moved to work with a congregation, one of the leaders told us they had loaned money to previous ministers for a down payment. When we were prepared financially to take on
this commitment, we approached the church about this possibility. They decided that this
was not something they wanted to do. Although they supported us in other ways, they did
not understand the importance we placed on home ownership.

Dismissal is the extreme form of absence of tangible support. A minister may be
dismissed for a number of reasons. One stated by the laity groups was the minister’s
unwillingness to accept a one-down position. The minister may believe part of his role is
to challenge the church, while the members may believe this is inappropriate.

A minister may also be relieved of his position when he is struggling. One
participant said the following:

A lot of us, when the preacher is having a problem, whatever it is maybe is an
irritation to us. And instead of us going to them and trying to work it out, we
decide we don't like him quite as well as we did and it just goes apart. It's like a
husband and wife, you know. Sometimes you don't care enough to try to
encourage them and try to solve the problem and get back together. You just
kinda let it drift...Well, he's been here about long enough. Rather than there
being support there, they're saying, “well the way to solve this problem is to start
over with somebody different.” And we'll get somebody different
(laugh)...Congregations do that with preachers sometimes, and that's not the way
it should be, but it's the way it is. When something doesn't start going so well, all
of a sudden, you're just hung out to dry. (NL, p. 12)

Category 2: Basis for absence of support

The subcategories of the category of basis for absence of support were also
divided into the point of origin of the absence of support. These points were with the
congregation, leadership group, or minister. Types of support as articulated by Cutrona (1996) are mentioned as this support emerged within the subcategories. The types of support are emotional, esteem, information, and tangible.

**Origin with the congregation.** Unmet expectations of the congregation appeared to impact their absence of esteem support of the ministers. If they believed him to be a poor role model or if he had not earned the esteem of the congregation, they believed the church would be less likely to be supportive. Expectations of the minister were mentioned so frequently, that I deal with it as a separate category.

The Churches of Christ pride themselves on their level of autonomy, both at the corporate and individual level. They do not have a national organization but operate through a more covert network of relationships. As stated previously, the paradigm of the church is influenced through the universities associated with the church and also through its various publications. At an individual level, there is an importance placed on the autonomy of each member. No one is responsible for a person’s salvation, but that person. This also impacts the leveling effect in which all members are seen as having equal value. There is an attempt to keep the minister at the level of the other members in the congregation. This again leads to somewhat of a double bind for the minister as he is expected to take the lead, but not place himself above anyone else. “You know, I think part of our heritage as the Church of Christ is like we’re independent agents, you know. Each person answers to God individually. Each congregation stands alone and that kind of thing. And I think that in some of the ways, we kind of put the preacher out there and say, ‘you’re on your own,’” (TL, p. 18).
The financial situation of the congregation was a basis for an absence of tangible support. It was perceived that the congregation wanted the minister’s salary to be comparable to that of its members. Again, this demonstrates the perspective that the minister should have an equal status with the majority of the congregation. They therefore were unwilling to give salary increases or offer a more affluent salary package. It was postulated, however, that the economy and diminutive income of the church also influenced the low level of financial support presented to a minister. Many times a church desired to offer a better salary for their minister, but could not. This situation was raised repeatedly by the laity focus groups. I believe it demonstrates the willingness of at least this population to better a minister’s position, although it is coupled with feelings of helplessness that they cannot.

Another basis for an absence of financial support was related to the contract between a minister and church. Some thought that the contract was at times detrimental to the congregation. “Yeah, some of them (contracts) were not very favorable to the church. One of them had cost our building. He had a like an eighteen month guaranteed salary or something” (CL, p. 16)

When there were few close relationships with the minister, the congregation was not as likely to be emotionally supportive. This could be due to the pedestal effect in which the members maintain distance from the minister because they hold him in a revered position. It was also stated that this absence of close relationships could be due to the mobility of the members. Some congregations have a high turnover rate due to the job market or other factors. If a minister has developed relationships in such a church, those individuals may leave. When my husband and I were working with the church in
Nebraska, there were a limited number of young couples. As this was a college town, the young couples were only there for a short time and then moved to other locations. We found it difficult to develop a social group within the congregation for this reason. We eventually developed this group outside of the congregation. We had friendships within the church, but they were not our closest friends. This facilitated a certain degree of distance that was a factor in our eventual resignation.

The manner in which the congregation perceived support also appeared to be a basis for the lack thereof. The congregation members mentioned they did not believe they had the skills to be supportive or the little support of which they were able was insignificant. Of the fifteen participants in the three laity focus groups, twelve stated that they did not have much to contribute to the dialogue. It became almost comical as each would take me aside and mention that they were happy to be there, but did not think they would add much to the group. I reassured them that as we talked, they would be surprised at how much they did know. This was the case as each participant found that they had something to contribute to the understanding of the issue of ministerial support.

There was also mention made of support being unnecessary—that a minister should be above the need for support and rely on God for his encouragement. It was stated “Well there are a lot of people in the congregation too, they kinda look on it [expression of appreciation] as sort of a worldly thing, and so I think you kinda have to get the pulse of the congregation” (NL, p. 19).

The final factor associated with the absence of support from the congregation was the size of the congregation. Along with the difficulties with relationships that the size
can influence, it can also have an impact on other aspects of support. There may be more requirements from a small church. The following was mentioned pertaining to size:

I think size of a congregation has a lot to play. If you're in a really, really small congregation, you don't have a secretary, you may be one of only thirty people, and you have to wear fifteen hats. Whereas if you are in a congregation of a thousand, you may be one of five or ten ministers and have a very specific role and staff all your own. So the hats, the support, all of that changes based on the size. (CL, p. 12)

Origin with leaders. A basis for lack of support was also stated as originating with the leadership. The laity spoke at length of the various models of leadership that impact the level of support a minister received. It was mentioned that when leaders were not collaborative with the congregation, it was difficult to provide a supportive environment for the ministers. This was due to the focus being on the conflictual relationship of the church and leaders rather than on the minister. A hierarchical model also might lead to the leaders intentionally withholding support because they were vying for control with the minister or because they had a hidden agenda. As a participant stated, “I’m not sure…where the responsibility lies when it doesn’t work. Whether it’s the preacher not expressing his needs and others well or are there hidden agendas either among elders or among certain constituencies?” (CL, p. 19)

The leaders believed they were in a more powerful position when the minister was kept in a subordinate position. The subordination could be seen as either intentional or unintentional when the leaders chose to fund other programs rather than give the minister a salary or benefit increase.
Some believed the difficulty in offering support lie in the fact that some churches did not have elders. A church elected elders to a position of authority. In the Churches of Christ, the elders are typically viewed as being in a superior position to that of the ministerial position. Although there are natural or temporary leaders in churches without elders, they are not viewed as having the same degree of power. In the churches with whom we worked, we observed an interesting dynamic of the change of leadership style that occurred when a man became an elder. He may have demonstrated a collaborative model of leadership until he attained the office of elder. At that point, he many times led in a more authoritarian manner.

**Origin with minister.** When the basis for absence of support originated with the minister, it was perceived as being due to various situations. The congregation members believed that at times the church has chosen the wrong type of minister. This was seen as being due to a lack of caution during the hiring process as mentioned by a participant:

"I think that's something that we just wrestle with. You know, you look to the Bible and people are called sheep (laugh). and there's a good reason. you know. that that's the expression that's used. When a congregation looks for a preacher. you know, I think--well how do they decide what they are looking for. You know. Sometimes we maybe do a survey or we do this or that, but a lot of times when it comes down to it, you know, you have different people come in and interview or try out or whatever you call it, and who you like or who you don't like is just kinda without--it's just what you think. Uhh, rather than saying this is what we are looking for. And a lot of times who you like or you don't like is a reaction to the last person.” (NL, p. 5)
If they hired a minister with an absence of an evangelistic personality, this led to disappointment and the likelihood of less support for him. Another characteristic that might have impacted the lack of support was an absence of strong leadership ability. This may have become apparent after the minister had been with the church for a time. Some of these difficulties may have been due to the insufficient schooling of the minister. It was believed that had they received an advanced degree or more practical training, they would be better prepared to deal with the congregation. One participant believed that the less skilled ministers had not attended preaching school. He stated, “There’s these guys that get kicked around from church to church to church to church and they’re the, I don’t know. maybe they’re the people that just, just barely passed those schools of preaching.” (TL, p. 8)

A scarcity of friendships with the minister was perceived as impacting the emotional support the minister received. Ministers may not be supported when they do not have the skills to have close relationships with members of the congregation. They may have appeared to be charismatic when hired, but then were not able to sustain friendships. The minister may also have encouraged the pedestal effect by maintaining distance or a hierarchical relationship with the members This effect was articulated by a participant. “But we tend to see preachers as, you know, these spiritual giants, I guess, within the congregation who don't need help when they very often do.” (CL, p. 3)

Power issues and triangulation influenced the lack of friendship with a minister that in turn encouraged a lack of support. This refers to those times when the struggle over power or the unwelcome involvement of another in the relationship prohibited the development of a close relationship. An absence of support may also have been a
reaction to the minister exhibiting ungodly characteristics. If the minister coveted the limelight, they were less likely to receive support. If they were divisive or worldly, they might also discourage the church from treating them in a supportive manner. In speaking of this divisiveness, a participant said the following:

But, I know that in another congregation where a friend of mine attends, the minister went in with the agenda that “I’m going to change this congregation. This congregation has great potential, but they’re not meeting it, so I’m going to start from day one and, you know, critically cutting them up and reordering them.” And I don’t think that’s biblical, I don’t think that’s scriptural. I think that, you know, I think anybody who’s divisive is wrong. And so, you know, if a minister comes in and he thinks his role is to be divisive, I think his role is to go somewhere else. (TL, p. 15)

Finally, if they wrested the lead from the elders, they may not receive the support they desired from the congregation. Although it was not viewed as an ungodly characteristic, if the minister was young or inexperienced, congregation members at times did not offer their support. It was mentioned that they did not want to support an individual whom they did not respect.

Other reasons that originated with the minister dealt with relationships as well. As opposed to an absence, many times the ministers were viewed as having exclusive friendships. Members withdrew their support when they did not feel included in the minister’s circle of friends. One individual said the following:

Well, from a lot of my experience, I would say, yes, [relationships of ministers are exclusive] but I’m sure that there are cases where it’s not. I’m sure that there are
cases where it's justified, you know. You can look at the preacher and say, "He spends too much time golfing or he spends too much time doing this or doing that, and he's not on the job." And it could be the same thing spending too much time with this circle of friends. (NL, p. 16)

Others perceived this exclusivity as being a function of the minister's involvement in a different social group or a different age group. If ministers were older, it was suggested that they were perceived as father figures. These individuals therefore believed they had little opportunity to provide support in a relationship to the minister.

Category 3: Basis for support

There was a lesser amount of dialogue regarding the basis for support. It is separated based on whether it originated with the minister or congregation.

Origin with congregation. The laity saw several possible occasions for the congregation to support the minister. At times there were economic factors that had an impact on the decision to support. When the congregation increased numerically they were able to offer the minister more financial support. It was stated, "I think really it comes down to, the support comes from attendance. If this guy is getting the souls in the door, then he enjoys support from the eldership." (TL, p. 6) There were also instances when the congregation took the cost of living into account as they considered the salary of their minister.

The congregation also offered emotional and esteem support in response to the actions of the minister. They believed support was offered if the minister had earned the respect of the members. This also occurred when the congregation became aware that there was a high need for support. When the minister made sacrifices for the
congregation or demonstrated his loyalty in other ways, they responded with both financial and emotional support. They saw his actions as a model for their behavior and in appreciation for these sacrifices, treated him well. A congregation member stated it well as follows:

And so, I don't know how we did it, but somehow we did [sent him on a trip] because he has sacrificed for us. And I think there may be a difference in an evangelist who begins a church and a preacher that does the, what is that called again, has an eldership meeting where they tell him what to do. I think that may be different because he started it, and we know what he sacrificed and we know that he worked a job and preached and still fed us well. You know, and then the deacons have had their jobs, but they still serve in all kinds of capacities, so I wonder if that just doesn't make us sacrifice more when he says he needs something or to even ask him, "what do you need." (TL, p. 18)

**Origin with minister.** Support at times came based on the results brought about by sabbaticals. The minister would return from his break refreshed and with new energy. The congregation responded to this new energy as is mentioned by this account:

You know when ______ is, you know, goes off on sabbatical, he comes back. It's always exciting to me. I look forward to see what we get when he gets back. Because I know it's going to be special. I know we're going to see a new man up there. You know, he's going to have new energy and it makes me feel like we've done something right by him. It makes me feel more responsible I think. (TL, p. 8)
Category 4: Expectations

As mentioned previously, although expectations of the minister could have been placed under a number of categories, such as basis for absence of support or recommended solutions, it was chosen as a category due to the prevalence of its occurrence in the focus group. The subcategories for expectations were the awareness the congregation has of expectations placed on the minister, expectations placed on the family of the minister, job expectations, and relational expectations.

Awareness of expectations. The first subcategory under this category is an acknowledgment of the expectations by the congregation members. They recognized that this was a complex situation in that typically the expectations are set too high. Although there is the realization that the minister is human and has needs, he is required to meet a number of expectations that may be beyond his capacity. Several participants articulated the following sentiment: “People have this—they have this [expectation] that the preacher’s supposed to be all and do all, and, that’s unrealistic.” (NL, p. 20)

One example of this is in the expectation that the minister fulfills his role and also moonlight in order to support himself and his family. Unrealistic expectations were spoken of more frequently than any other issue pertaining to support. I think it is significant that this issue was prevalent with both the laity and ministerial groups. Some felt the high expectations were justified. It was articulated by one participant, “Well, I’m a firm believer, you expect low expectations and that’s exactly what you’re going to get.” (NL, p. 20).

Although it was stated that the unrealistic expectations seem to be changing and becoming more reachable, this may partially be due to an uncertainty by laity of what the
expectations are that a minister faces. One participant mentioned that she did not know the expectations placed on a minister. She said in order to find out, she needed to ask the minister. When the expectations are ambiguous, both the congregation and minister experience anxiety.

**Job expectations.** The expectation expressed most frequently by the laity was that the minister is to be constantly available. There appeared to be a realization of the difficulty of this requirement, but a belief that this was a necessary aspect of the position. In one group it was mentioned, "this expectation that can be there. 'the preacher is going to be there whenever I want.' And if everybody's had that same mentality, it can really burn a person out." (TL, p. 2) A participant in another group said the following:

And being a preacher doesn't seem like the kind of, and certainly, it's not the kind of job where you can go, you know, 8 - 5, Monday through Friday and then play. And that seems kind of to be the model that people live by, that they look to. (CL, p. 18)

The minister is expected to carry the burden of ministry for the church. It was believed that there was a difference in this expectation depending on the size of the congregation. If the church was small, the minister faced the expectation to be involved in every service aspect of the church. He must either take a leadership role in these ministries or perform the ministry on his own. All three laity groups discussed this. In one group, the following was said:

There may be different dynamics between a preacher who is working with a large congregation as opposed to a small one. In a small congregation, you've got to literally be everything, which puts a whole different dynamic...If there's going to
be women’s class on Tuesday morning, the preacher’s doing it. He’s teaching the
Wednesday night class. He’s preaching two times or three times on Sunday.
He’s doing every funeral, every wedding, every anything. There’s just nobody...
and, you know, it just goes unsaid. There’s no contract that that’s written in. It’s
just, well, you’re the preacher, that’s the way it’s done. (TL, p. 4)

If the church was large, he was expected to do specific roles well. There also was
the belief that with a larger size, expectations were typically more clearly stated. This was
articulated in the following statement. “...if he goes to a big congregation, as a part of a
big staff, it would be clearer what his role would be.” (CL, p. 12)

Educational expectations are placed on ministers. They are expected to challenge
the body and offer not only a basic knowledge, but also a depth of understanding as they
teach the Bible. Being challenged in this way is expected as was articulated by a
participant. “I think recently it’s, it has crept in somehow where the role of a minister is
to push us up to the point where we’re uncomfortable and then push us just a little bit
farther...the reason for that is to make us grow or something.”(TL, p. 15)

Other expectations are associated with the role of leadership. Among other
things, the minister must have skills in organization to aid in the day-to-day aspects of the
church. As previously mentioned, these expectations are on a continuum from the
requirement that they be the leader, to being one of the leaders, to not being a leader.

