



CONVERSATION GUIDE: SUPPORTING HEALTHY LIFESTYLES IN YOUR CHURCH

Join the ELCA wellness reformation!

Portico encourages the ministry leaders and professional staff in your congregation to put the “we” in wellness by engaging in a small-group conversation about how the culture in your church is (or isn’t) supporting healthy lifestyles. We offer this guide as a suggested framework, not a script, to start a conversation that feels right for your organization.

Why talk about health and wellness in church? There’s a lot at stake. Too many pastors and churchworkers struggle with their physical and emotional health. Too many congregations struggle with the cost of providing health benefits for church staff and their families. While many ELCA leaders have taken steps toward living well, the wellness reformation calls us to take longer strides as a community. Everyone stands to gain from a church culture that supports healthy lifestyles — not just pastors and staff, but your whole congregation.

This information is not intended to evaluate medical conditions nor to treat or prevent disease. Each individual is responsible for his or her own health and medical treatment decisions and should consult a medical professional to determine the appropriate lifestyle changes and health care treatment options.

▶ GET STARTED

Invite a small group to participate in this conversation

- This might include your council president, mutual ministry leader, personnel team chair, senior pastor, parish nurse, and other key staff.
- It will look different in every congregation.

Set a respectful, supportive tone

- Affirm that ministry has many demands that can keep leaders from caring for themselves.
- Acknowledge that both the church and the pastor play a role in creating a healthy culture.
- Offer support without asking the pastor to reveal personal issues or health conditions.
- Ground your conversation in prayer and contemplation.

▶ CHOOSE YOUR APPROACH

- See the next page for three potential entry points. Feel free to adapt or combine them.
- Encourage participants to read the recommended resource before you meet as a group. They’re available on Portico’s website for sponsoring organizations, EmployerLink.PorticoBenefits.org — follow the link to the GO! Challenge.

▶ CONSIDER A NEXT STEP

- Target one way your church can better support your pastor’s health.
- Pray for your pastor as he or she works on creating healthy lifestyle change.
- Try Portico’s GO! Challenge as a small group, or try a community-wide initiative that lifts up healthy behavior. Find featured activities on Portico’s website for sponsoring organizations, EmployerLink.PorticoBenefits.org — select *Call to Live Well > Wellness Activities & Videos*.
- Tell us how it went, so that we can share your learnings with the broader ELCA community. Send an email to your Portico regional representative. Find contact information on EmployerLink.PorticoBenefits.org — select *About Us > Organizational Information > Key Staff*.

CHOOSE YOUR APPROACH

Consider saying: “Welcome. We create and sustain this ministry together. As your congregation, we value your commitment and recognize that there are many challenges to being a church leader. In this conversation, we’d like to discuss how we can work together to create a culture of health and wellness at our church. If you’re comfortable, we’d also like to explore what we can do to help you be as healthy as you can be. Only you know what you need to operate at your best. We are not asking about your health concerns. But we do want to support your efforts.”

ENTRY POINT	DISCUSSION QUESTIONS
Global: State of Ministerial Health	
<p>Use an external resource to talk about why an intentional focus on healthy lifestyles is important. If you’re hesitant to have a conversation about health and wellness, this approach offers a non-threatening place to begin.</p> <p>Online resource:* “Sacrificing the Body,” an article from the Fall 2015 issue of the Leadership Journal</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• What struck a chord with you?• Do you think this is an accurate picture?• What might this mean for the future of the church? For the future of our church?• Did you see any patterns or examples that might be true of our congregation?• Was there any good news in this article?
Local: Reality of Your Community’s Health	
<p>Take an inventory of how well your congregation fosters a healthy work environment. Aim for specifics as you focus on how the congregation’s habits, schedule, and attitudes might help or hinder the goal of a healthy environment for all people, not just the staff.</p> <p>Online resource:* Portico’s “5 Ways You Can Do Your Part” brochure</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Are benefits offered to help staff care for their physical and emotional health?• Are pastors, employees, and volunteers respected for taking time to care for their health?• Is work shared appropriately and timed so individuals aren’t constantly overtaxed?• Are healthy food options offered?• Is daily centering honored as a means to showing up as a non-anxious presence?• After answering the inventory questions above, ask: Can we name two or three concrete steps we as a congregation (or as congregational leaders) might be willing to try?
Individual: What it Takes to Live a Healthy Lifestyle	
<p>If the pastor chooses to share his or her personal experience, be a good listener. Be sure to let the pastor take the initiative with this part of the conversation so it doesn’t feel intrusive or unwelcome. Do not ask questions regarding any medical conditions.</p> <p>Online resource:* Wholeness Wheel and Labyrinth</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• How do you see your healthy lifestyle choices as connected to your faith?• What are some of the pitfalls you encounter?• Are there some life-giving healthy practices you currently use (or have used in the past)?• How might we give you support or encouragement?

*For online resources, visit EmployerLink.PorticoBenefits.org and follow the link to the GO! Challenge.

Consider saying: “Thank you for being willing to talk about how our church can be a place of health and wellness. We are grateful for the things you do to be well and want to support you for your sake and for the sake of our church. We want our congregation to be a place that encourages healthy lifestyle choices in response to God’s generous gift of life. In today’s world, that’s a message we all need to embrace. We’re looking forward to working together to make it so.”