

# Self-care in ministry

*Guidance notes on how to use the handbook at home*



Hello! I am John Truscott and I am so sorry not to meet you in person at your Easter School this year. But what I have done is to take the handbook I would have used with you and which you will have as a separate document, and then added these guidance notes to help you make the most of the material. A lot of this is backed up by items on my website so there is plenty of resource material you can access! I am also hoping to prepare three video introductions, one for each of the three sessions.

If you want to talk to me privately about anything in these notes here are my contact details.

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I work as a self-employed consultant, trainer and writer for churches and call myself a 'champion of creative organisation'. I cover leadership, management, structures, planning, communication and administration. I'm an enthusiast for innovative ways of looking at how we organise our churches, seeing this very much as spiritual ministry. And as part of this I train clergy and prospective clergy in how to administer themselves in such a way that they can devote themselves more fully to what should be their priority ministry. Hence these sessions. I hope you find them, yes, exciting! I cannot communicate my enthusiasm for this material in print as well as I can in person, but let's see what I can achieve in these notes.

If you want to know more about me see <https://www.john-truscott.co.uk/Biography>.

For the second session (B) on stress please be aware that I am not a medical specialist but have learned much from those who are and have checked my material carefully with them. I am however an analyst and have the privilege of discovering the hidden truths of many churches when I act as a consultant. So much of my ministry involves helping people to so order their lives that levels of stress can be lessened.

## My website

There is plenty of material on my website that relates to this theme and both the handbook and these accompanying guidance notes refer to particular items. Let me explain briefly what you will find.

If you go to <https://www.john-truscott.co.uk/> and then to the Resources section you will find:

### **Articles (with codes A1-A47)**

These are detailed pieces on major themes, up to 10,000 words.

### **Training Notes (with codes TN1-TN122)**

Shorter items, max 2,000 words, sometimes in lists or bullet point format.

### **Health-checks (with codes HC1-9)**

Three detailed tools for churches, mission agencies and individuals.

You will also find a **Topics index** which you might find helpful, in addition to an **Alphabetical index** and six other indexes for issues to do with leadership, management, etc.

Each individual page takes the form of a synopsis of the item in question and then a link to the pdf. Everything is free of charge unless you want to make more than 30 copies of any one item.

Please ask to come on to my mailing list and you will then get a bimonthly email from me telling you about new items just uploaded to the Resources section. To join the list simply fill in the online form at <https://www.john-truscott.co.uk/Contact/Contact-John> or you can just email me with your Christian and surname and email address and ask to come on to my e-letter list. You can add your church if you wish.

## **This event**

I have adapted this from material I might use with clergy on various topics: time management, desk management, stress management, etc. I have angled this particular day on self-care in the pressure of ministry.

There are three sessions. Each one has its own dynamic and would normally last about 90 minutes. I suggest you set aside at least an hour for each. Then add your group discussions and Q/A.

### **A: Big picture thinking.**

The secret to handling ministry pressure is not to learn to multi-task, but to be self-aware and to understand what the ministry you are being ordained into is all about. Get the big picture right and everything else can then slot into place.

### **B: The stress of church leadership**

We need to understand what stress (or, rather, 'distress') is and how it impacts us as people. Then we can put together some ways to reduce that stress in ministry so we can take control (under Christ) of our own lives, rather than letting other people control us as can easily happen.

### **C: Six key ideas to reduce stress levels**

Here are six specific tools for clergy to enable you to reduce stress levels and live an ordered life. But these only make sense once you have your big picture worked out. Hence these three sessions complement each other and need to be seen together.

## Session A: Big picture thinking (page references relate to the event handbook)

### Exercise

Draw four circles on a sheet of paper to represent

- 1 Your life as a human being
- 2 Your church ministry (either now or once ordained)
- 3 Your discipleship as a follower of Jesus Christ
- 4 Your employment (for those who have a part- or full time job)

The circles you draw may have meaning in their relative size and in their position: whether they overlap or some are contained within others. What that meaning is is up to you.

