



For the **Life of the World**
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Pastoral Fitness under the Cross

Rev. Dr Albert B. Collver

Fit for Ministry

Rev. Dr. Harold L. Senkbeil

Devotional Diligence

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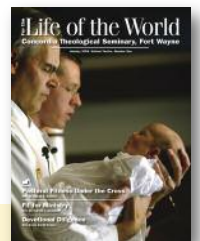
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Ranking at or near the top of a list of occupational hazards for ministers of the Gospel is succumbing to the tendency to treat Scriptures as an academic tool while neglecting its devotional use for the pastor's spiritual strength and well-being. Being "in the Word" includes more than our hands-on approach for preparing cogent sermons and Bible classes.

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Pastoral fitness begins with pastoral passivity. We hear much about pastors "burning out" under increased demands often coupled with confusion over what it is that pastors are to do. Are pastors mainly counselors, managers, public relations experts, or community organizers?



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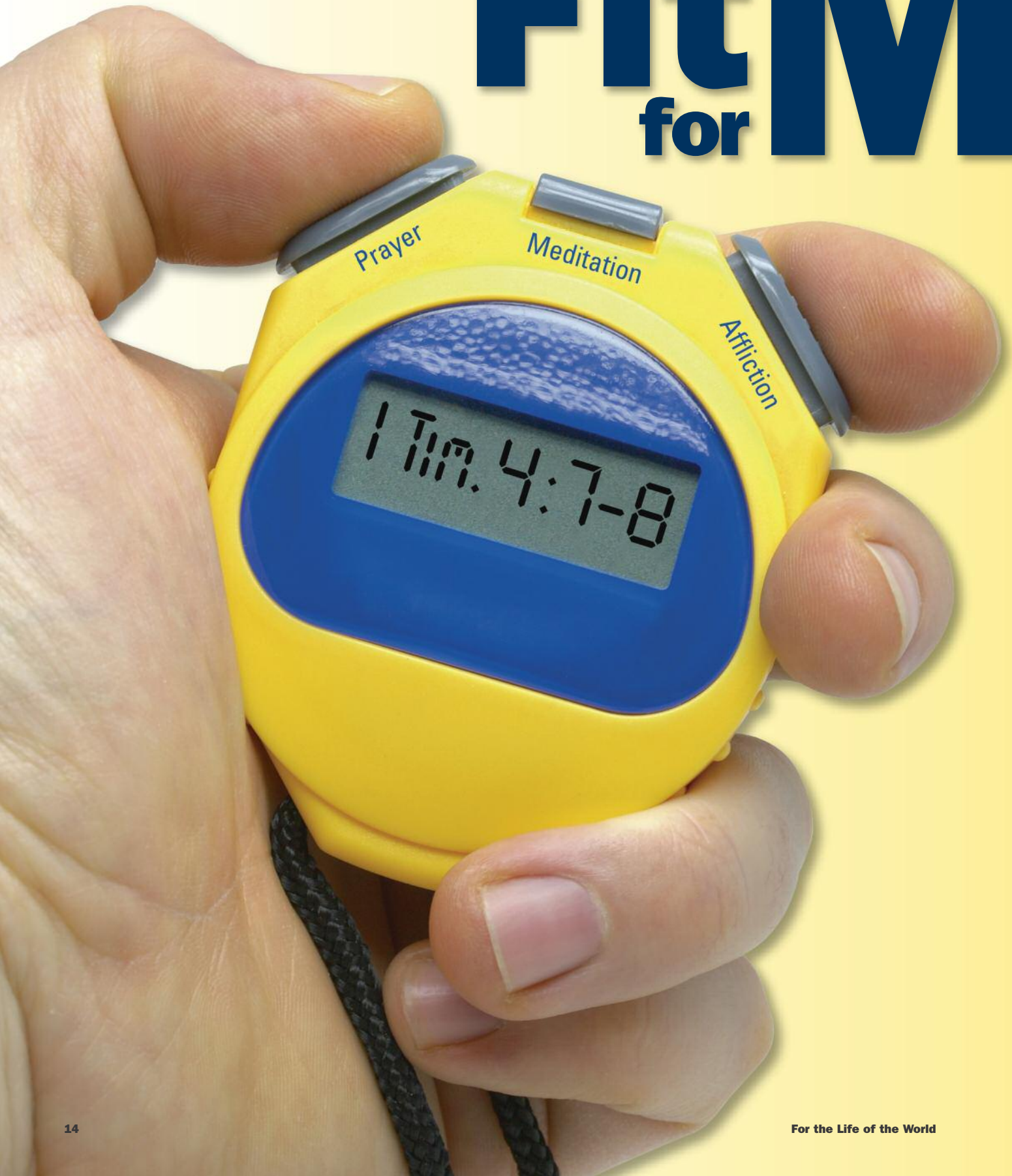
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FitM for M



