

Managing the Stress of Doing Too Much

Multi-tasking, the art of doing more than one task at a time, is quickly becoming an everyday reality. Inspired by internal and external factors, people of all ages are intrigued with commercial invitations and societal expectations to layer one encounter, event and activity with others of equal or greater importance. This basically sends our brains into overdrive and calls forth emotions that threaten our inner balance with an uneasy rush or striving for new levels of accomplishment.

Maria Puente, in a *USA Today* article, “Multi-tasking to the Max,” states, “If there’s a theme to the new millennium, it’s we can do it all—and manufacturers are busy coming up with gadgets that challenge us to do it all at once.” “And, for all of technology’s most earnest intent to conserve time,” Joanne Ciulla, author of *The Working Life: The Promise and Betrayal of Modern Work*, says, “it has just upped the expectations of what we can do in the same amount of time.” In fact, psychologists worry that multi-tasking is verging on a public health threat for the legions of the terminally busy. Some 43 percent of adults today suffer a variety of adverse effects from stress.

How your congregation can help

The church has a gift to offer people living in these days and times. Consider a few of the following ideas to share with leaders and members and friends of your congregation.

Publicize the image of your church as a sanctuary—a refuge, a place for rest and refreshment. Then, make sure it is.

- Pace your worship service to provide time for personal reflection and meditation. Provide music preludes, postludes and interludes that will enrich these moments. Or, try to include times of intentional silence.
- Consider your sermons and texts for the day to be vital entry points for nurturing healthy perceptions about faith and life. Help people of all ages to learn that God’s Spirit can help them restructure their priorities and manage their responses to the many events, relationships and experiences they encounter.
- Nurture a sense of confidence in the fulfilling, centering nature of faith. Be intentional about displaying Bible verses in worship bulletins, newsletters, on your bulletin board and Web site, such as “We are more than conquerors through him who loved us.” (Romans 8:37) Proverbs 3:5-6 and John 14:27 are also refreshing words of peace and assurance.
- Provide occasions for people of all ages to experience and observe concrete signs of love and forgiveness in your faith community. Try to teach practical skills and tips for nurturing occasions for grace in other times and places.
- Survey the congregation on a regular basis to see if there are special needs for small group support or for specific topics for youth and adult education, and start small group and educational conversations about how members can assess and simplify lifestyles.
- Encourage people to incorporate Psalm 46:10 moments into their days and time. Promote books and devotional materials to enrich individual and family occasions for meditation and prayer.
- Nurture a pastoral sense of community in your congregation. Promote mentoring relationships for people in a variety of life situations or transitions, such as incorporating actual occasions for conversation during a sermon to process or interpret a specific point immediately. You might also promote specific ministries to embrace practical needs that arise, such as single or older adult “pew buddies” to sit with parents with multiple young children or special “friends” to walk with people who are going through common challenges.
- Remind your leaders that everyone has a depth within them that longs to be filled. We are all looking for inner peace. It is the unique privilege of the church to provide occasions for the Spirit to fill us with the enduring love, joy, peace, and hope that only God can give.

Miriam Campbell is ELCA associate director for Christian education, children and family ministries.