

As the chair of, or member of, P/SPRC have you ever sat down and thought about your pastor's vacation time and how it might differ from that of those in the secular workplace? The following is meant to help you start that thought process and to give you some things to begin to consider.

In the first place, your pastor's vacation time is probably more valuable to him or her than that of his or her parishioners. Why? Unlike church members, pastors don't have the option of "mini-vacations" on weekends. Church members are free to take any weekend and go to a ballgame, visit family, run to the beach, stay at the lakehouse, get caught up on projects, spend the day on the river, etc. If a pastor wants to do these, he or she must use up one of their vacation Sundays. It might be interesting to ask your P/SPRC members how many non-vacation weekends they took to do other things in the last year.

Further, pastors are limited in which times they can take vacation. Surely not during Lent-Holy Week-Easter! Christmas? No! "Can't that week...got a wedding." "Sorry, busy teaching confirmation those 3 months." "But, Preacher, that's the week of VBS, Salkehatchie, Relay for Life, the UMW Bazaar, the Men's Club BBQ, etc." A busy church calendar is a nightmare for vacation planning. No church member is expected to be at every event, but there seems to be an unwritten rule that the pastor must be present at everything. This is not only a problem with regard to vacations, but also a dilemma with everyday conflicting family events [Trustee Meeting or TeeBall Game?] But that's a topic for another time.

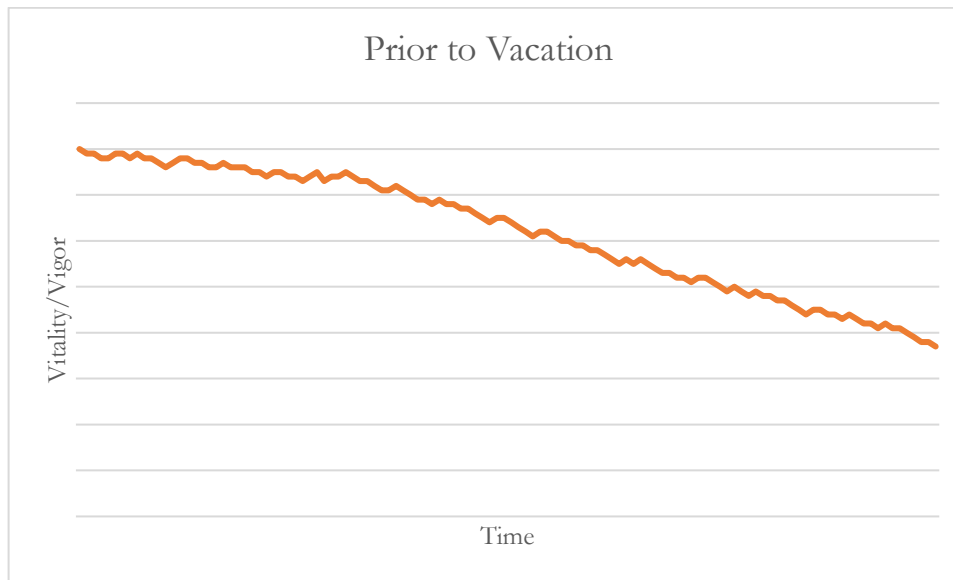
Have you ever stopped to think that your pastor never gets to sit with his or her mom on Mother's Day? Dad at Father's Day? Can't wake up with the grandkids on Christmas because they were doing a Christmas Eve Service? Has to take vacation to see their grandchild baptized? To attend their niece's wedding? Family events that church members do without thinking or using up vacation time.

To add insult to injury, many of a pastor's spouse's work and children's school holidays come around church holy days. So, their spouse and family are off, but the pastor must forgo taking advantage of that off time because of work. Yes, that is part of the job, but it makes coordinating time off all the harder.

