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# Seeking Balance: How the Practice of Spiritual Disciplines Impacts the Health of Residence Hall Directors

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SEEKING BALANCE: HOW THE PRACTICE OF SPIRITUAL DISCIPLINES  
IMPACTS THE HEALTH OF RESIDENCE HALL DIRECTORS

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A thesis

Presented to

The School of Social Sciences, Education & Business

Department of Higher Education and Student Development

Taylor University

Upland, Indiana

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In Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree

Master of Arts in Higher Education and Student Development

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by

Caylan DeLucia

May 2019

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**Higher Education and Student Development  
Taylor University  
Upland, Indiana**

CERTIFICATE OF APPROVAL

MASTER'S THESIS

This is to certify that the Thesis of

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entitled

Seeking Balance: How the Practice of Spiritual Disciplines  
Impacts the Health of Residence Hall Directors

has been approved by the Examining Committee for the thesis requirement for the

Master of Arts degree  
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### Abstract

Residence hall directors often fulfill an instrumental role in a student's college experience. As residence hall directors facilitate programs and intentionally interact with students, a unique connection is formed between the student and his or her residence hall director. Residence hall directors experience unique work-related stress through flexible workhours each day of the week. Thus, it is crucial for residence hall directors to establish healthy rhythms of rest and rejuvenation as they integrate living where they work. Research suggests spirituality as an effective stress management tool. This study specifically focuses on how various spiritual disciplines of Christianity impact stress experienced as a residence hall director.

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## **Chapter 1**

### **Introduction**

As college students arrive on campus the weekend before classes begin, they experience a wide range of emotions. These emotions then surface as they say farewell to their parents and hello to their new roommate and living space. During this emotional transition, students are introduced to their residence hall director who may begin an instrumental role in the student's college experience (Burke, Sauerheber, Dye, & Hughey, 2014).

Residence hall directors have the unique privilege of living as a neighbor to students who fill the hall. The residence hall director not only plans developmental programs for the students but also interacts with the students organically and intentionally (Winston, Anchors, & Riker, 1993). Additionally, residence hall directors serve as consistent resources for students who may face academic concerns, mental health crises, and adjustment strains (Burke et al., 2014). Overall, residence hall directors continually care for a wide variety of demanding needs for those around them. Thus, it is of utmost importance for residence hall directors to care for themselves as they care for others.

#### **Stress as a Residence Hall Director**

While individuals experience natural stressors of daily living, work-related stress occurs through working conditions and a worker's tendencies (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention [CDC], 2016). Residence hall directors face unique stress as they

work flexible, sometimes long, hours any given day of the week (Winston et al., 1993). Depending on the institution, residence hall directors may feel discouraged by a lack of opportunity to disconnect fully from their staff and building during “time off” (Winston et al., 1993). Thus, residence hall directors must cultivate rhythms that provide opportunities for rest, decompression of stress, and peace as they integrate living where they work (Burke et al., 2014).

According to Barton (2006), spiritual disciplines provide individuals space and opportunity to develop healthy rhythms. Rhythms afford the soul space to rest and experience deep intimacy with God (Barton, 2006). Because spiritual disciplines offer peace with God and reduction of stress, it is beneficial to study how these disciplines specifically influence residence hall directors and the way they approach their work.

### **Spiritual Disciplines**

Regardless of an individual’s specific religious beliefs, spirituality often provides a healthy coping mechanism for managing stress (Mayo Clinic, 2016). Within the Christian tradition, individuals may make meaning of their life through a relationship with Jesus Christ. Many Christian individuals often seek to practice spiritual disciplines in order to deepen their relationship with Christ. As Christianity involves various spiritual disciplines, this study focuses on spiritual disciplines as defined by Richard J. Foster’s (1998) *Celebration of Discipline*, a work rooted in the author’s understanding of the Christian tradition. Foster described inward disciplines—such as meditation, prayer, fasting, and study—as disciplines pertaining to the practices of one’s heart. Additionally, Foster described the outward disciplines of simplicity, solitude, submission, and service as disciplines experienced through actively engaging something outside of oneself.

According to Hardin (2012), spiritual disciplines occur in tandem with the Holy Spirit. As an individual creates rhythms of walking intentionally with the Spirit, he or she experiences spiritual disciplines in a deeper, more intimate way. Thus, residence hall directors committed to the Christian faith tradition may intentionally develop rhythms of spiritual disciplines. They are thus likely to experience decreased stress and a more meaningful relationship with Christ. As hall directors appropriately manage their stress, they may be more inclined to return to their halls for multiple years and therefore serve as a consistent resource, advocate, and friend for their students (Winston et al., 1993).

### **Purpose of Study**

The purpose of this study was to explore how spiritual disciplines impact stress experienced by residence hall directors committed to the Christian faith tradition. Current, full-time residence hall directors were interviewed about their experience in residence life. They discussed which, if any, spiritual disciplines they incorporate into the rhythms of their lives. They also indicated various personal stressors, especially the stressors experienced in their work. As residence hall directors reflected on their spiritual disciplines and stress, there emerged evidence of which spiritual disciplines best combat residence hall director stress.

Overall, this study sought to answer the question, “How do spiritual disciplines impact levels of stress experienced as a residence hall director?” This phenomenological study encourages further research on residence life. Because residence hall directors often remain unstudied, this research provides a framework to either further study stress or begin to study how spiritual disciplines combat burnout rates among residence hall directors.

## Chapter 2

### Literature Review

As students begin their college careers, they often enter environments in which holistic development and learning take place. While of those experiences occur in classrooms, studios, and laboratories, many others also take place in the residence hall and with peers from an individual's residence hall (Winston et al., 1993). Universities strive to create safe spaces where learning within the residence hall “enhances individual growth and development” and provides “orderly and effective administration of all aspects of the program” (Winston et al., 1993, p. 26). Because residence halls are crucial to student development, housing professionals known as residence hall directors have “almost limitless opportunities to influence students' lives and contribute to the enrichment of their educational experience” (Winston et al., 1993, p. 26).

### Residence Hall Directors

**Definition.** Residence hall directors are full-time professional staff members who live with the students they supervise and support (Winston et al., 1993). Required skills for these professionals often include communication, crisis management, conflict mediation, self-motivation, and effective interpretation of policies when making decisions (Collins & Hirt, 2006; Dunkel & Schreiber, 1992). Additionally, residence hall directors are expected to interact regularly with their students and plan developmental programs for their hall and the campus as a whole (Winston et al., 1993). These

programs include empowering students to act as responsible citizens, cultivate a healthy lifestyle—physically, mentally, emotionally, and spiritually—and explore and confront ethical issues (Winston et al., 1993).