**Relational expectations.** Relational expectations are prevalent for the minister.
He is expected to avoid close relationships so as not to be exclusive in his interactions.
One participant stated, “There are situations where people will feel like that the preacher
is giving all his attention to this group and he’s not taking care of the rest of the church,
and maybe sometimes that's justified and maybe it's not, but there are gonna be people
that feel that way.” (NL, p. 16) On the other hand, he is also expected to be close to all of
the members. He is to fit in with all social groups and is expected to create bridges
between these and other groups of the church. One group mentioned this as follows:

A lot of times, the preacher is expected to fit into all the groups, all the age
groups, but why should he? Most of us can't do that. We should realize, you
know, that that's a lot to ask to be able to do that. So at some time, you know, I
guess we treat the preacher like the preacher, and he's automatically a member of
every group, and he's expected to show up at every function. no matter what it is.
and, you know, be the whatever, you know, the special person that, you know,
he's just there because he's supposed to be there, you know. He doesn't really like
anybody else in the group maybe, but he's still supposed to be there. So you see,
a lot of preachers take that role on, you know. They are the reverend or whatever
that's just automatically kind of placed in that particular spot. Maybe they grow
in and they have to part and do it. And so they are treated like--not like just any
other person in the congregation. They are treated like something different and
they act different, you know. (NL, p. 14)

Another relational expectation is visitation. The minister is expected to visit those
members who were sick or sometimes there was the expectation that ministers spend time
in the homes of all of the members. In my experience, this requirement is less prevalent
now than it was when I was a child. My parents spent many evenings dropping in on
different families in the church. These days, hospitality is anticipated, as the members
may not want to be visited but may want to be in the home of the minister on numerous
occasions. There were many times when a congregation member would express the expectation that each member needed to be in our home.

A nurturing role is expected of ministers in that it is desired that they love the congregation. This again implies that the minister be very familiar with the congregation. The following was articulated regarding this expectation:

I have an expectation for the preacher to know the congregation, to know, you know, where people are because sometimes it’s easy to get up and make a statement in the heat of a sermon, you know, that will inflame certain people. And I think that the minister has to know whom he’s talking to and not necessarily always avoid that because it may be, there may be a scriptural, biblical reason for him to light that particular fire. But to know what the result’s gonna be and then to be able to step in. (TL. p. 15).

In conjunction with this familiarity, the minister is expected to have strong boundaries for himself and his family that he can model for the rest of the church.

**Familial expectations.** The need for strong boundaries is in reaction to the high expectations for the wife and children of the minister. The children are expected to be model children. In speaking of her minister, a participant said the following.

I remembered that one of the things that ____ had asked for was that his children be treated like normal...They’ve got very dynamic children. They’ve got about four or five of them, can’t remember right off. But they’re very dynamic and they’re involved in different things, but he says that a lot of times they are held to higher standards because we have a lot of youth there and they think, “well, ____, you know was chewing gum,” or, you know, “well, ____, he didn’t
go to Bible class this morning.” And so they’re harder and they call those things out. And, I think, they keep continually reminding us to not keep those kids at too high of a standard, just remember they’re human. (TL, p. 23)

The laity believed that the wife had expectations placed on her to perform a leadership role. One participant said the following:

Well, it's the responsibility of the congregation to support her, too. yes. I definitely think that. But I do think that if she marries knowing that she's going to be the wife of a minister and going from one church to another, that there will be some expectations. (CL, p. 7)

They did refer to churches that were addressing this unrealistic expectation by allowing the wife to choose her own ministry role. These churches were attempting to place few requirements on her.

Category 5: Identified support

Identified support was divided into three subcategories. They are as follows: congregational support, leadership support, and ministerial initiated support. These subcategories were again broken down into emotional support, esteem support, information support and tangible support.

Congregational support. This subcategory refers to areas of support that the laity has observed a congregation offering to a minister. Emotional support is believed to be offered by congregations. The idea was expressed that it was important to be understanding of what a minister’s role entails. This would include an awareness of the struggles he experiences. Members were identified who listen, encourage and care for a minister by doing various helpful acts for them. It was frequently stated that the
congregation offers the minister friendship. As previously mentioned, there seemed to be an awareness of the isolation a minister faces. One member stated it in this way:

It seems like everyone needs a special friend or two, and yet when a preacher has a special friend or two, it's looked on differently sometimes by the congregation. And maybe that friend is kind of abandoned because he's the preacher's friend, you know. So, I don't know for sure, but I think everyone needs someone that they can talk to—someone that will listen and, like _____ says, not particularly give advice, but sometimes as we talk, we solve our own problem. (NL, p. 16)

A participant in another group said the following.

I think one of the things I've always felt was most valuable was to treat them like everybody else, have relationships with them. Yes, they are the preacher. Yes, this is the preacher's wife. And yes, there's expectations for them, but unless you have a relationship with them, things will never, you'll never be as close later on when there might be times, when there are issues, things going on. They can handle that a lot better from somebody who they have a relationship with than just another critical person coming up. But I just think it's really important to treat them as one of us. (CL, p. 3)

Members meet with the minister in small groups and also encourage him to form groups with other preachers. This allows for emotional support through exchange of ideas and feelings. The groups can also foster appreciation. Expression of appreciation was mentioned as occurring more than any other form of emotional support by the focus groups. This is a simple act that was believed to have a significant impact on the emotional well being of a minister. The following was one of the statements made:
I think one big thing that would help the ministers is, let them know, let them know that you like the work that they are doing. And if he has a special sermon or something like that that you feel really had a lot of merit and really had a lot of things to give to enrich your Christian life, then let them know. Don't hide this stuff back, you know. (NL, p. 19)

Esteem support was believed to occur in many locations. A recognition of the professional status of a minister aided in the congregation offering few complaints or as one participant stated, "minding one's own business." This also led to the membership expressing a willingness to follow the lead of the minister and to the desire to offer a better salary even if the congregation was unable. It also led to a feeling of partnership by the congregation with the minister. They felt partnership in ministry and in the study of the Bible. This esteem support also was evident in the role many church secretaries accepted of serving as a buffer for the minister. Ministers saw this as vital in coping with the high expectations of the body. One member of a laity group said the following:

You know, we haven't even mentioned church secretaries. At least at our congregation, they, you know, they serve really as the first line of defense if you will, because they're kind of filtering the calls and hopefully able to get a little bit of information to know whether this is something that really needs to go to the preacher or does it need to go to some elders or to some deacons or something like that. So, I think the relationship between the minister and the secretary, if they are fortunate enough to have one, is very important if they can make clear here are the sorts of things, come to me, or here are the sorts of things that go elsewhere. (CL, p. 11)
The third type of support offered to ministers was tangible support. It was mentioned that simply being present at each worship was supportive to the minister. Some churches had special events such as a banquet or minister appreciation month. we were having "Minister's Month" where everybody in the congregation was notified that this is the month that we are going to be doing things and it could be a post card, it could be a flower put on their desk, a plate of cookies or an invitation to dinner... different people did different things. I know that _____, the first time that we did it, he kept saying, "All of these cards and cookies and cakes, and these things are appearing out of the blue." And sometimes people didn't even put a name on it, you know. But it was sort of fun for the congregation. (CL. p. 14)

Support was offered to the family of the minister in the form of childcare. Simply the recognition of the need for the break from the children and then the actual offering of the babysitting was seen as having benefited ministers.

The most commonly mentioned form of tangible support was financial support. This included offering the minister a sufficient benefit package. One participant said the following:

Well, many preachers, I mean, that worked in the past, ended up with no equity, no retirement. If they had not been good savers on their own when they retired from preaching, they did not have anything. And I think that that's something that's changing. People are starting to look and say, we need to give them retirement or we need to, you know, be paying them so that they can buy their own house and build equity and whatever they need to do. (CL, p. 17)
Financial support was also demonstrated through gifts, trips, vacations, and the provision of a parsonage. There was significant discussion regarding the benefit to the minister of a paid sabbatical. A growing number of congregations appeared to be offering this to their ministers. One mentioned, “Sabbaticals. We’ve got one of ours who’s been there, what, seven years? He was given a month off.” (CL, p. 14) The members suggested that the minister could moonlight in order to supplement his income. This strategy, along with the employment of the ministers’ wives, was sometimes accepted, but was often a source of conflict between the congregation and minister.

**Leader support.** Support by the leaders was said to manifest itself in various manners. Emotional support was offered through a Godly leadership group in order to provide guidance and relief of the burden of leadership. They were at times intentional in serving as mentors for the minister, as was stated as follows:

> Whereas, in a shepherding model [of leadership], you see, you know, I’ve seen different shepherds, not from an assigned basis, but from a personal basis, form relationships with the minister and form almost, mentoring teams, you know to work with them and work through their problems that would come from ministry.

(TL, p. 4)

They offered support to the family by acceptance of the children’s struggles and by having realistic expectations of the minister’s wife.

The leaders offered esteem support by treating the minister as part of the leadership team. One participant who was a leader in a church said the following.

> And the other thing is that - we’ve done it well at times and not so well at other times - but when it’s always really clear that the eldership is governing or ruling or
in control and the minister is just part of the team and not the head of the church. Sometimes, you know, they are always the most visible and the most vocal, but you know, it's always, to me it's got to be really supportive to the minister to know that he's just, you know, part of the team and not the guy hanging out there.

(CL, p. 4)

It was believed that as they were typically older than the minister, he benefited from the wisdom of the leaders. Thus, they were intentional about offering it. They demonstrated that they valued the insight of the minister and were willing to follow his lead at times. Advocacy was mentioned as beneficial in that the leaders could serve as a buffer between unhappy members and the minister and demonstrate to the congregation that they held him in high regard. This was stated as follows. "...other leaders, the elders in the church, can draw that (criticism) to them instead of the preacher bearing that burden." (NL, p. 18) They could educate the congregation regarding the boundaries of the minister and model a respect for those boundaries.

Another way the leaders demonstrated their esteem for the minister was by encouraging professional development and speaking engagements. This was at times viewed as detrimental to the church to have the minister absent, so it was a statement of the value placed on the minister to want him to grow professionally. A participant said

I know one [minister] that I've had in the past, that he wanted to leave just to go study, to go teach. He would take a trip to Israel and let the congregation have somebody fill in for him. And it was just regularly expected that he was out doing other things to help refresh his knowledge and make him more current and
make it more enjoyable of an experience, not just "I've got to speak in here every week." (CL, p. 4)

The laity stated that information support was offered in two ways—through contracts and constructive criticism. The written contract appeared to aid both the minister and congregation in articulating clear and realistic expectations. Constructive criticism was viewed as support, as long as there was a positive relationship already in place between the minister and leader.

**Minister initiated support.** The laity groups saw value in the times the ministers had been proactive in identifying or implementing support. Much of this support was associating with the setting of healthy boundaries. The ministers who were able to express their limitations were viewed as having support. One man expressed it aptly in the following manner.

We just built a new building and the preacher said, “I can’t”, I mean, just came out and said, “I cannot keep doing this business because you build a building, get all these things, you don’t know what’s involved.” And he just told us, “I’m preaching the Word. Go to the Word and use that for the struggles or whatever counsel that you need and, you know, I can’t be involved.” You know, kind of like “I can’t be involved in your triangle, you know, cause a lot of you are coming to me and there’s things that you can work out. Serious issues, make an appointment with me. I am, you know...” He mentioned to us, “I’m just drained.” “I can’t,” he said, “the builders, everybody’s calling, there’s all these decisions.” And he just overtly told us. (TL, p. 3)
Another example of these boundaries is in setting a day off and then being firm about keeping that. As a child I remember wishing that my father were available to us as a family more often. He was involved in some meaningful interaction with another person or group, but did not seem to place his family as a high priority. This appears to be common with many ministerial families. This necessitates that the minister have both an awareness of the needs of his family and an awareness of his own needs. Ministers who had this awareness were said to spend time in private devotions as well as feel a sense of the importance of their calling to this occupation.

Another way the minister initiated support was through the initiation of relationships. When a minister understood the political dynamics of the church, he was able to manipulate the system in order to gain support or he would seek mentors. In speaking of his minister, one member said “he’s being mentored by someone older, so I think that may be a helpful thing, too, for the minister to have a mentor. He walks beside him and he kind of is following this man’s model.” (TL, p. 7)

Ministers also start prayer groups. This was articulated as follows: “It was something that he [the minister] requested. He was seeking prayer partners, and he led them through a class on what that entailed, what he would ask of them, what kind of commitment. And that is still going on.” (CL, p. 2)

**Category 6: Manifestations**

The category of manifestations deals with the results of an absence of support or the results of support being available.

**Absence of support.** An absence of support can lead to emotional struggles for the minister. He may have feelings of powerlessness or worthlessness as he internalizes
the negative messages of the church. In speaking of the low salary received by a minister, one participant said the following.

It gives them a message of what they’re worth. And it may not be something the church can do, maybe it’s just financially the church cannot, the congregation can’t support the man totally as their minister. And, as a paid preacher…We all should be full-time ministers. We should all shoulder that responsibility and stuff like that. But it might be a function of not paying the preacher enough to live and then his self-image is related to how he’s paid and that kind of thing. (TL, p. 10)

The minister will frequently seek emotional support from outside the church when he is unable to find it within the church. It was repeatedly mentioned that he might leave the ministry altogether and seek another career. This occurred with my husband as he is now working with a nonprofit organization rather than a church. Although there were other factors involved in conjunction with an absence of support, the absence did facilitate the initial desire to seek employment elsewhere.

When a minister is dismissed, it was stated by the laity groups that the loss is greater than simply the loss of employment. This is due to the unique dynamic of the church having both spiritual and social significance for its members as well as the minister. The ministers lose their church as well as many close relationships. This finding certainly resonated with the experience of my husband and I. As we moved from three congregations, we found it to be almost similar to leaving a family. It was stated in the following manner:

But when ministers lose their job, they also lose their church. I mean, when they’re asked to leave, you know, they have to move. They lost the support of the
congregation and many friends and relationships. They literally have to start over...if they leave unfavorably. But even if you leave favorably and you move to another community, you are losing all those relationships...You're starting over. (CL, p. 18)

If the minister has been with a congregation for a significant amount of time, they have participated in much of the life of the members—weddings, births, illnesses, and deaths. It is difficult to simply relinquish those relationships and move on.

**Support.** The manifestations of a supportive environment mentioned by these groups were associated with improvement in the roles of minister; such as his preaching ability. The minister demonstrated a greater level of persistence as he dealt with his roles and other frustrating aspects of the ministerial occupation. One woman participant applied her experience with the corporate world with that of a preacher.

We have a lot of people who work for big businesses and have these perks. It's, you know, you just end up feeling a little bit better about, "Okay, yeah, I can hang on for a little while longer." If it was a bad week or whatever, "I've got this to look forward to." (CL, p. 15)

**Category 7: Recommended solutions**

The final category identified from the congregation members’ focus group was that of recommended solutions. As with the identified support, the subcategories that emerged were support from the congregation, support from leaders, and minister-initiated support. They were divided into the types of support as follows: emotional support, esteem support, information support, and tangible support.
**Congregational support.** When making recommendations for emotional support, a number of areas were identified. The congregation was encouraged to express appreciation to the minister. This could take the form of appreciation for what he had accomplished in order to build him up. As a participant said, “In the same way, it’s everyone’s job to support you or you. If you are the minister, part of my job is to build you up. You are part of the body, and we need to build each other up whether the toe or the head or the mouth.” (CL, p. 11)

It was suggested that the congregation communicate with the minister and be flexible regarding the expectations placed both on him and his family. In order to do this, they must identify his needs. A member spoke of an example that he was attempting to apply to his minister:

> An example...he was working with a non-profit organization trying to figure out why the turnover in volunteerism was so much. And he said. “What do you do?”

> And they said, well, it’s like, we appreciate them just any, every way we can. Any way we can to show appreciation. But when he got down and started analyzing this thing, that’s not what the people wanted. They were looking for other factors to make them feel they were receiving support and fulfillment in order to continue on with it, and when they didn’t get it, they left. So, it’s almost like you need to find out what the hot buttons are. (TL, p. 19)

As the wife and daughter of ministers, this fit with my experience. Often individuals would do things that were supportive in their opinion. These actions were typically helpful, but there were needs my family and I had at times that were not met because we did not articulate them.
Emotional support could involve looking more to the leadership group as opposed to placing all the leadership responsibility on the shoulders of the minister. In terms of meeting relationship needs, the congregation could include the minister in their social groups or they could make the effort to relate to him even when the minister is in a different social group. The minister could also be encouraged to develop relationship with other preachers. They referred to the fostering of these relationships with ministers of the Church of Christ as well as other denominations. Several members participated in the following articulation of this recommendation:

I think it's an important way to support by allowing them to develop relationships with other preachers, other people that are in their same position. They understand the job so much better than any of us could... It could be other ministers in the same town. It could be other ministers of the same denomination but across the country. Again, going to conferences or lectureships, getting advanced degrees or someplace where you can interact with somebody and just have a one- on-one prayer partner with somebody who's separated from the similar... more objective... I think it can kind of cut two ways. I mean, preachers need relationships with others of the same denomination for, you know, for those. because you need to maintain those kinds of ties, but I think, especially in smaller communities, my experience has been to cross over those denominational lines and see yourselves as part of a community. And I think that's important for the ministers to develop those relationships. (CL, p. 13)

As mentioned previously, it is important for the minister to believe the congregation esteems him. They can do this by questioning him regarding his needs and
then respecting his boundaries. One participant said “And even just asking, ‘what can I
do for you.’ ‘What do you need from us?’ We do that periodically – ‘What do you
need?’” (TL. p. 17) This demonstrates the belief of the importance of treating the
minister in a supportive manner.

