

saint mary's press

Letting Go *of the* Chaos

Ideas for

Addressing

Ministry-Related

Stress

Victoria Shepp

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Second, I want to thank Paulette, the person who helps me de-stress and who reads every word I write and challenges me to be the best minister I can be. I hope all people in ministry have someone like her to turn to.

Finally, I want to thank the youth ministry leaders who have sat around the table with me throughout the years—those who have helped me with my stress, those who have trusted me with their own stressful times, and those who identified the stressors addressed in this book. These leaders are why I wrote this book. They live and work “in the trenches,” and it is my hope that they will continue to do the great work they do, maybe with a little help from this guide.

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Introduction

Did you know that an online search using the key word *stress* generates about 290,000,000 results? We all know that too much stress can seriously affect our physical, mental, intellectual, and spiritual well-being. Simply put, stress affects all of us each and every day. We experience stress in our work, in our family lives, and, yes, even (or maybe mostly) in our faith lives. This is especially true for those of us who serve in ministry with the young.

Working with young people can be invigorating and joyful, but it can also be tiring and stressful. Too often those of us in ministry put aside our own needs for those of the young people we serve. We can forget the importance of finding time to renew our own minds, bodies, and spirits so we can continue to effectively minister to others. That's why we should always strive to control our stress before it controls us. The time and energy we spend managing stress will pay off in the long run by promoting health, happiness, and holiness in our lives.

How This Book Came to Be

A few years ago, I presented a workshop on creating balance in ministry. It revealed some of the stresses that many of us in ministry face. Two years after the workshop began, an idea for this book came about. In preparation for writing this book, I invited ministry leaders (volunteer and paid) to join me for what became a lengthy conversation about the stresses that so many of us face in the everyday happenings of ministry to and with young people. That gathering offered some great insights about ministry and stress, including what I consider four distinct areas in which stress and ministry overlap: emotional, physical, intellectual, and spiritual. These areas became the focus for this book.

How to Use This Book

The book is divided into four sections, each addressing one of the four areas mentioned above. Each chapter begins with a story or words of wisdom drawn from the Scriptures or a writing by a saint or modern-day Church leader. A short reflection follows to help you explore more fully the topic at hand. Each chapter also offers some questions for your consideration. You may either silently reflect on those questions, journal about them, or find someone to share your responses with. Each chapter also provides practical considerations and ways for you to work toward addressing (and hopefully conquering) the stress. These are simple, easy-to-achieve ideas. Finally, each chapter concludes with a simple prayer as a means for you to connect with God and ask for guidance in dealing with the stress in your ministry life.

You might consider reading the book from start to finish, or you might decide to come back to the book when a certain type of stress begins creeping into your life. How you choose to use the book's content is completely up to you.

Some Closing Thoughts

If you are like many youth ministry leaders (including me), you too have stress. I hope you can see past the stress and use the practical suggestions within this book to move beyond it. I don't guarantee a stress-free ministry, but I do hope this book helps you live beyond the chaos.

—Vikki Shepp

Section 1

Emotional Stress