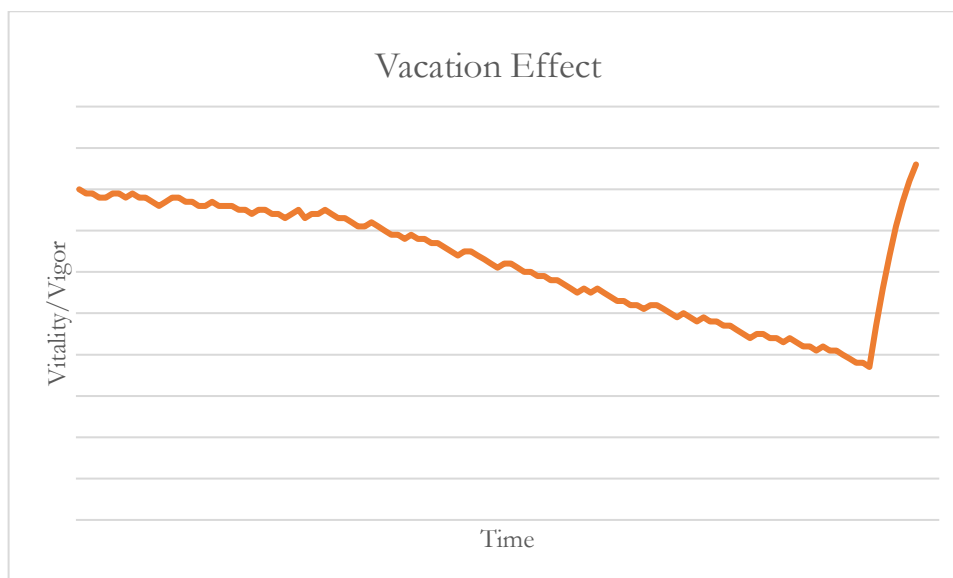
Have you ever noticed that your pastor's week of vacation does not equal a week of vacation for the average parishioner? For the church member, leave work on a Friday and don't worry about work for 9 days, two weekends and one work week. A pastor's "week" includes one Sunday. The best he or she can do is leave after church one Sunday, miss the next and be back at work on Monday. If you try to take your Sunday at the beginning of your vacation, you spend at least part of your vacation getting ready for the Sunday you return.

If all of the above weren't enough, your pastor probably further complicates things for him- or herself. At a secular workplace, the personnel manager monitors vacation and sick time and will let employees know they have to take their vacation time because the company doesn't want to pay them for working on top of vacation pay. Pastors are self-sacrificing, think they are indispensable, don't want to be criticized for not being there, and so are reluctant to take vacation. Sometimes, they actually need to be given permission to be absent. Do you know when was the last time your pastor went on vacation? When are they planning to go next?

Why should you care? If your pastor doesn't want to take vacation, why should P/SPRC care? Consider the graph below. The on-demand-24/7 nature of pastoral ministry can lead to slowly increasing stress in your pastor prior to vacation. That stress results in a loss of vitality/vigor (physical energy, mental acuity, spiritual health, emotional resiliency, etc.). Failure to take vacation can lead to physical, emotional, and mental issues which in turn lead to a reduction in pastoral leadership and effectiveness. In other words, if you want your pastor to be functioning at his or her best, they need a break! The very act of leaving town and feeling the burden of responsibility lifted can be a wonderful thing for your pastor.



Notice the next graph. It depicts the stress-relieving nature of a good vacation. Time away will hopefully reduce your pastor's stress to a point below where it has been in months. A renewed and refreshed pastor will be able to carry out his or her ministry with new energy and a fresh mind.



This, however, brings us to a very troubling topic—the interrupted vacation. Given all that has been said thus far, you can imagine the impact of a vacation that is delayed or cut short. In fact, our Annual Conference every year adopts the report of the Commission on Equitable Compensation which includes in Section R. Vacation Policy the following:

“Vacation” is meant as freedom from any responsibility in the local church or charge, district, conference area, jurisdiction, or general conference. Vacation should be a time of rest, recreation, and renewal. It should not be interpreted to mean time the pastor works at a church camp, is on a mission trip, a meeting of a general board, an agency of the conference, or a district retreat. Time away from the charge for annual conference and continuing education events shall not be considered vacation time. The charge shall make available as necessary the funds for pulpit supply while the pastor is on vacation.