Tangible support can occur through care for the minister’s family. The idea of
babysitting emerged again as a logical way to aid a minister and demonstrate support.
The congregation typically feels an investment in the family of the minister. Although
this can take the form of criticism or high expectations, it can also be demonstrated
through the commitment of the church to aid in the raising of the children. A touching
story by a participant portrays the importance of this investment. It is as follows:

You know, when we were wooing _____ [a minister] ... they had a young
dughter who was ill. She had been sick as a baby and was not able to, she was
developmentally challenged, so his _____ wife, was with _____ all the time. And
one of the elders that talked to him said, “if you come...we’re going to help you
raise your daughter and your son.” And so, we did and, you know, they came.
And _____ [the minister] was still uncertain. He’s told us all this, you know, and
he says, “I didn’t know if I really wanted to come to _____.” But, _____ [his
wife] was packing and she said, “I’m going whether you come or not (everyone
laughs), because these people are going to help me.” She hadn’t been in church in
four years, and not heard her husband preach. I’ve heard her say that. And this
was, and just the idea that here’s a church who will, who, they don’t even know
us, but they’re going to commit to us and help us through those hardest times and
get us through that, all the family stuff, the illness, that kind of thing, that we can depend on. (TL 21)

Another form of tangible support is in the identification and then taking care of needs for which the minister has little time due to his full schedule. This can be physical maintenance of his home—in the form of painting or repairs, or yard work. The gesture in and of itself is meaningful to the minister and his family.

Hospitality can be shown to the minister rather than having the expectation of being shown hospitality by him without reciprocation. This dynamic of hospitality not being returned was one that I learned quickly as a young minister’s wife. I attempted to have everyone in the church in our home at one time or another, but quickly learned that this was what I was supposed to do without thought of similar invitations. It meant a great deal to me when families would invite us into their home or take us out for a meal.

**Leader support.** Choosing the correct individual for the ministerial position was viewed as important in addressing the issue of absence of support. I believe when a congregation follows this caution, it leads to a higher level of emotional support from the congregation. It was suggested that it is important to obtain the input of the congregation so that the personality of the minister matches the expectations of the church. The congregation members thought that it is vital that the minister chosen have the ability to recognize the gifts of others and have a charismatic personality.

The leaders of churches were encouraged to allow the minister to be a member.

A participant spoke of this recommendation as follows:

One thing we need to do I think to support is to allow ministers and their families to be ministers, to be members of the congregation, to be a part of their own small
group and for other folks not to be jealous because they are spending time with a small group of people. Allow them to go to Sunday school class if they want to do that. (TL 20)

In my experience, it is not common for a congregation to support a minister in this manner. In my opinion, there is the belief that the minister only works on Sunday, so he must be very active on that day.

The leaders were also encouraged to offer spiritual support by praying for him on a regular basis. They could offer esteem by serving as buffers for the minister and being advocates for him. Advocacy was mentioned frequently as it was in the identified support category. It was articulated in the following manner:

I think in an ideal situation, and I know that there’s many, of course, that are not ideal, the minister is going to have good rapport with his eldership so that they will know that what’s coming in, what criticism is happening, either because the eldership is hearing it or the minister is sharing with them concerns that other people are expressing. And rather than the minister having to be the one to have to go and specifically deal with each and every situation, I personally think that that’s part of the eldership’s job, that they are the ones. Now, like I said, that’s an ideal world. But they should be, I believe, dealing with the congregation more than the minister should have to be. And I know that doesn’t happen often, but I really believe that’s a big part of where all the misunderstanding’s coming in the ministry. (CL, p. 10)

It was believed that the leaders could set high expectations in order to obtain excellent performance. Some of the laity viewed this suggestion as offering esteem in
that they believed it would communicate belief in his abilities. However, it was in
contrast with the suggestion by others that the leaders lower the expectations in order to
influence the level of satisfaction of the congregation. One participant discussed it in the
following way.

I think the eldership can do quite a few things. We—I think one they could make
the expectations clear to the congregations. I know personally I have almost no
expectations for the preacher. Of course, I'm in the age where I'm dealing with 5
kids sitting next to me. and that's my concern, not making—keeping track of them.
So as long as he's got clothes on up there, I'm satisfied, you know. But, I think if
the eldership gets up there and says, you know, this is what we expect from him,
you know. and not--and can set the expectations maybe a little low, then people
are happy, you know. (NL, p. 19)

Information support was to take the form of articulating the boundaries of the
minister to the congregation. As previously mentioned this can occur through a clear job
description. Some of the participants believed a contract would be more accepted in an
urban setting. One participant stated, “if you're in a town with a lot of corporate people
around, then I think you should treat the preacher the way you generally are treated in
your job.” (CL, p. 16)

Leaders were encouraged to provide a personnel group or minister care committee
as one form of tangible support. They were also encouraged to provide the minister with
retreats. Another suggestion was that the leaders recognize the unrealistic expectations
and utilize other gifted individuals to help fulfill these requirements. An individual spoke
of this utilization in speaking of the requirement of visiting the sick. They said the following:

Well, I think that you need--just talking about the visitation in hospitals - you need a visitation ministry, men and women preferably, that is their chosen ministry. They like to do that. And occasionally, the minister is asked for or needed just depending upon who it is that is very ill and how ill a person is and what the relationship is with the minister. And I, I don't think a minister needs to go to the hospital to visit every single person that's there. Today, one thing, they send them home so fast, there's hardly time to get there. But there are times when his support or the support of the minister's wife is very helpful to the family and that it doesn't need to be in every single time. (CL 8)

Financial support was again stated as a recommended solution for creating a supportive environment for ministers. It was stated that a minister needed to have financial perks; such as paid trips or sabbaticals or to be allowed time off of sufficient length to have a vacation. It was also suggested that the church take on the responsibility to educate the minister in financial matters. As ministers are not known for their financial savvy, this was seen as more important than simply increasing their benefits. Another extreme suggestion was that a minister should seek employment with a larger church if they wanted to receive an increase in salary. I mention that this is extreme because although this is often the manner in which ministers increase their salary, it is not the most attractive option. I found that ministers typically wanted to stay with a congregation and were willing to live with a lower salary rather than make a move.
Ministerial population

The categories that emerged from the ministerial group were similar to those articulated by the laity groups. They were (1) absence of support, (2) basis for absence of support, (3) basis for support, (4) identified support, (5) manifestations, and (6) recommended solutions.

Category 1: Absence of support

The ministers had more to offer regarding the category of absence of support than did the congregation members. In my opinion, this is to be expected due to their understandable investment in matters of support of the ministry. Points of origin lie with the congregation or leaders.

**Origin with the congregation.** The ministers spoke at length about the absence of emotional support that they experienced. They believed that at times they were not appreciated or encouraged. One participant said the following.

> It really wasn't until my current working experience, that I had a really continually present sense of appreciation. In the first place, I didn't feel appreciated hardly at all. The second place, it's like cognitively I knew it, but I didn't feel it, you know. (CM, p. 10)

The minister sometimes felt social isolation. Although they desired friendships, this was perceived as an area of need. One participant, who is in a position of training ministers, said the following.

> I sense that a lot of the young men who go out from graduate school really don't have relationships within the congregation. They don't have the kind of depth relationships whether it's mutual trust or whether it's mutual ministry. In other
words, rather than this always being a top down kind of ministry where I'm going to minister to you, that's my job, and you know, etc., they lack the mutuality of being able to say, "Look, I need ministering to here myself." And those relationships within a congregation I think, at least from what I'm hearing from my students, are pretty rare (CM, p. 4)

There was also an absence of friendship at times with the other ministers. One minister may desire a relationship, but the other may not have that same desire. This could take place within the congregation in terms of other staff ministers or within the denomination of the Church of Christ. One ministerial group discussed the situation of a previous minister staying on as a member of the congregation. Although this had the possibility of being an asset to the minister, several in the group spoke of having to deal with the attacks of the previous minister. One minister spoke of the following situation:

And, right in the middle of his sermon, he launches into a personal attack on [his wife] and me that started with my Ph.D. "We don't need a Ph.D. preaching in this congregation," and I mean it just went from there, it just went downhill. (CM, p. 21)

Another aspect of absence of support from the congregation dealt with violation of the minister's boundaries. They believed that this communicated a lack of caring for the needs of a minister and his family. This same aspect was also apparent in speaking of the absence of familial support. The ministers spoke at length of the absence of support available for their wives. Violation of boundaries was repeatedly mentioned as a difficulty for the wives. There were high expectations placed on the family, especially the wives. They were expected to be highly involved in the ministry and available to all
in need. It was perceived that they were not allowed to have close friends and struggled with being socially accepted by the women in the congregation. This impacted the manner in which they handled the burden of criticism of their husbands. They typically served as a sounding board for their husbands, but then did not have an outlet for their frustration with the criticism. A minister spoke of what his wife experienced in the following manner:

Because sometimes I take information, like _____ was saying, you've got something on your sleeve, and you take it home and dump it, and she has no place to go with it. And certainly not back to the congregation, because she feels like she's got to be loyal to you, and, even if she don't agree with you...that's a hard thing. I would a whole lot rather be a preacher than a preacher's wife (NM, p. 7)

The minister also is reluctant to share struggles with the congregation as many times the groups believed the repercussions for acknowledging weakness would be dismissal. This phenomenon as previously mentioned, demonstrates the belief of a congregation that it is easier to locate a new minister than work with the healing of the present one. Ministers are at times viewed as temporary employees.

**Origin with leaders.** The ministers expressed a lack of emotional, esteem, and tangible support from the leaders. Emotional support was lacking in that at times the leaders did not make the effort to communicate with the minister. They were quick to withdraw support in reaction to the acknowledgement of struggles on the part of the minister. Although the ministers saw the value in being vulnerable with their leaders, they also perceived the risk of possible dismissal.
The subject of esteem support was discussed at length. I believe this demonstrates the importance ministers place on being valued by the leaders of the church with whom they work. I know this belief was significant in both my family of origin and with my husband as we made decisions to stay with or leave a congregation.

The ministers wanted the leaders to be advocates for them with the congregation. They were often left, however, to fend for themselves with unhappy members. This was at times coupled with exclusion from the decision-making process. A hierarchical model of leadership was apparent in these situations in which the ministers were treated as a hireling. One participant spoke of the control the leaders held over him when he did not agree with a decision they made:

"We want you to drop that immediately and if this is not taken care of, then we were going to ask that you be removed from the pulpit there." And so we got together and talked about it and the other two men called to visit with a couple of the elders and then we got another letter back in which they said, "We do not appreciate your lack of accepting our approach and therefore, _____ is to be no longer preaching for the church there in any form or fashion as within 30 days."

(TM. p. 2)

This control was also evident in performance reviews that some of the ministers had experienced. As the reviews were typically derogatory, this gave an implicit message that they must gain the approval of the leaders. Another manifestation of this control was when they were placed in a one-down position when they had to ask for support. Although they believed it important to initiate some types of support, they expressed greater satisfaction with leaders who offered the support freely.
Tangible support was minimal at times as well. The ministers spoke of the absence of benefits, such as vacation time and sufficient salary. One minister stated his concerns regarding retirement.

I think it [retirement] is another area that has been greatly abused by the church. and I have no retirement, and I began to think, "what am I going to do. In 5 years I retire, and this house is no longer mine. I don't have a house." I began to think. you know. what does the future really hold for me, and then I sorta remember that the Lord loves me today and he is gonna love me then too. And I have promises to fall back on today that I will still have then. Does that make me irresponsible? I am not sure. But I think I am willing to face that, but the government has promised to take care of me, and their past director was not very good. (NM. p.13)

Housing was discussed in terms of the desire to own their own home rather than live in church owned property. Ministers believed owning a home was a way they could build up equity in preparing for their future.

**Category 2: Basis for absence of support**

The category of basis for absence of support is divided based on point of origin. As with the laity groups, this basis originated with the congregation, leaders, or minister.

**Origin with congregation.** One of the reasons of an absence of support was the ignorance of the congregation. The ministers suggested that many times there was unawareness that the minister needed support or of the dynamics of ministry. One participant articulated it in this manner, "I think it is just a real lack of awareness, and it's
not from people being mean or ornery or anything like that, it's just kind of a general lack of awareness.” (NM, p.3)

When members were aware of the need for support, there was often a lack of understanding of how to be supportive. A participant said the following:

But they just don't know how to care. No, we have not taught them, we have kept our job description to ourselves somewhat. So we don't know, and they want to kind of reach out to us, but they don't know how to do that. (NM, p. 4)

At times lack of respect for the minister led to an absence of support. There was a belief that ministers were expendable, so it was not necessary to provide a supportive environment. This expendability could take the form of a power faction, in that a minister might be ostracized from a group that was in control. If a minister is not included in this group, they may be excluded from key decisions. This results in an absence of respect. It becomes a vicious cycle—the less respect a minister has, the less inclusion, the less respect, and so on. My husband experienced this dynamic during a struggle with one church. If the leaders of the church empower the group, the minister is in a difficult position.

If the congregation was perceived as being problem-focused, they only were able to see the perceived negative characteristics of the minister. A minister said, “only when there are problems arise [with the minister] that anybody becomes concerned. If everything appears to be going okay, nobody raises any questions.” (NM, p. 3) In contrast, the church might only be aware of the problems of themselves as a congregation and place blame on the minister for not providing a solution.
Multiple employers were perceived as causing an absence of support. As previously mentioned, this refers to the belief of the members that the minister worked for each of them. The minister was unable to satisfy everyone. One minister spoke of this situation in a facetious manner:

I've been amused, you know, for IRS purposes, we are self-employed. Ha, Ha!! Ain't nobody got more bosses than a preacher! Everybody in the congregation thinks he's their lackey at one time or another. (NM, p. 24)

An inadequate level of financial support sometimes originated with a church that was unable to afford to offer the minister benefits or a sufficient income. Frustration was also expressed at the manner in which congregations believed they could hire two ministers for the price of one. In other words, the high expectations they had for the wife were considered excessive. The ministers believed that if she was expected to work, she should be provided a salary.

The pedestal effect was mentioned as a basis for absence of support. The minister was placed on a pedestal and many in the congregation thought the minister could do anything. They therefore were not in need of support. On the other extreme were those that were disappointed with the minister because he was unable to meet what the ministers perceived as being unrealistic expectations. Again, the congregation focused on the problems and was seemingly unaware of the successes of the minister. This focus is indicative of the personality of the congregation. A minister spoke of the personality as follows:

And another thing that I think is very evident is that congregations have personalities as the preachers and people have personalities and there's going to
be some rough times and there's going to be some negative people and there's
going to be some negative congregations, there's going to be some bad situations
you get in, but you look at the total picture and you see that things are supportive.
(TM, p. 13)

Another demographic factor that is believed to result in absence of support is the
size of the congregation. If the church was large, the members may assume others are
caring for the minister and his family. One minister told about this happening to him.
where it's 500 and we have committees that take care of these kinds of things.
Things didn't happen quite as naturally. And it took us a while to become
adjusted to that. One of the guys [minister's child] was sick and the congregation
didn't quite respond the same way. I mean, segments did, the ones that were
closest to us, but the congregation didn't respond, but sort of changed with the
size of the group...things happen differently in different size congregations.
What happens naturally, I think, in a smaller group doesn't happen naturally in a
larger group. (CM, p. 18)

If the church is small, they may experience factions and conflict. The majority of
members of the Church of Christ are located in the southern states. The congregations in
the north are typically small. One of the participants spoke of his experience with these
churches:
Well, I guess I can speak next, since most of our work was done in northern
United States or western United States, usually with small congregations, usually
with troubled congregations that are often - had been splits in the backgrounds
that we would go in and try to heal. But, with the exception of one or two
congregations that I can think of, probably the support was mostly negative, very low. (TM, p. 3)

A misunderstanding of the autonomous nature of the Churches of Christ tends to also result in an absence of support. As was discussed by the laity groups, the ministers also spoke of this autonomy. One minister stated the following:

I think the question of support for ministers in churches of Christ has something to do with the way in which we've defined our organization, and I am afraid that we have misinterpreted autonomy to mean isolation. And since we have isolated, I mean, there's a wonderful Biblical theological definition of autonomy that has to do with self-governance, but we have defined it as, I don't know you, and you don't know me and that's pretty neat, and we're just going to keep it that way in a city. So, if we carry that to its natural, logical conclusion, then we end the family of Christ. I don't know you and you don't know me, and we don't know our preacher. Now, what we're saying is that we've had a lot of positive experiences that have been in spite of that, but I think our misunderstanding of theology has not helped us in terms of real support for ministers. (CM, p. 23)

**Origin with leaders.** As with the congregation members, a lack of awareness was mentioned in speaking of the elders. It was perceived that some did not know how to provide support or were unaware of the dynamics of ministry. This lack of awareness could also have been due to the assumption of the leaders that the minister is always spiritually healthy and does not need help. This assumption may begin even before a minister is hired as stated by one participant. “I have never been asked on a job interview
about my prayer life. Sometimes I have rarely been asked about even my marriage or family life in the interview process. Those are all assumed.” (NM, p. 3)

An absence of support may result in a dichotomy between the minister and leaders. There may be a we and them mentality between the ministerial staff and the leaders. A minister spoke of his experience as follows:

I think one of the components that created some tension was that when we did get leadership and for a number of years, I was the only staff person. And when we went to multiple staff, that was a real transition and it nearly became, just in comparing it to previous experience - I was a part of meetings with elders, I was a part of decisions, I was just really there with them and they with me. And then it became kind of a us and them and I don't think intentionally necessarily or necessarily even overtly, but I think subtly there was a “we’ve got the staff now and we’ll meet and make decisions.” (TM, p. 5)

This can result in a discrepancy in the vision for the church. The discrepancy may be due to negative experience with past ministers or simply to miscommunication.