**Roles.** From the moment students begin their residential undergraduate career, they are connected with their residence hall director. This interaction may be brief, but students often look to this individual as their most consistent resource and advocate (Burke et al., 2014). Students are often encouraged to share their experiences of the university as well as their personal experiences away from the university with their resident hall directors (Winston et al., 1993). According to Winston and colleagues (1993), “having someone truly listen and show concern is rare on most college campuses and can be a powerful developmental intervention in students’ lives” (p. 44). Thus, resident hall directors have a unique role of hearing students’ stories and walking with them as their advocate, confidant, mentor, or connection (Burke et al., 2014).

**Challenges.** While many individuals begin their housing careers as residence hall directors, a growing number of professionals prove less interested in this live-in position (Winston et al., 1993). Such decisions are often due to the demanding challenges they face through “long hours, lack of privacy, and relatively low pay for a person with an advanced degree” (Winston et al., 1993, p. 288). As well, depending on institutional policy of on-call responsibilities and workload hours, professionals face challenges of establishing and maintaining healthy boundaries between their personal and work lives.

**Work and life balance.** Residence life professionals are significantly impacted by the culture of their campus from the moment they begin their job search. The culture of the institution shapes how a candidate understands potential job satisfaction (Belch,



Wilson, & Dunkel, 2009). For example, Belch and colleagues (2009) interviewed approximately thirty professionals discussing their experience in residence life. This study found institutions successfully recruit and retain professional staff when the institution has a clear mission statement and cultures of engagement, professionalism, and opportunity. Residence life professionals significantly benefit from understanding and affirming the mission of their university and taking opportunities for development and advancement within their professional goals (Belch et al., 2009).

While the recruitment and retention of residence hall directors provides an indicator of turnover within the position, one should also consider job satisfaction as an equally important determining factor (Davidson, 2012). The study by Davidson (2012) found professionals greatly satisfied with the work itself while still desiring increased opportunities for job promotions. Satisfaction with the work itself proves crucial since students often quickly identify residence life professionals as both an initial and consistent resource (Burke et al., 2014). Residence life professionals often help students, many of who contend with anxiety, frustration and/or stress at least once during their college career (Burke et al., 2014). Because residence hall directors are vital to a student's experience, providing opportunities for residence hall directors to find balance as they live where they work remains imperative. As residence hall directors find this balance, they not only become healthier individuals but also increase their likelihood of returning for multiple years as a consistent person in the lives of their students.

### **Stress**

According to the American Psychological Association (VandenBos, 2013), stress is defined as “a state of physiological or psychological response to internal or external

stressors; changes affecting nearly every system of the body, influencing how people feel and behave” (pp. 561–562). Stress pervades almost every area in one’s life. In fact, “[a] survey from 2016 found that financial worries, work/school changes and work/school schedules were the leading sources of stress among people in the U.S.” (Elflein, 2018, para. 1). Thus, while workplace stress contributes to one’s overall level of stress, workplace stress is unique to one’s occupation and expectations while employed.

### **Work-Related Stress**

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) (2016) defines work-related stress as “the harmful physical and emotional responses that occur when the requirements of the job do not match the capabilities, resources, or needs of the worker” (para. 11). Work-related stress is often confused with natural challenges in one’s occupation (CDC, 2016). However, challenge inspires potentially physically or psychologically meaningful goals to master, whereas stress leads to exhaustion, illness, or job failure (CDC, 2016). Overall, job stress most often occurs in the relationship shared by a worker’s characteristics and the working condition (CDC, 2016). Because of dynamics between the employee and his or her working condition, employees must understand how stress occurs before practicing stress-reducing habits (CDC, 2016).

As employees navigate the differences between challenge and stress, they gain an understanding of various ways stress develops in the workplace. Lewis (2014) discussed the importance of recognizing stress in the workplace by defining various triggers of stress (Cooper & Marshall, 1976). These triggers include (but are not limited to) the following; (a) poor working conditions; (b) threatened job security; (c) politics within the

office; (d) ambiguous roles; (e) colleague tension; (f) poor relationships with those in authority (Cooper & Marshall, 1976; Lewis, 2014).

As stress is triggered, an employee experiences changes in his or her behavior, commonly seen through withdrawal, aggression or a lack of motivation (Lewis, 2014; Michie, 2002). To best reduce the negative implications of stress in the workplace, employers must work with their employees to create various opportunities to decrease or eliminate stress (Lewis, 2014). As society continues to experience stress, workplace environments must recognize the implications of stress on potential burnout for their employees (Lewis, 2014). Thus, when employees have the freedom to establish stress-reducing routines, they decrease their chances of experiencing burnout during their career (Lewis, 2014).

### **Coping with Work-Related Stress**

Employees are often resilient individuals who constantly learn how to cope with both work and personal stress (Holton, Barry, & Chaney, 2016). To implement healthy coping strategies in the workplace, employees need to first recognize their perceived workload stress (Khubchandani, Nagy, Watkins, Nagy, & Balls, 2009). Holton et al. (2016) and Khubchandani et al. (2009) conducted two separate studies evaluating how employees cope with various work and personal stressors. The studies also examined the relationship between highly perceived stress and negative emotion-focused coping practices. Employees who experience highly perceived stress also tend to have poor coping mechanisms such as excessive drinking and/or overeating (Holton et al., 2016; Khubchandani et al., 2009). Both studies strongly suggested employers provide an increase of reliable resources (i.e., healthy habits motivators) in the workplace to give

employees more opportunities for successful, healthy stress management (Holton et al., 2016; Khubchandani et al., 2009).

As employers promote healthy stress-reduction interventions, employees likely experience higher job satisfaction (Pignata, Boyd, Gillespie, Provis, & Winefield, 2016). Pignata and colleagues (2016) conducted a survey of approximately nine hundred employees from thirteen Australian universities and focused on employee awareness of stress-reduction interventions and the perceived trustworthiness of their employers. Findings suggested employees more often trust management when the employees know of company-wide stress reducing practices. In essence, as employees recognize the various ways their employer cares for them, they likely experience high job satisfaction and less job strain (Pignata et al., 2016).

### **Spirituality**

While employers may offer tangible means for relieving stress such as a gym membership, less tangible stress relieving techniques, such as spirituality, also exist (Mayo Clinic, 2016). Spirituality, overall, “arises from your connection with yourself and with others, the development of your personal value system, and your search for meaning in life” (Mayo Clinic, 2016, para. 2). One can experience spirituality through such means as nature, religion, beliefs in a higher power, music, prayer, and community. Spirituality provides meaningful opportunities for individuals to manage their stress; stress management occurs as individuals feel purpose in life, connection to the world, released control, and a supportive community through one’s spirituality (Mayo Clinic, 2016). This study discusses spirituality through the lens of Christian religious tradition and, in particular, its evangelical Protestant dimension.

