

# SOUL *Care* Amid a Pandemic

By Susana Castro

Psalm 42 is a precious portion of God's Word. Here the psalmist opens his soul and allows us to see his reality and emotions: exhaustion, sadness, anguish, loneliness and a crisis of faith. What a contrast to our expectations from a servant of the Lord! Amid the pandemic, many of our Latin American leaders have experienced similar circumstances and deep emotions.

Self-care is a critical area of a pastor or church leader's life (See 1 Timothy 4:16, Acts 20:28 NIV). Yet, it is often underdeveloped. The leader's passion for Christ and dedication to ministry can easily cause imbalance. As pastors care for others daily, they and their families often are depleted and sometimes neglected. In many cases, the pandemic has accelerated unhealthy rhythms and established instability as a norm. As a result, our leaders face increasing stress, fatigue, fear, exhaustion, discouragement and illnesses of body, mind and soul.

In response to this reality, the Pastoral Care team in Latin America organized a four-hour seminar on self-care for pastors throughout the region. In February, 284 pastors and 93 church leaders connected to receive practical tips from professional pastors and counselors. Participants acknowledged their personal and familial needs are often the second or third priority. Many admitted they don't have deep relationships with people who can walk with them in difficult times.



As a result, mission-district leaders and conference superintendents realized the need to serve their pastors more intentionally. Today, more people are enrolling in pastoral care groups, allowing us to walk alongside and support one another on this ministerial journey. Within two hours after the seminar, I received calls from two pastoral couples asking for help in delicate situations. Both recognized they had neglected their personal lives for the "good of the ministry."

Many have thanked us for prioritizing this event. The seminar leaders provided practical tips such as implementing short rest times and active breaks, eating a well-balanced diet, incorporating recreation into our routines, and more. These simple strategies often are overlooked, but our follow-up shows many pastors are now incorporating these things into their daily life. Seminars such as this and our biweekly Pastoral Care Groups (similar to Wesleyan Bands) are key components as we participate with God in the restoration of Latin America by developing healthy leaders, multiplying committed disciples and empowering transformational churches.

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