Pastoral Vulnerability: Navigating the Nuance of Disclosing Clergy Mental Health Challenges

Rev. Dr. Mark Poindexter
Sarah Serrano, LCSW
Rev. Tracy Siegman
Angela Whitenhill, M.Div., LCSW
Importance of Clergy Disclosure

• Validates the experience of others
• Creates safe space for healthy vulnerability
• Builds foundation for true community
• Supports clergy authenticity and integrity
• Helps humanize clergy
• Supports teaching and modeling
Barriers to Clergy Disclosure

- Misconception that mental illness is a sign of spiritual weakness, failure, or demonic possession
- Misunderstanding of what vulnerability is
- Stigma: Mental illness requires a “whisper”
- Disclosure has potential to be used against us and our professional competency
- Lack of knowledge and education about mental health and illness
Types of Vulnerabilities

When In Need

When In Service
THEOLOGICAL BELIEFS
Sharing When in Need

1. Feeling Forsaken
2. Dark Night of the Soul “Jesus as Light”
   - Spiritual crisis as normal
   - Trust vs. understanding
3. Theology of the Unknown
   - Felt experience vs. yearning
4. Grace, Blame, and Causality
   - Understanding cause for treatment vs. blame
Sharing When in Service

1. Power of Testimony
   • Story of healing that brings healing

2. Humanization of Clergy
   • Allowing clergy to be more human than divine
   • Teaches healthy expectations

3. Modeling/ Spiritually Edifying Congregation
   • Using your platform of influence
   • Setting tone for healthy expectations
SHARING WISDOM
Closing and Q&A

Thank You!
Resources

NBA Mental Health Initiative
www.nbacares.org

Duke Divinity Clergy Health Initiative
https://divinity.duke.edu/initiatives/clergy-health-initiative

Wounded Healer: Ministry in Contemporary Society by Henri Nouwen