## **Spiritual Disciplines**

As Christians seek to establish routines and rhythms as they work and rest, many practice spiritual disciplines. Spiritual disciplines vary, including reading Scripture, fasting, resting on the Sabbath, praying, and taking time for silence and solitude (Calhoun, 2015). Overall, the spiritual disciplines are partnerships between believers and the Holy Spirit (Hardin, 2012). As believers develop a greater awareness of the Holy Spirit, they experience the spiritual disciplines in deeper ways (Hardin, 2012). When embracing the spiritual disciplines, individuals may combine two or three practices while developing a routine (Calhoun, 2015). For example, one might practice reading Scripture during a fast within the space of solitude. As individuals continue to engage various practices, the spiritual disciplines create space for healthy life rhythms (Barton, 2006). For the purpose of this study, the following information focuses on the eight inward and outward spiritual disciplines described in Foster's (1998) *Celebration of Discipline*.

**Meditation.** Throughout the Bible, meditation is referenced through two Hebrew words about sixty times (Foster, 1998). Each account of meditation involves "changed behavior as a result of our encounter with the living God" (Foster, 1998, p. 15). Meditation allows individuals to practice hearing from God, obeying what He asks, and becoming comfortable with Jesus as a familiar friend (Foster, 1998). Foster (1998) explained how, in meditation, individuals engage scripture through their senses and experience God's truth through their imaginations (Foster, 1998). Meditation can also occur through "re-collection" as individuals correspond prayers and physically turning their palms down and up as they sit in contemplative silence (Foster, 1998). Foster (1998) additionally explained how meditation occurs through quiet reflection on creation

through nature. Lastly, individuals experience meditation as they process current events through significance associated with scripture (Foster, 1998). Overall, “meditation is not a single act. . . It is a way of life. You will be constantly learning and growing as you plumb the inner depths” (Foster, 1998, p. 32).

**Prayer.** According to Foster (1998), “of all the Spiritual Disciplines prayer is the most central because it ushers us into perpetual communion with the Father” (p. 33). Prayer allows individuals to meet God in the ordinary and change the world through ceaseless prayers (Foster, 1998). Individuals learning to pray gain knowledge by listening intently, speaking confidently, and trusting intimately (Foster, 1998). These practices are seen in Jesus’ encouragement to pray as children and seek one’s daily bread (Foster, 1998). Overall, Foster (1998) encourages prayer through imagination as individuals pray against evil, for others, and with expectation of God’s faithfulness.

**Fasting.** While fasting occurs in religious traditions other than Christianity, many individuals in Scripture and church history strongly believed in fasting (Foster, 1998). Today’s society often conveys, “If we do not have three large meals each day, with several snacks in between, we are on the verge of starvation” (Foster, 1998, p. 47). Still, both regular and incremental fasting allows one to experience God profoundly and intimately (Foster, 1998). Foster (1998) noted fasting should occur through a progression (i.e., partial day fasts to 24-hour fasts), and one should evaluate his or her heart to monitor the physical aspects experienced. Overall, “fasting can bring breakthroughs in the spiritual realm that will never happen in any other way” (Foster, 1998, p. 60).

**Study.** Foster (1998) defined study as “a specific kind of experience in which through careful attention to reality the mind is enabled to move in a certain direction” (p.

63). Individuals study both verbal (e.g., lectures, novels) and nonverbal (e.g., nature, observation of events and actions) “books” through four steps (Foster, 1998). First, study takes place through repetition as individuals train their ingrained habits through their mind (Foster, 1998). Next, individuals increase their awareness and understanding of repeated content through concentration (Foster, 1998). After content is understood through concentration and repetition, comprehension can take place (Foster, 1998). Lastly, individuals must reflect on what they have learned in order to complete the steps of study (Foster, 1998). Foster (1998) suggested individuals study books, nature, events, relationships, justifying speech patterns, oneself, cultures, and values. While the discipline of study takes time to learn, it eventually produces great joy in one who learns it well (Foster, 1998).

**Simplicity.** Simplicity is an outward lifestyle reflecting an inward posture of one’s reality (Foster, 1998). Many Christians in today’s society often ignore simplicity as it “directly challenges our vested interests in an affluent life-style” (Foster, 1998, p. 85). However, Christians who practice simplicity often find themselves wrestling with a legalistic mindset (Foster, 1998). Overall, the practice of simplicity seeks to provide individuals a posture of gratitude and freedom from anxiety (Foster, 1998). Foster (1998) suggested a variety of tangible practices of simplicity including appreciating creation, habitually giving away possessions, and shunning distractions that keep individuals from pursuing the kingdom of God. Simplicity, when practiced intentionally, allows individuals to keep their full attention on God and His kingdom (Foster, 1998).

**Solitude.** In *Habits of Grace*, Mathis (2016) stated, “We are humans, not machines. We were made for rhythms of silence and noise, community and solitude” (p.

137). Rhythms of solitude provide the soul space to rest and experience God with intimate depth (Barton, 2006; Whitney 2014). Foster (1998) explained how inner fulfillment through intimacy with God is not merely met as a result of retreating from others, but rather allowing oneself to hear “the divine Whisper better” (p. 97). Foster (1998) suggested there are daily opportunities to embrace solitude if one takes advantage of quiet mornings before work or silence in a car after a long day. Additionally, extended retreats focused on solitude offer opportunities to reorient one’s soul, goals, and dreams (Foster, 1998). Foster (1998) explained how solitude not only impacts one’s ambitions but also the ways he or she cares for the ambitions of others. According to Foster (1998), “the fruit of solitude is increased sensitivity and compassion for others” (p.108). Solitude allows one to demonstrate this fruit through hearing the needs and hurts of others more deeply due to his or her time in solitude (Foster, 1998).

**Submission.** The discipline of submission is often abused as individuals frequently forget freedom offered within genuine submission (Foster, 1998). According to Foster (1998), submission “is the ability to lay down the terrible burden of always needing to get our own way” (p. 111). Submission allows individuals to discern between their own stubbornness and issues of genuine concern (Foster, 1998). As individuals practice submission, they also learn the difference between self-denial and self-hatred (Foster, 1998). Additionally, individuals have the opportunity to understand leadership by seeking to serve others as Jesus instructs in His teaching (Foster, 1998). Overall, submission practically occurs through submitting to (a) the Triune God, (b) Scripture, (c) family, (d) neighborhood and daily stranger, (e) body of believers in Christ, (f) broken and despised individuals, and (g) the world (Foster, 1998).



**Service.** Service supports living beyond the world's ideas of power, promotion, and authority (Foster, 1998). Submission encourages individuals to take positions of leadership, yet cautions against "self-righteous service" (Foster, 1998, p. 128).

According to Foster (1998), true service is found through the following: a relationship with the Holy Spirit; no distinction between large and small service tasks; contentment in hiddenness; freedom from calculated results; a non-discriminating ministry; simple and faithful stewardship; listening tenderly and patiently; and building community. Overall, service exemplifies the Christ's humility through one's way of living (Foster, 1998).