One of the groups spoke at length regarding a lack of theology leaders in the Church of Christ have regarding the sense of calling. A sense of calling refers to the belief that God has placed the desire to come to ministry on the heart of an individual. The group said that this misunderstanding impacts the manner in which ministers are supported. One participant said “Well, and it's [a misunderstanding of calling] the language, too. ‘We hired the preacher.’ ‘We fired the preacher.’” Another participant added “Yeah. Rarely do you hear a church say, ‘Well, God took him away from us.’” (CM, p. 17)
Origin with minister. When the basis for absence of support originated with the minister, it was at times due to the minister being unable or unwilling to ask for an increase in their financial package. They either did not want to burden the church or were not certain they offered the expertise to merit an increase in salary. As mentioned previously, some ministers were not comfortable requesting other types of support, such as emotional or familial support.

Some ministers portrayed a mentality in which they accepted or encouraged the pedestal effect and acted on their own. This could foster an absence of support either because of unawareness that they needed support or because they would not accept offerings of support. A participant said the following:

We have almost somehow developed a lone ranger kind of mentality, I don't know, that we are so strong or something that we can stand alone, and we certainly don't need the congregation praying for us. I mean, it's not that strong, (NM, p. 22)

Or they may have simply left the congregation rather than educate them on their need for support. At times even the minister is unaware of the reasons they leave as was stated by one participant. “I'm still interested in longevity, and I am not sure what causes or creates or is--why we have this system where we feel like every once and a while we have to--like the music stops, and we all run to our chairs in the congregation.” (NM, p. 25)

The age of the minister or their status as youth minister may result in an absence of support. In my experience this mentality is prevalent in the Churches of Christ. A minister is expected to earn his stripes before he is taken seriously. When my husband
first became a minister. There was some logic to the realization that my husband had little experience as a minister. He made some mistakes that were overlooked due to his youth. The double bind of which I spoke, however, came into play as he was hired to take a leadership role, but at times was not allowed to lead. One of the ministers who had previously been a youth minister spoke of the frustrations he experienced: "I have two ministry degrees as a youth minister and still didn't get respect, so there you go." (some laughter) (CM, p. 13)

Ministers may not be open to the support of other ministers because of a sense of competitiveness between them. The church may encourage these friendships, but the minister must initiate these relationships.

Finally, a basis for absence of support is the perception of ministry as a profession rather than a ministry. A participant stated it in the following manner:

When guys come into ministry with this professional mentality rather than a servant mentality, and your role as a minister then becomes more position than it is to have service, you know. And I think that if you can break that paradigm down and dispose of it, you're going to have a much more natural sense of... You know, when I came to ___... I said, I'm here for life until God moves us elsewhere, but I plan on dying here. And that immediately sets up an expectation of "okay, this is not a position and when the next offer comes along, we'll [not] take it." (CM, p. 12)

**Category 3: Basis for support**

The ministerial groups did not speak as extensively of the basis for support as did the laity groups. Ministers typically have a strong work ethic and may assume that
support should be available. Congregations, on the other hand, may look more closely at the minister to determine a rationale for supporting him.

One of the minister groups did offer input regarding this category. They said that the size of the congregation has an impact on support. The smaller congregations were said to be willing to take almost anyone who was willing to work with them. They did not have much available income to offer the minister, so this gave some ministers an opportunity that they might not otherwise experience.

Another way these smaller churches offered support was in their perspective of partnership in the ministry. One participant said “Part of that has to do I think with church size. too. We were in a teeny, teeny, tiny little congregation when we were in Texas and had twenty on a great Sunday, and boy...when something happens, everybody's involved. (CM, p. 18)

It was also suggested that when the church has a family mentality, regardless of the size, they were more willing to offer support. The ministers felt closeness with the leaders and in turn made it a point to foster this family atmosphere for other staff members.

**Category 4: Identified support**

Support identified by ministers was divided in a similar manner as the data articulated by the laity groups. It was divided into the subcategories of congregational support, leadership support, ministerial initiated support, with the addition of familial support. These subcategories were broken down into emotional support; esteem support, information support and tangible support.
**Origin with congregation.** At times it was believed that the congregation took the initiative to offer support to the minister. This could be individuals or groups within the congregation who acted on their own without the prompting of others.

The congregations offered emotional support to the ministers and their wives. The affirmation the minister's wives received appeared to be important to the ministers. One minister relayed the following experience.

I mean, they, there is one gentleman in particular that is always asking me, uh.

"How is ____ [minister's wife] doing?" You know, how's your wife, how's the kids, and just from past experiences he has picked up on, a lot of times the preacher's wife doesn't make that connection and is having a hard time with you know, sometimes the pressure is put on her, and so they have been aware of that and tried to back off and said, you know, "We are supporting ____ to work here, that doesn't mean that we have any expectations on you, and that...we just want you to be a part of this congregation."

Ministers received emotional support in various forms. One way was in the expression of appreciation—either verbally or in written form. A minister kept all his notes of appreciation in a drawer. When he was feeling discouraged, he would pull one out and read it. Another form of support was acceptance. Acceptance took the form of friendships. One minister said, "An older gentleman in our church, he calls me at least once a week or stops by, says let's go for a coffee, you know. We just go out and spend an hour or so drinking coffee together." (CM, p. 10) It also took the form of being invited into a family. This offset the loneliness a minister might feel when being away from their extended family. A minister shared the following experience:
One thing that’s been very important to me being in ______ is several of our families in the church invite my wife, my daughter and me to their family events whether it’s Fourth of July or birthday parties or whatever and they tell us “You’re coming because you’re family. And they just lay it on the line for us. And, you know, how can you refuse an invitation like that because they said, “We’ve adopted you and you’re our family” and it hasn’t been just one or two, it’s been several and, you know, we’ve got a tight knit there. Our hearts are close to people and we feel like their hearts are with us. (CM, p. 12)

The congregation offered esteem support by believing in the calling of the minister, both to their church and then away from it when the time came. This support again requires a theology that accepts the calling of a minister. In addition, esteem was given to the wife of the minister when she was recognized as an individual and allowed to use her gifts. One minister believed this was due to his wife’s personality. He stated the following:

I have been fortunate in that my wife...she has never felt obligated to play the role of the preacher’s wife. I have been fortunate in that. And we are different personality types...she doesn't worry too much about pleasing people, so she does what she thinks she needs to do, and it has worked out great. She has never really even caught any flack for it, which has kinda surprised me really, but I mean, people have been very accepting of that, and...she chooses a ministry and is very active in that, but...she may not be super evangelistic or whatever people might expect, but she does do ministry, and she just kinda goes merrily along and isn't
troubled by all that, but...if a woman was more my personality type, I think they would have a harder time with it. (NM, p. 10)

A minister from another group spoke of his wife and her place in the church.

...my wife doesn't do ladies bible class either. And she's not the kind of gal if she were a man in the churches of Christ that she would definitely be a preacher. She wouldn't be. And the congregation of ____ affirmed her by allowing her to be herself. And the gal before was real dynamic, I mean, real vibrant, a go-getter and teaching everything in the world. They gave her the freedom to be herself, which was a great gift. (CM, p. 19)

Tangible support was offered as well. This at times took the form of financial benefits or gifts. Although I am certain that a gift such as a trip meant a lot, the ministers believed that it was the intentional expression of support rather than the value of the gift that was meaningful. One minister said a member noticed he was using the pen she had given him. “She said ‘You use that all the time.’ I said, ‘Yeah, this is an expression of your love for me and it means when I see and use it. I think of you.’” (CM, p. 10)

The ministers mentioned several times that they were appreciative of the encouragement and recognition they received from the organization of Promise Keepers. This group had designated the month of October as Pastor’s month and offered materials and ideas for churches to demonstrate appreciation for their minister. The ministerial groups discussed times their congregation had followed the lead of this ministry in offering a Pastor’s Appreciation Month.

Another form this support can take is physical affection as in the following situation articulated by a participant. This was one of my favorite stories that emerged
from the groups. I think it is because I have been the recipient of this type of expression of love and there is no way one can express the importance it plays in the life of a minister and his wife. It is as follows:

   And right in the middle of that, [a member] passed away in a nursing home.

   So, when I went up to see [his wife], she said, “You know, of course, that our daughter graduated from _____.” “You know, that we always love for you to go out there,” and she just hugged me and she said, “Don't worry about this funeral...We want you to go to lectureship.” And she kissed me. And I think that those kinds of physical expressions are hopefully more and more comfortable in our churches today than they were thirty or forty. I mean, I'm in my 47th year of preaching and I know the first few years of preaching almost no one would do more than just shake your hand or occasionally pat you on the back, but for an older woman to hug you and kiss you would have been absolutely a disaster. No one would have thought of someone doing that or a younger person or a teenager. Indeed, I think we're becoming more comfortable showing our affection. (CM, p. 11)

**Origin with leaders.** The leaders as initiators are distinguished from the congregation in that they were designated leaders of the church. Again, they either acted alone or as a group.

   Emotional support was provided through a shepherding model of leadership. The leaders prayed for the minister, portrayed sensitivity to his struggles and sought to develop relationships with him. A participant spoke of the different relationships he had with different leaders:
there was one particular elder... He was a friend, he was like a father figure. I mean. I really wanted to be close to him. There was another elder that was a bit more stand-offish and would take me to task on issues, but it was that elder that would literally affirm his love for me. He would say, "I want you to know that I love you." You know, his wife would be there and say, "You don't know how much he really loves you." So it was that elder that I ended up being closest to. I wanted the relationship with the other one, and he and I both liked baseball, this, that and the other thing, but the other one expressed love. (CM, p. 9)

Advocacy to the congregation for the minister was a way in which the leaders demonstrated that they held the minister in esteem. All groups mentioned this repeatedly. It appears that one of the most difficult situations for a minister was facing criticism or anger alone. This resonated with my experience as the daughter and wife of ministers. Due to their position, ministers face many situations of emotional intensity. It seemed that my father and husband were able to weather these situations more effectively when they did not face them alone. One group stated it in this manner:

To have them [the leaders] defend you from your critics even though they may not agree with you, but they trust you enough to give you the benefit of the doubt... Exactly. To give you the benefit of the doubt. You know, maybe he's going through something else here, maybe he just made a mistake, maybe he just messed up and we need to give him an opportunity to fix it and we're going to defend him and we're going to have an opportunity to visit with him and give him a chance to apologize as I've had to do. (TM, p. 8)
Leaders can also provide tangible support. As mentioned in the laity groups, a contract provided by the leaders of the church was supportive because it provided clearer expectations and boundaries for the minister. One minister expressed discomfort with a contract, but the majority seemed to believe it was helpful to have their job description in written form.

The leaders at times provided a minister care committee. This committee had as its purpose keeping a finger on the pulse of the minister. It also allowed an avenue for the advocacy previously mentioned. Several of the ministers were familiar with this concept and all saw it as having a great deal of merit. One participant shared the following:

We don't have elders. I have a ministry committee...I go to camp, and I go hunting, and I'm here and there, so that has become a problem, with new people moving in, so the ministry committee or the committee that is in charge of my job...I sit down with them and say, "Okay, here is what I'm going to do in the next 4 months. Next week I am going to be in _____. ______[minister's wife] and I are going to go down and raise some money. November I am going to be here, this, and this." Then they say, "Okay, then. Now we know." So if anybody from the congregation comes and says, "Now what is he doing? You know, he's gone again." ...I know that I don't have to answer the questions. and I am not going to sit there and defend where I am going to be-- (NM, p. 19)

The provision of an adequate financial package is a form of tangible support. Financial support took many forms. It was surprising to me that this was not of greater significance to the ministers. The expression of concern for the financial situation of the
minister was viewed as encouraging, whether or not an increase in finances was forthcoming. It was repeatedly mentioned that if the minister was experiencing an environment that was supportive in other ways, they were willing to accept a lower level of income.

There was appreciation, however, for financial support. Housing allowances, sabbaticals, and vacations were viewed as important. Raises in salary were also seen as important, but it was articulated that many times the minister had to move to a new church in order to have an increase in salary and status. Self-support, in which the minister was employed at another job so as to not rely on a salary from a church, was viewed as desirable but not very common.

Another way the leaders offered support was through the information support of constructive criticism. One minister spoke of it as iron sharpening iron:

That it's them telling me, here are some ways you need to get better, without it being a formal, like I said earlier with the one church, a review process. It's out of love and concern, and I find that supportive because we can, you know - iron sharpening iron. We can spur each other on to better things and I know that they're not, it's not a personal attack, but it's that they're really concerned. (CM, p. 23)

This was especially the case when there was an environment of mutuality. The leaders offered constructive criticism to the minister and he was allowed to reciprocate.

Spiritual support, as a form of information support, was perceived as important because it was easy for the minister to struggle spiritually in private without having anyone to turn to for help. As they were viewed as the spiritual leaders, it was
prohibitive for them to acknowledge struggles. The ministers suggested that both they and the leaders could take the lead in making certain they were offered spiritual support. This could take place by encouraging times of study, accountability groups, or professional development to name a few.

**Origin with minister.** Ministers were oftentimes the initiators of support. Those that recognized the need they have for support took a proactive role in educating the congregation on how best they could offer support to themselves and their families. Some of the ministers were not comfortable with this initiation, but the majority seemed to believe it to be a good idea.

It appeared that relationships were the most often identified form of emotional support. Ministers initiated relationships with members, previous ministers in the congregation, and other ministers. Accountability groups emerged from these relationships. All the ministerial groups mentioned accountability groups, but one focus group emphasized these relationships more than another other issue dealing with ministerial support. A minister said the following about his accountability group.

The last way that this has been supportive is that I'm a part of an accountability group, and there are four of us men who are peers and who pray together and who support one another...they're in the congregation. And we are similar in age, we are similar in education, similar in background and we relate as peers; not in any other way, and that's a wonderful support system. It's quiet, it's over here to the side and it's confidential, it's very trust driven... (CM, p. 3)

When the relationship was with the previous minister of the congregation, a mentoring or at least supportive relationship at times emerged. One minister spoke of his experience.
“It's interesting, every place that I've ever been full time, the previous guy has been there to stay. Every place...every one of them was exceedingly supportive.” (CM, p. 22)

When needed, ministers viewed mental health care as supportive. This was difficult to receive as it had the potential of threatening the minister’s position. The ministers spoke of having to be cautious in whom they told of their counseling. This population seemed to be provided the support of their leaders in receiving this help, however, they spoke of others who were released from their congregations due to their use of mental health care becoming public.

A strong sense of calling appeared to promote esteem support on the part of the congregation and leaders. If the minister was confident in his calling, believing it to be affirmed by God, he portrays a greater commitment to the work of the church. This confidence was perceived to aid the minister as stated, “It also really, I think, gives incredible amounts of endurance to when times get lean.” (CM, p. 16)

Finally, the ministers spoke of support that was superficial in nature. Those offering it believed they were fulfilling their duty to be supportive. The ministers appeared to believe it was their responsibility to identify this type of support as being unhelpful.

Origin with family. The subcategory of familial support deals with support offered by the family. As previously mentioned, this subcategory was viewed as significant by the ministers, but was not spoken of in the laity groups.

The wives of the ministers were mentioned often in terms of the support they offered to their husbands. Again, they frequently served as a sounding board for the
ministers. They were viewed as partners in the ministry regardless of the time spent working with the church. One minister stated in well as follows:

Well, I've had some really positive experiences in terms of the question about the support. My primary support has been through my wife. We've been married thirty-eight years... We lived out here for a number of years. Our children were all born in ..., so she has been a real barometer for my ministry and I've looked to her for, not only for instinct, but her spiritual inclinations with God and what God is telling her and what that tells me and it's been very, very helpful. And I'm sure I would not be sitting here if it were not for her, personal support that ____ has given me for a lot of years. We left our home of ____ when we married, so we never lived there as a family, as a couple. But all her relatives and all of my relatives all live there... And so, we've not had the actual in touch with family that is in a city that you might have in some instances where your parents or your cousins or you know. And so ... ____ and I have developed, I think, kind of a unique support system for each other. (CM, p. 2)

Category 6: Manifestations

The category of manifestations is separated into the subcategories of the result that absence of support and the result that support can have on a minister. They are as follows:

Absence of support. An absence of support was said to be manifested emotionally by the minister. They typically experienced emotional pain and discouragement. They may feel a gulf between themselves and the leaders that leads to
loneliness. The minister many times became defensive and bitter. One minister spoke of the feelings of defensiveness as follows.

with that short-sightedness in our leadership (if that is a good term) we become a little sensitive to our positions, I think. So we kind of carry our emotions on our sleeves. If somebody says something wrong about a sermon or an activity we are involved in, then sometimes we have knee-jerk reactions to that, which sometimes is displayed, maybe from the pulpit. (NM, p. 4)

The ministers discussed the insecurity they can experience in their positions when they do not feel supported. In speaking of himself and others, one minister stated, “We’re plagued with insecurity all around.” (CM, p. 13)

The discouragement of the family was also perceived as being due to absence of support. As previously stated, the wives felt the burden of criticism directed toward their husband. The minister was able to use her as a sounding board to relieve his anxiety, but she was unable to discuss her frustration with others.

