

From Your Bishop: HEALTHY LIVING

In 1747 John Wesley published "Primitive Physic" or "An Easy and Natural Method of Curing Most Diseases." It was first published anonymously and only thirteen years later did he place his name on it. In this book, Wesley gives sound medical advice to the everyday person. He offers treatment for everything from the bite of a viper or rattlesnake to scurvy and kidney stones.

Some of his advice is right on target. For example, he advises, "A due degree of exercise is indispensably necessary to health and long life."

Some of his admonitions sound a little strange, like, "the fewer clothes anyone uses by day or night, the harder he will be."



It is no surprise that the founder of the Methodist movement believed in the health of the mind, body, and spirit. In addition to his concern for the health of the body, Reverend Wesley had a love of scholarship as an Oxford graduate and a passion for practical piety as an Anglican priest. Just as there is no holiness that is not social holiness, there is no wellness that does not involve the whole person—mind, body, and spirit.

For Wesley, the love of God was the remedy to make us whole. In his medical advice, he wrote, "The love of God, as it is the sovereign remedy of all miseries, so in particular it effectually prevents all the bodily disorders the passions introduce, by keeping the passions themselves within due bounds; and by the unspeakable joy and perfect calm serenity and tranquility it gives the mind; it becomes the most powerful of all the means of health and long life."

Like Wesley, I believe we must be healthy in our mind, body, and spirit to be fully alive and well. For me, keeping that balance is not always easy. I find that one of these areas inevitably gets neglected with a busy work and family schedule. I can be exercising my mind and caring for my spirit and find my eating habits and exercise going astray. Perhaps that is why it is essential to have people around us that call us into account for our self-care.

Living in a community of accountability keeps us healthy and increases our faithfulness. Remember the first part of the Great Commandment? You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength. (Mark 12:30)

Fitness of mind, body, and spirit increases our capacity to love God. Last year during the COVID-19 pandemic, Wespeth, our United Methodist pension agency, conducted a Clergy Well-Being Survey to create a more empathetic community and environment for clergy and lay staff struggling with mental health. Research shows one of every five Americans (52.9 million people in 2020) experiences mental illness.

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The Wespeth survey showed a steady decline over the past decade in five dimensions of the well-being of United Methodist clergy: physical, emotional, social, spiritual, financial. Men, older clergy, black clergy, and clergy working in smaller churches are at higher risk of physical well-being issues. Women, younger clergy (especially those with children), and white clergy are at higher risk for emotional well-being issues. Lower-income clergy are at higher risk for both physical and social well-being issues. I recommend you study the detailed summary of this survey by clicking [here](#). In response to their survey, Wespeth is developing wellbeing resources for each of the five dimensions of a healthy life.

In March, a First Aid for Mental Health training will be offered at no cost to clergy and their spouses, church leaders, staff, and congregation members. It is OK, not to be OK. The goal is to help attendees accept their personal mental health struggles without embarrassment or shame. It is an important step toward improving our support for those struggling with mental health issues.

When I was a young pastor in my twenties, a 70-year-old church member told me, "If I knew I was going to live this long, I would have taken better care of myself." I laughed at the joke, but the advice stayed with me. I am now older than the member who gave me this advice, and I'm not getting any younger. Let me stop writing this article and get some exercise.