### **Connecting Stress in Residence Life and Spiritual Disciplines**

While current literature has not evaluated the connection between stresses residence hall directors experience and the spiritual disciplines, reasonable evidence points to the possibility of a study at a Christian institution. As residence hall directors live where they work, they face unique stressors by virtue of their workplace along with the stressors of daily living (Winston et al., 1993). As well, residence hall directors are recognized by staff and residents as leaders (Winston et al., 1993). Nouwen (2002) described the importance of inner strength and guidance found through a deep relationship with Jesus as individuals lead those entrusted to their care (Chandler, 2008). Spiritual disciplines allow individuals to deepen their relationship with Jesus while also providing ways to make meaning out of one's work (Foster, 1998; Mayo Clinic, 2016). Thus, beginning to understand the ways spiritual disciplines influence residence hall directors is crucial. As a result, this study addressed the following the question: How do spiritual disciplines impact levels of stress experienced as a residence hall director?

## **Chapter 3**

### **Methodology**

This study examined the stress experienced by residence life professionals in the university setting and how, if at all, the spiritual disciplines influence the stress experienced. Because a gap exists in the literature, this exploratory study was defined by the hope of yielding a foundation for further research.

#### **Approach and Design**

Because the current literature does not discuss the connection between practicing spiritual disciplines and experiencing stress as a hall director, a qualitative research effort utilizing a phenomenological approach proved the most appropriate. According to Creswell (2007), “the focus of all qualitative research needs to be on understanding the phenomenon being explored rather than solely on the reader, the researcher, or the participants being studied” (p. 3). Within qualitative research, a phenomenological study then allows researchers to philosophically explore the research through themes and experiences discussed by research participants. Overall, “the basic purpose of phenomenology is to reduce individual experiences with a phenomenon to a description of the universal essence” (Creswell, 2007, p. 58).

Through this phenomenological study, residence hall directors discussed not only the stress they experience living where they work but also the spiritual disciplines they regularly practice. More importantly, the data collected provided the researcher with

possible forms of information to evaluate regarding the phenomena of stress, the spiritual disciplines, and what, if any, relationship they share. The data was collected through a focus group design, which allowed the researcher to hear multiple perspectives and gain a broad scope of information.

### **Context**

This study took place at a small (roughly 3,000 undergraduate students) faith-based liberal arts institution in the Midwest. The study focused on the residence life team at the institution. The institution has over a dozen halls from which students to choose a living space for the academic year. The residence life experience is highlighted at this institution through a commitment to developing a large, professional full-time staff, and each hall offers a unique atmosphere and accommodation.

The six study participants served as the residence hall directors at this institution. Six residence hall directors were interviewed in two focus groups with two participants in the first focus group and four participants in the second focus group. Their identity is not be revealed at any point within this study. The participants consisted of two male and four female residence life directors and represented various seasons of life, with some being married and some having children.

### **Procedures**

Prior to conducting research, Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval was secured from both the researcher's home institution and the institution where the study was conducted. Next, the dean of residential learning at the institution studied was contacted to gain permission. After the dean of residential learning approved the researcher's request, the researcher contacted all of the residence hall directors serving at

the institution. The residence hall directors received a rationale for the research taking place, as well as an informed consent form. Once individual residence hall directors agreed to participate, the researcher randomly assigned each individual to one of two focus groups based off of the time each participant was available.

As an incentive, participants received a beverage from the coffee shop on campus. Participants were asked the same questions discussing how they experience stress related to their job and how they engage spiritual disciplines as a part of their routine. In order to consistently identify individuals in the results discussion, they are referenced under pseudonyms. After the interviews were conducted and transcribed, the data was analyzed, and the researcher found no need for any follow-up interviews.

### **Data Analysis**

To evaluate qualitative, phenomenological data, the researcher transcribed each focus group interview conducted. According to Creswell (2007), having proposed the research problem, the researcher “asks several open-ended research questions, gathers multiple forms of data to answer these questions, and makes sense of the data by grouping information into codes, themes or categories, and larger dimensions” (p. 51).

The transcribed data was evaluated based on themes and coded through MAXQDA, a software that allows researchers to organize qualitative data through visual codes and tools. After coding, the researcher used triangulation to maintain the validity and reliability of the data collected. Creswell (2007) stated reliability can be obtained through “triangulating data from several sources, having studies reviewed and corrected by the participants, and having other researchers review procedures” (p. 45). Data was triangulated through having fellow researchers review the procedures and data analysis.

**Benefits**

Residence hall directors serve a vital role in a student's experience; it is therefore of utmost importance to provide opportunities for these professionals to find balance as they live where they work. As residence hall directors find this balance, they not only become healthier but also increase their likelihood of returning for multiple years and, in turn, being a consistent presence in the lives of their students.

People often remark how residence hall directors frequently burn out quickly during their career. Additionally, others make comments alluding to residence life as a short-term career. Thus, studying the implications of spiritual disciplines on the stress levels of residence hall directors can lead to a decrease in the burnout rate of the profession. Further, it provides tools for both residence hall directors and their supervisors to understand further how spiritual disciplines help residence hall directors better integrate their work and life.

This research can lead supervisors to change institutional on-call policies or expectations in order to provide more space for residence hall directors to engage spiritual disciplines more often. As well, even if residence hall directors do not feel close to leaving the profession, they can still benefit from practicing life-giving spiritual disciplines and, in turn, create healthy rhythms for meaningfully engaging their spirituality.

## **Chapter 4**

### **Results**

Through a focus group approach, the researcher coded the data for themes, supporting ideas, and essence (Creswell, 2007). The research generated four major themes with at least three supporting ideas for each one. The summative essence of the research is the practice of spiritual disciplines positively impacts a hall director's holistic balance. The four major themes represented the individuals' experience as hall directors at a private, faith-based university were as follows: job stressors, deeper understandings of God, deeper knowing of self and needs, and the impact of rhythms and consistency on work. The supporting themes emerged through related descriptions of occurrences among the participants' shared experiences.

The interview protocol consisted of nine open-ended questions relating to residence life expectations, spiritual disciplines, and how individuals balance both of these in their role (see Appendix A). Themes emerged from the participants distinctly depending on the question. The themes are presented below in the order they appeared throughout the interviews.

#### **Job Stressors**

At the beginning of each interview, residence hall directors explained their responsibilities, on-call policies, work-related stressors, and seasons of stress. During focus group interviews, three primary supporting themes emerged: stress occurs through

consistently having more work to accomplish (especially in busy seasons); regularly evaluating priorities between work and family; and appropriately handling crisis with students. Overall, the participants explained how residence hall directors always face work-related stress in some capacity during an academic year.

**Consistently having more work.** Residence hall directors face stressors depending on the academic calendar, as well as their balance of knowing when to stop working each day. Every participant explained consistently feeling more stressed during the beginning of each academic year, because there are constantly tasks to complete—even more so than usual. Additionally, five participants expressed closing the buildings for breaks, as well as the end of the academic year, as consistently stressful. Participant 5 summarized this phenomenon:

I mean I think opening and closing is always like a, there's a lot that tangibly needs to get done and students are feeling the like excitement and stress so they are like not as emotionally fully engaged and therefore there's a long to do list awaiting them at all of those things. So yeah I would say the beginning and the end of the year feel like probably the most time intensive...