The most obvious manifestation of an absence of support was when the minister would either leave the congregation for another or leave ministry altogether. A participant articulated his experience, “But, the experience to me was so bad that I got out of the ministry for over a year. I mean it just soured me. I had no intention of going back.” (CM, p. 7)

Typically it was believed by the church that the fault for the departure lay with the minister rather than the congregation. This could be true in the sense that he may leave due to the burnout he experiences in dealing with the high expectations of the church.
Support. The results are markedly different when the minister is experiencing support. He has a greater commitment to stay with the congregation through the hard times or even through the week if it is a particularly difficult week. One minister talked of his commitment as follows:

And I have to keep reminding them that's not going to happen [acceptance of another job offer]. I mean, somebody could offer me a million dollars and I'm not going anywhere. This is my home. This is where I'm going to raise my family, and my daughter was born here and we're together in this. (CM, p. 12)

The minister has a sense of security in the congregation's commitment to him. He has confidence in his calling to the place as God's instrument. He also has the surety that when the time is right to leave, he will know it. A participant said the following:

I felt very good about the relationship I generally had through the years...I'm in my 52nd year as a minister and I've just always felt close to the congregation until it seemed obvious to me it was time to move on. And I can't always specify just how that came about. Sometimes one person said something, sometimes more than one did. (CM 2)

Category 6: Recommended solutions

The final category identified from the ministers' focus group was that of recommended solutions. As with the laity groups, the subcategories that emerged were support from the congregation, support from leaders, and minister-initiated support. They also were divided into the types of support as follows: emotional support, esteem support, information support, and tangible support.
Congregational support. The recommendations made by the ministerial groups typically focused on solutions for the leaders and ministers. There were, however, a few directed toward the church as a whole. The congregation was encouraged to offer emotional support to the minister by seeking awareness of his needs and acting as a partner in the ministry of the church. A minister said, "we need some kind of network in the church itself, connectedness to the church, so that there's mutual ministry going on there." (CM. p. 7) This combated the feelings of isolation many ministers experienced in their work.

Another way to communicate partnership was by believing in the calling of the minister. A participant spoke of the benefit of this belief as follows:

But the church knows he’s here cause God brought him here, not because by any human decision we chose him, you know, because he sounded good or he looked good or had a good track record. And so it allows you to kind of cooperate, sometimes commiserate and really, I think it's significant. (CM, p. 17)

Leader support. The leaders can show emotional support by expressing appreciation. They can develop a relationship with the minister and identify the needs he has for support. It is also important to treat him as a member of the congregation. He is a leader of the congregation, but he also has spiritual needs that need to be met by a church. A minister articulated it in this manner:

I talked long with the church. I said, “Look, what I want to do is I want to be part of this family...the way I make my living is through preaching, but I want to be a church member here first and foremost and I intend to be here for thirty years or more.” And they said, “Good, that's what we want.” (CM, p. 7)
Esteem support can be given in a number of ways. As the leaders become aware of needs, it demonstrates the importance they place on the minister when they address those struggles immediately. As previously mentioned, the creation of a minister care committee allows the leaders to maintain awareness of the needs of the minister. A minister spoke of the way this committee could operate:

you could have a deacon or somebody who would take it upon themselves or be assigned to come and talk to the preacher about his financial picture, and it should probably be somebody the preacher likes...but I do think there needs to be somebody out there to work as a liaison between you and the whole group, you know, because we wind up in front of the whole group, and the whole group, in the whole group, there are some people saying, "He really needs a...we make $10,000 a year more than he does--he needs that much." You've got other people out there saying, "He's making $10,000 more than I am right now. I don't need as much as he is getting." ... But if somebody was able to sit down and talk to us. you know, you can do that on another job. You can say, "I want to talk to you about my raise," or automatic raises are built in, or. you know, many of those jobs out there, you have got a voice in it. But here, about your only voice is to find out whether the new place is going to move you or if you are going to have to move yourself (laughs). (NM, p.15)

They can also esteem him by developing a team mentality. When they treat him as a member of the leadership team, they demonstrate value in his input and leadership.

The leaders can provide information support by locating a publication of salaries offered to ministers in the denomination. It was mentioned that then the leaders would
have a basis for comparison. It was suspected that this would encourage a higher level of
pay for the minister. This would also enable the ministers to have an idea of how much to
request in terms of increases in salary and benefits. Another way to promote information
support was to have the leaders accompany the ministers as they made visits. In this way
they would gain understanding into the congregation and dynamics with which a minister
deals.

Financial support could be offered as a form of tangible support. The ministers
suggested that the congregation realize they are hiring one minister and not two for the
price of one. They mentioned that their wives were typically very involved anyway, but
wanted the choice of whether to be involved rather than the requirement.

**Minister initiated support.** The ministerial groups spoke at length about the
manner in which a minister could initiate support for himself and his family. I had
expected that the groups would focus primarily on the way the churches could offer
support. This demonstrated to me the level of investment the ministers have in seeking
support. It also showed their willingness to be proactive in the matter. In my experience,
this is typical of the ministerial population. They are committed to what they do and
want to find a way to create a satisfactory environment for both themselves and their
congregations.

The groups spent the majority of their discussion on ways to initiate emotional
support. They believed emotional support could be sought primarily through
relationships. **Appropriate friendship with congregation members was identified as a
manner ministers could be supported.** They defined the friendships as appropriate if they
were not exclusive. These could develop into prayer groups or small groups. The main
emphasis was to initiate relationships within the congregation. These typically would lead to a feeling of partnership in the ministry of the church. The minister was encouraged to pray with opposition as a means to both address the complaints and foster relationships. One group spoke of the importance of developing friendships with other ministers. They mentioned the significance of peer support in that it provided a sense of brotherliness. This was especially true if the participants offered support but did not attempt to solve the problems of each other. A participant spoke of his experience as follows:

I know in our group...we've got a common respect for one another in this group of preachers...And we share things going on in our congregation and that's it. I mean we don't say, "Okay, I'm going to solve your congregational problem or I'm going to support you and help you in your congregation," you know, to whatever extent I can, but it's not let's solve all the brotherhood problem, it's not let's solve whatever. Let's just get together and talk and be supportive and study and, you know, just be open and honest with one another and let each other do your work. (CM 8)

The minister was encouraged to address the emotional needs of his family. He was to educate the church in having reasonable expectations for his family. He can encourage them to offer affirmation for his wife and the contributions she makes to the congregation. One minister spoke of the expectations of which he wanted the congregation to be aware:

I think specifically that we would like to see your family as a family, but we don’t expect them to be the perfect models...your wife doesn’t have to teach the ladies’ Bible class. If she has that gift and wants to, that’s great, if she doesn’t and
doesn’t even want to come, that’s fine, too...Letting you be a family - with ups and downs. (TM, p. 16)

It was also stressed as important that the minister has concern for his family and places his children as a higher priority than the church. As I mentioned, as a child, I missed my father because he was absent much of the time. I knew, however, that the work he was doing was important, so I was made to feel guilty if I complained. I remember this being a source of contention between my parents as it is with so many ministers’ families.

The groups also discussed esteem support at length. If the minister had a certain focus and sense of calling, he typically was believed to be respected and supported by the church. The minister was encouraged to develop this spiritual maturity through a personal relationship with the Lord.

The minister was encouraged to focus on the big picture of ministry rather than the day-to-day struggles. He should think about the blessing of ministry and the aspects of the congregation that he appreciates. One minister exclaimed, “I love doing what I am doing!” (NM, p. 26) Another said the following:

Just the experience of being involved in ministry. If you didn’t want [it] before, [it] makes you realize that it is difficult work. It brings difficulties. Dealing with people, living with people. And, but that is also part of the richness of it. And part of the blessing that comes. If it wasn’t fun most of the time, I’d do something else. (TM, p. 19)

The ministers were also encouraged to give God the glory and have confidence in their calling. Each of the participants felt this calling. As one man said “Let it be said and let it be written that in this group of people with all of the horror war stories that we
have, all of us are preaching.” (TM, p. 20) It was recommended that ministers be
servants of the Lord rather than the church and that this service be their rationale for
ministry. At times this necessitated a reliance on the spirit of God, as one could not
accomplish the tasks of ministry by their own effort.

Recognition of one’s gifts for ministry was said to strengthen one’s sense of
calling. The ministers were encouraged to be aware of the external influences that could
lead them away from ministry. One could, however, initiate support from the
congregation and not attempt to stand alone. The groups emphasized the understanding
that one’s sense of calling was reinforced when support was available. One minister said,
“I think community reinforcement’s what deepens the calling. The calling could become
very superficial if the community is not reaffirming, ‘yes, this is your gift, yes, this is what
God has led you to.’” (CM, p. 15)

It was suggested that the minister help the church give his family esteem support
by setting good boundaries for his children and wife. He could also be proactive in
aiding his wife with identifying her gifts in order to participate in a ministry that she
enjoyed. A participant spoke of moving into a congregation and having his wife attempt
to live under the shadow of the previous minister’s wife:

Well, you know, one of the things we can do in that is that to be proactive is that we
can do a better job than we have, for example, in teaching the whole doctrine of gifts
in ministry, in which we could say... “We're delighted to have had, I'm sure you are
delighted to have had brother and sister so and so here for the last ten years and she
was a wonderful Bible school teacher. We've been called to this ministry and
[minister's wife] gifts are very different from hers, or whatever and spell those out, what those gifts are. (CM, p. 20)

The minister could initiate tangible support. Communication is important in that it allows both the leaders and congregation to participate in the ministry and be aware of the needs of the minister and his family. At times a minister may need to take a sabbatical. One participant spoke of the benefit of this rest as follows:

I preached for 17 years and said you know, “I think I want to get out of this game.” And so I left. I didn’t leave the church. In fact, I became a better Christian after I quit preaching than I was probably because I became more dependent upon God for a year and I prayed more and I probably cried more and I think it made me a better preacher. And I didn’t think I would come back and preach again. My wife always thought that I would and I did after a year, but I needed that year, you know, a sabbatical. I think within Churches of Christ, I don’t think we recognize - I doubt if leadership recognizes and memberships don’t recognize - the need generally and it’s an exception when it does happen, that preachers, after a period of time, need time to back away and to recreate and revive their own spiritual lives and their own focus. (TM, p. 6)

Finally, a minister may simply need to recognize that when they are no longer the minister in a church, they should leave. Sometimes a minister will retire and stay on with a congregation. Although this can be positive, it does discourage members from bonding with the new minister or looking to them as their spiritual leader.
I believe the story told by one participant summarizes the concluding form of informational support a minister can initiate. This is the choosing of ones battles. He said the following:

I heard a little ditty on Candid Camera the other day, and they had this little episode...the people would come in and buy something, say it was $3.40. So they would round it up to $4.00, and they wouldn't give the people the coins, you know, change... then they were taping all that, so they had all sorts of arguments. scenarios, and their explanation. One guy came out and they did their thing. He looked and he said, "We don't give change any more." He pulled out the bills he had left and started to [walk out]--He said, "Well wait a minute. Don't you care?" And he turned around and told him, "Sir, I'm not going to let anybody rent space in my head for 46 cents." Isn't that great. And I thought, you know. so many times, it's like he was saying, I let somebody rent space in my head for 46 cents. you know. If we can keep from doing that, you know, pick our battles and decide which ones--like raising kids, figure out which ones we have got to win and which one we can afford to lose, maybe even need to lose, and leave some change on the table, if that's what it takes. (NM, p. 26)

Through all these recommendations, it is apparent that the participants see ministry as a mixed blessing. One of the participants stated it in this way:

I think what most of us would probably agree - I think this would be a generalization - No one's ever treated me better than my church family. But nobody's ever treated me worse than my church family. Does that make any
Theological orientation

As previously mentioned, the participants of the ministerial focus group were asked to classify themselves and their congregations regarding their theological orientation on a continuum from progressive to traditional. They expressed surprise at the question and exhibited some discomfort in answering. The ministers at one of the sites identified themselves according to their reputation. This was the Pepperdine site. These participants primarily identified themselves as progressive. The Texas group was spread over the continuum from traditionally moderate to progressive. The group in Nebraska placed themselves in the middle of the continuum, identifying themselves as moderately progressive. All of the participants identified themselves as more progressive than their congregations. The explanation of the ministers for the choice they made in identifying their theological orientation centered on the difference between themselves and their congregation. They believed they were front-runners and that an aspect of their role was to encourage the congregation to be open to new ways of thinking and ministry.

The laity participants identified themselves similarly to the ministers of the same site. The Nebraska and Texas sites identified their congregations as moderate and their ministers as moderately progressive or progressive. The California site identified both themselves and their ministers as progressive in theological orientation. They discussed the role of change agent that he played and expressed understanding of the difficulty it must entail. They also appeared to be somewhat uncomfortable in discussing theological orientation.
At present in the Churches of Christ, there is a political battle regarding the correct theological orientation. Those who are on the traditional side of the continuum frequently believe those who think otherwise are in error and should be corrected or asked to leave. One minister wrote “biblical” beside his choice of moderate. Those on the other end of the continuum typically express impatience with those who are not open to new ideas and methods of worship and organization. It is the opinion of this author that this was the reason for the discomfort of the participants when asked the question regarding theological orientation. Although some appear to enjoy the battle, the typical minister and congregation member seem to want to avoid identifying their position.

I did not find theological orientation to be a factor in the categories that emerged from the groups. The discrepancy seemed to lie in whether the participants were laity or ministers. There was some difference in the process of the groups. The ministerial groups seemed to flow better with the California group being the easiest to facilitate. As previously mentioned, there were a number of factors that might have affected this process. The California group was the last group I facilitated, so I had more skill in my role. Another factor was that the ministers portrayed a greater investment in the topic, so demonstrated an eagerness to share their thoughts. Finally, the California focus group participants were very similar in theological orientation (as they self-reported) and the majority appeared to already have established relationships. I therefore do not believe the difference in theological orientation has significant influence on a minister’s perception of support. It would be in order to conduct a follow-up study of this topic with a larger population to determine if the same results would emerge.
CHAPTER FIVE

DISCUSSION

The data that emerged from the focus groups were similar to that found in the published literature. Both the stressors (absence of support) and supports reported by the research participants were comparable. The concept of roles, as demonstrated by the emphasis on expectations, was important to both ministers and laity as they discussed the topic of ministerial support. It was also determined that the theory of social constructionism is applicable to these findings. The similarities and differences of the ministerial and laity information will be portrayed followed by a discussion of the applicable theories. Implications for further research will be made at the end of the chapter.

Absence of support

The categories of absence of support, basis for absence of support, and manifestations of absence of support were comparable to the intra-psychic/interpersonal and systemic stressors mentioned in the literature. Intra-psychic/interpersonal stressors coincide with the absence of emotional and esteem support and systemic stressors appear to incorporate information and tangible support.

Intra-psychic/interpersonal

In terms of the absence of emotional support, the focus groups articulated this absence for both themselves and their families. Both the ministers and laity spoke of the congregation not meeting the emotional needs of the families. There seemed to be an understanding that unrealistic expectations placed on a minister's wife and children directly impacted the minister's perception of support. This coincides with various
authors who have emphasized the importance of support of the family to a minister's well-being (Hutchinson & Hutchinson, 1979; Lee, 1995; and Morris and Blanton, 1994a and 1995). The participants also spoke of the manner in which the minister was criticized but lacked guidance from the leaders. This was said to lead to the belief in the necessity to hide one's struggles from the congregation. Based on the manner they discussed the subject, it appeared that the ministers believed vulnerability to be of greater danger than did the laity. As stated by Raymond, Richmond, and Rogers (1986), it was sometimes safer for the minister to have a noncomplaining attitude than to risk dismissal.

There was a high level of agreement on the absence of support in the realm of relationships of the minister. The participants spoke of the isolation that the minister experiences. The ministers were pressured to avoid having close friends because these friendships might be exclusive and because of a pedestal effect. As stated previously, the pedestal effect refers to the ministers' inability to behave spontaneously due to parishioners' expectations, and to the caution and inhibition of the laity in expressing themselves openly (Blackbird and Wright, 1985).

