Southdown

September 29, 2026

The Person who Ministers



Emotional and relational wellness for priests

Four recordings, two workshops

Emotional wellness: two segments of 25–30 minutes

Relational wellness: two segments of 25–30 minutes

Pause between recordings; questions close each segment

A recorded room with real people

Use fictional cases in public discussion

Private reflection never requires disclosure

Personal health or safeguarding questions belong off recording

EMOTIONAL WELLNESS

Culture, stress, and the inner life

Recording 1 • 28 minutes

EMOTIONAL WELLNESS

The parish now reaches the priest everywhere

An urgent message arrives on the only evening off

A public comment demands an immediate reply

The phone makes every need feel equally near

EMOTIONAL WELLNESS

One evening, three losses

Three funerals this week. A council meeting ends badly.

At 10:45 p.m., a parishioner texts: “You never listen.”

The priest begins a sharp reply.

EMOTIONAL WELLNESS

Stress changes the field of attention

Urgency becomes more salient

Working memory and flexible appraisal may narrow

The first interpretation can feel certain

Between event and response

Event: the critical text

State: grief, fatigue, anger, bodily tension

Story: “They do not respect me”

Emotion carries information

Anger may point toward a violated value

Shame may turn a mistake into a judgment on the self

Neither feeling decides the next action

Notice: What is happening in my body?

Name: What feeling and story are present?

Next: What action fits the facts and my vocation?

EMOTIONAL WELLNESS

Return to the 10:45 p.m. text

What requires action tonight?

What can wait until the priest has slept?

Whom could he consult before answering?

Questions after recording 1

Where does urgency most often outrun judgment?

What helps you notice your state before you respond?

How might the priest distinguish a real emergency from a felt urgency?

EMOTIONAL WELLNESS

Regulation, grief, and knowing when to seek help

Recording 2 • 28 minutes

Slow the pace of an urgent decision

Let the exhale become gentle and unforced

Ask what the situation needs from you

EMOTIONAL WELLNESS

What grief can look like in ministry

Irritability after another funeral

Numbness after a parish closure or transfer

A quiet loss of a hoped-for future

EMOTIONAL WELLNESS

Shame can drive overwork

“If I stop, they will see I am inadequate.”

More work briefly relieves the fear

Exhaustion then makes the fear harder to question

EMOTIONAL WELLNESS

Burnout is not a complete diagnosis

Work-related exhaustion and distance matter

Depression can reach beyond the ministry setting

Grief, sleep, substances, and illness may overlap

EMOTIONAL WELLNESS

When to seek professional help

Symptoms persist or functioning deteriorates

Alcohol or compulsive coping becomes a refuge

Hopelessness or thoughts of self-harm emerge

EMOTIONAL WELLNESS

The person is embodied and called

Sleep and food are conditions of human attention

Prayer can hold truth without requiring performance

Grace invites freedom within an actual human life

Where did I act with freedom today?

Where did I become defended or depleted?

What belongs in prayer, conversation, or treatment?

EMOTIONAL WELLNESS

A plan for the next seven days

One transition pause after demanding ministry

One honest conversation with a chosen person

One request for practical help or protected rest

Questions after recording 2

What makes receiving care difficult for priests?

Which concern calls for spiritual, peer, or professional help?

What signs suggest that self-care alone will not be enough?

RELATIONAL WELLNESS

Belonging, authority, and boundaries

Recording 3 • 28 minutes

Being needed is not being known

A full diary may still leave a priest lonely

Parishioners often meet the role before the person

Mutual friendship requires another kind of relationship

Three relationships, three purposes

Pastoral care serves the other person’s need

Friendship permits mutual disclosure and reciprocity

Treatment and spiritual direction have defined roles

RELATIONAL WELLNESS

The collar changes the room

A parishioner may idealize or fear the priest

Disagreement can feel costly to a staff member

Consent and warmth do not erase unequal authority

RELATIONAL WELLNESS

A boundary is a pastoral intervention

Clarify purpose and availability

Choose a setting and channel others can understand

Arrange continuity when the priest steps back

Why are we in contact?

Whose need is shaping its frequency?

Would the arrangement withstand honest review?

Who can help me consult before it deepens?

RELATIONAL WELLNESS

The late-night confidante

A grieving parishioner messages her pastor nightly

He feels uniquely understood and hides the frequency

She has no other support arranged

A responsible response

Acknowledge her grief and define a contact plan

Connect her with suitable ongoing support

The priest addresses his loneliness elsewhere

RELATIONAL WELLNESS

Digital ministry adds new cues

Private messaging can hide frequency and intensity

Screens make late-night access feel ordinary

Documentation and agreed channels protect everyone

Questions after recording 3

Where does helpful availability become dependence?

How can a priest secure care without carrying it alone?

What support lets a priest set a boundary without abandoning care?

RELATIONAL WELLNESS

Conflict, fraternity, and shared responsibility

Recording 4 • 28 minutes

Correction can feel like threat

A critical comment brings bodily defensiveness

The priest’s intention becomes the first defense

The other person’s experience then goes unheard

RELATIONAL WELLNESS

A repair conversation has an order

Name the observable action

Acknowledge its impact without demanding forgiveness

Ask what was missed and what must change

One person plays a priest after a tense meeting

The other gives a fictional, specific criticism

Practice acknowledgment before explanation

RELATIONAL WELLNESS

The council meeting

A staff member says: “You decide before asking us.”

The priest remembers three urgent decisions

What can he own before explaining the constraints?

RELATIONAL WELLNESS

Fraternity needs more than goodwill

Meet regularly beyond parish logistics

Ask permission to name signs of withdrawal

Know how to help a brother find professional care

What is giving you life?

Where are you carrying more than you can name?

What help would you accept this month?

RELATIONAL WELLNESS

The diocese also has work to do

Make relief and consultation predictable

Offer confidential routes to assessment and treatment

Do not reward unsustainable availability

RELATIONAL WELLNESS

One decision to carry home

A person I will call

A boundary I will clarify

A conversation I will repair

Questions after recording 4

What would make fraternity credible in this presbyterate?

What action can begin this week?

What can a deanery change so help-seeking is easier?

Questions for personal reflection

When do I mistake felt urgency for a call to act now?

What loss or strain have I left unnamed?

Who knows me beyond my priestly role?

What boundary or conversation would protect my freedom?

Questions for a deanery or presbyterate

Which demands on priests can our community change?

How do we make honest feedback and repair possible?

What shared norms should govern private digital contact?

How can a priest seek care without fear or isolation?

Sources and further reading

CFPC/NFPC, A Practical Guide to Priestly Wellness, pp. 27–35

Arnsten (2009); Lieberman et al. (2007); WHO ICD-11

Pastores Dabo Vobis (1992); Holt-Lunstad et al. (2010)

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