Participant 1 noted the inconsistency of hours in this role during the shared seasons of stress among colleagues:

In general, there are definitely rhythms to the RD job, August, beginning of December, April [at institution] are just crazy months, we are definitely working more than 40 hours those months, that can be stressful, just because we are going, going, going all the time.

The stress experienced as hall directors due to the academic calendar is often predictable yet consistently more stressful than most other times during the year. However, this impacts each hall director differently as he or she approaches his or her work. Additionally, four participants discussed the impact of working in a role with loose or tight boundaries depending on how one operates. If not careful, residence hall directors could spend most, if not every, moment working—including weekends. For example, Participant 4 summarized this tension:

I was just talking with [spouse] about this, but we were talking about roles where you could always be doing something and I feel like an RD role falls into that category and so as a person who likes to do things I will find myself like always having something to do, if I don't intentionally say, "I'm on a break, it's the weekend" or whatever, "it's 6 or 5 and I need to cut it off" you could always find something to do and so I think being new to this role I had to learn how to have self-care and boundaries, because there was just so much that could be done and that was overwhelming to me.

**Evaluating priorities.** Because residence hall directors live where they work, stress can occur when they have to choose between their family and work. Four participants discussed the ways their perspectives of boundaries shifted as married residence hall directors compared to when they were single residence hall directors. Participant 5 claimed,

I think I was a single RD for 2.5 years and now this is my first semester of being a married RD and I feel more stressed to get it right now because I realize that my capacity to overdo it and work all the time and probably be okay was really high,



and I was really good at it, and yet didn't mean it was healthy. And now there's like another person who it affects their well-being and it affects our relationship if I overcompensate and don't have boundaries in work. I feel stressed, I think trying to not be bad at either role or like either I want to be good and give a good faith effort to both of those things and yet feel like pretty much always in negotiation with what that looks like on a pretty daily basis.

Hall directors who experience the position as a single residence hall director and then as a married residence hall director offer a unique perspective on new tensions faced when managing appropriate boundaries. All six participants are married, and the importance of recognizing how they evaluate priorities through the lens of a married individual proved valuable. As Participant 6 noted, "I think that [referring to stress moments of choosing to sacrifice something] applies to all four of us because we are all married." Additionally, three participants discussed the tension of choosing how to best manage their time with their family, while balancing work priorities. For instance, Participant 3 explained the following perspective:

I think sometimes like my stress moments are when I feel like something has to be sacrificed so I have to choose, and it's like either I don't do this work thing that I feel like I should do or I don't do this family thing that I want to do or maybe I should do and that I think too causes a lot of moments of stress and trying to find that balance when you live where you work and you're like this is family time and then you get a knock on your door.

As residence hall directors experience growth within their family, the balance of healthy boundaries often becomes more complex.

**Crisis with students.** Lastly, four participants discussed the role of crisis as a top job stressor, depending on the students who live in the building during the academic year. Three participants specifically mentioned the moments in the midst of crisis as stressful. Participant 2 explained, “yeah, I would say whenever a student is going through a high stress situation, I feel like my stress is elevated.” Additionally, two participants noted how moments after crises feel extremely stressful with the questions that arise from the situations, as well as the rearranging of one’s schedule to maintain time for each meeting. Participant 3 described his/her experience with stress after crisis:

I feel like the moments of crisis are not very stressful for me, but the moments after crisis can be really stressful because you’re thinking about “did I do it right, did we care for the student as best we could, what’s next, has everybody been communicated with, did I drop a ball somewhere?” and then there’s less sleep in those moments too, which contributes to me for the more stressful moments.

Overall, crisis often causes stress in the moment or after the crisis passes. While each residence hall director experiences stress related to crisis differently, undergoing crises with students contributes to each individual’s stress level.

### **Deeper Understandings of God**

Participants were also asked about their practice of the spiritual disciplines. The participants communicated they experienced a deeper understanding of God while practicing spiritual disciplines. The following supporting themes emerged: feeling closer to God, becoming more in tune with Him each day, and creating a partnership between God and the participants through understanding His character.

**Feel closer to God.** Spiritual disciplines provide an avenue for connection to God. As participants explained their relationship with God, three participants specifically discussed their connectedness to God through the practice of spiritual disciplines.

Participant 4 noted, “I mean I think it feels obvious to say the more that I am in rhythms with these spiritual disciplines the closer I feel to God, but I mean I think that’s true.”

Additionally, Participant 1 described the discipline of study as an avenue to “focus on the Lord and to get into a place where I can connect with Him and really focus on our relationship in that time I have set aside with just him and I.” The disciplines provide space for concentrated time connecting with God.

Overall, Participant 6 explained the dynamic of his/her relationship with Christ and closeness felt through the disciplines:

A lot of my faith and my relationship with Christ is kind of based on like I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me and the times that I have felt closest to Christ are when I feel like I have been successful or have grown because of Him and I know that also feels like it directly correlates with times I have practiced spiritual disciplines and like actively practiced a relationship with Christ if that makes sense.

While time spent practicing spiritual disciplines is difficult to quantify, participants consistently explained how more time spent with Christ directly related to feeling deeply connected to Christ.

**More in tune with Him daily.** In addition to feeling connected with God, participants also discussed how the consistent practice of the disciplines influences their ability to see and think how God is moving each day. Participant 2 described, “my

spiritual disciplines allow me to remember that [referring to God's faithfulness, work and presence], to see it constantly, to be able to connect dots for myself that are encouraging.”

Overall, Participant 5 summarized this experience:

When I spend more time thinking, praying, talking about the Lord that I am more attuned to looking for the spirit to work and I think that I, years ago heard that they pray at the beginning of their day that the lord would add or take away whatever isn't supposed to be in it that day, like cancel a meeting take it off my schedule, put this in there, let me cross this person's path, and I thought in that moment like I would not be attune to that being the work of the Holy Spirit ever. Like I would just think great I can take a nap and maybe I needed that nap, but there's like no crediting the Holy Spirit to that work but also no special awareness in that to see how he might want to use that interaction or those kind of things.

Practicing spiritual disciplines allows individuals to understand better the ways God seamlessly moves in his or her lives.

**Create a partnership with God and his character.** Both focus groups reflected on how the practice of spiritual disciplines helped them not only experience deeper levels of God's character but also enabled them to understand their partnership with God in Kingdom building work. Participant 3 described his/her experience of walking with students in hard places: “. . . my first inclination is not to go to my training but to go to the spirit . . . what is being prompted on my heart in this moment and I think those are the most fruitful moments in my work.” Additionally, Participant 2 explained how the disciplines “[bring] me the peace of mind that I feel like I am actually doing the Lord's

work, instead of just good work.” Overall, however, Participant 1 summarized this through her/his experience:

Yeah, I think that the spiritual disciplines help remind me that the kingdom of God is near and that God is really good, and that we can partner with the just the like the prayer that His kingdom come on earth as it is in heaven. I think all the spiritual disciplines remind me of Him and His character and of His kingdom and it helps me take a step back.