What does your picture tell you about how these four angles on your life relate to each other? You may want to ponder on and to revise your picture as you work through this material.

### A1: A typical planning process (study page 1 – this is about the circle of your life)

You might like to read Article A4 on my website (accessed from <https://www.john-truscott.co.uk/Resources/Articles-index/Twelve-questions-to-help-you-plan>) but note that that is written with a church in mind. The notes for this session relate the same questions to yourself, your life, and that is a bit different.

Ponder each question slowly and in turn. So, Q1 asks for your passionate desire for your life – be aware that church ministry can drain passion for both your life and your ministry. NB Remember that each of these questions is about your *life*, not your ministry. You are more important than your ministry!

After about ten minutes, consider and complete the box at the bottom of the page.

### A2: Using the Ordinal (study page 2 – this is about the circle of your ministry)

We now move from the circle for your life to the circle for your church ministry. I have simply taken the priests' ordination service and regrouped it and written it out in something more like a list of priorities. You can read a fuller version of this page at Training Notes TN78 at <https://www.john-truscott.co.uk/Resources/Training-Notes-index/The-role-of-a-church-leader>.

Meditate on each of the nine headings. Excite yourself with what your future ministry (if being ordained) will be all about. How can you keep this big picture before you at all times when the daily detail crowds in and pushes the big stuff out? Read Acts 6:1-7 to see what the apostles had as their priority (and check out Training Notes TN112, *Set my leaders free*, for more on this).

Ponder on the words (near the top of the page): servant, shepherd, messenger, watchman\*, steward. (\* This is the term used in the service.)

What does this page tell you about ministry now or in the future?

What can you do in practice to stop the detail stifling these priorities?

### **A3: A reflection on time** (study page 3 – this is about the circle of your discipleship)

This is another ponder page. Work through the 10 points as a prayer, asking God to show you what he has to teach you on particular ones. Look up the four Bible references and pray those lessons in.

What is the main thing you have learned from this page?

### **Exercise**

Find an Ordnance Survey map (or a street plan of a town) and also a road atlas or map of the UK. The first is all about detail, so study it for a minute to see what kind of detail you can discover. The second is about big picture so study it to see what it shows you that the OS map does not and vice versa.

Relate these to this session. Most churches live in Ordnance Survey mode most of the time: planning the detail of next Sunday or today's 'To Do' list. But that makes no sense without the bigger picture of the road atlas so you can see where the detail is located. This has been a road atlas session.

What does this teach you about your life, your ministry, your discipleship and your employment?

### **Your group discussion on Session A**

- QA-1 What one thing have you found that has most challenged you from this session?
- QA-2 What one thing have you found that has most encouraged you from this session?
- QA-3 What one action do you now want to take to apply this session to your life and ministry?
- QA-4 What does your four-circle diagram look like and have you changed it at all after this session?

### **Session B: The stress of Christian service**

Most of this session comes from Training Notes TN67 on my website:

<https://www.john-truscott.co.uk/Resources/Training-Notes-index/Stress-and-the-Christian-worker>

I suggest you read that along with the course handbook to give a slightly more detailed picture.

### **Exercise**

Think for a few minutes and then write down three things that distress you about the current Coronavirus pandemic. Spend a few minutes in prayer for these.

How honest are you about what gets your goat in life, ministry, discipleship and employment: (a) with your church, (b) with your closest family/friends, (c) with yourself, (d) with God?

## B1: Stress or distress (pages 4,5)

The point here is that 'stress' of a certain level is necessary for wellbeing. It is good for us! God has made us that way. So I use the word 'distress' for the level that is too high.

Work through the notes and do Google 'Holmes and Rahe stress test' when you get to that point and check out the kind of scores they give for different types of situation. But some of those scores could vary enormously between different people and in different ways, so don't take them too seriously! But the basic point holds. What distresses us is when we hit several stressors at the same time and the one that flips us may be quite minor. Think back to the exercise with the circles: you may have a family bereavement (a life stressor), a crisis of faith (a discipleship stressor), a major deadline at work (an employment stressor) and then hit a major safeguarding issue at church (a ministry stressor). If you can just cope with that lot (!) it only needs your cat to get ill (or whatever) and you collapse.