On the other end of the spectrum is the intrusiveness that the minister experiences (Lee, 1995; Morris & Blanton, 1994a). This is an example of the absence of esteem support. The two populations were familiar with this absence of support and spoke of it at length. They referred to it as a violation of the boundaries of the minister. The minister spoke of the lack of privacy for both himself and his family and the expectation that he must be on call twenty-four hours a day. There was some delineation by the two groups of the high expectations placed on a minister. Both groups appeared to believe these expectations were too difficult to achieve, but as would be expected, the ministers
expressed the greatest amount of frustration with this dilemma. There was some mention made of the necessity of not setting expectations too low, as this would result in poor performance. As mentioned previously, this emerged from the laity group.

Lack of respect of or the belief that the minister was unappreciated by the congregation was stated by both populations. The groups spoke of the struggles for control that ministers go through with their leaders. The laity groups discussed the leveling effect that the minister experiences as a result of these power struggles. As previously mentioned, the leveling effect in the Churches of Christ is the attempt of the congregation to keep a minister from having an exalted position. The ministers did not seem to want to be in a superior position, but wanted to be part of the leadership of the church. They placed great emphasis on the importance of advocacy. I believe this signified a team mentality in that the other leaders believed him to be one of them and were willing to speak in his defense. The laity groups touched on this subject but not with the same emphasis as the ministers. I think this demonstrates an aspect of support that is significant to the ministers but of which the congregation may be unaware. This may also be due to the difference in the manner the congregation and minister view the church and its work. As the role of congregation members is voluntary in nature, their participation in ministry does not engender the same significance as it does to the ministers who gain their livelihood from the existence of the church (Harris, 1998).

Systemic

In viewing systemic stressors or absence of support, the absence of tangible and information support was apparent. An inadequate financial package was a category of tangible support that emerged. This was in keeping with the findings of Daniel and
Rogers (1981) on the importance of adequate financial compensation. When asked the grand tour question “What are your experiences with the manner in which ministers are supported in your congregations?” the congregation members initially spoke of financial support. They believed that this was typically due to the financial status or size of the congregation rather than being an intentional withholding of support. The laity as a whole felt the responsibility of educating the ministers in financial management to offset the struggles the ministers had financially. Although important to them, the ministers placed less emphasis on the absence of financial support. This seemed to be secondary compared to their desire for other forms of social support. I remember as a child knowing that our needs would always be met. This seems to be the belief of many ministers. If they are invested emotionally in a church, they will make sacrifices. The ministerial population believed an insufficient financial package was due to the financial status of the church but also thought it could be due to the lack of initiative of the minister in requesting better benefits.

Of greater concern to the minister at the systemic level was the tendency for dismissal to occur when there was dissonance regarding their ministry. Both they and the laity group believed that the perspective that the minister was expendable was the basis for an absence of support. The literature again supports this belief in that it states many ministers hesitate to acknowledge difficulties due to the fear of being judged unfit for ministry or being downgraded in terms of church appointment (Morris & Blanton, 1995, and Frame & Shehan, 1994). In the Churches of Christ, the minister is asked to leave or encouraged to resign. They then must locate another position of ministry on their own without aid of a denominational placement structure. Typically this occurs through word
of mouth or through clearing houses of ministers seeking placement and churches seeking ministers at universities associated with the Churches of Christ.

Congregation members often equate the absence of systemic support with a flawed choice of minister. That is, the congregation did not choose a minister who was a good fit for them. This is often believed to be the fault of the leaders. Both groups mentioned the difficulty the minister experiences in having multiple employers. I would categorize this under information support because there is an absence of a clear chain of command or job description. As previously mentioned, this may be in part due to the autonomous nature of the Churches of Christ. The phenomenon appears to be common to all churches, however, with the minister struggling with whom to please (Hall, 1997). The laity group mentioned the absence of a contract as contributing to this situation. They thought that if the job description were clearly stated, there would be less pressure to meet unrealistic expectations.

Finally, the laity believed that they lacked the skills or know-how to provide support for a minister. The ministers believed the system of the church lacked awareness in how to provide support or in the calling of a minister. They stated that if the congregation had a problem-focused lens, they would primarily be aware of the weaknesses of a minister rather than his strengths. At one point in our ministry, my husband spoke with a man who consults with churches regarding conflict resolution. He (my husband) was having conflict with one of the leaders and wanted advice on how to deal with him. The consultant stated that once a leader began questioning the character of a minister, it was very difficult to change that perspective. In speaking with other
ministers since that time, I have witnessed the powerful impact a negative lens can have on a church.

Hall (1997) also spoke of the negative impact of stressors on the psychological and spiritual functioning of clergy. The category of manifestation of absence of support emerged from the ministerial focus group. The ministers spoke of the emotional pain they experienced, such as discouragement and discouragement of their families. They also mentioned the feelings of worthlessness they would begin to exhibit. This was similar to findings by Crittenden (1992), as they did not believe themselves competent to meet the expectations of the church. This could ultimately lead to resigning from a congregation or leaving ministry altogether.

Support

The categories of identified support, basis for support, and manifestations of support were comparable to the intra-psychic/interpersonal and systemic support mentioned in the literature. The intra-psychic/interpersonal category again coincides with the emotional and esteem support and systemic appears to incorporate both information and tangible support.

Intra-psychic/interpersonal

The ministerial group highlighted families when speaking of available emotional support. It was mentioned that the wives of the ministers were some of the most significant providers of support. They also spoke of the importance of support being offered to themselves and their family in the form of affirmation and acceptance. Recently when speaking to a group of minister’s wives, we talked about their role in the support of the minister. They expressed familiarity in the part they played in the ministry
of their husbands. When the situation with a church was good, they could enhance their husband’s position. When the situation was poor (as in a political struggle with a church), they could make the situation tolerable. There was an obvious sense of partnership between the ministers and their wives. It is important to the minister that his comrade in arms be supported. Nesbitt (1995) demonstrates agreement with this finding as he stated that the wife of the minister was found to be one of his most important resources.

As previously articulated by Daniel and Rogers (1981), the importance of friendships both within and out of the church was mentioned. The focus groups identified the friendships of the minister as vital. They believed that relationships of both social and spiritual nature were significant. The laity groups emphasized the importance of guidance from the leaders in the form of mentoring relationships. The ministerial groups appeared to believe mentoring relationships were important as well, but placed greater importance on accountability groups among peers—either other ministers or individuals with whom they could have a reciprocal relationship. I believe this speaks to the need of ministers to have individuals with whom they can share their struggles without thought of repercussions.

The laity group spoke of the awareness of needs of the minister and the significance of understanding and expression of appreciation offered to the minister. Carroll (1981) examined the nature of leadership and its impact on relationships between leaders and staff. He found that when the leadership was hierarchical in nature, there were fewer positive relationships between the leaders and ministers of a church. The ministers reiterated this finding in their belief that they would be offered support when a
shepherding model of leadership was apparent. The shepherding model is based on the analogy of a shepherd with his sheep. Rather than driving the sheep with a stick, the shepherd calls them by name and they follow him. This portrays a more collaborative form of leadership. When we began attending our present church, I spoke with the leaders and asked their views on leadership. My perception was that they utilized the shepherd model of leadership. They affirmed this perception and attributed their evolution to this style to the education they received from a former minister. He had been with them for a significant amount of time (20 years) and was respected by the leaders. He was able to introduce this new model and demonstrate the benefit of its use. The leaders stated that through the past fifteen years, they had witnessed the success of the shepherding model.

Both groups spoke of the importance of the minister having an advocate, either in the form of a person or leadership group. The laity mentioned the importance of a team mentality between the minister and leaders. As was previously mentioned, when the leaders viewed the minister as a respected member of their team, they were more likely to act as advocates for him. This appeared to be viewed with greater significance by the ministerial participants than the laity. However, it was the laity groups who identified the recognition of the professional status of the minister as being important. They believed that when he was respected as a professional, he was treated in a more supportive manner.

The ministerial group also emphasized that they appreciated the mental health care that had been provided for them and other ministers. Morris and Blanton (1994b) identified prevention and intervention programs as being available in some
denominations and vital to the health and longevity of one’s ministry. When the church believed in the calling of the minister, this is one type of support that was said to be more easily attained. When churches held this belief, they again were more committed to the minister and believed he was committed to them. They, therefore, were willing to support him and help him work through his struggles because they cared for him and because they believed God had called him to this ministry.

The laity believed that when a minister was given support the change this brought was manifested through an improvement in the performance of the various roles a minister performed as well as in his level of persistence with the position. It was believed to be a factor in enhancing his personal worth (Daniel & Rogers, 1981). The ministers also stated that when they were supported, they had a greater sense of security and were more committed to the congregation. This was articulated by Hoge, Dyble, and Polk (1981) who found that individuals demonstrated a higher level of commitment to their vocation when there was a positive relationship between the minister and members.

**Systemic**

Tangible support was identified by both ministers and laity. In the initial groups conducted for the pilot study of this research, the ministers identified more types of financial supports than did the laity. This was not an apparent difference when the following data were collapsed with the first set. Both populations were able to identify a variety of resources. This form of support was believed to be available to a great many ministers. It was articulated by the laity groups that the offering of an adequate financial package was dependent on the financial status of the church. They believed congregations typically wanted the best for their minister. The ministers agreed with this
and based the financial status on the size of the congregation. The agreement on the need for sufficient financial compensation by both groups was in contrast to an earlier finding by Bonifeld and Mills (1980). They stated that congregations typically believe that clergy do not give much thought to financial security. Perhaps this misunderstanding is being corrected in the twenty years since the authors’ research was performed.

The use of the minister care committee by some churches was also mentioned and applauded by both ministerial and laity groups. They believed this form of tangible support could perform the advocacy roles desired by the minister as well as maintaining an awareness of the needs of the minister. These committees also initiated other kinds of tangible support such as physical affection, banquets and the offering of childcare. The Pastor Appreciation Month was mentioned by all groups as a type of support that was a benefit to ministers. This deliberate act of support appears to be growing in popularity within the Churches of Christ.

As supported by the literature (Frame & Shehan, 1994; Morris & Blanton, 1994b), both groups identified education as a form of support present in some churches. This is information support. Its focus was on lowering the expectations of ministers, articulating appropriate boundaries for the minister, and helping the congregation become well aware of the minister and their family.

Other forms of information support mentioned by both groups are contracts and constructive criticism. These were mentioned earlier as being absent from many congregations, but were also found to be present in some churches. Both populations believed these to be the responsibility of the leaders of the church. Again, criticism seemed to be accepted more readily when a positive relationship between leaders and
minister was already in place. The ministers also expressed appreciation for the spiritual support offered by their leaders in terms of education and encouragement to maintain a personal relationship with God.

Sense of calling was again mentioned by the ministerial groups as having been vital in the implementation of a supportive environment. The ministers believed that this confidence in their ministry gave them permission to initiate support (Crittenden, 1992).

**Recommended solutions**

The two populations were fairly balanced on the number of recommendations they offered. The only significant difference appeared to be that the ministers presented the most suggestions for esteem support, while the laity offered more ideas for tangible support. Recommended solutions will be divided based on the above criteria used for absence of support and support.

**Intra-psychic/interpersonal**

Positive relationships were the primary recommended solution for meeting the emotional needs of the minister. Laity encouraged the ministers to seek relationships with other ministers. They believed these relationships and the minister's personal relationship with God were vital. The ministers suggested a broader range or relationships. This was in keeping with the literature on the subject (Crittenden, 1992). They recommended that ministers initiate relationships with the leaders, congregation members and other ministers. They also encouraged the formation of prayer groups, accountability groups and other small groups. The ministerial groups also encouraged the maintenance of family relationships as a high priority (Lee, 1995).
All focus groups believed esteem needs could be met through appreciation of the minister and acceptance of him as a member of the congregation as well as a leader. This encourages the congregation to identify his needs as an individual and develop realistic expectations for both the minister and his family. Both groups also encouraged a sense of partnership in the ministry between the congregation and minister.

Although the laity population did not identify advocacy as a support, they recommended it as a solution to the minister’s struggles with support. This may indicate a growing awareness of how important it is for the minister to have a buffer between himself and the congregation.

A significant subcategory that emerged from the ministerial group was a sense of calling. As previously mentioned, a sense of calling refers to a rationale for ministry that comes from God rather than the congregation (Mickey, Wilson, & Ashmore, 1991). Although I had believed that this concept is not pervasive in the Churches of Christ, it was apparent that the ministers all believed in calling in one form or another. Some referred to it as a sense of calling while others used other language. A related concept—a clear focus of ministry—was referred to as being important. If one focused solely on the negative aspects, one would not be successful in their ministry. Jussim (1992) stated that the minister must be intrinsically motivated in order to have the motivation to work with and feel positively toward the congregation.

**Systemic**

The ministerial and laity groups agreed on several recommendations for tangible support. The idea of the minister care committee again emerged as a solution for dealing with the creation of a supportive environment for the minister. I believe the popularity of
this idea lies in its organization. It appears that many times the support of minister is important to a congregation, but simply falls through the cracks as the congregation has its focus on many tasks. The creation of this committee places the responsibility for ministerial nurturance in the hands of a few individuals. They act as a liaison between the minister and church and then this important act of caring for the minister is addressed on an ongoing basis.

It was suggested by all that an adequate financial package be offered to the minister. Again this entails a sufficient salary as well as benefits such as insurance, retirement, vacations, and housing. The laity groups recommended additional forms of tangible support such as physical tasks of caring for the children of the minister, house repair, and the offering of hospitality to the minister. As previously mentioned, they suggested that the congregation commit themselves to the families of the ministers by having an interest in the growth and maturity of the children that is manifested in a positive manner. Morris and Blanton (1995) emphasized the importance of this investment not only for the families, but for the minister as well.

Education of the congregation on the boundaries of the minister and family was a form of information support suggested by the laity groups. They offered two solutions that they believed would eliminate many of the potential problems of support. These were the identifying of the correct individual to work with the congregation and having a clear description of the expectations in the form of a contract. Frame and Shehan (1994) spoke of the necessity of eliminating candidates who were not suited to the demands of the ministry. The ministers suggested the importance of communication between themselves and the leaders and congregation. They stated that this was the responsibility
of the minister. They also encouraged the leaders to take an active part in the ministry of the church. This was believed to result in a partnership with the minister as well as an understanding of the dynamics of ministry.

Concept of roles

The influence of expectations on the ministers’ perception of support from their congregation is important. As articulated by Jussim, et. al. (1992), there are several concepts emerging from Symbolic Interactionism regarding roles. The concepts of role overload, role ambiguity, and role taking coincided with the emergence of data from the focus groups.

Role ambiguity was evidenced as the two focus groups spoke of the high expectations placed on ministers. These expectations involve the roles that the minister is required to perform. The discussion articulated the unrealistic nature of the expectations and the lack of guidance that was coupled with the criticism received when the minister did not meet these expectations. As mentioned, there is a leveling effect that places the minister in a double bind. He is expected to be a visionary and lead the church in new directions, but is simultaneously discouraged from placing himself above others in the congregation. The expectation of a visionary role was evidenced in the expression of the theological orientation of the congregations and ministers. A couple of participants identified the minister and congregation as having the same theological orientation. However, the majority placed the theological orientation of the minister as being at a more progressive level than that of the congregation. The expectation was placed on the minister to expose the congregation to new ways of thinking.
Multiple employers with which ministers deal also results in an ambiguity of one's roles. The ministers thought it a never-ending battle to balance keeping certain members happy without ostracizing others. It has been interesting to live in the South with the larger population of Churches of Christ after having lived in the North all of my life. When members are unhappy in churches in the north, they stay because there are no other Churches of Christ from which to choose. This results in a certain level of conflict due to the investment of members making the church what they believe it needs to be. On the positive end, it results in a continuity and family dynamic in that members stay and resolve conflict rather than leave the congregation. My experience in the south has been that when an individual is unhappy with a congregation they leave and locate a congregation that better matches their thinking. There appears to be an absence of commitment due to this mobility as well as less diversification in the thinking of the members of a congregation. I believe the ministers of the Church of Christ located in areas with fewer churches experience a greater level of difficulty in dealing with the diversity of expectations. This is not to say that the other ministers do not experience this ambiguity, it is simply of a different nature.

As previously discussed, role ambiguity is one aspect of role strain. Role strain occurs when one has a plurality of roles that cannot be met. They have too many roles to meet, the roles contradict each other, and the roles cannot be met simultaneously (Klein & White, 1996). This is certainly applicable to the unrealistic expectations of a minister. Simply the necessity of being on calling twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week is impossible. Again, the need to satisfy a congregation full of employers leads to one feeling overwhelmed and burdened. I believe this is the reason advocacy emerged as one
of the primary desires of the ministerial groups. They want an individual or group to stand between them and diminish the number of expectations placed on them. This is also the rationale for the popularity of the idea of a minister care committee. This group would serve to identify their needs and educate the church on appropriate boundaries and expectations.

Role ambiguity was addressed by the recommendations made by the groups as well. Educating the church on appropriate expectations and boundaries is again in order. Clarity can also be sought through the articulation of the job description through a contract. The minister can also obtain clarity through a strong sense of calling and clear focus for his ministry. As previously mentioned, when a minister is able to have a clear idea of his role in order to fulfill it, he has a more positive interpretation of the situation in which he finds himself (Burr, Hill, Nye, & Reiss, 1979).