Practicing spiritual disciplines not only allows individuals to experience peace but also understand God’s character and Kingdom.

### **Deeper Knowing of Self and Needs**

Throughout the focus group interviews, participants displayed a deeper knowledge of self as well as their personal needs by practicing spiritual disciplines. The questions that sparked these responses are the same as those discussed in the section above: spiritual disciplines, engagement with the disciplines, and how the disciplines impact the health of their faith. This theme emerged through the supporting idea of spiritual disciplines connecting to self-reflection and experiencing honesty with community and God.

**Self-reflection in disciplines.** Four of the six participants discussed how their practice of the spiritual disciplines enabled them to think more rightly about how they view their stress and themselves. As Participant 1 stated, “so I think the spiritual disciplines helps me to discern is my stress productive or is this stress that I’m quote on quote feeling actually fear.” Additionally, Participant 3 noted how her/his “relationship

with Christ is closely tied into my perspective of myself,” as well as the impact of consistent time spent mediating and studying:

. . . [I understand] how Christ sees me which I think enables me to be more open to him and to what he has for me and to see growth not as criticism but as growth and to see hard moments not as I suck but as wow Christ I can't believe you still love me, thank you for that, how can I learn in this moment.

The participants better understand how God sees them when they more consistently practice spiritual disciplines and therefore better understand themselves.

**Honesty with community and God.** Participants explained how their practice of spiritual disciplines impacted their faith and their relationship with God. One participant in particular discussed how practicing spiritual disciplines allowed her/him to be a fully authentic version of him/herself with his/her community. For example, Participant 3 describes this authenticity:

I think it's [practicing spiritual disciplines] very cyclical for me. And I think the opposite is true, when I don't do the things I don't want to do the things. And church becomes less meaningful and community becomes meaningful in a not as fruitful way and when a friend asks you how your faith is you come up with some like standard answer and instead of being able to say this is where I'm really at, and I think I can be more transparent and honest about my faith even when it's not healthy when I'm doing the things that I know help grow that.

While her/his statement was the only one that specifically mentioned community, it is crucial to include because of the weight of his/her comment. Additionally, as discussed earlier, the spiritual disciplines offer space for individuals to see how God views him/her,

as well as communicating honestly with God through prayer and journaling. As

Participant 5 described:

I think prayer tends to have lots of eb and flows in my life or tends to be the, I don't pray without ceasing, but I think there's a sense where I'm continually coming back to discuss things with God and bring things to God and that tends to be how I engage him . . .

Overall, the practice of the spiritual disciplines allows individuals to experience themselves, others, and God in deeper, more meaningful ways.

### **Rhythms and Consistency Impact Work**

During the last few questions of the interview, participants were asked to discuss how their practice of the spiritual disciplines impacts their faith and work. Additionally, they were asked to describe how the consistency, or lack thereof, impacted work-related stress. In their responses, participants unanimously discussed the impact of consistent rhythms positively impacting their work as residence hall directors. As Participant 3 explained, "when I am consistent in my spiritual disciplines and more centered in who God is and in who I am, I find that I am more confident in what He has called me to in my work." This last theme emerged through the subthemes of participants discussing how practicing spiritual disciplines promotes an increased capacity to give and care more for students, requires intentional margin, and provides consistency and grounding to an inconsistent role.

**Increases capacity to give.** Each participant described how the practice of the spiritual disciplines increased their capacity to care for individuals around them in different ways. Three participants specifically discussed the peace they experience as

they encounter God's presence through practicing spiritual disciplines. Participant 2 explained, "I think that these disciplines allow me to be aware. I think that it does, that it brings peace and there's different aspects to that that allow me to have less stress." The other three participants specifically discussed how their practice of the spiritual disciplines allowed them to care better for their students through increasing their capacity to give more to their students.

For example, Participant 6 explained his/her experience of being a "worse RD, a worse educator, a worse servant-leader when I am not practicing spiritual disciplines consistently I feel it . . . because I can see it in the quality of what I am doing and how much I care for people." Overall, Participant 3 described the capacity element through his/her experience:

And because I did that in that hard season, I saw and felt that I had the capacity to not be as stressed and to do my work well and I felt filled in that season . . . when I have been consistent I have seen the impact of that in my work because the stress levels goes down, my ability to do things goes up, my efficiency goes up, my capacity, emotionally, spiritually, mentally, physically is all higher....

Even though the practice of spiritual disciplines requires a sacrifice of time, rest, or other desire, the disciplines offer an even greater reward. Overall, residence hall directors see an increased ability to perform their work as they choose to engage spiritual disciplines, even during the busiest season.

**Requires intentional margin.** Four participants used the word *intentional* when describing how they created time to practice the spiritual disciplines. Two other participants alluded to the idea of intentionality as a part of establishing their rhythm.



Participants described how they are intentional with their staffs; whether during each meeting or during specific dates on the academic calendar, they all practice certain disciplines together. Participant 1 explained his/her experience with his/her staff through seasonal intentionality:

And, as an RD, I have made it a practice at the beginning and the end, so during training and then close down, to make my staff practice solitude. Some staffs really love it, some of them cry and get mad at me, but afterwards admit it was the best thing you ever did for us.

Participants also discussed the time of day as well as length of time spent spending time practicing spiritual disciplines. Overall, Participant 4 summarized this idea:

. . . I was already feeling the urge to be really stressed about it and um I think there was a moment of, I was particularly in tune to like oh yeah I need to create margin and some space to just like engage with the Lord and try to be very intentional about that during that week and even if it was just like 20 min I mean of just quieting my mind and taking a genuine break from the to do list, there was just a centering. . . .

As residence hall directors seek to establish rhythms within their personal practice of spiritual disciplines, as well as for their student leaders, they find peace and quiet at the margins of work and rest.

**Provides consistency to an inconsistent role.** Five participants emphasized the inconsistency and “rhythm-less-ness” experienced as a residence hall director. The participants explained the challenges of a, as Participant 2 stated, “work that’s always changing”; similarly, Participant 3 described “so little consistency with the day to day.”

Thus, participants demonstrated difficulty in finding ways to implement consistent practices in such inconsistent spaces. As Participant 6 explained, “but when there is so much inconsistency, to do something that requires consistency like spiritual discipline, is really, really hard.”

However, when practiced consistently, the spiritual disciplines positively impact the individuals practicing them, as well as individuals around them. Participant 3 best summarized this phenomenon when sharing the impact of his/her consistent time with God in the mornings:

. . . but I think I’ve loved having that rhythm of getting up every morning and I want that to be translated for me into my job and my spiritual disciplines kind of as a part of that because so much of our work is lax rhythm but I think when I can have rhythm in those things, the lack of rhythm in my work won’t be as stressful to me, because I have something that’s consistent, I have something that’s intentional that’s constantly giving life back to me that again allows me to give to others.

