

Why can't we be friends?

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February 15, 2016

My friend, Tricia Dillon Thomas, pointed out [this post by L.T. Lewis at RevGals](#). I was pretty surprised at the stats from the Schaeffer Institute, although maybe I've read them before. They just shock me every time.

70% of pastors are depressed and burnt out.

70% of pastors say they don't have a close friend.

Let that sink in for a moment.

A friend from seminary visited a couple of weeks ago. Her father-in-law was a pastor in the South, and she had been on a church staff for years before she became a pastor. She talked about how the male pastors of former generations would say that they were going to make visits, and they would spend the afternoon at the golf course.

I imagined the smell of freshly cut grass and thought about those privileged days of Protestantism, when pastors had too much time on their hands. I envisioned sunny skies, manicured lawns, and my perfect swing. I thought about how I would provide my caddy with totally unsolicited advice. He would nod as if I were a sage. I vaguely remember reading about one of those pastors in Updike's *Month of Sundays*. Then I rolled my eyes.

But yesterday, my own loneliness felt crushing, I read those stats, and I realized that there has to be some sort of middle ground.

I live in a city where people don't move often. It's a beautiful place, but like many Old Southern cities, the populace has dwelled here for generations. It's tough to break into a group of friends who all went to the same grammar school. It means that there's always a party going on that we're not invited to.

There is a group that is transient in the city. They are other pastors. Pastors have the added bonus of not apologizing to us every time they curse. They don't get freaked out when we make a joke about a funeral. But have you ever tried to do something with another pastor? You have to coordinate your calendars months in advance. Then you get a text fifteen minutes before you're supposed to meet, saying a pastoral emergency has come up.

And it's true. There are big emergencies--sicknesses, hospitalizations, budget crises.

But, my friends, a 70% depression rate is also an emergency.

So, we might not be members of the country club. When we see that lawn we can only think about how many gallons of water they're wasting and how the grass must be some sort of mutant Monsanto monstrosity, or else it could never be that shade of green. We can't take every Thursday out on the golf course. But can we begin to make a commitment to friendship? Can we go out to lunch with someone once a week? Can we pick a continuing ed event that will nourish our friendships as well as our professions? ([Insert shameless plug for UNCO here.](#)) Can we learn to dump our work stress on someone other than our spouse? Can we be that person who receives something, rather than the one who is always presiding and providing? Can we be friends?