Social Constructionism

Another theory that offers insight into the perspective a minister has of support is the theory of social constructionism. As mentioned at the outset of this report, there are four assumptions articulated by Gergen (1999) who is one of the primary proponents of the theory. These will again be viewed in terms of their applicability to the data from the focus groups. Implications will be made for the ongoing dynamics between congregations and ministers.

The first assumption suggests that there are an unlimited number of explanations for any given situation. As previously mentioned, an absence of support can result in feelings of worthlessness and discouragement. A minister makes assumptions of his personal worth based on what he is offered financially. Stacey (as cited in Smith, 1997)
states. "some have more meaning-making power than others" (p. 5). In a situation in which a minister is not offered the respect and appreciation of the leaders, he may accept the perspective of the leaders as the truth regarding himself. Smith (1997) speaks of the ability of those in power to make evaluations of people's capabilities and worth that may result in their being discounted or pathologized. All of the ministers relayed contrasting stories of times they were in unsupportive environments versus times they were in supportive environments. They spoke of discouragement and self-doubt that was faced in the unsupportive environment as opposed to the joy and fulfillment they were experiencing in their present settings. They were the same men in both settings with the exception of the benefit of age and maturity. Their perspective, however, toward their ministry was vastly different dependent on how they were treated.

This assumption offers the suggestion for ministers to rise to a meta-level when experiencing times of stress or an absence of support. They can look for various explanations rather than the linear causality of their ineffectiveness resulting in a faulty ministry.

The second assumption states, "our modes of description, explanation, and/or representations are derived from relationship" (Gergen, 1999, p. 47). This demonstrates the importance of relationships in developing both stressful and supportive environments. In an earlier writing, Gergen (1991) states "interpretations of situations are based on a community of interpretation" (p. 104). The minister is influenced by the relationships of which he is a part. Some relationships may have a negative impact on his perception. When aware of this influence, he can diminish the impact through less contact. When this is impossible, however, the minister can offset the influence through the initiation of
positive relationships. I believe this accounts for the appreciation of the accountability
groups in which the ministers participated. Through experiencing the beneficial nature of
these groups, the ministers had come to the realization that their perception of ministry
was constantly being shaped as they shared their struggles and joys with their peers.

The third assumption articulated by Gergen (1999) speaks to one’s self-agency in
that “as we describe, fashion, or otherwise represent, so do we fashion our future” (p. 47).
Nichols (1998) speaks of new realities emerging in conversation as opinions are shared
and perspectives are respected. This speaks to the ability of the minister to take a
proactive stance in the shaping of his future. The groups, especially the ministerial
groups, encouraged the ministers to take the initiative in the creation of a supportive
environment. This has a significant impact on the control the minister believes he has
over his environment. Cutrona and Russell (1990) speak of the influence of control on
the need for social support. The greater the level of control, the lower the perceived need
for support.

This assumption also speaks to the desire the ministers have for the advocacy of
the leaders. It adds another voice to the conversation as the minister attempts to shape
the future of the church. When the leaders are supportive of the vision of the minister
and of his performance of his role as minister, it enhances the influence of the leadership
of the church. This models a partnership in ministry for the congregation that invites
their participation as well.

Finally, the fourth assumption suggests reflection regarding our perceptions as
important for personal growth (Gergen, 1999). He encourages self-examination as a
manner of aiding one is rising to a meta-level in order to have a broader perspective.
This assumption coincides with the recommendation of the groups to have a strong sense of calling and clear focus for one's ministry. This necessitates a continual examination of the manner in which one perceives ministry. When a minister becomes discouraged, he can look to his rationale for ministry—is it for his own gain or the glory of God? Gergen (1998) speaks of the emancipatory potential of constructionism as follows:

   Its capacity to let us step outside the taken for granted, to break loose from the sometimes strangulating grip of the commonplace. And herein lies the possibility for new futures, for critical reflection that invites us into a posture of reconstruction. We are prompted to explore alternative understandings of what takes place, and to locate meanings that enable us to go on in more adequate ways. For those who live in complex societal circumstances, the potential for creative reconstruction is a continuous treasure; for lives despondent, tormented, or tortured, such resources may be essential. (p. 415)

**Implications**

**Implications for congregations**

Congregations have the opportunity to utilize the recommendations of the laity and ministerial groups in order to provide a supportive environment for their ministers. In speaking with one of the previously mentioned church consultants, it was articulated that it is at times difficult for ministers to educate their churches on how to create this environment. He stated that it is viewed as self-serving when the minister attempts this education. The consultant believed that the ideal solution was to teach the leaders of the churches and allow them to in turn educate their congregations.
To reiterate the recommended solutions for congregations, it is helpful to the minister to see oneself as a partner in ministry. In this way, one communicates a belief in the calling of the both the minister and oneself to the work of the church. Through the creation of a minister care committee or acting on an individual basis, the leaders and members can develop an awareness of the needs of the minister and act as advocates for him. They can also provide sufficient tangible support in the form of an adequate financial package.

**Implications for ministers**

It is recommended that ministers take the initiative in the creation of a supportive environment. This may not be the ideal but due to the difference in level of investment of the minister versus the congregation, the most likely way to have one’s needs as a minister addressed is to encourage support. The ministers can take a step in educating the congregation regarding their needs and in the development of a committee to act as a liaison between them and the congregation. They can also foster a partnership in ministry through sharing a strong sense of calling and clear focus for ministry.

The ministers can provide for some of their needs by inviting others to join them in relationship, particularly in accountability groups. They are also encouraged to be aware of the influence of their social context on the perception of ministry.

**Implications for marriage and family therapists**

For those of us who are in the helping profession, particularly in the field of Marriage and Family Therapy, there are implications as well. As the profession is identifying new populations with which to work, the church family is a logical leap from the family one sees in practice. Angera (1997) states that “the skills associated with
viewing the patterns of connection and understanding systems can be transferred to other human systems beyond families and couples.” (p. 165)

An increasing number of theories of family therapy are demonstrating the influence of social construction. As portrayed in the previous section, therapists for the benefit of ministers and congregations can utilize this theory. In speaking of social constructionism, Milan & Keiley (2000) state “individuals experience problems when they interpret life experiences in ways that are personally undesirable. These interpretations are then formulated into a problem-dominated story that penetrates ongoing interpretations of past and present events” (p. 308). This certainly explains how a minister’s perception of support impacts them in either a positive or negative manner and how the perception is maintained once it is accepted. Therapists can help the minister step back and examine their perceptions.

The helping profession can also educate the minister and congregation on the manner in which sociocultural factors, in this case the culture of the Church of Christ, influences both ministers and congregation members. Churches cannot help but be shaped by this factor (White & Epston, 1989). We can explain the similarities in the perspectives of minister and laity, and also the apparent inflexibility of the system due to the church culture.

Implications for further research

There are several directions one could go in following this research. A quantitative study could follow-up this study. It could utilize a survey based on the results of the present study for the purpose of seeking confirmation of its findings.
There are additional related areas that could be addressed as well. It would be interesting to focus on the perceptions of the families of the ministers—both the children and the minister's wives. The literature on the wives of ministers was scarce with information on children being even more rare. Although they occupy the same environment as that of their husbands, I know from personal experience that they perceive the situation differently than their families.

Another direction would be the examination of ministers from other denominations and an analysis of the differences and similarities across these groups. Although the literature portrayed many similarities, I am certain there are unique dynamics within each denomination just as there are in Churches of Christ. It would also be interesting to examine this issue across types of religions.

Applicability of these results to other occupations could also be examined. Examining the level of embeddedness in other helping professions versus the ministry would be an interesting study. One could also study the comparison between the perceptions of individuals in leadership positions with those of the remaining population of an organization. The possibilities are endless.
CHAPTER SIX
CONCLUSION

Lee (1995) calls for the therapeutic community, particularly that segment already allied with local churches to lobby proactively for the need to support clergy through research and empirically grounded intervention.

In studying burn-out caused by job-related stress, Daniel and Rogers (1981) quote Maslach as saying “The prevalence of the phenomena and the range of seemingly desperate professionals who are affected by it (i.e., burn-out) suggest that the search for causes is better directed away from the unending cycle of identifying the ‘bad people’ and towards uncovering the operational and structural characteristics in the ‘bad’ situations where many good people function.” I would add that it is also important to identify perceptions of both clergy and laity in order to be of assistance to clergy and their families. My desire in studying these perceptions of support received from congregations in this and following studies is to identify ways by which both ministers and congregations can address the intentional availability of support to ministers.

Personal reflections

An anonymous source offered the following description of the perfect preacher as follows:

After hundreds of years, one has been found! A model preacher preaches twenty minutes and sits down. He condemns sin but never hurts anyone’s feelings.

He works from 8:00 a.m. to 10:00 p.m. in every type of work from preaching to custodial service. He makes $60.00 a week, wears good clothes, buys good books regularly, has a nice family, drives a good car and gives $100.00
a week to the church. He also stands ready to contribute to every good work that comes along.

He is twenty-six years old and has been preaching for thirty years. He is tall and short, thin and heavyset. He has one brown eye, and one blue, and hair parted down the middle, left side dark and straight and the right brown and wavy.

He has a burning desire to work with the teenagers, and spends all his time with the older folks. He smiles all the time with a straight face because he has a sense of humor that keeps him seriously dedicated to his work. He makes fifteen calls a day on church members, spends all of his time evangelizing the unchurched, and is never out of his office (“Weakhumor,” personal communication, July 18, 2000).

This tongue-in-cheek account of the expectations of a minister is humorous because of its closeness to reality. As the daughter and wife of ministers, I have long been aware of these expectations. Much of the data that emerged from the focus groups were familiar to me. The support available to ministers and the lack thereof have frequently been prevalent in the discussion of my family and peers.

There was, however, an emphasis placed on some of the factors that emerged that made an impression on me. These factors dealt primarily with relationships and the ownership of the issue of ministerial support.

Rather than believing it to be an option, the ministers emphasized the necessity of being involved in peer groups. All of the ministers spoke of the importance of these groups to their ministries. Through the dialogue and support of these relationships, the ministers were able to both survive and thrive in their chosen occupation. My father had
been engaged in groups informally and my husband had been more deliberate about identifying groups in which he could be involved. The necessity of these relationships was impressed on me as the ministers encouraged each other to create these opportunities for themselves.

Another aspect of relationship that impressed me was the importance of advocacy to the minister. They believed one must follow the call of God, but they gained encouragement and esteem when the leaders of the church served as a buffer for them. They repeatedly mentioned the need for, or appreciation of, committees that addressed the care of the minister. I think there is the belief by ministers that they alone deal with some of the stressors that were articulated by the group. The creation of these committees offers the message that “you are significant to us and worth the effort of assigning individuals the task of addressing your needs.”

This advocacy also addresses the leveling effect that was discussed in the groups. Although the majority of ministers in the Churches of Christ have dealt with this dynamic for years, it seems that only now is it coming into the awareness of the denomination. I believe this will benefit ministers as both they and leaders gain understanding into the double bind with which the ministers deal. It is hoped that the leaders will address this situation by allowing ministers the leadership role for which they were hired.

The final emphasis of relationship that made an impact on me is the importance ministers’ place on the support of their wives. This occupation appears to necessitate the partnership of a man and wife for the success of the role. Ministers seemed to believe that resigning from the work was the only option available to them if their wife was unsupported. As I typically view the world through systemic lens based on my training
in systems theory, this should not have come as a surprise. I always believed my husband and I were partners in the work of the church. The level of significance made an impact on me, however. It appeared that support of one’s wife was of greater importance than support of oneself. There seemed to be the belief that one can fend for oneself in the ministry, but it was unbearable to watch someone you love being abused.

In addition to the role of relationships, the ownership of the issue of support was interesting to me. It did not surprise me to have the laity place the responsibility of support on the shoulders of the minister. However, what did surprise and impress me was the ownership that the ministers had in this issue. They commiserated with each other on the absence of support and what the church could do differently, but appeared to believe that it was their responsibility to change the system. Even with the understanding of the impression of self-interest, ministers thought the task of educating the congregation fell to them. I believe this is due to the fact that the creation of a supportive environment benefited not only the minister but also the congregation.

I have heard it said that the relationship between a minister and congregation is a marriage that must be nurtured. Both partners must be content in the marriage for it to be a vibrant growing relationship. Maybe this is resulted in the training of a minister’s daughter in the field of marriage and family therapy that in turn led to the desire of that daughter to contribute to the health of the relationship. It is my hope that this research will offer some aid to what can be a delightful union.
APPENDIX A

CONSENT FOR RESEARCH PARTICIPATION

This research will consist of the following items: initial contact and phone interview, a one and a half to two hour audio-tapes focus group regarding your experience with the manner in which ministers are supported in your congregation, transcription of the focus group, and completion of a follow-up questionnaire. The results of the study will be analyzed by the facilitator and assistant, and a final report will be written and presented in dissertation format at Iowa State University.

I have received satisfactory explanations of purposes and procedures involved, and I agree to participate as a subject in this research project. I agree to participate in a one-and-a-half to two-hour focus group, which will be audio-taped and transcribed for research purposes. I will complete all necessary forms and questionnaires included in the procedures. I understand that I will have the opportunity to review the transcription prior to the release of the data for presentation, and I realize that the audiotape will be kept solely by the principal investigator. I also understand that I am assured of receiving feedback about the aspects of the study in which I participate. Moreover, if I desire more extensive debriefing related to my participation in this study, I understand that it will be made available to me at no expense.

Above all, I realize that my participation is voluntary, so I may choose to withhold information and/or withdraw at any time. I understand that all information that I do share will remain anonymous to all except the principal investigator conducting the study (whose name appears below). I also understand that there are no financial charges to me for my involvement.

__________________________________________  ________________
Signature of participant                        Date

__________________________________________  ________________
Signature of researcher                         Date
APPENDIX B

PEER DEBRIEFING SAMPLE
Focus Group - California
Ministers debriefing


RANDY (consultant): Well, it was, I think, a good mix of ages. Some guys have been in ministry a long time. Some younger guys agewise. I thought they had a little... They were a little slow warming up to. They talked a lot in theoretical terms I thought.

JACKIE: As opposed to practical?

RANDY: Well, as opposed to personal or kind of personalizing it. Although, you know, there were a lot of stories told. But I guess, you know, like this _____ kind of took it as more the professor more than... He approached everything in light of his students, you know, what they're experiencing. The groups seemed to interact well, enjoy each other.

JACKIE: _____ held back a long time. I think that, part of that may have been he wasn't sure about the confidentiality. He was concerned about some of the negative things he was going to say and because he came in later.

RANDY: Yeah, he missed the introduction.

JACKIE: It's hard to know how much to backtrack with ones who come in late. I hate to lose that time.

RANDY: It seemed like they chased some rabbits more than... They were getting off on minister, minister groups and stuff and other issues of support.

JACKIE: But not specifically from the congregation?

RANDY: Yeah. That related to more. They weren't as specific with, you know, here's what...

JACKIE: Well, I think they threw out some specifics in terms of cards and they just didn't spend a lot of time on specific support and affirmation.

RANDY: None of them talked about money really. Not in terms of support.

JACKIE: ____ kind of framed it as it's more the intentionality rather than the financial.

RANDY: But that wasn't in terms of the salary package, taking care of... That was more, you know, a bonus kind of thing.
APPENDIX C

SAMPLE MEMBER CHECK SUMMARY
California Laity Focus Group

The following list of categories emerged from the discussion of the focus group that occurred in April 1999 on the campus of Pepperdine University.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Categories</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Absence of support</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Financial</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Absence of</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Health benefits</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Home ownership</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Retirement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sufficient salary</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>From congregation</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Criticism (2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disrespectful of boundaries</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dissatisfaction with absences</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Isolation of ministers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Large size congregation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cautious regarding cliques</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Feel lost due to size</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Small size of congregation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Smaller pool of friends</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Loss of esteem (2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>From leaders/elders</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Criticism</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dismissal with no severance pay</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Basis for absence of support</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Origin with congregation</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Due to absence of esteem for minister</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Financial</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Contract viewed as detrimental to church (2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Diminutive income of church</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not considerate of impact of cost of living</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Minister placed on pedestal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mobility of congregation (2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Size of congregation (3)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Origin with leadership</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hidden agendas of leaders</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Model of leadership</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Basis for absence of support (cont.)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Expectations of minister</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Awareness of expectations</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Expectations changing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Impact on career choice</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Too high</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unrealistic due to multiple employers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Family</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Children — unrealistic standards</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wife — high expectations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wife leadership role (2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wife — no requirements</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Job expectations</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ambiguous</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Availability (2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clearer expectations with large congregation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Do everything — small congregations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Visitation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Relational</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Close to everyone</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Realization of needs (is human)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Identified support</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Congregational</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Banquet</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Church secretaries as buffer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Esteem</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Expression of appreciation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Familial</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Acceptance of children’s struggles (2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Realistic expectations for wife</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hospitality to minister (2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Minister appreciation month</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prayer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Financial support</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Benefits</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gifts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parsonage (2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sabbatical</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trip (2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vacation (2)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Identified support (cont.)