Overall, providing consistency to extremely inconsistent work affords individuals the opportunity to receive renewal and thus give more to those around them.

### **Spiritual Disciplines Positively Impact a Hall Director's Holistic Balance**

Throughout this study, participants across both focus groups described the positive impact the practice of spiritual disciplines have on their holistic sense of being. Residence life professionals always face various stressors in their job due to the nature of the work. However, by practicing spiritual disciplines, individuals can better understand God, themselves and the work God has called them do to. Thus, this study demonstrates

that, as the hall directors consistently engaged in the practice of the spiritual disciplines, they experienced an increase in their holistic wellbeing.

### **Conclusion**

This study sought to answer the question, “How do spiritual disciplines impact levels of stress experienced as a residence hall director?” Through the major and supporting themes, an overall essence emerged: residence hall directors experience positive benefits to individual wellbeing as they consistently engage in the practice of spiritual disciplines. This study provides a framework for residence life professionals to develop realistic spiritual goals, as well as future researchers to continue to explore this phenomenon.

## Chapter 5

### Discussion

This research explored how the practice of spiritual disciplines impacts residence hall directors. In particular, this qualitative phenomenology study used exploratory focus group interviews to identify themes in order to bring clarity to this topic. The main themes found through the groups of residence hall directors showed how their holistic balance is influenced by (1) job stressors, (2) deeper understandings of God, (3) deeper knowing of self and needs, and (4) rhythms and consistency's impact on work. The essence of increasing holistic balance in residence life professionals is seen through the development of consistent engagement in the practice of spiritual disciplines. The following discussion connects the relationship between the main themes and offers discussions concerning implications for practice and future research as well as the limitations of this study.

### Findings

**Job stressors.** Residence hall directors fulfill vital roles as mentors, advocates, and confidants for their students and thus have countless opportunities to influence the lives of students during the students' undergraduate career (Burke et al., 2014; Winston et al., 1993). Because residence hall directors face a variety of challenges navigating the balance of work and life and often run the risk of burnout earlier than other collegiate educators, they must seek stress-reducing routines (Lewis, 2014; Winston et al., 1993).

Each participant shared similar job stressors, prominently ones regarding the tension of evaluating priorities for themselves and their families, as well as constantly having work to complete, especially during the beginning of the school year.

The participants generally identified stressors resulting from seasons of not fully disconnecting from their work, similar to the stressors discussed by Winston et al. (1993). Overall, the participants face unique stressors because of the role they fulfill on campus; however, as Lewis (2014) described, they combat these stressors effectively through stress-reducing routines.

**Deeper understanding and knowledge of God and self.** As Hardin (2012) noted, spiritual disciplines provide a meaningful partnership between the Holy Spirit and believers. As participants described their relationship with God, they explained how they experienced this connection through feeling closer to God, being more in tune with His Spirit on a daily basis, and creating a partnership with God and His character.

Foster (1998) explained how spiritual disciplines provide opportunities for individuals to create spaces to develop deeper intimacy with God through the ways they experience the spiritual disciplines by the power of the Holy Spirit (Hardin, 2012). Overall, the participants experienced this phenomenon and expanded on how they experience self-reflection and honesty, coming to know themselves more deeply while practicing spiritual disciplines as they understand how God sees them (Benner, 2015).

**Rhythms and consistency's impact on work.** Barton (2006) explained how spiritual disciplines offer individuals the space to foster healthy rhythms in their routine. Five of the six participants explained how, through their practice of spiritual disciplines, they experienced consistency in a role often defined by unpredictability. Because of the

nature of their work, incorporating consistency in their lives by practicing spiritual disciplines often becomes a proactive stress-reducing routine for residence hall directors (Lewis, 2014).

Additionally, practicing spiritual disciplines empowered the participants to experience an increased capacity to give to their students, colleagues, and family members. Overall, participants recognized how these rhythms are established and maintained through the creation of intentional margin for their practice of spiritual disciplines. Thus, as the residence hall directors consistently practiced spiritual disciplines, they experienced a positive impact on their holistic balance.

### **Implications for Practice**

As residence hall directors begin their careers, they should prioritize establishing disciplines and rhythms that enable them to understand God and themselves as not only critical for the development of their faith but also as critical to their ability to serve their students well. By establishing rhythms through the practice of spiritual disciplines, residence hall directors likely experience greater purpose and passion in their roles. Additionally, the source of consistency offered by these practices provides a sense of balance in roles that often seem extremely inconsistent. Residence hall directors should develop a plan for consistent engagement with the practice of spiritual disciplines during their summers, when their rhythm is typically slower. As residence hall directors have more time to think through their desired routine, they are more likely to implement their plans throughout the academic calendar.

Another implication for practice includes the role of supervisors in the development of these practices. As supervisors check in with residence hall directors to

provide encouragement, support, and space to process the consistency or lack thereof in their lives, residence hall directors may recognize the need for a renewed rhythm more quickly than if they are reflecting on their practices with someone else. Thus, as individuals process the rhythms of their practices with supervisors, they are likely to prioritize reestablishing or creating rhythms because of the accountability offered through proceeding one-on-one meetings. Additionally, supervisors should provide funding when possible to provide an accessible outlet for residence hall directors to practice spiritual disciplines off campus in order to connect with God with fewer distractions. As supervisors provide both accountability and opportunities to exercise practices away from campus, residence hall directors are likely to benefit greatly.

Lastly, institutions should strongly consider building in monthly weekend retreats away from campus for residence life professionals. As residence hall directors are offered opportunities to get off campus, they are likely to find rest as they experience God in different locations. Because residence hall directors live where they work, they are likely to connect with God in different locations largely because they face fewer distractions away from campus. Overall, these retreats can serve as both rejuvenating and proactive measures to continue serving in their roles as residence hall director.

### **Implications for Future Research**

Research regarding residence hall directors in general should continue because, as the literature review noted, comparatively few studies exist concerning this critical and relatively large population of educators. Residence hall directors are often passionate about their sharing their work and contribute heavily to the realm of higher education.

Thus, it is critical for researchers to continue to better understand the population of residence hall directors through research.

Stemming from this particular study, researchers could seek an increase in sample size by conducting research at both private and state universities. As the institutional sample size increases and diversifies, residence hall directors are likely to display a variety of life stages (i.e., single, married, parents). Residence hall directors in different stages of life would also provide ripe opportunity for comparative studies. Researchers may discover different job stressors and will have the data to compare similar job stressors at various locations.

In addition, researchers should continue to evaluate and refine the interview protocol as needed, particularly asking more questions about specific spiritual disciplines. For instance, if a survey was sent out prior to the study, focus groups could be based on which spiritual disciplines are practiced and then differences between various practiced disciplines could be compared. Depending on the results, researchers may determine certain spiritual disciplines are more crucial for residence hall directors due to the nature of their work. Thus, further study could also empower residence hall directors to practice new spiritual disciplines more quickly if they know it helps others in their field.