A vacation that is delayed, cut short, or cancelled is in some respects worse than no vacation at all. Consider the planning, the waiting, the anticipation that has gone into a particular vacation. The pastor has waited past all the holy days, the special events at the church, and has found the one week he or she can take off with their spouse and family, and perhaps meet up with other family and friends. Word comes that a church member has died. Admittedly this is a tragic event and certainly devastating for that family. But does anyone stop to consider the impact on the pastor? Some examples:

**Scenario A.** It is Saturday morning and Pastor Joe is facing a day of last-minute preparations. He and his wife are planning to leave after church the following day to head to a vacation resort in the mountains where they will meet up with their youngest daughter and her husband and children for the first few days of the vacation. He has bought tickets to a nearby amusement park for them all to go on Monday or Tuesday. As he is driving to the store, he gets the call that a beloved church member has just died. The family wants to know if they can have the funeral late Tuesday afternoon or Wednesday morning. He agrees to Tuesday afternoon, even though it will be too late to travel by the time the service is over. He arrives at the resort just in time to say goodbye to his daughter and son-in-law.

“Preacher, just take a few more days next week.” Not possible, they were coming back on Sunday so that his wife could return to work. Nor would that replace the time with his daughter and her family.

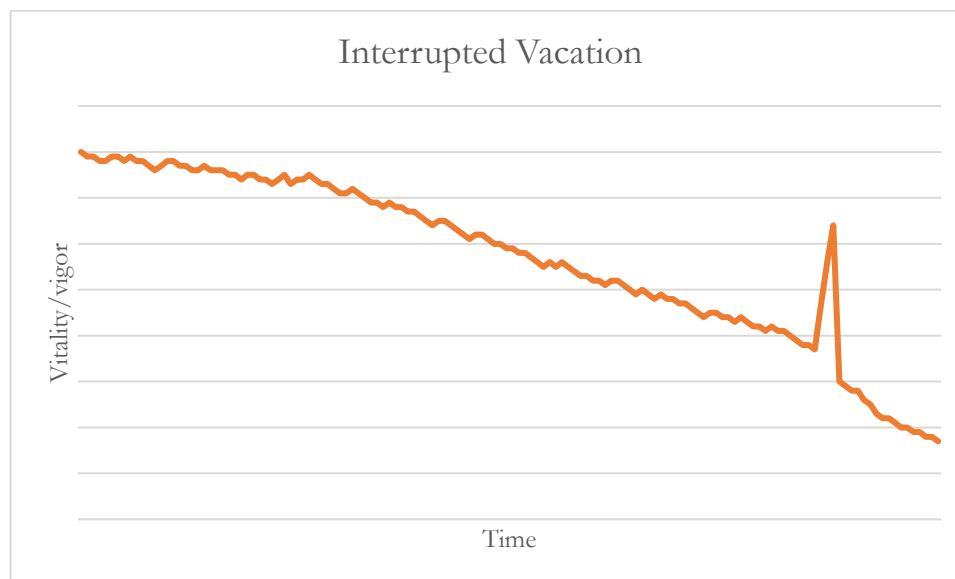
**Scenario B.** It has been a long and hard year and Pastor Mary has been looking forward to taking the week after Christmas and traveling with her husband and young daughter. On Tuesday she held the Christmas Eve Service and she has actually taken off two Sundays as her daughter doesn’t have to be back in school until January 2. They leave on Friday and travel all day to get to where her relatives live. After spending several days there, they head to Pigeon Forge, driving all day and arriving late on Monday to begin the vacation proper, planning to stay a week. She has booked their stay at timeshare using a week’s worth of points. At lunchtime on Wednesday she receives a call that a church member has passed. Despite her requests to delay the funeral until Monday, the

family insists on having it Saturday. Pastor Mary and her family pack up and head home on Thursday.