ministry

By The Rev. Dr. Harold L. Senkbeil

The fitness craze is everywhere. And none too soon, by the looks of things. Evidence shows obesity running rampant throughout our society. And pastors are among the most vulnerable. Huge chunks of their time are spent just sitting around—doing important things, to be sure—but sitting just the same. The sedentary lifestyle, lack of exercise, and high calorie and fat intake is a recipe for looming health problems. Most pastors could stand to get off their chairs, lose a few pounds, and get in better physical condition. Even more importantly, they need to be spiritually fit.

Himself seasoned by spiritual struggle, the apostle Paul gave this counsel to his young protégé, Timothy: “... train yourself for godliness; for while bodily training is of some value, godliness is of value in every way, as it holds promise for the present life and also for the life to come” (I Tim. 4:7b-8).

Pastors may be God’s servants and stewards of His sacred mysteries, but they’re only human after all. They’re subject to the same temptations, spiritual and emotional struggles as everyone else. Like their parishioners, they too juggle the responsibilities of home, family, and work—24/7. Always on call, pastors must be ready to provide spiritual care to hurting parishioners on a moment’s notice. That kind of readiness calls for spiritual fitness. Yet all too often, while giving careful attention to the spiritual needs of others, pastors don’t practice

what they preach. Sadly, they neglect to maintain their own spiritual health and emotional equilibrium.

So how can pastors be spiritually fit?

Martin Luther’s paradigm for making theologians isn’t a bad model for spiritual fitness among pastors (and other Christians, too): Prayer, Meditation, and Affliction (spiritual struggle). The affliction takes care of itself. It goes with the territory in a fallen world. Where Christ builds His kingdom, Satan attacks with fury. It will always be tough sledding for those who seriously want to serve the Lord Jesus. Under such affliction, God’s grace is seen all the more clearly.

But prayer and meditation are quite another matter. These need ordered attention, especially in the frenzied world we live in. Meditation as Luther envisioned it is not just ordinary Bible reading, but slow, deliberate oral reading in which a particular text is read over and



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over aloud, pondering and mulling over those words deeply until they resonate not only in the ear but in mind and heart as well.

Then there's prayer. Prayer about anything and everything that may be weighing down the soul, to be sure, but especially prayer as answering speech in which the soul gives answer to what it hears in the living Word of God. In Luther's model, prayer is a wreath woven out of the strands of God's own Word. Therefore prayer starts with reflecting and echoing back what God says in a specific text of Scripture, thanking Him for what He gives or teaches there, confessing sins against that Word, then finally asking for what God commands or promises in that same text. Since Christ is present in His Word, this structured discipline of meditation and prayer provides strength and peace in the midst of on-going ministry, its inherent challenges and the ensuing emotional and spiritual turmoil it brings to the conscientious pastor.


But besides this vital spiritual self-care, pastors need shepherding too. Just as barbers need barbers or physicians need physicians, pastors need pastors. A brother or father confessor is important for the pastor's spiritual well being: a fellow pastor to whom he can go for spiritual help like pastoral conversation, prayer, or an absolution for his personal confession.

In order to advance spiritual fitness among pastors and provide them with advanced skills in counseling and the art of the cure of souls, a new Recognized Service

Organization of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod has been formed. DOXOLOGY, The Lutheran Center for Spiritual Care and Counsel, will provide training in a number of retreat settings around the country beginning in July 2008. A generous grant from the LCMS Board of World Relief and Human Care greatly reduces the cost of the program to participating congregations.

DOXOLOGY's program of study and reflection includes training in the classic art of soul care as well as insights from contemporary Christian psychology. The executive directors of the program are Dr. Beverly Yahnke, licensed psychologist and Director of Christian Counseling Services, Wauwatosa, Wisconsin, and Dr. Harold Senkbeil, Associate Professor of Pastoral Ministry and Missions at Concordia Theological Seminary.

The program also addresses parish support for pastoral work; one phase of the program trains laity in how the congregation can support its pastor in his vital work of providing them with spiritual care and emotional counsel.

To learn more and to access registration information, visit the DOXOLOGY website: www.doxology.us 

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