Spend some time on page 5 and think through each one in the list. Do you want to add up to three more? Which one or two are issues now – or do you see as issues likely to apply to your future ministry?

## B2: Signs of distress (page 6)

Work through this page and answer the questions shown there. Then complete the box at the bottom of the page. If time read Article A25 which you will find at <https://www.john-truscott.co.uk/Resources/Articles-index/Working-from-home> and note in particular the first section. Which of the four categories there describes you?

## B3: How can you reduce distress? (page 7)

You cannot get rid of most of the things that life and ministry will throw at you (such as the list above for B1), but you can train yourself to manage your life to increase your ability to cope with such distress. There are nine suggestions (plus a note in No. 10 of the session to follow this one). Which two might be ones you could work at? How – what can you do now to help? What ideas do you have to add to the list?

Consider the 'Biblical stress' heading at the bottom of the page. Read quickly through the early chapters of Mark's Gospel and notice the pressure of ministry that Jesus had to cope with (actions follow one another in quick succession, there is a pressure).

Another idea would be to quickly read through 2 Corinthians which is the epistle that most deals with stress. Look in particular at 2 Cor 4:7-12 and 11:28-. Notice what Paul had to cope with in life and be grateful that your stressors are unlikely to be anything like his!

## Exercise

Prepare a short 'Holmes and Rahe table' for your own life, perhaps with a simplified scoring of 1 to 10 where 10 is real distress and 1 is just minor inconvenience. Aim to list the higher scoring issues. Some may be ones that HR tables already show (such as Christmas, or bereavement), some may be

specific to your present or future ministry (preparing and giving a sermon, taking a funeral), some may relate to the present Coronavirus pandemic (home-schooling the kids, loneliness in isolation).

## Your group discussion on Session B

- QB-1 Share what silly things distress you – and realise that we are all weak. For example, I hate anything going wrong: WiFi, the car, the printer, anything to do with plumbing.
- QB-2 What practical means of coping can people suggest for items in the list on page 5?
- QB-3 What might you each put in the box at the bottom of page 6: ie. organisational ways in which you tend to go to pieces when under too much stress?
- QB-4 Which of the list on page 7 do each of you find really works well for you?

## Session C: Six key ideas to control stress

This final session gives you six tools you might like to use to help you look after yourself in stressful situations. These are all about self-organisation and I might cover these and similar ideas on a time management day. Your aim should be to find two or three of these that might well work for you if you are not already using them. So expect to find one or two that do nothing for you. We are all different!

### C1: Planning retreat (page 8)

This is written up in more detail at Training Notes TN54 at <https://www.john-truscott.co.uk/Resources/Training-Notes-index/Creating-space-for-a-Planning-Retreat>. If this idea appeals to you, and I regard something of this kind as essential for any Christian leader, complete the box on page 8. Note: this is **not** quite the same as a normal Retreat.

Don't copy me but I take about six days away in a minute cottage in Shropshire near the Stiperstones each August. My wife rather enjoys having a week to herself and says I come home a nicer person. I take all my work documentation with me (diaries, lists of assignments, time sheets, etc.) and carefully analyse the past year, praying on long walks each day what this shows, and then planning for the future. I have found that every change in direction in my ministry has come about through one of these weeks. Sometimes a seed is sown one year, pondered on for the next 12 months, and then seen to fruition the next August. Before I go I feel I cannot afford the time, but I am always so glad I went.

### C2: The art of saying 'No' (page 9)

This is written up in more detail in Training Notes TN84 at <https://www.john-truscott.co.uk/Resources/Training-Notes-index/How-to-say-No-when-you-should>. If you find it hard to say 'No' you may prefer to read this up on the website in its slightly fuller form.