### **Limitations**

This study contained a few limitations. For example, this study was the first in which the interview protocol was used. The research developed the interview protocol based on literature in order to understand if a connection existed between practicing spiritual disciplines and work-related stress, specifically for residence hall directors. Due to limited availability of the researcher, the researcher was unable to pilot the interview



protocol before the study took place. Thus, the interview protocol used has room for improvement.

Second, the questions were framed for Christian spiritual disciplines and not all forms of spirituality. If the same set of questions were used in another study that involved individuals from various religious backgrounds, the data collected would not be fully accurate. Some participants may even take offense to the various definitions of the included disciplines in this study. Thus, the study is limited as the data collection process did not include individuals from religious backgrounds other than Christianity.

Third, the research was conducted at one institution and included a small sample size. Because of the small sample size, single resident directors were not represented. Single residence hall directors face different job stressors than married residence hall directors. However, those differences were not accounted for in this particular study. Overall, many individuals are not represented, primarily due to the limited availability of participants.

Finally, the researcher faced researcher bias; when conducting this study, she served as a residence hall director who experienced job stressors as well as the practice of spiritual disciplines. The researcher participates daily in the role of serving as a residence hall director and often practices spiritual disciplines. Thus, the researcher has experienced similar perspectives shared by the participants. Overall, the researcher had to analyze the results more critically in order to avoid speaking for the data.

## **Conclusion**

The practices individuals partake in each day are instrumental to how they are shaped both personally and professionally. In particular, practicing spiritual disciplines

offers individuals the space to learn more about themselves and God. The residence hall directors involved in this study explained how practicing spiritual disciplines has influenced not only how they approach their work but also how they experience work-related stress through a role in which work-related stress is often present.

In essence, the residence hall directors who participated in this study experienced a positive impact on their holistic sense of being when they consistently practiced spiritual disciplines throughout the year. Practicing spiritual disciplines has the power to transform every aspect of one's life once he or she begins the journey of regularly making space to engage such sacred practices.

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## **Appendix A**

### **Survey Questions**

1. What do your typical work responsibilities include?
2. Explain your on-call policy.
3. What ways, if any, do you experience work-related stress?
4. What, if any, time of the academic year feels most stressful for you?
5. What, if any, spiritual disciplines do you practice?
6. How often do you engage those spiritual disciplines?
7. How do your spiritual disciplines impact the health of your faith? Your relationship with Christ?
8. How, if at all, do those spiritual disciplines influence your work-related stress?
9. How does the consistency, or lack thereof, of practicing those spiritual disciplines influence your work-related stress?

## Appendix B

### Informed Consent

#### RESEARCH PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORM

**Title of Project:** Spiritual Disciplines and Stress Management: How Residence Hall Directors Experience and Manage Stress.

**Principal Investigator's Name:** Caylan DeLucia

**Research Advisor's Name:** Todd Ream

**Academic Division/Department:** Taylor University MAHE

**Purpose of Research:** I understand that the purpose of this research is to explore a potential connection between spiritual disciplines and work-related stress experienced as a residence hall director

**Specific Procedures to be Used:** If you agree to be in the study, you will do the following things: Respond to the initial email from the researcher giving preliminary consent to be placed in a focus group interview. Before the focus group interview begins, you'll be handed a hard copy of this informed consent form and must sign it before participating in the study. You'll receive a beverage of your choice from McConn at the beginning of the interview. The interview consists of open-ended questions in a randomly selected focus group, consisting of your colleagues. The groups will be no larger than five individuals and no smaller than three individuals. Your focus group interview will consist of nine semi-structured interview questions and will ask of anywhere between 60-90 minutes of your time. Additionally, you will agree to allow your interview to be voice recorded and transcribed by the researcher, in order for the data to be most effectively analyzed. Your answers will remain anonymous as research is analyzed and discussed.

**Duration of Participation:** Each participant will only be asked to give a maximum of 90 minutes of their time for a focus group interview, plus any time it takes to correspond with the researcher to determine one's focus group.

**Risks to the Individual:** There are no known risks to participating in this study. Benefits to the Individual or Others<sup>[1]</sup><sub>SEP</sub> The benefits to participation that are reasonable to expect are learning from your colleagues, having time to share about your meaningful work, and spending time reflecting on your current experience in residence life.



**Compensation:** You will receive a beverage of your choice from McConn for participating in this study.

**Extra Costs to Participate:** There are no known costs to participate in this study.

**Injury or Illness:** In the event of physical injury resulting from your participation in this research, necessary medical treatment will be provided to you and billed as part of your medical expenses. Costs not covered by your health care insurer will be your responsibility. Also, it is your responsibility to determine the extent of your health care coverage. There is no program in place for other monetary compensation for such injuries. If you are participating in research, which is not conducted at a medical facility, you will be responsible for seeking medical care and for the expenses associated with any care received.

**Confidentiality:** Efforts will be made to keep your personal information confidential. We cannot guarantee absolute confidentiality. Your personal information may be disclosed if required by law. Your identity will be held in confidence in reports in which the study may be published and databases in which results may be stored. The researcher alone will have access to the voice recordings for transcription purposes only. They will be destroyed immediately after the researcher finishes transcribing the entire focus group interview. Once the thesis is defended, the transcriptions will also be deleted.

Organizations that may inspect and/or copy your research records for quality assurance and data analysis include groups such as the study investigator and his/her research associates, the Taylor University Institutional Review Board or its designees, the study sponsor, Todd Ream, and (as allowed by law) state or federal agencies, specifically the Office for Human Research Protections (OHRP) etc., who may need to access your research records.

The data will be stored on a password protected computer or cell phone. Electronic copies of all signed consent forms will be sent to the IRB in one electronic file at the completion of the study. All other study documents (hard copy or electronic) will be retained for a minimum of three years after close of the study by the principal investigator.

**Voluntary Nature of Participation:** I do not have to participate in this research project. If I agree to participate, I can withdraw my participation at any time without penalty. At any moment, you may choose to not be interviewed with a focus group. Additionally, if you decide you no longer want to have your answers be included in the research, please contact Caylan DeLucia, and she will delete your transcribed responses immediately.

**Release:** I participate of my own accord in this research project and release any claim to the collected data, research results, publication in any form including thesis/dissertation, journal article, conference presentation or commercial use of such information or products resulting from the collected information.

**Contact Information:** If I have any questions about this research project, I can contact: Caylan De Lucia at 614-439-0262.

If I have concerns about the treatment of research participants, I can contact the Institutional Review Board (IRB) at Indiana Wesleyan University, 4201 South Washington Street, Marion, IN 46953. (765) 677-2090.

I HAVE HAD THE OPPORTUNITY TO READ THIS CONSENT DOCUMENT, ASK QUESTIONS ABOUT THE RESEARCH PROJECT AND AM PREPARED TO PARTICIPATE IN THIS PROJECT.

Participant's Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

Participant's Name (Type or Print): \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Investigator's Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

I have read this page \_\_\_\_\_ (initials here)