**Leader support**
- Advocacy by leaders
- Contracts (3)
- Educate congregation regarding boundaries
- Encourage professional development (2)
- Encourage speaking engagements (2)
- Treat as part of the team (3)

**Minister initiated**
- Day off
- Prayer group
- Sense of calling (4)

**Social support**
- Exchange with other preachers (2)
- Friendship (3)
- Meet with him as small groups

Manifestations

**Absence of support**
- Choose other careers (3)

**Dismissal**
- Lose church (2)
- Loss of friends
- Loss of relationships (4)

**Support**
- Improved sermons
- Persistence

Recommended solutions

**Minister**
- Be aware of motives
- Be clear regarding expectations in interview process (6)
- Communicate expectations
- Develop personal relationship with God
- Develop thick skin
- Identify desired ministry
- Learn to say no
- Persistence in profession of ministry

**Financial**
- Perks
- Vacation (2)

**For support from congregation**
- Appreciation expressed (3)
- Build up minister
Recommended solutions (cont.)

For support from congregation (cont.)
- Care for families by babysitting
- Have contract if in urban setting
- Have flexibility regarding expectations Hospitality to ministers
- Respect boundaries
- Social support
  - Encourage friendships with other preachers
  - Help with needs they don't have time for

For support from leaders
- Advocacy (6)
- Educate church on boundaries of minister
- Utilize other gifted people to fulfill expectations

I have read the above summary of categories and agree, to the best of my knowledge, they are indicative of the focus group in which I participated.

______________________________  __________________________
Name  Date

Please indicate the theological orientation of your congregation by placing an “X” on the following continuum. Briefly explain your rationale for identifying them in this manner.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Traditional</th>
<th>Moderate</th>
<th>Progressive</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

______________________________  __________________________

______________________________  __________________________

In addition, please indicate the theological orientation of your minister by placing an “X” on the following continuum. Briefly explain your rationale for identifying them in this manner.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Traditional</th>
<th>Moderate</th>
<th>Progressive</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

______________________________  __________________________

______________________________  __________________________
APPENDIX D

PROCESS OF DATA ANALYSIS

This appendix will demonstrate the process by which an idea articulated by a focus group participant is analyzed and emerges as a category written in a final report. Several statements will be highlighted on each of the following pages in order that the reader may follow their progression to the final compilation of a category.

Excerpt from Nebraska’s ministers’ focus group (pp. 1-2).

JACKIE: So that leadership is kind of a key in feeling that support?

: Sure, I think they really need to be.

JACKIE: Giving the support, I mean.

: Preaching in a congregation that didn't have elders when we came and never had elders. as a matter of fact, I think we probably only had one family that had ever worshipped in a congregation that had had elders, so that was almost a new concept when we installed elders in Norfolk. But I think God's guidance in the selection of leadership from the very beginning of a work can be crucial. Sometimes I think we wait too long to do that, but I believe that is where the support for the preacher, I think that is where the support for the congregation initiated. It initiates from Christ of course, but that's where it is carried out, and we have had in the 10 years, almost 11 years I have been in Norfolk now, we have had about half that time with elders, and I would sure hate to go back without it, you know, without that support that I get from them, and if you don't have that from the eldership, it is probably just as well to pack up and go anyhow, you know, if you can't get the leadership to back you, you are probably in the wrong place, I mean, not that they are always going to agree with you, but it is certainly is not where they will be, but--

JACKIE: What are some of the ways they manifest that support? You know, you were talking about sometimes they are behind you and sometimes they are not. What are some ways that you know about?

: Well, where the support was there, they would simply, I think, encourage me, and then they would go talk to the individual that seemed to be disgruntled, and, uh, with the intention of bringing together and finding out what the resolution might be, rather than just let something seethe.

JACKIE: Okay.

: You know, the Bible provides certain responsibilities when you feel like has (if we can use the word) sinned against you, as to how to deal with that, and oftentimes that
is never followed. You go talk to everybody else but not to the one that you have a problem with, and so, I think that has always been very good when the eldership would step in and say we are going, you know, going to deal with this, and you won’t have to be burdened with it. We will try to get it in a biblical way. Conversely where the leadership was not there, it was in kind of a unique situation, but a few young individuals actually put out information that had no truth at all in it, because they got upset about something, probably personal matters, and first thing you know, it was just totally out of hand and the place where I had been for a good number of years, the people who were supposed to be in charge, finally said, well, you know, we have good to do something to settle it. It looks like the easiest way would be for you to just move on. Which was one of probably the best things that happened to me, but (laugh) it should not have been done in that way.

JACKIE: Okay. So in one sense they kind of stepped in and said we are on your side, and--

_____: One the other side, we are on--. A few--well actually I think maybe 3 people were responsible for destroying a work that had been done for 23 years, and they were just were there for, you know, as college students and didn't even live in the community. and they would be gone. you know, in a year or two,
Problems - Preacher expendable
the preacher is the most expendable individual in the congregation, and that if you don't have good leadership, that what I call the "squeaking wheel syndrome" can take over, and that when somebody goes complaining, well, it's easier to get rid of the preacher than to deal whatever the problem may seem to be. (1)

where the leadership was not there, it was in kind of a unique situation, but a few young individuals actually put out information that had no truth at all in it, because they got upset about something, probably personal matters, and first thing you know, it was just totally out of hand and the place where I had been for a good number of years, the people who were supposed to be in charge, finally said, well, you know, we have good to do something to settle it. It looks like the easiest way would be for you to just move on. (2)

Problems - Lack of support from elders/leaders
both sides of that--one where I had no support from leadership and the other when the support was very excellent. One time I moved, and one time I didn't. I think it is imperative...the Lord knew what he was doing when he set the bishops as overseers of the flock, and the qualifications that he gave. We may not possess them all perfectly, but people need to be of that kind of character to deal with situations. (1)

most elders don't know either (how to support) or else don't know how to go about it or don't take the initiative. (3)

Power of a faction
go talk to everybody else but not to the one that you have a problem with. (2)

maybe 3 people were responsible for destroying a work that had been done for 23 years, and they were just were there for, you know, as college students and didn't even live in the community, and they would be gone, you know, in a year or two. (3)

Problem-focused
only when there are problems arise (with the minister) that anybody becomes concerned. If everything appears to be going okay, nobody raises any questions (3)

Pedestal - expectations - Assumption of spiritual health
I have never been asked on a job interview about my prayer life. Sometimes I have rarely been asked about even my marriage or family life in the interview process. Those are all assumed. (3)
Excerpt from Summary of Categories
Nebraska Ministers Focus Group

The following list of categories emerged from the discussion of the focus group that occurred in October of 1998 on the campus of York College.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Absence of support</th>
<th>Subcategories</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Familial – wives</td>
<td>Boundary violation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Burden of criticism of husband</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>High role expectations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Social acceptance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Financial</td>
<td>Benefits</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Housing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Vacation time</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>From congregation, due to</td>
<td>Church bashing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Expendability of preacher</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Lack of know-how</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Lack of respect</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Number of employers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Power of a faction</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Problem-focus of congregation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Unawareness of dynamics of ministry</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Unawareness of need for support</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>From leaders/elders, due to</td>
<td>Assumption of minister's spiritual health</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Lack of know-how</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Unawareness of dynamics of ministry</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Minister</td>
<td>Boundary violation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Contract - written</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Encouragement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Lack of calling</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>No voice</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Minimal longevity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Social acceptance</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Excerpt from Texas ministers' focus group (pp. 2-3)

_____ : Yeah, was not too supportive. And from there they simply said, "We want you to drop that immediately and if this is not taken care of, then we were going to ask that you be removed from the pulpit there." And so we got together and talked about it and the other two men called to visit with a couple of the elders and then we got another letter back in which they said, "We do not appreciate your lack of accepting our approach and therefore, Glen is to be no longer preaching for the church there in any form or fashion as within 30 days."

JACKIE: So, what aspects of support would you see that as? How would you label that? Obviously, financial is part of that. What other

_____ : Basically it was a total misunderstanding of how we were to work or how we were to That was never made real clear. They had really, when they had learned about our problem previously with the Southwest 36th Street congregation, they offered to get into the work and become involved. We were looking at some ideas over a building, but we didn't have a building and we had some contacts in Canada that were helping us with the building. And so that was what one of the elders in Moore was an architect and he offered to draw a plan for us there as a part of their efforts. He had sent us a copy of the plan and it was just - totally wouldn't fit our situation or our size or he didn't understand some of the things we'd need. And so I think maybe that all that added to this kind of situation.

JACKIE: So, I guess what I'm trying to do is break it down in terms of what types of support would you have seen that - obviously a lack of emotional support or I mean there's a lot of

_____ : There was certainly no emotional support involved in it and there was very little effort at good communication for what we were trying to do. And a very definite control kind of factor that we are going to decide on things to be done. As I tried to figure it out a little bit later and looking back over it, basically, it was the preacher at that point who wrote those letters and there were some by all the elders. But he, about 8 or 10 years later, I met him one time and he apologized to me and said, "I was the one who was all wrong in that situation. I did that and I wrote those letters and the elders simply just rubber stamped whatever I was saying."

JACKIE: I hear what some of the rest of you - What are some aspects of support or lack of support you've seen in your work in congregations?

_____ : Well, I guess I can speak next, since most of our work was done in northern United States or western United States, usually with small congregations, usually with troubled congregations that are often - had been splits in the backgrounds that we would go in and try to heal. But, with the exception of one or two congregations that I can think of,
Excerpt from the Texas Ministers' category “Absence of Support”

**Leadership**
**Absence of communication**
there was very little effort at good communication for what we were trying to do. (TM 3)

In terms of vital involvement in, I think, leadership, in decisions and then ultimately, I think that in terms of communication, communication broke down. (TM 5)

**Control**
Yeah, was not too supportive. And from there they simply said, “We want you to drop that immediately and if this is not taken care of, then we were going to ask that you be removed from the pulpit there.” And so we got together and talked about it and the other two men called to visit with a couple of the elders and then we got another letter back in which they said, “We do not appreciate your lack of accepting our approach and therefore, _____ is to be no longer preaching for the church there in any form or fashion as within 30 days.” (TM 2)

And a very definite control kind of factor that we are going to decide on things to be done. (TM 3)

**Exclusion from decision-making**
Probably. Like our last year and a half there, they were discussing whether I would continue there as the preacher for over a year and I wasn’t aware of it. And I would like to have been brought into that discussion. If there were pertinent issues that needed to be addressed, and somehow my interpretation, my understanding - There were pressures brought on them I think by a certain segment of the congregation that therefore, I could not be included in such discussions, and therefore, I was somewhat isolated and I think the whole staff was to some degree. And so there were forces that were at work that, you know, you’re not even aware of and then BOOM, it hits you. At that point, I really felt like the supportiveness in terms of understanding family wasn’t even there. (TM 6)

**Withdrawal of support**
But it is risky.(being vulnerable) (TM 12)

**Minister**
**Appreciation**
And I can talk about that because I preached for a church in a galaxy far, far away for almost 9 years and did not receive one penny raise in that 9 years. But I had a commitment there for my family. But preachers don’t move usually for money. They move for lack of appreciation. That would be my observation. And I say that on the analogy with coaches as well or parallel with coaches cause I see that as well in a lot of coaches. You know, they’re just not appreciated for what they do many times and there’s always someone wanting you fired, there’s always someone wanting you to stay. (TM 7)
Excerpt from Summary of Categories  
Texas Ministers Focus Group

The following list of categories emerged from the discussion of the focus group that occurred in February 1999 on the campus of Abilene Christian University.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Subcategories</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Absence of support</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Financial</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Housing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Salary (2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Leadership</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Absence of communication (2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Control (3)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Exclusion from decision-making</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Withdrawal of support</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Minister</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Appreciation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Burnout</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>Emotional</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Expectations of Numeric growth</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Friendships (2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Mixed blessing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Repercussions from sharing struggles</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
And the other guy was kind of caught as a pawn in between those two things, you know. I mean, it wasn't that serial, but at the same time, it wasn't, it wasn't what I've tried to create where I am now, you know, where very much there is... You know, really hit it on the head with the sense of team between elders and staff and even administrative staff. In all of our staff meetings, we share in prayer, we ask each other, you know, to pray for specific burdens.

JACKIE: There's less of a hierarchy there.

_____ : Yeah. In part of the...go ahead.

_____ : I was going to say, I've had experience on both extremes in two churches I've worked primarily with. In one when I first started there, the very first thing they said was, "We're going to have quarterly reviews of your performance." And that worked for a while until I really didn't enjoy it very much anymore and asked them if I could have quarterly reviews of your performance. Can I review you?

_____ : You didn't last long after that.

_____ : That didn't go over too well (group laughs). But, and the experience to me was so bad that I got out of the ministry for over a year. I mean it just soured me. I had no intention of going back, and then I had an opportunity to go where I am now in _____, and I talked long with the church. I said, "Look, what I want to do is I want to be part of this family." "I want to - the way I make my living is through preaching, but I want to be a church member here first and foremost and I intend to be here for thirty years or more." And they said, "Good, that's what we want," and we've developed that, and I've got an accountability group with guys in my church my age and a little bit older even. We get together on a weekly basis and even in between week, and we've got a good relationship. We play ball together, we, you know, we have small group studies in our houses, we just spend time together, and we confess our sins one to another faithfully.

_____ : I think there's a triangular way of thinking about this and one is that we need the support, we need the team concept of ministry first. And then I think we need peer support from other ministers in the area, people we can talk to. And then we need some kind of network in the church itself, connectedness to the church, so that there's mutual ministry going on there. If you have those three support structures in place along with family, of course, at the heart of all that, then I think you're, you know, in pretty good shape.
Excerpt from the California Ministers’ category “Absence of Support”

[Note for reader: At this point, I began keeping track of from which category the previous statements came]

Leadership (N, T)
Absence of communication (T 2)

Advocacy (N)

Control (T 3)

Exclusion from decision-making (T) No voice (N)

Expect payment of loan
I paid the full amount that I borrowed. (CM 14)

Hireling mentality
I think what I hear from students who go out into the field and are out there for a few years and the frustrations they have are at a couple of levels. One, is that in some of the churches that some of you - I’m going to speak to the negative side here for a moment - there is a hireling mentality, very business oriented, (CM 4)

So, I think that's a big frustration is the whole concept of ministry and whether it's a team ministry or whether it is a hireling kind of situation. (CM 4)

Must be asked for support
But I have a different feeling when I write my check to the U.S. government. And every time I write the check to the congregation, you know, that didn't appreciate me ... which is a strange thing in me. And part of it is, there's probably a lot of factors. I'm sure I'm guilty of a lot of things. But part of it was, it was I expected it and I wanted it and I laid out the, here's exactly how I want you to show that you appreciate me and (CM 14)

Performance reviews
I was going to say, I've had experience on both extremes in two churches I've worked primarily with. In one when I first started there, the very first thing they said was, "We're going to have quarterly reviews of your performance." And that worked for a while until I really didn't enjoy it very much anymore and asked them if I could have quarterly reviews of your performance. Can I review you? (CM 6)

Withdrawal of support (T)
Excerpt from Summary of Categories
California Ministers Focus Group

The following list of categories emerged from the discussion of the focus group that occurred in April 1999 on the campus of Pepperdine University.

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Final compilation of category of “Absence of Support”

ABSENCE OF SUPPORT

Familial – wives (N, C)
Boundary violation (N)

Burden of criticism of husband (N, C)

Extended family absent (C)

High role expectations (N, C)

Social acceptance (N)

Financial (N, T, C)
Benefits (N, C)

Housing (T)

Salary (T 2)

Vacation time (N)

Leadership (N, T, C)
Absence of communication (T 2)

Advocacy (N)

Control (T 3)

Exclusion from decision-making (T) No voice (N)

Expect payment of loan (C)

Hireling mentality (C 2)

Must be asked for support (C)

Performance reviews (C)

Withdrawal of support (T)
Minister (N, T, C)
Appreciation (T, C 2)
Attacked by previous minister (C 2)
Boundary violation (N)
Burnout (T)
Contract – written (N)
Emotional (T)
Encouragement (N)
Expectations of Numeric growth (T, C)
Friendships (T 2, C 3)
Friendship with other staff ministers (C 4)
Friendship with other C of C ministers (C 5)
Lack of calling (N)
Loneliness (C 2)
Minimal longevity (N)
Mixed blessing (T)
Repercussions from sharing struggles (T)
Social acceptance (N, C)

[note to reader: The subcategory of “expendability of preacher” was moved to the category of “Basis for absence of support.” From this point, the categories and subcategories were written in the dissertation in a narrative format.]
REFERENCES


Pierce (Eds.). *Social support: An interactional view* (pp. 319-366). New York: Wiley & Sons.


Pierce (Eds.), Social support: An interactional view (pp. 97-128). New York: Wiley & Sons.