This is why we did Session A on the big picture. If you don't have that absolutely clear, you have no criteria for what you should do and what you should not. Some clergy love to say 'Yes' to every request and are then hopelessly overloaded. Don't pander to pride and jump to everyone else's ideas of your life and ministry. Think carefully for when Jesus said 'No'.

### C3: The 'To Do Diary' (page 10)

This is an idea that many clergy have told me has transformed their ministry. The idea is to take the basic concept of a 'To Do List' and diarise it, so that you go to bed every night with everything done or transferred to another day. This gets you completely away from the guilt many feel at a list which they never complete. I do this on a paper diary and find that physically writing things down is more effective than any digital tool. But you may be different and many apps can be made to work in the way I describe.

Again, this is written up in more detail at Training Notes TN23 at <https://www.john-truscott.co.uk/Resources/Training-Notes-index/How-to-do-To-Do-lists>.

### C4: A monthly calendar (page 11)

This is what feeds into the 'To Do Diary'. The idea is to have a reminder for major tasks that need doing for each month of the year. So you have 'Plan Christmas' down for September rather than December! This does not have a write up in detail on my website yet – but I mention the idea in TN23 above.

Try listing your aims for the next six months or a year in the box on the page.

### C5: Asking others to help you (page 12)

This may apply more to incumbents than curates or those at college but it is worth getting the idea into your head at this stage. Read the page through and complete the box at the bottom.

### C6: Planning for interruptions... (page 13)

Complete the first two boxes for yourself. I need to explain the third box.

If you operate my idea of a 'To Do Diary' then there is nothing to stop you diarising time for yourself, your family and for God, if you find that helpful. If someone asks you to a meeting in a family time session, you look at your diary and explain you are already booked then.

Many do this, but what many do not do is to allow diarised time for pack/unpack. What I mean about this is as follows. You have a PCC meeting, a School Governor's meeting, or a staff meeting. You need to diarise 'pack time' for this by which I mean preparation. You need time to get the papers together, to remind yourself of each item, to study any papers, to check you are prepared.

But then, after the meeting, you need 'unpack time'. There will be papers to file, messages to convey, actions to diarise. If you don't diarise time for this you dump all your papers on the desk and do nothing. The next day more get dumped on top of them, and so on. So any meeting needs both pack and unpack time in the diary or you get in a real mess.

For more on interruptions, see Training Notes TN62 at <https://www.john-truscott.co.uk/Resources/Training-Notes-index/Know-what-distracts-you> and for time off see Training Notes TN106 at <https://www.john-truscott.co.uk/Resources/Training-Notes-index/Talk-about-taking-time-off>.

## Your group discussion on Session C

- QC-1 (C1) Find out who has something like a Planning Retreat (note this is not just a normal Retreat) and ask them how it has helped them in life and ministry.
- QC-2 (C2) Between you, see if you can make a list of reasons why many of us find it so hard to say 'No'. Try not to look up the list in Training Notes TN84.
- QC-3 (C3/4) Share details of apps that different people use to help diarise not only appointments but work too, both major and minor reminders. Some Ministers find it better to do a 'To Do Diary' by week rather than by day. Does anyone do this and with what impact?
- QC-4 (C6) How might the idea of pack and unpack time work out for each of you? Give examples and work out what each of these might mean in practice.

## Action plan

Read page 14 and diarise (!) an hour within the next week to fill this in. You will get far more out of this session if you return to it within a week, reread all the notes and check out your discussions and the Q/A. If you don't do this, much will disappear into the ether....

Thanks so much for taking part in this. The handbook is written of course assuming my leading it all and dealing with questions as they arise. But I hope these notes have enabled you to use the material at home in an effective way.

Don't forget to sign up for my mailing list if you would like to know as new items get uploaded to the website (usually just about 1<sup>st</sup> February, April, June, August, October and December). Here is the link again: <https://www.john-truscott.co.uk/Contact/Contact-John>.

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