Scenario C. Pastor Mike was planning to take vacation after Easter and travel with his wife who would be on spring break from her teaching job. But this is 2020 and COVID hit. With the help of a capable church member, Pastor Mike has managed to create a viable online worship service. In early June, his church leadership begin contemplating a return to in-person worship in July. Pastor Mike feels he needs to be there when at least part of his congregation returns, so he does not plan for vacation in July. Plans are to begin worship in August so again he plans to remain home, but then those plans are delayed. His family returns to school, charge conference season begins, and then his leadership wants to resume in-person worship in October. In-person worship continues through November and they go back to recorded worship in December. He records a service for the Sunday after Christmas, and has a friend who will record something for the first Sunday in January. He had planned on leaving that Sunday after Christmas for Williamsburg, Virginia, and returning the next Sunday, but due to a mix up, his wife has to remain in town for an MRI on Monday. The plan is to leave on Tuesday and proceed to the timeshare in Williamsburg.

Since he cannot leave yet, Pastor Mike goes to his office to plan for the second Sunday in January. About midmorning he receives word that an inactive parishioner has died. The family is insistent that he conduct a graveside service at 2 in the afternoon in a city that is nearly 2 hours away. Pastor Mike calls his wife who agrees that driving all day to Williamsburg on Thursday and returning on Sunday is not worth the effort. When he hangs up the phone, Pastor Mike realizes that 2020 will end and he will not have had one day of official vacation.

The above scenarios depict the delayed, the interrupted, and the cancelled vacation. While the chart below depicts the interrupted vacation, the results of all three are basically the same – stress is now higher than before the vacation and rises more rapidly going forward consequently, vitality/vigor is at a new low and falling quickly. This is why it was noted earlier that a vacation that is delayed, cut short, or cancelled is in some respects worse than no vacation at all.



Why is stress now greater and increasing more rapidly? Obviously, there is the frustration of the interruption/delay/cancellation. Also, the full week of vacation was needed to reduce stress to that pre-vacation level, and that has not happened. Furthermore, there is that ongoing thought that that vacation has been lost. It is hard not to resent that.

If that weren't enough, there can also be the added burden of familial resentment. The spouse and/or children who have lost yet another vacation. Perhaps the vacation was an intensely needed time away to rebuild or nurture the relationship. Its loss can add fuel too an already overheated fire of discord. Of course, the pastor isn't about to share that with the congregation, or even P/SPRC, and certainly not the family of the deceased.

“Ok, so if a pastor's vacation is interrupted all we need to do to fix it is to say, ‘Pastor Ann, that week didn't count as one of your 4 weeks. Just take another week.’” As was noted near the beginning, scheduling a vacation around the church's calendar is extremely difficult. Even if another week could be found in the church's schedule, while the church may be willing to grant Pastor Ann another week, will her spouse's place of employment be so understanding? Will her children be out of school?

Which brings us to the last aspect of the delayed/interrupted/cancelled vacation. Even if by some miracle a new week is found, Pastor Ann's husband can take an extra week off, and the kids are out of school, where will the money come from to fund that vacation? In the Scenario A above, Pastor Joe forfeited more than \$500 in tickets and accommodations for his use. Also, he had the added expense of driving another vehicle to the vacation site. In Scenario B, Pastor Mary can not gain back those timeshare points and apply them to a new vacation. Booking a new week at that resort on website that handles such things would cost more than \$2000. Pastor Mike's lost accommodations cost more than \$1500 (and the family felt good about giving him \$200.) [By the way, in Pastor Mike's case the deceased was the only member of the family who was a member of the church. Think about that – non-church members just made an important decision about the ongoing effectiveness of Pastor Mike.] When a pastor delays, interrupts, or cancels a vacation there is often a monetary loss that is by no means offset by what the family gives for the funeral.

So, what can be done? Here are some suggestions:

1. Have a frank conversation with the leadership and the entire congregation about the importance of your pastor's vacation and pledge to protect pastoral vacations.
2. Make sure your pastor is planning vacations and taking them. Announce them to the congregation in advance so that people will know that the pastor is unavailable.
3. Consider a policy that says if a pastor's vacation is delayed/interrupted/cancelled that a minimum fee must be paid by the family and/or church.
4. Take up love offerings prior to a pastor's vacation, particularly if it is a “replacement” vacation.